

Finding Tellable Tales at Your Local Public Library (Yes, I'm talking about books!)

by Mary Hamilton

If you are among those very fortunate people whose older relatives handed down a complete repertoire of family stories, folktales, and more, lucky you – you can stop reading this article right now.

However, if you are more like me – a lover of stories who was not raised on an oral diet of retold folktales, it's time to visit your public library. In the mid-1870s Melvil Dewey created a classification system for organizing the books and catalog of the library at Amherst College. The Dewey Decimal

System, now used in libraries worldwide, organizes books by subject. However, this does not mean books of interest to storytellers will all show up side-by-side on library shelves. Why? Because storytellers have broad interests and because storytelling is useful in many fields.

Here's a list to help you browse the nonfiction section of your public library. Just as car sales stickers state, "your mileage may vary," your library may not have made these exact decisions, so if you aren't finding something, ask your librarians.

027.6 In this section are books about libraries for children, so some storytelling resources may be found here.

133.1 Ghosts and other hauntings

220 Bibles and Bible Stories

282 My public library shelves stories about the saints in this section on Roman Catholicism. Your library may use 922.22, in the collected biographies section.

290s This is where you will find information on religions, other than Christianity. You'll find Greek and Roman mythology in 292. You'll also find the faith stories of many, many religions. (Yes, the Dewey Decimal system is a bit biased with 201—289 allocated to Christianity and all other religions in the 290s.)

372.642 Books on storytelling can be found here amidst books about elementary education.

398 Folklore -- If you go nowhere else, go here. 398.2 for folktales, fairy tales, and other narratives. 398.6 for riddles. 398.8 for rhymes. 398.9 for proverbs.

649.58 Books on storytelling can be found here with books on child rearing.

782.1 Opera, including books with the plots/stories told in operas.

792.8 Ballet, including books with the plots/stories told in ballets.

808.543 Books on storytelling can be found here with books on creating speeches.

808.83 Ghost and horror stories.

817 & 818 In my public library, these sections include such diverse literary offerings as short stories by Mark Twain and Saki and collections of Appalachian humor by Billy Edd Wheeler and Loyal Jones.

920s Biographies. Your library may shelve biographies with other nonfiction books or in a separate location. Biographies are arranged by the last name of the person whose life is the subject of the biography. Collected biographies, biographies containing information about more than one person, are shelved according to Dewey Decimal number.

Don't forget to use these same Dewey Decimal numbers to explore the reference section and the children's and young adult sections of your library. Enjoy your library tour. Good luck with your browsing.

Brief bio: Mary Hamilton has earned her living telling stories and pondering how the art of storytelling works since 1983. www.maryhamilton.info