**Storyteller**

Bobby's innate ability to read and connect with audiences of all ages makes him one of America’s premier storytellers. Using dynamic movement and vocal effects, Bobby creates vibrant characters who come to life through imaginative, creative story. Living History programs that highlight the African-American experience, and toe-tapping musical shows that feature song and live musicians are also part of his repertoire. His stories promote character education traits (such as respect and responsibility), cultural diversity, and literacy. He inspires and motivates kids and adults telling stories that can be shared through the oral tradition. “No fancy electronics, just teller listener, and the imagination.”

**Influences**

Bobby Norfolk grew up a shy child in North St. Louis with a debilitating stutter. Son of an elevator operator and confectionery clerk, Norfolk's future was hazy when he was young. As a youth, Bobby wondered “What could a lost, lonely, discouraged kid from the low-rent blocks of St. Louis do with the rest of his life?”

Norfolk's path toward storytelling and success began in 1961 when he suddenly overcame his stutter when performing in a fourth-grade poetry recital. From that moment, his teachers helped him to grow as both an individual and a performer.

“They saw things in me didn't see in myself, which is the mark of a master teacher, to see inside the student with low self-esteem (who) hasn't found his or her gifts,” Norfolk said in a recent interview. His teachers put him in drama class, Greek club, poetry recitals and talent shows. “Whenever I performed, I wouldn't stutter.” he said.

Norfolk reflects on how his teachers, friends and experiences as an African-American in the 1960s and '70s propelled him along a windy road of happenstance.

Along the way, Norfolk gained performance experience as a stand-up comedian, learned narrative skills as a National Park Service ranger and docent, and discovered meditation with the aid of his teachers and the public library system.

Norfolk says that this variety of experiences allowed him to combine his interests and passions into a profession of storytelling. “I found out just from my research that the human brain is hardwired for storytelling. There was a study done where they had electrodes hooked up to some kid's temples. It was a study group on storytelling, and they rolled in a television on a cart and watched all this stuff on PBS and they looked at the brain activity on the graph and it was almost flat lining. The tests showed very little brain activity - very little rapid eye movement. Then they rolled the TV away and brought in a storyteller telling stories live and they looked at the graph and it was almost off the chart. Synapses were being fired in the brain, and imagery, the (areas of the brain) that creates imagery were firing!”

Norfolk says this sort of hypnotic reaction is what he loves about the power of storytelling. “I have the Harry Potter CDs narrated by Jim Dale and I was driving home one night, five miles from home, and I had this amazing CD playing in the car. I was so wrapped up in the story that I missed my exit by three miles! That's the power of storytelling.”

“I came to realize that what I do - though some see it solely as entertainment - is important work. The folktales, poems and stories I perform are very educational and can make a huge difference in forming values and beliefs”.

**Early Years**

Bobby began his career as a stand-up comedian in 1975 at local St. Louis comedy clubs and as an actor with The St. Louis Black Repertory Co. Concurrently, he worked ten years at the Gateway Arch in St. Louis as a National Park Service Ranger. In 1979, Bobby made his first appearance as a storyteller at the St. Louis Storytelling Festival, and discovered that through storytelling he was able to combine his theatre and stand-up comedy background to become a “story-performer.” After a Scott Joplin performance at a school in Ladue, MO three teachers said: “Mr. Norfolk, we’ve been talking and we decided that you remind us of a skinny Bill Cosby or a clean Richard Pryor!”

**TV Star**

In television, Bobby won three Emmy awards as the host of the CBS TV show “Gator Tales” and also hosted the Emmy nominated series “Children’s Theater at Bobby’s House.” Both shows were based out of St. Louis and the themes were character education, literacy, and storytelling.

**Circle of Excellence**

In October 2009, Bobby was given the national Circle of Excellence Oracle Award, an honor presented by the National Storytelling Network, which recognizes the very best storytellers in the nation. This prestigious award is given to artists for exceptional commitment and exemplary contributions to the art of storytelling, who set the standard of excellence in their craft.

**Author**

Bobby has created over ten CD’s, many having won the prestigious Parents Choice Gold Award. He has co-authored eight children’s books, and won first prize from Foreword Magazine in the Spoken Word category with his *Dunbar Outloud* CD. His book*The Moral of the Story: Folktales for Character Development* is a popular reference handbook for using story in the classroom. He is also contributing author in *Writer’s Choice*, McGraw-Hill/Glencoe Press 1999; *The Storytelling Classroom: Applications Across The Curriculum*, 2006 Libraries Unlimited; *Social Studies In The Storytelling Classroom*, Libraries Unlimited/ABC Clio-2011; and *Literacy Development in the Storytelling Classroom*, Libraries Unlimited (2009.)

Bobby travels both nationally and internationally presenting performances, keynotes, and workshops. A past member of the Board of Directors for the National Storytelling Network, he currently serves on the St. Louis Storytelling Festival Advisory Council and is a featured artist in festivals word-wide. He founded Folktale Productions, a storytelling company started in 1987. His web site is [www.bobbynorfolk.com](http://www.bobbynorfolk.com/).