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The Art of Storytelling: From Parents to Professionals

Course Guidebook

Professor Hannah B. Harvey
East Tennessee State University



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Professor Hannah B. Harvey is an Adjunct Professor in the Storytelling program at East Tennessee State University, an internationally recognized performer, and a nationally known professional storyteller. She earned her Ph.D. in Communication Studies, with a concentration in Performance Studies, at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she was also a teaching fellow. She earned her B.A. from Furman University. Professor Harvey is the managing editor of the journal *Storytelling, Self, Society* and a past president of Storytelling in Higher Education, the professional organization for scholars of storytelling within the National Storytelling Network. As a scholar-artist, she studies storytelling as a pervasive cultural force and an everyday artistic practice.

Professor Harvey's research and teaching specialty is performance ethnography, which unites theater with anthropology: Scholars investigate everyday storytelling as an embodied cultural practice. As a performance ethnographer, she develops oral histories into theatrical and solo storytelling works that highlight the true stories of contemporary Appalachian people. Her ongoing fieldwork with disabled coal miners in southwest Virginia culminated in a live ethnographic performance of their oral histories, *Out of the Dark: The Oral Histories of Appalachian Coal Miners*, earning her a directing award from adjudicators at the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival in 2007 and three year-end awards from professional critics in 2005. Her written research has been honored by the American Folklore Society and featured in *Storytelling, Self, Society*, among other publications. Her research has been presented at the National Communication Association, the Oral History Association, the International Festival of University Theatre, and the Canadian Association on Gerontology.

Professor Harvey is an award-winning director and performer and has delivered workshops in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Morocco. Her energetic style brings to life humorous and compelling stories from the worlds of personal experience, oral history, folklore, and myth. Critics have called her work “very funny” (*Theatre Guide London*) and “deeply moving” (*Classical Voice of North Carolina*). As a solo storyteller, she has been featured at the National Storytelling Festival and in the International Storytelling Center’s Teller-in-Residence program. Her international performances as a member of the North Carolina-based Wordshed Productions earned a five-star review in the *British Theatre Guide*. Professor Harvey has led workshops in storytelling at the National Storytelling Festival in Tennessee; in the adaptation and performance of literature at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in Scotland; and in cross-cultural storytelling at University Hassan II, Ben M’Sik, in Casablanca, Morocco.

Professor Harvey’s students at Kennesaw State University selected her as an Honors Program Distinguished Teacher and for the Alumni Association Commendation for Teaching Impact. She is proud of her Storytelling students’ achievements, from garnering professional credits (including a four-star review from the *British Theatre Guide* for her students’ group-storytelling adaptation of *Beowulf*) to simply enjoying and becoming more critically aware of storytelling in their everyday lives. ■

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Disclaimer

This course includes stretching and breathing exercises for storytellers; you should take into account your own level of physical fitness before performing these exercises. Neither The Teaching Company nor Hannah Harvey is responsible for your use of this educational material or its consequences.

The Art of Storytelling: From Parents to Professionals

Scope:

The gift of storytelling may be one of life's most powerful—and envied—skills. A story well told can make us laugh, weep, swell with pride, or rise with indignation. A story poorly told can be not only boring or uncomfortable but positively painful to experience. We all want to tell good stories, but we don't often realize how fundamental storytelling is to the human experience. Storytelling isn't just entertainment; your story is what grounds you. It gives you a sense of purpose, identity, and continuity between the past and the present. This course takes both a practical and an intellectual approach to understanding how storytelling works and how to use artistic storytelling techniques to enhance your stories, big and small. Each lecture will help you build your repertoire of stories, often inviting you to get up on your feet through guided workshops on specific aspects of your stories.

Our introductory lecture looks at the nature and prevalence of “orality” in society today and helps us see how much of our lives are spent telling stories. We'll consider how your experience of telling and listening to an oral story is different than your experience of writing or reading a story. Telling does many things that writing simply can't do, and it does those things quite powerfully for your audiences. The next three lectures help us see storytelling as a relationship among the teller, the audience, and the story. We look in-depth at these interconnected parts, beginning with your relationship with your story and the different ways we're drawn to stories. You'll discover some resources for finding different kinds of stories and why it's important to choose stories that matter to you personally. Perhaps most important, we'll look at the effect your relationship with your audience has on how, why, and even whether or not you tell your stories. This relationship with your audience is what sets storytelling apart from all other forms of communication or entertainment. In all these interconnected relationships, there are a variety of contexts you must consider and establish: physical, emotional, intellectual, and social.

We then move from “what is storytelling?” to “how and why are some stories so powerful with audiences?” Having looked at what storytelling involves from a broad view, we now look underneath the surface to question what oral stories do for us in our families (culturally), in our minds (psychologically), and in our human spirit.

For some answers, we turn to three major genres of traditional stories. One of the first places we encounter stories is in our families, and these seemingly small stories are often the ones that stick with us, shape our sense of who we are, and get passed down to our children. When you lose a family member, that person exists primarily through stories. Family stories are as complex as family relationships are; often, we want to tell family stories to our friends, but how do you bridge from inside the complex world of the family to the outside world? We’ll look at many examples of how to contextualize your family stories to connect them, playfully and powerfully, with the outside world. Family stories are an example of oral traditions, as are fairy tales. We often think of fairy tales as simple children’s stories, but these lasting stories contain complex themes (many of them sexual!) that help children and adults integrate and deal with the conflicting facets of human psychology. We look at how some of these contradictory desires play out in the fantasy world of “Little Red Riding Hood” and how fairy tales can entertain both children and adults. Fairy tales and myths often follow a trajectory of events that Joseph Campbell called the “hero’s journey.” The hero’s descent into the abyss and the battles that take place there with “the dragon” mirror the psychological battles we encounter in our own personal lives. The final lecture on traditional stories helps you identify your own personal hero’s journey. We take a guided walk through one of your stories, mapping your journey and identifying archetypal figures that can connect powerfully with your audiences.

With this foundation in what, how, and why, we turn to storytelling craft and technique.

The workshop-based lectures begin by seeing the process of story development as a cycle of telling, writing, imaging, playing, and rehearsing. “Rehearsing” can be as simple or as involved as you wish for any given story; it involves stretching yourself, just as you would stretch any muscle before you prepare to perform in a game. You may be surprised to

find that you need to give yourself permission to stretch. You begin this process by visualizing the world of your story, which is a particular way of remembering a story that does not involve word-by-word memorization. We then consider multiple points of view in telling stories and the role of the narrator as a guide who connects the audience with the other world of the story. We investigate character development and kinesthetics, helping you find humor, dimension, and playfulness with the people in your stories. The structure of your story is the container that holds these different elements—narrator, visualized events, and characters—and many different structural forms are possible for stories. The emotional arc of your story—where your story goes emotionally—is a different thing than this structural trajectory of events; we'll discuss how the two intertwine and influence your audiences. Your voice, along with your body, is a crucial instrument in your telling; you'll practice warming up this instrument and building layers of intonation with your stories. Because we all have some degree of nervous energy when we speak in public, we'll also look at the mechanics of performance anxiety and how to channel nervous energy into an energized performance.

We then turn to some specific issues you may face as a storyteller, with practical advice for how to approach them. Through many examples, we'll learn the best ways to address specific audiences, including children and organizational audiences.

Our final workshop lectures tie together the whole storytelling experience by looking practically at introductions, conclusions, and everything in between—how to keep your audience's attention through repetition, audience participation, and other elements of the craft of storytelling.

We'll conclude with a return to our initial observations, with new insights into the nature of orality and its continuing role, side by side, with the written word. Storytelling makes up the bulk of our daily lives. If every story has a narrator, whose perspectives influence the stories we hear and the stories that influence our material decisions? What are the implications of our choices as storytellers in creating meaning for our audiences and in the world? Storytelling is who we are and how we live our lives. This course aims to help you find even more humor, enjoyment, and fulfillment in the stories you tell as you discover your own voice as a storyteller. ■

Telling a Good Story

Lecture 1

Most of our lives are spent telling stories. Storytelling is at the core of the human experience. Personal stories are what ground us—what give us a sense of purpose, identity, and continuity between the past and the present. Oral storytelling is the primary way that people remember and record the peak moments of life in their families. In this course, we will examine how you can tell stories better—that is, tell stories in a way that brings them to life for other people, both within and outside of your family or your community.

The Study of Storytelling

- In academia, storytelling studies are found across a wide variety of programs—communications, theater, performance studies, education—because storytelling directly taps into many different fields.
- Our approach to storytelling in this course will take the perspective of a scholar-artist. We will not only learn practical guidelines for storytelling, but we will also come to understand the nature of “story” and storytelling.
- By analyzing how storytelling works—how we use stories in everyday life and why we tell stories—we can become better practitioners of storytelling as an art form.

The Functions of Stories

- Written narratives are stories that we find in print, while oral narratives—stories—live in conversation or in our memories. They are often not written down, but they come alive through our voices and our bodies as we tell those stories.
- Stories serve multiple functions for us. For example, orally told stories can delineate relationships and set parameters.

- In my family, whenever we gather for a holiday, someone has to make the “pink salad.” This salad is special to the cooks in my family because the recipe is a story that we share only inside the family.
- In other words, the recipe delineates borders between our family and the outside world: the people who know the recipe and the people who don’t!
- It’s a small thing—a “story” about a salad—but it separates our family and defines us as a cohesive unit.
- Stories also make life coherent; they give us a sense of who we are and where we’ve come from, and they give us a picture of the future that we can either work toward or avoid.
 - A story about my grandfather’s hands gives a sense of history and the trajectory of his life. And it makes death bearable because in the story, death is not the end of my grandfather—he is still holding my hand. You may have people in your life who still hold your hand, too, whether or not they have passed away.
 - When you’re telling someone a story, you’re doing more than just relaying a message; the story is a container for our deepest longings, hopes, and fears.
- Stories also question life. Storytelling forces self-reflection: It puts up a mirror to yourself and to culture.
 - Your story gives you access to yourself; in other words, it’s how you get a handle on yourself—if you don’t recognize your story, you can’t change it.
 - In some sense, that’s what therapy does: It helps you shape a narrative for a listener, and in hearing yourself tell your own story and having someone question it for missing or forgotten parts, you can listen to and change your story.

- Stories reveal human truths, which are different from facts. Facts are what happened; truths are about what those events meant to people.
 - Many stories aren't factual. A story about a gingerbread man who runs away from home and gets eaten by a fox is completely fictional, but it gives us a way to see a truth: how foolish it is to run away from the wisdom of people who love you for the sake of having your own way.
 - Such stories act on us, often invisibly. Many of the ideas we have about what is truly important in life—ideas and values that motivate decisions—come from stories.

The Focus of Storytelling

- Stories don't live on the printed page but in spoken words and in images that we carry in our minds. The primary work of oral storytelling is to convey the images in the mind of the teller to the listeners. Storytelling is focused on image and storyline, not the memorization of written lines.
- Memorizing is the challenge of live theater. But storytelling is about knowing a series of images so well that they live in you so that you can call them back up, although not with the same words every time. You don't need to write down stories about your childhood; you know them by heart and can call them up at any time.
- Maybe you're thinking, "But I don't have any stories! My life is very ordinary; nothing ever happens to me." But as you hear stories being told in this course, it's likely that you will come up with many ideas for stories of your own. In future lectures, we'll talk about the kind of journal keeping that storytellers use to develop their ideas into stories.

Outline of the Course

- We'll start this course by looking at the basics of the storytelling process. It's important to understand that storytelling is a living collaboration that involves the teller, the audience, and the story.

The stories you tell are constantly adapted to each different audience you encounter; they aren't delivered in one fixed, intact form.

- We'll examine stories that have staying power. We'll look at classic stories—from family stories to traditional fairy tales and myths—and explore why certain stories have lasted for so long, even across cultures.
- Throughout the course, we'll also practice, using how-to workshops that will help you develop your stories, make them more engaging to your audiences, and even make them more enjoyable for you to tell.

“Hands”

- The story of my grandfather's hands illustrates some of the qualities of oral storytelling.
- As we've said, storytelling is ephemeral. It's also economical—nothing is wasted. “Hands” could have included many more details, but it was trimmed to focus on a few specific things.
- Stories are also “additive”; that is, they build on themselves.
- “Hands,” like other stories, contains certain oral memory aids, for example, the repeated images of hands. These images unify the story, but they also serve as a memory aid for the teller.
 - When we look at some of the earliest stories on record—those that come out of an oral culture—we see this same kind of redundancy. For example, we find repeated modifiers for “Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow” in *Beowulf* or “Enkidu, the faithful companion” in the Epic of Gilgamesh.
 - These repeated phrases highlight the fact that someone had to remember these stories.
- Also like an epic, “Hands” is action-centered. The story moves from planing wood, to working on engines, to building houses. Storytelling is focused on action and on *agon* (“struggle”).

Hands

One of the things I remember most about my grandfather was his hands. You see, my grandfather learned carpentry from his father. And by the time I knew him, his hands were tough, and those knuckles were just like big marbles set into his fingers, they were so large. He used to come home from work when I'd come to visit, and take that big hand, and pat me on the head with it—and when I was young, I didn't think about where those hands had been to make them so leathery and big.

When he was a little boy, my grandfather [Tom Jr.] would follow his father, ... Tom Sr., out to his workshop, and he would sit there and study his father while he worked. And Junior, my grandfather, he'd go tagging along behind his father as his father went up toward his shop. He said, "I was taggin' along behind, wonderin' what he was a' gonna do." ... On this

particular day, Junior sat as his father took down this big old poplar board—real dry wood. He always said, "Poplar works good, you know; it's good lumber." And he got this board down and looked at it, and laid it up on his workbench, and he started planing it, you know. Junior just stared, that old wood of the shop, and freshly cut boards, and outside, the apple tree Tom Sr. had grafted. ...



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And as he watched, he learned. And he used those young, strong hands to plane the boards himself. And when the war broke out, he took those hands to Guam, and he used them to reach inside the big engines of bomber planes that flew out over the Pacific. Those strong hands that held his bride so tightly when he came home, alive—alive!—from the war. And when he came home, those hands picked up a hammer and wood, and they shook his father’s hand and the hands of young couples and preachers, because he and his father built houses, and they built churches. He always said, “We don’t build homes; we build houses. You can’t build a home—you have to make a home. It takes a heap a’ living in a house to make it home.”

Those hands, he washed and washed so that he could hold his baby girl, so small, her head fit right into the cup of his palm. And then his second baby girl—right there, nestled against his fingers. Hands that held the rod and reel, the fish, the fork, and the belly. Hands that planed, like his daddy. Hands that held a walking stick for hours as he continued to exercise after triple-bypass surgery. Held the walker, held the bedframe—held the tiny foot of his great-grandson; that foot was dwarfed by those big bones and marbled knuckles, covered in smooth skin. A hand that held mine—like he’d done all my life. Like he still does, even though those hands are far away.

You can tell a lot about a person, just by looking at their hands.

- Note, too, that those actions happened in a specific context. I didn’t say that my grandfather went to war (an abstraction) but that he worked on a plane in Guam.
- Storytelling is central to the survival of the family and of specific people. Important people in our lives pass away, and what we have left of them are the stories we share.

Suggested Reading

Langellier and Peterson, *Storytelling in Daily Life*.

The National Storytelling Network, www.storynet.org.

Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

Rydell, ed., *A Beginner's Guide to Storytelling*.

Questions to Consider

1. How is your experience of telling and listening to an oral story different than your experience of writing or reading a story? What does telling do that writing can't do?
2. What do you enjoy most about telling stories? What scares you most about getting up to tell a story?

The Storytelling Triangle

Lecture 2

Storytelling isn't about delivering a fixed thing. It's a dynamic process of you shaping the story with the audience. One way of looking at the process of story crafting and storytelling is through the storytelling triangle. In this lecture, we'll set up the triangle, and in the following lectures, we'll look at two aspects of the triangle in more depth: developing your relationship with the stories you tell and developing your relationship with your audience.

The Points of the Triangle

- Telling a story is a three-way relationship involving you, the story, and the audience. We can represent this relationship with the image of a triangle.



Storytelling is a three-way relationship among the teller, the story, and the audience, with each element of the triangle connected.

- Notice that none of the points on the triangle is independent of the others—they're all connected. Stories are always mediated through a storyteller and exist in relation to an audience.

- Again, storytelling is about connections; in fact, stories exist by virtue of this connection with an audience and the teller.
 - If a story doesn't grab you as a teller, chances are, it isn't a good story for you to tell, because in order to tell a story well, you have to be connected to it. Even if you know a "good" story that others like, ask yourself: Is this a story that means something to me?
 - You should also ask the same question for your audience: Is it a story your audience will connect with? You may have stories that are appropriate for only some audiences but not others, and if a story isn't right for an audience, the connection won't be made.
- Storytelling is also about choices. There is no one "right" way to tell a story because a story isn't an "ideal form" that you are trying to achieve; storytelling is a series of choices that you make in how to connect the audience with a story.
- Storytelling is an adaptive cultural phenomenon. Because of these connections among the story, audience, and teller, stories develop and are adapted based on the needs and desires of the audience and the teller. Many of the stories that we consider "canonized" as great tales, from Greek and Roman myths to fairy tales, exist because they connect with tellers and audiences.
 - Stories survive by virtue of their relationship with tellers and audiences. In this sense, the very idea of what constitutes a story is culturally specific. For example, Western stories (those from the United States and Europe) typically focus on character development and a linear plotline; audiences in these cultures tend to expect that the story will follow events as they happened.
 - But in Bali and Java, there is no such expectation. A story may center on one event, then jump back in time, then move forward

The Old Maid

Last time I saw my Aunt Mae, we went to the nursing home. I'd come home from college. I went with my mom, and we walked in the door. You know how it is, kind of, in some nursing homes? You open that door and it smells faintly of rubbing alcohol and urine? We walked in—we were going down the hall to her room, and as I passed by this man in a wheelchair, he reached out and grabbed my shirt. I kind of shied away from him, and I told my mom. She said, "Well, some people just don't get a lot of visitors in here, and I bet he was just lonely." I was really glad we were going to see my Aunt Mae.



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We walked in the door, and *Days of our Lives* was on, and she was on the phone with one of the women in her calling circle. She was finishing up that conversation, so we visited with her for about an hour. When it came time to leave, I bent down and I hugged her. I stood back up, I held her hand, and I remembered all those times when I'd walked into her house. She had held my hand—big, tall, strong, big-boned. Now I was the tall one. She looked up at me and she said very firmly, "Don't forget about me."

I thought at the time that she just wanted me to come back and visit, but she passed away soon after that. "Don't forget about me."

I keep a jar of Aunt Mae's buttons on my desk, right beside a picture of her. She's got that big smile, all wrinkles. "Don't forget about me." She's one of the most beautiful women I have ever known.

years later. In these cultures and for these audiences, following a linear timeline is not a requirement for a “real” story.

Lines of Communication

- The three points of the storytelling triangle represent not only connections but lines of communication—and not just one-way communication.
- Consider a situation in which you’re explaining the values of your company to new employees. You might share a story with them about the company. We could think of this situation as handing the story over to the audience, as you would a briefing or a document. In a linear diagram, this would be represented with the story first and then the teller, who takes the story to the audience.
- This picture is useful to see how stories are mediated by tellers. Every story we know—whether it’s an orally told story or one in print form—was brought to us by storytellers. And the storyteller—the mediator—often has a stake in how the story gets told.
 - The stories you grew up with were probably the stories your parents wanted you to hear. The stories you tell to your children are ones you mediate to them—and you probably craft those stories with careful lessons in mind! My story about my Aunt Mae is mediated by my experiences with her and by my own expectations about how women should act.
 - My story about Mae is different than the stories my grandmother told about her, because my grandmother had a different relationship with Aunt Mae.
 - This reveals something significant about the dynamics of storytelling in any situation. Unlike the experience of reading a story in a book, when you’re hearing a story in an audience, you might, for example, laugh at a part of the story, which might prompt the teller to embellish a little bit more. The dynamic of the live encounter influences the story; thus,

there's a relationship between the audience directly back to the story itself.

- The directional arrows in our diagram tell us that storytelling is a living thing, a process, an action. As a storyteller, you must be constantly aware of these active lines of communication between you and your audience, the story and your audience, and yourself and the story.
- A sample from the work of award-winning storyteller Bil Lepp illustrates his attention to the audience and the changes it brings to his story about buffalo tipping. Note also the additive qualities in his storytelling as he includes additional examples: “and gator rolling, and elk punting....” Note that Lepp isn't doing stand-up comedy; in that venue, humor is the goal, but in storytelling, humor is a vehicle for the story.

Triangle Review

- Storytelling connects a storyteller and an audience with a story. In this process of connecting the audience with the story, the storyteller makes choices that are specific to that audience and that story. We do this on an unconscious level all the time.
- As a result of these choices, stories are constantly in flux, adapted from one situation to another.
- The triangle image gives us a visual sense of the living, ongoing nature of storytelling. At its best, storytelling is a dynamic dialogue—one in which the teller listens to what the audience needs, the audience listens to the story and the teller, and the story moves back and forth between them.
- An awareness of the storytelling triangle gives us more insight into the process that storytellers use in the moment of telling a story. Tellers don't deliver intact stories to their audiences; at the moment of telling, the story always changes.

Suggested Reading

Conquergood, “Rethinking Ethnography.”

Ellis and Neimi, *Inviting the Wolf In*.

Lepp, *Seeing Is Believing*.

———, www.leppstorytelling.com.

Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling*.

Questions to Consider

1. Your audience will and should affect how you tell a story. Think of a story you’ve told recently. Whether your “editing” was conscious or not, what is one thing you didn’t include in your story because of that audience? Why?
2. We’re drawn to stories for different reasons. Can you think of an example of stories you’re drawn to because of what or who they represent, how they reflect parts of yourself, or how much you don’t like the original and want to retell it differently?

Connecting with Your Story

Lecture 3

When you start to look more deeply at the stories you tell and ask why you tell those stories—why you connect with those stories—you’ll be surprised at how many deeper layers of meaning your everyday stories hold. What those stories say to you at a deeper level is what makes them stick with you. Clearly, we tell many different kinds of stories, such as folktales or family stories. In this lecture, we’ll talk about how you personally connect with stories, the genres of stories available to you, and the underlying reasons that explain why we tell the stories we choose to tell.

Personal Connections with Stories

- The personal connection you have with the stories you tell is perhaps the most important relationship in the story-teller-audience triangle. The amount of interest and time you take with a story will certainly vary, but no matter how much time you take in preparation, in the moment of telling, you must care about the story.
- I am drawn to the story about the trickster George Buchannan partly because of what it means to me culturally, as an Appalachian woman.
 - During the Irish potato famine, some Scots-Irish came to America and settled in the mountains of Appalachia, where they were almost always considered members of a lower class. These “hillbillies” were and still are looked down on as being ignorant and backward.
 - But the people of Appalachia know that they’re smart, although sometimes they pretend not to be to “have a bit o’ fun” at the expense of upper-class society.
 - Being an Appalachian-American in a region with a strong Scottish heritage, I feel cultural, physical, and emotional connections with stories about George Buchannan. I care about

George, and I treat him as if he's a real person, not a two-dimensional character.

Sourcing Stories and Checking Facts

- I also have an intellectual connection to the story of George Buchannan. I'm intellectually challenged by it—the riddles, for example, are delightful—and this intellectual connection means that I have looked deeper into all that the story has to offer. This intellectual connection will vary, depending on how much time you want to spend developing your story.
 - For an impromptu story that occurs to you from personal experience or a recounting of a story you've heard, you may have one level of intellectual connection.
 - But for other stories, you may have a deeper connection. You may spend time getting to know the characters, the plotline, and the cultural context and considering the metaphorical resonances of the story. You may read different versions of a story, learning about cultural context from multiple sources.
- The goal of seeking multiple sources applies whether you're telling a folktale or a personal story. Even if your story is about an event that happened to you, it helps to do some research to flesh out the story for a wider audience. Look for at least three sources to ensure that the details you relate are accurate.
- As someone with training in the methods and ethics of collecting and performing oral history-based stories, I sometimes feel a compulsion to share the stories I learn with others—to start a dialogue about how a story connects outward with wider social and economic issues. You, too, may have access to those kinds of stories.
- If you're telling someone else's story, it's important to get permission to do so, and make sure you're telling the story your subject wants to be told—not turning the story into something that serves your own motives but telling it in such a way that honors that person's perspective.

- In seeking out multiple credible sources, you're seeking multiple viewpoints. This will help you develop the characters within your story. Every character in the story is a potential main character; every character has the potential to be a hero or a villain, depending on the point of view.
- Make sure you do both broad and detailed fact-checking. Details matter; if you get a date wrong in your story, someone in your audience is bound to recognize it, and that misstep immediately distances that audience member from experiencing the story. The details of context are also crucial for you when you're getting to know your story.

Genres of Stories

- Most of the time, the stories we tell come from our personal experience or from the immediate world around us. These are personal narratives—stories you tell about yourself to yourself and to other people. Note that you are always the first audience for your stories. We all test our stories first on ourselves to decide if the stories are worth remembering and repeating.
- Family stories are those passed down to you by family members about your heritage. Stories in this genre include “Hands” and “The Old Maid.”
- Some ghost stories are shared in families or in particular regions. Others are part of a wider cultural experience and story-base, shared by larger groups of people.
- Folktales are another kind of cultural story—told by the people of a particular culture, region, or part of the world. They're usually localized; thus, you'll hear about Scottish folktales, such as the stories of George Buchannan, or African folktales, such as stories about Anansi, the spider.
 - In these stories, we can see the dominant cultural values of a region. In the American folktale “Johnny Appleseed,” the main character plants and harvests—laying claim to the land as he

A Miner's Story

Buzzy and Dan and Luke, they was all crushed. We carried them out in pieces days later. But Donzel lived. He had 70-some injuries, and where those arms had been pinned underneath him all those hours—14 hours under that rock—it had cut off the circulation, and they had just rotted out from underneath him.

The doctors, they cut off a piece at a time, trying to find something that was living. They left about six inches on each side, but he was alive. I went to visit him while he was in the hospital and then over the next couple of years while he was recuperating at home, and I tell you something, it's true: He and I still go hunting together. It's true! Now I know I'm not much of a hunter, you know, with my leg and my back, but the doctors, they made Donzel some good arms, prosthetic arms, with metal hinges and a finger that's just about right for that trigger.

We sit out on his back porch and we just wait for them crows to come along.



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That night, the night of the accident, I went over, I sat down on my bed when I got home. I unzipped my jacket, took out that fossil. I looked at it; I thought about where it had come from: hole in the earth that's fallen in on itself again, all that coal crushed in with blood and skin where those bodies had stained it. And you look at my knees now, mine where after so many years of working, I got these little spots on them, black coal spots, can't wash them out, can't get them out, can't get them out. The doctors, they pulled me out of the mines a few years back.

I tell you the truth: I would give anything to go back down there again. The friendships that you make down there... And I was an archaeologist. Given the chance to live over again, I'd go back down every time.

plants seeds across the country. Arguably, these actions relate to some of the values of the early American settlers.

- We generally understand that folk stories aren't true, but they reveal something about a culture, either explicitly or implicitly. It's also true that the culture itself may have changed and adapted away from the values conveyed by the story over time.
- Among the many scholarly sources about folktales, I recommend the online compendium done by D. L. Ashliman at the University of Pittsburgh (<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html>), the Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library, and the books and recordings of August House Press. The versions in these collections usually include cultural context and have been vetted for cultural accuracy or fidelity to oral versions.
- Fairy tales, or wonder tales, such as the stories of Snow White or Sleeping Beauty, are those in which some magical element comes into the story to help (or harm!) the characters.
- Sacred stories and myths deal with gods and mortals and the “big questions,” such as: Why am I here? How did I come to be?
- Legends, such as the “Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” are stories that may or may not be true. You may also have heard urban legends when you were a child at camp, such as the story known as “The Hook.” These legends, as well as other types of stories, serve to communicate cultural values.

- In tall tales, characters or events are blown way out of proportion, perhaps with superhuman strength or size. Often, the joy of these stories is that the person telling them absolutely believes that the story is true, and sometimes they sound so real that you want to believe them, too.
- Finally, there are fables, such as Aesop’s fables—stories that teach a moral lesson at the end. Usually, these are short stories with anthropomorphic characters, animals that take on human qualities (the wise owl, the clever fox). But there’s always a clear lesson, which is usually stated directly.
- Depending on your background and experiences, you’ve probably been exposed to several of these genres, but you may not be familiar with some of the others at all. This takes us back to the storytelling triangle in some specific and important ways.
 - We’re exposed to stories based on our family backgrounds, our cultural backgrounds, our peers, and our everyday experiences—we’re inundated with stories based on the specific contexts of our lives.
 - There are also stories we’ve sought out because they weren’t a part of our background. You may have traveled, for instance, and learned about cultures different from your own. You may have sought out higher education to expand the stories you know; you’ve chosen to read certain books and watch movies and TV shows that tell stories.
 - At the same time that certain stories press in on us, our own context propels us toward other stories, and the contexts surrounding us and surrounding the stories we seek out are part of how we know the stories we know.

Suggested Reading

Langellier and Peterson, *Storytelling in Daily Life*.

Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling*.

MacDonald, *The Storyteller's Start-Up Book*.

Pantheon Fairytale and Folklore Library.

Sherman, *Mythology for Storytellers*.

Questions to Consider

1. Story genres often bleed into one another. Do you have a story that has reached “mythic” proportions in your family? Is there a personal story that’s really a “tall tale”?
2. Consider your physical, emotional, social, or intellectual connections with the stories you tell. What genre of stories are you most familiar with telling, and what genre do you want to learn more about?

Connecting with Your Audience

Lecture 4

In this lecture, we will focus on the second aspect of the storytelling triangle—your relationship with your audience. We'll talk about some of the different contexts of this relationship (physical, social, emotional, and intellectual), and then we'll consider how stories bring audiences together. At the end of the lecture, you'll start keeping a storytelling journal, recording three events that happened in the recent past that might hold meaning for others.

Physical and Social Contexts

- Think for a moment about the contexts of the performance of the George Buchanan story. First, there's the physical context of storytelling. As the teller, you're in a room with other people and, perhaps, you're at a microphone. One of the first things you'll do is make eye contact with the audience.
 - Psychologically, this acknowledges the presence of other people; eye contact is the first way you invite the audience into a relationship with you.
 - Try to make eye contact with everyone in the room, and as you speak, continue to do so.
- Making eye contact acknowledges that you're speaking with your audience, as opposed to speaking to them or having them overhear your conversations onstage. You're in a social relationship with your audience. Speaking with someone is very different than delivering a monologue; it means you're entering into a conversation with that person.
 - Remember that communication is a two-way street; the audience is feeding you information (through body language, reactions, and so on) while you are feeding them information (telling them about the different places and people in your story).

- Many effective storytellers constantly evaluate how their audience is communicating with them, incorporating that information into how they develop the emotional arc of the story and their choices in telling the story.
- If children in a group are starting to fidget and talk to their neighbors, they're telling you that they need more help getting into the story. Ask them to physically do something to draw them back in.
- Note, too, that sometimes physical cues can be misleading. If a listener is looking off into space but seems focused, it could be that he or she is imagining the story you're painting with words.
- The truth is that you never really know how a story is resonating with an audience. But if you're in tune with the audience and look for obvious cues, you can adjust your story to suit their needs. Telling a “dynamic” story means you're able to change and adapt what you say in the moment to communicate the story effectively.

Audience-Centered Storytelling

- In audience-centered storytelling, you put the needs of the audience first. Part of adopting this perspective is acknowledging that every audience is different—every audience has a different background and different needs.
- As we discussed, each point on the storytelling triangle represents a different sphere of context and interaction; each audience member comes from one context, and that context influences his or her understanding of the references you make and the symbols you use.
 - In cross-cultural storytelling, audience members may have completely different interpretations of what we might think of as “universal” references and symbols. For example, the sociologist Laura Bohannan was corrected in her telling of *Hamlet* by the elders of the Tiv people in West Africa. If the dead king were a ghost, they said, he wouldn't be able to speak; thus, he must have been an omen sent by a witch.

- Such cultural differences may influence how your audience understands and accepts your stories.
- In storytelling, your job isn't to dictate conclusions to your audience. It is, instead, to help your audience see inside a situation—the world of the story—and the situations of the characters. Stories help us see inside the decisions of other people in such a way that they open us up to other perspectives.

Establishing Trust with the Audience

- Part of the social connection with an audience also has to do with trust. In order to really hear a story, you have to trust the person who's telling it. You have to trust that the teller is telling the truth, which again, is different from relating facts. Remember, facts are about what happened, and truths are about the meaning behind what happened.
- One way to establish a trust relationship with an audience is to speak in a conversational and approachable way, as Bil Lepp did in his telling of the buffalo tipping story. Don't be afraid to laugh at yourself, which gives the audience permission to laugh with you.
- It's also important to pay attention to how you physically interact with an audience. Standing in an open posture invites others to approach you. Closed or negative postures close you off from your audience and tend to focus your energy in and down.

Emotional Context

- Connected with the social context is the emotional context between you and your audience, because everyone you come into contact with brings along his or her own emotional baggage.
- It's your job to put everyone in the right mood to hear the story, to try to tune out the emotions of previous contexts and tune in to the emotional context of the story.

- Much of that emotional tuning happens in your introduction—those first moments with the audience. This means that you must be emotionally committed to the story you’re going to tell. You must believe the words that you are saying. You must take the time to let the words and the truth of those words resonate with you; in doing so, they will most likely resonate with your audience.

Intellectual Context

- The intellectual context of storytelling requires you to gear your story’s language, content, and length to the needs of a given audience.
- This doesn’t mean that you “dumb down” the story for an audience any more than you would intentionally talk over their heads. Neither of these approaches accomplishes anything. You want to meet your audience members where they are.
- Especially with children, don’t underestimate your audience. When you talk down to children of a certain age, they tune out, or worse, they start to mock you! Talking a little above children can be a good thing—it keeps them on their toes.

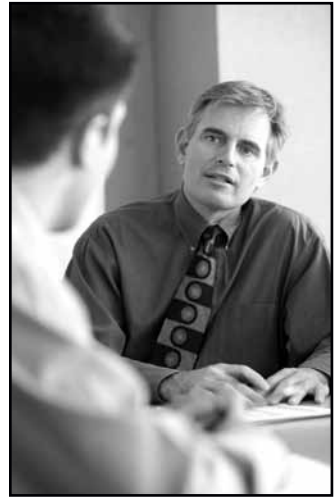
How Stories Bring Audiences Together

- Sometimes, your relationship with an audience may be mixed. Maybe you know some people in a group better than others. Stories are a way to bring the group together. One of the best ways to do this in everyday conversation is to look for ways that your own human moments connect with the struggles that everyone faces.
- A story about losing patience with a store clerk demonstrates this point. At the moment the incident took place, it didn’t seem as if it would make a great story. But later, sharing the story with friends was cathartic—allowing the group to laugh at shared frustration—and it was healing—illustrating how understandable it is to get angry and snap.
- Finding a connection with your audience sometimes means finding the story that connects your common struggles. It’s a good idea to

reflect a few times a week on those “human moments” that you’ve experienced so that when you’re in an everyday conversation, you can plug those stories in.

The “Universal Singular”

- In stories, your small triumphs or stumbles serve as metaphors, which is what makes storytelling such a powerful way to relate to people. In life and in everyday conversation, stories often become metaphors for larger issues: the explosion at the store clerk—the small moment—that stands for more universal struggles with patience, kindness, and self-control.
- Stories can help us see a real situation in a different setting. And that separation out of the everyday helps us return to our current situation with new eyes, because we’ve started to see our own world through the lens of the story-world. This is why stories work so well in difficult conversations and why humor in stories can help relax a tense situation.
- Of course, this can work in reverse, as well; as you listen to the stories of others, you see the universal moments in their situations.
- The cultural theorist Norman Denzin uses the term “universal singular” to discuss the fact that each of us represents both singular and universal experiences. We are singular—there are things that are unique to our own backgrounds, upbringing, choices, and personalities—and, at the same time, we each represent something universal about our cultures and, indeed, the human experience.



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A small story about frustration outside of work might be useful in counseling an employee who is frequently angered in the office.

- With this in mind, I invite you to target your own experiences—big and small—and begin to see the thread of universal experience in them. Start a storytelling journal, and as a first exercise, write down three things that happened to you this week that stick out in your mind.
 - These events don't have to be significant—just occurrences that were meaningful to you. It could be hugging your child after you came home from work or making a difficult choice at the office.
 - Think of the details surrounding each of those three events. If you hugged your child after coming home from work, what was work like that day? What was the commute like? What was the expression on your child's face? Where were you when you hugged your child? Take time to write down as many details as you can.
 - Then, look at those three rough stories and see if you can identify one universal struggle or feature in each of them—something that goes beyond the individual circumstances that you just wrote down.
 - Remember those three universals and look for opportunities later this week to tell one of those stories in a situation in which your audience might need to hear it. The audience might be your son or daughter, your spouse, or a couple of co-workers.
 - If you find the right situation to tell the story, pay attention to the ongoing needs of your audience as you're telling it. Do you need to tell a shortened version of the story (because of the physical or social contexts)? Do you need to stress some details and not others because those are the ones that would matter most to this audience?
 - Finally, if you get a chance to tell one of those stories, record how you adapted the story to your audience. And hold onto that notebook—you'll need it for the lectures to come!

Suggested Reading

Breen, *Chamber Theatre*.

Lepp, *Seeing Is Believing*.

———, www.leppstorytelling.com.

Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling*.

Questions to Consider

1. How, specifically, does an audience communicate its needs to you as you're telling a story?
2. Think of three events or moments from your past week. Can you see threads of universal experience in those events?

Telling Family Stories

Lecture 5

In this lecture and the next two, we'll talk about time-tested stories: family stories, fairy tales, and myths. Of course, there are many other kinds of stories, but these are some of the foundational ones. In fact, one of the first places we encounter stories is in our families. The stories we hear as children shape family continuity, creating a sense of connection to the past and sending that connection on through future generations. This lecture will help you identify more of your own family stories to tell. We'll also talk about the hidden meanings of this story genre: why we tell family stories, how stories organically emerge from families, and what remembering these stories entails.

Why Do We Tell Family Stories?

- Many repeated family stories are about small things: the time you skinned your knee, or built a tree house, or your father told you something wise after you'd done something foolish. Some of the most meaningful stories we pass along to our children are about small occurrences that amount to big truths about who we are and who we want to be.
- A story about my two-year-old son's reaction to a dramatic weather forecast on TV serves several purposes for our family. When we tell this story to our son later, we will be shaping his sense of self and identity; he'll grow up knowing that we know he's smart, that we were charmed by his innocence, and that he's central to our family. According to Professor Elizabeth Stone, family stories tell us "who we are and how we got that way."
- We tell stories within the family to shape identities—for ourselves and for other family members. We also give others outside the family a sense of who the family as a unit is through our stories. The very fact that we think of families as being cohesive is the

result of stories. Families are linked by blood, of course, but we make that blood mean something through our stories.

- Family stories give us a sense of continuity with the past and buoyancy in the present—they give us a foundation for where we stand in history.
- Further, it's not just what we say (the content) but how we say it (the telling) and who speaks. Your sister may tell a story about when you were children, and it may irritate you when she tells it, but she can tell it because she's your older sister. Her telling that story is a sign of her authority and position in the family.
- There may also be stories that aren't told to newcomers in the family, as a way of keeping them out and securing the family borders, or stories that are only whispered among family members.
 - The next time you're at a family gathering, observe how the stories emerge. Going back to our first lecture, you can see many of the qualities of oral thought in these scenes.
 - For instance, family stories are co-constructed in vibrant, complex contexts. You've got Uncle Joe telling a story about his first wife, and his current wife shushing him under her breath, and the cousins whispering side comments to each other, and all the while, people are adding to other people's stories. All of these activities add to the emergence of the story.
 - Stories hang in this web of social relations, and they're edited and in constant flux depending on the audience they're told to.
 - We can take all of this back to the storytelling triangle: Here is the physical and social context in which you're telling many of your stories—in the midst of family bustle or in quieter moments with just one other family member.



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Family stories are often co-constructed in complex contexts, with multiple tellers and activities contributing to the emergence of the story.

Family Stories and Memory

- Family stories are usually about memory—remembering other family members who have come before us or remembering childhood experiences.
- In telling a story about a family member, we're often choosing how to remember that person. That choice may not be a conscious one—you're just telling your son about his grandfather—but even in that context, there are deep relationships going on in the storytelling triangle.
 - You're telling stories to an audience—your son—and you want your son to think of his grandfather (and, by association, himself) in a certain way.
 - You have a relationship to the story subject (your father), and that affects what you want to tell, how you want to remember that person.

- There is no such thing as an objectively told story. There is a power dynamic at play when you are the storyteller. You decide what gets into the story and what gets left out, whose voices are privileged, whose experiences matter enough to be worthy of mention, and how the story concludes—who gets the last word.

Your Canon of Family Stories

- Start a list in your storytelling journal of people in your family who exist now only through stories. Are there family members for whom you are the sole bearer of their stories? How do you remember those people? How do you want your children to remember them? What do those closest to you need to know about these family members? How do you want those people to survive?
- Write down three characteristics that you know about yourself. Can you connect any of those characteristics to other family members or to the opposite of other family members?
- Think about the stories you know because they were repeated to you many times by family members. Write down a few quick phrases or topics to help you remember.
- Think about the stories you have passed down to your children. Again, jot down just a few topics or phrases.
- Also consider how small a family story can be. What is one thing that happened to you this week that typifies a value for your family or yourself?
- Consider whether there are family stories that you intentionally don't tell. Why not?
- Finally, think about how you want to survive. What stories do you want your family to tell about you?
- These questions are wonderful for jumpstarting ideas about the family stories you already have, and they can help you think about

stories you might want to share with others. Family stories and personal stories are a wonderful place to start when you're working on developing your storytelling because you often know these stories so well already.

Bridging Personal Stories to Public Audiences

- One difficulty in telling family stories to audiences outside the family is that you know the characters so well that it may be hard to contextualize the social connections and to distill the characters.
- In the sample story from Elizabeth Ellis about her grandson, note how the characters are introduced, how the context is set, and how the particular story relates to wider issues facing many other people. Ellis uses several techniques to make the story accessible to an outside audience.
 - First, she clarifies who she is and her relationship with her grandson. She also sets the context of the story well. Much of the story is relatable to us; many of us have children, and we understand the difficulties of trying to get out the door with a child.
 - Then, Ellis takes us inside her own perspective, and the humor of the story becomes what isn't clear to her. From this moment of humor, we get to the meaning of the story—it expands out from the particular situation to the wider struggles that many people face. The story is about much more than a conversation in the bathroom; it's about love, and investing time in the people you love, and taking care of each other.
- Revision and editing are crucial when you're adapting family stories for a public audience. Such a story as “Hands” is what Ellis would call an “accordion story”; it can expand or contract to suit the needs of the audience. In fact, there was much that I had to distill into that story.
 - The idea for the story began with the image of my grandfather's hands. Their size, his tough skin, the signs of arthritis—all those details spoke to many other parts of his life. I thought

outward to other stories that connected to his hands, but at each of those mini-stories, I had to maintain an awareness that they came back to his hands.

- The image of my grandfather cupping the heads of his baby girls in his hands is an imagined one, but it encompasses many other stories that relate to the unquestioned love my mother felt from her father. The audience doesn't get to hear those stories but gets the point that moves this particular story along. The editing retains the focus on the central character and allows the narrative thread to hang together.
- When you're doing your own editing of family stories, keep the following tips in mind.
 - Look at the story as a whole, with all the tangents, and try to identify what the story is really about for you. With "Hands," the story was about my grandfather's deep love for me. He loves a lot of other people and ideals in the story, but ultimately, the story came back to him and me—with the central image being his hands.
 - Consider what parts of the story your audience can relate to.
 - If possible, limit yourself to three main characters. If you include more than that, an audience may get overwhelmed.
 - Pair these editing suggestions with the questions we asked regarding Elizabeth Ellis's story to help bridge your story to an audience unfamiliar with your family dynamics. Introduce the main characters, set the context, and relate the particular story outward to wider issues facing your audience.
- Keep in mind that family and personal stories are most effective when the particular dramas of your own life animate and illustrate the wider dramas in all our lives. Make your story relevant by identifying your own moments of human struggle or triumph and

giving your audience the language to voice those dramas that we all face. Give them a story they could live in.

Suggested Reading

Ellis, “Storytelling and the Development of Ethical Behavior with Elizabeth Ellis.”

———, *Elizabeth Ellis: Storyteller*, www.elizabethellis.com.

Ellis and Neimi, *Inviting the Wolf In*.

Meyerhoff, *Number Our Days*.

Stone, *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins*.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you have a family member who exists now only through stories? How do you want others to remember that person?
2. Think of one of your favorite family stories. What would an outside audience need in terms of context and character descriptions in order to understand the meaning of that story? How might that specific story relate to wider issues facing many other people?

The Powerful Telling of Fairy Tales

Lecture 6

Fairy tales have staying power. We have many versions of these basic stories because, like myths, they contain something that speaks to us at a core level. As we'll see in this lecture, fairy tales relate to everyone—not just children—because they reveal the human condition; they are, in fact, deeply personal. In this lecture, we'll talk first about how we come to know fairy tales; then we'll discuss what fairy tales do psychologically for children and why the themes of these classic stories can be just as appealing to adults.

“Cinderella”

- Most of us know the story of Cinderella in one form or another, but did you know that nearly every culture has a Cinderella story? There are hundreds of variants of this story from around the world.
- One of the oldest versions of the Cinderella story comes from China, where the ancient practice of foot binding reveals that culture's association of small feet with beauty. From this, we get the idea that Cinderella must have a dainty foot to fit inside the slipper.
- This detail carried over into the German version that the Grimm brothers collected. In fact, in the Grimm version, the stepsisters, whose feet are too big for the slipper, cut off their big toes to try to make their feet fit.
- The idea of a glass slipper comes from a French collection done by a man named Perrault; his is the only version that has the slipper made of glass. In Russia, it's a fleece-lined boot, and in Kashmir, it's a nose ring. Perrault took the common versions of the story and elevated the raw materials—from common skin to glass—because his versions were written to suit the salons and courts of 17th-century Paris.

- Of course, the Cinderella story is also repeated in modern films, such as *Pretty Woman*. This fairy tale is even embedded in *The King's Speech*, in which King George VI enlists the aid of a speech therapist (his fairy godmother) to help him overcome his stuttering so that he can announce on the radio Britain's declaration of war on Germany (his magic-slipper moment).

“Little Red Riding Hood”

- Let's look at another fairy tale you're probably familiar with: “Little Red Riding Hood.” Many versions of this story also exist around the world, all forms of a tale type called the “Grandmother's Tale,” which originated in Asia. The different versions of this story animate earlier cultural mores and psychological preoccupations.
- Perrault's version, for example, is a reworking of the story from a 17th-century perspective, shaped by the court of Louis XIV, a reign known for sexual excess and intrigues. In earlier versions, the girl figured out a way to escape from the wolf's clutches. But in Perrault's version, she is an unchaste girl, draped in red, who dawdles in the woods and is eaten. The didactic fable ending tacked on tells little girls not to associate with wolves.
- The Grimm brothers in Germany called their version “Little Red Cap.” They were the ones who introduced the huntsman into the story and the idea that the grandmother and the girl are eaten whole but then brought back out of the belly of the wolf.

Contradictory Desires

- Over the years, this story has been handed down and revised to suit the cultural values of the time and location of the telling. But throughout these versions, the theme of contradictory desires comes through: Should Red Riding Hood talk to the wolf or go on her way; stay on the path or wander and pick flowers; talk to grandmother, even though she seems odd, or run away?
- Of course, as adults, we deal with conflicting desires all the time. In Freudian terms, we're dealing with the reality principle and the

pleasure principle. The reality principle (what we know we should do—go to work, take out the trash) stands in direct contrast to the pleasure principle (what we want to do, even at the expense of others).

- At age five, these contradictory desires can seem very basic, but they are real and even heightened, so children who get into trouble really do feel as if a wolf has swallowed them whole!
- It's important to recognize the reality of these heightened feelings in children. They need to know that their feelings are valid; that even though they struggle with contradictory desires, everything will be fine in the end; and that when they enter the woods again, they can overcome the temptations and desires the woods present.
- Bruno Bettelheim was one of the first scholars to note the real work that fairy tales do for children's psychological development. Fantasy provides an "unreal" world where a wolf can be cut open and a grandmother and child can remain alive in its belly! Although that world is a fantasy, it still reveals powerful truths, and it reveals them in a heightened way that meets children right where they are—in the heightened emotional state of childhood.
- When you're telling a fairy tale to children, keep these three points in mind:
 - Such characters as the wolf represent a "real" temptation and problem to children. When I tell "Little Red Riding Hood" to children, I believe that the wolf is real. This helps draw the children into the story because they see that I'm taking it seriously.



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In the heightened emotional state of childhood, a child who gets in trouble or is put down may believe, "Nobody loves me!"

- As a storyteller, you have to clearly picture the story you want to tell. You need to have specific visual images that you “see” when you talk about the wolf, or the path, or Red Riding Hood. We’ll discuss this visualization in depth in later lectures.
- Finally, the happy ending assures children that their real conflicting desires are valid and that it’s acceptable to have those desires. As they grow and mature, they will work through those conflicts. As a storyteller, you take children into the belly of the beast—because their fears of the beast are real—but you leave them in a safe, reassuring place at the end.

A Medieval Version of “Little Red Riding Hood”

- A French version of the “Little Red Riding Hood” story from the Middle Ages is more representative of a majority of the older oral versions across cultures.
- In this version, we find no huntsman, no “resurrection” for the grandmother, and no little red cape for the girl. In fact, this story presents some curious and mature themes.
- For instance, the wolf asks the girl if she wants to go the path of the pins or the path of the needles. Conducting research in rural France, the scholar Yvonne Verdier found that traditionally, young girls were sent away to spend the winter with a seamstress. Ostensibly, this practice was meant to teach the girls about sewing, but in effect, the ritual winter away was more about preening the girls for womanhood.
 - Girls were said to be “gathering pins” until they reached the age of 15, when they could go to dances and be “pinned” by the boys; thus, pins symbolize the bridge to maidenhood.
 - Needles, with the thread going through the eye, are symbolic of sexual maturity. When the girl in this story faces the fork in the road with the wolf—and he gives her the choice of maidenhood (pins) or sexual maturity (needles)—she picks the pins, but

the wolf (a clear sexual symbol in the story) goes the path of the needles.

- When she gets to the house, the girl drinks her grandmother's blood and eats her flesh. According to Bettelheim, this is a symbolic act of maturity and puberty; the girl is coming into womanhood, replacing the older woman of the family and conquering her by consuming her. The gore in these stories seems to give form to the psychological disarray in our minds as we sort through the steps into a new phase of life.
 - Literature and the media often feature stories of aging women having difficulty with young women. "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves" is about that theme: the age-old "war" between younger women and older women. The theme relates to fears of both young and old alike.
 - As I'm telling this part of the story, I'm narrating about blood and flesh, but in my mind, I'm thinking about that step into maturity. In theater terms, this is the difference between my spoken lines and my "internal monologue," the voice inside that motivates what you say.
 - You can apply this technique to add nuance to your storytelling. Symbols are very powerful, and you can communicate them powerfully to audiences, not by explaining what they mean but by thinking about the deeper meanings of them while you tell.
- The wolf crawls into grandmother's bed and draws Red Riding Hood closer to him; he seduces her toward the bed. And she is drawn to him; even in the more sanitized Perrault version, she jumps into bed with the wolf. This points to the human fascination with things that are bad for us.
 - But the idea of literally "getting in bed with the bad boy" is never explicitly stated; it's handled through metaphor and fantasy. That's the crucially unique thing that fairy tales do for us: They handle universal themes that stick with us.

- For a five-year-old girl, the metaphorical wolf may be the temptation to eat all the cookies from the cookie jar when mom isn't watching. But when that girl gets to be a teenager, the story is still there as a part of her memory, whether she consciously brings it to mind or not, and it may remind her not to associate with the bad boy or to veer off the path that leads to college and wander through the woods.

Telling Fairy Tales to Adults

- I apply many of the same lessons about storytelling for children when I'm telling adult versions.
- As a storyteller, you have to believe in the truth of what you're saying. Even though they may be fantasy, fairy tales reveal truths. Explore the deeper themes and truths that a story offers; even as adults, such stories help us sort through contradictory desires.
- Again, clearly picture the story you want to tell. You need to have specific visual images that you "see" when you talk about the wolf, or the path, or Red Riding Hood.
- As a storyteller, you must have the "dark" in order to have the "light" of the happy ending; that is, Red Riding Hood must get swallowed by the wolf in order to see the goodness of not wandering from the path again. Explore the possibilities that the dark and light places in these stories offer.

Suggested Reading

Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*.

Pantheon Fairytale and Folklore Library.

Winding, "The Path of Needles or Pins: Little Red Riding Hood."

Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm*.

Questions to Consider

1. Fairy tales take us to a fantasy world. Things are possible in this world that aren't in the real world (for example, animals talk and magic exists), but there are still rules that govern that fantasy world (if you don't obey, a wolf might get you). How does "fantasy" still represent a kind of "reality," and how can reality be enhanced by our experiences in fantasy?
2. Name one metaphorical "wolf" in your own experiences—something or someone that you're drawn to (the pleasure principle), but you know you shouldn't act on that desire (the reality principle). Can you retell a short version of "Red Riding Hood," still using the fantasy characters and scenes but thinking about your own personal "wolf"? How does that enhance your telling?

Myth and the Hero's Journey

Lecture 7

In the same way that patterns in art are repeated across cultures, so are patterns in stories, including repeated structures and archetypal symbols. The tale of Red Riding Hood, for example, followed a kind of pattern: start in the “real” world, descend into a dark place, and emerge from that place as a new and different person. Many traditional stories symbolically connect with the needs of the human spirit through archetypal figures and by following a specific trajectory of events mapped out as the hero's journey. Everyday storytellers can apply these concepts that scholars have gleaned from studying myths across cultures to make their own stories more lasting and compelling.

Joseph Campbell's “Hero's Journey”

- The trajectory of events identified by the mythologist Joseph Campbell as the “hero's journey” follows a pattern of separation from the world, initiation into new understanding (usually through trials), and return to the known world. This is the same formula that we all experience in life in “rites of passage.”
- This type of journey doesn't happen only in adolescence. Life is marked by continual rites of passage, points when we leave the known and enter something new. When your parents pass away, for example, you are flung from your known world into an unfamiliar and frightening place. After a time of wrestling with your new position, you emerge with a new understanding of who you are.
- This pattern of separation, initiation, and return is one way to think about structuring the stories you tell. This structure is evident in the story of Kyazimba, the East African man who set out to find the land of the rising sun.
 - The separation occurs when the mythological hero is unwittingly called into danger. At the very moment that Kyazimba is about

to give up his search, he meets the old woman, who gives him her cloak, with which he is whisked away.

- As his initiation, Kyazimba casts himself into the unknown and faces powerful forces that have the potential to destroy him. He must earn the favor of the sun god.
- Finally, Kyazimba returns home, and with the sun god's blessings, he prospers. When the hero emerges, he is not the same person who once descended into the dark—the journey has transformed him.
- Think about applying the hero's journey to pivotal moments in your life, at which you had a choice to either stay where you were or go into the unknown. Consider events that transformed you in some way, even though they may not seem significant to others, such as the first time you rode a bike or traveled in a foreign country.
 - In your storytelling journal, write down a few details of the events surrounding this pivotal moment. See if you can identify the point of departure, and circle the word or phrase that most pointedly marks this moment.
 - Next, circle the word or phrase that marks the point of initiation. Note that this may or may not be the emotional peak of the story.
 - Finally, identify the word or phrase that marks the moment of return.

The Inanna Story: Separation

- The Inanna story is one of the most ancient stories we have on record. In it, Inanna descends into the underworld and is transformed into a corpse. When she is finally rescued, she is told that she must find a replacement for herself. Ultimately, the replacements she names are her husband and his sister, who divide the time they must serve in hell each year. When her husband is in hell, Inanna mourns, and her sorrow brings winter to the earth.

- Even in the truncated version of the Inanna epic, we can see the structure of the hero's journey emerging in more detail.
- At the moment of departure, Inanna receives aid from her servant; Ninshubur promises to come for Inanna if she doesn't return.
 - Usually in myths, there is some form of helper (an old woman, a servant) who nudges the hero further along the path. Symbolically, this is the moment of overcoming the ego, when the hero lets go of what is secure and exhibits the willingness to take a risk in order to change his or her life.
 - Go back to the story from your life in your storytelling journal and try to identify the person or thing who nudged you into your journey. What part of you might have needed convincing to take the journey? What desires or fears might you have needed to overcome in order to dive in to your adventure?
- In the Inanna story, the hero reaches the threshold—the gates of hell—where Neti is the gatekeeper. This is the edge of the earth, beyond which is the unknown.
 - Psychologically, this is a moment of self-annihilation; if what has come before is the self you've known, crossing this threshold is passing into the potential for a new self—which risks a kind of death of your old self.
 - Inanna is the concrete form of this psychological risk; she knows she risks literal death. For your story, the gatekeeper may be those desires or fears that you had to push past as you set out on your journey.
- When Inanna passes through the seven gates of hell, she descends fully into the underworld—fully surrounded and encompassed by this dangerous place.
 - Such stories as Inanna's give us a trajectory for our own experiences; they map out those times in our lives when we feel swallowed whole by an overwhelmingly impossible task,

and they map out the inner struggles that take place when we're in the midst of those outer, physical realities.

- In your journal, write down a few descriptions of what it felt like for you to be in the midst of a new and unfamiliar place. In some cases, your journey might be a grand adventure (such as a trip overseas), but it can still be overwhelming; you're still making yourself vulnerable by leaving home.

The Inanna Story: Initiation

- In the second phase of the hero's journey, the hero is initiated into some new knowledge and way of being. As Inanna passes through the seven gates of hell, she must give up some part of herself or her former life at every gate.
 - Psychologically, this is the point when you decide to put the comfort and security of your former life aside in order to risk change or transformation—it's the point when you let go.



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The “dragon” in your story may be physical exhaustion in a race or fear of taking a risk in business.

- In the story, Inanna is literally stripped bare, and to some extent, that's what it feels like when you're in the midst of an overwhelmingly challenging experience and you commit yourself to complete that challenge. The process is one of both letting go and opening up to meet what awaits you.
- In that state, you face your dragon. For Inanna, the dragon is the judges and death. In your story, the dragon could be a point of utter exhaustion in a race, a point of depression, or a moment of fear. Write down your thoughts on your "dragon," including the physical events of the moment and the mental challenges you had to overcome.

The Inanna Story: Return

- In Inanna's story, she has a magical helper, one who fought for her in heaven. In your story, you may have a very real spiritual moment when some greater power saved you as you faced your dragon. But remember that traditional stories give us a way to deal with different aspects of our own personalities.
 - According to Carl Jung, the images and characters in our dreams don't represent us versus the evils of the outside world but different aspects of ourselves. And myths are our collective dreams. They bring up archetypal figures—shared symbols, such as the mother figure or the servant-helper—who tap into our collective unconscious and connect all of humanity.
 - Archetypes link humanity laterally; for example, everyone has a mother figure, although she may be embodied by someone other than your biological mother. They also connect us horizontally, up and down the family line, to the line of mother figures who have come before us.
 - We feel the power of archetypes perhaps most keenly when we lose an archetypal figure in our lives, such as a parent or grandparent. You're not just losing the person, but you're losing the physical trace of all that figure represents, both laterally and horizontally.

- Look back to your story to see if you can identify any archetypal figures.
- Perhaps in your story, you found some inner strength to overcome the dragon you were facing and return to the known world with new knowledge about yourself.
 - If the complete story is an attempt to reconcile all the parts of a whole person, then the helper represents that strong part of ourselves that we know exists, the part that steps in to save us when our former selves have been eviscerated.
 - The helper brings growth, change, and renewal. And in Inanna's story, she herself prepared this help before she descended; she knew she would need a way out, and even though she dies in the story, she helps herself out of death.
- Inanna leaves the underworld as a new person, with new power. She has, after all, just frightened the judges who rule over death. She exerts this power over all the earth to give us the seasons.
 - Campbell describes the ability Inanna now possesses as being the "master of two worlds." She has one foot on earth and the other in the realm of the spirit.
 - In your story, your journey may have brought you to some new insight about yourself, have given you access to a different way of being, or have brought a spiritual revelation. You can keep your feet in this world, but you also have access to cross into another place that you've journeyed through and survived.
 - In your journal, write down what facing the dragon led you to. What did you find when you were in the belly of the beast? You may have gained something physical (a new ability or renewed physical strength), as well as something mental. When you returned, how did you understand your world differently as a result of your journey?

Your Hero's Journey

- What you've sketched out in your journal over the course of this lecture is probably a fairly compelling story for others.
- You've looked not just at your own experience but at the deeper psychological journey that the experience took you on. And you've looked for those archetypal figures in your story that connect with our collective human experiences and struggles.

Suggested Reading

Bodkin, *The Odyssey: An Epic Telling*.

———, www.oddsbodkin.com.

Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

Campbell, Moyers, and Lucas, *The Power of Myth*.

Sherman, *Mythology for Storytellers*.

Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna*.

Questions to Consider

1. Discuss the hero's journey story you sketched out in this lecture. What is your "dragon," and how did you overcome it?
2. When I told my hairdresser the Inanna story, I drastically shortened the separation and initiation sections in order to get to "her" part at the end: when, in Inanna's return, she sends her husband to hell instead of her beautician! You may want to focus on a specific part of your journey story, either because of your audience or your own connection to the story. Which part (separation, initiation, return) interests you most in the story you just sketched out? Why?

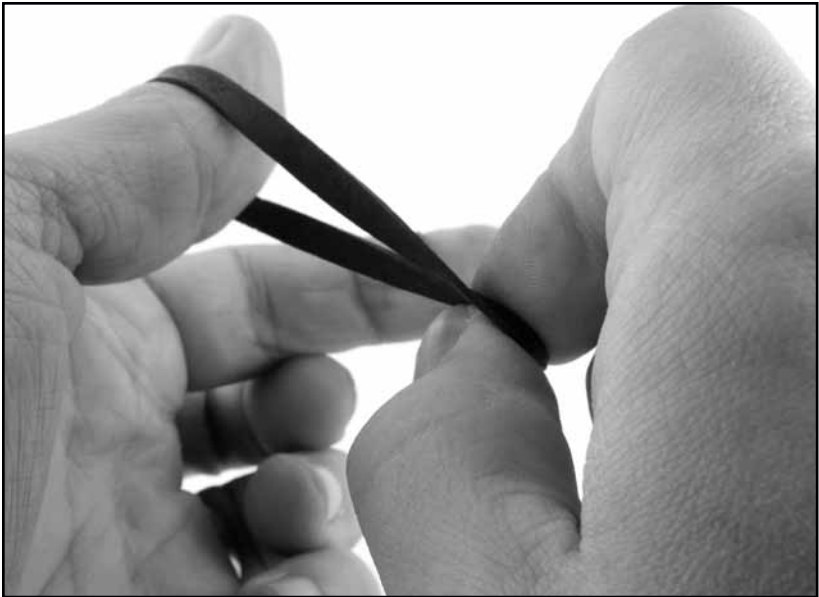
Tensive Conflict and Meaning

Lecture 8

Thus far, we've talked about mythical journeys, psychological themes, and family dramas. But what about the beginning, middle, and end— isn't that what a story is all about? Many stories follow that structure, but as we'll see, some stories don't. Locating a beginning, middle, and end isn't the way you discover a story's meaning. In this lecture, we'll think about a story as a set of interconnected pieces, and we'll look at how these pieces relate to one another to create drama.

Story Pieces

- Let's begin by looking at the hero's journey we sketched out in the last lecture and identifying some of the different pieces that are present in that story. If you like, get out your storytelling journal and take some notes.
- Start by listing all the characters in your hero's journey story and consider whether there are any tangential characters or people who could be included. Next, list all the places that are present in your story.
- Every story takes the audience out of the "here and now" and into a "there and then"—a different time. What moment in time does your story transport your audience to? Is there a radical shift in time from one scene to the next?
- All of these pieces of your story stand in relation to one another. The people are connected in some way, but there's also a kind of dynamic tension that's possible between characters in a story. This kind of relationship is known as "tensiveness."
 - This is not the same kind of tension that we think of as a negative in our daily lives. In the storytelling context, tensiveness is the dynamic quality in stories that reveals pulls between opposing forces.



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Think about tensive forces as a rubber band; there's a connection between the two ends of the band, but each side is moving in a different direction from the other.

- These opposing forces are everywhere in stories: The main character wants to go somewhere, but she's stuck somewhere else. Another character is getting older but feels and acts much younger.
- Literary scholars sometimes use the term “juxtapose” to talk about contrasts in a story, but that term has a static quality to it. In “Snow White,” the juxtaposition of the old queen and the young princess tends to make both ends of the age spectrum clearer, but it doesn't reveal the dynamism or interaction between those opposites.

Tensive Forces in Action

- The story told in an earlier lecture about the coal miner trapped underground for 14 hours was based on interviews with more than 20 miners, most of whom were disabled, and most of whom said

they would go back to the mines again if they could. In the process of stepping back and seeing all the pieces of mining life that could make a story, I noticed many tensive desires at play:

- The pain of disability and the longing of the miners to go back to the work that had made them disabled
 - The constant danger of daily work in the mines and the horseplay that made the daily work bearable
 - The underground work of the miners and their lives with their families aboveground
 - The connection to parents who had been miners and a strong desire for the miners' own children to do a different kind of work.
- Tensive possibilities were also present in the concrete environment of the mines and my own thoughts about mining in the wider scope of American life:
 - The blackness of coal and the fact that we get the brightest and most valuable gem—diamonds—from coal
 - The dirt and dust of the mines (and the stigma that attaches to dirtiness in American culture) and the clean, bright places that coal enables us to create
 - One miner's observation: "We work with our hands so other people can work with their heads."
 - From those tensive pulls, I started to locate the real point of these stories—the connection between audience members' aboveground lives (powered by coal energy) and the bodies working underground to make that lifestyle possible.
 - From my interviews with miners, I saw what they stressed in their stories—the fascination with fossils, the relationships with friends,

and the real need for horseplay as a kind of relief from the tension of their difficult and dangerous work.

- I began to see that the story of the one trapped miner, Donzel, could be the spine for all the tensive pulls that existed in the mining culture. Instead of retelling the mining company’s version of Donzel’s story, I stepped back and looked at the real tensive pulls at play.
 - The story couldn’t be one of doom and gloom, because that’s not how the miners view their lives; as I said, many of them dream of going back to the mines.
 - The real story is about relationships, about the fact that the “rescue team” is the person working beside you, and about survival. The moment when Donzel made it out of the mine was the climax for the story.
 - Looking at these tensive forces is how you locate conflict in your story, and conflict is what drives a story.

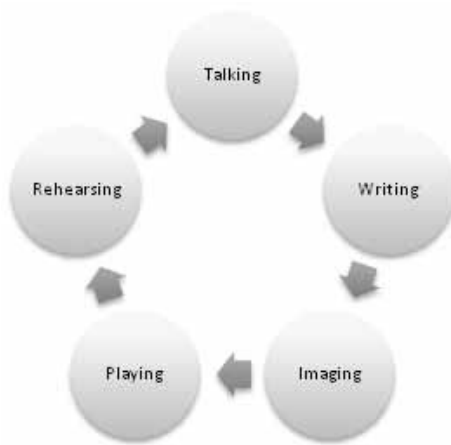
Maintaining Tensiveness in Telling

- Of course, people often tell stories once the “real” conflict is resolved, but it’s important, while you’re telling the story, to be in the moment of each scene, because the characters don’t know what’s going to happen!
- Telling a story as if everything that takes place is a foregone conclusion diffuses all the tensiveness that you worked so hard to identify.
- Living and telling in the moment, as if you don’t know how the story will turn out, will help draw your listeners closer to the characters. They’ll empathize with the characters more, because they’re right there with you, following your lead, not knowing what’s going to happen either. Your audience becomes curious to hear more.

- Examine one of your own stories to try to identify one tensive pull between locations. Is one place darker, more threatening than another? Is one place more vibrant or full of life? Again, it's not just a juxtaposition that you're looking for—it's not just labeling opposites. Think about how these places relate to each other. Next, try to identify one tensive pull between two different characters in your story, two times, or two emotions.
- Along with these tensive pulls, stand back from your story pieces and identify any repeated images or themes, such as patterns of light and dark. Both the tensive pulls and the common themes help you locate what's really going on in your story—what your purpose is in telling the story and the meaning you find in it.

The Cycle of Story Development

- As we said, a storyteller's work does not start with identifying a beginning, middle, and end; rather, it starts by identifying the tensive potential—between characters, between places, between times, or between combinations of those elements.
- The idea of stepping back from your story, seeing the story pieces, and looking at the tensiveness and relationship between those pieces is all part of the cycle of story development.
- Stories live with us, and the more we get to know a story, the more we see in that story and the more dimensions open up. The more we tell the story to audiences (formally or informally), the more we see how others see that story, and that opens up more dimensions. Then you step back again and see other relationships between the pieces.
- For the professional storyteller, creating a story performance is an alchemical process that usually involves an interconnected cycle of talking, writing, imaging, playing, and rehearsing. The process of developing a story could begin at any of these points.
 - Talking is a crucial part of story development because stories often come up as a part of conversation and are initially “rehearsed” in conversation. Talking—practicing the story as



The story development process is an interconnected cycle of talking, writing, imaging, playing, and rehearsing.

part of a shared conversation—prevents you from crafting a story in isolation, which may result in telling that feels forced. Talking also reveals aspects of a story, such as humor, that you may not be initially aware of.

- In the story development process, writing does not mean scripting; it means journaling, sketching out ideas, or free-associating on paper. Writing works in tandem with telling the story aloud to help you piece together the parts of your story. Writing also helps you remember, but it's important not to get tied to the wording you use in your journals and sketches. Writing can give you a certain comfortable distance from your audience and your topic, but in telling, you are fully immersed in the scene.
- This immersion is equivalent to imaging. You should be able to see the story all around you; the places and people of the story become real to you because you are “in” the story. In turn, your audience will be drawn into your story and will believe

it because they can see the reality of those people and places for you.

- One of the best parts of storytelling is playing with stories, that is, exploring all the possibilities that a story can hold. When you play with your story, you're testing the characters: How loud can the giant be? How frightening can the witch be? You can play with the order of events or the appearance of characters. You're also testing possible meanings; is the story really about power or love, revenge or forgiveness? Finally, you're testing your own limits as a storyteller—your gestures and delivery.
- Rehearsing is really the process of learning the story, which is what you're doing when you're talking, writing, and so on. To rehearse is to get comfortable with a story so that it lives inside you.
- Again, because this cycle is interconnected, you can start at any one phase of it and jump to another. Stories come to us in different ways, and you will develop your own preferred way of developing stories. This is a much freer, more creative approach than trying to find a beginning, middle, and end.
- Keep in mind, too, that this is a repeating cycle. You don't just play once with a story and that's it. As you develop and refine a story, you'll go back to each of these parts of the process, and each time, you will deepen your understanding of the story and reflect on the meanings it can hold.
- With each audience and each telling, your relationship with the story changes; another layer of meaning and experience is added. Sometimes, this process of story development can be its own hero's journey, going deeper into the story until you emerge with a story that feels comfortable to you and that you enjoy telling to audiences.

Suggested Reading

Ellis and Neimi, *Inviting the Wolf In*.

The Folk Tellers (Regan-Blake and Freeman), *Storytelling*.

Questions to Consider

1. Story development is a process. What part of this process (talking, writing, imaging, playing, rehearsing) seems most natural to you? What part might be a different experience for you?
2. Think of a story you like to tell. What are some tense pulls in this story?

Giving Yourself Permission to Tell

Lecture 9

As you add layers of life onto a story and dig deeper into the meanings that the story may contain, you may also find a few layers of yourself and your own anxieties that you need to strip away in order to see what the story contains and what you, as the storyteller, can bring to your delivery. Part of preparing to tell a story is being able to let go of the things that might be holding you back. Sometimes, we worry about how well we can tell a story or how we might appear to other people when we tell. In this lecture, we learn about giving yourself permission to play with stories, make mistakes, and even “break up with” your stories.

Breaking a Story Apart

- In the last lecture, we looked at stories as a bunch of pieces that you can fit together to create a whole. It’s important to see stories in this way from the beginning, because while a story is in pieces, you have creative freedom in putting it together.
- Think of a story like a mosaic. You’ve got pieces that you’re fitting together to make a unified whole—a complete picture that has dimension, color, texture, and meaning.
- If you put the pieces together and they don’t seem to fit, give yourself permission to break up what you’ve made and start over. See how the pieces could fit together differently.

Playing with Stories

- One of the most fun parts of storytelling is getting to experiment on your own with the dimensions of a story. You have to stretch yourself as a storyteller in order to see where the story could go. Rehearsals are an excellent way to play with possibilities; after you rehearse, you can trim your story and tame it down to what you actually will do when you tell the story for an audience.

- Choose the meanest character from a story you know; it could be the wolf, your boss, or your ex-spouse. Now, say out loud one line from that story as if you were that mean character. Exaggerate your delivery beyond what you would use for a public audience.
- Next, think of another character’s reaction to what that mean character just said; again, this could be one of the three little pigs or yourself responding to something your boss has said. If this character didn’t say anything, think of a line that describes what he or she did—sulked away or slammed the door. Out loud, say that character’s response.
- If you’re unable to try these exercises, ask yourself: What is holding me back from experimenting? Why can’t I give myself permission to play? Remember, what you do in rehearsal is not the same thing you have to do in telling the story. Rehearsal is “you” time; it’s time set aside for you to play with the story.
- As we’ve said, every storyteller has a unique style of telling, and every storyteller can improve his or her range of telling by experimenting. The stretching exercises in these lectures are aimed at helping you discover and become even more at home with your own style of telling.
- You play in order to become more familiar with a story, to see the story’s depth, and to visit your own possibilities as a teller. Stretching yourself is a good thing—it’s like stretching any other muscle in your body. When you limber up, you’re all the more ready to perform well.

Making Mistakes

- Especially in the beginning phases of the rehearsal process and when you’re playing with stories, give yourself permission to make mistakes.
- When you’re playing with stories—seeing what might work, what doesn’t fit, how big a character could sound, how small a voice

could be—you will discover some things that you decide not to include in a public telling of the story. When you tell the story to some audiences, you will discover some things that don't work with a particular audience. But telling is a part of the story development process, and in that process, you will make mistakes.

- Allow yourself to take some risks in telling stories to friends, especially when you're working on developing a particular story to tell. These audiences are forgiving and less apt to focus on things that don't work in the story.

Going to the Dark Places

- Some stories appear to be relatively mild on the surface, but layered within them may be other possible themes. As you're developing a story, give yourself permission to go to the dark places.
- The story "Mama's Wings" began as a memory about playing with my dog and making something. But then I gave myself permission to see all that could be explored in that memory. The real meaning for me came through in the darker side.
- When I looked at the places and characters in the story—not only the main characters but the characters in the background—I could see that the tense pulls were between the innocent and "light" things that happened up front and a dark background.
- Remember what we said in the last lecture about not being too quick to put a story into a structure. You need to allow other sorts of thoughts and ideas to come into your thinking.
 - Pull from your memories, write them down, hold onto them, and see how they might fit into a story.
 - A story about a little girl with her dog seems almost routine, but by giving myself permission to think about everything going on at that time—the sadness, too—I was able to find the tense pulls, the drama, that made this collection of memories into a real story.



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The story-sharing that takes place among small groups increases student retention at colleges and universities.

Digressing

- We often hear people discouraging digression, but in storytelling, digression gives flesh to the bones. Many business professionals are learning that the “digression” of storytelling and story-sharing during work hours can actually increase productivity, and many universities are now clustering freshmen together in small groups because the interaction that occurs in these groups measurably increases retention.
- Sometimes the most direct route to your final story comes from probing around the edges of that story. Give yourself permission to make digressions as you think about what to include in your story. Often, such digressions add a delightful slice of humor. Note, too, that you can jump to short digressions without completely losing the thread of the story.

- Discoveries about digressions may come while you're telling a story; they're a part of being in the environment with an audience. If your listeners laugh at something or you think of a tangent they might enjoy, give yourself permission to leave the story for a moment to make that further connection. When you return to the story, your audience may be all the more with you.

Editing and Breaking Up with Stories

- Of course, you can go overboard with digressions and lose both the thread of the story and your audience, so you also have to give yourself permission to edit the story. This may sound simple, but it's sometimes difficult to say only what needs to be said, especially with family stories or stories from your own experiences.
- This tendency also reflects the additive quality of story-making. As you develop your story, you'll find connections with other topics, other points in your life, and other stories.
- With an abundance of possible details to include, ask yourself: What story do I want to craft now, knowing that I may craft other versions of this story later? Give yourself permission to choose one of a number of possible stories you could tell—and might, at a later time.
- It's also important to give yourself permission to tell only what you're comfortable with telling. You may find that you are not able to tell everything about a particular story when you are first developing it. You might be too close to the events or too emotionally caught up in them to be able to bring your audience safely to a conclusion. Give yourself permission to wait until you're ready to tell the full story.
- As you are developing a story, you may also decide that you really don't like it. Some stories just aren't meant to be told. In those cases, give yourself permission to break up with a story or put the relationship off until a better time.

Getting into Stories

- Finally, give yourself permission to really get into your story—to really imagine that you’re experiencing the events.
- In our next lecture, we’ll start getting into the real “how to” of storytelling, and one of the first things you’ll want to do as a teller is to visualize all the pieces of your story—the people, characters, and events going on around you. If these people and events are real to you, then they will be real and believable to your audience.

Suggested Reading

Bogart, *A Director Prepares*.

Ellis and Neimi, *Inviting the Wolf In*.

Questions to Consider

1. What might inhibit you from playing with your stories? Why?
2. How is it “risky” to tell some stories? When do the benefits outweigh the risks for you?

Visualization and Memory

Lecture 10

As a storyteller, you are the audience's guide to a foreign place—the location of your story. In order for your listeners to immerse themselves in your story, for them to believe that they are present in the story, you have to believe that you are in the story. This sounds a lot easier than it is because we're trained to constantly think of the next thing—not to be present in the moment right now. In this lecture, we'll focus on what it means to truly visualize the places, people, and events of your story—to believe that you are in the midst of the action you're describing.

Visualizing Story Scenes

- When you're first learning a story, before you write the story down, sit back, close your eyes, and imagine the different places and people that the story takes you to.
- Experiment with visualization right now. Get seated in a comfortable position and picture the place one of your stories begins. Are you inside or outdoors? If you're inside, what do the walls and windows look like? If you're outside, what is the weather like?
- Next, imagine the characters that appear in the beginning part of the story. What are they wearing? Where are they standing? What is their relationship to one another?
- As you move to each different location or point of action in the story, imagine where you are and whether the mood has shifted. What happened to make this change in the story? Why did you move to a new place? What time is it in the story? What characters are present?
- Again, in the final scene, think about where you are and what has happened in the story. What is the last thing that someone says at the end of the story, and to whom are they speaking?

- Once you've given yourself time to look at each scene and listen to the characters, you will be well on your way to being able to visualize those places when you get up and tell your story.
- Try to end this exercise by telling the story to someone immediately. As you speak, try to see each of the places you are describing to your audience. The more details you can see in front of you, the more clearly your audience will see them. You don't even have to narrate all the details in words; if you visualize the places and people in your story, your audience will get a sense of those details by watching you see them.

The Purpose of Visualization

- When you visualize scenes around you, the audience sees you experiencing the story in real time. The audience takes its cues from you; if you plant yourself in a scene of the story and see it around you—experience it—the audience will experience the story, too, as opposed to merely understanding the story on an intellectual level.
- The more you visualize, the more your listeners will see, and the more they see, the clearer the identity of the people and places will be.
- Visualization helps you “visit” each scene in your story so that you really know each of those places and people. Many people worry about memorization or learning stories, but memorization has nothing to do with storytelling. The more you visualize as you begin to craft your story, the easier it will be to remember your story.
 - Storytellers move from image to image, not word to word. Unlike many other forms of performance, storytelling doesn't necessarily follow a set script. You don't ask, “What's my next line?” but “What storyline am I following?”
 - There's no need to worry about memorizing a script or knowing exact wording. You follow the images and simply describe what's happening in front of you.

- Remember, if you memorize the words of a story, you're conveying words. If you visualize places, people, and actions, you're conveying an experience. Don't cheat yourself out of a dynamic story delivery by relying too heavily on the written word.
- Storytellers learn scenes "by heart," meaning that the story is in the body—it moves the body—and the audience sees the story moving the teller as it is told. That's where the storyteller's gestures and movements come from—from seeing the scene.

Visualization in Action

- You can start using visualization right now to bring your stories more alive for your listeners. In fact, most of us already use visualization when we're talking from personal experience. We shift between being with the audience to being in the place and with the people that we're describing.
- One of the first things to do when you start to tell a story is to pause and try to see the first scene around you—not just in your head but around you. It takes only a few seconds to get the place in front of you so that you can give it to your listeners.
- If you rehearse with visualization, the story will present itself to you whether or not you lose track of the way you want to word your descriptions.

A Visualization Exercise

- Think of one main feature of the setting from one of your stories; it could be mountains off in the distance or a house that's right in front of you. Visualize that feature in color and in three dimensions.
- Think about your relationship to this feature of the setting. Does it relax you? Does it put you on edge? Does it have some special meaning in your story? Let your body react to that relationship with the space around you.



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If you're telling a story about a huge storm, give yourself time to sense the smell of the air and the quality of the light around you.

- Do you want to move closer to that part of the scenery or farther away? While still visualizing, actually walk closer to or farther from the scenery. Is the feature close enough to touch? Reach your hand out and see if you can feel the texture of that place around you.
- With the knight in the George Buchannan story we heard earlier, I'm seeing something farther away from me that comes closer. When I look at that knight, I'm visualizing him, and I'm putting him in a specific place in space. The place where I've assigned that knight is called a "focal point."
 - A focal point is an imaginary point in space that you use to stand for some element of your performance. Focal points aid in clear communication and visualization for your audience; they help you show your audience what you want them to see.

- A focal point provides clarity to a painting, and it does the same thing for you as a storyteller. When you focus your attention on one point of the story and you see it—all your lines of focus are pointing to it—your listeners will focus their attention to that part of the story, as well.
- Try choosing another object in a scene of your story—something that you can reach out and pick up. Pick up that imaginary object and look at it. Now compare that object to a feature of the scene that's far away from you. Take note of the difference between looking at an object that's close to you and one that's far away.
- Next, imagine a large, hairy creature far off in the distance, but it's coming closer to you. From your perspective, this creature is getting larger. Now it's right in front of you! What did you just do with your focus? How did your focus change as that creature came closer?
- Note that you don't have to show the difference with exaggerated gestures or actions. Because you are immersing yourself in seeing what you are saying and believing that what you are saying is real, the moment becomes real for those who are listening.

Remembering Stories

- Think again of the very beginning of your story. Stand up and imagine that a friend is sitting in front of you (or try this exercise with a friend). Turn slightly to the left so that you are a bit turned away from your audience. As you visualize the beginning scene, it won't spill out directly in front of your friend but slightly off to the left. Assign focal points to the important characters at the beginning of the story.
- Next, turn to fully face your audience. Skip ahead to an important scene in the middle of the story, and again, look around and assign focal points to the people in that scene.

- Finally, move to the end of your story. Turn to the right, and visualize the end scene of your story.
- Now, face to the left and quickly visualize the starting scene; face forward and visualize the middle scene; face to the right and see the ending. Repeat the progression again.
- After the lecture, tell a short version of your story, keeping yourself as much as possible in those three scenes. Try to keep your visualizations “on” and really see what’s in front of you. For now, don’t worry about making eye contact with your audience; just move from beginning, to middle, to end and give yourself time to see the scene before you talk about it.
- Once you’ve told the short version of your story, step back and evaluate what you just did. Then, try telling the story once again, but this time, face forward the entire time and move only your head (rather than your whole body) in those three directions. The images will still stay to the left, center, and right, but you will face forward, toward your audience.
- This exercise is a great way to help you learn a story quickly. You can also use this technique when you’re asked to give a presentation and you don’t have much time to prepare. Locate the beginning, middle, and end; visualize what’s in the “story”; and use focal points to place specific ideas or characters in space. This method helps you remember what’s in the story, what comes next, and where you’re going in the end.

Inviting the Audience into the Scene

- As a storyteller, you can’t just look out into the scenery and not acknowledge the audience in front of you. You have to look your listeners directly in the eyes and invite them into the scene.
- This requires a shift in focus on your part. You’re moving from the scene you’ve shaped in your imagination to the listeners in front of you, whom you’re asking to come into the scene with you. You’re

shifting between “open focus”—looking directly into the listeners’ eyes—and “closed focus”—visualizing the scene in front of you but closed off from the audience.

- This can be a subtle shift, but it gets to the heart of what a storyteller does, that is, jumping from the “here and now” to the “there and then.” Your eye contact with your listeners in the here and now invites them in to see the world of there and then—it brings that other world into the present.

Suggested Reading

Collins and Cooper, *The Power of Story*.

Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling*.

Questions to Consider

1. What surprised you about the visualization exercises? Did you begin to “see” new things in your story? What?
2. Think of a place that you have been before—try to visualize that place while you describe it aloud to another person. Keep your focus on “seeing” that place as it was then, with an awareness that you are explaining it to someone now. Ask your listener: What part of the story description was most vivid as you listened?

Discovering Point of View

Lecture 11

Storytelling is a series of choices you make, and one of the most important of these is your choice of perspective. As we mentioned in the lecture on family stories, there is no such thing as an objectively told story. There is a power dynamic at play when you are the storyteller: You decide what gets left in the story and what gets left out, whose voices are privileged, whose experiences are worthy of mention, and who gets the last word. That's a huge responsibility! In this lecture, we'll reflect on how and why you make these choices, because your reflections on your own standpoint get to the heart of discovering your voice as a storyteller.

Point of View

- Let's begin by thinking about age. Our age affects the way we view life and our experiences; it influences the stories we're drawn to and how we tell those stories.
 - Think about an important event that occurred when you were a teenager, perhaps driving a car alone for the first time. How might you have retold the story of that experience when you were a teenager?
 - How might you tell that story now? You're still yourself and still narrating a story about yourself, but because you've had many more life experiences from that time to now, your vantage point on that event will have shifted.
 - You have probably had a wealth of experiences that put that event into a different perspective. Your conclusion to the story may change, or you might position the story within a larger context. As a parent, you may use the experience of your first time driving alone as a cautionary tale to your own teenager.
- Another critical part of your point of view is gender. Gender affects who we sympathize with in a story and how we think about stories.

- Culture influences how we think of some stories as gendered. As a man, you might not think that you should tell a story about your mother's cooking, or as a woman, you might feel that you can't tell a story about your father's experiences in a war, but you can.
- Such stories can be deeply meaningful to you and to selected audiences. Sometimes, one aspect of yourself might lead you to shy away from stories that you'd like to tell; thus, it's useful to evaluate not only what you're drawn to but what might be holding you back from stories.
- Your geographical location also affects your point of view. For example, we tend to root for the home team; in other words, we have a particular point of view based on a connection with "home."
- Not only where you're from but who you're from is another important factor in your point of view. If you were close to your mother or father, you may be drawn to stories that emphasize those kinds of close relationships, and you may be more inclined to see stories sympathetically from a mother's or father's point of view. If you have a strained relationship with family members, you may be drawn to stories that feature similar struggles.
- Connected with family background is your racial background and makeup.
 - Race is both a social and a cultural marker. It can, to varying degrees, affect the peer groups we gravitate toward (our primary audiences), as well as the kinds of cultural stories we're exposed to as we grow up.
 - Like gender and geographical background, race can be a factor that immediately connects you with an audience; it can be a neutral factor with your audience; or it can sometimes be a barrier to connecting with an audience.

- Your temperament also shapes your relationship to the world around you and your point of view. If you're a fast-paced person, you may be irritated by someone who moves slowly. If you enjoy short conversations rather than long ones, you will probably be drawn to stories that get to the point quickly.
- Class and economic background are additional factors in shaping your point of view on the world. They may influence who the hero is and who the villain is. You can extrapolate this to your position at work: Is management the hero or the villain in your stories? If you're telling stories to employees, how do you narrate those stories so that the characters help your audience relate to management and see things from the managers' point of view?

The Storyteller and the Narrator

- As a storyteller, you choose the perspective from which an audience hears a story—you narrate the story from that perspective. But the perspective you choose to adopt in narrating the story may be entirely different from your own actual perspective on the events.
- This adopted perspective is called a “persona,” a word that comes from the Latin for “mask.” The persona is like a mask that the



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Your persona is like a mask you put on to tell a story; in fact, the idea of “persona” has given us the icon for drama, the masks of comedy and tragedy.

storyteller puts on to tell the story, and like a mask, the persona you adopt directs where you look and frames what you see.

- For example, the narrators in my stories are often either androgynous or masculine, even with personal stories. For me, imagining a masculine narrator frees me from using more feminine gestures.
- Your persona is influenced by your perspective on life and by the narrated perspective you choose to adopt in telling a story.
- As we've said, when you tell a story, all of the factors of your background weigh on how you tell that story—the point of view you take on narrating events. They also influence your particular voice as a storyteller. For example, if your temperament is one that finds humor in life, then many of your stories will probably emphasize humor; you will narrate stories from a vantage point that sees the ironies around you.
- Most of the time, when you're telling a story, you think you're telling *the* story. But the truth is that when you're telling a story—any story—you're piecing events together, making choices based on your perception of events and directing the audience's attention.
- Inside the story that you create—from your piecing together of events—is a narrator, who is both you and someone else. This narrator may sympathize with some of the characters in the story and not others. He or she may know everything that you know as the teller or may not have all the information you have.
- The narrator's perspective on events is what makes stories interesting; it's why a group of friends may choose one person to tell a particular story. That teller may have a unique perspective on the events of the story.
- Should a narrator always be objective? Remember: Stories reveal truths, and they do so by looking through subjective points of view.

In fact, stories often reveal powerful truths when the narrator asks us to look inside multiple points of view.

Choosing a Primary Perspective

- One of the first things you need to do when you're preparing to tell a story is to look at all the possible perspectives you could take on the story and choose one that you'd like to follow as you guide the audience through the story.
- Whoever your narrator follows most closely will become the main character of the story, even if that character was, in other versions of the same story, a minor character or someone with whom you wouldn't ordinarily sympathize.
- Storyteller Milbre Burch has a wonderfully thought-provoking version of "Snow White," told from the perspective of the "evil" stepmother. From this perspective, the stepmother is really trying to save Snow White from her father, whom the stepmother recognizes as a pedophile! She sends Snow White into the woods not to get rid of her but to save her.
- Classroom teachers sometimes use a similar role-switching exercise. They might ask students to stage the Lincoln-Douglas debate, then have them switch roles and debate the other side. Such exercises help students understand both sides of an issue and help them learn the material in a memorable way.
- In a corporate setting, an employee might be asked to explain the point of view of upper management to a small group, while a manager might adopt the perspective of employees. Such an exercise sets a foundation for meaningful cooperation in the future.
- In choosing your perspective for a story, consider those aspects of yourself that define your perspective on the world—age, gender, temperament, cultural background, and so on. Choose just one of those aspects and think about how it affects the stories you want to tell.

- As a challenge, try telling stories from a different perspective. If you're a woman, consider a story told by a male character. If you're comparatively wealthy, consider a story told from the perspective of someone who struggles. If you're healthy, consider a story from the perspective of someone who has a disability. All of these changes in perspective make for stories that are interesting to share with your audience and can be enlightening for yourself.

Suggested Reading

Burch, "What the Queen Saw."

Kling, *Alive*.

———, *The Dog Says How*.

———, www.kevinkling.com.

Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling*.

Sacre, *A Mango in the Hand*.

———, *La Noche Buena*.

———, www.antoniosacre.com.

Questions to Consider

1. Your persona as a storyteller isn't a separate role that you play; it's you, but it's also your choice of how to see a story. Is there an experience you've had that you would like to narrate from a different perspective than your own? Why?
2. Even the most seemingly objective stories always originate with and are gated by narrators, each with his or her own values and perspectives. Whose perspectives do each of the following kinds of "stories" come from: magazine features, political rhetoric, news programs, scholarly articles, medical reports?

The Artful Manipulation of Time and Focus

Lecture 12

The narrator is the audience's guide through a story. Once you've chosen the perspective from which you want to view a story, you can start to play with how your narrator guides the audience through the actions. For instance, the narrator may lengthen moments by expanding descriptions or speed up time by condensing or summarizing events. The narrator has the power to cede control of the story over to one character or another. He or she can direct the audience's attention to a single object or to a vast scene. These are some of the practical implications that grow out of the understanding of storytelling as an art, not an exercise in relating facts.

Degrees of Control

- You choose how much control your narrator has over a story. You can narrate your story in such a way—in conjunction with visualization—that your listeners have the sense that the narrator is creating the story before them. The narrator is in control of everything that happens and knows what's going to happen before it comes to life.
- This is different from a teller who narrates the scene as it unfolds; this second kind of narrator has less control over the events. We can see the difference in two versions of the same line from a story, one in which the narrator is fully in control of what's being painted in the scene and one in which the narrator has been plunked down in the scene and narrates what is happening in the moment.
- The difference is subtle, but each gives a different effect for the audience. You don't have to choose to tell a story using one or the other of these levels of control the entire time; you can give your narrator more control over events at some times and less control at others.

- We see an example in an excerpt from a story called “Santraigh.” Here, the story starts with the narrator in control of the scene, looking out to the audience in epic mode (making direct eye contact). But the narrator quickly moves to take on the perspective of the woman in the story and becomes more uncertain about what’s going to happen. The more the narrator gets inside the head of the woman, the less control she has over events.
- This loss of control is a great way to add suspense and interest to a story. And you can give that effect most successfully when you let yourself live inside the scene.

Manipulating Time

- Usually, a narrator has more control over scenes that are sped up; he or she may zoom the audience from one moment to another that takes place years later. This kind of narration is called “summary.”
- Again, in the “Santraigh” story, we see an example of the narrator using summary to zoom through several weeks of time and transport the audience from one scene to the next. Note that the physical scene doesn’t change, but the mood has changed, as have the relationships between the characters.
 - The first scene was tense; the characters stood at a distance from each other. In the next scene (after several days have passed), the narrator seems more at ease in describing the woman and the arrival of the fairy. The woman is still cautious, but she’s no longer afraid of the fairy.
 - When the woman tells her husband “Say to the fairy as I have said,” she’s in control. There are also moments where the narrator is more in control; for example, in the narration of the woman going down to the dock and leaving for the mainland, there is little or no visualization.
- “Summary” is one of three ways that the narrator can manipulate time; it shortens the “story time” (the time it takes to tell that part

of a story) in comparison to “actual time” (the time that would have actually passed in the story).

- The narrator also has the power to slow things down—to make us focus on a specific event or object. In other words, the narrator can freeze the actions going on in order to guide the audience to a new understanding. This is called “description,” and here, story time is greater than actual time.
 - In the “Santraigh” story, we see description at work when our focus is drawn to the kettle.
 - The actual action of the story might take only four or five seconds, but the thoughts of the woman about the fairy and her kettle could be narrated for a half a minute or more!
- Most of the time in the “Santraigh” story, the narrator is moving at the same pace as the actual time it would take for the events to happen. This is called “scene time”—when story time is approximately equal to actual time.
 - The narrator can use scene descriptions in conjunction with visualization to guide the audience through a place that he or she is discovering right along with the characters.
 - For example, the time it takes for the narrator to lock the door against the fairy is about the same amount of time it would take to perform that action.
 - Scene time also takes place when characters are in dialogue, as we see in the exchange between the woman and her husband.
- A narrator can also manipulate time in order to give a comedic effect or to increase the energy or pacing of part of a story in dialogue.
 - In the dialogue between the husband and wife in the “Santraigh” story, notice that the narrator says “he said” and “she said” at the start of the dialogue, but as the pace of the conversation increases, the narrator’s voice fades away, leaving just the two people talking.

- Once you've established two characters are in dialogue and you've made a distinction between those characters (in attitude, through voice, or in other ways), your audience no longer needs the narrator.

Conveying Tense

- Most of the time, when you tell a story, you're talking about things that have already happened, and often, you use the past tense to talk about those events. But sometimes, you may bring those past events into the present by using the present tense, or you may tell stories about things you want to happen in the future: "When I go to Venice, I will take a gondola ride."
- All these tenses are appropriate for storytelling, but you'll want to decide which tense is most effective in telling your story. The one tense you should try to avoid is the present progressive: "He is traveling to the zoo, and he is seeing a herd of elephants." This tense tends to distance your audience from the action, giving the subconscious impression that your characters are acting rather than really doing the things you're talking about.
- In another excerpt from the "Santraigh" story, notice that even though the narration is in the past tense, you get the sense that things are happening in the present moment. You can make the "there and then" feel like the "here and now" by the commitment you have to discovering and reacting to the events you visualize going on around you. Remember: Your characters don't know what's going to happen!
- This is one of the keys to engaging storytelling: Your narrator has to care about what's happening. If your narrator cares about the characters, your audience will care; if the narrator doesn't care what's happening—or won't be affected by what's happening—then the audience won't care.

The Santraigh Story

There once was a woman who lived on the island of Santraigh, and that woman had a kettle. That kettle, it hung on a hook over the hearth by the fire.

One day, that woman, she was working in her kitchen, and she heard the door open behind her. She heard it open, and she wasn't expecting anyone, so she turned around to look, and there, standing in her doorway, was a woman of peace, a fairy. That fairy was silent. She glided through that room, and she went straight for that kettle, and she took out milky white fingers and she wrapped those fingers around the handle of that kettle, and the woman, she froze. Because here was a fairy, creeping out of her fairy knoll and coming down her fairy path and coming into her house through the town, disguised as she was, and through her door and through her kitchen and coming for her kettle.

As frightened as that woman was, she knew that was the only kettle the family had. They needed that kettle, so as that fairy,

she laid those milky white fingers around the handle of that kettle, that woman, she plucked up her courage and she said some certain magic words. She said, "The due of the kettle is bones and to bring it safely home."

And that fairy, she turned and she nodded to the woman, and she picked up that kettle as if it were light as air and glided through that room, shut the door. The woman, well she worked all that day,



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and she thought about that kettle and she thought even more about that fairy. Soon enough, the evening came and she heard that door open. She turned and she saw, there was the fairy, and there was that kettle. It was heaped high full of flesh and bones and things that that woman thought would be delicious to put in a stew for that night. That fairy, she took that kettle light as air and glided over and hung up on that hook where it belonged, nodded to the woman, and went out the door.

- One of the ways to make the past tense feel present to you, the storyteller, is to allow yourself to commit to what you're saying as if it's the most important thing in the world right then.
 - In other words, you have to be present with the story in order for the story to feel present to your audience.
 - That doesn't mean overacting. It means you have to commit your attention and energy to seeing those events and caring about what happens to the people who are in the midst of them.

Guiding the Audience

- In making all of these choices—the degree of control your narrator has, how time is manipulated, and so on—you are guiding your audience's attention through the story. Your relationship with the audience is what sets storytelling apart from all other forms of communication or entertainment.
- You may, for example, sense that a particular audience needs to hear the story told in a certain way—to hear more about a particular aspect of the events or to pay attention to one feature of a character.
- Pick out a story that you like to tell and choose one feature of that story that is important—any feature that is worthy of drawing the attention of your audience. Then try to connect that feature to a specific physical part of the scene. For example, if the feature is

something a character said, what did that character's face look like when he or she spoke?

- Use summary to get your audience up to speed with the context of that feature in about 10 seconds. Now zoom in on the feature and take about 30 seconds to describe it in detail.
- Here, you're making the same kind of artistic decision that film makers do when they zoom in on a specific feature of a scene. You can have the same effect and connection with your audience as zooming in for a close-up does by the way you manipulate time and use specific descriptions.

Suggested Reading

Lipman, Doug. *Improving Your Storytelling*.

Questions to Consider

1. Your narrator artfully controls where the audience looks and how the audience attends to certain features of your story. Identify one feature of a story that would be appropriate for the use of description to slow time down.
2. How might your preparation with visualization help you adapt in the moment if you sense that your audience needs more description or if you unexpectedly find that you have to summarize events to move quickly to another part of your story?
3. Choose a two-page selection from your favorite novel. Label all the passages on those two pages as scene, summary, or description. How does this author manipulate time and with what effects? How can you apply these ideas to your storytelling?

Narrator—Bridging Characters and Audience

Lecture 13

In any story, the narrator performs the job of shifting focus between the audience and the world of the story. In this lecture, we'll talk about the narrator's relationship with the characters, specifically, how the narrator can cede control of the story over to certain characters at different points in the story. We'll then start to discuss elements of characterization as they relate to how the characters interact with the narrator, the audience, and with one another.

Epic Mode

- As the narrator of a story, you will shift your focus from inside the world of the story, using “closed focus” (visualizing the scene, seeing the characters), to looking the audience directly in the eye—“open focus.” The term that describes this shift between open and closed focus is “epic mode.”
- Aristotle used the term “epic” in reference to narrative that is “not tied to time” versus tragedies, which he saw as time-specific. As the narrator speaking to an audience in epic mode, you're stepping outside the time of the story to jump into the present time with your audience. This movement brings the audience in the “here and now” into the scene happening “there and then” but also “now” in the present moment of the story.
- When you're telling a story about yourself, you may be one of the characters in the story, but that doesn't mean that you talk about yourself in the third person. The “you” in the story is in the “there and then”; this character isn't the same as the person telling the story. Unlike the “you” character in the story, your narrator has the power to stand outside of story time and to manipulate time.

Closed Focus and Visualization

- Let's play around with a story in closed focus. Pick one of your stories that has at least two characters and then choose one of those characters to focus on. What is your narrator's relationship with that character? Does the narrator like the character?
- If the character is you, your narrator may be thinking back on you when you were at a different point in life. What do you now think of the person you were? Do you like the old you? Do you laugh now at how this version of you handled the situation that your narrator sees the old you encountering?
- Think physically, in three dimensions: How tall is this character in comparison with the narrator? If the character is taller, you'll have to look up. The narrator has a relationship with the characters, and you can use visualization to show that relationship.
- Using visualization, try to see the character you have chosen in front of you. Out loud, describe what that person is wearing and his or her height. Assign a specific focal point for the character's eyes.
- Imagine that your character stays in the same place in the scene in front of you, but shift your focus from looking at the character in the eye to looking at your audience in the eye. Then shift back to the character and back to the audience once again.
- While looking at the character, pick out one striking feature that your audience should know. Maybe the character doesn't have much common sense or is wiser than he or she realizes. Or maybe your character is wearing something ridiculous! Shift your focus back to your listeners and tell them about that feature—while maintaining awareness that the character is still right in front of you.
- This technique gives your audience a compelling access point to your characters. It's not only a real world of actions and places, but it's a world of people with whom the narrator—and, by extension, the audience—can have a relationship.

The Santraigh Story

That woman, she picked up her shawl from where she had just laid it down and she was off, out the door. She went out through the town, way out, long out into the fields, away from the town, until she could see that fairy path, that green grass growing much greener than any of the other grass around it. (She was careful not to step on the path—they don't like it when you step on their path.) She walked beside it ... and she followed it until she saw that fairy knoll.

It was way late, what they call the mouth of the night. She walked over, and that knoll, it was open, so she walked inside. She looked up and to the left. She didn't see anyone, but she saw her kettle. It was heaped high full of flesh and bones and good things that she thought would be good to eat, so she crept over to it and picked that kettle up. So heavy with all of that inside, but she backed away, she turned around, and she almost got out of that knoll, when she



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heard a voice behind her ... and she heard the clink of the chain behind her and two dogs barking in the distance. Well, she didn't stick around; she didn't look around to see what was behind her and she didn't drop that kettle. She just started running: a-huff and a-huff and a-huff and a-huff.

She didn't drop that kettle because she thought, well, if I get away with the kettle, so much the better. And if she didn't get away with it—if those dogs caught up with her—well, then, she could just reach in and throw some of that meat back and stop those dogs. And that was just what happened....

Those dogs, they caught up with that food, and they started digging into that meat and those bones. The woman kept running: a-huff and a-huff and a-huff. She could hear them again, so she reached in and grabbed a second handful, and she threw it back. [And that way], she got all the way to her gate. When she got to the gate, she took that entire kettle and she threw it out. All of it fell down onto the ground, and she ran inside her house and shut the door!

That was just in time because those dogs, they caught up with that gate, and they grabbed onto that meat and those bones, and they howled. They woke up all the rest of the dogs in the town and they howled long into the night.

From that day onwards, those fairy dogs never bothered that woman. From that day onwards, that fairy never came for that kettle. There's an old Gaelic proverb that goes: "Dlighthidh coire cnáimh," or "Deserves cauldron bone." Where I'm from in Appalachia, there's a similar phrase: "A pot is entitled to a bone."

What that phrase means is that if you ever borrow anything, like a casserole dish or anything from a friend, you should always return that thing not only unharmed, but with a little present, as a way of saying thanks to the person who loaned it to you.

- The rapid switching of perspectives between the woman and the dogs is a technique known as a “crosscut” in film.
- How you use these techniques in storytelling will be unique to your own style and voice, and the more you play with these techniques, the more naturally they will come to you in the moment of telling an impromptu story.
- No two storytellers have the same style, and there’s no right or wrong way to tell a story, but the more specific you can make your choices in visualization, focal points, and character perspectives and relationships, the more effectively you’ll communicate your meanings to your listeners and the more fully your listeners will see your story unfold around them.

Dramatic Mode

- In an excerpt from a Japanese folktale told by Motoko Dworkin, notice how the teller switches back and forth between characters. As the pace of the story picks up, the outside narrator starts to fade away, and the characters carry the story. Motoko uses the tool of focus in a particular way to give the effect of distinct characters.
- In Motoko’s story, when Tio and her mother-in-law are speaking to each other, the older woman looks up to the younger, and the younger woman looks down on the older one. Although Motoko is in closed focus (not looking at the audience) during these moments of character dialogue, she remains in “open posture,” meaning that she’s facing her body out to the audience the whole time.
- From this outward-facing position, the two characters speak to each other, but the teller fixes the focal points of each one throughout the conversation—lower for the old woman and higher for the younger one. Once the narrator has set up those focal points, she doesn’t need to enter the conversation; the audience understands who is speaking.

- When two characters speak to each other in this way, the storyteller is using “dramatic mode,” which is different from epic mode. In epic mode, you’re breaking the fourth wall, looking out and making eye contact with the audience, but in dramatic mode, two characters are speaking in dialogue, and the teller doesn’t make eye contact with the audience.
- You don’t need much movement when you switch characters. In fact, too much movement is distracting; it interferes with the pace of the conversation, and it tends to obscure the teller’s facial expressions.
- Try using dramatic mode with one of your stories. Begin with an open posture and assign focal points to two characters, either higher and lower or to the right and left. As the first character speaks, step into his or her perspective and look at the second character’s focal point. Reply from the perspective of the second character, looking at the focal point of the first. Let each character’s reaction to the conversation infuse how you deliver their lines.
- In our next lecture, we’ll delve even deeper into characterization. Where you look to distinguish characters is one thing, but you can have even more fun as you play with bringing characters to life through gestures, voice, and facial expressions.

Suggested Reading

Dworkin, *Tales of Now and Zen*.

———, www.motoko.folktales.net.

Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling*.

Questions to Consider

1. Watch your favorite film yet another time, paying attention to editing effects, such as crosscuts, panning (when the camera “looks” around a

room), and special effects. How might you apply these same techniques to how your narrator tells a story?

2. Take out your favorite novel and look for passages of dialogue. Are there points when the narrator's voice evaporates—the "he said" and "she said" descriptions go away, and the dialogue is just character quotes? Reread this passage. What is the effect for you as a reader in terms of pacing? Can you imagine using focal points to distinguish these characters, using dramatic mode?

Developing Complex Characters

Lecture 14

Your narrator is one bridge between your audience and the world of the story, but once your listeners are in that world, the characters are what make them want to stay in the story. In this lecture, we will get into the nitty gritty of developing characters into people your audience enjoys seeing in action. We'll talk about how to add depth and dimension to your characters, and we'll work with gestures and body postures. Remember, the best way to learn the art of storytelling is by doing, not just talking.

Character Contexts

- If you think back to our lecture on perspective, we talked about all of the contexts in your life that weigh on your point of view—your gender, age, and so on. We'll use a similar mode of analysis to understand the dimensions of the major characters in your stories.
- To begin, let's return to the same story with two characters that you worked on in the last lecture. Choose one of those characters to focus on now.
- What is the gender of that character, and is that character more masculine or feminine? Keep in mind that our culture deems certain behaviors and postures “masculine” or “feminine.” For example, a male character might stand and move in a boxy style, with the hips squared off and the feet planted apart, while the movements of a female character might be more dainty or delicate.
- Of course, you can embody these postures and movements to varying degrees. If you're at a party and talking with one or two friends, you might give just a suggestion of a certain posture, but if you're on a stage, you might more fully embody the posture.
- If we're talking about giving dimension to characters, we can't simply stop at “men walk like this and women walk like this.” Not



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Caricatures are one-dimensional representations, while characters have dimension, depth, and the capacity for change.

only is that not true to any good cultural analysis of how human beings behave in the world, but it also flattens your characters into a single dimension. And people—the real characters around us and those we re-create for a storytelling audience—aren't one-dimensional.

- Sometimes, in children's stories, characters may be delightful because they're utterly flat—the “bad guy,” for example, who is completely bad.
- But if you're telling a story to adults, especially a story from personal experience, you want to think about more than one dimension of the major characters. This is the difference between creating characters and caricatures.
- Age is another dimension for your characters. What is the specific age of the character you're focusing on now?

- Note that younger people might walk breezily, with easy movements, perhaps more centered in the upper part of the body.
- A character in his or her 50s might walk a little slower, with less showy movements, and with more weight centered in the lower part of the body. Someone who is 80 or older usually walks much more slowly, perhaps with a cane.
- Keep in mind, however, the tensive qualities in people. You might have a character who is 70 but feels 20 or a feminine woman who adopts a more masculine posture when she goes into a business meeting. In a story, you may want to reveal those types of differences.
- As we said, temperament is another facet of your character's perspective—his or her knee-jerk reactions. Is your particular character quick-tempered or unflappable? Such characteristics might be reflected in that character's rate of speech.

Centers of Energy

- Theater professor Doug Cummins developed a series of exercises for experimenting with the different ways that characters hold their centers of energy. There are five major centers for energy in a person's body: head, shoulders/chest, stomach, pelvis, and anus.
- A head-centered person tends to hold his or her head up high when walking and looks up and out. In looking down, this character moves just the eyes rather than the whole head. What are some of the connotations we might associate with this way of carrying oneself? Perhaps proud, or snobbish, or preoccupied.
- Of course, the chest-centered person leads with the chest when walking and tends to look straight ahead. We might decode this carriage as proud or confident and in control.

- With stomach-centered people, the center of energy moves down to the stomach, and the gestures are in the same plane as the stomach. Notice that the energy center also moves the spine, as well; the spine curves, and the plane of vision is lower. This way of walking might be decoded as relaxed and, perhaps, more masculine.
- With pelvic-centered people, the energy center is in the hips. This way of walking tends to be interpreted as highly feminine, perhaps even sexual. The plane of vision is pulled downward, which means that people with this body center have to look up at others, perhaps diminishing the character and giving the illusion of smallness.
- Finally, anus-centered people locate all their energy in their behinds. This is the nerdy Steve Erkel character from the 1990s sitcom *Family Matters*.

Experimenting with Body Centers

- Get up on your feet and experiment with each of these body centers. Start by walking around in your space as you normally would.
- Next, try walking around as if you were head-centered. Pay attention to how that changes your perspective and what it does to your gestures. If this center feels strange to you, it may be that it's different from your own energy center. Where are you looking as you walk with this center of energy? If you're looking up, try looking down. Does it feel more comfortable to look up or down from this body center?
- Now, move to chest-centered walking. If this feels more natural to you, ask yourself why you might have adopted this posture. Do you use this posture at work? Try out gestures and notice where you are looking.
- As you move to stomach-centered walking, you may immediately notice a change in your pace. Moving to this center tends to slow you down. Are you more relaxed in this body center? Do you notice a slump in your spine? Keeping your center in your stomach, try

making gestures up above your shoulders. This may feel strange because your gestures usually follow along with your body center.

- Next, move to hip-centered walking. You may not feel that this center is your “gendered” way of being, but give yourself permission to try out this body posture. How does concentrating your energy in your hips make you want to move? Are you interacting with the space around you differently? Where are your gestures? How do you feel with this body center? For what sort of character might you use this body center?
- Move to anal-centered walking. Notice immediately that this body center tends to curve your spine. What does it feel like to have this body center? Where is your gaze? How would this body center affect the way you interact with the world?
- Finally, change to the way you normally walk and see if you can tell which body center you usually gravitate toward. You might even find that you’re drawn to one body center in more relaxed situations and a different one in more formal or tense situations. The body center often changes based on the circumstances we find ourselves in.
- Stop walking but remain standing and think about the character in your story. What would be that person’s body center? Consider the connotative values we discussed for each body center.
 - Begin to walk around in the space with that body center while you think about that character.
 - How does your character see the world with this center of the body? How does he or she interact with the world from this center? Where does your gaze fall? Where do your gestures tend to be? Is your character actively performing a gender through this body center?

- After you've tried out walking with this character, stop and speak a line to your other character, using a focal point to look at the second character.
- Start moving again as the second character. Again, consider what body center that character might have. It may be the same as the first character, but if possible, try to pick a different body center.
 - How does this second character interact with the world? Where does your gaze fall, and where are your gestures?
 - Stop and speak the line that this second character says in response to the first, using a focal point to look at the first character.
- Stand in place and remember the body centers for each of your characters. Without walking, stand with the first character's body center, and really exaggerate it. Move the focal point for the second character in front of you and say the line again. Then, do the same thing with the second character, speaking the response.
- Whatever your style of storytelling, these exercises are useful in developing and distinguishing your characters. The degree to which you enact these characterizations through your body and gestures is a matter of personal style and depends on the style of the story itself.

Suggested Reading

Dworkin, *Tales of Now and Zen*.

———, www.motoko.folktales.net.

Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling*.

Rocha, *Under African Skies with Antonio Rocha*.

———, www.storyinmotion.com.

Questions to Consider

1. What is your dominant center of the body? What different centers of the body do you find yourself performing throughout the day and in what contexts? Think about why these different situations “call” for different centers. What would be the impact of performing the “wrong” center of the body?
2. The degree to which you enact character differences through your body will depend on your personal style and the context of the telling. How would you adapt your characterizations to suit a business meeting, as opposed to an office party or a storytelling performance for children? How much of this adaptation is a consideration of the audience and the appropriateness of the context, and how much is your own inhibition?

Plot and Story Structures

Lecture 15

Now that you've dived into the places in your story through visualization, thought about the different perspectives from which you could see these places, and gotten to know the narrator and the characters in that world, let's work on putting it all into an order that makes sense for you and your audience. In this lecture and the next, we'll talk about choices for structuring the pieces of your story. What you're looking for is a structure that works well with the meaning you want to convey and gets you and your listeners from where you are to where the story wants you to be.

What Happened and What Matters

- Begin by choosing a story that you have worked on earlier in these lectures. Think back to our last few lectures on narrators, characters, and perspective and consider the different perspectives you could take on for that story.
- Choose one of these perspectives that you want to align with for this version of the story. Keep in mind that you can always return to this lecture, choose a different point of view, and perform these exercises again.
- From this chosen perspective, think about these questions: What is the one major event or happening in the story? What is the action about? What matters about what happened? What is the most important thing about this story to you; what truth does it convey? It's helpful to put the meaning into words—a few phrases or a sentence. This is the point that your narrator is drawing us toward; it's what shapes the journey for the narrator.
- Next, list the main characters in the story; then, go back to the first question about the action of the story—the physical drama. Which of these characters does the main action happen to? Put a star by that character's name.

- You arrived at the meaning of the story by adopting a particular perspective, and remember that your narrator conveys and lives with this perspective. That’s the narrator’s role: to link the audience with the events and characters from this point of view.
 - Your narrator may sympathize with one character more than another and follow one character more closely than others.
 - Most of the time, the narrator sympathizes with the character who is the center of the action. However, you may also find that the person who really matters to your narrator is someone who is supposed to be a secondary character.
- With this exercise, we’ve gotten a start on separating out the “plot” (the sequencing of events in the story—what happens to whom) from the “emotional arc” (how listeners feel about the events in your story—what matters about what happened).
 - Most of the time, this emotional arc moves with the plot of the story; thus, when you reach the climax of the plotline, you also reach the emotional climax of the story.
 - But this may not be the case when the narrator sympathizes with someone other than the person who is the center of the action. On your list of characters, put a star by the name of the person who helps you arrive at the main point of the story.

Developing Story Structure

- The story structure is a kind of frame you put around the events of your story. You need to choose a frame that “fits” the story—not so narrow that it cuts off half the story, not so large that the main point



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There are three audiences that will help you in developing stories: the teddy bear, the mirror, and the best friend.

gets lost, and not so garishly obvious that it's distracting from the story. In other words, the frame should serve the story, not the other way around.

- A good way to begin threading together the plotline of your story is to “storyboard” the main scenes of action. This is a very organic way of following your storyline, in the sense that there's not a rigid structure that you're trying to fit your story into.
 - A storyboard is nothing more than a series of drawings that you make to sketch out who and what is in each of the major scenes in your story.
 - Draw a few boxes in your storytelling journal; then begin sketching the scenery and the characters for each scene in the boxes.
 - Those quick sketches represent a flow of action. You'll notice that there are reasons that one scene flows into the next: The characters are propelled into the next scene both by what has come before and by what's waiting for them.
 - Look at two scenes on your storyboard and ask: What motivates the action to move from one scene to the next? Draw arrows that show the two-way connection between these scenes and write (in a few words) what is pushing and pulling the characters into the next scene.
 - Storyboarding is a highly useful rehearsal technique as you develop the flow of action for your story. You'll see that the separate scenes are connected both by a logical chain of events and by lines of force. The story isn't just a series of events—it's full of urgency.

Aristotelian Story Structure

- We've already seen one classic story structure: the hero's journey, which uses separation, initiation, and return as a form of beginning, middle, and end. Another structure followed by many stories was

first laid out by Aristotle in 335 B.C.E. and later amended by German playwright Gustav Freytag in the 19th century.

- This classic story structure starts with an introduction, where we learn just enough about the protagonist that we care about what happens to him or her.
 - The introduction leads to an inciting incident (something that gets the action going), and then rising action builds to a climax.
 - At the end is the dénouement, or falling action, and the conclusion.
 - The main character has almost always undergone a transformation between the introduction and the conclusion.
- Note that this frame leaves you in a different place than you began. The conclusion is physically charted as being on a higher plane than the introduction. This is an appropriate way of thinking about a story, because when you experience a story, you don't return to the exact same place you were before you heard it.
 - When you are developing a story with this kind of frame, you can work through the Aristotelian plotline from several directions.
 - For instance, you can follow linearly, starting at the beginning, moving to the middle, and then going to the end. Ask yourself: From the main character's perspective, what propels the story forward? From that inciting incident, other actions follow.
 - You might also start from the ending. Ask yourself: In order for my audience to "get" this ending, where must I start this story? Then work backwards, with that ending always in mind.
 - You might even begin in the middle, with the incident that stands out the most to you in the story—either the climax itself or a particular part of the rising action that captivated you. You then work outward and backward from that point.

- Choose one of these entry points for working through an Aristotelian story frame and quickly sketch out the action of your story according to this frame.
- This is the prototypical Western frame for stories, and it can work quite well when your story is told from one point of view in a chronological fashion.

Alternative Story Structures

- Of course, we all know that there is more than one side to any story. In your story, you might choose to play with multiple points of view. Some well-known films have multiple characters telling the “same” story.
- You should also consider whether your story has to happen chronologically. Remember, your narrator has the power to expand and contract time through descriptions and summaries, but the narrator can also hop back and forth in time, using foreshadowing and flashbacks.
 - Look at the scenes in your storyboard and experiment with switching their order. This is especially useful to do to a story that you think must be told in chronological order. Try putting one pivotal point at the end of your story first.
 - In the Dadaist movement, artists would paint a picture or write a poem and then tear it up and throw the pieces on the floor to see what new and interesting image or combination of words fluttered down when those pieces reshaped themselves.
- Another way to structure a story is to start with the main “things” you are drawn to in a story and let the structure flow from these things.
 - In this case, a “thing” could be something that one character says to another, or it could be a place, a specific event, or a feeling at a certain point in the story.

- Identify three to five things in your story and pair each with a specific image. Then, structure your story in a way that ties those images together.
- Storytelling coach Doug Lipman advises students to look for the “MIT” (“most important thing”) in a story. From the MIT, you can arrange the smaller insights into themes or chronological clusters of events to link together the plotline.

The End—The Resolution of Your Story

- Your story will come to some sort of resolution at the end, but that doesn’t mean it has to have a happy ending. Some stories don’t have a neat and tidy conclusion. In fact, you may be doing an injustice to a story if you try to make it fit the Aristotelian model! This structure works because most audiences recognize it, but it’s not necessarily the best structure for every audience or every story.
- In thinking about the end of the story, go back to the first question we asked in this lecture: What is the main point of the story for your narrator? What is that “nugget” that you don’t want your audience to lose?
- That main point will be the MIT for your story, which serves as an umbrella for any story structure and determines how your narrator will glide through the plot. It shapes the economy of your performance, because it determines how much information you need to give and what you can leave out. It tells you how far the introduction needs to go back and where the story lands in the end.
- On your storyboard, where is this point in the plotline? Is it at the very end, or does it coincide with the climax? Draw a circle around this point—the emotional climax of the story—on your storyboard.
- In the next lecture, we’ll talk about the even more important role of the emotional trajectory of your story and how this emotional through-line offers the primary points of connection between your story and your audience.

Suggested Reading

Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling*.

Questions to Consider

1. Plot is based in the action of the story—physical places, doings, and people. Where does your story take us? Try to visualize each of your storyboard scenes and ask yourself: Where do you go? In which scene is the peak point of action in your story?
2. To what story structure are you most drawn? Why?

Emotional Arc and Empathy

Lecture 16

Your listeners don't believe your story just because you tell them the facts; they believe your story because you make the progression of facts and events understandable and emotionally true. This is what the emotional arc does for your story. The plot is what happens in the story; the emotional arc is how we feel about what happens—whether we believe and emotionally connect with what happens. In this lecture, we'll add more nuance to a story by developing the emotional arc and considering how your performance choices contribute to that arc. Then, we'll talk about how conscious decisions relating to the emotional arc help tie together the ending of your story into a good resolution.

Emotional Tones

- At different points, your story may take listeners on a journey from an emotionally neutral place, to happy, to tense, to nervous, to elated, back to happy, and then to terrified; all of these are emotional tones that we feel when we experience a story.
- Let's return to the storyboard exercise we did at the beginning of the last lecture on story structure. In the upper left-hand corner of each of the boxes you drew for each of the scenes in your story, write one word that describes the emotional tone of that scene.
- The emotional tone will depend on the point of view that you've chosen. An emotionally neutral scene to one character may be an emotionally charged scene for another character—the one with whom the narrator most identifies. Or the narrator, standing outside the characters, may realize the sadness of a scene, given what he or she knows is coming.
- When we talk about an emotional arc, we're talking about how you as the teller shape and arrange the flow of emotional tones as we

progress through your story. The image of an arc mirrors the image of the Aristotelian frame for a story.

- Just as the events of a story climax, the emotional arc of a story reaches a climax, as well.
 - Most of the time, the emotional arc parallels the sequence and climax of the plot, but sometimes, you may want the emotional arc to climax at a different point in the plot.
 - For the teller of the Jarius story, the peak emotional moment doesn't coincide with the peak moment of action—when Jesus heals the girl—but occurs in a small moment afterwards—when Jesus gives bread to the girl. Notice that the teller gives a protracted description of this moment, artfully manipulating time.
- The success of storytelling is far more than relating a string of events; it's much more nuanced than that. It's about making the conscious decision to distinguish between the events in the story and what really matters to you in the story.

Emotional Investment

- You can communicate emotional arcs without being overly expressive, but you need to remember that when you tell a story, you're committing yourself to being fully present in the moment with the story and the audience. That's the storytelling triangle.
- Being present with someone else means that you are seeking a kind of empathy with that person's situation. Remember, sympathy is feeling for someone else—feeling from a distance—but empathy is feeling with someone. This emotional empathy is one of the key tools for effective storytelling.
- Psychologically, our emotional connection to a story is our “entry point” into the story. We talk strategically about winning “hearts and minds” because, like it or not, we're not programmed to be purely Sherlock Holmes individuals: It's not just our enlightened, rational

brains that drive our choices or our actions, but it's our hearts, our emotional connections.

- Emotions drive material decisions, and emotional resonance is key to effectively communicating with your audience. The intellect of your listeners may draw them to the plotline of a story, but it's the emotions that make the story memorable.



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We collect objects not because of their material or useful value but because of their sentimental value; such objects are emotional entry points to the story of our lives.

- Empathy provides an emotional entry point to your story; it's what gets your listeners in the door and keeps them there. With empathy comes vulnerability on the part of the storyteller, along with belief. These two things are crucial in effectively communicating the emotional arc of your story to an audience because they give the audience permission to emotionally engage with the story.
 - Vulnerability means that you're living in the moment of a story while you're telling it. Your narrator may know what's going to happen, but there are selected times when the narrator dips into the minds of the characters—who don't know what's going to happen next. This action on the part of the narrator gives the audience permission to be in the moment and feel with the characters.
 - Belief means that, at every moment of the story, you believe that you are telling about something real. Even if you're telling a fairy tale, you need to do the character work to make the characters believable to yourself and to visualize the scenes around you. Your belief in what you're saying gives the audience permission to believe the story and to act on it.

Charting the Emotional Arc

- Emotionally, where does your story begin? What's the emotional tone at the beginning of the story? Neutral or energetic and full of action? You want to create an emotional entry point for your audience so that the audience can begin to connect with some aspect of the story.
- Now think about the middle of your story. How do you want your audience to feel here? And how do you want your audience to feel at the end, when the story resolves itself?
- Go back to the Aristotelian chart you made for your story's plotline and begin to draw a second line over that chart that maps the emotional arc for your story. You may have some peaks and valleys along the way; the arc may not be smooth, just as the plotline's rising action will probably have valleys and high points along the way to the climax.
- We call it an "arc" because somewhere along the line, there is a crest in the emotional drama of the story.
 - In poetry, this moment is called the "fulcrum," and you can imagine the fulcrum as the literal thing that it is, the tipping point of a lever, the point on which everything else in the mechanism hinges. This metaphor of the fulcrum is useful for thinking about and identifying the emotional climax of your story.
 - A tipping point means that, at a certain moment, gravity takes hold and pulls an object in another direction. Imagine a teeter-totter: At a certain point, you're tipping past the level plane and heading upward, and then you pass that edge of balance and you begin to fall down again.
- Throughout your story, you want the emotional tones to help propel the audience from one scene into the next. For example, at the inciting incident—when something happens that hurls us into a

conflict—there may be an emotional turn that moves the audience from a neutral place to an anxious place.

- Then, the action rises toward a climactic point, when that conflict comes to a head. With the Inanna story, the gods of heaven throw all the help they can down to Inanna in hell, and she will either rise from the dead or stay in hell. The emotional climax of the story is the point of no return; something has to happen or change.
- If you're having trouble locating the emotional climax of your story, ask yourself: What's at stake for the character who brings us to the main point of the story? What are his or her risks? What's on the line? And when is the final moment, the point of no return? At what specific moment does the primary character face the biggest risk and resolve it?
- Also think about how you want your audience to feel right before the climax. Whatever your choice here, your narrator will have to feel the same emotion—and build to that point emotionally. You'll have to communicate that emotional commitment through your words, your body, and the emotional resonance of your voice.

Working toward the Emotional Tipping Point

- As we discussed in the last lecture, the “most important thing” can keep you from getting “lost in the weeds,” both in structuring your story and in your emotional commitment to the story.
- The most important aspect of developing your emotional arc for a story starts with your overall empathetic investment: your belief in the things happening in the story and your vulnerability to live in the moment with those characters.
- In a clip from the “Santraigh” story, we can hear in the narrator’s description that she empathizes with the old woman. The narrator’s and the primary character’s attitudes and emotional resonance are aligned. The result for the audience is an even deeper emotional tie to the primary character.

- What you're doing with empathetic narration and emotional arc is adding nuance to your story. Storytelling is something we do every day, but the art of storytelling is about making many small choices that add up to a compelling story.

Suggested Reading

Ellis and Neimi, *Inviting the Wolf In*.

Questions to Consider

1. Does your emotional arc follow the plotline and plot climax, or does the emotional arc peak elsewhere? How will this affect your story delivery?
2. Belief and full-focused commitment are essential to telling a good story. Does this kind of vulnerability make you think differently about storytelling? What other areas of your life could benefit from this kind of full-focused commitment?

Varying the Narrator's Perspective

Lecture 17

In order for the resolution of a story to be satisfying, your audience must care enough about the primary character to want him or her to succeed and must care about seeing the other characters resolve their tensions with the primary character. One of the best ways to encourage your listeners to develop their own momentum with the emotional arc of your story is to give them just enough of a taste of the different character perspectives (including that of the villain!) that they start to see your story in three dimensions. You do this by having your narrator switch allegiance from one character to another and narrate events from a new perspective.

Shifting Perspective

- As we've said, most of the time, your narrator is empathetic toward the main character of your story, but sometimes, you may want your narrator to dip inside the head of another character and narrate from that perspective. We see this in an excerpt from "Red Riding Hood," when the narrator shifts perspective from the girl to the wolf.
- Allowing the narrator to dip inside the head of other characters—even the villain—can give a wonderful dynamism to your story. It helps highlight the tensiveness we spoke about in a previous lecture and gives the audience a delicious variety of perspectives to take in.
- Note, however, that changing your narrator's allegiance should happen as part of the flow of the story; it shouldn't call attention to itself. This shift in perspective provides a new angle on things while contributing to the overall meaning of the story.
- Sticking with one perspective can be an effective choice, but you open the story up to many more possibilities when you allow the narrator to switch perspectives. Again, in the older version of "Red Riding Hood," when the narrator gives us the perspective of the

laundresses, the potential for humor is introduced into what would otherwise be a terrifying experience if the story was narrated only from the perspective of the little girl.

Empathizing with Multiple Characters

- For your audience to truly experience the emotional resonance of different perspectives, you as a storyteller must believe that you are seeing the scene from different characters' points of view. This gets us back to our exercises on empathy and belief.
- Although you may be using third-person narration ("he did this," "she did that"), you must speak as if you are providing a first-person account of the moment. In this way, your listeners will start to believe that this character is really experiencing this event. They will be drawn into your story, because they see you believing the character's perspective as if it were happening to you, the storyteller.
- This is one of the unique features of storytelling; if you were an actor, you'd be tied to dialogue and would never get to use narration. You'd also be tied to one character role, while a storyteller plays multiple roles. But you don't lose your narrator's strong association with the primary character in doing this; if anything, seeing the villain from the inside allows the audience to bond even more fully with the main character.

An Exercise in Shifting Allegiance

- Choose one of your stories and list all the main characters in your storytelling journal. For each character other than the primary one, think about what he or she wants in the story. What does the antagonist want most; what does the helper character want most? Put into words the motivating desire of one of these characters.
- Next, stand up and speak aloud that character's desire. If you were working with the miner's story we heard earlier, you might say, "I want to get Donzel out of the mine." Assign a focal point to

someone your character might be speaking to and repeat the line, in dramatic mode, until you believe it.

- Still standing and maintaining the focal point, change the line from first person to third person. Now, repeat the line in epic mode to the audience. Say the line until you believe it.
- Come out of that character and think about a moment in your story when this character and the main character are a part of the same scene. Practice moving back and forth between character attitudes. For the purposes of this exercise, speak everything in third-person narration. Don't worry about character dialogue between these two figures; just focus on how you're saying the narration.
 - Start narrating the scene from one character's perspective—either the main character or the secondary character—while looking out at the audience.
 - As you adopt the secondary character's perspective, think about what's going on with that character. Carry his or her beliefs and attitudes as you share descriptions with the audience. Concentrate on believing what you're saying from that character's point of view.
- This exercise will help you develop a kind of storytelling muscle memory so that you can respond in the moment when a new story calls for narrational dimension.

Internal Conflict

- You can also use this technique of having the narrator dip into other character perspectives when the main character is experiencing internal conflict. Imagine two sides of your own self, for example, battling against each other; think of having a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other.
- As mentioned earlier, the hero's journey is a kind of mirror for the internal conflicts that go on in our lives, and the external "dragons"

in such stories are often metaphors for our own internal beasts that we try to overcome.

- When you're telling a story that deals with an internal dragon, you may want to personify the thing you're struggling with. Give that area of conflict an attitude and claim that attitude in moments of description. You can even separate the two perspectives with different focal points and body postures.
- Robert Breen, a scholar at what is now Northwestern University's Department of Performance Studies, referred to this kind of internally conflicted character as a "bifurcated narrator." It's as if the one person becomes two characters, and the narrator of your story can then dip inside the perspective of each of these characters.
- This technique returns us to the very reason that we tell stories: Stories give form to our deepest desires, fears, and hopes. By giving form and embodied attitude to a disembodied area of conflict—the addiction, or the debt, or the unrequited love—by finding the differences in "character" between the easy path and the right one, you *name* these struggles. And in naming them, you and your audience gain a kind of power over those forces that doesn't exist without the story.

Story Resolution

- Adding nuance by teasing out the plot from the emotional arc and allowing the narrator to cede control to other characters' attitudes and perspectives add richness to the resolution of a story.
- There are as many different resolutions for a story as there are different kinds of stories to tell, but a key question to ask is: What purpose does the resolution of a story serve? It must bring the audience to a safe place in the end. But note that a safe place isn't the same thing as an easy place; for some stories, the point may be to make your listeners uneasy in order to make them think about things in a new way.

- A safe place in storytelling is satisfying.
 - Sometimes, it's appropriate to have everything turn out all right in the end. This might be the case in telling to children or at a party. Your audience wants a satisfying dessert, not a full meal that requires digestion. At other times, a sugar-coated ending may be inappropriate.



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Sometimes, a satisfying resolution in storytelling is like dessert—sweet and light!

- The audience and the context of the telling determine what kind of ending will “satisfy.” You may adapt some aspects of the ending of your story to satiate the appetites of the specific audience, while other aspects remain consistent from one telling to the next. This, again, is the difference between the emotional arc (adaptable) and the plotline (consistent).
- A safe place leads the audience out of the story.
 - Toward the end of a story, the audience should feel that everything has been accounted for. The events have been treated, the emotional points have been established, and the characters have had a chance to speak.
 - The emotional arc of your story doesn't take listeners up and then plummet them back to earth in a heap. It guides listeners from the place they were when the story started to a different place at the end.
 - One definition of “resolution” relates to arriving at a plan of future action. The resolution of a story, then, is the point at which the audience is sent out from the story with a plan of

action. It's similar to a commencement ceremony for graduates; it marks an ending, but it is also a beginning, a "sending forth." The resolution sends listeners out from the story with a new outlook, a new course of action for their lives, and new questions to explore.

- You might also think of "resolution" in the sense of the quality of a picture on TV or taken with a camera. This definition relates to how clearly we can see something in fine detail. Thus, the resolution of a story is how listeners are left to see everything in the end. It's not just a wrap-up of the plot but how the characters and the narrator think about how the events played out.
- You don't want to hit your audience over the head at the end with the meaning of your story. Remember, your listeners are smart people! Instead, your job is to help them see their own situations more clearly through the metaphor of the story.
- Finally, a safe place does no harm to the audience.
 - This characteristic of a safe place has to do with ethics. For instance, some audiences may feel cheated if you tell a story from personal experience and it later turns out that the story was fiction.
 - Likewise, you need to take the audience into account when you determine how you want the story to resolve emotionally. Are your listeners mature enough to handle the themes you're presenting to them? And if they are, do you land the audience in a place where they are ready to assimilate what they've encountered in your story in a meaningful way in their lives?
 - Another aspect of ethics has to do with your own emotional preparedness. Are you ready to tell the story? Have you dealt with the issues you raise and resolved them for yourself to the extent that you can make this story a meaningful experience for listeners and not just therapy for yourself?

Suggested Reading

Ellis and Neimi, *Inviting the Wolf In*.

Questions to Consider

1. Where is one point of dynamic tension in your story—between what two forces? How can you use the tensiveness between these lines of force to build the emotional arc of your story?
2. Some stories are satisfying in the end like chocolate cake and others, like bitter coffee. What is one thing you need to consider in order to end your story in both a “satisfying” and a “safe” way for your audience?

Vocal Intonation

Lecture 18

Our past four lectures have focused on bringing different characters to life, how those characters move along in the plot of the story, and how the narrator guides listeners through the plot in such a way that they develop an emotional relationship with the story and the characters. Through all these elements, there is a flow to the story; the arc guides the audience along in a rhythm. Some of the most dynamic storytellers make use of dynamic vocal intonation not only for individual character voices but in how they use pacing, pause, and rhythm over the entire arc of the story. In this lecture, we'll talk about one of the most important tools of a storyteller—your voice.

Vocal Warm-Up

- We all do some unconscious vocal warm-ups as part of our morning routine. Let's look at how effective some of these unconscious behaviors can be when you consciously use them in preparation for storytelling.
- Begin by sitting up straight, rolling your shoulders back, and yawning. As you reach the end of your yawn, put two fingers between your lips just inside your mouth to prevent your teeth from clamping down. Your fingers will stop you from biting down at the end of your yawn and tensing your muscles. Now try another yawn.



A yawn loosens up your jaw muscles so that you can move your jaw freely.

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- Next, place the tip of your tongue behind the bottom front row of your teeth. With the middle part of your tongue, push up and out of your mouth. Try this only two or three times to avoid straining your tongue.
 - The average human tongue is about eight inches long, reaching all the way back to the voice box, or larynx, which also houses the vocal folds (or vocal cords).
 - In action, the folds look and act like a second set of lips. It's the vibration of these vocal folds that produces a vibration in the air coming from your lungs and forced out by your diaphragm.
 - All of the rich power of your voice starts in the diaphragm muscle, which pushes the air up and out of your lungs. That air travels up through the trachea, where the vocal folds vibrate. As they vibrate, they produce sound waves that travel up through your mouth. Your tongue further shapes those waves into speech.
 - You stretch your tongue to help limber up one of the many muscles that contribute to vocal dexterity and power.
- Another way to warm up the vocal system is to do some closed-mouthed humming.
 - Keep your mouth closed, take a deep breath (feel your diaphragm expand underneath your lungs in your ribcage), and maintain a continuous hum.
 - Bring up the volume on your hum and try to feel the force of air coming up from your diaphragm.
 - Try moving your lips around, as if there's a bee stuck in your mouth, and bringing the sound higher and lower in pitch. As you vary the pitch, pay attention to how that change feels in your trachea.

- Finally, turn your close-lipped hum into an open-lipped “mee” and throw that sound to the back of the room that you’re in: “mee-YO.”

Articulation

- We tend to be very lazy with our mouths in everyday speech; we don’t move them as much and articulate as clearly as we could. Most of us get by with our communication, but at times, a listener may have asked you to speak up or to repeat something that you have said. In order to tell a good story, though, your audience must be able to understand what you’re saying.
- Tongue twisters make for excellent articulation exercises. The one below is from Gilbert and Sullivan’s 1885 opera *The Mikado*. As you say this poem, project your voice, not with the force of air coming from your chest but from your diaphragm. Also make sure you enunciate the end consonants clearly.

To sit in solemn silence in a dull, dark dock,
In a pestilential prison with a life-long lock,
Awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock,
From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big, black block.

- Practicing tongue twisters doesn’t mean that you should sound like an exaggerated model of proper elocution. You should sound like you, only more intelligible.

Rate, Pitch, and Tone

- You don’t have to do much to change your voice to sound like different characters. You can change simply your rate of speech or your pitch—how high or low your voice is. The pitch of your voice affects your tone, that is, how the pitch is interpreted to mean something.
- For example, if you start your pitch low and end high, your tone seems quizzical, as if everything you are saying is an unanswered

question. A character whose pitch descends at the end of each sentence may have a condescending tone.

- Using different pitches and rates to distinguish characters is especially useful if you don't want to use accents for your characters. In fact, unless you are well trained in using accents, it's probably best to avoid them so you don't risk offending members of your audience.
- You can use pitch to make a character sound more approachable or more menacing. For example, a moderate pitch and a slower rate of speaking can make a character seem more calculating but still approachable, while a lower pitch and a faster rate can seem darker and more forceful. In contrast, speaking slowly and deeply gives the impression of a big, slow character.
- Give yourself permission to be playful with your pitch and rate and experiment with character voices. This extends not only to the words someone says in dramatic lines but also when you choose to narrate from the perspective of a "little narrator," that is, when you allow a character to take over and narrate from his or her perspective.
- In one of your stories, choose two characters between whom you can identify tensive qualities. Make sure the characters are not too similar in manner or role; look for some clear distinction.
 - Think about the pitch of the first character and identify a specific point in the story when that character either speaks to another character in dramatic mode or becomes a "little narrator." Try speaking as that character, intentionally varying your pitch and adjusting your rate of speech to match the character.
 - Try the same exercise with the other character, choosing a different pitch or rate. Either of these qualities can distinguish your characters for your audience. Note the contrast that just these small conscious choices can yield.

- Other factors of rate include pacing and pause, which can be used to add dynamism and shape tension in your story.
 - Pace is the relative speed of your story. Usually in the introduction, you'll want to use an easy pace, but you will speed up the pace toward the climax.
 - Pause makes your audience wonder what's going to happen next. In conversation, we're often afraid to pause because we think we might lose our listeners' attention, but in storytelling, pausing gives the audience a needed moment to catch up and let the meaning of a story or a piece of the action sink in and resonate.
- In Connie Regan-Blake's ghost story, she intentionally lowers the volume of her voice at times so that her audience must listen carefully to hear her. When she does this, she's still projecting from the diaphragm, but she turns the volume down a notch to pull her audience in closer.

Sound Effects

- We naturally think of sound effects in conjunction with stories for children, such as the bear hunt story, but they can also be useful and fun in stories for adults.
- One of the best ways to easily insert sound effects is to add the effect to a particular word in the narration that describes the action. For example, if a door is creaking open, you could make the word "creak" itself into a sound: "The door creeeeked open."
- Such effects add to the "sensorium" of the story—the full array of senses that a story can evoke.

Suggested Reading

Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice*.

Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling*.

Lundberg, *Cords (Hear Us and Have Mercy)*.

Regan-Blake, *Chilling Ghost Stories*.

———, www.storywindow.com.

Stern, *Acting with an Accent*.

Questions to Consider

1. Check in with your body following the vocal-physical warm-ups in this lecture. Do you feel different following these stretches and warm-ups?
2. How small can a change in voice be to make a difference in characterization?

Preparing to Perform

Lecture 19

Thus far, we've talked about different elements of a story as separate "things" to experiment with as you tell a story to a neighbor or a colleague. As you're telling a story, you change the pace of how a character talks to add characterization, or change the way you hold yourself to suggest a different character, or use visualization to walk your way from one plot element to the next. But these aren't separate "things" that you do in a story. In this lecture, we'll work on putting these elements together and seeing how they relate to one another.

The Story Outline

- Begin by choosing an entirely new story, one you haven't worked on before in these lectures, and one that is relatively short. Tell, out loud, a 15-second version of this story. You'll use this story to prepare a story outline.
- Think about the background of the story—your research. What is the genre of the story (folktale, personal story, myth)? What is the primary source text for the story?
 - For cultural stories, such as folktales and tall tales, it's useful to try to get at least two or three versions of the story from different authors or oral sources, both for variety's sake and to ensure that you're not plagiarizing someone else's version of a story.
 - You might also investigate what was going on in history at the time of the events in your story and identify the cultural origin of the story. Keep copies of any variants of the story you find, to help your memory if you come back to the story at a later time and to prove that you crafted your version from a variety of sources.

- Next, in your storytelling journal, write down the main problem in the story, focusing on the action of the plot. In one sentence, state the major problem or task that orders the plot.
- List the locations of the story and the historical period. If the story jumps around in time, include that fact, too.
- List the characters in the story and underline the primary character, the one who is the focus of the emotional arc.
- In one sentence, write the outcome of the story’s problem or conflict, again, focusing on the plot.
- Finally, state the meaning of the story in one sentence.
- This outline gives you the basic “pieces” of your story. The next step is to order those pieces.

Ordering Your Story

- Using the same story, think about your introduction. What is the first thing you want to say, the opening phrase to introduce the characters? It might be a simple sentence that piques the interest of the audience: “Mama never liked Tuesdays.”
 - In considering your introduction, you also need to think about what you must say in order to get the action going. What is the bare minimum that your listeners need to know to understand what’s about to happen?
 - Briefly introduce the characters, the setting, and the time period before bringing listeners to the inciting incident that gets the action moving.
- Next, quickly sketch out the plot—the major events—in a numbered sequence, ordered as you plan to tell them.

- Locate and write down the climax of the story. If the emotional arc of your story reaches a climax at a different point from the plotline of events, be sure to note that in your outline, as well.
- Write down the conclusion of the story. Here, you may think of specific wording, as you did with the introduction. Even if you forget the precise wording later, having a good idea of the closing phrase will improve your telling.
- Finally, write down your target audience for this story (your family, friends at work, or business colleagues if you plan to tell the story as part of a presentation). This is the audience that you will imagine for the rest of this exercise.

Performing Your Story

- Stand up, roll your shoulders back, and stretch your arms up above your head, feeling the stretch all the way down your body. Then, drop your arms and head, bend your knees, and fold forward at the waist. From this folded position, relax your neck. Finally, roll yourself upright from the base of your spine.
- Go to the beginning of your story, and visualize the first place all around you. Think in terms of the five senses. What colors do you see in this place? What does it smell like? What background sounds do you hear? As the narrator, see in your mind's eye where the primary character is, even though he or she might not be in this scene. Your knowledge of that character will inform the tone you take in the opening moments.
- Imagine your target audience in front of you and move back and forth as the narrator, from looking at the audience to looking at the scene. Begin by looking at the audience and, if you remember the opening phrase you wrote down, speak it out loud.
- Next, move the audience into the action. Given that the story has just taken off, you should change your pace, even if it's only a subtle change.

- As you bring the audience into the next scene, think about the forces that are propelling and pulling the characters. Let that sense of propulsion push you forward and influence your pacing. Physically move to a new place (step to one side) as you're propelled into the next scene.
- Focus on one character and choose his or her body center. The next time that character speaks, move into that body posture and use a focal point to bring the character alive. Choose another character and give him or her a different rate of speech from the narrator and others in the story.
- Next, move to the plot climax of your story. Use a "little narrator" and give your audience a different perspective; show the tensiveness between perspectives in your narration.
- Somewhere in the scene, add a pause to punctuate some moment in the story. The way you look at the audience when you pause, with either a smile or a more serious expression, carries the force of the pause forward; it's a way of projecting the pause, similar to projecting your voice.
- If you haven't reached it yet, move ahead to the emotional climax of the story. Remember the real reason that you're telling this story. Let that sense of urgency and purpose affect your intonation and how you look at the audience.
- Finally, bring your audience to the resolution. If you can remember the final phrase you wrote down, say it, but if you can't, just say what comes to mind at this point in your telling.

Exaggerating Your Performance

- Try out the body centers of at least two characters on your list. Take on the different centers, walk around in your space, and speak as those characters.

- Take on the body center of your narrator, which will probably be your own body center. Walk in the space, come to a standing point, and stop. Look at your imaginary audience and tell a version of your story using exaggerated gestures, characterizations, and volume.
- Give yourself permission to look ridiculous as you do this exercise, which will help you see the extent of where your energy and characterizations can go. Exaggerate everything in the scene; the big things should be huge and the little things should be tiny, and your voice should reflect those exaggerations.
- Move to the middle of your story and let the climax build, making your voice more dramatic than it would ever really be in telling this story. As you reach the climactic moment, amplify the characterizations.
- Finally, as you reach the resolution of the story, maintain your high energy but relax your pacing.
- When you're through with this exercise, think about any discoveries you made in this exaggerated telling. For example, you may have used your voice in a funny way for a certain character. Try to locate one aspect of the run-through that you'd like to retain in a telling with a real audience.
- Note, too, that the energy you have in an exaggerated run-through is at the same level that you need to maintain when you tell the story. This energy isn't about goofy gestures or voices but about focus and investment in a story.



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Your listeners take their cues from you; when you're more interested and invested in what you're saying, they will be more interested, too.

Scripting

- Take out your journal again and consider the meanings your story holds. What is significant about the story? Reflect on the meaning from both a cultural and a personal perspective.
 - Contextualize the story in its community, which might be your family or peer group. What cultural purposes does the story serve? What values does it reinforce or instill? Why does the story survive in this culture?
 - From a personal perspective, why were you drawn to this story? What value does this story have for you?
- At this point in the rehearsal process—after you feel comfortable with your story and your characters—script out the story. Scripting helps you work through key phrases and flesh out scenes, but even while you do it, you should be prepared to let go of this wording. Memorizing a script is a surefire way to kill your story performance!
- After you've written the story out, tell it again away from your script; then revise what you've written. Keep the story fluid. Don't allow the act of writing the story down to mummify it. The script is a tool, not a final goal.
- It's a good idea to try out different versions of a story for different audiences before you write it down. Visualize the scenes, try out different voices and postures for the characters, and tell the story informally to friends before you script it.
- After you internalize the story in your body and mind, then use scripting as a way of going even deeper into the images. As you script, try to stay “in scene,” visualizing the setting and action in front of you.
- Once you've got a script, make another storyboard in the margins that you can use to refresh your mind about the story before you perform it.

- Scripting, when done at the right time, can be helpful as a memory aid, can help you see connections between scenes, and enables you to plan out your pacing and rhythm, but remember that your wording should be adapted to suit the audience. It's the images that you visualize—not the specific words you write—that remain the same from one telling to the next.

Suggested Reading

O'Callahan, "The Herring Shed."

Questions to Consider

1. Did you discover anything new about your story or storytelling—the possibilities of characterization, for example—while doing the exaggerated run-through?
2. The story outline is designed to be a quick way of organizing your research and thoughts about the flow of your story, as well as a good reference for refreshing your memory about a story later. You won't do an outline for every story you tell, but there may be stories that you want to record in some way on paper—either with an outline or with a script. What is one story that you really want to get down on paper—or in an audio recording—for your family? Can you do that outline, script, or recording this week?

Putting Performance Anxiety to Good Use

Lecture 20

The number-one fear among Americans today isn't the fear of dying, aging, or losing one's mind; it's the fear of public speaking. Whenever we speak to other people—whether it's a full-scale public performance or an informal encounter with a smaller group—we all experience a degree of nervous energy. This bodily reaction to public engagement is useful for creating a lively storytelling experience for your audience. In this lecture, we'll look at the physiology behind performance anxiety, the correlation between anxiety that debilitates and energy that enlivens, and practical tools for channeling nervous energy into an energized performance.

The Physiology of Anxiety

- The responses of the body to fear are similar whether you're facing a difficult ski run, a boardroom presentation, or a challenging question from a four-year-old.
- When you encounter a situation of potential danger, your hypothalamus is triggered, which in turn, signals the pituitary gland to release hormones into your nervous system. Those hormones then cause the adrenal glands to secrete cortisol, sometimes called the "stress hormone."
- These hormones trigger your respiratory and pulmonary systems so that your breathing becomes heavier and your heart pumps faster. The purpose here is to get more oxygen into your bloodstream and pump the blood throughout your body to enable you to perform better.
- Notice that this physiological response is what gives your body the energy to perform; it boosts you up. Professional athletes know this, as do professional actors and storytellers. Your physical and mental performance is enhanced with a moderate increase in stress.

- But as we know, too much cortisol in the system can result in long-term health problems. For performers, too little stress can result in a debilitated performance level. Somewhere in the middle is where you feel the adrenaline rush enough to be excited but not overwhelmed.
- Fight-or-flight is an automatic (nonthinking) response of the body that increases the breathing and heart rate. Another region of the brain, the bed nucleus of the stria terminalis, can actually control the physical fight-or-flight response that bypasses thought. The fact that the bed nucleus is thought-linked means that you can train your brain to regulate the fear response.

Breathing and Body Warm-Ups

- How do you engage the bed nucleus to get your breathing, sweaty palms, and rapid heart rate under control and keep cortisol at a manageable level? One approach is to use some techniques of cognitive behavioral therapy to train your brain and body to react positively to the stress of public storytelling.
- Begin by standing up, with your legs shoulder width apart and knees bent slightly. Roll your shoulders back and stretch your arms up and to the sides. Take a couple of deep breaths and exhale. Then, take in a big breath, but don't let it all out at once. Try to let your exhalation last as long as your inhalation. This breathing technique is from Ashtanga Yoga.
 - Maintain that measured breathing, but now, make your breath audible in the back part of your throat (Ujjayi breath). This technique is great for when you feel that your breath is starting to get away from you: Take deep, measured breaths and engage Ujjayi breath. You can even pause in front of an audience to take this kind of controlled breath.
 - If you feel a little dizzy from taking all these deep breaths, sit down for a few minutes. That dizzy feeling is the rush of oxygen entering your brain.

- To warm up your body, follow the instructions for a sun salutation from yoga, concentrating on your breathing as you repeat the position twice. If you're not ready to do the full pose, follow the instructions for the modified pose.
- Another good warm-up is jogging in place for a few seconds. This exercise gives your body the sense that you're using cortisol purposefully. You might even take a jog outside in the days leading up to a performance. Again, you're training your body to recognize an increased heart rate as normal.

Projecting Your Voice

- One of the best ways to use nervous energy in storytelling is by projecting your voice. As we said, when you get nervous, the action of the lungs speeds up, and you have a tendency to try to force air out of the top of your lungs, but there's no power or authority in that kind of breath. You need to learn to use that increased breath to force sound up and out from the diaphragm.
- To use the full power of air entering your lungs, practice saying the consonants in the alphabet, pairing them one at a time with each of the vowel sounds: ba-ba-ba, be-be-be, and so on. As you speak, feel yourself forcing the sound out of your mouth with the power coming from your diaphragm. Try to throw those sounds across the room.
- Along with the vocal warm-ups from a previous lecture, this is a great and ridiculous way to start your day—you can even do it in your car on the way to work. This exercise enlivens your speech and prepares you to project your voice outward.

Readying Yourself to Tell

- Visualization is the best way to remember your story and the best way to center yourself and get ready for telling your story.
- Repeat the visualization exercise from our earlier lecture. Close your eyes and visualize your story scene by scene. Walk through

the story in your mind. Don't worry about remembering words; focus on getting into the story.

- Keep in mind that you as the storyteller exist in a place somewhere between your audience and the world of the story that you're telling. That story is your own safe place; no one in the audience knows how the story is supposed to go, and there's no script that you're tied to. Even if you skip a scene accidentally, you can always reinsert it later.
- Once you've run through the story in your mind, it's useful to walk through the story physically in the space where you're going to perform. If you're giving a business presentation, walk through the presentation in the meeting room before the meeting takes place.
- Another useful technique is to assign a specific location to the scenes in the story or to break up where you will stand in terms of



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Test takers are encouraged to study in the place where they will take an exam because there is a subconscious association between knowledge learned and recalled in the same place.

the beginning, middle, and end of your story. You might start your story by standing on the left, then move to the center for the middle, and end on the right. You can do this with a lot of movement or very little—just a step. These separations can help you remember the parts of your story and give purpose to your movements.

- Instead of losing your energy through “shuffling feet,” plant yourself and make your movements purposeful. This technique allows your energy to come out in your gestures or facial expressions. But keep in mind that less is more in storytelling. Gestures can be distracting if they are just expending nervous energy; you may be able to channel them to facial expressions instead.

Your Personal Style

- Everyone is a storyteller, and every storyteller has a different style. You have strengths as a teller that others don’t have—ways of connecting with an audience and even access to specific audiences. Others have different gifts.
- Don’t feel that someone else knows the “right” way to tell a story. There is no ideal form for the way you will tell; there is a unique way that you will engage with your audience and adapt to that audience as you craft your story in the moment.
- All of these warm-ups and rehearsal ideas are aimed at preparing you to be ready to have fun and be spontaneous in the moment. It’s by rehearsing and playing with stories in a safe space that you will prepare yourself to be free in the moment to relax, harness the energy your body is feeding you, and dive into your story.

Suggested Reading

Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice*.

Questions to Consider

1. Good stress is called *eu*-stress, as in the words “*euphoria*” (“good feeling”) or “*euphonic*” (“good sound”). *Eu*-stress is essential in giving a good performance, storytelling or otherwise. Can you think of a time when your nervous energy helped you in a situation? How?
2. Before any big performance, I try to get into the space at least 30 minutes ahead of time and walk through my story—literally walk around in the space and place the scenes in that performance area. How can “blocking” techniques help you remember your stories?

Adapting to Different Audiences

Lecture 21

Most of the time, we're telling stories in the course of our everyday lives, and all of the storytelling tips we've learned up to this point can be applied to office parties, presentations, and other common situations. But it's important to note that even these storytelling scenarios are different; there's a difference between telling a story to a friend and telling to a roomful of people. Different storytelling scenarios require you to adapt your story content and your persona as a teller in specific ways. In this lecture, we'll look at the typical parameters of different storytelling scenarios, how stories emerge in different settings, and what specific audiences typically need from a story.

Living-Room Storytelling

- Most of the time, we tell stories in a living-room type of setting, sitting down in close proximity to our audience. Stories usually emerge in these settings in the course of conversation.
- Something in the conversation may remind you of a story, and from your seated position, you start to visualize the first scene that comes to mind. Having that first image in front of you not only establishes the characters for the audience but also helps you settle into this “spontaneous” story and start to see how it will unfold.
- Even in conversation, you can transform what you want to say from an anecdote to a story by making character distinctions, taking on varied perspectives, adding cultural connections, and building a “plot.”
- In a conversational setting, your story satisfies at least one primary need for your audience: It provides some common ground to stand on. Your story gives both you and your audience a metaphorical place to stand and a literal way to interact. This interaction occurs

as dialogue—stories shared back and forth—and this exchange requires a few things from you as a storyteller.

- Be aware of economy in living-room scenarios. In a living room, you aren't performing; you're "giving ground" for the conversation to stand on. Your purpose is to give more ground to stand on and invite others to add their stories to the mix.
- Be prepared to share your storytelling with your audience. If someone jumps in, you have the choice to ignore, yield, or incorporate. Probably the best choice is to incorporate because that action allows you to draw in other examples as part of the larger story and to share the telling without sacrificing your own trajectory.

Organizational Storytelling

- There are generally three kinds of storytelling opportunities at work: (1) a story told as part of a presentation, (2) the story of your company told to employees or outside audiences, and (3) stories told to build community and camaraderie among employees.
- When you're giving a presentation at work, don't just think about including a story, but look at the whole presentation as one long story. Various scenes are part of the overall arc of the presentation, which has a trajectory and some kind of resolution or ending.
 - If you're offering a solution to a problem or findings that your group has made, tell it as a story: Who is the villain? Who do you want to unify your audience against? Personify your idea as the hero. Also, think carefully about the role of your listeners; can you give them a specific role within the story?
 - If your presentation is framed as the story of an unlikely hero (your company), then your audience of co-workers can be cast in the role of helpers to that hero. Think of the hero as the company, the villain as falling sales, and the helpers as the co-workers to whom you're giving the presentation.

- There's a different kind of dynamic in this storytelling scenario; it's more formal, so there is an expectation of a specific kind of performance. You want to be approachable but confident; speaking in a solid, well-projected voice helps establish that persona.
- Stories also emerge more purposefully in this setting than in an informal conversation. If a story occurs to you in the midst of a presentation, keep it economical and welcome your audience to participate.
- Stories can illustrate your point, and they're often most useful when they come before an outright statement or outline of your points; use stories as foreground over outlined concepts. This sequence gives your listeners a chance to see for themselves the real-life application and the truth of your propositions.
- As you're telling a presentation story, you can still have fun with it and commit to it! You don't lose any authority or confidence when you share a story with characters your audience wants to remember; that investment in your story often transfers over to more investment in the other elements of your presentation.
- Similar ideas apply when you are telling a workplace story to convey the history, mission, and vision of your business to employees or outside audiences.
 - Again, personify the company as the hero and the opposing forces it faces as the dragons in the hero's journey.
 - One way to think about your company story is the idea that your company has a beginning and a middle but no end. Your hope is that your business or organization keeps going. Thus, you're bringing your employees into the story during the rising action—they are part of the story of building that business. This approach unifies you and your employees in the same role of working to strengthen the company.



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New employee orientations represent a golden opportunity to tell a compelling story about your company.

- In an organizational setting, you also have the chance to ignore, yield to, or incorporate the contributions of your listeners. Keep in mind that it's critical to listen to your employees' stories in the workplace. In fact, professional consultants sometimes use storytelling as a tool to help companies improve internal communications.
 - When you have a chance to hear stories from employees, listen for the implicit values and repeated themes that are communicated.
 - Creating space in the workday for senior employees to tell their stories allows them to mentor younger employees and shares their trajectory with the company, keeping the story alive.
 - If you give people the freedom to tell their stories, you will be amazed at the insights your employees and colleagues will contribute.

Storytelling for Children

- Obviously, in a classroom or other setting with children, the physical environment is different. If you're a teacher, you're often standing at the front of the room, facing a group of students seated in rows. This positioning is inherently submissive for the students; the teacher looks down on the students, and they look up. The same thing is true for a group of children sitting on the floor with a storyteller sitting in a chair in front of them.
- In a setting where there are more bodies in the room, be aware that bodies swallow sound. For this reason, you will have to project the volume of your voice more in a classroom setting.
- Make sure you don't adopt a flat or false persona when telling stories to children. This shows a lack of engagement with and belief in the story.
- In children's stories, there is room to make your gestures bigger and your characterizations more embodied. Young children up through middle schoolers respond well to storytellers who use their whole bodies.
- For infants and toddlers up to age 3, use stories with a lot of action, sound effects, and props. Keep the plots simple and include only a few characters. Smile often in telling stories to this age group, because young children can be frightened by scary faces or mean characters. A good rule of thumb is to make the story as long as the age of the child.
- With preschool children (ages 3–5), give them roles to play and long words to master and use. Introduce science and basic physics stories (how our bodies work, how we build a house), and encourage them to tell their own simple stories (how a seed grows). Again, keep the plots simple.
- In the early elementary school years (ages 5–7), children can start to handle a more developed plotline with clear answers. Children at

this age are starting to compare their own strengths and weaknesses to those of others. Tell stories that emphasize a variety of strengths and diverse abilities. Also at this age, children become more interested in telling their own stories.

- For ages 8–10, you can tell longer stories (such as the tales of Snow White or Paul Bunyan) and spooky stories. Stories with surprise endings are good; at this age, children have a better grasp of reality and can handle their expectations being foiled.
- When children turn 11, they start to see beyond their own problems and imagine possibilities outside of their own experiences; they can reason through abstract problems to arrive at underlying principles. Avoid didactic stories, such as fables; let these children draw their own conclusions about a lesson. Stories with riddles and mysteries are also great for this age group.
- Keep in mind that older children will not necessarily start out on your side. They can't take the risk of liking you until their peers give their assent. As a storyteller, your biggest task is to get these children out of the mode of posturing for one another and into the world of the story. To some extent, you have to match your persona to theirs—you have to be “cool,” too.

Suggested Reading

Lehrman, ed., *Telling Stories to Children*.

Questions to Consider

1. Think about the permeability of the borders between the three storytelling scenarios discussed in this lecture. When is a boardroom like a living room? When is a living room like a classroom?
2. What kind of boardroom stories are you most called to make, and how can listening to your audience influence and affect that kind of storytelling?

3. What age range of children do you most come into contact with? What are the specific needs of that age range in terms of stories and storytelling?

Invitation to the Audience—Mindset

Lecture 22

Now that you have an amazing story to tell, how can you get and keep your audience’s attention? This lecture is about on-ramps and off-ramps, devices that help you lead into your story and make it relevant to your audience and help get you out of the story in the end. We’ll continue this very practical discussion in the next lecture by focusing on troubleshooting tips—how to get your listeners back if and when they start to wander and how to keep them engaged. But to get to that point, you have to hook them from the outset.

The Audience On-Ramp

- One of the first things any audience needs is a transitional link or “hook” into your story. This is different than an introduction to the characters; it takes place even before that moment. We call this hook a “mindset”; it’s how you lead into your story. Your mindset will be different for each audience, because the mindset is all about getting your audience ready to listen to your story.
- The mindset is your audience’s on-ramp; like an on-ramp to a highway, it literally gets you from the road you’re on (the conversation you’re in) to another road (the story you’re about to tell).
- Your mindset makes the intellectual and emotional transition for your listeners from what’s come before in their lives to what they’re about to experience. The mindset is what your audience needs to know (or to feel) in order to be open to hearing your story.
- Note that there’s a difference between an audience hearing a story and really listening to a story. When you hear something, it’s going on around you, but you’re not necessarily involved or interested in that sound. Listening, in contrast, means that you’re paying attention and, to an extent, you’re making yourself vulnerable

because you trust that what you're listening to is worth your time and attention.

Setting the Tone

- One of the main functions of a mindset is setting the tone for the story to come. This is done primarily through your body and intonation. Your embodied presence sets the emotional tone for the telling. If you're energized, your story will be energized and so will your audience. If you're anxious, your audience will be, too.
- For this reason, your first task is to put yourself into an emotional tone that is appropriate for your story. If your story is humorous, it's important to let that show from the beginning to give your audience permission to laugh at what's to come.
- Your listeners are more vulnerable than you think. They want to react in the appropriate way to your story, both for your sake (so as not to hurt your feelings) and for their own sakes (so as not to embarrass themselves by responding inappropriately).
- Your opening tone gives the listeners cues about their role. If they can laugh, you might smile or throw in a joke. If the coming story is scary, you might lean in toward them and speak a little more softly. If your listeners are going on an adventure, you might speak with an energetic and bold voice. In every case, you want to start off at ease. Remember, if you're anxious, your audience will be anxious, too.
- This tone that you create through your body and voice establishes a trust relationship with your listeners. They trust that they can go with you in this story, that you'll guide them and bring them back safely.
- Establishing trust with the audience can be as simple as speaking the first few words of your story with confidence. But sometimes, you may need more than that to hook your audience's attention. The

beginning of the “Santraigh” story, for example, requires a link between reality and the fairy world.

- To draw your audience into the story, keep these tips in mind:
 - Make eye contact with everyone. Do a full sweep of the audience and then individually look into each person’s eyes. This eye contact establishes your connection with the audience.
 - Practice open posture. Avoid folding your arms over your chest. Keep your feet pointed toward your listeners so that you are facing them. Opening yourself up to your listeners encourages them to open up to you and your story.
 - Ask questions to establish a dialogue and make a content connection. Asking questions acknowledges your listeners and gives them permission to participate.

Mindset in Conversations and Presentations

- When you’re in the midst of a conversation, often the content-based work of the mindset is at least partially done for you. You may be able to insert a story into the conversation with minimal introduction. But at other times, you may need a bit more to bridge between the topic of the conversation and the topic or place of your story.
 - To build this bridge, you can use a combination of flash-forward and intonation. In order to get your listeners to jump on the train of your story, you might give them a glimpse of the point of connection at the beginning: “I have a friend, and he came back from Argentina with the most detailed work of art...” The tone and rate of your speech may also cue the audience that you’re about to talk about something new.
 - Another bridge-building technique is to use transition wording: “I haven’t seen detail like that since my friend showed me this piece of art he picked up in Argentina.”

- Notice that in both of these examples, you make connections and give a glimpse of what's to come, but you don't reveal everything—you don't steal your own punchline.
- When you're giving a presentation to a group—whether it's a group at work or children in a classroom—you don't have the luxury of bouncing off of what's just been said to enter into your story. Thus, your mindset must create a springboard for the audience; in effect, you're creating what the audience might say to lead into a story, and then you're responding to it.
- If you're beginning a presentation, verbally welcome everyone and give them a reason for attending the presentation. Set up the common problem that has resulted in the need for the gathering: “You all know that our sales last quarter dropped.”
 - Then use that problem as a way to set up the “story” of your presentation: “Our average customer has been strapped for



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A short “story” about the weather or traffic can align you and your audience against a common foe—the heat or rush hour!

cash. Here's our customer: She's bright, she's well-educated, but she just got a cut in salary."

- Your job is to funnel your audience's attention from the world outside the doors of your performance area into the world of the story. You have to help your listeners tune out the different experiences that have brought them to this room so that they can tune in to your story.
- In establishing your mindset, don't ramble on. Make this moment as purposeful as any other element of your story.
- Many of these presentation tips also apply to telling in a classroom. In the first moments, when you're trying to wrangle children into a story, you can also try these tricks:
 - Ask, "Who's ready to hear a story?" and have children raise their hands in response. Raise your hand excitedly to show that you're excited to share the story.
 - Ask them to show how they listen (by putting their hands to their ears), look (by pointing to their eyes), and get ready for a story (by putting their hands in their laps). Use any variation of this exercise you like, but give the children some way to "get their wiggles out" before you begin the story.
 - Ask questions, but be specific about how you want the children to answer: "How many of you have a best friend? Raise your hand!"
 - Be prepared to incorporate negative comments. If a child says, "I've heard this story before," you might say, "You may have heard another version of this story before, but do you know the real story?"

Words of Caution

- Don't apologize for your story, and again, don't steal your own punchline. Don't state what the story will make clear. Don't tell

the audience what the story is about, what perspective the narrator takes, and so on.

- Bring the audience to a safe and satisfying place. Don't tack on a happy ending to your story that doesn't fit. And don't make the whole story a dream—don't trick your listeners after they've trusted you!
- When your story ends, give yourself an “I am terrific” moment: Stand in place, make eye contact with the audience, and allow the story to settle in and resonate. Don't rush immediately away. You want a strong finish; allow the final image to “burn into” the minds of your listeners.
- To signal the “off-ramp” moment of your story, decrease the pitch and pacing of your voice (but not the volume).
- Finally, you may want to give your listeners a way to apply to the story to their own lives. But don't be so didactic that you flatten your story with an obvious meaning. Trust your listeners to get what they need out of your story.

Suggested Reading

Davis, *The Grand Canyon*.

———, www.ddavisstoryteller.com.

Forest, *Tales of Womenfolk*.

———, www.heatherforest.com.

Questions to Consider

1. Donald Davis's story about the Grand Canyon is hilarious and touching in its own right, and his mindset in the first part of the story hooks the audience with something universal: taxes. What is one way you can hook your audience through a shared experience?

2. Channeling your listeners' attention from where they've been into the world of the story can be challenging. In what ways do your listeners "tell" you where they're coming from? In what ways can you listen to them from the beginning?

Keeping Your Audience's Attention

Lecture 23

Once you've hooked your listeners and gotten them into the story, how do you keep them there? This lecture focuses on the adaptive qualities of storytelling—the need to adjust in the moment to keep your audience engaged. We'll cover all sorts of special occasion advice, as well as general rules to live by as a storyteller. We'll see many examples of professional storytellers' work, and we'll bring these professional techniques into the everyday world, by discussing how you can use props, sound, and audience participation in your stories.

Audience Participation

- One of the easiest and best ways to keep your listeners engaged is to invite them to participate in some way with telling a story. You can ask them to repeat certain phrases or perform certain gestures with you, or you can have audience members tell part of the story or act out certain roles. Participation works with any age level to draw listeners in and keep them engaged.
- In the excerpt by storyteller Donna Washington, notice how the participatory elements keep both children and adults interested. Note, too, that the repeated phrase keeps the pace of the story building.
- Repetition gives a structure for listeners to follow and prevents them from getting lost in a story. When you keep these moments of participation playful, even adults gain a sense of accomplishment. Using repeated phrases and gestures also helps to cement the story into the audience's memory.
- If you're telling a story and you notice that you're starting to lose your listeners, bring them back to the story with an invitation to perform a gesture or say a phrase along with you. This technique

gives the storyteller a playful kind of authority as the director of the group.

- This type of participation also gives listeners a sense that they matter. They contribute to the story, but their contributions are structured and manageable for the teller.
- Often, participation works well when you're doing a presentational-style story—in a classroom or boardroom—rather than in conversation with friends.
- One kind of repetition that's useful in living-room scenarios, and any other time you want to add interest through humor, is the “inside joke.” The reason inside jokes work so well to keep your listeners interested is that they unite the listeners in a sense of ownership. The story becomes theirs; they share a secret joke, along with the narrator or primary character.
 - Establish something at the beginning of a story, such as a particular character trait, and then return to it at key points in the story.
 - In “The Old Maid,” I established a firm characteristic about Aunt Mae (she watched *Days of Our Lives*) and then returned to this endearing habit at the end of the story.
 - You can use this technique to build a character into a friend or to turn a character into a villain.
 - When you're using inside jokes, remember that storytelling is about unifying beyond the moment of the telling. Don't use a joke that might alienate audience members.

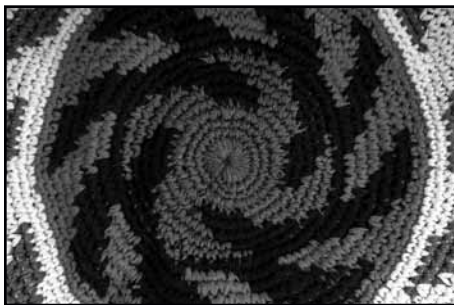
Disaster Strikes!

- It's true that forces beyond your control may sometimes interrupt your story. The power may go out, or a jackhammer may start up outside.

- In some cases, such as when a cell phone rings, you can ignore the interruption. Or you can acknowledge it quickly and go back to the story.
- You might also incorporate the interruption into the story. If you're telling "Jack and the Beanstalk" and you hear a jackhammer outside, you might say, "And then Jack heard the hammering of a thousand tiny dwarves in the neighboring village, but he kept walking."
- You can also adapt your story to an interruption. If the power goes out during a presentation, you can wrap it up quickly, using summary to speed up the "events" and get to your resolution.

Using Props and Costumes

- Sometimes, you might want to use a visual aid when you're telling a story. This can be something as simple as a photo or even an abstract representation: "We went to a temple in Mexico, and it was huge; it was like two of these buildings stacked on top of each other."
- When you're telling to children, finger puppets and hand puppets are good props. For other audiences, you might choose a cultural artifact, such as a Chinese fan or a scarf from Finland. The key is to integrate the prop with the story so that it's not a distraction. Use props to draw listeners into a story.



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- Like props, costumes can be useful visual aids, but using a full costume can limit

If you use a cultural artifact in storytelling, treat that object with respect and contextualize it correctly so that it isn't viewed as merely a souvenir.

you to one character. Try using costume pieces rather than full costumes, such as hats, scarves, or gloves.

- Keep in mind, too, that what you are wearing is a kind of costume—your suit and tie or your party dress—for a specific performance.
- Whatever you wear, make sure it allows you the full range of movement you need or be prepared to adjust your storytelling to suit your clothing.

Lighting, Music, and Other Considerations

- A sample from the storyteller Brenda Wong Aoki shows how music, costume, props, and lighting can be blended into a story to create what Aoki calls a “monodrama.”
 - Note her use of a fan as a “transformational object,” an object that becomes something else, in this case, the ocean.
 - Note, too, that her costuming sets the tone and cultural context of the story but doesn’t limit her characterization because it’s not specific to one character.
- Unless you perform on a stage, you probably won’t have to deal with positioning lights or creating a mood through lighting, but you can still change lighting effects to your advantage. Turn the lights down to tell a scary story to children, use a flashlight, or even light a fire! In a boardroom, make sure the lights are adequate for your audience to see you and to be seen.
- Again, you may not have musicians to incorporate music and sound into your storytelling, but if you play the guitar or piano, consider adding those elements to underscore specific moments in your story or to bring characters to life. Think of the musical composition *Peter and the Wolf*, in which each instrument is a different character in the story.
- Along with music, you can also use sound effects to communicate action and push the narration forward. A simple way to incorporate

sound effects is simply to use your voice: whizz, buzz, brrrrrrrrrr! Once you've established what a sound means, it can become an inside joke for your audience.

- Depending on the venue for your storytelling, you might have the option to sit or stand. Be aware that a seated position can drain away some of your energy. If you're using a chair or stool, sit on the edge of it or use it as a prop, sitting when characters in the story sit. If you can stand easily, it's usually best to do so.

Suggested Reading

Aoki and Izu, *Mermaid Meat*.

Aoki, www.brendawongaoki.com.

Bodkin, *The Odyssey*.

———, www.oddsbodkin.com.

Harley, *Yes to Running!*

———, www.billharley.com.

Washington, *Troubling Trouble*.

———, www.donnawashington.com.

Weitkamp, www.kimweitkamp.com.

Questions to Consider

1. Participation is a fun way to engage your audience. What is one way you could use repetition with participation to draw your audience into one of your stories?
2. We discussed Brenda Wong Aoki's use of a transformational object, her fan. What is one prop you could use in your story that could serve as a transformational object? What three things could this visual aid represent?

Remember Your Stories—The Power of Orality

Lecture 24

This lecture wraps up the course with some final considerations on how to keep an audience's attention, from the technical aspects of microphones and slides, to the more nuanced ways that we read audiences and understand their needs in the moment. Finally, we'll take all our how-to's back to the nature of orality itself as a cultural force that shapes all of us, all the time, everywhere.

Slides and Microphones

- We talked in the last lecture about using props, and you can consider PowerPoint and other multimedia tools as similar to props. PowerPoint slides work best as a well-integrated prop, not the focus of attention but a visual aid to pull listeners further into the story.
- When you're creating slides, think in terms of using images and key words that illustrate or draw out significant points in the story.
- We often think of slides as a way to prompt memory or guide a presentation. It's fine to use slides in that way, but keep in mind that if PowerPoint guides your story, then PowerPoint becomes the narrator, not you. Let the slides support your story. Speak first, then bring up the slide.
- Choose carefully what to include on a slide. If you want to prompt your memory, put up a single word or image as the first slide. Then, when you're ready to come to your bullet points, bring up a second slide with those points. In this way, you remain in control.
- In giving a presentation, you may also be provided with a microphone. Of course, microphones project your voice through speakers so that people can hear you better. But microphones can also malfunction and become more of a distraction than an aid.

- A microphone gives you another way to manipulate your voice; your growl can sound more menacing or your whisper, more ethereal. But a microphone can also throw you off if you're not used to hearing your voice projected.
- Visually, a handheld microphone distances you from the audience, although if you're comfortable holding a microphone, it can sort of fade away. The goal is for it to become an extension of yourself and the story.
- A microphone attached to a lectern restricts your movements, and the lectern probably blocks most of your body from the audience. With a stand, you have the option of holding the microphone yourself and moving freely in the space or allowing the stand to hold the microphone to free up your hands. Lapel and over-the-ear microphones give you the most range of movement and are the least invasive presence between you and the audience.
- If you plan to use a microphone, try to get into the space ahead of time to do a sound-check and to give yourself a chance to practice briefly. If you have a corded microphone, make sure you don't trip over it.
- Remember that even with a microphone, you still need to project from your diaphragm so that your voice sounds confident.
- In all the elements you use to maintain your audience's attention—an engaging mindset or hook from the beginning, as well as technical additions, such as props or costumes—keep it simple. Use only those props that you can handle with ease and that fully integrate with your story. Use only those costumes that help you bring the story to life without limiting your mobility.

- Be selective in your storytelling. Don't oversimplify your stories, but include only those elements that are necessary. Make your story manageable for an oral audience.

The Nature of Oral Storytelling

- Orality is how we know much of what we know, and it's how we retain what we know. We tend to think that everything that matters is written down, but most of the time, knowledge is spoken. It's carried through an oral story before it's canonized in print.
- This was true of the ancient epics—the *Odyssey*, the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Upanishads—and it's true today. Your family history, the stories you tell about yourself that define who you are and shape your identity, the stories of your faith or the truths you hold that shape your daily decisions—these all exist in oral form in your mind and in your body and voice as you retell those stories to others through your words and actions.
- But oral storytelling is ephemeral—it lives in the breath in one moment, and it's gone in the next. Because they're ephemeral, oral stories work well when they latch onto those qualities of the mind that ground them in place.
 - Repetition, for example, mirrors the redundant quality of oral memory, reinforcing themes and points.
 - Keep your stories economical; don't clutter them with unnecessary props or digressions, but get to the meat.
 - Ground your audience in strong images through visualization and characterizations, using your voice as a tool to shape these places and people into life. Those qualities latch onto the image-based and action-centered nature of oral memory.
- Specifically grounding your stories also helps keep you ethical as a teller. You don't take someone's life or words out of context and you're not poaching someone else's cultural heritage; you're

contextualizing the story, making specific choices about character and situations.

- Oral storytelling is co-creative. Every story has an audience, and every story exists in relation to that audience. You adapt your stories to suit different audiences, and you're aware of how an audience contributes to a story.
- When you come to the end of a good story—and a good storytelling experience—both you and your audience are in a different place than where you started. The story changes you.
- Storytelling has the capacity, more than any other art form or persuasive medium, to provoke questions, incite dialogue, and reach both the mind and the heart. The vulnerability the teller and audience show in the face of the story widens to encompass others in a shared experience.

Story Trends

- As we've said, stories serve as metaphors for our own inner struggles, to integrate the often contradictory facets of our personalities and desires. They are also powerful metaphors for the struggles that go on in the wider culture and the world around us.
- Look at the story trends around you; start paying attention to the kinds of stories you see in movies or the kinds of stories your co-workers tell. Notice not only the content of these stories but what they represent—the values they express and the wider themes that emerge.
- Of course, stories are entertaining, but they also serve as “code” for cultural mores. The stories we whisper are whispered for a reason—because they have power. The same is true of the stories you tell your children to prepare them to face the world. Your stories tell them where they came from and give them strength.

Nana

My Nana was a note-taker. I think it came from her being a secretary for so many years. She took notes on everything: She'd write on the backs of old envelopes her list of things to do; she'd stick Post-Its all over the kitchen door with our phone numbers on [them]; she'd put a little note on her bathroom mirror to remind her to brush her teeth with her special paste. We always laughed at her tendency to obsessively make notes, until my grandparents passed away. And on the back of every little thing in their home, Nana had written who was in photographs—some of them went six generations back, names we'd never have known—she'd written where she got pottery, and when all my cousins and I said our first little words to her—she wrote all of it down.

And when we went down in the basement of their home.... In the back of that basement, wrapped up in plastic, was an old chunk of wood. And that piece of wood would have meant nothing to us if Nana hadn't left a little note on it: "Mr. Little (my great-grandfather) grafted this apple tree the year he died. The tree limb broke off a few days ago and Tom (my grandfather) wants to keep this graft. D. Little."

...

While my grandfather was alive, he taught me a lot of things. He taught me how to graft trees. He taught me how to love people. And he taught me how to tell stories.



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That piece of grafted wood sits on display in our home, along with the note Nana wrote. I think if Nana were here today, she'd still be writing notes—because she knew that the value in a thing isn't the thing itself; it's the memories that thing holds, how that thing connects you back to people you love. There's love, and history, and family in an old piece of wood.

So I write notes. Remember: store up apples for winter. Remember: mom gave me this vase for my birthday. Remember: remember, remember our stories.

- Every story has a narrator and is told from a point of view. Every story is shaped by the context out of which it comes—an economic context, cultural and social contexts, and personal contexts.

Telling Stories

- The best story performances harness the power of the elements unique to a live performance—your voice, your body, and the reactions of your audience. Even if you start to lose your audience—and this will happen to you—consider that a good thing. Think how much better your writing would be if you could get that kind of immediate response from your readers.
- When you remember and tell your stories, the awesome privilege and power and gift for the storyteller as performer is that everything you need is right in front of you—in your visualizations of the story and in the faces and body language of your audience. It's also inside you, in your face, in your body, and in your life and memory.

Suggested Reading

The National Storytelling Network, www.storyweb.org.

Sobol, *The Storyteller's Journey*.

Wolf, *The Art of Storytelling Show*.

Questions to Consider

1. How has your family culture shaped a story that you know? What truths do you find from your perspective on that story now, and how would you tell that story to others? In a hushed voice? Proudly? With a different hero or heroine?
2. Culture shapes not only how we tell stories but how we can tell stories and even whether or not some stories ever get told. Sometimes, our cultural context directs attention to certain stories over others. Over the course of these lectures, what is one story that has come to the surface that you might not have considered a “real” story before you began? To whom could you tell that story now?

Credits

Piano Performance by Sue Keller

Title music supplied by Getty Images

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