

Breaking Down Barriers: Exploring Migration Stories and Local Heritage with Young People

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Digital Storytelling Toolkit: Part One

“What is a story?”

Toolkit produced by Melting Pro



What is a story?

There are different kinds of stories:

- A Story About **Someone** (Character Stories; Memorial Stories)
- A Story About an **Event** (Adventure Stories; Accomplishment Stories)
- A Story About a **Place**
- The Story About **What I Do**
- Other **Personal** Stories (Recovery Stories, Love Stories)
- **Discovery** Stories

Check your opinion

What do you think?

- Short stories are more important than long stories
- Every story is important
- Only original stories are important

What is a good story?

A good digital story has to focus on a "turning point", a crucial and specific moment. We describe that moment as a “dragon”, and when you "pass the dragon" your life changes. Every story follows a narrative arc, with a catchy start, development, and conclusion.

Remember that telling a story means: transmitting a message. It implies a receiver - an audience that will watch it.

It has a context: where? When?

Types of stories

A story can be self-expression, and the preservation of memory; a tool for learning and the sharing of information; a tool for organizing and mobilization; a tool for advocacy and social change, and a tool for evaluation and reflection. The same story can be said to have a different role, simply by the way it is contextualized. The starting point is to recognize the different types of stories.

Stories start as deeply personal things, often to be shared with a limited audience, family members, friend and community, and at the other end of the scale, they become broadcast stories consumed by a general public.

The Storycenter Denver Office Director, Daniel Weinschenker, takes an aphorism from John Gardner when he facilitates storytelling workshops. All stories, they both agree, can really be boiled down to one of two types:

- 1) "A stranger came to town..." or
- 2) "We went on a vacation."

In other words, change came to you or you went towards change. These stories, in essence, fall into the widely used archetype of the symbolic journey, the journey of self-understanding. And while stories oftentimes have a journey built into them, it is important to recognize that the journey occurs for both the storyteller and the audience alike.

In this unit we focus on types of personal stories, and specifically:

A Story About Someone Important
A Story About an Event in My Life
A Story About a Place in My Life
A Story About What I Do
Other Personal Stories

These are all kinds of stories that we can develop into multimedia pieces.

Here are a few examples of some of these stories. You are encouraged to create your own categories, by combining existing story types, or developing a new one of your own.

A Story About Someone Important

Character Stories

How we love, are inspired by, want to recognize, and find meaning in our relationships are all aspects of our lives that are deeply important to us. Perhaps most stories are about a

relationship, and in the best stories, they tell us more about ourselves than the details of our own life story.

Memorial Stories

Honouring and remembering people who have passed is an essential part of the grieving process. These stories are often the most difficult and painful to produce, but the results can be the most powerful.

- What is, or was, your relationship to this person?
- How would you describe this person (physical appearance, character, etc.)?
- Is there an event/incident that best captures their character?
- What about the person do/did you most enjoy?
- What about the person drives/drove you crazy?
- What lesson did the person give to you that you feel is most important?
- If you had something to say to the person but they never had a chance to hear you say it, what would it be?

A Story About an Event in My Life

Adventure Stories

One of the reasons we travel is to break away from the normality of our lives and create new vivid memories. All of us who travel know that the experience is usually an invitation to challenge ourselves, to change our perspective about our lives, and to reassess meaning.

We often return from these experiences with personal realizations, and the process of recounting our travel stories is as much about sharing those realizations as sharing the sense of beauty or interest in the place visited.

Strangely enough, while almost everyone tells good travel stories, it is often difficult to make an effective multimedia piece from these stories. We rarely think about constructing a story with our photographs or videos in advance of a trip. And we do not want to take ourselves out of the most exhilarating moments by taking out a camera and recording.

Before your next trip, think about creating a story outline based on an idea prior to your visit, as well as what sorts of images, video, or sounds would be useful to establish the story.

Accomplishment Stories

Accomplishment stories are about achieving a goal, like graduating from school, landing a major contract, or being on the winning team in a sporting event. These stories easily fit into the desire–struggle–realization structure of a classic story. They also tend to be documented, so you might find it easy to construct a multimedia story. Televised sporting events have taken up the accomplishment story as a staple, and it might be helpful for you to carefully examine an “Olympic moment” to see how they balance the different elements, of establishing information, interviews, and voice-over.

- What was the event (time, place, incident, or series of incidents)?
- What was your relationship to the event?
- With whom did you experience this event?
- Was there a defining moment in the event?
- How did you feel during this event (fear, exhilaration, sharpened awareness, joy...)?
- What did the event teach you?
- How did this event change your life?

A Story About a Place in My Life

Until recent times, 90% of the world's population died within a ten-mile radius of the home where they were born and raised. While this now might be difficult for us to imagine, our sense of place is still the basis of many profound stories. One of the earliest interactive storytelling websites, 1,000 Rooms, a German-based project, invited people to submit a single image of a room in their home and tell a story about their relationship with it. Hundreds of people responded with their own intimate stories.

You may have a story about your current home, an ancestral home, a town, a park, a mountain or forest you love, a restaurant, store, or gathering place. Your insights into place give us insights into your sense of values and connection to community.

- How would you describe the place?
- With whom did you share this place?
- What general experiences do you relate to this place?
- Was there a defining experience at the place?
- What lessons about yourself do you draw from your relationship to this place?
- If you have returned to this place, how has it changed?

A Story About What I Do

For many people with professional careers, their life story is shaped by their job. Author and oral historian Studs Terkel collected a series of interviews in his book, *Working*, to demonstrate that we all have unique ways of perceiving and valuing what we do. And while jobs help to give some people a sense of identity, they also refer to their hobbies or social commitments when thinking about who they are.

A good story often comes from looking at the familiar in a new way and with a new meaning.

The details of the tasks, the culture of the characters that inhabit our workplace, or our spiritual or philosophical relationship to our work or vocation can lead us into many stories.

- What is your profession or ongoing interest?
- What experiences, interests, and/or knowledge in your previous life prepared you for this activity?
- Was there an initial event that most affected your decision to pursue this interest?
- Who influenced or assisted you in shaping your career, interest, or skill in this area?

- How has your profession or interest affected your life as a whole (family, friends, where you live)?
- What has been the highlight of your vocation?

Other Personal Stories

Recovery Stories

Sharing the experience of overcoming a great challenge in life is a fundamental archetype in human story making. If you can transmit the range of experience, from descent, to crisis, to realization, then you can always move an audience.

Love Stories

Romance, partnership, familial or fraternal love all naturally lend themselves to the desire-struggle-realization formula. We all want to know how someone met their partner, what it was like when the baby was born, or what our relationship is with our siblings and parents. We constantly test other people's experiences in these fundamental relationships to affirm our own. These are also stories that tend to have plenty of existing documentation.

Discovery Stories

The process of learning is a rich field to mine for stories. The detective in us gets great pleasure in illustrating how we uncovered the facts to get at a truth, whether it is in fixing a broken bicycle or developing a new product.

Don't Just Sit There...

One of the hardest, but most important thing to do, is get started. Because many of these stories ask us to reveal things about ourselves that make us feel vulnerable, putting together a story can be a procrastinator's paradise. Just get up, start answering questions on a tape recorder, write things down, gather up the photos, review your videos, and bounce your ideas off of your friends and family.

Life is full of stories, but you may not have a lifetime to capture them as movies, so, go for it!

As you decide what story would best serve your needs, keep in mind that these categories are in no way sacrosanct, and they intersect in a number of ways. It is also probable that you will come up with your own additional categories or other ways of dissecting the stories in your mind.

References/Bibliography

Lambert, J., (2010) Cookbook. *Digital Storytelling Cookbook. Listen deeply, Tell stories*, Berkeley, CA 94702 USA