telling your story

a guide to what makes a story work, regardless of medium

** DRAFT **

by jason ohler

with brett dillingham

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- Draft v. 1.2 (8/5/04) -

"I know only one thing about the technologies that await us in the future: we will find ways to tell stories with them."

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telling your story – a guide to what makes a story work, regardless of medium

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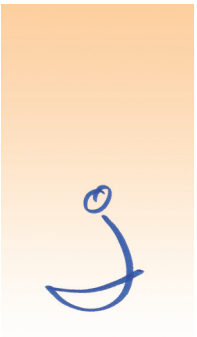

Brinton Books

To Terri, my wife & best friend.
Life with her is a wonderful story indeed.

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Brett Dillingham, my favorite story teller, from whom I have learned so much that my hard drive is often overflowing.

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The hundreds if not thousands of students who have taught me much through the stories they have created and told in my classes.

Peter Anderegg, whose Job-like patience with my technology questions will no doubt earn him a place in heaven.

Lynell Burmark, who inspired the format for this book.

Other books by Jason Ohler

Classroom Spreadsheet Activities, Alaska Dept. of Education, 1987

Written with teachers enrolled in his educational technology program, it was one of the first books to show how to integrate this powerful software tool into all areas of a K-12 curriculum.

Taming the Beast: Choice and Control in the Electronic Jungle, 1996

"Of all the books now appearing on what to do about media in the education of our youth, Jason Ohler's is, in my opinion, the best." *Neil Postman,* ***Amusing Ourselves to Death, Technopoly, The End of Education***

"...timely...a book that presents the pros and cons of technology and stimulates readers to reach their own conclusions." *Howard Gardner,* ***The Disciplined Mind, Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences***

Future Courses: A Compendium of Thought about Education, Technology and the Future, 2001

A compelling collection of essays, including chapters by Bill Gates, Ray Kurzweil, Esther Dyson and many others.

Then What? Everyone's Guide to Living, Learning and Having Fun in the Digital Age, 2002, 2004

"The new McLuhan has arrived in the person of Jason Ohler." *Nebula Award Winner Robert Sawyer,* ***Calculating God***

"Tune into Jason Ohler." *Howard Rheingold,* ***Tools for Thought, Virtual Communities***

"Brilliant, truthful, delightful." *Beth Vishnevsky, Greenwich Village Gazette*

Read Jason's column, TechWit, about living with technology produced for Apple Computer and Morris Communications:

www.techwit.info

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"To use technology effectively, creatively, wisely and with a sense of fun,
To balance my needs with the those of my community,
To learn from the past, prepare for the future and seize the day."

Vision for living with technology, ourselves and each other, from
Then What? Everyone's Guide to Living, Learning and Having Fun in the Digital Age

Every story that is important to you is worth telling. But story listeners tend to remember stories that have certain qualities and contain certain elements. This book is for story tellers who want to understand these qualities and elements so that their stories have a better chance of being remembered and of empowering those who listen to them.

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who's this book for?

Who's this book for? Those who want to tell stories that listeners remember.

Every story that is important to you is worth telling to someone who cares about you. But story listeners tend to remember stories that have certain qualities and contain certain elements. This book is for story tellers who want to understand these qualities and elements so that their stories have a better chance of being remembered and of empowering those who listen to them.

Do I have to be a digital story teller to use this book? No!

Although I discuss digital storytelling this book, don't let that scare you off. This book is for anyone, regardless of your relationship to technology (or, for that matter, your political affiliation or dietary habits), including:

- **traditional story tellers -** who sit around a campfire, stand in front of an audience or just shoot the breeze with friends
- **fully tricked out digital story tellers -** who use the full technological arsenal of a movie studio

digital, schmigital... this book is for everyone... it could even help make you more interesting to talk to...

- **everyone in between -** who might have a student project to undertake, a Powerpoint presentation to create, or a digital camera and experiences to share.

But, who specifically might benefit from this book? The "rest of us."

There are gifted storytellers who have an intuitive grasp of the elements of a good story. As if by magic, they can simply write, tell or create stories without a lot of planning or forethought. Then there's the "rest of us" who need a little help planning, developing and telling our stories. Although I come from the education world, and this book was written from an educational perspective, the principals of storytelling that I cover apply to everyone with a story to tell:

- **teachers -** who want to use storytelling as a teaching technique and as a way to help their students improve literacy, content mastery and communication skills.
- **kids and students -** who want to express their understanding of life, math class, adults, social studies concepts, prom angst, dreams for the future, whatever.
- **policy makers -** who want to tell the story of their vision for a school district, organization, community or project.
- **moms and dads -** who want to tell the stories of their families through diaries, old photographs, home movies or dinner table conversation.

- **business folks -** who want to tell their stories in order to sell products or services, create effective branding, and create a common vision for employees and stock holders.
- **artists -** whose stock in trade is telling stories about the human condition.
- **you -** who may want to write a book, deliver a speech, use your digital camera to tell the story of your summer vacation or sit around the living room and spin some yarn.
- **even master storytellers -** who might be looking for a way to explain storytelling to others and/or might need materials for classes or workshops.

I think that covers just about everyone – as it should. Because after food, clothing and shelter, stories are the most important things in our lives.

What will this book help "the rest of us" do? It will help you make sure that the important elements of a story are present in your story. In short, it will help you do the following:

- **understand the "essential elements of story" -** which make a story memorable and powerful.
- **use story mapping tools -** which create a map of the overall emotional flow of your story to ensure that the essential story

"Basics of survival: food, clothing, shelter and stories."

Credo, from **Then What?**

elements are present in your story project; story mapping is very different from storyboarding.

- **teach others the story mapping process -** which can be adapted to all ages, professions, walks of life, though I was inspired by a desire to help teachers.
- **keep the focus on story -** which can be hard when you get swept away by the power of digital tools calling out to you, saying "use me, use me..."

This book will also help you to:

- **expand your notion story -** which will help you embrace personal experience and flights of imagination as the basis for good stories, as well as more conventional approaches to plot and story material.
- **understand the elements and value of performance literacy -** which shows how to use effective oral storytelling techniques.
- **integrate Digital, Oral and Written storytelling into the DOW of storytelling -** which will help you use a multi-faceted approach to literacy.

How should I use this book? As a reference, as great late night reading, or both. Feel free to skip through it and take what you need or just sit back and read it like a story.

story is big

Story is big. In fact, the word and concept of **"story"** is so multi-dimensional and multi-faceted that I want to make sure you understand how I am viewing it for the purposes of this book. Keep in mind that I don't consider the way I look at story as "the right way." There is no "right way." In fact, I just returned from a conference on digital storytelling at which stories were viewed in dozens of ways, each of which was valid and important. But this book assumes a particular perspective about developing and telling stories and it is important that you understand what that is. Let me set the stage by first considering the "bigness" of story.

How big is story? Let's see:

- DJ on the radio says, "This just in: explosion at the boarding house. Roomers are flying! Our on-the-scene reporter has the **story**…"
- A little girl says to her grandmother, "Can you please read me a **story**?" Her grandmother smiles and says, "Instead of reading you a book, let me tell you the **story** about how your mother managed to put the family car in the ditch the day she got her driver's permit..."

- "Come and listen to a **story** about a man named Jed, a poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed..." (from the Beverly Hillbillies TV Show theme)
- You show up late for a dinner date with a friend, who scowls demurely as she asks, "So, what's your **story**?" After charming her with your new age sensitivity over appetizers, she forgives you and begins to tell you her life's **story**. But after listening to her talk about how she named her cats for an hour, you begin to concoct a **story** that will allow you to get the heck out of there.
- You bring your boyfriend to your childhood home to meet the parents. You climb the creaky wooden stairs and walk into your old bedroom for the first time in over a decade. Still sitting on your blue and gold dresser is the charm bracelet you wore all during sophomore year. You take the bracelet in your hands. A tear hangs in your eye as you say to your boyfriend, "There's an incredible **story** behind this old thing."
- "That's my **story** and I'm sticking to it," Dennis Miller.
- What building has the most **stories** in the world? The Library of Congress.
- "Every picture tells a **story**," old saying and title of a Rod Stewart song.
- An elder says to the community, "The **story** of the wolf teaches us how to use wisdom when confronting our fears…"

That's how big story is. If you want to it prove to yourself, ask a dozen people, "What's the first thing that comes to your mind when I say the word "story"?" I just did that in the building where I work. Here's the first things that popped out of the mouths of my co-workers: fairy tale, excuse, news, you (apparently because I have so many interesting stories), trying to get out of trouble, too confusing (means too many things), important to native culture, floor of a building, how we learn, cucumber (huh?), what's personal and important to me, never ending (the arc). Story obviously covers a good deal of territory.

When you get right down to it, what ISN'T a story?

So, what's a story? Given that story is so big, and that I can't cover every approach to storytelling within the confines of this humble tome, I will define "story" for purposes of this book as something that has the following:

- **essential story elements -** A story needs to contain certain essential story elements, most notably:

  1) a beginning with a "call to adventure" (Campbell) in which a character or characters leave their ordinary lives behind, at least temporarily; this is typically caused by a unique and important event, or reflection on otherwise ordinary events that cause

the character to embark on a mission of personal discovery 2) conflict, challenge or opportunity (involving problem-resolution, or tension-resolution), 3) transformation or evolution of the central character (sometimes called "the hero" or the protagonist), so that s/he is demonstrably different by the end of the story; typically it is this transformation allows for the resolution of the conflict 4) transferable transformation, that allows the reader/listener/viewer to transform and learn new things along with the central character, and 5) an end, which means closure, not necessarily a happy ending.

- **mappable elements -** the "essential story elements" mentioned above should be able to be mapped using a story map (discussed later) in a way that captures the emotional flow of the story. In fact, we will use the story map to determine whether a story has what it needs in order to be successful.

- **universal appeal & personal resonance -** while the elements of the story may recall personal events, they should be universal in nature, allowing the audience to identify with them, remember them and be changed by them. A universal story should resonate with readers. Ideally, what it teaches us should be able to be related to other situations and larger contexts. In many cases, the most personal stories are universal, often without intentionally trying to be.

Hero stories, personal stories, documentaries and animal tales?

The elements of story described above are typically associated with a "hero-based" story, a story often told in the third person As my informal survey of the word "story" showed us, stories are many things to many people. We need to be careful not to get stuck on a purely formulaic approach to storytelling, which is often told in the third person about a fictional "hero" who knocks out the bad guy by developing the cunning and courage to do so. In fact, much of the recent interest in storytelling is a celebration of first-person personal stories told that are in essence, reflective documentaries about issues and experiences close to us. In between the hero story and the personal story are stories told in the "third-person magical." This is a reference to the stories Brett Dillingham helps kids to write that are typically about animals and told from the personal perspective of an animal as protagonist. I address each of these perspectives later in the book. The point for now, is this: whether the story is told from the exterior viewpoint of the third person, the interior perspective of the self, or anything in between, the essential story elements described earlier are present in some form.

This book does not cover many of the wonderful techniques I have learned and used over the years for helping people reach into themselves and find the stories within. That will have to wait for another volume that will most certainly come out one day – just my way

of giving you something to look forward to. But once you have found your story ideas, and have decided that you want to turn them into a more formal story project, this book will teach you how to structure them and make them memorable and effective.

A word about heroes. It's hard to hear Rossini's "William Tell Overture" without seeing the Lone Ranger riding his horse, isn't it? Or hear the name "Barbie" and not think of the doll? Or be offered M&M candy and not think of the rap singer, Eminem? That may be pushing it. But the point is that some things get stuck in our brains and until some really amazing technology is developed to delete these things, there they will sit.

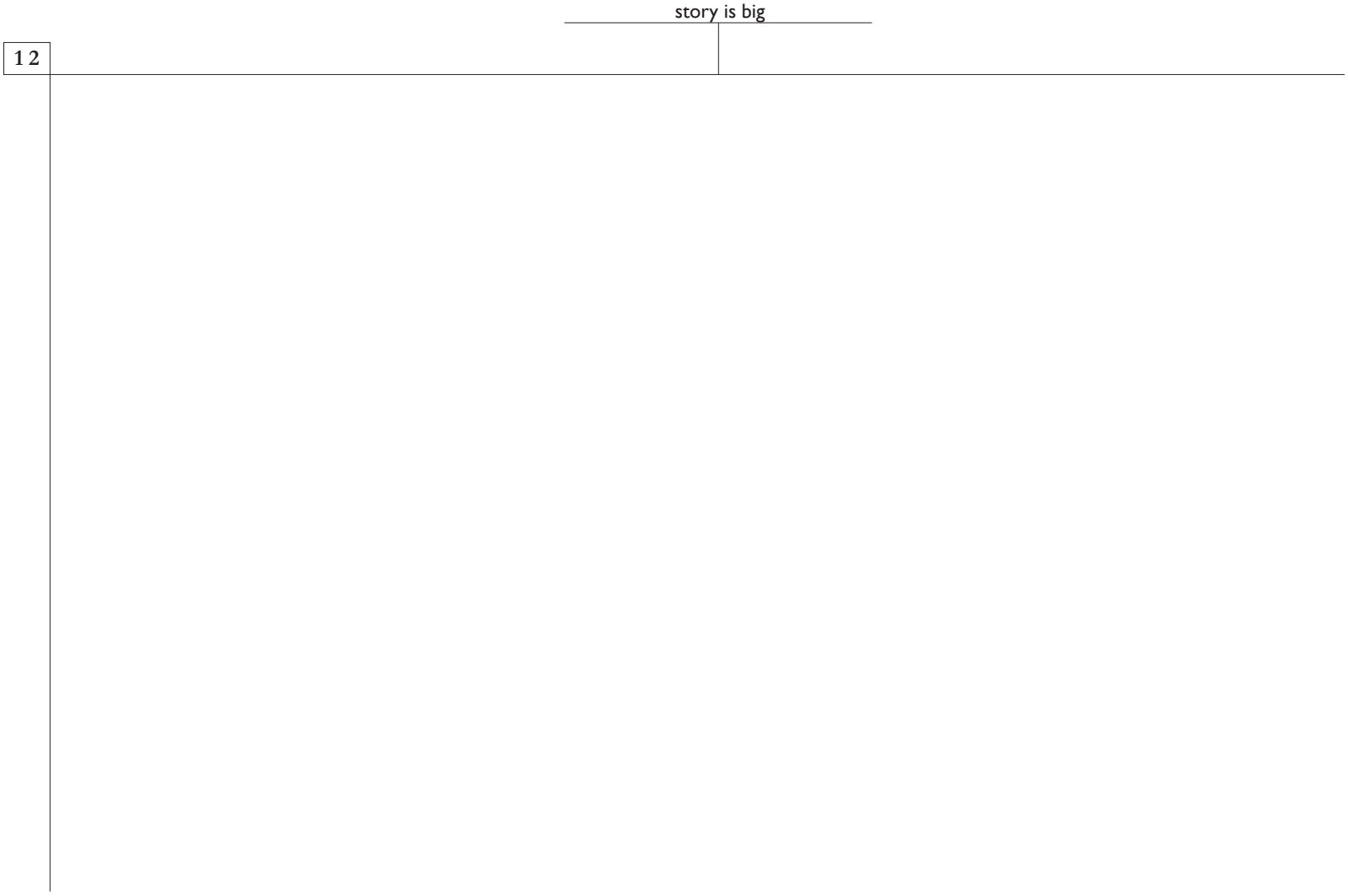
The word "hero" is one of those words that is so stereotyped that it seems impossible to dislodge. When I read it I think of Superman – I can't help it. Then I focus, and Superman goes away. But I have to work at it in order to make this happen.

That's why I hesitate to use the word "hero," preferring the term "central or main character." If I slip sometimes, it is because outside the world of comic books and B movies, the word is used more meaningfully and reverently. It is an important concept in the world of mythology, religion and Joseph Campbell. It denotes a central character who is not perfect and who does not always save the day. A real hero undergoes significant trials and tribulations, as well as failure and disappointment, on the path to enlightenment, fulfillment or salvation. So, when I slip and use the word "hero," that is the kind of character I

am referring to.

Other kinds of stories. There are many kinds of stories with attributes like non-linear, circular, user-directed (like games, in which the user controls the flow and events of a story), and so on. I expect technology to increase our abilities to expand the notion of storytelling by creating new ways for listeners and tellers to interact. But this book does not address these other kinds of stories. Instead, it looks at "story" in the more conventional sense just described, which is the way that most of us experience story. A more expanded notion of story is addressed in **Digital Stories in the Classroom: A Telling Experience** (Corwin Press, projected publication date: Fall, 2006).

Stories are dangerous. Another topic addressed in **Digital Stories in the Classroom** is the inherent tension between the hypnotic, persuasive nature of stories and the need for critical thinking in education. Ideally, education will find ways to blend these two in what could become one of the most powerful pedagogies available to teachers. However, this topic will not be addressed in this book.



my story... confessions of a digital story teller

We have one more stop on the way to learning how to tell stories: my story about how I became so inspired to "put the story into digital storytelling." If you are anxious to get to the tools this book offers, then skip to the next chapter and don't give a second thought to hurting my feelings. If you are not in a hurry, and/or consider yourself a sensitive person, then read on.

Imagine how different the information revolution would've been if early personal computers had booted up in a word processor rather than a programming language.

Once upon a time, long before the Internet was a gleam in Al Gore's eye, we were telling what we now call "digital stories." These are simply the latest manifestation of one of humankind's oldest activities: storytelling. As we are continually swept away by the latest wave of leading edge invention, it's reassuring to know that some things never change. From the age of prehistoric cave dwellers to the age of post-modern computer digitalists, our need to tell stories is one of those things.

The Apple IIe computers that my students and I were using in the mid-1980s "booted up" in the BASIC computer language. That is, when you turned them on they sat there blinking at you, wait-

ing for you to get in touch with the programmer within. Even though programming was a calling few of us had, that didn't stop me from using the computers as storytelling machines. One of the first computer assignments I gave my high school students was to write a computer program that told a story about the values and principles that guided their lives. Despite clunky keyboards, fuzzy screens and truly inelegant software, the light of their stories shone through. I have been involved with digital storytelling since the earliest days of personal computing, and although the tools have changed dramatically over the years, the nature of a good story – and the need to tell a good story – have not.

I like to think of the tools of the Digital Age as being "assistive technologies for the aesthetically challenged." They give the rest of us – who didn't learn how to use a typewriter or play a piano or wield a paintbrush – a chance to tell a story. Digital cameras, painting programs, music keyboards and word processors – as well as all those technologies just around the corner that we can't even imagine right now – give us new ways to personalize the tools of self-expression. We get to explore new communication forms with relative impunity because we can try out an idea and then change our minds, something that's hard to do using a typewriter or paint brush. And

"Information technology is assistive technology for the aesthetically challenged."

Edwina Tech, from **Then What?**

thanks to the Internet, we have an international stage for the stories we tell. In fact, it is largely because of the Internet and the need for an international Esperanto for our global village that art is becoming the "4th R" and "story" is becoming an important format for global communication. For more about this, I invite you to go to the **Art the 4th R** web site (www.artthefourthr.com).

Do you know those moments in your life when suddenly everything changes? Like when you realize that your parents were actually your age at one time? Or the pet you love will someday leave you and go to pet heaven? One of those moments came in a digital storytelling class I was teaching many years ago. It consisted of four revelations, so it was a rather long moment – about the length of a class period.

First, a little background.

For some time I had noticed something interesting: even though the technology was getting better, the stories weren't necessarily. Some students seemed to have an intuitive grasp of using new technology powerfully and artfully, but many others didn't. In fact, for them the "story" part of the stories were getting worse. I could hear the words of my teacher Marshall McLuhan echoing in my mind: "Technology is an amplifier."

"Art is the 4th R: reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, and aRt."

Edwina Tech, from **Then What?**

What happens when you give a bad guitar player a bigger amplifier?

Indeed it is. On the upside, a car amplifies our backs by allowing us to carry more; it amplifies our feet by allowing us to travel faster; it amplifies our night vision by giving us headlights. But on the downside, it amplifies our ability to pollute, generate noise and ignore our environment. All technology amplifies the upside and the downside of what it is to be human. And what I was watching in my digital storytelling class was a good example of the up and downsides in action.

As a teacher, my immediate concern was to help those who were struggling. As I worked with them, Revelation #1 hit me like a ton of bits in form of the following fundamental truth about digital storytelling: if you don't have a good story to tell then the technology just makes that more obvious. Or, to put this in language that anyone who grew up during the 1960s (or beyond) can relate to, "What happens when you give a bad guitar player a bigger amplifier?"

Revelation #1: If you don't have a good story to tell, the technology will just make that more obvious.

Don't get me wrong – I really enjoyed music in the 1960s. But a lot of it was loud and, well, bad. I know because I contributed to it. I put together my first band in 1965 when I was twelve. We were called "Jason and the Argonauts." We were loud. And we were very bad.

So, it became my goal many years ago as a digital storytelling teacher to make sure that I was not enabling the technophile at the expense of the story teller in my students. That is, I wanted to make sure that my students knew what a good story was before they sat down behind all the wonderfully empowering and distracting technology they had at their disposal. I began incorporating storytelling basics into every class in which telling a story was a focus. I even brought in an oral storyteller to teach my students how to plan, write and tell stories in front of people. I then helped my students transition from oral to digital stories. And lo, the quality of my students' digital stories rose dramatically.

This was a huge change in my approach that yielded a tremendous improvement in my students' work. Naturally, I wanted to tell others about it. One day, as I was trying to explain to a group of educators the new techniques I was using, I realized I was using stories to do so. In fact, most of my teaching, and much of my conversation in general, consisted of stories. That's when revelation #2 hit me: stories are everywhere. When you get right down to it, much of what happens among people, whether in a classroom, an office, or a living room, consists of telling stories. I began to see and hear stories all around me, like a kind of emotional and psychological air we all breathed to stay alive. It become clear to me that our dependence on stories was deep and pervasive.

Revelation #2: Stories are everywhere and essential for survival.

Not only is storytelling basic to the human experience, but so are the elements of a good story (which we get to in the next chapter). They seem to be fairly consistent, regardless of how and where stories are told. And, as Joseph Campbell so eloquently points out in his work (**Hero's Journey**, et al), these elements seemed to be consistent across cultures, too. So, if the nature of stories span the ages, curricular areas, the spectrum of human activities, and the galaxies of world cultures – and if we all love stories and depend on them as much as we seem to – why not use stories deliberately in education as tools of learning and expression? Three big revelations in one day. Not bad. And I wasn't done.

The fourth revelation came shortly thereafter. (At this point I was getting weak – revelations take a lot of ya'.) It had to do with our relationship with information flow in the Digital Age in two respects: the rate of information change and the inherent conflictual nature of the information we consume in the "Infosphere," that great amalgam of information resources (the Internet, TV, radio, etc.) in which we are immersed and which we take for granted – a lot like air.

Revelation #3: As long as everyone loves & depends on stories, why not use them as tools of learning and expression?

Rate of info change. There is a relatively new term in wide use today that is directly related to the accelerated rate of change of life in the Digital Age: life long learning. It implies that we can

never stop learning because the rate of change won't let us. But the fact is that life long learning has always been a way of life. Even fifty years ago people were learning all the time. However, the rate of change was much slower and therefore the need to learn new things was much less demanding. When little changes, there is little to learn. The slow rate of change assured the status quo a position of supremacy in the scheme of things.

But not anymore. Because billions of bits of data hit the Net each hour – and radio, TV, newspaper, magazines, not to mention our own email and chat activity, continue to crank like there's no tomorrow – life long learning has become a pervasive, immediate and on-going lifestyle. The attitude has become the aptitude. That is, your attitude toward learning new things – as well as your willingness to let go of obsolete information – plays an important role in determining your aptitude and intelligence.

Conflictual nature of information. Information fifty years ago not only changed more slowly, it was also much less "conflictual" in nature. The information our parents consumed from the very few sources they had access to fit much better into a consistent schema about how life worked. Want to know how to behave? Pick up a newspaper, watch one of the three channels of network television available to you, talk to your parents. There was, compared to today, relative consistency in social behavioral norms because there were fewer information sources, all of which were tightly controlled.

Not so anymore. The information we have access to is much more liberated and conflictual. Pick a topic, any topic, and head out into the Infosphere where you will find as many different ways to look at it as there are people who care to voice their opinion through their web sites, chat rooms, video cams and the zillion other ways we post and exchange information. What happened to the consistent social schema our parents depended on? Gone, given way to our right to be informed, overwhelmed and free to choose our own paths. The social expectation of children being "seen but not heard" has given way to the expectation that they become critical thinkers and creative problem solvers. In an age of conflictual information, being able to critically assess information is a survival skill.

But the truly important point about the conflictual nature of information is the fact that the heartbeat of any good story is conflict, as we shall see later on in this book. And given that we are all surrounded by conflictual information, we have the potential to become heroes of our own life stories in which learning is a quest and ignorance is the dragon that needs to be slain.

The story is everybody's metaphor. The story has become the metaphor for our time, not just for personal storytelling or movies or business presentations, but for adapting to life in the Digital Age. The same story structure that frames much of our popular

media can be used as a metaphor for the path you take in order to have the life you want. In fact, if you are a teacher, one of the most powerful stories you can have students write is the story of their future selves, in which they become heroes of the lives they want to live. If we are not heroes of our lives, then we are victims of it.

Once you begin to see your students as heroes in charge of their own learning stories – or your patients as heroes of their own recovery stories, or your clients or customers as heroes of their own dreams for self-fulfillment – then you've got the idea. And once you've got the idea, you can begin to see life as a story you write, rather than as something that writes you.

Ultimately, stories are more than just good for us – they are essential to survival. I have come to believe that on a very basic level that feels biological to me, we need stories. Without them, life is just too overwhelming to piece together from scratch each day. Stories allow us to take snippets of life and put them together in ways that make it possible for us to learn and remember new things. They give communities consistency and our lives meaning. Stories make order out of what would otherwise be the chaos of life.

Revelation #4: We are all heroes in the stories of our present and future selves. The stories are ours to tell.

I now step down off my soapbox. On with the show.

In the next chapter we will look at the basic story elements that make a story powerful and memorable. We will also look at story maps and how they can be used to make sure those elements are present in your story.

"As the saying goes, experiencing life is like trying to take a drink from a fire hydrant. Fortunately, stories allow us to drink life one cup at a time."

Credo, from **THEN WHAT?**

story maps & story elements

You know the drill - get a story idea, then create an outline or a storyboard for your story, right? No! Create a story map first, **then** create a storyboard or an outline. If some of these terms are unfamiliar to you, good – it means you don't have to unlearn much. We will go over them shortly.

For now, tuck away the following idea in your mind. The essential difference between storyboards (or outlines) and story maps is that storyboards tell the who, what, how and when of a story, but not the why. That's what a story map does. And it is the "why" that expresses the key elements of a story and therefore often determines the quality of the story you are telling.

In this chapter we are going to look at what the key elements of a story are, and how story maps can be used to make sure they are present in your story project. This applies to any kind of story project, whether you are making a presentation to the local school board, creating an interactive web site or telling a story around a camp fire.

Storyboards tell the who, what, when, and how, but story maps tell the why. And the why is what really makes or breaks a story.

First, let's place story mapping within the overall context of the storytelling process.

The basic storytelling process. There are many ways to view the components of the storytelling process. For the purposes of this book, we are using the following:

1. **Get a story idea, inspiration -** you have a story to tell
2. **Create a story map -** map it out (explained in a minute)

3. **Pitch it -** to your teacher, peers, wealthy patron, whomever, using your story map; "...Imagine a teacher as a studio executive, minus the cigar..." (Nikos Theodosakis, **Director in the Classroom**)
4. **Create a storyboard -** if project length or type warrants it, storyboard or outline it; there are many good resources on the web about storyboarding...
5. **Scripting/Writing -** if project length or type warrants it, write or script it; there are many good resources on the web about this too...
6. **Review, rehearsal -** peer review, teacher review, critiquing for feedback and revision, rehearsal, preparation
7. **Production/post production -** oral storytelling could require nothing, while movie making involves production every step of the way; in heavily digital projects,

production is usually broken into pre-production, production, and post-production. (for an excellent resource in this area, I refer you to Nikos Theodosakis' book, **Director in the Classroom**)

8. **Performance -** covers everything from showing your final digital movie to delivering the speech you have been working on
9. **Assessment/Improvement -** following assessment, you re-write, re-shoot or do whatever you need to do to incorporate suggestions for improvement into your project

You will need to adapt this "basic storytelling process" to the kind of media that you are using, the length of your story, the goal for your story, and so on. But in a short list, this is the basic process to follow.

Now, let's focus on the second activity in the list, **story mapping**. Note that I have labeled it as "**new!! (sorta)**." What I mean is that even though story mapping has been around a long time, my guess is that it is probably new to you. Many story development processes go from story idea to storyboarding or scripting, skipping story mapping entirely. Because mapping is often left out – and because it is so important – this chapter, and this book in general, is concerned primarily with the power and pragmatics of story mapping. Story

mapping is how and where you will do your most important work in terms of conceptualizing your story and articulating the essential elements of your story. And it is easy to do.

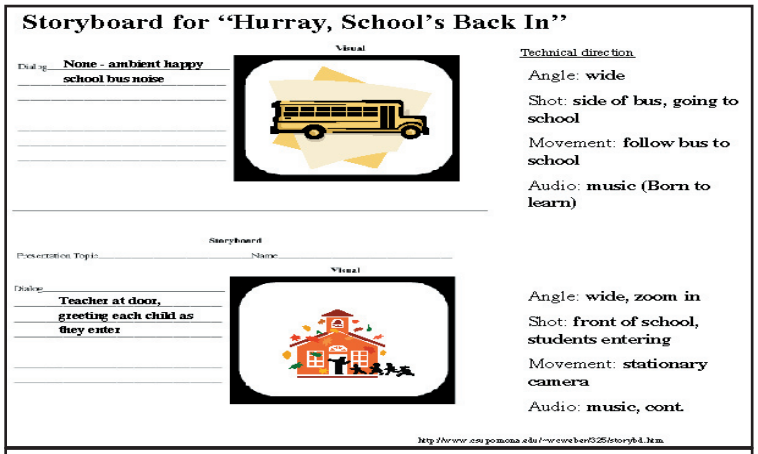
Because storyboarding is familiar to many readers, I will explain story mapping by comparing and contrasting it with storyboarding. So, let's take a slight detour to understand how storyboarding works so we can understand why it is not the best next step to take in the development of a story.

Storyboarding. Probably the closest thing to a storyboard for the average reader is a Powerpoint presentation, which consists of a series of slides that create a visual outline of the flow of events in a presentation. When I use a Powerpoint presentation, each screen acts as a cue card or part of a visual outline that helps me keep my story flowing and on target. When I want to get a sense of the "big picture" of my presentation, I can zoom out and look at all the slides in the slide sorter. If I am creating a purely written piece, then an outline does the same thing as a Powerpoint presentation. I have a 4 x 6 foot white board in my office that has been the home of many outlines over the years. The stories that white board could tell...

Teach the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar.

Similarly, movie directors, computer game developers and others in the creative content business use storyboards to describe

the different scenes that comprise their work so they can see the overall flow of events. Although every artist handles storyboarding differently, storyboards typically consist of "scene panels," which are a lot like Powerpoint slides. Each panel has a sketch of the action in the scene as well as information about camera angles, music and so on. Taken together, the scene panels serve as an outline of events for the project.



Here are the first two panels from a storyboard for a movie I am going to make some day about a group of students who demand to go to school all year long because they love learning so much. I am still looking for backers for this project.

One of the best presentations of a storyboard I have ever seen was in a short film about the making of **Raiders of the Lost Ark**. In it, director Spielberg had taped dozens (hundreds?) of pieces of standard 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper (turned on their side to represent movie screens) to a wall inside his trailer. Each one contained a sketch of what happens in a particular scene. He then walked through the movie, scene panel by scene panel, explaining the sequence of events and overall flow of the movie.

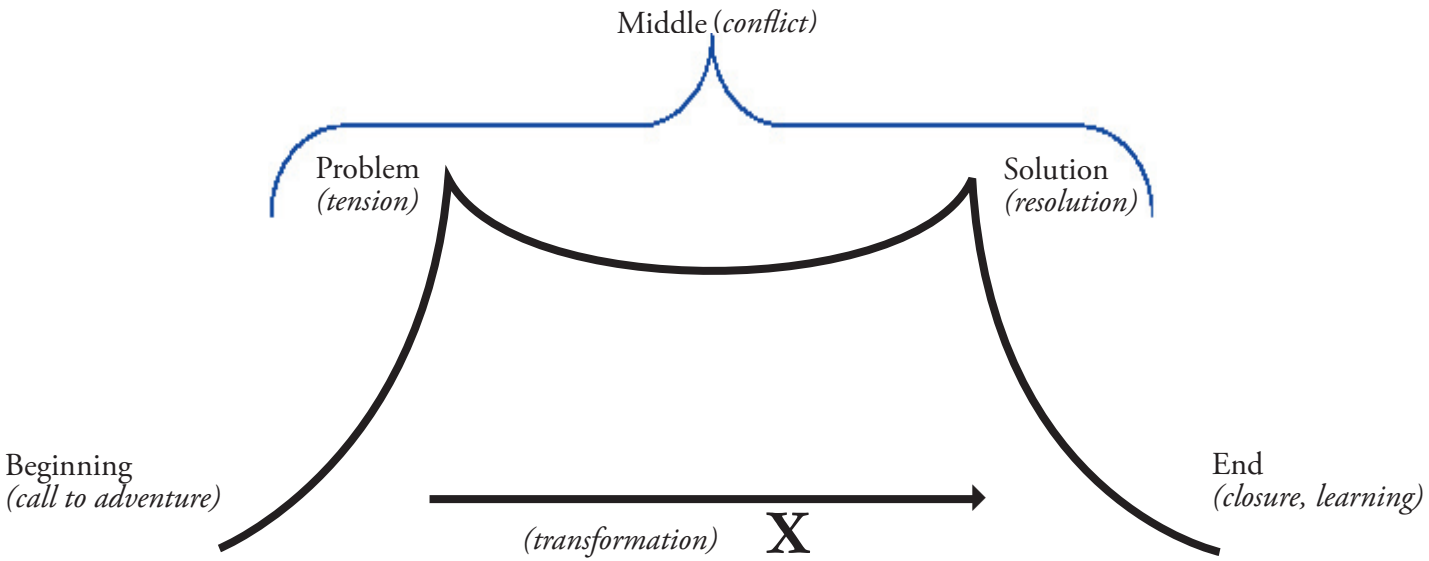
But while the slides or panels show the who, what, when and how of a project, the why – that is, the heart of the story – consists of the elements of a story. These elements are best represented using a story map. Elements and maps come next.

Story maps

What does a story map look like? In a later chapter we look at a variety of them. And I encourage you to develop your own once you understand how they work. But for now, consider the story map presented here developed by Brett Dillingham, called a "visual portrait of a story" (VPS). It is the one of my favorites.

Take a good look at this story map. Walk through it in your mind a few times, following the solid black line as though you were following a path on a journey into new yet somehow familiar territory. Now let's look at the essential story elements and how they are accommodated by the VPS. Keep in mind that no matter what kind of story map you use, these elements should be present. Also keep in mind that being able to draw the VPS as smoothly as you see here is hardly the point. A rough approximation will do. The only reason this one looks as good as it does is because I used a computer to draw it. Normally, I would just use pencil and paper.

Story elements. Well-meaning people have probably told you since childhood that a story consists of three parts: a beginning, middle and an end. While you can see from the



Visual Portrait of a Story (dillingham, 2001), with transformation (ohler, 2003)

VPS that this is true, each part needs to have certain elements in order to be effective. These elements comprise the components of the VPS and are explained below:

Elements of a beginning *(call to adventure).* The story begins by moving out of the flat, ordinary events of life to new heights of experience. The upward movement of the curve suggests that characters are going to need to climb to get to where they are going. The key elements and characteristics of the beginning are:

- Information is presented that grounds the listener in the ordinary life of a character or group of characters.
- A hero or main character is "called to adventure" (Campbell) in which the ordinary routine of life is interrupted. It is because of the suspension of ordinary events that a story emerges.
- A quest of some kind is described or begun. The listener understands that the main character, perhaps with help from others, needs to accomplish something or go somewhere. This establishes the beginning of a problem that must be solved, and/or a conflict that needs resolution.

Elements of a middle *(conflict, consisting of problem/solution, tension/resolution)*. Look at the VPS. What does it suggest? To me, it looks like a tension bridge, held together by cables

that keep it from falling apart. It also looks like a high wire that characters are going to need to cross in order to get to the other side: resolution. It is slumped, rather than straight, suggesting that things might get worse before they get better; that is, the characters may fail on their way to other side, but they will get there eventually. Elements and characteristics of the middle (conflict) are:

- The full extent of the tension, problem or conflict is made apparent. The story focuses on a series of adventures that are related to solving the problem and relieving the tension. "Problems" can be challenges or opportunities as well as obstacles.
- Tension is increased through the use of situations that beg for some kind of resolution; readers subconsciously want to know "What's going to happen next?!" Failure to answer that question (by providing extraneous detail, special effects, etc.) dilutes the story. There can be a series of such situations in which the characters, through failure, persistence and personal growth, finally achieve a goal.
- In the process of traversing the path from problem to solution, the character learns, grows and becomes a new person in some significant respect. Vicariously, the listeners do, too. I address this separately in the next section on transformation.

Transformation in a sentence: slaying internal dragons through attitude adjustment.

Transformation (middle, continued). Let's consider the transformation part of the middle separately for a moment. Note how it is represented, as an arrow moving toward the resolution, which has an X (shorthand for "transformation") as its off-center fulcrum. Visually, it makes the arrow tip up, implying a positive but uphill change. That is, things may get better but it will take work to make it happen. The key to transformation is that the central character (or group) cannot solve the problem of the story easily or simply; s/he needs to change in order to do it. S/he has to be pushed and tested by the situation to grow and learn something new. If the central character does not undergo some sort of transformation on the way to solving the problem, then listeners are dissatisfied, often feeling cheated by their listening experience. The bottom line is that the central character must be a different person at the end of the journey. And, in the best of all possible stories, so are you – the reader, listener or viewer – because you changed along with the central character, learning what he or she learned. Elements and characteristics of transformation are:

- The main character needs to transform in order to solve the problem or achieve resolution. S/he needs to become stronger, smarter, wiser, more mature or some combination of these. Transformation is covered in some detail in the chapter "**transformation formations**."

- Transformation runs the gamut from the sublime (Luke Skywalker needing to become a Jedi to defeat the Dark Side) to the banal (a character in an advertisement realizing which deodorant to buy in order to make him more successful in life).
- Transformation usually needs to involve slaying some personal, internal dragon, such as insecurity, misunderstanding, ignorance, cowardice, close-mindedness or some other character flaw.
- In a phrase, transformation can be summed up as "The slaying of an internal dragon through an attitude adjustment." This is an oversimplification to be sure, because the focus of all transformation is not internal. But stories with inner transformation tend to be more memorable than stories without it.

Elements of an end *(closure)*. After the story's problem is solved, there needs to be closure that doesn't leave the listener feeling like the story teller 'has simply run out of material' (Egan). This does not necessarily mean a triumphant or a "they-lived-happy-ever-after" ending. It simply means that the listener needs to feel as though a goal has been reached, that s/he has come full circle, or that events have been concluded. Do you know how disappointed you feel when a movie you are watching ends with "to be continued"? Or you know that art film you saw which deliberately left things up in the air? This works now and again, but don't use it too often. Essential elements and characteristics of an end are:

- Stories need closure. Stories need to have endings that allow listeners to feel as though their personal investment in listening has not been in vain.
- The essential transformation, and what is learned from it, is somehow put into play. Life goes forward differently because people have been transformed. You, the listener also feel changed. You feel you understand something, or have experienced something, you would not have otherwise.
- Stories can conclude in an obvious way, such as stating what has been learned in the form of a moral or personal revelation. Or the story can move forward with some action that shows the learning has been internalized by the characters; this is what is called in writing "showing rather than telling."

Let's map a story. That's next.

building and mapping a story

If all a story needed to have was a beginning, middle and end, then the following would work as a story:

> Once upon a time, Billy's mother gave him some money and told him to go to the store to get a loaf of bread. Billy walked to the store, bought the bread, walked home and gave the bread to his mother. And everyone lived happily ever after.

Waddya' think? Unexciting. Forgettable. A word that comes to mind in light of the story map we just looked at is "flat." There is no sense of quest, no sense of rising or falling. There's no tension to resolve, no problem to solve. Above all, no one transforms or learns anything. But if a monkey stole Billy's money, and Billy had to get up the courage to chase the monkey into a haunted house to get it back, and if, in the process, he met a homeless man who owned the monkey and the two of them had to work together to find the monkey to get the money, well, then we're on to something.

Let's look at an actual story I tell during my workshops. It comes from my novel, **Then What? Everyone's Guide to Living, Learning and Having Fun in the Digital Age.** I am going to tell it in stages with commentary, changing it deliberately to show what works and what doesn't in terms of the elements of a story we considered earlier. Then we

will story map it.

William Tell and the Little Girl Who Could Fix a Computer

Once upon a time, there was a Director of Information Technology for a large company. His name was William Tell. He was shy, skinny and only twenty-two years old. It was his job to make sure everyone's computer worked just right and that everyone's web page looked and acted wonderfully well. There were over 500 people in the company, so that was quite a job.

One day William's boss phoned him. "I'm calling to remind you that this Saturday is Company Family Day," his boss told him in a gruffly, no-nonsense boss-like voice. William knew all about Company Family Day. It happened every third Saturday of every February. Husbands and wives and kids and moms and dads and aunts and uncles of all the employees got a tour of company headquarters. They listened to boring Powerpoint presentations by important people who were trying to be funny (but weren't) and ate free hot dogs on mushy white buns. Even though William didn't like crowds, he always went to Company Family Day in case someone needed technical help. "This year we are going to do something different," his boss continued. "I want you to show everyone the new company web page you have been working on. Set everything up in the auditorium and be ready to go at 10 AM." Before William could beg him to let someone else show the web page who actually wanted to stand up in front a bunch of people, his boss hung up. William suddenly felt like someone with a hand the size of bowling ball socked him in the gut.

That Saturday William went to the auditorium early to make sure all the connections were connected, the microphone didn't squeal and the web page didn't look too fuzzy on the vast projection screen that filled the wall behind him. At 10 AM, William walked onto the stage, hit a button, and his web page lit up the

auditorium. The audience oooed and aahed as he explained the need for the bold new colors, nifty icons and persuasive animations. He showed 3D rotating pictures of members of the Board of Directors, and explained how to get weather forecasts for anywhere the company did business. He was afraid he used too many acronyms and technical terms. But the audience oooed and aahed so loudly and longly that William's boss gave him a raise. And everyone lived happily ever after.

This story has a beginning, middle and an end:

Beginning: We meet William, the technology guy, who is asked to come to company family day to show the company's new web site. He is shy and nervous and doesn't want to do it.

Middle: William shows the web site. The crowd loves it. All goes well.

End: The boss gives him a raise. And everyone lives happily ever after.

Waddya' think? It starts out with a call to adventure, but William does not encounter any problems or conflict during the story. We assume he struggles with his fear of being in front of people, but we have no sense of how he overcame it. Basically, everything works out just great and William is the same guy at the end of the story as he was in the beginning. So far, this is basically flat and forgettable. Let's pick up the story half way:

But as people started filing in to the auditorium, something went woefully wrong. William could see the web page on his computer screen, but it had suddenly disappeared from the big screen behind him. Where

once appeared the company's new web page was now a vast gaping screen full of fuzzy nothing. He began frantically checking all his cords and connections.

Better. There is a "rise" in the story because of the presence of a problem that needs to be solved. We have a glimpse of a memorable story. So, let's solve the problem:

Whew! The cord from his computer was disconnected. He reconnected it and everything was fine.

Ooops. The story just fell and became eminently forgettable. Why? Two reasons. First, the problem was solved too easily, without conflict or tension. William's experience sounds like something that could happened to us on a normal day – and stories aren't usually told about ordinary people on normal days. And second, our hero, William, was not required to "transform." If William is going to be an engaging character then the situation needs to force him to grow somehow in order to solve the problem. Here he was not required to slay any inner dragons or to change in order to fix the situation. Let's create a situation in which he has to change. But first, let's raise the stakes, making the tension a bit more tense:

As the auditorium filled with buzzing, expectant people waiting to see the new web page, William Tell frantically checked his cords and clacked away on his keyboard. But no matter what he did, nothing appeared on the big screen behind him. William could hear heckling erupting throughout the room. A woman in the front row said, "It's no wonder my husband didn't get a bonus last year with bozos like this running the

joint." William could hear a group of young boys in the third row who had their baseball hats on backwards begin to chant, "loser, loser, loser…" So much perspiration rolled down William's body and into his shoes that they made a sloshing sound when he moved.

We have ratcheted things up. The situation is more dire. The greater the tension, the greater your emotional involvement in wanting to see it resolved. Now, whatever transformation William undergoes will seem more important, memorable. Imagine ending the story right here. You'd have me arrested for lack of resolution! So, let's get back to the story before you get too ornery:

Just then, a little girl with coke bottle glasses and long blond pigtails walked up to the stage and called out to him. "Mr. Tell, Mr. Tell! I had the same problem with my computer. If you hold down the shift key and press the F12 key, the image will come up just fine." William did just that, and indeed, the big screen behind him filled with the company's new web page. He thanked her, delivered his presentation and everyone lived happily ever after.

The introduction of the girl presents the possibility of the need for William to change. In a sense, he does: he learns a few keystrokes. But he didn't have to work for his transformation. He simply accepted her advice, no questions asked. The resolution is much too weak for the tension that exists. So let's try the ending again.

William tried not to be gruff with the little girl as he told her that he was very busy, but she insisted on helping. "But Mr. Tell, just hold down the shift and press F12," she chimed in a friendly sing-song. "That's all

you need to do." William smiled a fake, nasty smile as he was thinking, "I am the adult. I am the director of Information Technology. I am not going to be embarrassed in front of this crowd by some little girl telling me how to fix my computer! Not in a gazillion years!"

Hear William wrestle? He is in the throes of an internal conflict. An inner dragon rears its head. He feels the little girl is causing him to lose face in public, yet he needs to solve his problem. On top of all of this, he's shy and doesn't even want to be there! What's he going to do?

Everyone in the back row got up to leave, talking loudly about going to get a drink to take their minds off the stupid web page demonstration that never happened. The boys with their baseball hats on backwards chanted a little more loudly, "loser, loser, loser..." The little girl tugged on William's sweaty shirt, which made his perspiration-filled shoes slosh. "Mr. Tell, why don't you just press shift, F12?" she asked. "Don't you know where the F12 key is?" William turned beet red. Little puffs of steam were venting through his ears. "Yes, I know where it is!" he nearly screamed back at her. "Then why don't you press it, Mr. Tell?" she insisted. "We're all waiting."

The dragon looms. William's sword is drawn. He is at the tipping point.

William looked up at the impatient crowd that was growing hecklier and hecklier as entire rows got up to leave. He turned and looked up at the blank screen behind him, then down at the little girl tugging on his shirt, then at the crowd that seemed filled with nothing but disgusted parents with unruly kids who were using Palm Pilots, no doubt instant messaging each other about what a loser he was. He looked up at the blank screen, down at the little girl, up at the screen, down at the girl and then, in one swift moment of

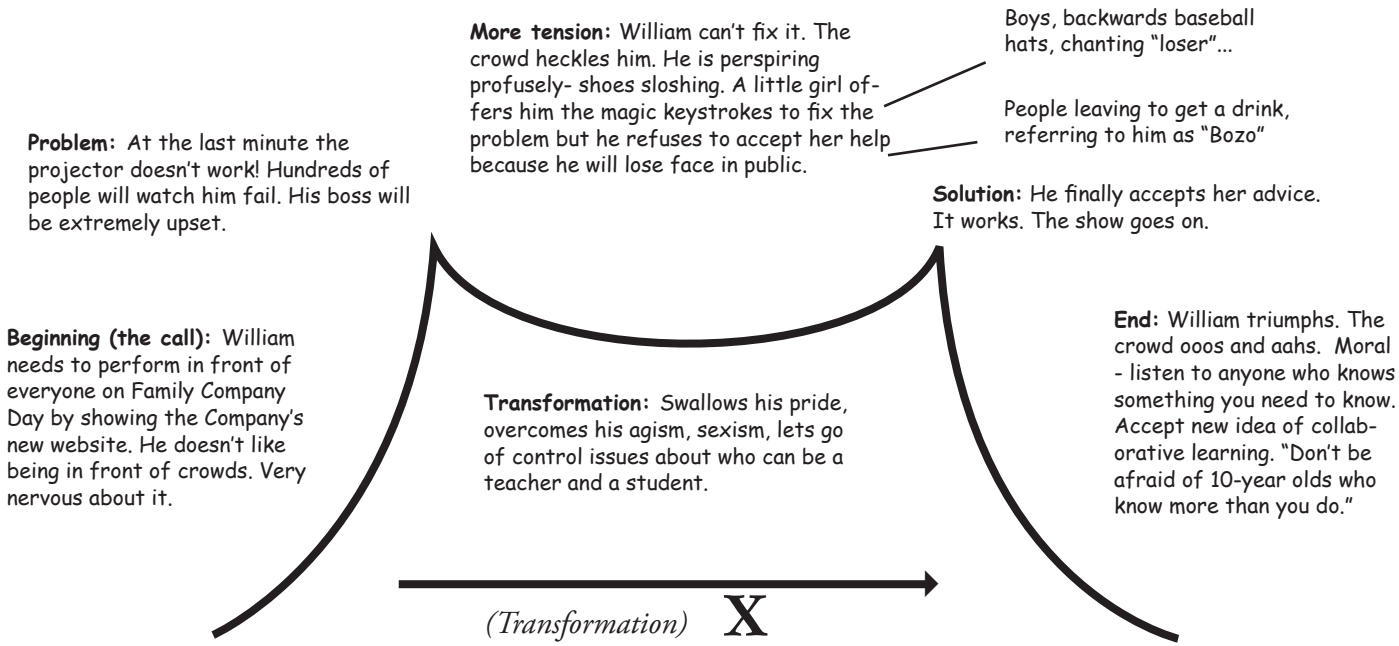
courage during which he could feel something within his psyche shift with the power of tectonic plates grinding away in an earthquake zone, he held down the shift key and pressed F-12. WHAM! The screen filled with the company's new web page. Everyone applauded. The people who were leaving to get a drink sat back down. The mean kids wearing backwards baseball hats stopped chanting. William walked up to the microphone in his sloshing shoes and publicly thanked the little girl for making it all possible.

Sometimes a moral helps sum up the hero's transformation and provide a sense of ending. In this case, it is useful:

Years later, when William was a technology teacher in an elementary school, he often recalled that company family day. Now, whenever a little girl tries to give him advice about how to run his computer, he listens.

In order to solve the problem of the computer image not appearing on the projection screen, William needed to overcome his prejudice about listening to someone much younger than himself. He had to swallow his pride and develop the inner courage to let go of his agism and perhaps his sexism and accept a new order in the world in terms of who learns from whom. As a result, he was a new person. In the very end, he reflects on how he has changed and how he uses what he learned. And William should consider himself lucky – we could have turned the little girl into someone who reminded him of his little sister he never got along with. Then he would have had to get over a slew of personal issues from his childhood, too. But we cut him some slack...this time.

Let's story map this:



Visual Portrait of a Story (dillingham, 2001), with transformation (ohler, 2003)

Normally I would scribble my notes all over the VPS map rather than type them, as you see here – however, then you wouldn't be able to read them. But you get the idea: the basic plot and emotional flow were fleshed out with notes that are attached to each major story element. The VPS incorporates big picture action, as well as details that flavor the action. We understand why William is different at the end. That is, we understand the transformation that has caused him to become different

By the way, how universal is this story? That is, does what William learn resonate with us? I think so. The reader can imagine similar situations in his own life – who isn't surrounded by kids who know a lot more about technology than adults? And the moral transcends the immediate situation. William listening to young girls with computer advice is just the tip of the iceberg. We, if we are astute enough, will allow ourselves to learn from those we never expected to be our teachers.

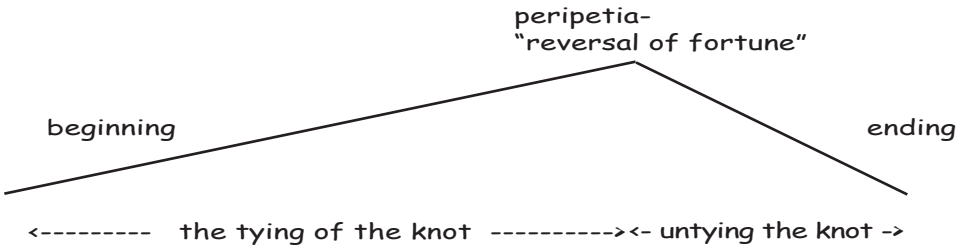
Keep in mind that if you had heard a lecture at which ten famous scholars cited ten great studies that proved the effectiveness of kids helping adults with technological problems in ten different ways, you would have forgotten it by the next week. But there is a good chance you will remember this story. Of course, you might have remembered the lecture, if the lecturer had been a good story teller.

We forget lectures, but we remember stories.

more story maps

Story mapping is not new, it's just under utilized. In this chapter, we are going to look at a number of story mapping approaches. My hope is that if the VPS does not work for you, something else will. Here are a few more story map models to consider.

Aristotle dramatic diagram. Long, long ago, in an English classroom on the campus of the University of Toronto, one of my professors sketched out the following diagram to depict the nature and flow of what Aristotle considered to be "effective drama" – or,



Aristotle's Story Map

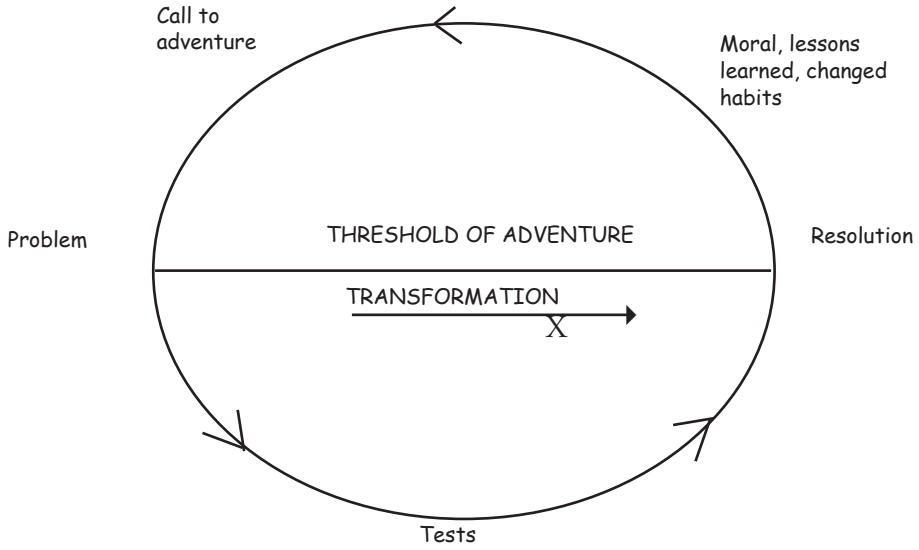
in our terms, "a good story." It is derived from Aristotle's famous treatise about art and drama (among other things), called **The Poetics**. While **The Poetics** isn't what I would

call a page-turner, it is amazing how well it describes the essential elements of a good story, even today. The basic shape is a hill or mountain, which characters must climb to live out the story. Aristotle called conflict creation "the tying of the knot;" tension resolution was "the untying of the knot." Transformation is brought about through "a reversal of fortune" of the hero at the top of the mountain.

In Aristotle's day, endings were important, though most of them weren't happy. Pretty much people ticked off the gods, suffered and died. But they did so according to the particular formula presented here. I have actually used Aristotle's story map with video production students with great success. It is a bit crude by today's standards, and adapting it to today's needs may require a bit of Poetics license – but it still works. To me, Aristotle's story map has a nice kinesthetic quality to it, as I recall trying to untie a knot in my shoe lace or in an electrical extension cord I'm trying to use. And this map is easy to relate to. It shows the rising and falling of the story in simple terms; it is basic yet powerful.

Modified Joseph Campbell Map. Joseph Campbell's work has done more to inform storytelling than any other body of work I know of. He spent his lifetime finding similarities in myths and stories throughout the world, and presenting a coherent view of the kinds of universal emotional, psychological and social needs that stories meet. No book on storytelling would be complete without referencing his work. I am using a modified version

of a diagram he created that is, to me, essentially a story map. The original, which appears in the appendix, is more complex than you need at this point. Besides, parts of it would



only make sense if you read the book from which it is taken, **The Hero with a Thousand Faces.** The modified version of his story map presented here fits better with the "keep it simple" approach to mapping we are using in this book. Compare this with the original in

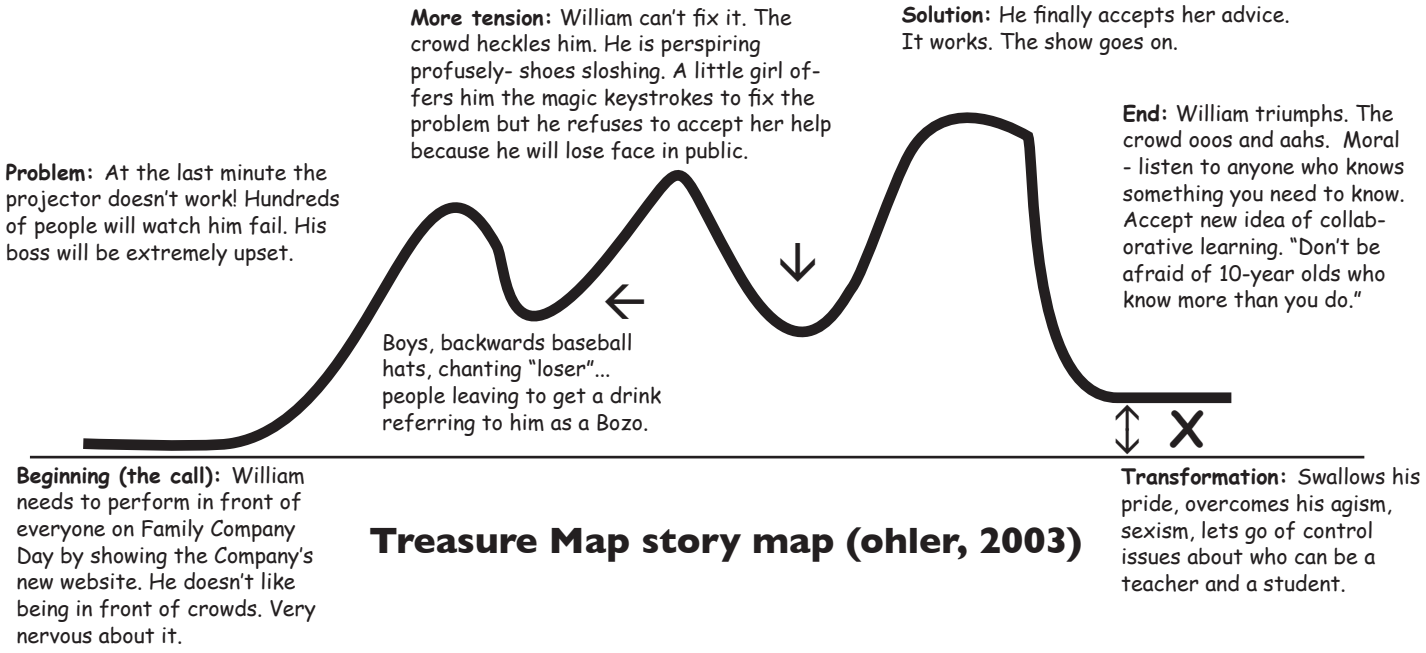
the appendix and you will note that Campbell has used different names and included a lot more detail. But the basic journey – or story – is the same.

The basic shape is the circle, which conjures up a number of useful images: the never-ending story, the journey home, and so on. Campbell believed that heros ended up where they began, though they were changed by their experience. At the end they live in two worlds – the one they left and the new one they emerged from, both of which are present at the top of the circle. In the story I told, William comes full circle. That is, he starts and ends on stage in the auditorium, though a changed man. He essentially now lives in two worlds: his old world and the new one that has been informed by his experience. If you squint at the modified Campbell map, you can see the VPS in circular form. All the components are there.

Treasure Maps. In between the bridge-like structure of the VPS, and the circular map of Campbell lies a more freeform approach to story mapping that I call "the treasure map," (TM) because it reminds me of the treasure maps I would see in comic books as a kid. I use the letter "X" to mark both the treasure and the transformation! It's probably easiest to think of the TM as a VPS that can be significantly modified in that you create the hills, valleys and paths for your story rather

> **To refuse the call is to risk stagnation.**
>
> *Joseph Campbell*

than have them provided for you, as the VPS does. The example I use here demonstrates how it to apply this technique to the story I told earlier, "William Tell and the Little Girl



Treasure Map story map (ohler, 2003)

Who Could Fix Computers."

Let's walk through this. It begins like the VPS – with a rise to denote a call from the flat

line of ordinary life. But in this map the rise is very sharp. This is because William does not ease into his situation – he is suddenly and thoroughly confronted by it. Then there are two dips at specific points, signifying low points for William. One occurs when people start to heckle him and another when the little girl approaches him. Note that at the end of each of these, the line moves higher on the page – the tension is building. Now he really needs to work to get to his solution. When the story finishes, the end of the map is higher on the page than the beginning. The difference between the two is denoted by X. Visually, the X denotes not only the presence of a transformation (the treasure we seek), but also that there is a difference between who William was at the beginning of the story and who he is at the end.

The treasure map allows you to really customize your story map. You can have as many peaks or valleys as you like, which can help more accurately represent the action in your story. In addition to multiple peaks and valleys, maybe add a circle to denote where a character gets stuck. Maybe use arrows to denote an attack or jagged lines to denote a rough trail. It is wide open and yours to interpret. Play with it and make it work for you.

Kieran Egan's Story Form in Education. Dr. Egan is well-known in education circles for his commitment to leveraging children's most under-utilized resource – their imaginations. At the time he wrote **Teaching As Story Telling** (1973), Egan's theories disagreed

with conventional teaching wisdom in many profound ways, two of which are of primary concern to us here. First, the predominate belief at the time was that children only learned new material in terms of previously mastered material, while Egan believed that children could learn new material based on what they were capable of imagining. Second, while many professionals believed that children possessed limited capability to understand complex topics, Egan believed that children's ability to understand emotionally complex stories proved otherwise.

To capitalize on children's imaginative abilities in learning situations, he recommended that teachers develop lesson plans based on "the story form" rather than the typical task-subtask lesson plan structure that was (and still is) in such prevalent use. To him, there was nothing inherently meaningful to the young mind in a logically constructed sequence of tasks. On the other hand, the story form provided an effective context for content instruction because it was affectively engaging and it took advantage of children's understanding of how stories work.

The crux of the story form is what Egan calls a set of "binary opposites," a structural device that establishes a central conflict that can be described in broad terms, but which plays out in very concrete ways. The conflict created by the binary opposities "...serves as criteria for the selection and organization of the content of the story and serves as the main structuring

lines along which the story moves forward." In short, it is the force behind the story that defines what happens, how people change and what we learn as listeners.

Children are used to binary opposites from the stories they hear. To use Egan's example, consider the story of Cinderella. The heart of the story consists of the binary opposites of good – embodied by Cinderalla – vs. bad – embodied by the wicked step-mother. Most children's stories embody some form of binary opposites like this, whether it is "...good vs. bad, courage vs. cowardice, fear vs. security." Subconscioulsy, children expect to encounter binary opposites to guide a story and to create the expectation of and basis for resolution.

To Egan, lesson plans – as well as news stories, dramatic works and a number of other human activities – are most meaningful if they are built upon or understood in terms of a set "binary opposites." Thus, a unit on the Vikings can be cast in terms of barbarism vs. civilization, rather than in terms of dates and conquests. A unit of science studying steam generation can be cast in terms of 'heat as helper' vs. 'heat as destroyer,' rather than as a list of facts or a progression of physical events. The details are present but subordinate to the form.

In essence, binary opposites form the conflict that is resolved in a learning story. What Egan adds to our discussion about story conflict is that beneath the problem-resolution dynamic that provides a story's forward momentum is a thematic tension created by two

opposing forces of human nature. Children, either intuitively or through exposure to stories, understand this, so why not use it as a teaching tool?

The Story Form Model by Kieran Egan

1. Identifying importance:
   - What is most imporant about this topic?
   - Why should it matter to children?
   - What is affectively engaging about it?
2. Finding binary opposites:
   - What powerful binary opposites best catch the importance of the topic?
3. Organizing content into story form:
   - What content most dramtically embodies access to the topic?
   - What content best articulates the topic into a developing story form?
4. Conclusion:
   - What is the best way of resolving the dramatic conflct inherent in the binary opposites?
   - What degree of mediation of those opposites is appropriate to seek?
5. Evaluation:
   - How can one know whether the topic has been understood, its importance grasped and the content learned?

Because Egan is an educator, his book focuses on classroom uses of the story form, specifically lesson plan development. But his notion of binary opposites is relevant to general considerations of stories as well. How the opposites are mediated – that is, what occurs in the story to resolve the conflict at hand – typically describes the nature of the transformation the main character must undergo during the process of conflict resolution. It is easy to see everything from personal stories to advertisements to movies in terms of the resolution of some overriding set of binary opposites that provides the emotional schema for the story.

Egan's 'story map' is presented in his book in terms of a series of questions teachers need to ask in order to help create a lesson plan based on the story form. This is presented here.

Although Egan's work is impossible to summarize in a few pages, hopefully I have provided a glimpse into its value as an approach to organizing a learning experience. Before moving on, here are some important points that emerge from Egan's work comparing traditional and story form-based education that any storyteller can benefit from:

- **Story form content is inherently memorable,** while lists of tasks and subtasks are not. We make lists because we forget things; we tell stories to help us remember them.
- **Story form content is emotionally engaging**, while the same content set within a logical task-oriented context is emotionally disengaging. Stories involve a sense of 'what's next' and 'how things end' that keep us listening and engaged; logical lists do not.

- **Story form content is inherently contextualizing**, while logical lists are not. Lists exist in an open-ended often disconnected mental environment, while stories create a closed system, allowing for considerations of consistency, relatedness and meaning.

The Story Spine by Kenn Adams. The Story Spine is another step-by-step approach to providing structure for a story that was developed by the playwright Kenn Adams. Adams provides the skeleton – that is, "the spine" – of a traditional story by providing "sentence starters" that introduce important segments of a story.

The Story Spine by Kenn Adams	
The platform	- Once upon a time...
	- Everyday...
The Catalyst	- But one day...
The Consequences	- Because of that...
	- Because of that...
	- Because of that...
The Climax	- Until finally...
The Resolution	- Ever since then...
	- And the moral of the story is...

Look at the "spine list." If you squint you can see all the major story elements. **The platform** items describe ordinary life, while **the catalyst** – "but one day" – functions as a call to adventure. **The consquences –** "Because of that" – imply that life begins to change as the adventure unfolds. The **climax** and **resolution** imply that consquences created problems or situations that needed to be resolved. The moral at the end brings closure to adventure for the characters as well as the readers.

The first time I was introduced to the story spine, the facilitator asked audience members to work in pairs to create the story together. It was a very powerful experience as my partner and I created a situation "with consequences," that is, a situation that naturally sought some kind of resolution. What we found was that we were exploring what we were learning at the conference, the problems and opportunities of using our new knowledge, and how we were going to change some of our processes at work.

Homework. Whether you love TV, hate it, tolerate it for the few good shows it brings you or secretly like it more than you would care to admit, I am going to ask you to watch it. Pick a drama or a sitcom; it doesn't matter. The point is that just about anything you watch can be story mapped. You will find a central conflict (and some auxiliary ones), problems that get solved, characters that realize new things or evolve in some way, and endings that wrap things up. And while you're at it, story map a few commercials. In most cases they are trying to convince you that you have a problem they can solve. Your transformation? You become an enlightened consumer when you realize you need their product. Ads are very short stories, and often very superficial stories. But, they are stories.

And if the opportunity avails itself, ask your grandparents, parents, relatives, friends – whoever – to tell you a story about when they were growing up. Sit back and listen. When it is all over see if you can find the reason the story stuck with them all these years. No doubt you will find a call to adventure that changed them in some way.

story map considerations

This chapter addresses a number of issues that should be of interest to you as a story teller. Many of the points covered here are things I have learned the hard way. I pass them on to you, one story teller to another.

- **A story map should be as simple as possible.** It works best if you can fit your story map on one piece of paper. The size of the paper doesn't matter; the point is to try to get all of your important ideas in one place. A third party should be able to look at the story map and, with a little bit of pitch and explanation from you, get the emotional flow of the story and understand how the essential elements of story are incorporated into your project.
- **Story maps are meant to be scribbled on.** Fill the white space of the paper with notes and arrows that describe events, characters, relationships, transformations...whatever is important.
- **Start with a small project first.** Story maps are ideal for shorter stories; many of the digital stories I have worked with tend to be 3-5 minutes long, which is a very mappable length. But story maps can be used for longer

Story mapping is ideally suited to shorter stories, but can be adapted to long ones as well.

projects too. You should be able to create an overall map of the story, regardless of size, and then create sub-maps for subplots.

- **Clarify your quest in your own mind.** Most good stories are quests of some sort. Figure out what you are questing for. That will help you determine the kind of journey your story will take, which in turn will help you flesh out your story map.
- **A story map needs to be developmentally appropriate.** Words, concepts and diagrams need to be suited to the age and skill level of your audience.
- **Make your own story map.** You probably have developed your own way of creating lesson plans or filing your customer information or organizing your CDs – or whatever. The point is that planning tools usually contain personal as well as generic attributes. Same with story maps. Once you get the gist of story mapping, adapt the story maps you have encountered in this book – or create your own altogether. For instance, in this book we used a story map developed by Brett Dillingham, called the "virtual portrait of the story" (VPS). I modified it to add the dimension of character transformation. You may want to modify it to...show how color changes within your digital story to emphasize your point? Signify music, sounds or noise? Who knows. But modify away.

Mapping short stories vs. long stories

As listeners, we consume stories of every imaginable length, from 10-second advertisements to two-hour movies. But as tellers we tend to tell stories that are fairly short. The stories we bring home from work about what happened to us during the day are short; when they're not, you can see everyone at dinner roll their eyes. Teachers require students to create short stories because that's what fits into a curriculum. When businesses tell their stories, they do so within the context of a 10-30 second advertisement or a presentation that musn't go on too long for fear of losing the audience. Most of the digital stories I have experienced as a teller, teacher or audience member are under 10 minutes and are usually in the 3-5 minute range, which is largely driven by the sheer amount of work it takes to create a technologically-based piece. Fortunately, story mapping is ideally suited for story projects that are short.

However, rest assured that story mapping can be adapted to longer stories. At the heart of most movies is a central "map," surrounded by subplots and sub-maps. And recall our early discussion about "writing the story you want for your life." The starting point for that map could be today, and the other end could be next week, five years from now

A story map is a portal into the story teller's mind. It is a plan that team members can refer to.

or longer. In between now and then there are problems to solve, things to learn, and transformations to undergo.

There is, perhaps, a potential downside to creating stories that are short that you should be aware of: an audience can tolerate anything for a short period of time, including under-developed stories. The solution is not to create longer pieces; it is to pay close attention to the short pieces we develop. Story mapping is an extremely good tool to use in this regard. Even if you don't map your story, you can go through the "essential elements of a good story" as a checklist to make sure you have covered the ground you need to.

Special tips for teachers. Whether you are teaching storytelling or using storytelling in a content area, a story map is a great tool because:

1. It allows you to see at a glance whether or not your students have an effective story. The story map is a portal into the mind of the teller, allowing you to understand what your students are really trying to say, and what kind of emotional ground they are trying to cover.
2. A story map is created at the beginning of the story development process, allowing you to critique and intervene before students have invested a lot of time into creating a lengthy storyboard or outline.

Special tips for working with younger kids. Earlier I made the comment that story maps needed to be developmentally appropriate and suited to the age and skill level of your students. Here are some points to consider in this regard:

1. Concepts like "problem-solution" and "tension-resolution" can be heady ideas for the younger students. Try using "getting into trouble and getting out of trouble." They almost always know what you are talking about.

3. The concept of transformation can also be too advanced for some. Try asking questions like "How did the character change?" or "What's different in the character's life at the end?"

4. Try leaving out transformation altogether. Students will often cover transformation anyway, either explicitly or implicitly. When they do, you can use this as a teachable moment to talk about transformation, or not, depending on your goals.

5. Try having students draw a picture to go along with the story map. Ask them to draw something in the story that reminds them of the story. It helps students focus on the story and the journey described by the story map.

6. Brett reports great success with having young, first time story tellers develop stories about animals. It provides distance between the reality of their lives and the story they

want to tell, while at the same time offering a vantage point to talk about their lives. Animals are a safe yet creative and revealing subject to use.

7. While some students are natural story tellers, most will need at least some training. There are many ways to teach students how to deliver an oral story. I use a mixture of my own process and one that Brett uses called SME (for Sound-Motion-Expression). The goal is to teach students how to use sound, movement and facial and body expression to accompany the spoken story. I'm happy to send you more about this if you are interested.

Special tips for team members. The concept of story map as a "portal into the mind of the teller" is especially important for team-based projects:

1. You've heard the saying "Let's make sure we are all playing from the same sheet of music?" The story map is the sheet music for your project. Team members should converge on it, brainstorm about it, develop it, iron out differences, leverage each other's imaginations, and eventually finalize it as a group. The story map allows everyone to discuss the essence of the story in shorthand. Therefore, it should be a map that describes an itinerary that everyone agrees on. The clearer the map is to everyone involved, the easier it is going to be to storyboard and/or script the story.

2. Because a story map concisely captures the essential elements of a story, it is a great tool for a team (or individual) to use to pitch a project idea.

Telling stories from the end and the middle

So far, our stories have been fairly linear. We were called into adventure, encountered problems, solved them, were transformed by them and learned from them. Do we have to use just this approach to map stories? Absolutely not.

Beginning at the end. It actually makes a good deal of sense to start at the end if you already have a goal in mind or a point you want to make with your story. Here are a few scenarios that can make use of the "beginning at the end" approach:

- You have a product or idea you are trying to sell to customers whose transition will consist of going from a state of not realizing they need what you offer to believing they need it. Create relevant problem-solutions that focus on experiences common to the buyers that would naturally lead them to your product.
- You are a teacher who is going to use storytelling in a content area. No doubt your lesson plan already spells out learning objectives. Use these objectives as the end of your learning story and design backwards (see Wiggins

> **The heroic life is living the individual adventure.**
>
> *Joseph Campbell*

and McTighe's work) to create stories through lesson plans.

- You have learned something important over the years that you want to convey to others, like, "beware of pain you get used to," or, "don't pet a burning dog." Create a story that will allow you to deliver that moral. Although it does not matter how you get to the moral, you want your story to be effective. So, use relevant references that are attuned to the age and make-up of your audience.

If it's story mappable, then it's potentially memorable.

Telling from the middle. If you can start from the end, can you start from the middle? Sure you can. In fact, most people find themselves in the middle of a story map in every day life, not sure how they got there and not sure where to go. Even more important, they are not sure what success would look like to them and therefore can't write the ending to the story.

Seeing life as a story that can be written by each of us is a powerful and pragmatic metaphor. If you start from the point that you are unhappy, trapped or in the middle of something – and seek some perspective on your life in order to move forward – you place yourself squarely in the center of the map. It is up to you to write to the rest.

Telling via transformation. Part of the method I use for teaching storytelling (see the chapter, "**teaching storytelling**") involves having students brainstorm problems as well as a number of potential ways to solve each problem. These problem-resolution scenarios then serve as the basis for story development. As a way to assess the power or "storyability" of the solutions, participants and I talk about the kinds of transformation each solution could compel the character(s) to undergo. It becomes clear quickly which transformations are more powerful than others. If the point of a story is to explore or model how and why people change, a story teller may be better off to conceptualize a story in terms of the story's character transformation rather than the problem.

For more about different kinds of characters transformation, see the chapter titled "**transformation formations**."

"Every storyteller collects and arranges vital inner pictures; behind these live universal ordering principles."

Nancy Mellon
The Art of Storytelling

Telling personal vs. universal stories

Earlier on I said that part of the definition of a memorable story was that it be universal. What about more personal stories? Can these be universal? Most of the good ones are.

Let me direct your attention to country-western music for a moment. It seems that every song belted out by a twangy crooner is telling a tale of woe that happened to him or her

personally (or to their truck or dog). Yet even if you aren't a C&W fan, you can often relate to the stories in the songs because they contain elements of universality. For our purposes, a story is universal if the experiences of the main character connect with your life and your experiences. Because of the connection, you can learn and transform as a story listener. As with most things in life, if it involves you, there is a greater likelihood that you will care about it and remember it.

Universality is a particularly important concept in the world of digital storytelling, in which an amazing thing happens when first time digital story tellers fully comprehend the tools available to them: they realize they have a chance to be heard. These students often gravitate toward telling first-person narrative stories of self-exploration in which they are trying to solve the problem of understanding their lives or particular experiences in their lives that have confounded them. The solution consists of collecting and analyzing artifacts from the past that hold the clues.

But to help give their work a quality of universality, it is up to me to ask them questions like, "How are you different having developed this project? What do you realize now about your life and life in general that you didn't before? How does what

Powerful experiences become powerful stories if the authors reflect on how the experiences changed them.

you have learned relate to others in similar situations?"

If what a story teller has learned is that, "I now realize that I don't talk to my younger brother because he stole my baseball hat when I was ten," then this is pretty much a personal story. It becomes much more universal if the author says, "One unresolved incident between brothers, like taking a baseball hat and not talking about it for decades, can keep a family bond from completely forming. Later on in life, when you turn to family members in a time of need, they aren't there." Notice how what happened to him – being deprived of his baseball hat – became an example of something larger than his personal situation.

Here is another example. Every year my students created digital stories about their rural teaching experience, in which they had the opportunity to teach in a remote area of Alaska for two weeks. They used video cameras and digital cameras to document their experience and gather the raw material for their projects. The projects always varied widely. There were usually a number of them that basically chronicled the details of the experience; these tended to be somewhat forgettable. However, there were also always projects that saw the big picture, in which students explored what they learned within the broader social context of the multicultural situation of rural Alaska. These were much more memorable. They resonated because most people have experienced cultural disorientation, either when traveling or from simply living in a multicultural society. What my

students learned about handling those situations could be transferred to the situations of the listeners.

If you do not seek a wide audience, and are creating personal stories for your own edification and catharsis (a perfectly reasonable thing to do), then by all means focus on yourself. If you want to create a story that is memorable and useful for listeners, then connect your experiences to theirs through universal appeal. It is often quite simple to do because your story is often everyone's story. Powerful experiences becomes powerful stories if authors reflect on how the experiences have transformed them. The question for story tellers is not just "what happened?" but also, "how has what happened changed me?" Implicit in many powerful, personal experiences are the elements of transformational stories.

Fiction: just because it didn't happen doesn't mean it's not true. Documentary: just because it did happen doesn't mean it IS true. Story: both of these.

As with so many things in life, how you approach something has to do with your goals. Whether your goal is personal or professional, or public or private will determine the best approach to use.

Documentaries vs. fiction

How does mapping relate to a documentary vs. a piece of fiction? You'll note in the above discussion about the uni-

versality of stories that both examples I used were, in essence, documentaries. That is, they involved actual people and events rather than imaginary characters. Yet the examples were quite mappable.

There is no question that documentaries and fiction-based work are very different. By definition, according to www.dictionary.com, a documentary consists of "presenting facts objectively without editorializing or inserting fictional matter," while a work of fiction is "a ...work whose content is produced by the imagination and is not necessarily based on fact." But at their heart, documentaries are stories in the mappable sense. If a documentary shows people evolving in the process of solving their problems – and/or if it shows how the narrator is transforming because of what s/he learns – then there is a better chance that you will remember what you learned while watching it.

Breaking the rules

I will never forget something that happened in a photography class many years ago, long before digital cameras were around, when my favorite piece of photography gear was a fully manual Olympus camera. My teacher had just spent an entire class period explaining the rules of composition for shooting a good picture. To drive the rules home, he showed us numerous examples of photos that had positioned the subject matter of the picture extremely well. Then he showed us one of his favorite photographs, which just

happened to break all the rules. “Break the rules after you understand them and can use them effectively,” he coached us.

I think these are wise words. My suggestion to you is that you begin by building and telling stories the way I have shown you. Then feel free to begin pushing the envelope and breaking the rules. Your new adventures will benefit tremendously by understanding what has made a story work for literally millennia.

teaching storytelling

I can't emphasize this strongly enough: No matter what kind of storytelling you want your students to do (strictly oral, strictly digital, and everything in between), making sure they have some facility with traditional storytelling is immensely helpful. My digital storytellers learn how to "stand and deliver" an oral story FIRST and are always transformed by the process – which is the heart of a good story! Brett has a name for this: Performance Literacy. I want all of my students to be performance literate because I am convinced that it makes their digital stories dramatically better. It increases the likelihood that the story will drive the technology, rather than the other way around.

This chapter outlines the basic workshop process I use. Recall our 9 point process for telling a story that I presented in an earlier chapter. The format presented here mirrors that process and adds a few elements and activities to help develop particular aspects of story development and telling.

How long is a workshop of this kind? I'm sorry to be vague, but it can last anywhere from an hour to 2 days. I have done a credible job in as little as 45 minutes, but always end up wishing I had more time.

Being able to tell an oral story will help you tell a digital story.

Part I - Setting the stage

1. **Overview.** I talk about my four revelations (see chapter titled "**my story**") that drove me to want to put the story into digital storytelling. I compare and contrast storyboards and story maps, and describe story mapping in detail, as I did in the chapter titled, "**story maps and story elements**."

2. **I tell a story.** I usually tell the story, "William Tell and the Little Girl Who Could Fix Computers," which is featured in the chapter titled "**building and mapping a story**." I tell it as an oral storyteller would (rather than present it and discuss it).

3. **We map the story I just told.** Students help me develop a story map of my story. I usually use the "visual portrait of a story" or the "treasure map" mapping tool. You will recall that in the chapter, "**building and mapping a story**," I played with a number of ways the story could have developed. I also do this when teaching storytelling, using the story map to clarify how events strengthen or weaken a story.

Part II - Focus on the middle

4. **We brainstorm problem-resolution situations.** I ask participants to identify problems in their businesses, classrooms, lives. I set them up in a table, like the one

shown here. Typically, I will do this for three to five problems, or until participants get the hang of it. We then brainstorm ways that the characters or audience might transform to solve the problem.

Problem	Solutions	TX?
I can't get on the Internet. My email is lonely. What can I do???	- Do something else - Fix what is wrong - Beseech the god of bits & bytes for help - Use someone else's connection - Buy a farm & go back to the land	

5. **Make up a story.** Workshop participants and I develop a story based on one of the problem/solutions/transformations brainstormed by the class. I like to play with this, making up the story as I go, soliciting input from the audience along the way. The thrust of the activity is to make a story go up and down, rising and falling as I explore what works and what doesn't. I explore the kinds of inner and outer dragons the main character needs to slay, how s/he needs to transform in order to do it, who s/he might meet along the way, a number of different endings that might work, etc. It's great fun.

6. **Map the final story.** After we have completed the story, we map it as a group. I pay particular attention to the following: 1) the lead character's transformation, 2) the

ending's sense of closure, 3) what we learned, and 4) how effective and memorable the story will be.

Part III - Students create their own story

7. **Students develop a story map.** Students create a map for a personal project using any of the map formats presented.

8. **Students use the story map to pitch/workshop the story idea.** Using the story map, students pitch the story, obtaining feedback from peers (I call this "peer pitching"), me and others who might have an interest in the project. Students modify the map and the story based on the input they receive in preparation for writing the story more formally.

9. **Students write or "bullet" their story.** What happens at this point is determined by the length and literacy goals of the workshop. Ideally, students write a one page version of their stories, one paragraph per major story part (beginning, middle, end), with the middle paragraph longer and more developed than the other two. Students use typical peer review and feedback methods as they go through the writing/re-writing process. When I don't have enough time for them to focus on a well-developed

writing process, I will encourage students to write their stories as a series of bullets in order to prepare them for telling their stories orally. I would rather not sacrifice one kind of literacy development for another, and only do so when pressed for time. When pressed, I forgo writing in favor of story telling literacy simply because "performance literacy" is my primary workshop goal. But this might not be the case with you.

Part IV. Telling the story

10. I provide instruction on basic storytelling techniques. Although some participants turn out to be natural story tellers, many need training in the techniques of effective oral presentation. There are many ways to provide this training. I usually begin by telling a quick story that I make up on the spot in which I employ effective and ineffective uses of "sound, motion and expression" (Dillingham, 2002). Then I use exercises that allow students to develop these attributes in a general sense first, and then in specific ways that are directly related to their stories. There are many exercises I use to help students develop their abilities in this area. Contact me if you want to know more about them.

A public performance of children telling their stories can build strong bridges between schools and communities.

11. Students stand and deliver. Students tell their stories, usually to the rest of the class. If I am conducting a workshop at a conference, I will always look for ways to bring in outside audience members. If you are working in a school system and performance literacy is your end goal, then there are a number of performance venues that work well: lower grades (e.g., sixth graders tell their stories to fifth graders and below – this is a great way for students to get comfortable in front of an audience), school assemblies, and public performances, to which parents and policy makers are specifically invited. Public performances can happen at public libraries, senior citizen homes and just about anywhere. Kids telling their stories in public can build strong bridges between schools and communities.

12. Assessment and evaluation. I use a good deal of peer review in which participants are asked to critique each other's stories in terms of 1) how the essential story elements played out in a story, and 2) what worked and what could use improvement in terms of the actual delivery of the story. Also, Brett and I have developed a rubric for assessing storytelling, which students find helpful. Contact me if you would like to have a copy.

Part V - Making the transition - going digital

13. Discuss moving from the oral to the digital world. Participants and I discuss moving from the oral domain to the digital domain. The goal is to preserve what works from the world of oral storytelling and take advantage of the extra power

that digital technology offers without being distracted by it. I take students through exercises to accomplish this. Depending on the workshop, I might then move into a section on storyboarding and/or scripting.

14. **Storyboard, script or outline the story.** Using conventional storyboarding, outlining or scripting techniques, participants prepare the details of their project.

15. **Students go digital.** Finally, my students are let loose on their digital stories. If they never stand up and tell another oral story in their lives, that's fine. But I bet they will.

transformation formations

I have mentioned "transformation" throughout this book without fully exploring what it means. By example and by assumption, I have tried to convey what it means in the context of a story. This chapter explores it in a bit more depth.

Transformation is change on steroids. Whereas changes can be small, transformations tend to be big. We change our socks but we are not transformed when we do so. It is the transformation of characters in a dramatic work that gives the audience a chance to transform as well. Character transformations also help create depth and universality.

How do people change? And more specifically, how do characters in stories change in ways that work for the listener?

The catch-all definition I use for transformation is "slaying internal dragons through attitude adjustment." The adjustment is necessary because of "the hero's flaw." The flaw identifies a hero's imperfection and how s/he needs to transform to address it. The flaw also tends to define the nature of the challenges that s/he will face during the course of the story. While this definition works in a general sense, let's get specific. Let's look at a few ways of understanding transformation so that you have more control of what you can do with your story.

The Eight Levels of Transformation. In my reading, listening and viewing of stories, I find eight basic levels of transformation. Characters can transform at as many of these levels as make sense. The levels are not mutually exclusive by any means, therefore characters often transform at more than one level at the same time.

The Eight Levels of Story Character Transformation

Level	Kind	Explanation
1	Physical/kinesthetic	Character develops strength or dexterity. Popeye eats spinach and grows muscles; 'Baby' (Jennifer Grey in **Dirty Dancing**) learns how to dance and wins the contest.
2	Inner strength	Character develops courage, overcomes fear, at great risk to themselves. Lucilla and Proximo (Connie Neilson and Oliver Reed in **Gladiator**) help Maximus (Russell Crowe) in his effort to restore the republic of Rome.
3	Emotional	Character matures, thinks beyond his or her own needs; Hans Solo returns to fight the good fight in **Star Wars**.
4	Moral	Character develops a conscience; Schindler develops his list
5	Psychological	Character develops insight, self-awareness. Neo (Keannu Reeves in **Matrix**) understands who he is in relation to the Matrix.
6	Social	Character accepts new responsibility with respect to family, community or a group; Max (Mel Gibson in **Road Warrior**) sticks around and helps the small oil refinery community defend itself against terrorist bike gangs.

Level	Kind	Explanation
7	Intellectual/creative	Character advances intellectual/creative ability to learn or do something new, allows him/her to solve a problem, puzzle or mystery (Neo in the **Matrix**). This level captures the essence of making students heros of their own learning stories.
8	Spiritual	Character has an awakening, which changes his or her entire perspective. With the help of a lama, Larry Darrell (Bill Murray in **Razor's Edge**) achieves a kind of enlightenment that alters his perspective of what is important about life.

How did William transform in my story? Physically/intellecutally he learned some new keystrokes. But he also gained courage and maturity in order to accept advice from a little girl in order to solve his problem. Ultimately, he changed a number of attitudes about society, particularly with respect to how teaching and learning happens. Mull over these levels of transformation. Think about the stories that you find powerful, and ask yourself how their main characters transformed.

Consider B Action movies for a moment and why they tend not to stick with you. While they usually contain a lot of conflict and resolution in the form of endless fighting, there is very little internal conflict; very few inner dragons are slain. The good guys tend to be good, the bad guys tend to bad, and no one transforms. Just a lot of fighting. Boring. And what does boring really boil down to? Unmemorable.

Bloom's Cognitive Taxonomy and Levels of Transformation. If you have spent any time in education you have undoubtedly heard of Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive processes. Although it was developed as a way to classify how we learn, it works just as well as a system for classifying how we change. Essentially what Bloom has developed is a hierarchy of transformation. As with the last hierarchy we looked at, transformation usually happens on more than one level at a time. But any one of the levels by itself could be used to cause a transformation of some kind.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive "Transformation"		
Level	Kind	Explanation
1	Knowledge	Character knows, remembers or describes something
2	Comprehension	Character explains, interprets, predicts something
3	Application	Character discovers, constructs or changes something; applies understanding to a new situation
4	Analysis	Character deconstructs a situation, distinguishes among options, plans or organizes something, compares and contrasts different things
5	Synthesis	Character pieces together parts to form a new understanding of a situation
6	Evaluation	Character assesses a situation, critiques and/or defends an idea, person; evaluates a situation in order to respond to it

Let's apply this hierarchy to the story I told. On the most basic level, William gained new knowledge that he applied to the situation: the little girl taught him a new set of

keystrokes that helped him out of a jam. But after synthesizing everything he learned from that day, he formed a new understanding about himself and the role of teachers and students in the Information Age. William transformed on many levels at once.

Bloom's Affective Taxonomy and Levels of Transformation. Bloom also created a taxonomy about the affective domain: the world of emotions and feelings. It appears below.

Bloom's Taxonomy of Affective "Transformation"		
Level	Kind	Explanation
1	Receiving phenomena	Character listens to others respectfully
2	Responding to phenomena	Character participates in solutions, works with a team, helps others
3	Valuing	Character demonstrates belief in a value system that manifests itself in solving problems for others and in valuing cultural and individual differences
4	Organization	Character prioritizes values, resolves conflicts, develops personalized value system; balances freedom, responsibility and accepts standards of moral behavior
5	Internalizing values	Character acts on value systems as an individual, rather than in response to group expectations; uses teamwork effectively, values others for their intrinsic merit rather than external qualities

How does William fare according to this transformation hierarchy? Not so well. He certainly didn't start out listening to the little girl respectfully (Level 1). But by the end of

the story, he was. In fact, in the end he promises to always listen to any little girl with computer advice. I don't want to give away the rest of the book, but I can tell you that as the story progresses William gradually does make his way through Bloom's Affective levels. I can also tell you that the butler didn't do it and no one dies in the end.

The locus of transformation. Remember the movie Ghandi? As the central character, Ghandi did not transform much throughout the movie. Yes, he learned new things and became stronger in his resolve. But as a viewer, the major transformation did not happen within him, it happened within me. I left the movie theater feeling different. Maybe I was not more willing to take on the world, but at least I was aware of the fact that I could if my convictions were strong enough. There was a kind of global transformation as well. Through reports of Ghandi's work, people throughout the world began to consider alternatives to violent conflict. My point here is that there are a number of places to look for transformation within a story. Here are four:

1. **Hero or central character.** We have discussed this a good deal throughout this book.
2. **Those the hero impacts.** As with Ghandi, much of the transformation occurred in those who observed him, a point the movie made very well.

3. **You, as listener.** As I explained above, the movie Ghandi changed me. I have never forgotten about it. As I write about it more than twenty years later, it is very present in my mind.

4. **You, as author.** Consider the digital story tellers I described earlier who engaged in stories of personal transformation. In the process of developing and telling their stories, they were transformed through their insight.

Using transformation to guide your story. Having an awareness of the many kinds of transformation allows you to do two very important things:

- see transformation in other stories that have stuck with you over the years
- craft the kinds of stories you want to tell so that they stick with your listeners

Transformation is key to developing stories that others will remember.

ready, set, tell! - putting the story into digital storytelling in 5 easy steps

I have had a number of requests for a quick step-by-step guide to using the tools in this book. Here it is as kind of a shorthand version of the entire book. If you are interested in a more detailed look at how I conduct a workshop, then see the chapter entitled "**teaching storytelling**."

Step 1. I tell a story and story map it. Basic techniques of using story mapping to map "the essential elements of a story" are explained and applied to a story I tell.

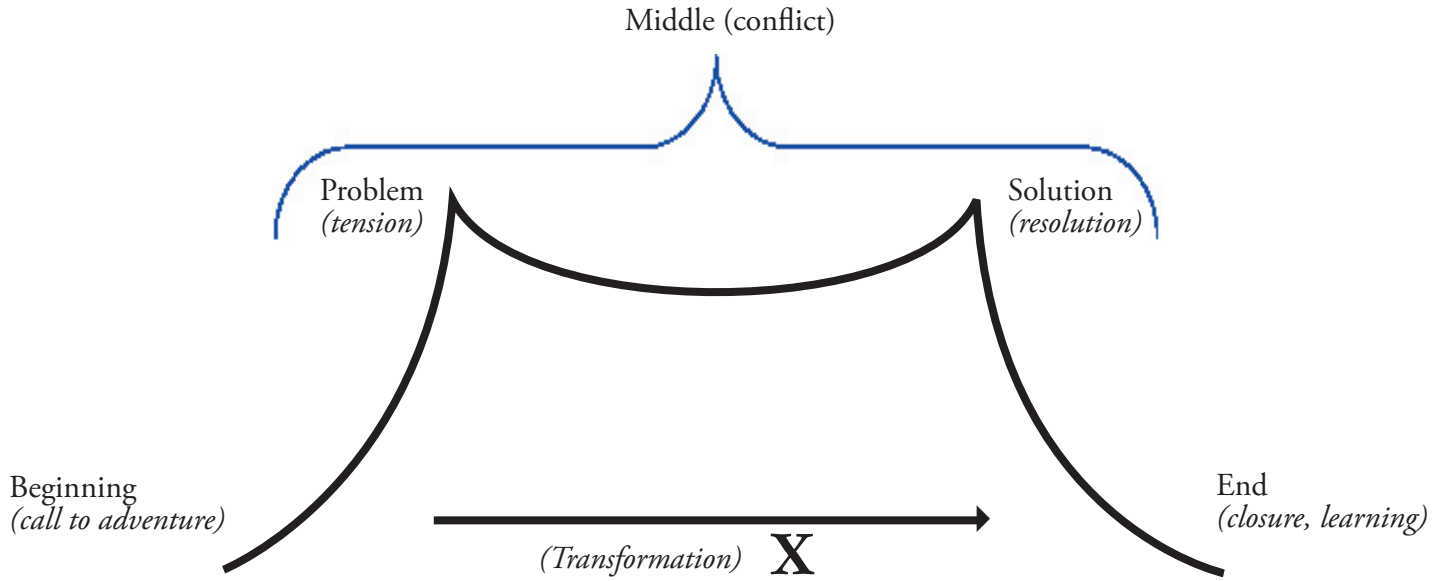
Step 2. Map your story using a story map. Participants map their own stories. In this handout I show my two favorite story mapping tools: the virtual portrait of a story (VPS) and the treasure map (TM). Note: a story map and a storyboard are ***very*** different.

Step 3. Write your story based on your story map. Aim for three paragraphs, one for each section of the story with the middle paragraph being a little longer than the beginning and end.

Step 4. Tell your story. You stand and deliver your story using storytelling techniques that I demonstrate and teach.

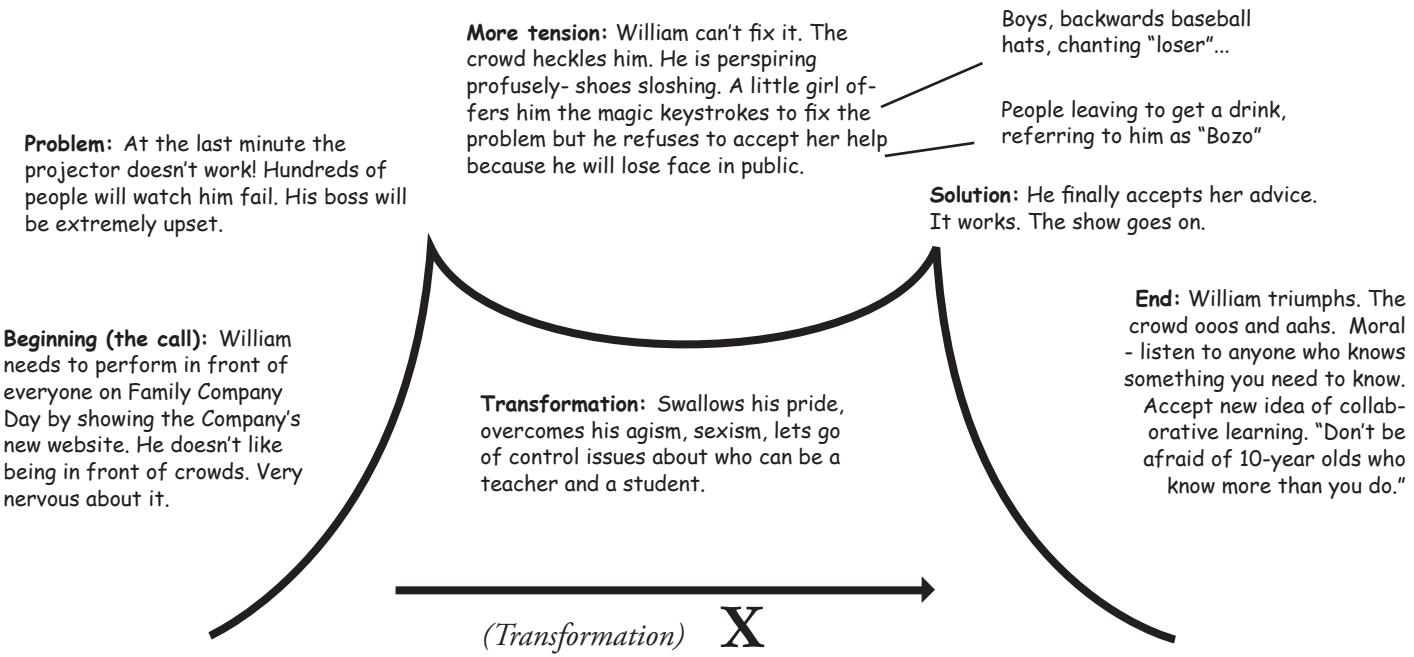
Step 5. Go digital. Now participants may create a digital story, using all the gear they like. I help them transition from oral to digital, reminding them not to forget to use their story map to keep your bearings.

On the following page you will find a "blank" virtual portrait of a story (VPS) template. On the pages following the blank VPS you will find the VPS and the treasure map (TM) applied to a story of mine.



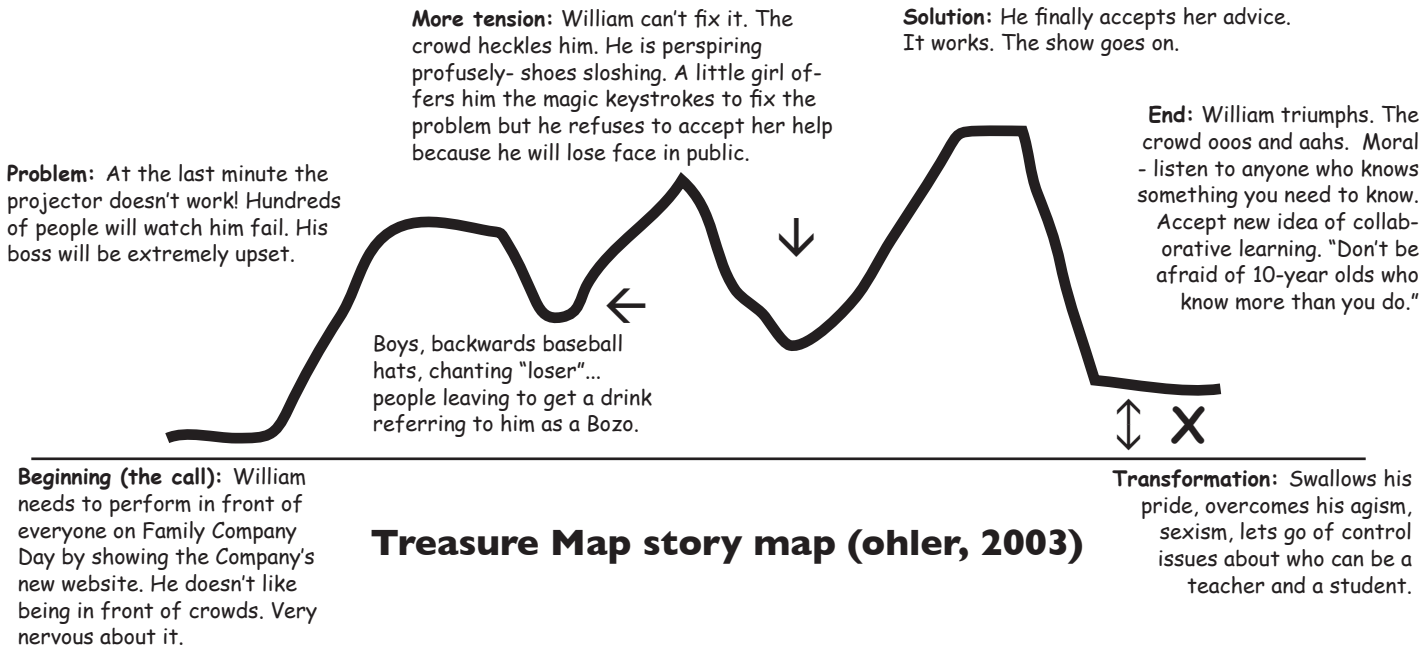
Visual Portrait of a Story (dillingham, 2001), with transformation (ohler, 2003)

Using the virtual portrait of a story map to map "William and the Little Girl Who Could fix Computers"



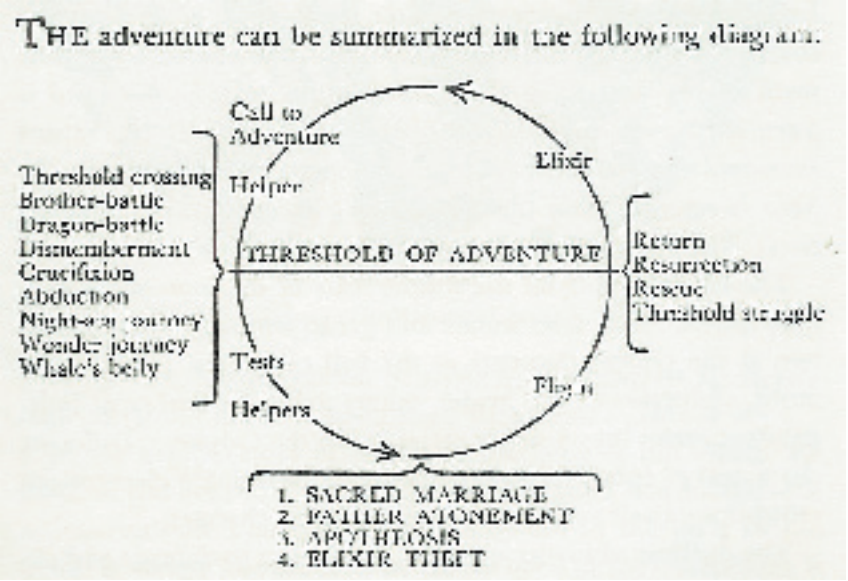
Visual Portrait of a Story (dillingham, 2001), with transformation, (ohler, 2003)

Using the treasure map to map "William and the Little Girl Who Could fix Computers"



Treasure Map story map (ohler, 2003)

appendix



Excerpted from **The Hero with a Thousand Faces** by Joseph Campbell

Published by Princeton University Press, 1973 (third printing).

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