



The power of storytelling

How to tell a good story?

Storytelling Centre believes in the power of storytelling. We are also convinced that in a balanced, culturally diverse society, there should be space for everyone's story especially in times of intercultural tensions! In an ever-changing society we see it as a necessity to provide a platform for all those stories, in the theatre and in society, and to encourage people to connect through stories. That is our mission.

In recent years Storytelling Centre has developed numerous activities in the field of storytelling. The Centre is now known nationally and internationally as a training centre, festival producer, producer of urgent performances by young storytelling talents and as a supporter of cultural diversity and connectivity between different cultural backgrounds.

Go to www.storytelling-centre.nl and www.sharetoconnect.org for more information.

Storytelling

Storytelling - is increasingly being discovered as a strong tool to put social processes in motion. Storytelling involves both the narrator and the listener and brings them in contact with each other, which make storytelling projects valuable for projects aimed at connecting people. It is this connection between human beings that is necessary to work towards a sustainable and peaceful society.

Storytelling has been applied in many fields. It proves its value, for example, in projects with older people, who are helped by storytelling to keep their past and history, or in projects for migrants who use storytelling to strengthen their identity. Storytelling has also been discovered by business managers as a methodology to guide organizations through reorganisation/transition, cultural change or to develop good leadership.

What is storytelling?

Storytelling is about sharing stories, about telling and about listening.

Everybody can tell a story! We are storytelling beings. It's a talent with which we are naturally gifted, although not everyone is aware of it. In storytelling projects, we do not teach people to tell a story. We only make them aware of their ability to do so.

In addition, a story that is shared in small companies, for example in a group of friends or on a birthday, is just as important as the story that is told on a stage. The latter is called **theatrical storytelling**. When we talk about the use of storytelling in societies, we refer to that as **applied storytelling**. In essence, the difference between them is not so big in the end it is about communication.

Storytelling is the oldest form of communication and has always been a means of communicating ideas, thoughts and shared values. Storytelling lends itself to being a perfect means of creating and developing dialogue between people from a variety of diverse backgrounds. Storytelling helps define who we are. Storytelling connects people and communities.

Storytelling is a tool which encourages respect, mutual understanding and acceptance in a responsible manner that often is more profound than many other disciplines aimed at connecting people, using the personal and authentic experiences on which the stories are based.

Listening is just as important as telling. The participants therefore also learn to listen and respond. Learning to listen to 'the other' is a competence that participants can use especially in conflictive situations they might be faced with in their own lives. Listening to someone is often the beginning of a solution. The actual process of listening to someone's story encourages the listener to vocalise his or her own story, beliefs and experiences. The profound nature of storytelling is, and always has been, that one story generally tends to lead to another.

Creating and, above all, telling a story is a very useful skill. Someone who can tell a good story will be able to really connect to the listener and will be awarded by a concentrated and interested 'audience'. This also contributes to increasing self-confidence. Someone who can tell a story can also articulate his/her own aspirations, problems and fears, as well as articulating those of others.

How to tell a good story?

Everyone can tell a story, that's what we stated above. The one might be more of a natural talent than the other, but with a few simple tips and tricks everyone can make a story that everyone wants to listen to.

Below, we briefly describe what some important guidelines to tell a good story. We start from the three so-called pillars of storytelling and provide a number of examples. However, explore this yourself as well listening to stories, reading stories or watching a movie or television series. You will notice that stories are everywhere and the theory of telling a story is used by everyone.

The three pillars of storytelling

The base of creating and telling a good story consists of three pillars:

- **The narrative structure**
- **Imaginative telling**
- **Contact**

Below we describe these three pillars



The narrative structure

Every story has a structure and often that structure is somehow the same. Simply said, a good story has a beginning, a middle and an end, plus a number of elements that make the story exciting.

We explain this with the use of The Hero with the Thousand Faces, a theory about the structure of a story written about seventy years ago by the American Joseph Campbell.

The **hero** is the main character in a story. In a personal story, it's usually the teller him/herself. In a folktale or fairy tale it's Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood/Leila or Aladdin, to name some examples.

Situation A is the begin situation, the daily life in which the main character has no clue of what's going on or will happen.

Situation B is the final situation, in which the hero has got new insights after going through a sequence of happenings. When we say new insights, you could think of things such as: you have to obey your parents (Little Red Ridinghood/Leila), follow your hart (Romeo and Juliette/Mashnoun and Leila) or you could realise that indefinite wealth comes from the inside and it's good to stay true to yourself, whether you are poor or rich (Aladdin).

There should always be a reason to go on a journey. That's what we call the **trigger** or the **call**. Often, the main character receives an assignment: Little Red Riding Hood who is asked to bring cookies to her ill grandmother by her mother. In a personal story the trigger can be: one day a friend asked me to pass by to have a chat. The phrase 'One day' often marks the beginning of a journey.

During the journey the hero encounters all kind of situations and people, **helpers** and **opponents** (helping forces and opposing / antagonist forces). Some support the hero on his journey, while others create obstacles. This isn't just about human beings. A big lake that comes across your path when you are escaping from the hands of an evil witch can be quite an antagonistic force as well. For example: for Little Red Riding Hood the wolf is an **opponent** and the hunter is a **helper**.

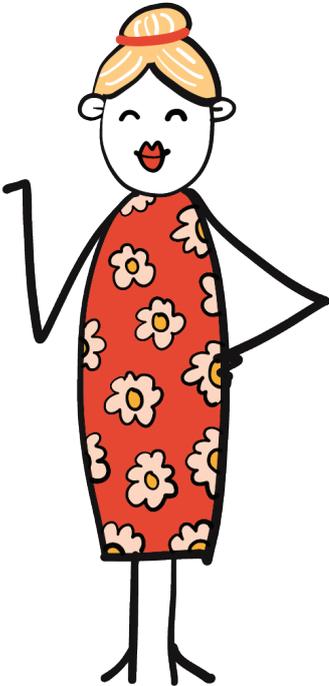
These opposing and helping forces are there to make a story exciting. Imagine there's no wolf in the forest Little Red Riding Hood has to cross. She would just cross it and deliver the cookies to her grandmother, the end. That's hardly an exciting story, but most importantly, Little Red Riding Hood doesn't gain any new insights. In that case it has no use to tell the story. In fact, there's really no story at all.

Now think about your own stories. If you decide to share something, do you also tell a story containing elements that make it exciting?

Imaginative telling

When someone tells a story, he or she has to take care that he or she uses a lot of images. We always say: it is the teller that provides the images, but it is the listener that makes the story based on the images that are provided by the teller. It is as if the listener plays a film in his/her head, based on these images.

To reach that effect it's important to use images in telling, by which we mean that it's important to describe images by, for example, mentioning details.



When you say: "I saw a woman"

The listener doesn't immediately imagine the woman.

But if you say:

I saw a woman wearing a colourful dress, with extremely red lips and likewise red painted nails

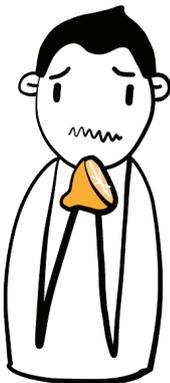
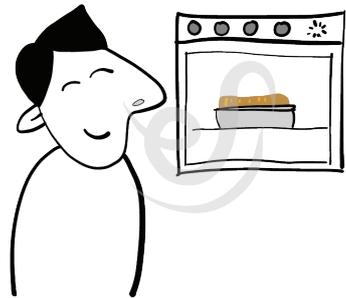
then the listener gets a far clearer picture.

To stimulate the imagination of the listener we advise to always use the five senses:

- Sight
- Smell
- Taste
- Sound
- Feeling

Use these sensorial experiences when telling a story. For example:

I entered the room and the smell of apple pie entered my nose!



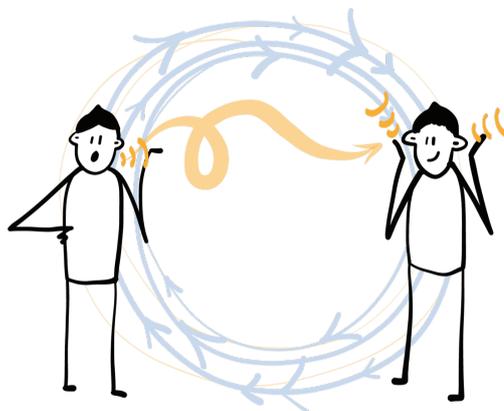
I took a bite from an unknown yellow piece of fruit and it tasted so sour that my mouth contracted!

It was pitch dark in the forest and I did not see a thing.
Far away I heard an owl: oehoe, oehoe and immediately
I got goosebumps.



Everyone can picture this little (beginning of) a story!

It's important to train yourself in describing as many images as possible when sharing a story. Simply describe what you see in your imagination as you tell the story. Because when you share a story, the listener sees the movie with images so to say in his/her heads.



Contact

The previous two pillars really focus on creating a story. The last pillar is more about dealing with presenting it. As soon as a story is well presented, it will gain strength and the listener will be happy to pay attention to it.

We consider it important that the teller maintains contact with the listener and his surroundings. You are together in one space and – like we described above – you also make the story together. That implies that the teller – by being in contact with the listener – should be able to estimate if the story is clear and if the listener is still completely focused etc. The teller should also be able to adjust his story or presentation if he/she feels it's necessary. If something else happens in the space – a chair falls, it starts to rain – the teller should be able to involve this in his / her story. It brings the story to life and makes it attractive.

Everybody has the ability to make contact, but some people will have difficulties to do it. For that reason, it is good to practise it.

It's important to also stress that the teller always has to take the listener into account, for example by inserting some pauses in his/her story. A little silence enables the listener to digest the information he / she just heard. The moment the teller doesn't allow him/herself any rest the listener also gets no rest, often resulting in that the listener simply stops listening... definitely not the effect you wish to achieve.

A more experienced participant can work with his or her voice as well. By adding variation in pitch, speed or volume he or she will be able to captivate the listener even better.

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