



Storytelling Guide for Individuals and Small Groups

The experience of belonging is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). To know we are valued and celebrated for our intrinsic identity, not just for what we produce, how we look, or our winning personality. It is more fundamental than food and oxygen. It's why flight attendants tell us to put our own oxygen masks on first. We will risk greatly to protect those with whom we share true belonging. A shared narrative is the context for belonging. This guide is intended to help facilitate a storytelling process that will increase belongingness for you and in your group.

Every story has four critical elements- a **beginning character, a crucible, a community, and a changed character**. In every person's story, they are the main character. Their character is defined by what they want to be, do or have and how they go about achieving it. Their crucible is an obstacle and a journey to what they want. The refining of the crucible changes the character. It may be an internal struggle. It could be something about other characters in the story. It may be something within the setting of the story. The community is made up of other connected characters in the story. They clarify, encourage, guide, strengthen, and challenge.

The storytelling process you are about to embark on is a continuation of and an addition to the story of your life. You are participating in an intentional, verbal process with a small group of people. The goal of this process is to know and be known - to find out more about your character by finding out more about other characters in your story as you explore together. This will create a shared narrative that contains your shared experience of belonging.

It matters because fulfilling the fundamental need for **belonging is the foundation of mental, emotional, behavioral, and physical health** (Miller, 1976, O'Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009). It will produce exponential and lasting benefits for every aspect of your life; relationships, work, health, and happiness. It may also spread from you and your group to the other people in each of your social networks. This process can turn your group into patient zero in an epidemic of health *caused by belonging*.

Step into the story you create together. Just be you. Allow others to do the same. Trust each other and trust the process. This will require a bit of purposeful effort, perhaps a willingness to be more vulnerable than normal. Be bold. It is vital that the storytelling environment is safe. This is generated by a shared commitment to making it so. It means that judgment is unhelpful, differing perspectives are valued, vulnerability is fiercely protected and the easy responses of "fixing" and "advice giving" are resisted. This is not about becoming the same or finding easy answers. It is a collaborative effort to find shared meaning, comfort, truth, and understanding. Curiosity is key. Questions and perspectives are welcomed for encouragement without manipulation. The process will become more comfortable as it grows and it may also become harder. It doesn't get over, it becomes a way of sharing life.

Character, Crucible, and Community Guide

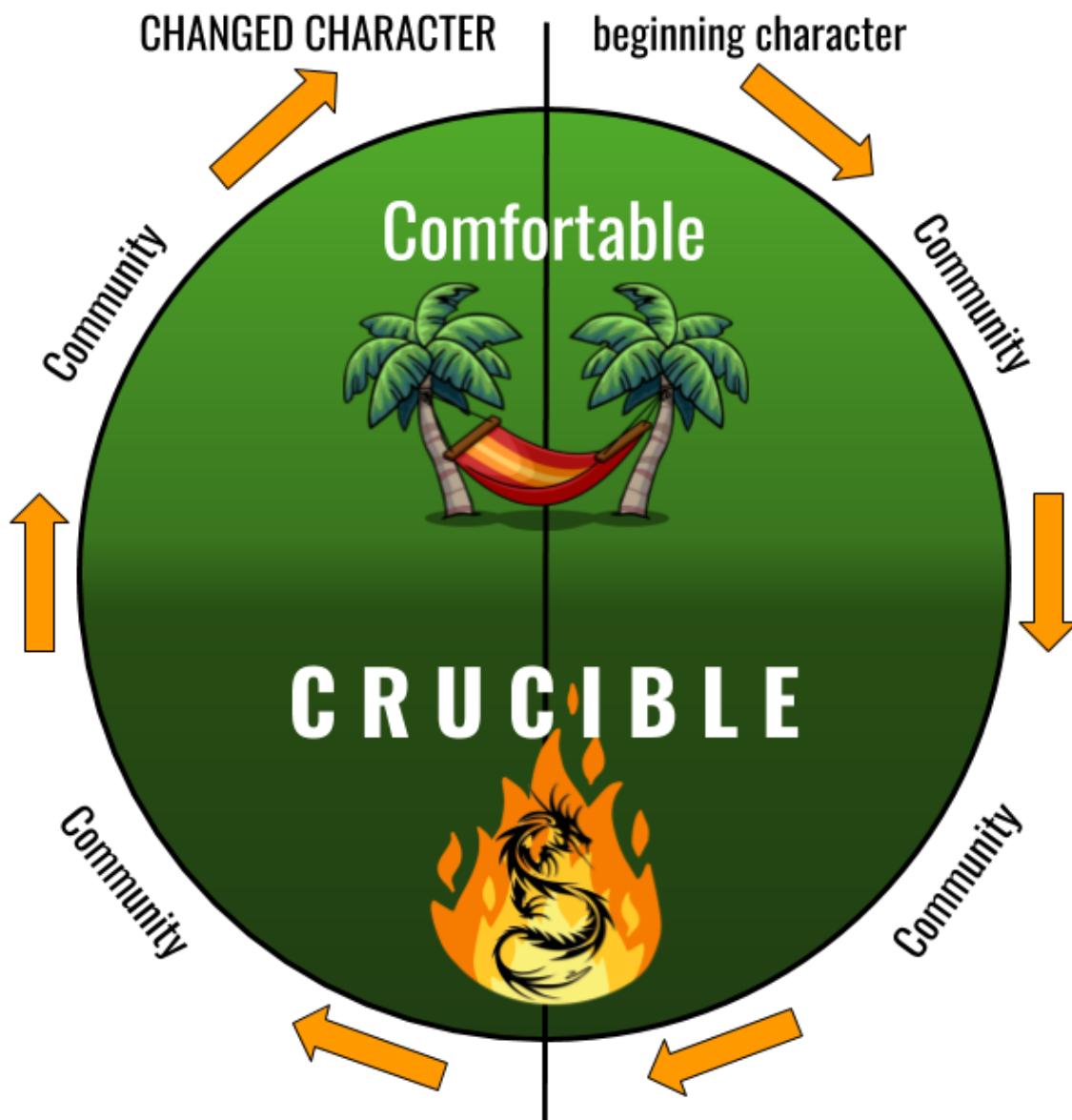
(4 parts of a story)



1. Beginning Character - The character is a person (you) who wants to be, do, or have something. You may not know what you want in the beginning. You will start in your normal world and then something will interrupt and you will take a journey to accomplish a task, make a discovery or overcome an obstacle.
2. Crucible - The limitation or obstacle your character must overcome is the crucible. It reveals the untapped capacity and potential of the character. Stories don't work without problems. They pose the question, what will happen? Difficulty helps define and refine the character and makes the story interesting. Three kinds of crucibles that may combine:
 - a. Self - A limitation or perspective about or within the character
 - b. Others - Interactions between or with the other characters in the story
 - c. Setting - Conditions or threats within the story setting
3. Community - The character is almost always part of a community that reveals their true identity, value, and need. They help expand the character's capacity and help pass through the crucible. The guide comes from within the community.
 - Source of Strength - A guide that gives you courage and reduces your confusion
 - A person who understands your dilemma
 - A discovered paradigm shift or new idea (a book, map, legend, etc.)
 - A memory or realization you had forgotten
 - Plan and Call to Action - In some way, the source of strength offers or produces a plan of action to overcome the problem. At some point, the Source of Strength and the Plan result in a decision to act or give up on solving the problem.
4. Changed Character - The story will revolve around how you change, as a character, into the person who can achieve what it was that you wanted in the beginning. This change occurs as you decide to enter into the crucible, deal with whatever the crucible requires of you, and emerge on the other side.
 - Happy or Sad Ending - The character prevails or is defeated. Even if the character prevails, the story includes the consequences of their potential failure (suspense). If defeated it is tragic because we know what was lost.

Thanks to Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey, Dan Harmon's Story Circles, " Donald Miller's, "How to Tell a Story" and my friend Randy Ingermanson's book "How to Write a Dynamite Scene Using the Snowflake Method."

The Story Cycle



This four-part story cycle is an adaptation from Joseph Campbell's monomyth or The Hero's Journey and Dan Harmon's story circles. It is simplified to make it more useful for telling personal stories. There are four key parts.

- The Beginning Character
- The Crucible
- The Community
- The Changed Character

Keep these in mind when you are telling and listening to stories. Notice that each story takes on more life and greater dimension when these four areas are developed. It is because they are representative of your life.

Group Storytelling - 6 Steps

1. Introductions as needed: name, stage of life, role, why here, favorite food, etc.
2. Thankfulness: Start by giving each member of the group an opportunity to share some of what they are most thankful for (five minutes each +/-).
3. Synopsis: Next allow each storyteller to give a brief (5-10 minute) version of their life story including some or all of the following:
 - a. **Where were you born and what was happening in the world then?**
 - b. **How was/is your family, schooling, and friend group different?**
 - c. **Locality: urban, suburban, rural, geography, weather - describe**
 - d. **Culture, race, ethnicity - (food, traditions, etc.)**
 - e. **What impacting events and/or relationships changed you, gave you perspectives, strengths, and identity you have now?**
 - f. **How you spend your time (vocation, family, hobbies, causes, etc.)?**
 - g. **If you could do or be anything you want, what would it be?**
4. Storytelling Focus: After each member has shared their synopsis, identify commonalities and decide as a group where you want to focus your storytelling. Start with a. and b.
 - a. Major events and/or relationships and how they shaped your identity
 - b. The strengths you rely on to navigate your crucible(s)
 - c. Common themes from synopsis/5 minute life stories
 - d. Eras and experiences during those times
 - e. Major accomplishments and what it took to succeed
 - f. Favorite stories (books, movies, myths) and how you relate to them
 - g. Stages: childhood, teens, college/career, marriage, parents, retired, etc.
5. Developing Storytelling: Elements to consider while telling stories.
 - a. **What did/do you want (to be, do, or have) and why?**
 - b. **What was/is the crucible (the obstacle and refining process)?**
 - c. **What capacity reveals itself? What do you find out about yourself?**
 - d. **What did/do you need to survive the crucible?**
 - e. **What (known) stories are related to your story (books, myths, movies)?**
 - f. **What doubts do you have about your identity, capacity, need, and name?**
6. Finding Belonging: As storytelling is woven into a shared narrative, look, as a group, for the unique identity, significance, need, and name for each storyteller. **Share these and discuss them as you discover them.** Discussion is warranted as this is an exploratory process. Some people have rarely considered this for themselves and most of us have not intentionally considered it for others. Focus on positive, encouraging descriptions.
 - a. What is the **identity** of each character? What description best fits their character (see list page 6 for suggestions)? How do they fit?
 - b. What is the unique **significance** (value) of each character to the community?
 - c. What does each character **need** from other members of the group?
 - d. What **name** is most suited or what known character are they like (p. 6)?



Guidelines for the Collaborative Storytelling Process



1. The Group: Identify a group of individuals. It may be one that is already connected or a group of people who want to be.
 - a. Friend group
 - b. Church small group
 - c. Classmates/work associates
 - d. Neighbors
 - e. Support group members
 - f. Care facility residents
 - g. Fellow inmates
 - h. Teammates
 - i. Band members
 - j. Volunteers at a nonprofit
2. Physical Environment: If possible, find an environment where:
 - a. Everyone is physically comfortable (temperature, noise, seating, etc)
 - b. Storytellers can face each other (a circle of some sort is best)
 - c. Interruptions are minimized (busy public places and multitasking are not ideal)
 - d. Good food and drink are shared
3. Weaving: Take turns sharing 1-3 stories at a time 5-15 minutes per story. Build the shared narrative thread by thread, brick by brick.
4. How it Actually Was: Describe your story how you lived it, how it looked and how it felt rather than altering it for effect. Show, don't tell. Use the senses.
5. Clarity: Finish sentences, put them in order. Include details your audience won't know. Watch for signs of confusion and check in with listeners to see if clarification is needed.
6. Don't rush: It's the process that matters, not the schedule - but don't be a story hog.
7. Setting: An important part of storytelling is describing the setting. For these elements, use descriptive words that communicate what you see in your mind. You may tell stories *about* the setting to give it life.
8. Chronological: Stories are chronological, with a beginning, middle, and end. They also have a main point. It's helpful but not always possible to know these before starting. Sometimes, sharing the story is how it takes shape. The main point is a revelation about the character or the crucible; how they were thwarted, how they overcame or something they discovered. Don't waste time trying to figure out exact days and dates.
9. Finish: Stop telling the story when you've reached the end. Let the audience digest.
10. Acknowledge: Appreciation for sharing and emotional support for traumatic stories.
11. Strength/Weakness: Within each story, there is strength and weakness, glory and shame revealed. They are always connected. Sometimes one is obvious and the other is hidden. These are clues to the true identity, contribution, and needs of the character.
12. Feedback: Respond with curiosity, encouragement, insight, confirmation, etc. Do not argue, correct, criticize, fix, belittle, or condescend - and apologize if you do. Make room for questions and clarification at the end of each person's storytelling time.
13. **The Goal**: Learn more about your identity and become confident in it. Believe that you add value to your community and the identity of other characters. Understand what you need from others.
14. Notice how the combining of character's stories shapes and changes the shared narrative as well as each of the other characters.
15. See if/how the shared narrative helps you understand the purpose, the unique capacity and the action to be taken by the group.
16. Spread: when you know your character, and have the experience of belonging, it is a life-changing gift that you can share beyond the borders of your group.

Identity Descriptors and Character Naming Ideas



Descriptors

Administrator
Apostle
Artist
Builder
Calmer
Cleaner
Combiner
Communicator
Connector
Cook/Chef
Counselor
Counter
Crafter
Creator
Defender
Designer
Developer
Discerner
Encourager
Energizer
Entertainer

Evangelist
Faithful One
Finder
Fixer
Giver
Governor
Guide
Healer
Helper
Hoper
Host
Hunter
Imaginer
Instigator
Interpreter
Inventor
Inviter
Jokester
Leader
Listener
Mentor

Mover
Nurturer
Organizer
Peace Maker
Planter
Proclaimer
Prophet
Provider
Puzzler
Rescuer
Solver
Stabilizer
Strengthened
Teacher
Thinker
Trainer
Wanderer
Whimsicalist
Wise One
Wonderer

Characters

Anne Shirley
Aragorn
Ariel
Atticus Finch
August Rush/Evan Taylor
Batman
Belle
Briar Rabbit
Bridget Jones
Capt. John Miller
Captain America
Captain James T. Kirk
Cinderella
Dagny Taggart
Daniel LaRusso
Dorothy
Ellen Ripley
Elliot Ness
Elsa
Erin Brockovich
Forrest Gump
Gandhi

George Bailey
Guinevere
Harry Potter
Hemione Granger
Indiana Jones
James Bond
Jason Bourne
Jayne Eyre
Jean Valjean
Joan of Arc
John McClaine
John Rambo
Jo March
Katniss Everdeen
King Arthur
Laura Croft
Laura Ingalls
Letty Ortiz
Lt. Frank Bullitt
Lucy Pevensie
Luke Skywalker
Marlin & Dory

Matilda
Maximus
Moses
Neo/Mr. Anderson
Princess Leia
Riggs & Roger
Robin Hood
Rocky Balboa
Sarah Connor
Sherlock Holmes
Shrek
Simba
Snow White
Spiderman
Spock
Superman
Thelma & Louise
Tony Stark
Walt Kowalski
William Wallace
Wonder Woman
Wyatt Earp & Doc Holiday

