



Storytelling on peace and security



Storytelling is the single most important skill and perhaps the only way to plant ideas into people's minds. Since the first cave paintings, we told each other stories. These stories gave us courage and knowledge to deal with the real world. Stories became humankind's tools, libraries and histories. Telling stories has been one of the most fundamental methods. Stories break through all the distractions, information overload and clutter, as well as disinterest and make your ideas heard by audiences. A story is much more engaging than a set of facts or bullet points. It grabs people's attention and lingers in their memory. Storytelling is uniquely powerful.

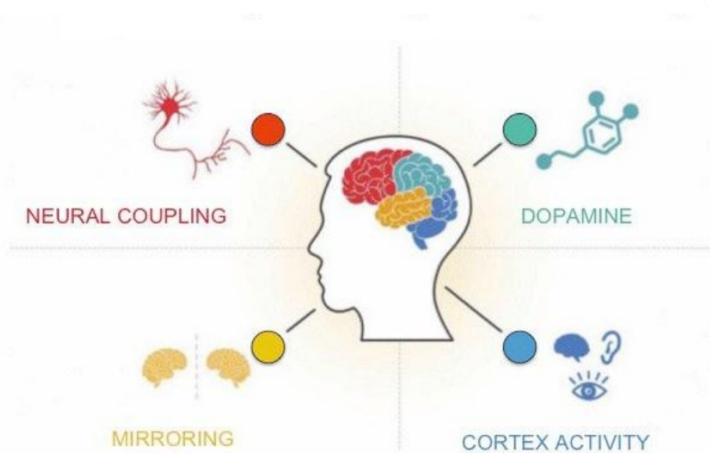
Why Storytelling?

Storytelling can help attract people's attention and interest to policymaking, which has long-term effects for the populations or "people on the ground." The nature of policy making is very complex and not accessible to an "average" individual. If you tell a good story, your policy communications are likely to become more effective. It means that the *Youth, Peace and Security* agenda can earn more attention, visibility and solutions through telling and sharing stories.

These days, an individual under the barrage of information, advertising and news is naturally wired to reduce ambiguity and manage complexity through storytelling. It means that the myriad of things and people "scattered" around in bits of information is organized into the story patterns that stick to our memory, help us make sense of the world and act.

When talking about "big and serious" topics or "policy matters," we tend to think and communicate in terms of facts and statistics. And as Mother Teresa once said, "If I look at the mass, I will never act," statistics and facts may not be convincing enough for people to change their hearts and minds. A story with a single focus on situation, individual or any other object can be more impactful due to its emotional appeal. A story consists of elements that have a cause-and-effect relationship. That's what makes it memorable and that's the way human beings are wired to think. We think in narratives and we forget dispersed (collection of) facts and statistics. Our thinking is shaped in stories all day long, for every action and conversation. According to research, personal stories and gossips make up 65 percent of our conversations. And we make up short stories in our heads for every action and conversation.

brain activity during storytelling



A neuroscience behind the storytelling effects

When we listen to a speech with boring statistics and facts, often in "bullet points," the brain activates its language processing parts. The words get decoded into meaning and that's it, nothing else happens. But when we listen to a story, the brain activates other areas used when we experience events – the events of the story.

If someone tells you about the delicious foods or uses metaphors the sensory cortex lights up: "leathery hands," "velvet voice," "black sheep," etc. If we listen to stories, our brains activate better.

What: a story and storytelling

A story is a mental configuration that have closure, that have beginnings, middles and ends. Every story should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action.

The **beginning** sets the tone and mood for the story and hints at the surprises that lie ahead by raising the right questions in the minds of the audience.

Many a time, a story starts off, but the **middle** becomes boring. A story must move progressively forward to a final action. The events must become bigger and better and their excitement and involvement must gradually increase as the story moves forward. This is called progression. The movement forward needs to be sharp and planned.

The **end** is usually a reiteration of the core assertion of the story. Often, it is done by hammering home the assertion with a 'key feature,' which could be anything from a phrase to a visual, or many visuals, to one last event that sets the impression. All or many issues are hopefully, or at least temporarily, resolved in the end of a story. There are two types of endings. Closed end: *all the questions raised in the story are answered and all emotions evoked are satisfied*. Open end: *leaves some or many questions unanswered and some emotions unfulfilled*. In such a case, some clear and limited alternatives in the open end make a certain degree of closure possible for the audience.

Characters give a human face to any story. They experience the story for the audience. The more the audience knows about a person in the story, the closer they feel to that person. This empathy is important because, through it, the audience can get emotionally involved and be that much more affected by it. Again, there two types of characters. Active ones initiate the events that take place around them, take action and make things happen. Passive ones react to situations thrust upon them without their choosing or act in response to things happening to them



Without **conflict**, there is no reason for the story to move forward. Characters try and reach their goals in the face of opposition and obstacles. These opposing forces could be big or small, one or many, brief or protracted and in any shape or form. Opposition could come from other characters, organized entities or the situation and environment surrounding the characters. In non-fiction work, you have to study the various conflicts facing the story's real-life characters and portray them in the story. You must then follow the characters as they try and overcome their 'opponents' in the story. Characters might not overcome all or any of the conflict. Real life isn't always made up of heroes and villains, and the character may fail to achieve what he set out to do. An **outer conflict** is an antagonism from the world around the characters. It could be from other people, objects, organizations or environment. An **inner conflict** is a conflict inside the characters and may include psychology, weaknesses, fears, dark sides, etc. Many stories contain a combination of both because one rarely occurs without the other.

Change is some aspect of reality becoming different in a particular way. Change must occur in a story. In the beginning, the inciting incident introduces change to the character's life. In the middle, the character must face conflict and, when they do, things change around them and possibly within them. In the end, something must have changed from the beginning and this change lead to the resolution.

The “How” of Storytelling

To become an effective change agent, you have to master four types of stories to engage the hearts, minds, and limbs of your constituencies to give wings to your ideas and projects:

- ✓ the challenge story
- ✓ the how-to story
- ✓ the big idea story
- ✓ the impact story

Anyone who has a new idea and wants to change the world will do better by telling stories than by any amount of logical exhortation.

- Stephen Denning

Step 1: What you want to change?

Describe the central conflict or challenge you would like to address to inspire others to act.

Step 2: Who is your key audience?

Different audiences require different approaches. For example, the **general public** wants dramatic, inspiring, surprising and emotional appeals. **Social innovators** want stories with insights into addressing a social problem, practical solutions, and overcoming challenges. **Thought leaders** want to see the new solution within the bigger picture of a social change and emerging trends. **Funders** want to know about new solutions and convincing evidence of impact potential.

Step 3: What is your core message?



Why are you telling this story: raise awareness, change behavior or attitude(s)? Distill your solution and mission into **one memorable idea**. Try to tell your **story in six words or less** to get to its core.

Step 4: What is your story type?

The proven story types can help you shape your narrative for impact.

✓ The challenge story is about a hero overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles to turn their idea into reality. It is inspiring, dramatic, emotionally engaging and accessible. It is good for the general public audience.

✓ The how-to story explains the process of solving a (social) problem in a unique way. It is also inspirational and gives hope showing how change is

possible. It works for social innovators and thought leaders.

- ✓ The big idea story describes a novel solution and explores how this solution fits within a larger context of inducing social change and emerging trends in a society.
- ✓ The impact story describes the impact of the solution, provides convincing evidence to illustrate an ROI potential. Such impact and big idea stories work well with thought leaders, investors, donors, decision makers, politicians, etc.

Step 5: What is your call to action?

Your story should make the audience “act” in some way or the other. For example, share your story with others, support your cause, sign a petition, volunteer, donate, etc.

Step 6: Decide on your story medium.

A story can be “told” through writing (articles, books, blogs), speeches (presentations, interviews, panels, conversations), digital stories (video, animation, photos, long reads) and audio stories.

Step 7: Create and share your story.

- Be authentic and vulnerable: to establish emotional connection and inspire empathy in your audience.
- Make your story concrete, visual and jargon free.
- Choose the right channels and medium to reach your target audience.

Engaging Stories with the Message on youth, women, peace and security. They provide interesting angles and solutions, collaborative advantage of a young generation to co-create the future and learn as they do.

They range from writing, digital, photo, etc.



A Note to the Youth: Resistance Is the Theme of Our Generation (by Lulit Shewan):

<https://tinyurl.com/yxmdsml6>

African Men. Hollywood Stereotypes (by Mama Hope):

<https://tinyurl.com/y42geege>

Water Changes Everything (by charity.water):

<https://tinyurl.com/yxh5hd2q>

There's More to Life: <https://tinyurl.com/y2da5693>

... storytelling has gained recognition as a core competence of leadership.
- Stephen Denning, *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling*

Good stories surprise us. They make us think and feel. They stick in our minds and help us remember ideas and concepts in a way that a PowerPoint crammed with bar graphs never can.”
- Joe Lazauskas and Shane Snow, *The Storytelling Edge*

You're never going to kill storytelling, because it's built in the human plan. We come with it.

- Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*



“Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.”
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Think about the word destroy. Do you know what it is? De-story. Destroy. Destory. You see. And restore. That's re-story. Do you know that only two things have been proven to help survivors of the Holocaust? Massage is one. Telling their story is another. Being touched and touching. Telling your story is touching. It sets you free.”

- Francesca Lia Block