

# Share your professional learning story

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# Today's Agenda

- Why stories matter
  - Story structure
- Key elements of a story
  - Cautions
- Storytelling venues
  - Resources
  - Questions



# What's your story?


What story do you need to tell?

What do you hope will happen if you tell it?



## Our challenge...

- We work in a data-obsessed field in an era of big data.
- Data alone don't move people to change or take action.



The universe is made of  
stories, not of atoms.

-- Muriel Rukeyser

# Why stories matter

Neuroscience indicates that engaging stories stimulate the brain and move us to action.



# Why stories matter



# Why stories matter

So how can we as professional learning advocates balance elements of stories that touch the heart with data that indicate our strategies make a difference?





# The structure of stories

Our protagonist  
is living  
peacefully in  
her world.



# The structure of stories

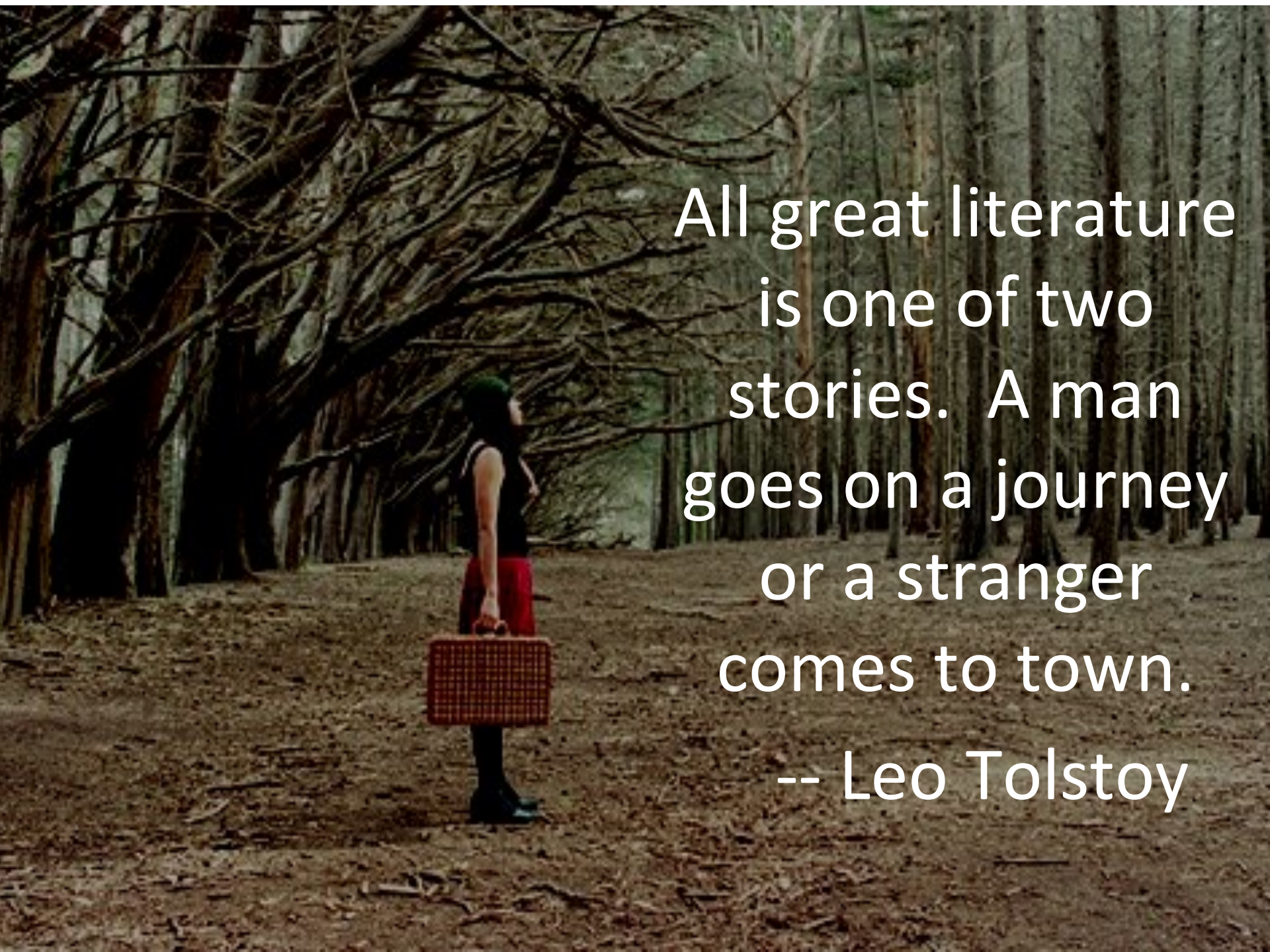
Then...something happens to change it in an instant!



# The structure of stories

And our heroine is sent on a quest. She has a goal.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black sleeveless top and a red skirt, stands in a forest. She is holding a red and white checkered suitcase. The forest has many trees with bare branches, and the ground is covered in brown leaves and twigs. The lighting is somewhat dim, creating a somber atmosphere.

All great literature  
is one of two  
stories. A man  
goes on a journey  
or a stranger  
comes to town.

-- Leo Tolstoy

# The structure of stories

However, her journey is not without trials.

She encounters barrier after barrier.



# The structure of stories

Through the process, she acquires knowledge and companions, making progress along the way.



# The structure of stories

The reader  
moves along  
with our  
protagonist,  
eager to  
learn what  
happens.



# **The structure of stories**

**After overcoming a number of barriers, our heroine achieves her goal.**

**The reader, along with the heroine, has often learned a valuable lesson as a result of moving through the story.**



**And They Lived  
Happily Ever After**

# For example...

**I have made a terrible mistake.**

I waited fourteen years to do something that I should have done my first year of teaching: shadow a student for a day. It was so eye-opening that I wish I could go back to every class of students I ever had right now and change a minimum of ten things – the layout, the lesson plan, the checks for understanding. Most of it!

Guest post on Grant Wiggins's site.

# Key story elements

Your protagonist...who is the star of your story?



# Key story elements

## Good protagonists...

- Are easy to relate to either because of their personalities or situations.
- Persevere.
- Show their human emotions on their journeys.



# Key story elements

Know what point you want to make.

A good anecdote isn't enough – what do you want readers to believe, think, do as a result of reading your story?



# Framing your story

Who is the protagonist of your story?

What do your readers need to understand about his or her world?

What sends him or her on a journey?

What is your protagonist's goal?

What challenges does your protagonist face?

What is the resolution of your story?

What is the takeaway for readers?

How is this story tied to your work?

# Key story elements

Show, don't just tell.

*Bring readers into your story by constructing scenes where characters talk to each other.*

*Share enough details and description so readers can live in the characters' world.*



## For example...

One sunny spring day, I held a heavy three-ring binder full of student writing. The evidence of a career as an exemplary teacher of writing was in front of me. This teacher had saved copies, and sometimes originals, of kid-perfect writing....

Zimmerman, *JSD*, February 2014



## For example...

Teacher 1: I'm noticing about three-fourths of my students got the problems correct and can draw a picture to compare fractions.

Teacher 2: I had all but four students get the comparison fractions correct. Most of my students used drawings too....

Gibbons & Knapp, *JSD*, June 2015

# Write a scene

## Based on your story framework...

- Write one scene from your story that shows your characters in action.
- Use enough detail to bring readers into the room with your characters.
- How can you engage readers emotionally through what you write?

# Cautions

## Watch out for the “black box.”

Don't lose key details of your story that show how change happened.

For *JSD*, I often see this when people forget to describe what the learning looked like...in a story about professional learning.

(The Goodman Center)

# Cautions

Beware jargon and too much background.



No, no! The adventures first,  
explanations take such a  
dreadful time.

– Lewis Carroll

AZ QUOTES

# Cautions

Remember your reader's perspective – why do they care? And how can you strengthen your story to reach them?



# Where will you share your story?



Blogs

Magazines/Journals

Social media

Online community forums

E-books

Conference sessions

Videos/infographics

Letters to the editor/blog comments

# Who are your primary readers?



Other educators

Policymakers

Community members

General public

Others?

# **Different venues/different approaches**

How would your story change depending on where you wanted to publish it and who your audience is?



# Next steps

What are your questions at this point?

How will you move forward?

How can we help?

**To hell with facts! We need stories.**

-- Ken Kesey



# Storytelling Resources

The Goodman Center

[www.thegoodmancenter.com](http://www.thegoodmancenter.com)

Storytellers for Good

[storytellersforgood.com/](http://storytellersforgood.com/)

Fevered Mutterings

[feveredmutterings.com/](http://feveredmutterings.com/)