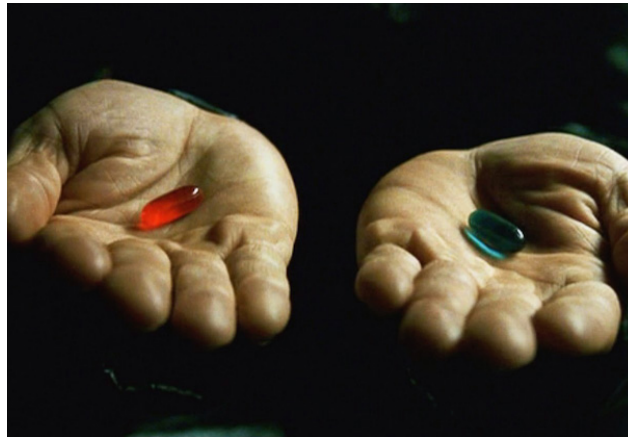


The Secret Science of Storytelling

Oak Leaf Story Design

Everything you are learning is tied to effective storytelling, especially, the context expansion and new neural pathways you are forging. For all of the actual story design content to have a place in your brain to take hold, to be digestible, you must have that context expansion. As we dive deeper into storytelling, you are likely finding, in human beings are designed is inextricably linked to to keep you in the dark, to magnificent storyteller, designed to invent stories, beginnings, to protect you, overcome traumatic events survive. When you see this, broken, your survival machinery ceases to work.



real time, that the way –to belong and survive– story. Your brain is wired resist seeing that you are a because, well, your brain is from your earliest life, your to keep you alive, and to so that you *can* continue to when that fourth wall is

You are about to take the *red pill*. You've been dancing with it, swishing it around in your mouth, thinking about swallowing it. As Morpheus says to Neo in *The Matrix*, "You take the blue pill...the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill...you stay



in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.”

You got story structure when you were born. The first meal you consumed, the first diaper you filled happened inside of balanced symmetry, the story structure of life. The more that you consume exceptional story, the better you'll see all of the stories you made up as a wee bairn, a child, the better you can then see balanced symmetry, and the better you'll be able to write story that brings



audiences to tears, to their knees, to Amazon to leave 5-star reviews. It's a little like negative space images. You can only see one of the images until your context expands to see the other image. You probably saw Batman in the image on the left immediately. But did you see Penguin? Do you immediately see Penguin when the image is inverted on the right? Did the image of Penguin escape you until just now? Maybe you still don't see him. Look at the yellow, the negative space in the image. Suddenly, he appears.

Dark Matter, Black Holes & Other Invisibilia



Now look at the image to the left. You probably see the dog right away. But do you see the cat? Or maybe you saw the cat first. But now, you're looking for it. You created new neural pathways in the time it took to finish the last page and start reading this one.

Do you see the gloves on the right first, or do you see the boxer?



Do you see a man squinting below on the left? Or do you see a face with an airplane where the eyes and nose should be? The way our brains function is to back-burner unnecessary input from our senses. The brain processes about 400 billion bits of information per second. But we are only aware of about 2000 bits of that information, a mere sliver.

To complete the picture—the information your brain is relaying to you—your brain relies on memory to fill in what it perceives as unnecessary input. And this is how, with everything we know—from Aristotle to J.K. Rowling about proper motivation, character development, pacing, voice, genre, emotional beats, description, and even ideal word count—we have missed the element of balanced symmetry in storytelling. There is no light without the dark. Everything in physical existence has its opposite.

While the traditional story structure does rise and fall, what is missing is the mirror symmetry—the negative space—if you will—from the rollercoaster, or 4-part story structure. But if you nail the symmetry, you'll find that you can actually be less concerned about using a traditional model for plot structure.



Notice that everything around you, even your experience in life, is designed inside of balanced symmetry.

It doesn't matter what came first, the chicken or the egg, whether human beings resonate with story that is built with symmetry because our world is built with symmetry, or if we are built symmetrically, and therefore what we see is the symmetry around us. Regardless, symmetrical storytelling is the most powerful way to move your audience. And it sells.

You can slice your story for radial symmetry, like an orange. Or you can look at a cross section, cut like an apple, and see the mirror symmetry. But it really isn't apples and oranges—the differences *between*—but rather, the *sameness* that matters.

Don't Reinvent the Wheel

Every page-turning story relies upon symmetry for its foundation. If you change up the setting and give your characters and your plot their own spin, that structure disappears. Let's look at an example.



RUDOLF the Red-Nosed Reindeer: A flawed, social outcast who wants to belong goes on a journey of self-discovery with fellow misfit Hermey. Clarice the Doe likes him just the way he is. He returns to save the day, proving that “different” can be a superpower.

CLARICE: Tries covertly to clue the hero into her opinion that the hero is perfect the way he is. The hero misses this critical piece of info entirely. She is sweet and astute, if even in an ironic sort of way.

HERMEY the Misfit Elf: Provides some comic relief as he embarks on a sidekick-style co-journey of self-discovery with the hero. He's sometimes quite clueless, but he is ever loyal.

YUKON CORNELIUS: Crazy fool with noble intentions who is impossible to discern. We like him sometimes, and sometimes he's a bit of a knucklehead. He finds acceptance even if he never does quite fit in.

SANTA CLAUSE: Grumpy, myopic, self-serving creeper/head-honcho who is misguided, but we ultimately come to understand him and we forgive his failings, because his weaknesses are ultimately unintentional.

OTHER REINDEER: Small-minded bullies who finally see the light, and in the end, actually cheer for the hero they once ostracized.



NAPOLEON DYNAMITE: A quintessential dork who wants to belong—but doesn't have to leave Idaho—embarks on a journey of self-discovery with fellow misfit Pedro. Deb likes him just the way he is. He saves the day, proving that “different” can be a superpower.

DEB: Tries covertly to clue the hero into her opinion that the hero is perfect the way he is. The hero misses this critical piece of info entirely. She is sweet and astute, if even in an ironic sort of way.

PEDRO: Provides some comic relief as he embarks on a sidekick-style co-journey of self-discovery with the hero. He's sometimes quite clueless, but he is ever loyal.

The Hero's Brother KIP: Crazy fool with noble intentions who is impossible to discern. We like him sometimes, and sometimes he's a bit of a knucklehead. He finds acceptance even if he never does quite fit in.

UNCLE RICO: Grumpy, myopic, self-serving creeper/head-honcho who is misguided, but we ultimately come to understand him and forgive his failings, because his weaknesses are ultimately unintentional.

CHEERLEADERS & JOCKS: Small-minded bullies who finally see the light, and in the end, actually cheer for the hero they once ostracized.