

Implementing Good Storytelling in Your Exhibits



This webinar is based on national museum standards from the StEPs program offered by the American Association for State and Local History. StEPs is a self-study program created specifically for small- and mid-sized history organizations.

www.aaslh.org/steps



Funding to develop materials for this workshop was provided by:



Plan for the Hour

- Define stories
- Learn basic elements of good storytelling
- Examine object-based methods by which stories might be better incorporated into interpretive exhibits

So What is a Story?



Pixar says it:

- “is a sequence of events ... which unfolds through time.”
- connects and engages people on an emotional level

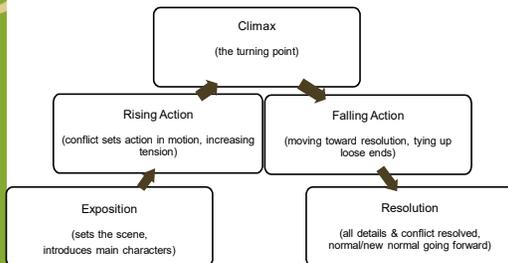
From Khan Academy, "Pixar in a Box: The Art of Storytelling," <http://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/pixar>

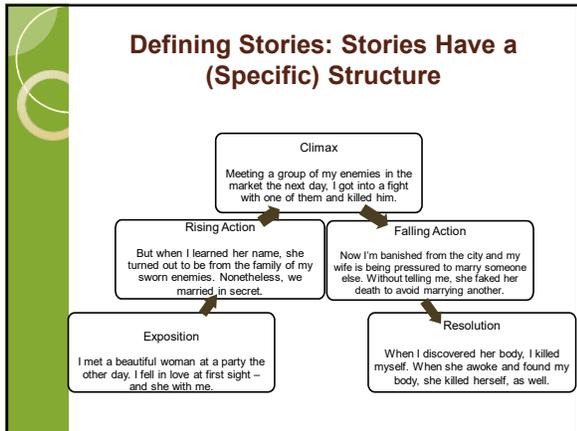
Defining Stories: Stories Have a (Specific) Structure

Version 1	Version 2
<i>"I met a beautiful woman at a party. I shouldn't have been at the party because it was at the house of someone who doesn't like me. But the woman was beautiful. We married secretly. I killed someone and was banished. We both killed ourselves."</i>	<i>"I met a beautiful woman at a party. I fell in love at first sight – and she with me. But when I learned her name, she turned out to be from the family of my sworn enemies. Nonetheless, we married in secret. Meeting a group of my enemies in the market the next day, I got into a fight with one of them and killed him. Now I'm banished from the city and my wife is being pressured to marry someone else. Without telling me, she faked her death to avoid marrying another. When I discovered her body, I killed myself. When she awoke and found my body, she killed herself, as well."</i>

Adapted from "What's the Difference between an Anecdote and a Story?" by Nick Morgan. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorgan/2010/10/13/whats-the-difference-between-an-anecdote-and-a-story/#2e9ed87536e7>

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Histories vs. Stories

"Histories tend to generalize events... Stories, on the other hand, begin on an intimate, personal level. Stories tend to heighten the unique traits and foibles of each character and, more often than histories, they get expressed in the first and second voice. This intimate view proves very accessible to those who otherwise claim to have little interest in history. Empathy is naturally felt by one person for another..."

- from "A Practical Guide to Personal Connectivity" by Daniel Spock

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Histories vs. Stories

History	Story
<i>"In the early twentieth century, when Italian immigrants first came to the United States, the jobs available to them were menial, low wage, and often dangerous."</i>	<i>"On Thanksgiving night there was a real bad storm... [Uncle Filomeno] was called to go to work... I begged him 'Don't go tonight.' ... Well he insisted. He thought he had to go when he was called to go. And he went... Before you knew it... [my aunt] came up and said, 'Something's happened to Filomeno' and that night he was sideswiped by a train. That's the kind of work that they did, they had to go do this work."</i>

Histories vs. Stories

AN ANATOMICALLY INCORRECT DRAMATIZATION OF THE DANGER OF STORY

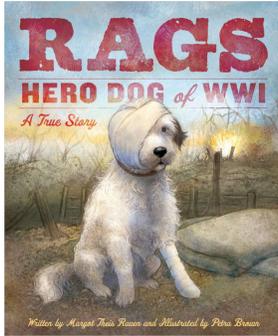
FACTS LIVE HERE



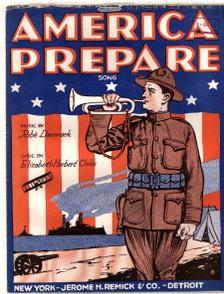
STORIES LIVE HERE



Tips for Telling a Good Story



Prepare



America Prepare sheet music by Rube Danmark and Elizabeth Hebert Childs. Retrieved from Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/item/rrs.150005390/>.

Keep it Simple



Aerial view of trenches near the Somme River in France. AP Photo.

Show, Don't Tell



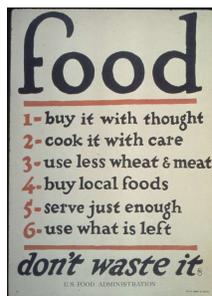
"Infantry attack in woods at Argonne Forest" by Lucien Jonas. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004670601/>.

Remain Aware of Your Audience



Women! Help America's Sons Win the War, poster by R.H. Porteous. Retrieved from Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/wwjpost/item/93510435/>.

Be Flexible



Food - don't waste it, poster by Frederic G. Cooper. Retrieved from Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002708936/>.

Object Biographies



National World War I Museum and Memorial

National World War I Museum and Memorial, <http://theworldwar.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/E12F9A81-6F62-4012-A91E-931358152234>

Object Biographies: The Building Blocks

Object Name	Watch, Wrist
Accession number	2006.56
Description	Wristwatch, marked on case: PARIS 5/30/18 1ST MILE RELAY - AEF-YMCA, with leather wrist band. No Maker's Mark.
People	Banks, Bruce L.
Subjects	Track athletics Sports Entertainment Recreation
Search Terms	YMCA



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Informational Label



Private Bruce L. Banks won this watch when he took first place in the mile relay race hosted by the YMCA in Paris on May 30, 1918. Banks served in the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I.

National World War I Museum and Memorial

Object Biography Label



Fighting in World War I was a physically and mentally exhausting experience, and officers and enlisted men alike looked forward to escaping the front lines on leave to rest and recreate. More than 1.9 million Americans visited 26 YMCA-operated leave centers in France during the war. While serving in France for 18 months, Private Bruce L. Banks visited a leave center in Paris in May 1918. While there he took first place in a one-mile relay race and won this watch, engraved with the date, name of the event, and the initials of the YMCA and the American Expeditionary Forces. He carried the watch with him throughout the war and brought it home with him in 1919. Despite surviving the horrors of war, Banks died of scarlet fever within a few years of returning home, while attending college at Fordham University.

Object Biographies

Questions:

1. Where did this object come from?
2. Who used this object?
3. What did this object mean to its owner?

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Multiple Stories

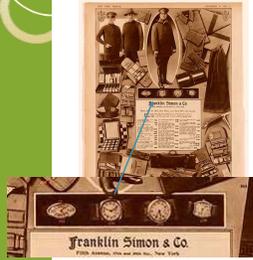


First storyline:

"As the first Christmas after U.S. entry into the war approached, the Franklin Simon store on New York's Fifth Avenue advertised gifts to send the troops."

"X-Mas Gifts for Men over There and Those Who Are Going" in Library of Congress Exhibit, *Echoes of the Great War*. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/world-war-i-american-experiences/online-exhibition/over-there/over-seas-gifts-for-servicemen/>

Multiple Stories



Second storyline:

"The ad featured radium dial wrist watches, a tempting gift for servicemen, who could then read their glowing watch dials in the dark. The manufacture of these watches posed considerable health risks for young female workers at the United States Radium Corporation and the Radium Dial Company factories, who painted the tiny numbers on the dials. Dubbed "Radium Girls," the women were encouraged to lick their paintbrushes to keep the tips pointed, thereby ingesting fatal radiation doses. Radium paint was also used on the gauges of military instruments during the war."

"X-Mas Gifts for Men over There and Those Who Are Going" in Library of Congress Exhibit: *Echoes of the Great War*.
<https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/world-war-i-american-experiences/online-exhibition/over-there-war-over-seas-gifts-for-servicemen/>

Other Sources of Stories

- Lives of people who lived through the event
 - Oral histories, biographies, autobiographies
- Architecture
 - Who commissioned the building, and why?
 - Who designed it?
 - Who built it? From what materials?
 - Who lived in it?
 - Alternative uses?
- Community members
 - Local lore
 - Stories passed down through generations

Wrap-Up

- Hopefully today you learned something about:
- What makes a story a story
 - How to tell a compelling and engaging story
 - How to develop stories from objects



Contact Information

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