

Story Power:



Dr. Pamela Rutledge
Director, Media Psychology Research Center
www.pamelarutledge.com

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Stories are the
Building Blocks
of the Brain



The Neuroscience of Stories

NEURAL COUPLING

A story synchronizes the listener's brain with the teller's brain.

MIRRORING

Mirror neurons enable listeners to mirror experience

CORTICAL ACTIVITY

Two areas of the brain process facts.

Stories activate additional areas such as the motor cortex, sensory cortex and frontal cortex.



CORTISOL

The brain releases cortisol during conflict increasing attention & memory

DOPAMINE

Dopamine is triggered by emotionally-charged events, resolution of conflict, or recognition of a pattern, creating a pleasurable response enhances memory & recall

OXYTOCIN

Oxytocin is released when we relate to characters & increases empathy, connection, compassion & trust



2



The Primacy of
Emotion



“ “ People will forget
what you said,
but people will
never forget how
you make them
feel ” ”

Maya Angelou

3

Why Stories Stick



Cognition & Persuasion

- Tap into universals, ancient traditions, myths and archetypes
- Speak through image
- Activate emotions
- Enhances memory
- Connect to larger sense of purpose
- Shared truths of what it means to be human
- Create presence & Immersion





Johnie

Stories Are Social

The Primary Function of Stories: Connecting People



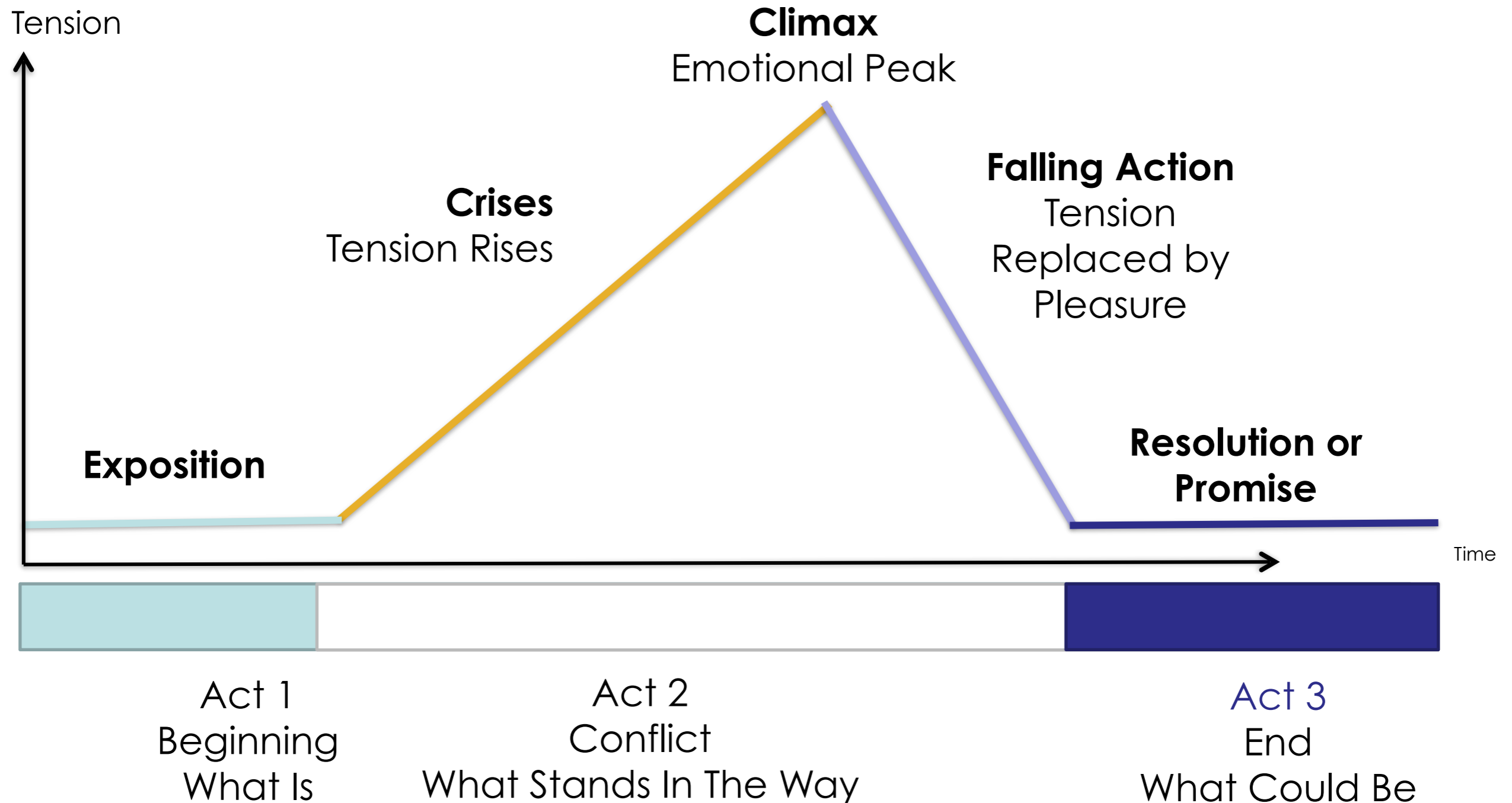
- Transcend differences; connect with others
- Build trust and common bonds
- Understand ourselves and others
- Create empathy
- Define and teach social values
- Inspire and teach
- Good stories are shared

Building Blocks of Story

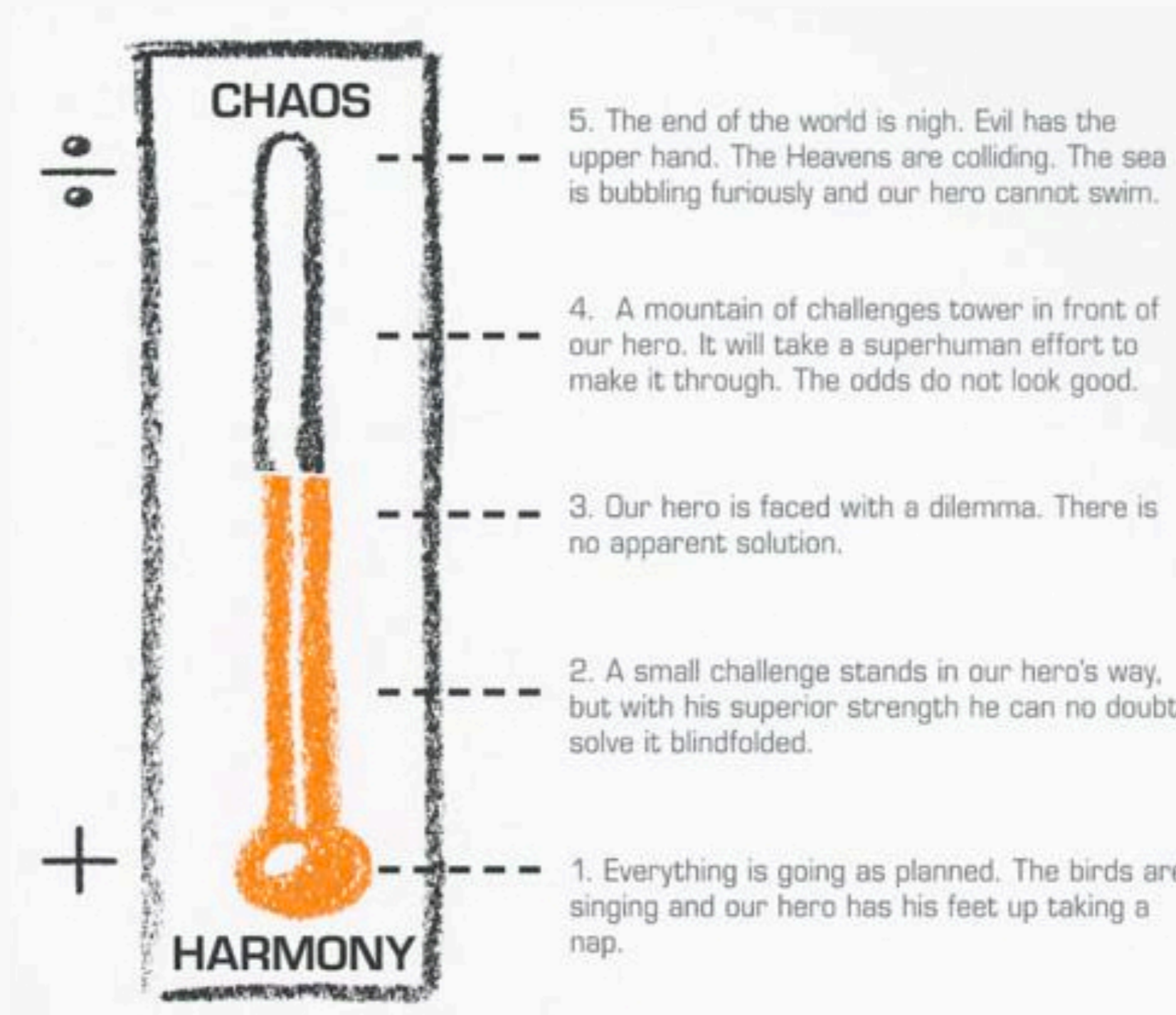
- Purpose
- Structure
 - A Hero
 - Catalyst
 - Conflict
 - Transformation
 - Resolution
- Audience



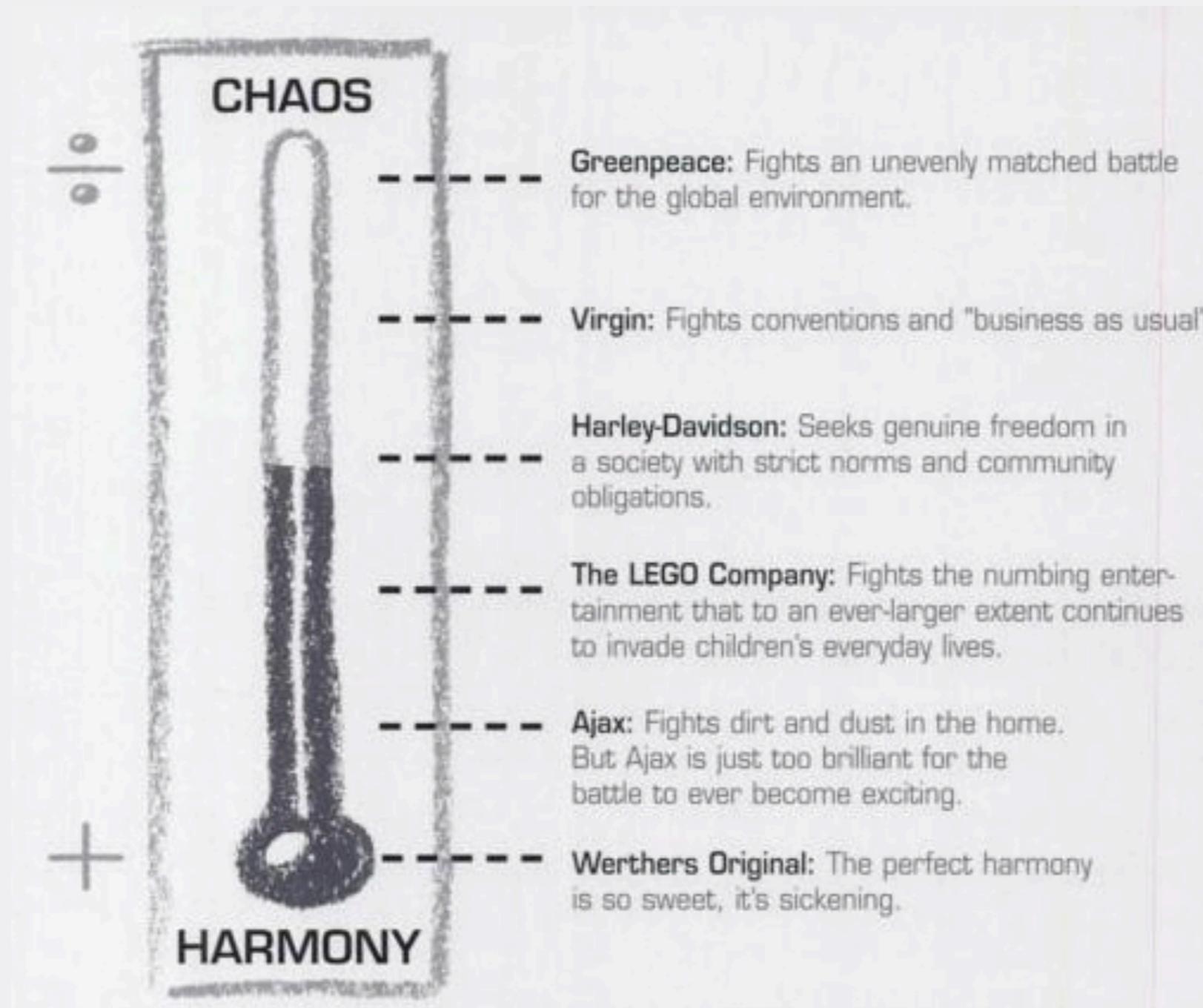
Three Act Structure: What Is vs. What Could Be



Conflict Provides Energy



Conflict Must Fit Cause



Resolution vs. Inspiring Action

- Cognitive certainty (aka Resolution) feels good
- To inspire action:
 - Show the goal
 - Inspire purpose
 - Enhance efficacy
 - Make action easy, doable & accessible



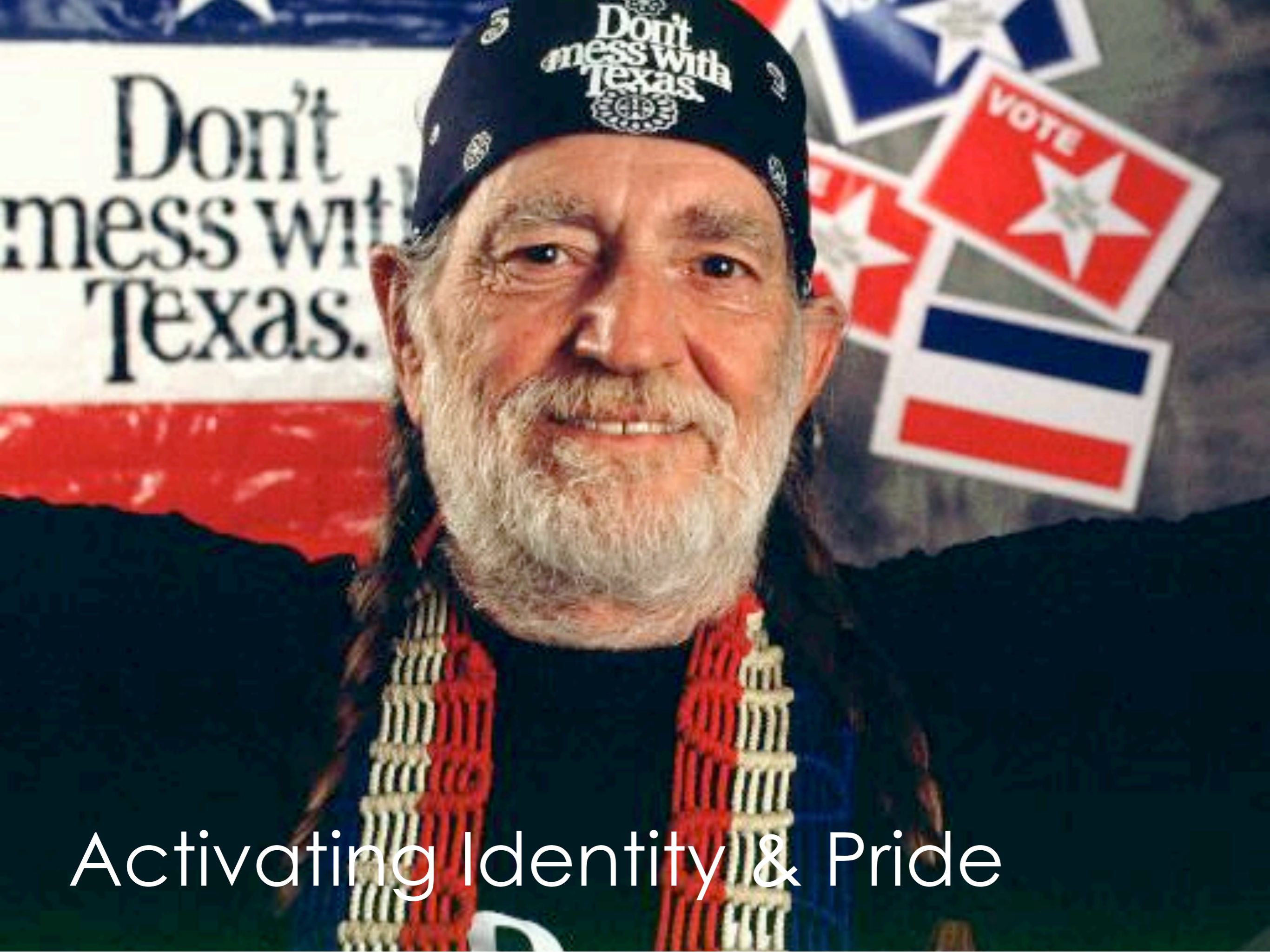
Examples:
Empowering Change

Humanizing Child Poverty



TOMS

- Protagonist
- Antagonist
- Conflict
- Goals



Activating Identity & Pride

Challenging Social Norms



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Missed Opportunity

The image shows a screenshot of the Surfrider Foundation website. At the top left is the Surfrider Foundation logo, a stylized wave icon above the text "SURFRIDER FOUNDATION". To the right of the logo is the tagline "Protecting Oceans, Waves and Beaches since 1984". In the top right corner, there is a "MY ACCOUNT" button. Below the tagline, there is a newsletter sign-up section with the text "SIGN UP FOR OUR WEEKLY SOUP NEWSLETTER!". This section contains two input fields labeled "email" and "zip code", and a "SIGN UP" button. A teal navigation bar spans the width of the page with the following menu items: "MISSION", "CAMPAIGNS", "PROGRAMS", "CHAPTERS", "CURRENTS", "STORE", "TAKE ACTION", and "JOIN!". The main content area features a large photograph of a person in a white protective suit and mask, kneeling on a beach and holding a small dark object. The background shows waves crashing on the shore. Overlaid on the bottom of the photo is the text "HOW SAFE IS YOUR BEACH?" in large, bold, white letters. Below this is a paragraph: "The EPA is proposing startlingly lax guidelines that allow for 1 in 28 beachgoers to become sick before a response is taken. Please join us in telling them this is unacceptable!". At the bottom left of the photo, it says "Photo: Shutterstock". At the bottom right, there is a prominent orange button with the text "TELL THEM NO!".

Protecting Oceans, Waves and Beaches since 1984

MY ACCOUNT

SIGN UP FOR OUR WEEKLY SOUP NEWSLETTER!

email zip code SIGN UP


MISSION CAMPAIGNS PROGRAMS CHAPTERS CURRENTS STORE TAKE ACTION JOIN!

HOW SAFE IS YOUR BEACH?

The EPA is proposing startlingly lax guidelines that allow for 1 in 28 beachgoers to become sick before a response is taken. Please join us in telling them this is unacceptable!

Photo: Shutterstock

TELL THEM NO!

An open notebook with lined pages is placed on a wooden surface. A hand is writing on the right page with a silver pen. The text 'Build your story bank' is written on the page. To the left of the notebook is a white smartphone with a black screen. A hand is also visible on the left side of the notebook, resting on the page.

*Build your
story bank*

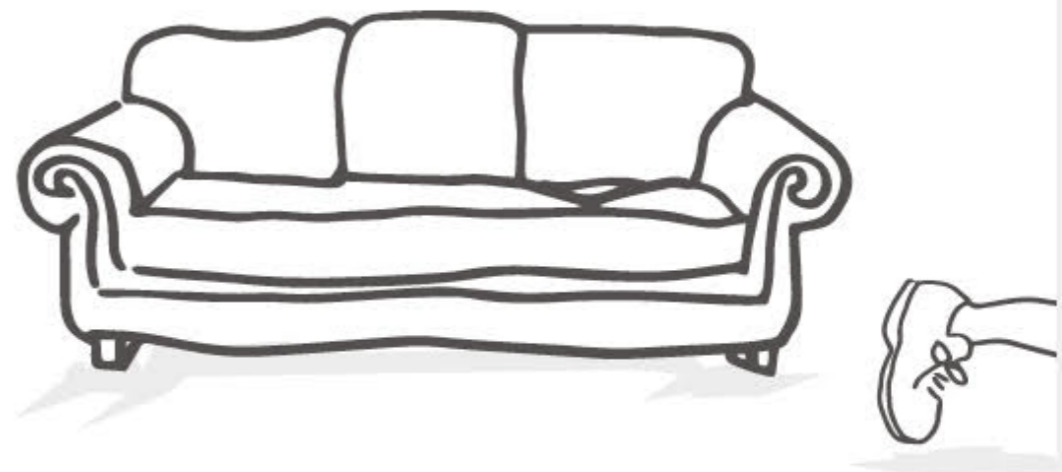
Building a Story for Social Change

- Focused goal and purpose
- Tangible and specific: Who, what, where
- Clear conflict and resolution
- Relevant and relatable =
- **Know your audience**
- Emotional
- Memorable
- Actionable
- Easy to share

Know Your Audience: How 'This girl can' got 1.6 million women exercising



21% are getting up for it.



1.6m women aged 14-40 who recognise the campaign have started exercising.

Story Sources: Different Voices & Perspectives

- Successes
- Failures
- Mentors
- Popular culture
- Experiences
- Listening to the audience



Story Development Process

- What qualities or situations comes to mind.
- What demonstrates those in a way you can see and feel?
- What values are framing your story?
- Choose one idea to develop into a story
- Mind map/story board
- Test tell your story
- What works, what resonates in your story (take notes about the specifics.)
- Evaluate yourself. What do you like best? What sticks with retelling? What details make it feel more alive?

*Adapted from Annette Simons "Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins"

Get Started: Pick One Story to Break Down

- What's the conflict?
 - What's the goal?
 - What's the message?
-
- Does the analysis suggest any changes you would make in the telling?
 - Examine your stories to learn about your own story-patterns and biases









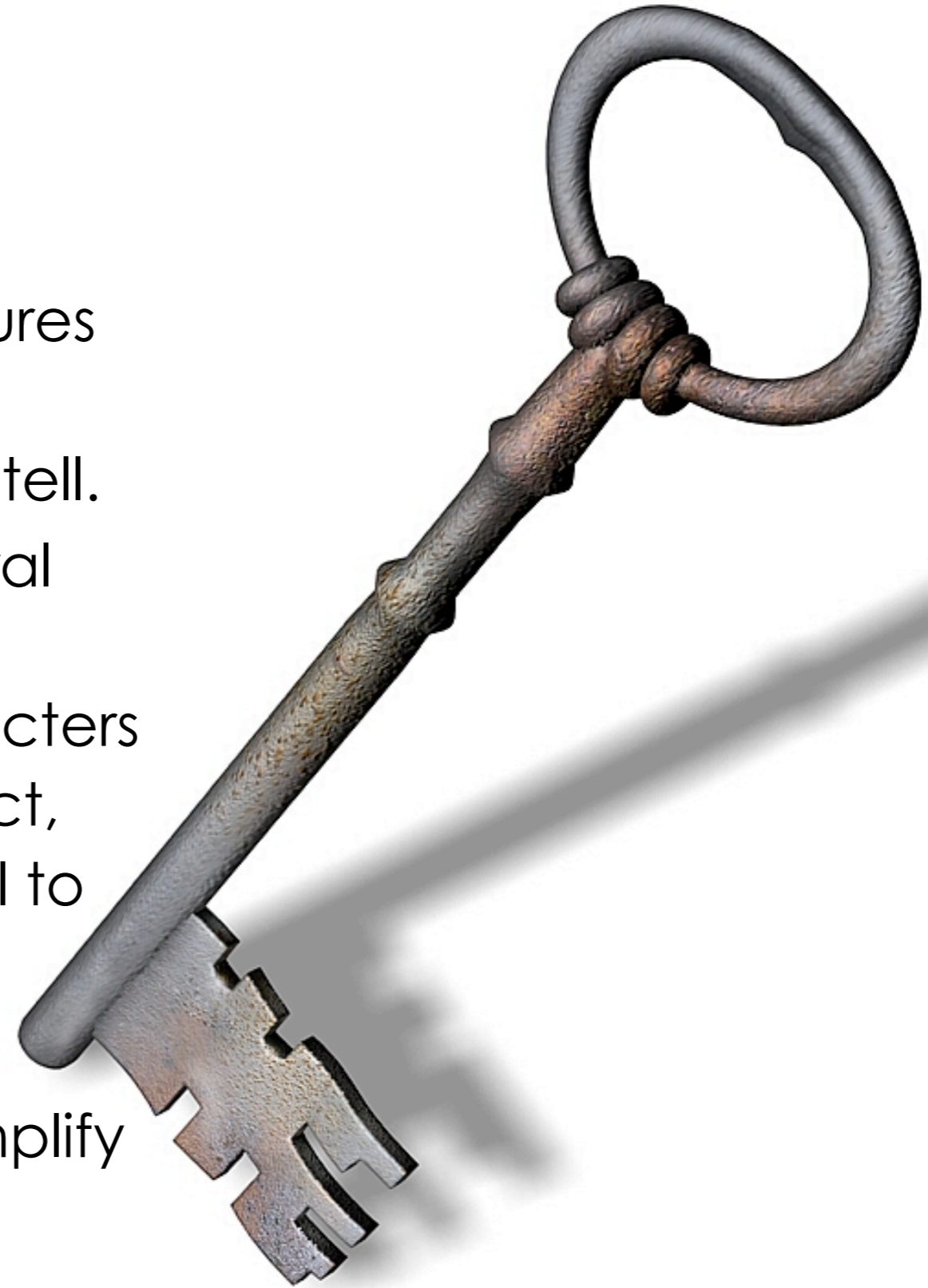






Key Take-Aways

- Identify your goal
- Focus on a core story that captures your purpose & values. It is the 'north star' for all the stories you tell.
- Make sure you have the structural elements and narrative arc that make a compelling story (characters people care about, clear conflict, building action, resolution or call to action)
- Research your audience
- Use the media landscape to amplify your stories and engage your audience



Thank you

A group of approximately 15 people are sitting in a circle around a bright campfire at night. The scene is set in a dark, mountainous landscape under a starry sky. The fire provides the primary light source, casting a warm glow on the people's faces and clothing. The mountains in the background are silhouetted against the dark sky.

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