

TELL ME YOUR STORY

Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me the truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever. – Indian Proverb

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The Art of Storytelling

- Stories can be used in so many different ways: to teach or to persuade.
- Fairy tales, fables, books or movies can all be used as stories.
- Our culture has evolved in a manner that we have no time to sit around elders listening to stories.
- Yet there is always that special place in our hearts for good story tellers.
- TED talks or other Podcasts are all examples of modern day storytelling. These stories are not only told to share information but they attempt to change us, engage us, touch us deeply and then shape how we see ourselves and the world around us.

The Art of the Artist

- The visual artist Mr. T. Sanathanan's story touched me the most. He spoke of art as a method, he taught us how to draw histories.
- His presentation discussed 4 art projects that he has spearheaded since 2004: *History of Histories*; *Imagining Home*; *The Incomplete Thombu* and the *Cabinet of Resistance*.
- All of these dealt with the memories of civilians who witnessed the Sri Lankan civil war.
- The greatest lesson learnt: How the history of civilians escape our perception because of the constant memorialization and monumentalization of the ones involved in such wars.

The Art of the Artist

- History of Histories: Used a dilapidated public library for storing artefacts collected from civilians.
- Imagining Home: The Tamil diaspora in Vancouver were encouraged to share objects that they have stored in their new home, that reminds them of their roots. These objects showcase both history and victimhood. These objects have travelled with their owners, losing their spatial relevance but yet symbolising the very space that they belonged to. They are the only connections with the homeland.
- Incomplete Thombu (a public land registry): People displaced during the war were asked to draw the ground-plan of their home before they were displaced. As they began this project, these people found it rather painful to draw it themselves so they involved their children in the process. Often while drawing little anecdotes and stories were shared.
- Cabinet of Resistance: A library cabinet was used to catalogue and store anecdotes and stories of resistance. Such an important step taken to record the history of the vulnerable groups.
- All projects opened up narratives, subjective narratives. All projects led to creation of some amazing stories!

Incorporating Storytelling in the Classroom

Storytelling

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Storytelling from
the front of the
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Letting students
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What is a Story?

- A story can be defined as, a series of connected events. One way we humans make sense out of experience is to organise experience into stories.
- In a story one thing may lead to another, occurrences may be connected, and actions have consequences.

Why is storytelling important?

- When telling personal-experience stories, one often feels one is just remembering what happened. But in fact, one is also often in the process making sense of what happened. Through story telling, we may come to terms with the world, and may harmonise our lives with larger realities.
- By reframing and telling about difficult experiences, individuals and societies can overcome trauma and heal.
- A story gets us in the habit of organising data into sequences that progress from a beginning, to a middle, to an end -- and hold together cohesively as a unit, a unit that has significance and meaning.
- Story telling helps us recognise patterns of behaviour and actions. This familiarity helps us recognise unfolding situations, and to predict upcoming developments.
- Story telling enables listeners to face and consider a variety of situations, and to become aware of, and to get a grasp on their emotions.
- Through story telling, memory can be enhanced and attention spans can be expanded.
- Story telling can help one develop one's self, or, a sense of one's self.
- Listeners are exposed to ways of handling situations, and types of characters and personality traits. They can think about possible ways to solve problems.

The Power of a Story

Bahuchara Mata, daughter of a known warrior of the charan caste, was traveling with a caravan along with her sisters. While on their travels, a notorious road bandit named Bapiya hijacked the traveling caravan. In charan culture, dying at the hands of an enemy is an absolute no-no. Instead, charans would rather take their own lives opposed to dying at the hands of someone else. However, Bahuchara decided that it wasn't her time to die. Instead, she cut off her breasts as a way to curse Bapiya. What was he cursed with? Impotence! The only way for Bapiya to have the curse removed was if he paid homage to Bahuchara Mata by dressing and behaving like a woman.

(Image Courtesy: Google Images)



Using Storytelling as a tool of Social Research

- The ISC Sociology curriculum demands two 15 mark projects that are to be based on social research on any topic of sociological relevance.
- The biggest problem is to motivate students to undertake research at such an early stage of their life.
- It is an unknown territory and they often feel scared at the very mention of the word 'research'.
- They are yet unaware about the various tools of social research and the curriculum gives only a brief idea.
- Also they are extremely value-laden and the discipline demands them to develop a value-neutral perspective.
- This is where the art of story telling comes in.

Developing Narratives as a Sociology Project

- Identify an area of interest and then a small sample fitting that area of interest.
- Treat the samples as characters in a story. Who are your characters? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What relationships exist between the characters?
- Explore social problems as challenges faced by the characters of your story: What challenge are the characters facing?
- Understanding the social problem: Why are the characters behaving in a specific way? Why must they be the ones to face the challenge? What is preventing the characters from solving the challenge?
- Linking theory with research: What is the backdrop of the story, how does this affect the characters and the story?
- Analysis: How do the characters overcome the obstacles, what transformations and events were necessary?
- Conclusion: This is the time to tie up the loose ends and draw a strong connection between the theme of the story and the lesson or topic that was being explored through the research.
- A case study is ready.
- Students can then use a variety of digital tools to showcase their case study to others in class (eg: Kaneb Center's [Technology Remix](#) site)

An Example

- Child labour (topic of interest)
- Visit a dhaba in your neighbourhood and explore, you may find a child working there.
- Develop an unstructured interview schedule treating each member at the dhaba as a character of your story.
- Interview schedule should address the following questions (data collection): Who are your characters? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What relationships exist between the characters? What challenge are the characters facing? Why are the characters behaving in a specific way? Why must they be the ones to face the challenge? What is preventing the characters from solving the challenge?
- Develop the backdrop of your story: read a few articles written by other social scientists on the plight of child labourers. This serves the purpose of a review of literature.
- How do the characters overcome the obstacles, what transformations and events were necessary? (data analysis)
- Link the backdrop to your story (conclusion): writings on child labour to this particular dhaba worker.

Conclusion

- Narratives help overcome bias of empirical data. For Eg: A survey on child labour only gives us an objective view of the problem.
- Narratives help see a social problem through the eyes of a vulnerable group and not just the mainstream.
- The researcher gets involved in the story and hence his subjectivity makes the research holistic in nature.