

# Why We Love Stories

## The Power of Storytelling

How a 100,000-year-old skill became the most powerful communication tool in the world

■ B1 Reading ■ 30 min ■ Fun & Culture

<b>Level</b>	B1 (Intermediate)
<b>Skill</b>	Reading
<b>Topic</b>	Fun & Culture
<b>Duration</b>	30 minutes
<b>Age Group</b>	Teens & Adults

### Learning Objectives

- ◆ Read and understand a text about the power of storytelling
- ◆ Learn 15 key vocabulary items related to communication and psychology
- ◆ Understand how stories affect the brain and create empathy
- ◆ Discuss the role of stories in everyday life and professional contexts
- ◆ Write a personal narrative using storytelling techniques

## 1 Before You Read — Your Story

Think about stories in your life and discuss:

1. What is the best story you have ever heard, read, or watched? Why did it stay with you?
2. Do you prefer reading books, watching films, or listening to podcasts? Why?
3. Why do you think humans have always told stories, even before writing was invented?

## 2 Reading: Born to Tell Stories

### Born to Tell Stories: Why Narratives Rule Our World

Imagine sitting around a fire under the stars, 50,000 years ago. The flames flicker across the faces of your family and tribe as an elder begins to speak. She tells the story of a great hunt — how the bravest hunter tracked a dangerous animal across the plains, how he nearly failed, and how he finally succeeded. The children listen with wide eyes. The adults nod and smile. Everyone in the group feels closer, braver, and more **united** than before.

This scene has been repeated in every human culture, on every continent, for at least 100,000 years. Stories are not just entertainment — they are the **foundation** of human civilisation. They are how we teach, how we remember, how we make sense of the world, and how we connect with each other. In a world full of data, facts, and information, stories remain the most powerful **communication** tool humans have ever invented.

### Your Brain on Stories

When someone reads you a list of facts, only the language-processing areas of your brain activate. But when someone tells you a story, something very different happens. Your brain **lights up** across multiple regions — not just language, but also the areas responsible for sight, sound, smell, movement, and emotion. Your brain essentially **simulates** the experience described in the story, as if you were living it yourself.

This is called "**neural coupling**," and it explains why stories are so much more memorable than facts. When you hear a statistic — "30 percent of students experience stress" — you process it intellectually and quickly forget it. But when you hear a story about a specific student named Ana who stayed up all night crying before her exams, your brain creates a vivid **mental image** that stays with you far longer. Research shows that stories are up to 22 times more memorable than facts alone.

## Stories Create Empathy

Perhaps the most remarkable power of stories is their ability to create **empathy** — the feeling of understanding and sharing another person's emotions. When you read a novel, watch a film, or listen to someone's personal story, your brain releases oxytocin, the hormone associated with trust and **bonding**. You literally begin to feel what the character feels.

This is why fiction makes us better people, according to research. People who read literary fiction regularly score higher on tests of empathy and social understanding than those who do not. By experiencing hundreds of lives through stories — lives of different genders, cultures, time periods, and circumstances — we develop a deeper understanding of the human **condition**. Stories teach us that other people's experiences are just as real, complex, and important as our own.

## Storytelling in the Modern World

In the age of social media and information **overload**, the ability to tell a good story has become one of the most valuable professional skills. The best teachers do not just present information — they wrap it in stories that make it come alive. The most successful brands do not just sell products — they tell stories about values, identity, and belonging that make customers feel part of something bigger than a transaction.

Job interviews, presentations, speeches, and even everyday conversations are all transformed by storytelling. Instead of saying "I am a hard worker," a job candidate who tells a specific story about overcoming a challenge at their previous job will be far more **persuasive** and memorable. The story proves the claim in a way that a simple statement never could.

## The Elements of a Great Story

What makes a story compelling? Researchers and storytellers agree on several essential **elements**. First, every great story needs a **protagonist** — a main character that the audience can identify with and care about. Second, there must be a conflict or challenge — something that creates tension, uncertainty, and the desire to know what happens next. Third, there must be a transformation — the character changes, learns, or grows as a result of their experience.

The best stories — whether they are ancient myths, modern novels, or personal anecdotes shared over dinner — follow this basic structure: a person faces a challenge, struggles with it, and is changed by the experience. This pattern mirrors real life, which is perhaps why it resonates so deeply with every human being, in every culture, across every age.

You are, whether you realise it or not, a storyteller. Every time you describe your day, explain a problem, or share a memory, you are using the same ancient skill that has connected humans for a hundred thousand years. The question is not whether you tell stories — it is whether you tell them well.

### 3 Key Vocabulary

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>united</b>	brought together as one; feeling a strong connection	Stories make groups feel closer and more united.
<b>foundation</b>	the base on which something is built or depends	Stories are the foundation of human civilisation and culture.
<b>communication</b>	the exchange of information, ideas, or feelings	Storytelling is the most powerful communication tool ever invented.
<b>lights up</b>	becomes active; shows increased brain activity	When you hear a story, your brain lights up across multiple regions.
<b>simulates</b>	imitates or recreates an experience artificially	Your brain simulates the experience as if you were living it yourself.
<b>neural coupling</b>	when two brains synchronise through shared storytelling	Neural coupling explains why stories are more memorable than facts.

Word / Phrase	Definition	Example Sentence
<b>mental image</b>	a picture created in your mind by imagination	A good story creates a vivid mental image that stays with you.
<b>empathy</b>	the ability to understand and share someone else's feelings	Stories create empathy by letting us feel what characters feel.
<b>bonding</b>	the process of forming a close connection with someone	Storytelling releases oxytocin, the hormone linked to bonding.
<b>condition</b>	the state of human existence with all its experiences	Fiction deepens our understanding of the human condition.
<b>overload</b>	too much of something, causing stress or confusion	In an age of information overload, stories cut through the noise.
<b>persuasive</b>	able to convince people to believe or do something	Personal stories are far more persuasive than simple statements.
<b>elements</b>	essential parts or components of something	Great stories share several key elements: character, conflict, change.
<b>protagonist</b>	the main character in a story, film, or novel	Every great story needs a protagonist the audience cares about.
<b>resonates</b>	creates a feeling of shared understanding or emotional connection	This storytelling pattern resonates deeply across all cultures.

## 4 Useful Collocations

tell a story · once upon a time · main character · plot twist · happy ending · life story · personal experience · fairy tale · oral tradition · narrative structure · creative writing · character development · compelling narrative · real-life story · share an experience · come alive

## 5 Reading Comprehension

### 1. How long have humans been telling stories?

- a) About 5,000 years
- b) About 10,000 years
- c) At least 100,000 years ✓**
- d) About 1 million years

**2. What happens in your brain when you hear a story?**

- a) Only the language area activates
- b) Multiple brain regions light up, simulating the experience ✓**
- c) The brain shuts down to conserve energy
- d) Only the visual area activates

**3. How much more memorable are stories compared to facts alone?**

- a) About 3 times
- b) About 10 times
- c) About 22 times ✓**
- d) About 100 times

**4. How do stories create empathy?**

- a) By teaching grammar rules
- b) By releasing oxytocin and making us feel what characters feel ✓**
- c) By providing historical dates
- d) By showing us pictures

**5. Why is storytelling valuable in job interviews?**

- a) Because interviewers love fiction
- b) Because a specific story proves a claim more persuasively than a statement ✓**
- c) Because you should always lie in interviews
- d) Because facts are not allowed in interviews

**6. What are the three essential elements of a great story?**

- a) Beginning, middle, end
- b) Protagonist, conflict, transformation ✓**
- c) Hero, villain, treasure
- d) Setting, dialogue, humour

**6 Vocabulary Exercise — Fill in the Blanks**

Complete the sentences with the correct word from the box:

**empathy · foundation · simulates · persuasive · protagonist · resonates · overload · elements**

1. Stories are the \_\_\_\_\_ of human civilisation — we have told them for 100,000 years.
2. When you hear a story, your brain \_\_\_\_\_ the experience as if you were living it.

3. Fiction creates \_\_\_\_\_ by helping us understand and share other people's feelings.
4. A specific personal story is far more \_\_\_\_\_ than a general statement.
5. Every great story needs a \_\_\_\_\_ — a main character the audience cares about.
6. The structure of challenge and transformation \_\_\_\_\_ deeply across all cultures.
7. In an age of information \_\_\_\_\_, stories are the most effective way to communicate.
8. Character, conflict, and transformation are the three essential \_\_\_\_\_ of a great story.

## 7 Answer Key

### ■ Vocabulary Exercise Answers

1. foundation
2. simulates
3. empathy
4. persuasive
5. protagonist
6. resonates
7. overload
8. elements

## 8 Speaking & Writing Tasks

### ■ ■ Speaking Task: Discussion

Discuss these questions with a partner or your teacher:

- What is the most powerful story you have ever heard? Why did it affect you?
- Do you think stories can change the world? Can you think of an example?
- Are you a good storyteller? What makes someone good at telling stories?
- Do you prefer true stories or fiction? Why?

### ■ Useful Phrases for Telling Personal Stories

- **Let me tell you about the time** I got completely lost in a foreign city.
- **What happened was** I missed my train and had to spend the night at the station.
- **The most surprising part was** that the stranger who helped me became a close friend.
- **Looking back,** I realise that experience taught me more than any class ever did.
- **The reason this story matters to me is** that it changed the way I see the world.

 **Writing Task: A Story That Changed Me**

Write a paragraph (120–160 words) about this topic:

**"Tell a personal story about an experience that changed you. What happened? What did you learn? How are you different because of it?"**

Use the story structure from this lesson: set the scene, describe the challenge, and explain how you were changed. Make it personal and specific.