

Storytelling for Advocacy

Why Tell Stories?

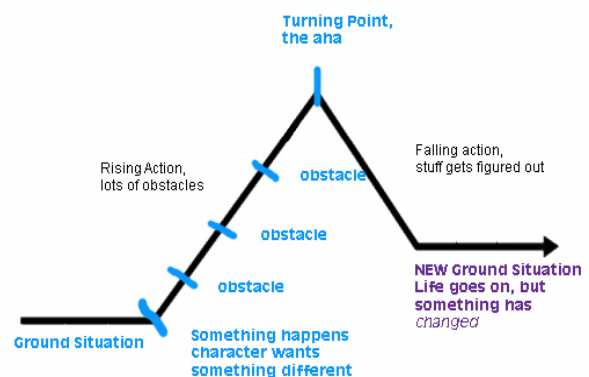
Our brains are wired to remember stories. For most of human history, stories were the main way to pass along knowledge. As a result, our brains are set up to not just hear or listen to stories but to **experience** them along with the storyteller. Princeton University researcher, Uri Hasson,¹ found that, “by simply telling a story, the [teller] could plant ideas, thoughts and emotions into the listeners’ brains.”

Stories help elected officials do their job. Elected officials want to hear from their constituents so that they know how their decisions impact real people in real places. They pay attention to which programs work in their communities and which ones don’t. Sharing stories will help your elected official understand how your program is changing and improving lives.

The Story Arc

There can be a difference between telling a story and a telling *memorable* story. Great storytellers often follow the classic story arc below. The story arc (think fairytales) will help you to keep your story familiar, concise and clearly leading to the point you want to share.

1. **Introduce the protagonist** (which might be you).
What makes the protagonist relevant and relatable to the audience?
2. **Inciting incident**- *What creates the conflict in the life of the protagonist? What spurs them to action?*
1. **Rising Action**- *What are the complications and barriers that result from this conflict?*
2. **Climax/ Turning Point**- *What changes the direction from the complications and barriers?*
3. **Falling Action**- *What happens when that direction is changed?*
4. **Resolution**- *What has the protagonist gained or learned? What can others learn from this story?*

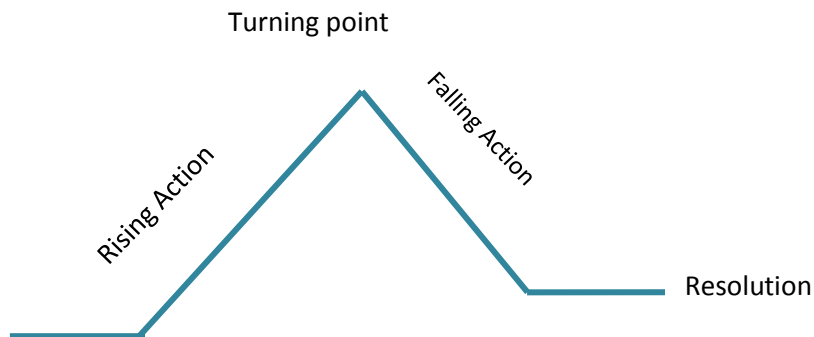


Storytelling Tips from the Network’s Resident Ambassadors

1. **Choose one story to tell.** Advocacy visits are short and you may only have a few minutes to tell your story. Pick one story, free of tangents, that is clear and concise.
2. **Focus on the personal aspects** of your story by sharing one to two details to make it unique and memorable. Elected officials and their staff hear countless stories during a day and details will help them remember you.
3. **Connect your individual story to your larger ask** by sharing a piece of data about the bigger issue it represents. But, this is the icing on the cake. The real purpose of your story is to make your audience care about your issue as much as you do.
4. **Take a deep breath.** It’s okay to be nervous. Just take a deep breath, stay calm, be yourself and speak from the heart.

¹ For more information on the Princeton study, visit: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2922522/>.

Storytelling Worksheet



Unique and relatable detail:

One piece of data to connect to the bigger story:

- 1) **Who is the protagonist?**
(Hint- it's a person, not an organization, house or community).

- 2) **Where and when** is the protagonist at the beginning of the story?

- 3) **Inciting incident:** What creates the conflict?

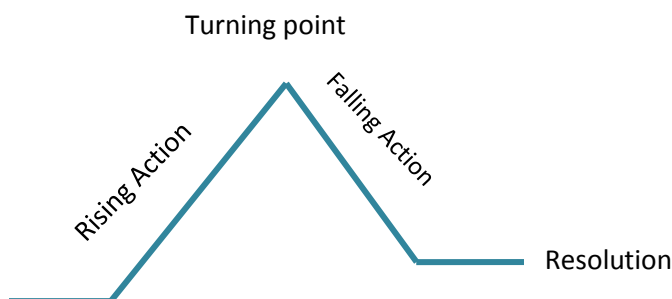
- 4) **Rising Action:** What are the complications and barriers that result from the conflict?

- 5) **Climax/ Turning Point:** What changes the direction for the protagonist?

- 6) **Falling Action:** How does the turning point begin to change the protagonist's life?

- 7) **Resolution:** What has the protagonist gained or learned at the end of the story?

Storytelling Worksheet (SAMPLE)



Unique and relatable detail:

I was pregnant and wanting a stable home for my family.

One piece of data:

HOME and CDBG are the most common sources of funding for affordable homeownership opportunities.

- 1) **Who is the protagonist?** (Hint- it's a person, not an organization, house or community)
Myself (Jackie)
- 2) **Where and when** is the protagonist at the beginning of the story?
I was pregnant during my junior year of college and living with my aunt in her small apartment in Minneapolis.
- 3) **Inciting incident:** What creates the conflict?
But, due to my aunt's cultural beliefs, I wouldn't be able to continue living with her after my baby was born. I moved onto campus and continued my studies. By that time, I was desperately seeking a place to live before my daughter was born.
- 4) **Rising Action:** What are the complications and barriers that result from the conflict?
When I started looking for apartments, I couldn't find anything that I could afford. I was worried about finding a job and making sure that I had enough resources to pay my rent—especially around the birth.
- 5) **Climax/ Turning Point:** What changes the direction for the protagonist?
I happened to meet a CLT homeowner at a play-place who told me about the City of Lakes CLT. She encouraged me to learn more about their program and to see if I could qualify for a home. It took me a year to build credit and save for a down payment, but at the end, I was able to purchase a 1.5 story home in North Minneapolis.
- 6) **Falling Action:** How does the turning point begin to change the protagonist's life?
I became a true advocate for myself and my soon-to-be family. I became aware of available resources and was proud to know that my country could offer an opportunity for a better future for me and my family.
- 7) **Resolution:** What has the protagonist gained or learned at the end of the story?
That is why it is important that congress to provide sufficient funding for the HOME and CDBG programs—two of the main sources of funding for affordable homeownership opportunities across the country. Homeownership the primary way to build healthy and productive society members and I want as many people as possible to have access to the same opportunity that I did.