



Empowered communications for a better world.

Authentic Storytelling for Greater Impact

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Session Goals

- Understand why the brain loves stories
- Identify the characteristics of authentic stories
- Understand story structure
- Flex your storytelling muscles
- Identify powerful, authentic story ideas and what medium to use

Group Commitment

- Participate and allow others to participate
- No bad questions or ideas in this session; we're here to learn!
- Have fun!!

Introduction

- Ensemble Media empowers clients to improve communications through strategy, storytelling and instructional tools



- I am story-obsessed!

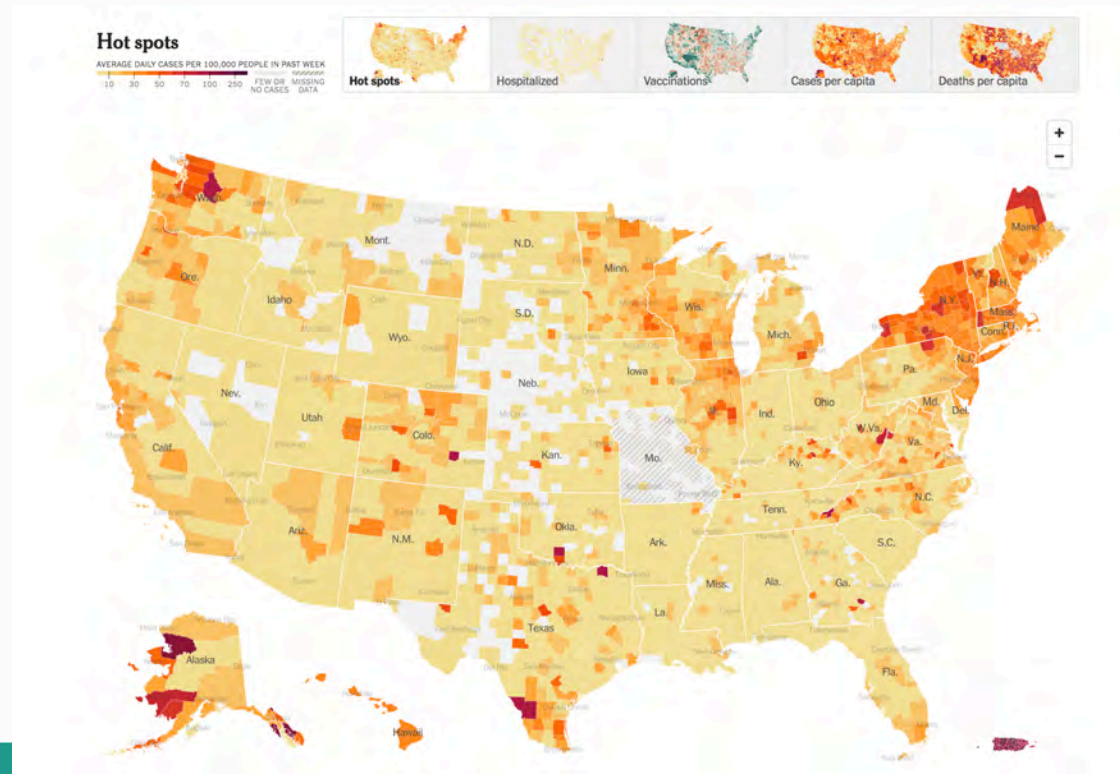
Hot Potato Introductions



What's your
communications
superpower?

Why do we tell stories?

- ✓ Engage your audience—grab their attention and ensure they are really listening to you
- ✓ Bring facts and data to life, or explain complex ideas and solutions in a way that is easy to understand and remember



Why do we tell stories?

- ✓ Bridge cultural gaps and language barriers
- ✓ Move your audience emotionally, so they connect to your call for action

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.
-- Maya Angelou

Why do we tell stories?

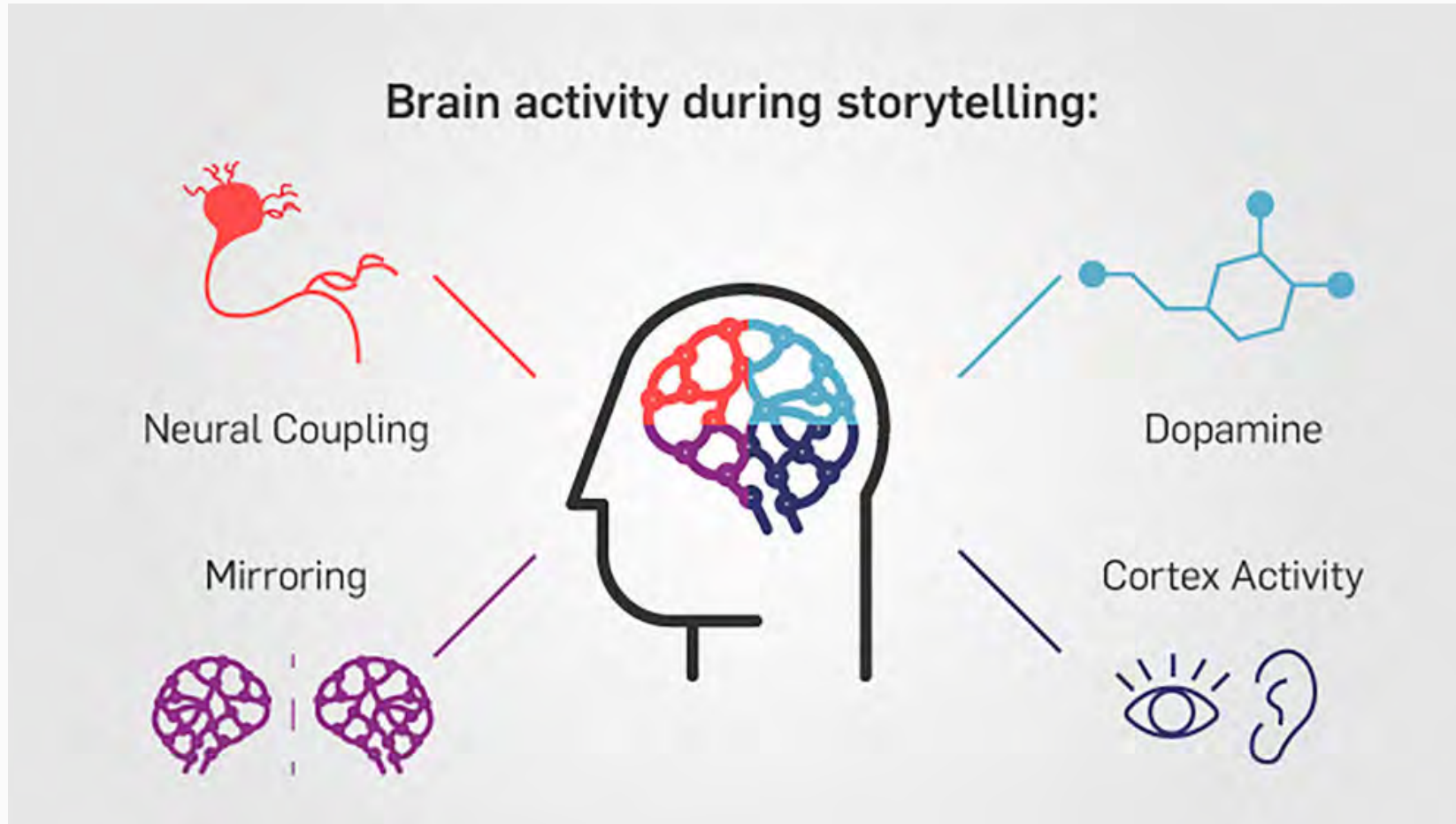
- ✓ Achieve greater results—gain more donations, more support, and more awareness for your cause
- ✓ If you don't tell your story, someone else will—and their version may lack nuance, miss the mark, or cause a PR headache.

Science: Why our brains love authentic stories

Listening to a story activates parts in the brain that allow the listener to **embody the story** and their own ideas and creates neural coupling, where the brain activities sync up and release the feel-good hormone **dopamine**. Thanks to this, we feel **closer** to one another and the story becomes **easier to remember with greater accuracy**.

Source: <https://scaleupnation.com/post/storytelling-for-impact/>

Science: Why our brains love authentic stories



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Super glue for the brain!

What are authentic stories?

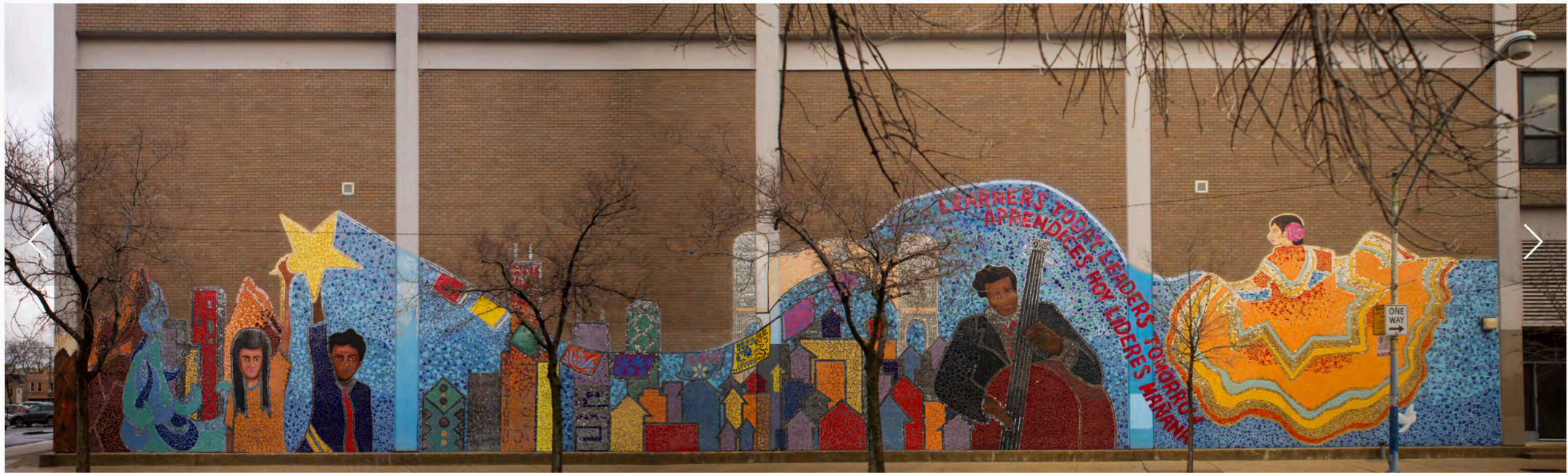
They reflect our values, beliefs, and help express our needs.

They possess a vein of Truth and deliver Meaning.



What are authentic stories?

They foster Connection.



What are characteristics of authentic stories?

Relatable

Showing,
illustrating

Not all
positive

Believable

Imperfect

Original

Evoke trust

Detailed

Vulnerability

Specific



Photo: Naoko Kawamura/Ashi Shimbun, via AP

What isn't an authentic story?

Perfection

Telling,
summarizing

Generalities
and
vagueness

A voice
from the
sidelines



Quick Exercise: Personal example of tell vs. show

(TELL) *We crossed the field, and afterwards found out it had landmines.*

(SHOW)

There was an eerie silence as we walked across the soccer field. The driver had followed us everywhere else that afternoon--but not this time. Lugging our gear, we began signaling him to come over to help, but he just stood, watching.

We finally made it across, huffing and puffing. "Why couldn't you help us?" I demanded. "That was a big field!" Speaking softly, he answered, "We were afraid the truck would set off the landmines."

Quick Exercise – 5 minutes

1. Pair up with the person to your right.
2. Together, choose an image, and invent a two-sentence story about the image that is relatable, emotional, and authentic.



Photo: Hugo Infante/Government of Chile, via AP



YOU as the Authentic Story Sleuth

Where and how can you find authentic stories in your work?

YOU as the Authentic Story Sleuth

- Mine stories from stakeholders--what changed or improved as a result of their participation in a project, a training, an event?
- Capture "Aha!" moments when they happen
- Reports are about people; what stories lie within the stats? Deconstruct the data!
- Seek out enthusiasm and transformation—there are stories there!

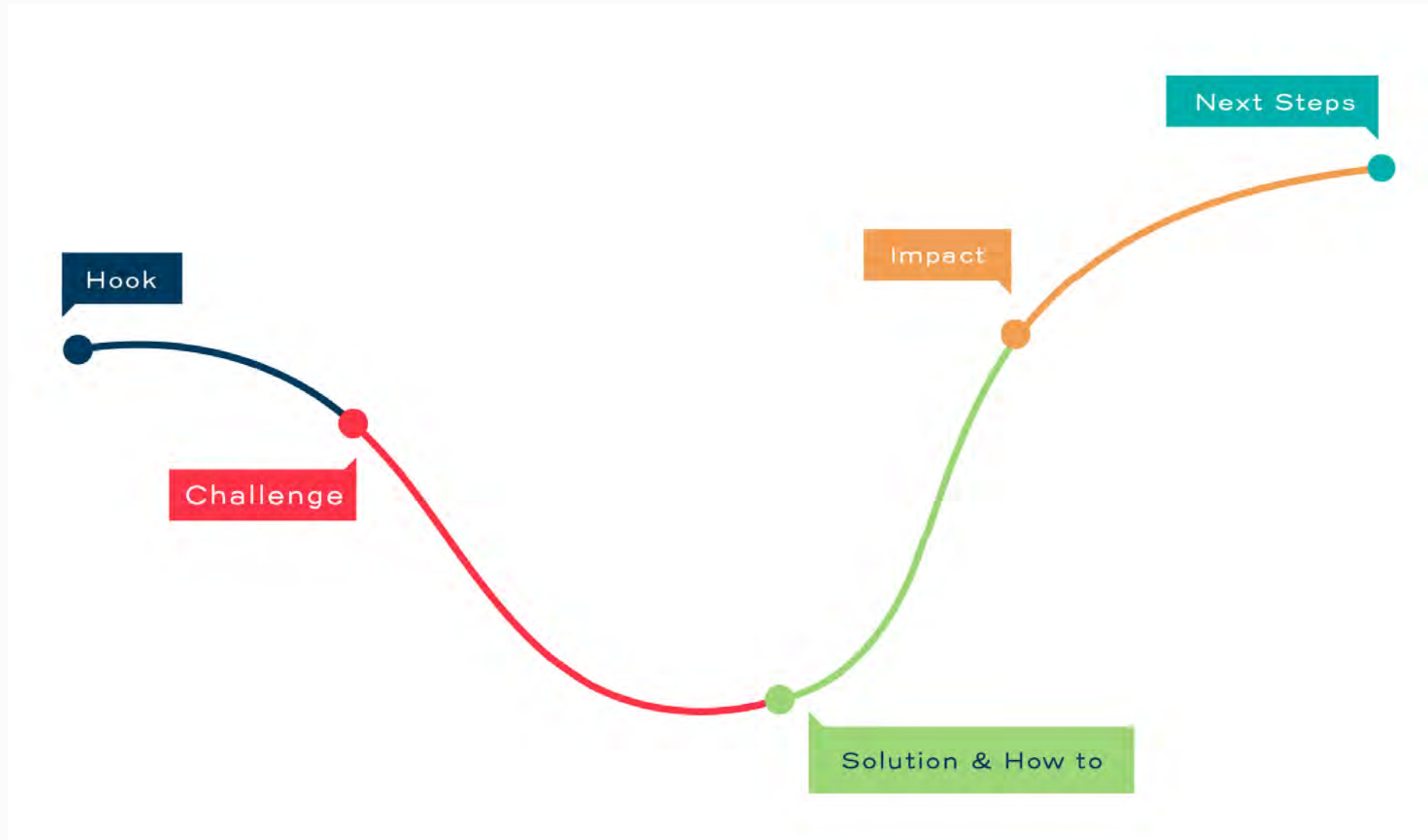
Authentic storytelling obstacles

“We have to be careful about our funder—let’s stick to report language, it’s safer.”

“We don’t really have the time to figure this out.”

“Storytelling isn’t part of our deliverables.”

The Elements of a Powerful Story



INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE:

Authentic Story Challenge

Take 10 minutes and using the worksheet, jot down the “bones” of an authentic story for your school/district/system.

❖ Story structure

- Who is the penultimate teller of this story?
- What's the hook? How are you drawing people in?
- What's the challenge? And solution?
- What transformation or impact occurs?

Unpack it—consider:

- ❖ Why **this** particular story?
- ❖ Who is the audience and why should they care?
- ❖ What emotion(s) does this story evoke?
- ❖ What details are useful and add flavor?
- ❖ What action does this story inspire?

How will you share it?

Stories are literally all around us:

Images, poems, videos, animation, graphics, data visualizations, podcasts, theatre, music, performance art.

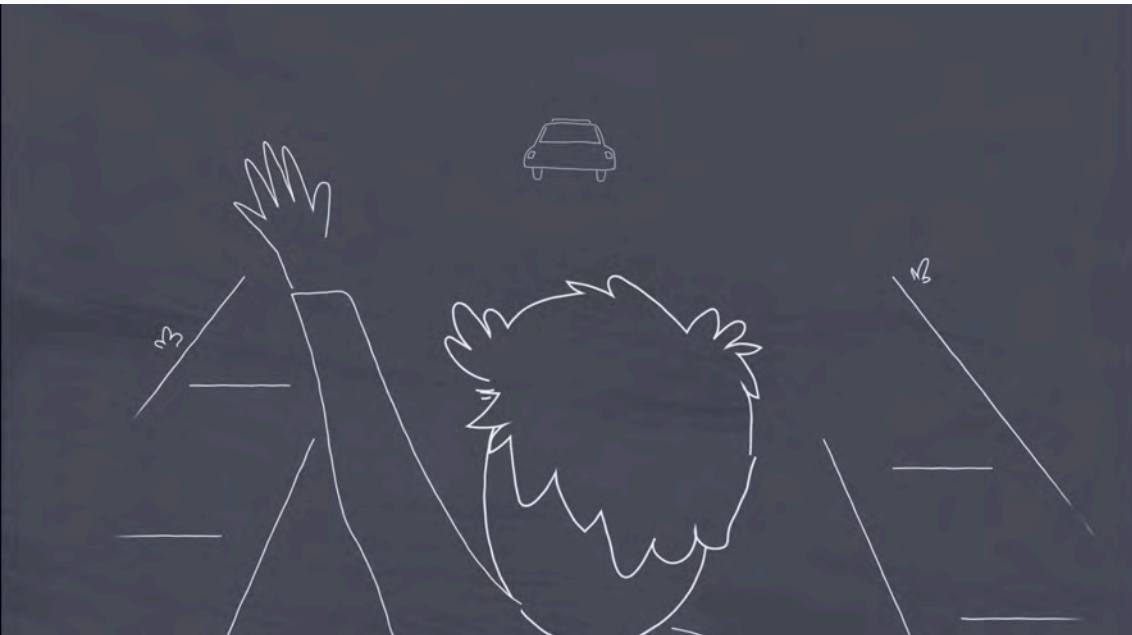
Graffiti, billboards, virtual reality, social media...



Finding the right medium for your story

How to get great results?

Let the **story** determine the medium, not vice versa.



You can watch Amar's story here:
<https://vimeo.com/451658924>

Finding the right medium for your story

- Who is the most important audience? How can they easily engage with this story?
- Are there cultural, accessibility, language, or safety factors to consider?
- What challenges face your audience (e.g. boredom, guilt, apathy, fatigue)?
- Is it time to break the mold and try something new?

Go forth, storytellers! Remember:

- Stories connect us! Our brains say so.
- When told authentically, they have real impact.
- Develop your story idea first, *then* choose the medium.



Q&A

THANK YOU!!!!!!

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<https://ensemble-media.com/>

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