



THE PANIC SQUAD
FRESH, CLEAN, FUNNY - IMPROV COMEDY ON A MISSION!

The Story Spine

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The Story Spine is a tool used by improv actors, writers and other communicators to create great stories. It was originated by Kenn Adams, who writes about the story spine in his book, *How to Improvise a Full-length Play – The Art of Spontaneous Theater*.ⁱ

This is the backbone of any film, novel, play or story. Pixar uses and teaches the Story Spine method, as do Disney and Lucas Films. It is the basic framework for well-constructed stories.

The structure includes a beginning that establishes a routine, an event that breaks the routine, a middle that shows the consequences of having broken the routine, a climax that sets the resolution to the story in motion, and the finally, the resolution. It goes like this:

Once upon a time...
Every day...
But, one day...
Because of that...
Because of that...
Because of that...
Until, finally...
And, ever since then...

This is how each of the elements add to the story:

The Beginning that establishes the routine: Once upon a time... Every day...

The Event that breaks the routine: But, one day...

The Middle that shows the consequences of having broken the routine:
Because of that... Because of that... Because of that...

The Climax that sets the resolution to the story in motion: Until, finally...

The Resolution: And, ever since then...

Church leaders can use the Story Spine to structure sermons, tell stories, or coach others on how to give a testimony.

Here is Disney's "Cars" Movie using the Story Spine:

Once upon a time...There a hot young rookie racer named Lightning McQueen.
Every day...He relied on his own ability to win and refused help from others.
But, one day...He got lost and ended up in Radiator Springs.
Because of that...He had to fix the highway he had torn up.
Because of that...He met new friends who helped each other and helped him.
Because of that...He learned the value of friendship and teamwork over ego.
Until, finally...He got back to the big race and won using his newfound skills and relationships.
And, ever since then...He has always put his friends over winning.

Here is the Gospel using the Story Spine:

Once upon a time...God created mankind in Adam and Eve.
Every day...They walked and talked in perfect relationship with God in Eden.
But, one day...They sinned.
Because of that...Their perfect relationship with God was broken
Because of that...Mankind has struggled with sin
Because of that... God created the Law and his people offered sacrifices for atonement.
Until, finally...God sent his son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for all mankind.
And, ever since then...Whoever believes in Jesus Christ has a restored relationship with God, victory over sin, and will reign with Christ in Heaven one day.

Now think of your own testimony or story. Structure it using the Story Spine framework. Include just one or two sentences for each line. Does it resonate with you?

This is a proven structure to ensure your story will capture the attention of your readers or listeners. The Story Spine boils down the details of your story into the essential elements. You can add more information and details later, but beginning with the Story Spine ensures you will be able to draw your audience in and deliver impact.

ⁱ How to Improvize a Full-Length Play - The Art of Spontaneous Theater
Kenn Adams - Allworth Press 2007