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Tool: Describing conflict and characters of your story

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What can I do with this tool?

This tool helps you understand and identify two crucial elements for an effective story: conflict and characters. It is a valuable tool to help you develop your story techniques by brainstorming with your colleagues about conflicts and characters.

For whom is this tool meant?

For professionals who help implement international agreements on biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development

What knowledge is presumed for using this tool?

To effectively use this tool, it is required to understand Key subjects 1 - 4 of the course Storytelling on Frogleaps.org. You need to know the subject of your story, the target audience and the key point.

When can I use it?

Storytelling is most effective if you first truly understand your target audiences and have a clear picture of what you want to achieve. Investing time and energy in preparation will pay off in a later stage! Stories are a crucial means to communicate messages about nature conservation. The course Storytelling helps you to use stories for: getting attention and informing and changing behavior for conservation action.

How can I describe the conflict & characters of my story?

Brainstorm exercises

The best way to get working material for your conservation story, is to brainstorm with your colleagues. Look for a quiet place with a flip chart. You need markers. You will find the exercises below explained on the following pages.

Exercise 1   Define the conflict and resolution of your story.

Exercise 2   Describe the psychological and physical traits of the characters of your story.

Frogleap!   Now you have described your story's conflict and characters, you can further shape your story. In the next topics, you will practice more technique of storytelling.

Brainstorm exercise 1: What is the conflict of my story?

Explain your colleagues why a story must have a conflict:

Stories are characterized by conflict, which is overcome by the hero in the story. Humans like balance. But balance gets boring. Imagine a story about a main character who is doing great. His life is on track. He is having fun. He falls in love and marries. His wife is beautiful and smart. He gets two wonderful kids, a boy and a girl. He has a fantastic job. He gets promoted every year and is loved by his community. He lives a happy life and dies peacefully in his sleep at the age of ninety. End of story.

Who will be interested in this story? Nobody! What key point is hidden in these sequence of events? None!

To get us interested, the main character must struggle to reach his goal. The balance must be disturbed by a conflict. You could also call it a moral dilemma –a struggle between good and evil.

Divide the flip chart in two parts. Describe together the conflict of your story and the resolution. Try to be concise..

Conflict of my story	Resolution of the conflict

Examples of conflicts of stories	Resolution of the conflict
Poachers threaten wildlife	By listening one identifies how to help poachers and by helping them help wildlife
Ignorant villagers engage in illegal logging and wildlife trade	Reminding villagers of their Buddhist values motivates for positive action
Access to clean water	Reminding women of health hazards motivates for positive action
Displacement of communities because of the construction of a dam	Showing respect for communities is a basis to engage them to help themselves
Consumerism versus working on resilient communities	Demonstrating that you do not have to follow the consumerism model
Forest conservation versus concrete benefits for local communities	Agree on a logging moratorium for 10 years and in return introduce step by step new livelihoods for communities
Habits of the forest departments versus habits of local communities	Giving communities the lead in co-management provides results for both the department and the communities

Brainstorm exercise 2: Who are the characters of my story?

Look at your definition of conflict and resolution and the discuss together and fill in the characters of your story: who is the **hero** of the story? And who is the **adversary**? Explain to your colleagues:

A character is a person or an animal in a story. Main characters have important roles. They have specific physical and psychological traits. A story needs at least a hero and an adversary. The hero represents good, the bad guy stands for evil. The world of humans is made of shadows and lights. None of us are only good, we all have our weak points, we all have our personal battles to fight.

A good story shows us we are human, having strong and weak points, so we can identify with it. In order to get personally involved with a story, the listener must be able to identify with both the hero and the conflict.

Then together describe your main characters in detail. You don't have to mention all traits in the final story, because the listener will fill in the blanks. But it helps you give life to the story, the traits of the character also show through their actions and relations.

- What are their physical traits? Examples of physical traits are: tall-short, strong-weak, fat-thin, blue or brown eyes, black or blond hair, young or old.
- What are their psychological traits? Examples of psychological traits are proud, ambitious, smart, honest, shy, witty, introvert or bold.

Hero: ………….	
Physical traits	Psychological traits

Adversary: ………….	
Physical traits	Psychological traits

Example from our Story of Rezvin:

Hero: Rezvin	
Physical traits	Psychological traits
She is young, has black hair, smiles a lot and has good looks	She is very accurate and shows an enormous willingness to learn. Rezvin is cheerful, extrovert and makes easy contact with the villagers living in the Sundarbans.