

SOUNDBITES ACTIVITY #1

STORYTELLING

SEVEN SENTENCE STORY

SET-UP:

GUIDING QUESTION: What are the essential elements of a story?

TOOLS:

- Something to write with and something to write on
- The ability to listen to an online audio story

VOCABULARY:

- **Story structure:** How a story is organized, or the basic framework of a story.
- **Characters:** The individuals that a story is about.
- **Setting:** The location (time and place) of the action in a story.
- **Plot:** The sequence of events that make up a story.
- **Conflict:** A challenge or problem that drives the action of the story.
- **Resolution:** The part of the story's plot where the main problem is worked out.
- **Fiction:** A type of story that is written about imaginary characters and events.
- **Non-fiction:** A type of story that is written about real people, real events, and facts.

INTRODUCTION:

For as long as anyone can remember, humans have been telling stories. Even before the invention of writing, we passed down stories orally. We're drawn to stories in part because they are predictable. Stories take on recognizable patterns, and we find comfort and meaning in those patterns. In fact, we're so connected to these patterns that [we sometimes see stories even when they're not there.](#)

Every story has a **structure**, or a framework for how the story is organized. Structure is what helps us turn an idea, or a topic, or a list, or a rant, into a *story*. A story's structure is its recognizable pattern. The **Seven Sentence Story** is a writing tool we can use to write our own stories using a common story structure that includes the classic elements of a great story: characters, setting, plot, conflict, and resolution.

You'll find the Seven Sentence Story tool on the next page.

THE SEVEN SENTENCE STORY

- 1. Once upon a time...**
- 2. And every day...**
- 3. Until one day...**
- 4. And because of this...**
- 5. And because of that...**
- 6. Until finally...**
- 7. And ever since that day...**

EXAMPLE:

Once upon a time there was a robot named Wall-E who lived alone on Earth. And every day he picked up trash. Until one day a ship landed with another robot named Eve. And because of this, the ship returned and picked up Eve and Wall-E. And because of that, Wall-E and Eve convinced the humans on the ship that it was safe to return to Earth. Until finally the ship returned to Earth. And ever since that day, they all lived happily on Earth.

The Seven Sentence Story is adapted from an improv exercise called the Story Spine that Kenn Adams says he invented in 1991. He writes: "When stripped down to the Story Spine, [stories] lose many of their characters and much of what makes them so brilliant and memorable. That's because the Story Spine is not the story, it's the spine. It's nothing but the bare-boned structure upon which the story is built. And, that's what makes it such a powerful tool. It allows you, as a writer, to look at your story at its structural core and to ensure that the basic building blocks are all in the right place."

Source: ['Back to the Story Spine,' Aerogramme Writers' Studio](#)

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CREATE YOUR OWN SEVEN SENTENCE STORY

We'll begin by writing our own short stories using the Seven Sentence Story structure.

Create your own Seven Sentence Story by completing each of the sentence prompts in order. You'll write one sentence per prompt. For example, you might write: "**Once upon a time** there was a frog. **And every day** the frog jumped from lily pad to lily pad..."

Your story can be fiction or non-fiction. Feel free to be silly and creative! Notice how each sentence builds on the one that comes before it.

THE SEVEN SENTENCE STORY

1. **Once upon a time...**
2. **And every day...**
3. **Until one day...**
4. **And because of this...**
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6. **Until finally...**
7. **And ever since that day...**

Write as many Seven Sentence Stories as you'd like! Now share your stories with someone in your household, and share them with us on social media using the hashtag **#RASoundBites!**

LISTEN AND APPLY THE SEVEN SENTENCE STORY

Listen to the short audio story "[Two Little Girls Explain the Worst Haircut Ever](#)" (3 minutes).

Now see if you can fit this story into the Seven Sentence Story structure. Make sure to only include information and details that you heard in the audio story. For example, for the first sentence, you might write: "*Once upon a time there were two little girls.*"

For an added challenge, do this activity with a friend or sibling, and then compare notes. How did your Seven Sentence Story differ from your partner's, even though they were based on the same audio story?

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LISTEN AND APPLY THE SEVEN SENTENCE STORY

Now choose a youth-produced story from the [RadioActive Youth Media 2019 podcast season](#) to listen to. (If you can't decide, try [How one transgender dancer challenges the Bollywood binary](#), a 2018 story by RadioActive's Keya Roy.)

Now try it again: see if you can fit the RadioActive story you chose into the Seven Sentence Story structure, using only the information you heard in the story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was fun about making up your own stories? What was challenging?
- What other stories in your life (favorite books, movies, video games, etc.) fit easily into the Seven Sentence Story structure?
- What are the essential elements of a story?
- What did you notice after fitting audio stories into the Seven Sentence Story structure? What can we learn about stories generally after doing this activity?
- All media messages, from fairytales to news stories, are constructed, meaning that someone created it, and made decisions about how to put it together. How does learning about story structure make you think differently about the media messages you encounter every day?
- How can you use the Seven Sentence Story structure on your own, in your own life?

MORE ABOUT STORY STRUCTURE

- [All Stories Are the Same](#) (John Yorke, The Atlantic, 2016)
- [Kurt Vonnegut graphed the world's most popular stories](#) (Ana Swanson, The Washington Post, 2015)
- [My Kingdom For Some Structure](#) (Rob Rosenthal, Transom, 2013)