

(Learning) ^{Story-telling}

Lessons from the Art of Story-telling for
Enhancing a Learning Experience

Legend goes, there was a King called Amarsakti, who ruled a kingdom in Southern India. He was a scholar and a powerful ruler.



King Amarshakti had three sons...



The three princes were, what we would today call 'reluctant learners'

Must study... blah, blah, your future... blah, blah, blah

What's the point...



Here we go again



I am forced!



Minister Sumati advised the king that instead of using conventional ways of teaching, they should find ways to wake the intelligence of the princes... and for this he suggested requesting the great teacher, Pandit Vishnu Sharma to tutor the princes.



Since verbal sciences have no final end,
Since life is short, and obstacles impend,
Let central facts be picked and firmly fixed,
As swans extract the milk with water mixed.



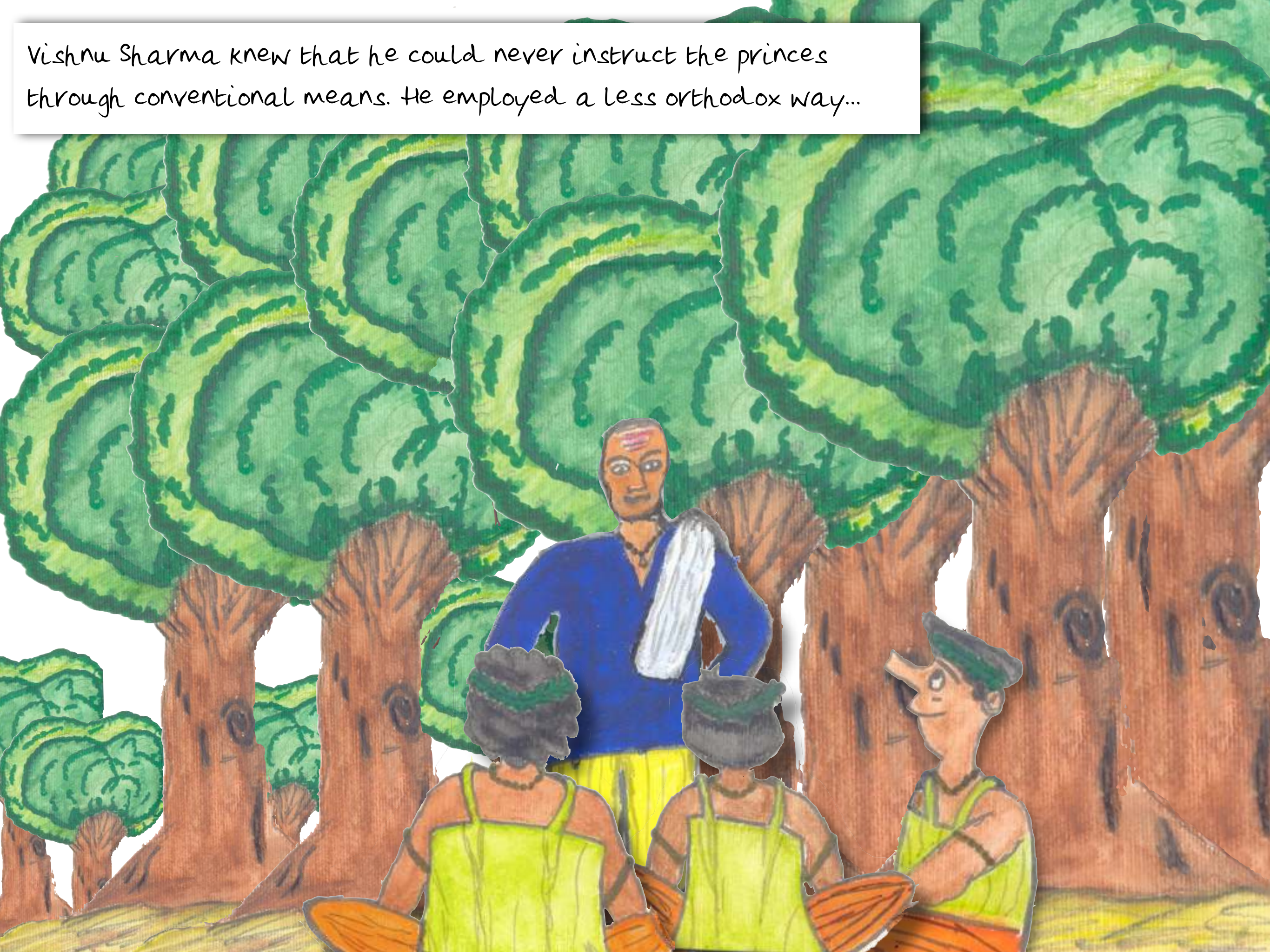
Holy Sir, as a favour to me you must make my three
princes masters of the art of practical life. In return, I
will bestow upon you a hundred land-grants.



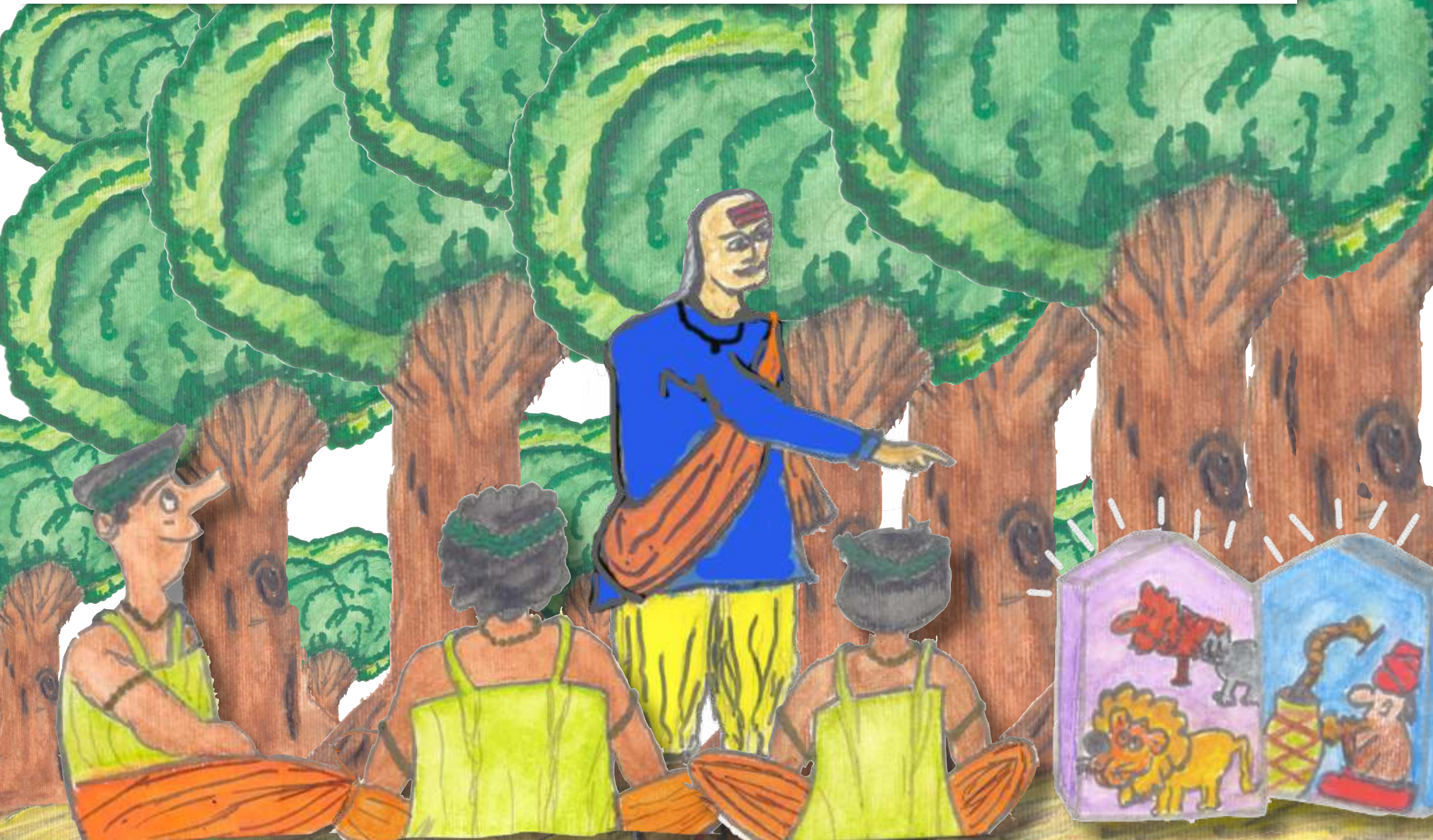
O King, listen. I am not a man to sell learning.
So keep your land-grants. But if I do not, in
six month's time, make the boys acquainted
with the art of intelligent living, I will give up
my own name.



Vishnu Sharma knew that he could never instruct the princes through conventional means. He employed a less orthodox way...



He weaved a succession of animal fables to help the princes understand the 'wise conduct of life'. The collection of 5 discourses is called 'PANCHTANTRA' - meaning the five (pancha), treatises (tantra).



Panchtantra stories are still loved by kids in India and the fables have been translated into many languages



Stories and narratives play a very important role in education

According to Marsha Rossiter and Carolyn Clark

- Stories help in sense-making
- Learners connect new knowledge with lived experience and weave it into existing narratives of meaning
- Bruner (1986) explains that a story develops the 'landscape of action' and the 'landscape of consciousness' (human intention).
- As audience we engage with both levels and enter into the minds of the characters and into the deeper meaning of the story.

- Stories can be instruments of information and transformation (Jackson 1995), taking the audience from the familiar to the unfamiliar.
- When one identifies with the character who has changed one can envision and embrace the possibility of change in oneself (Clark 2001).
- Stories make information rememberable because they involve us in the actions and intentions of the characters and demand active meaning making.
- Stories enable us to engage with new knowledge, broader perspective and expanded possibilities.

Harvard psychologist, Lawrence Kohlberg, who proposed a stage theory of moral thinking, used stories like this one, to test moral reasoning:



A woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was just one drug that might save her.



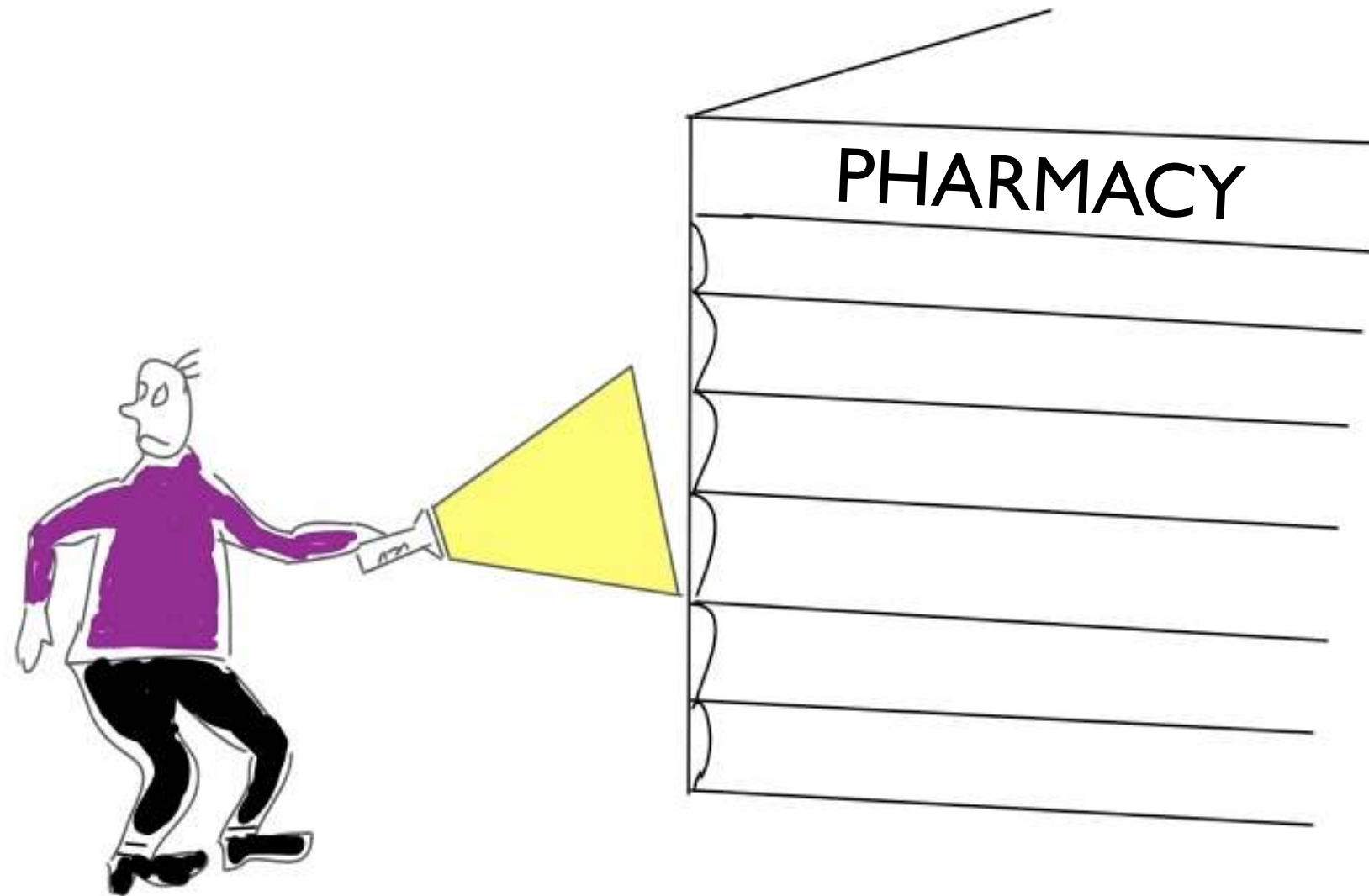
Only one pharmacist had that drug and he was charging ten times the normal price.

The sick woman's husband, Heinz, could arrange just half the amount.



He pleaded and argued with the pharmacist that his wife was dying and so could the pharmacist please lower the price or allow Heinz to pay later.

But the pharmacist refused.



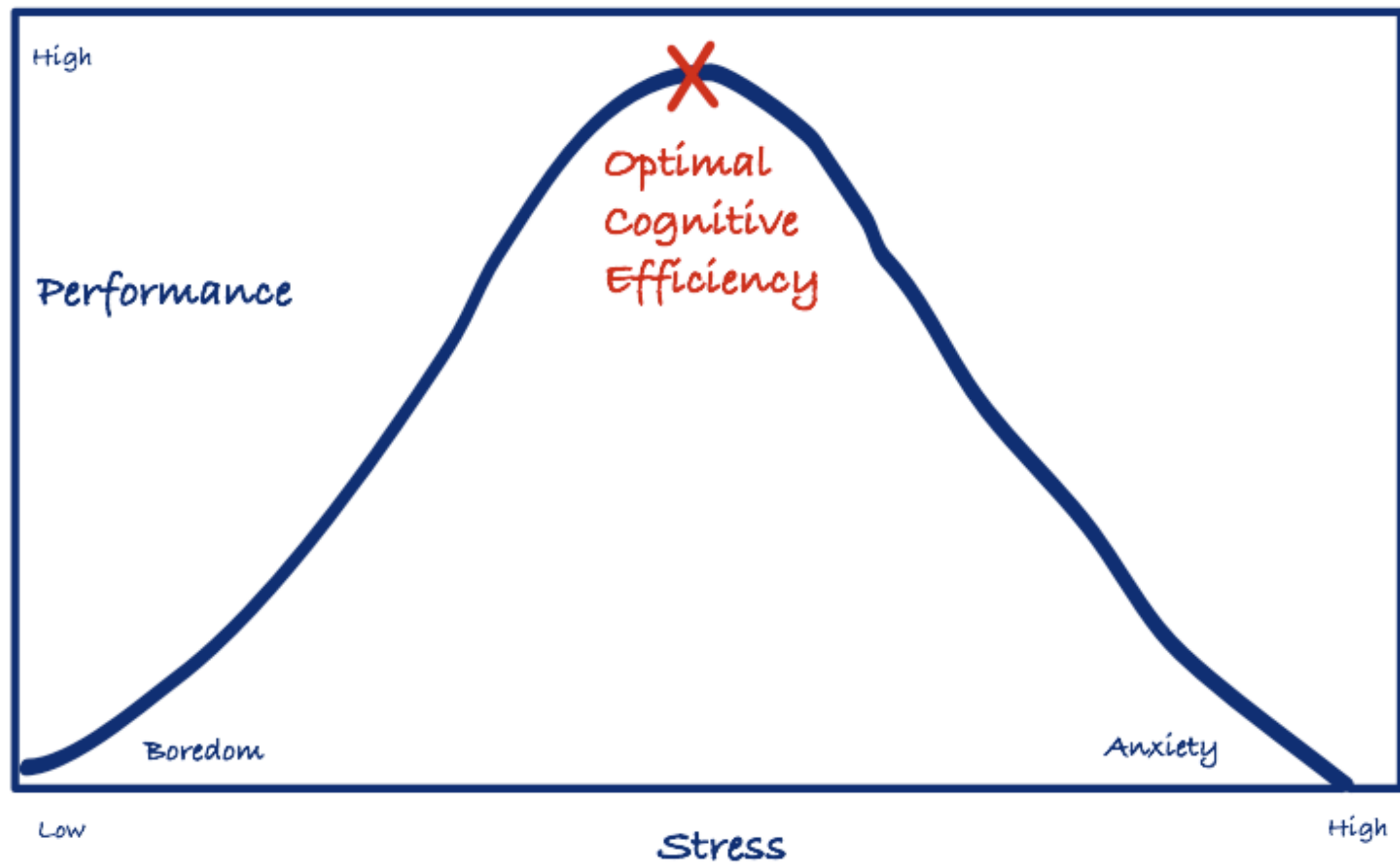
Heinz got desperate and that evening he stole the drug.

Should Heinz have stolen the drug?

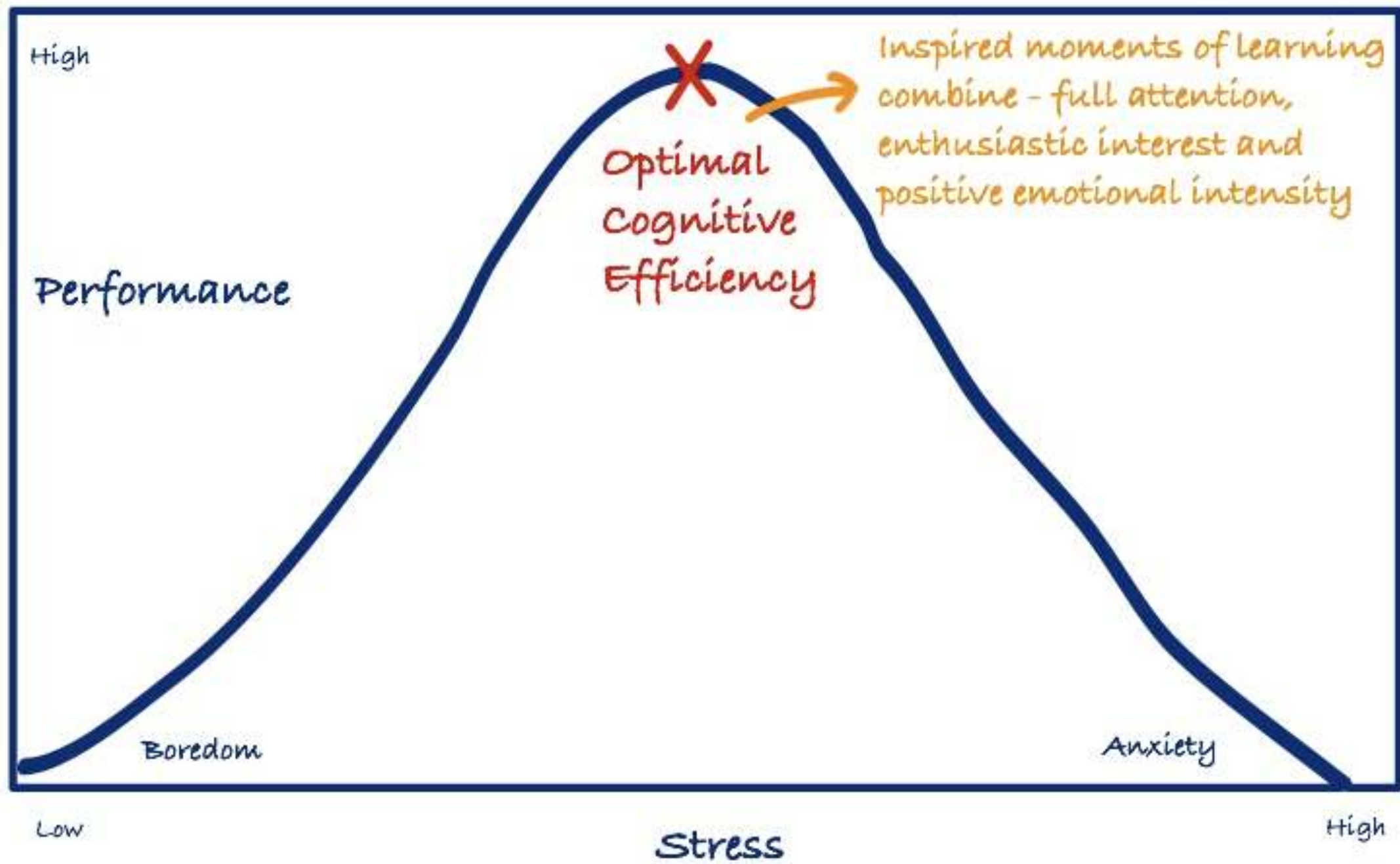
Should he be punished?

This story is very effective for further discussions on
thinking and moral reasoning

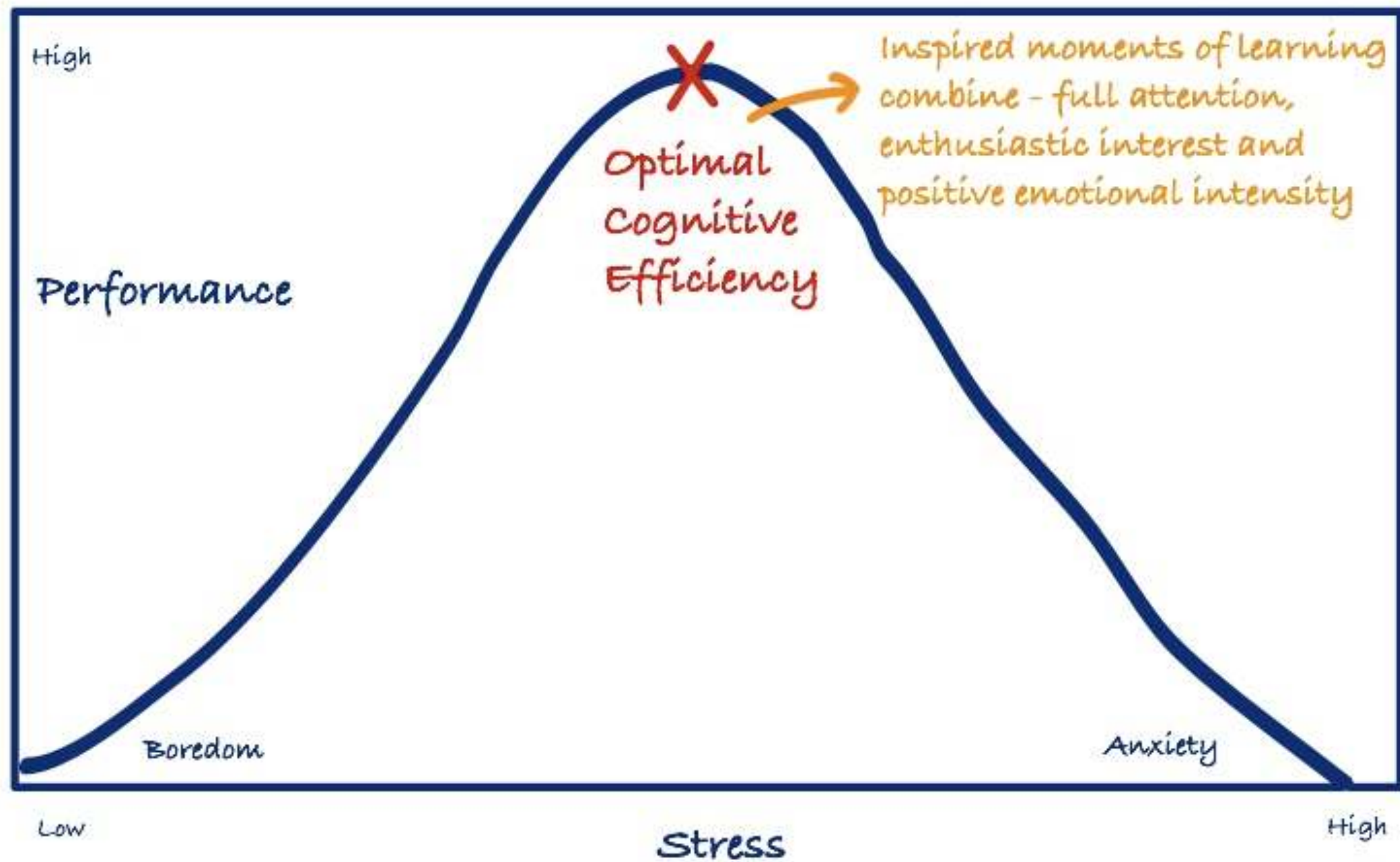
In his book 'Social Intelligence', author Daniel Goleman explains the impact of emotions on learning and performance...







Stories can play a major role in creating such
'inspired moments of learning'



What can teachers and parents learn from the art of storytelling, to make learning experiences highly engaging, meaningful and effective?

Let's look at some elements, that go into making of a good story, and can be used to enhance learning experiences

Elements of a Story that can Enhance a Learning Experience

1. Structure

2. Conflict (emotional sub-text)

3. Resolution

1. Structure

- Aristotle
- Gustav Freytag
- Joseph Campbell

2. Conflict

3. Resolution

- Persuasion - Ethos, Pathos, Logos
- The Rider, the Elephant, the Path

1. Structure

- Aristotle
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- Joseph Campbell

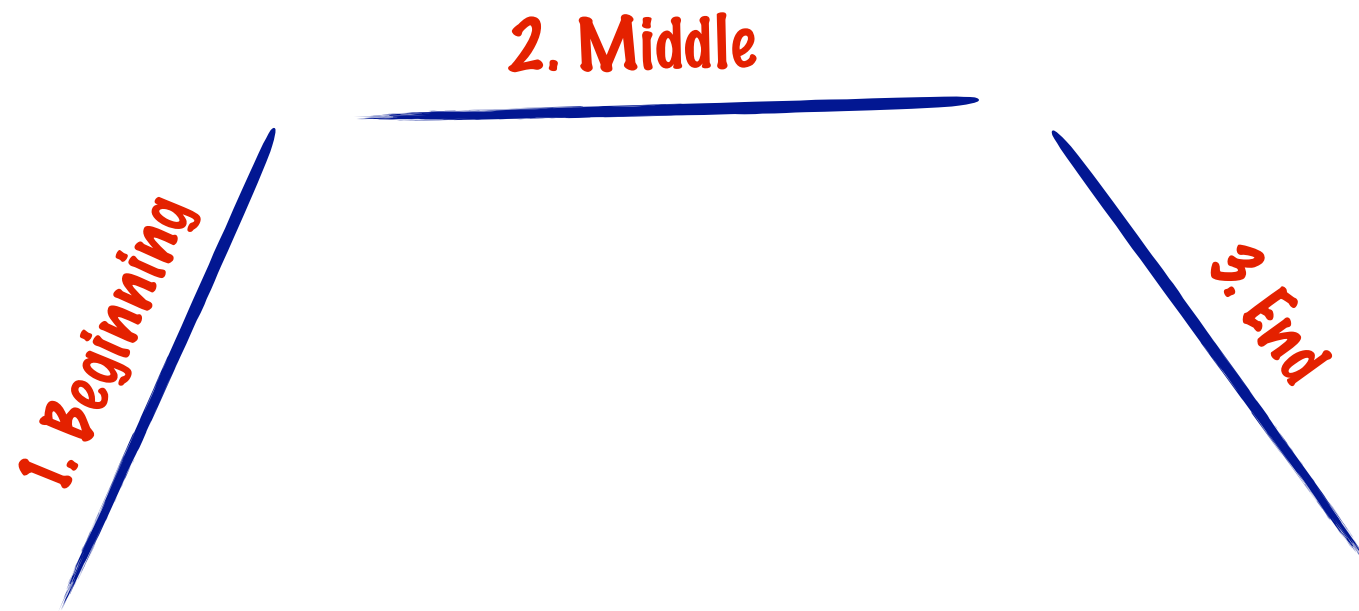
2. Conflict

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Aristotle suggested a Three-Act Structure for Drama, in his 'Poetics' (c. 335 BCE)



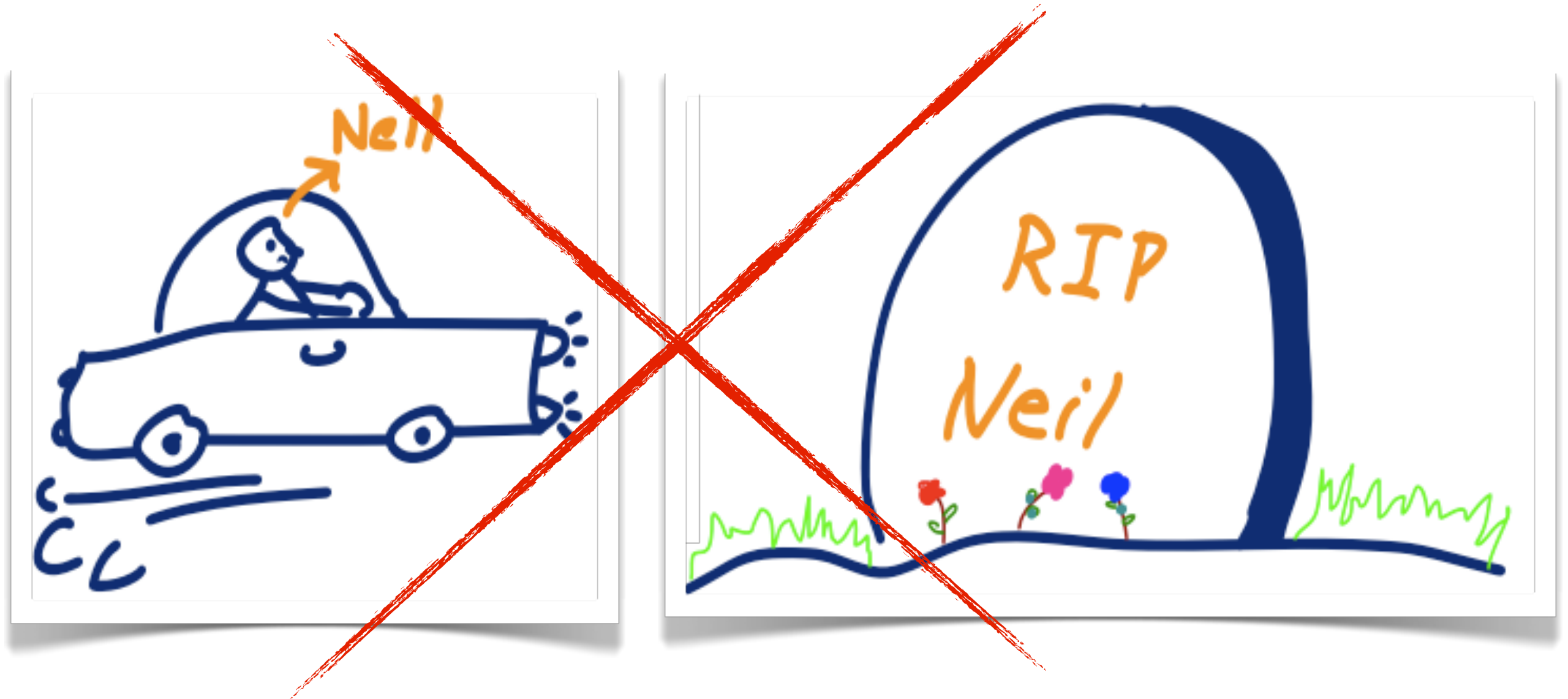


According to Aristotle, Mythos or Plot...

- is the sequence of events in a story
- events are causally related
- events can come as a surprise first, but the logic must be revealed later
- plot must arouse emotions of the audience

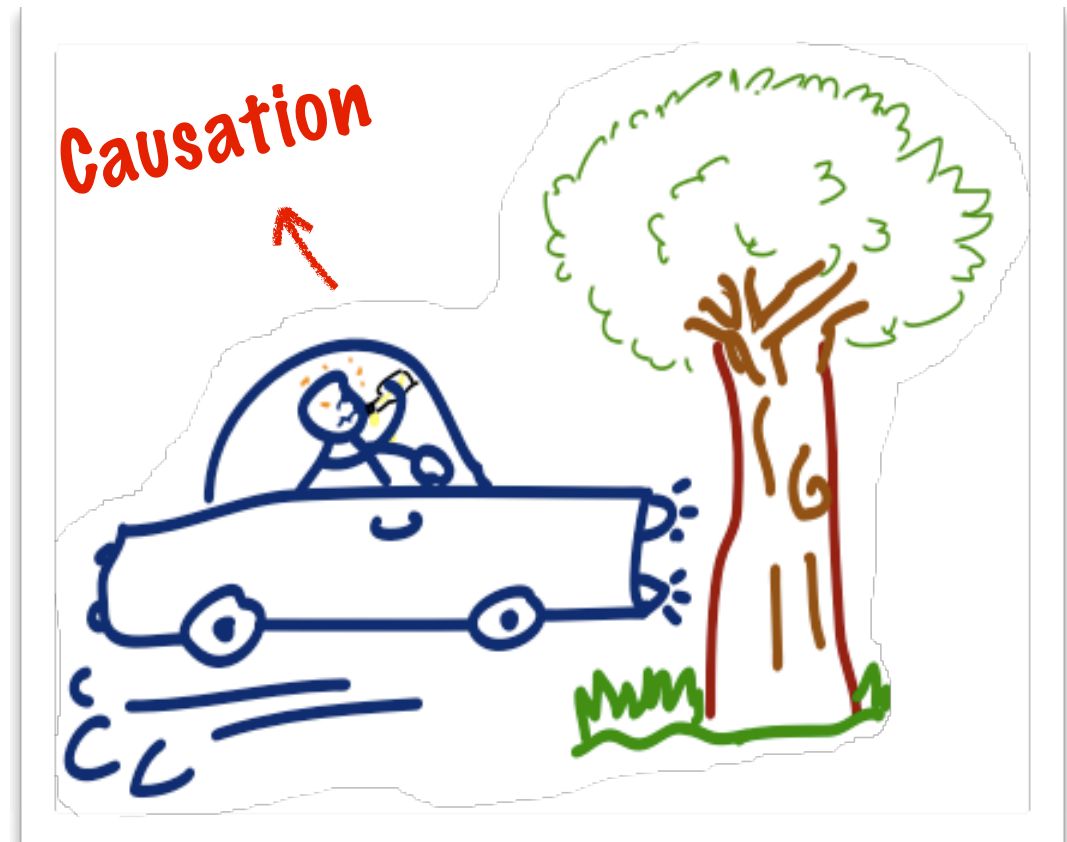
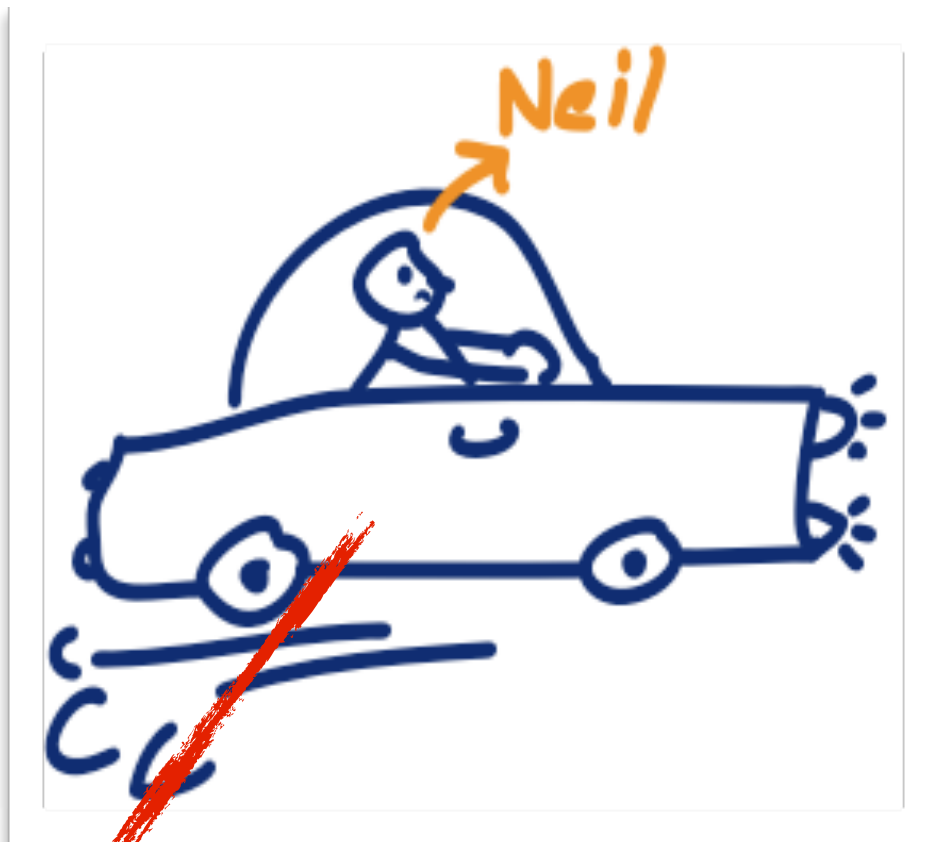
Let's look at an example...





- No causation
- Little emotion





Elements of a Story

1. Structure

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- Gustav Freytag
- Joseph Campbell

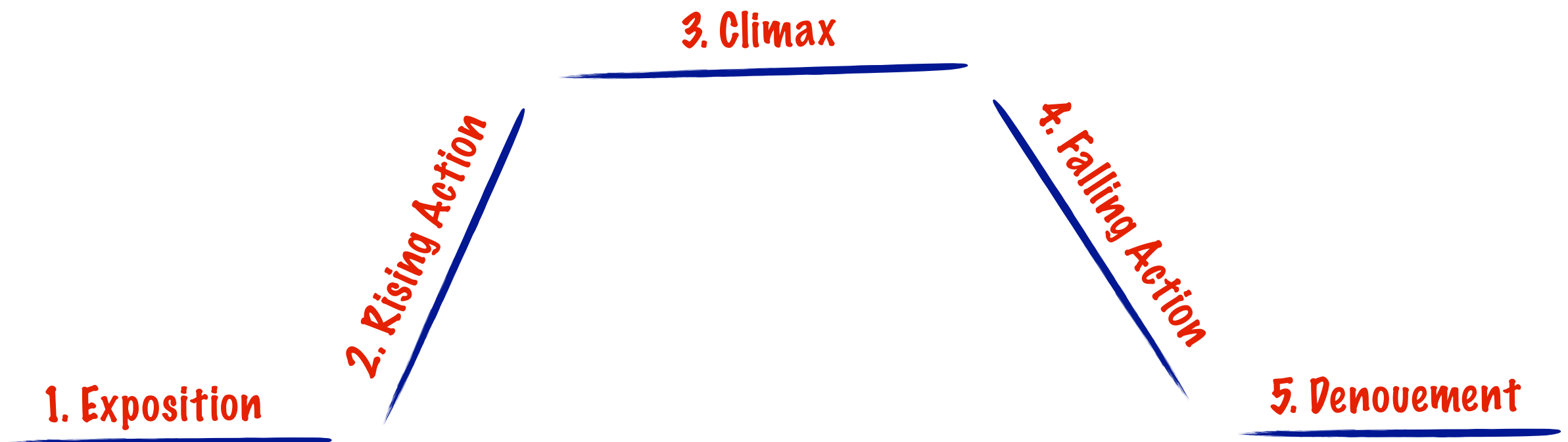
2. Conflict

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Gustav Freytag suggests a Five - Act Structure for Drama



1. Exposition

2. Rising Action

3. Climax

4. Falling Action

5. Denouement

- Exposition of the situation, characters introduced, what kind of people they are and their relations, goals and motivation
- Main Character gets to know the goal and what is at stake if he or she fails

1. Exposition

2. Rising Action

3. Climax

4. Falling Action

5. Denouement

- Conflict is introduced
- Small problems thwart protagonist
- Protagonist overcomes these secondary obstacles
- He or she is finally in a position to go for primary goal

1. Exposition

2. Rising Action

3. Climax

- Turning Point
- Single big decision that defines outcome
- Protagonist and antagonist plans get revealed and get in direct or indirect conflict
- Protagonist makes a decision or choice which shows his or her main quality

4. Falling Action

5. Denouement

1. Exposition

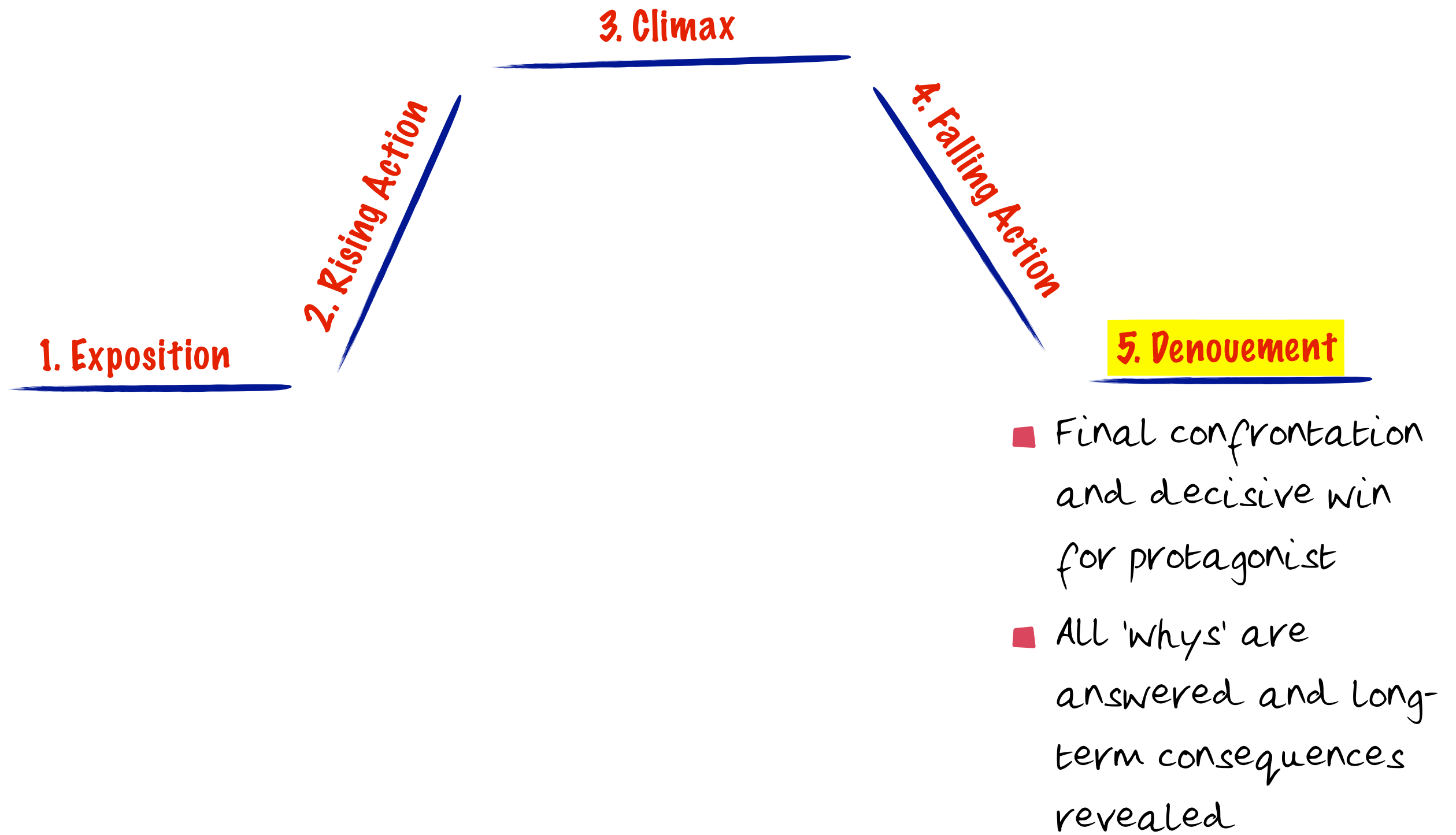
2. Rising Action

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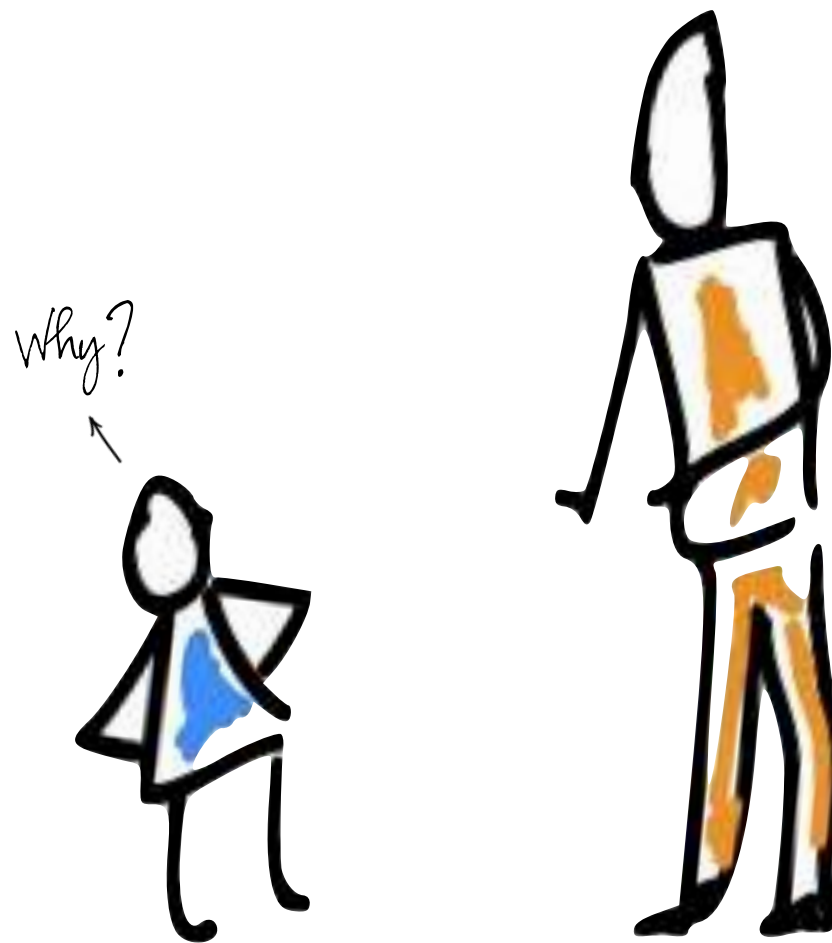
- Greatest tension
- Things go wrong for protagonist
- Seems evil will triumph

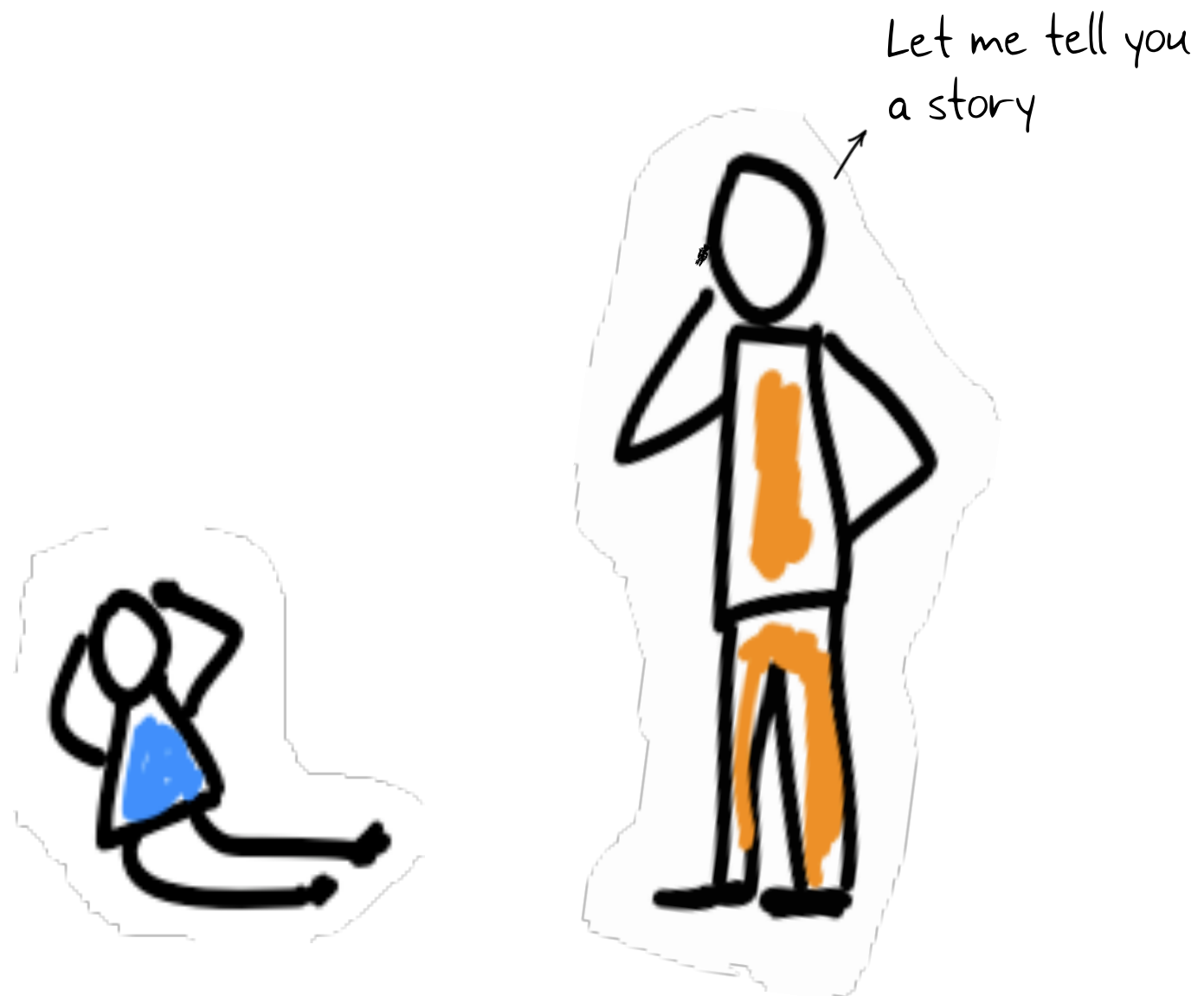


Let's look at an example...

You must stay curious,
read more, learn to learn...



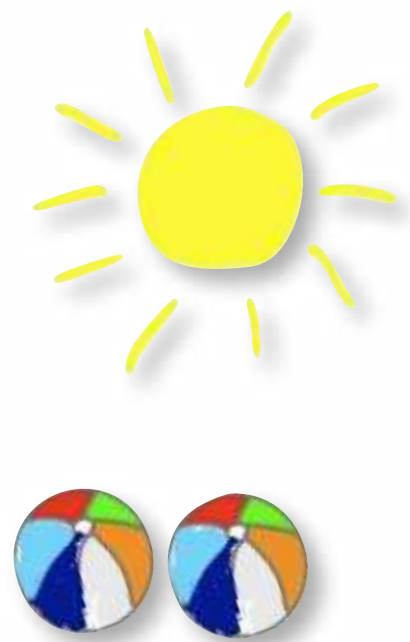




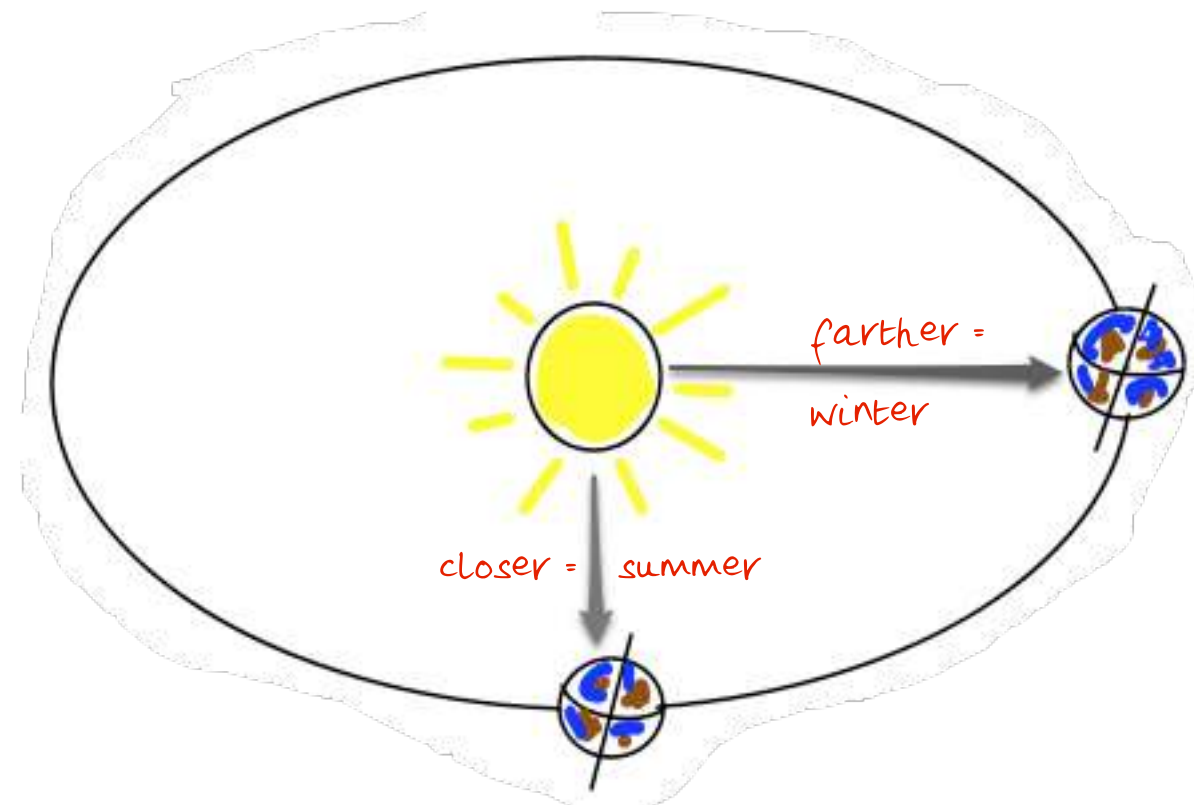
A group of graduates from a prestigious university were asked...

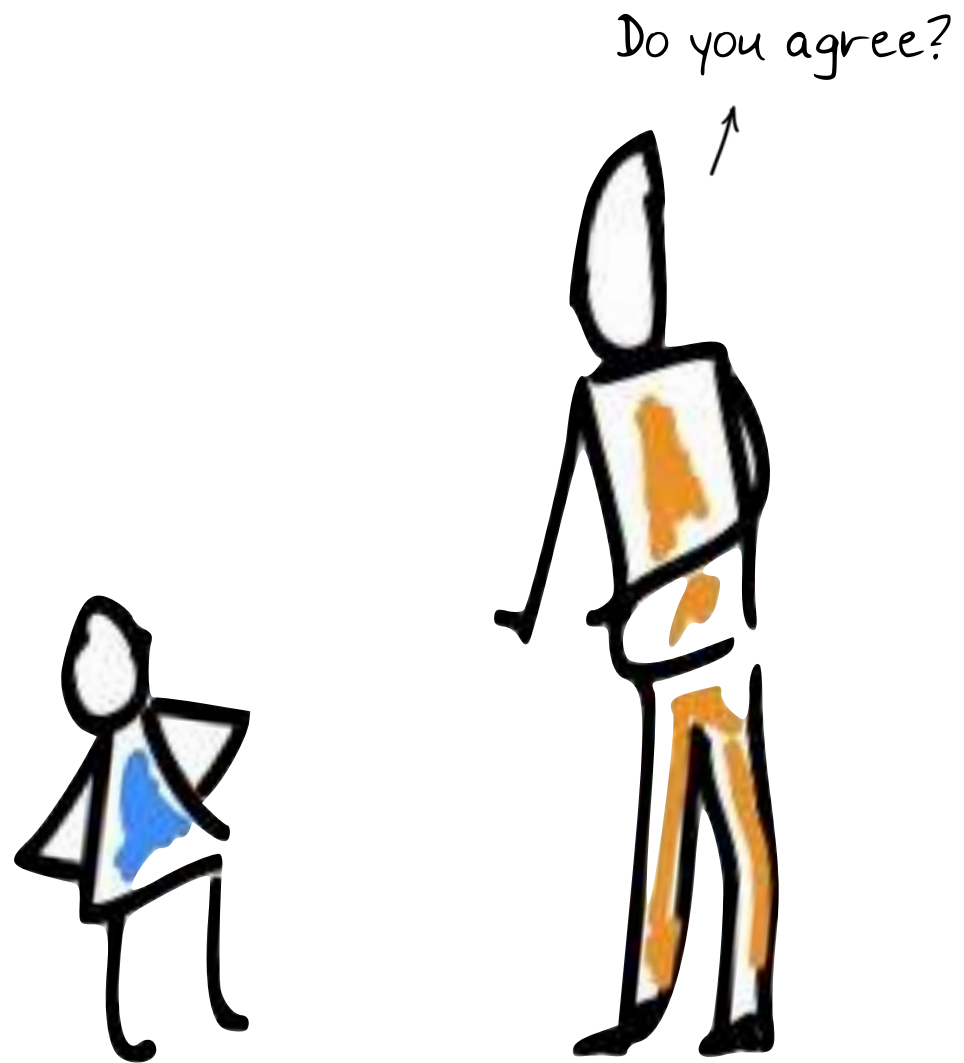


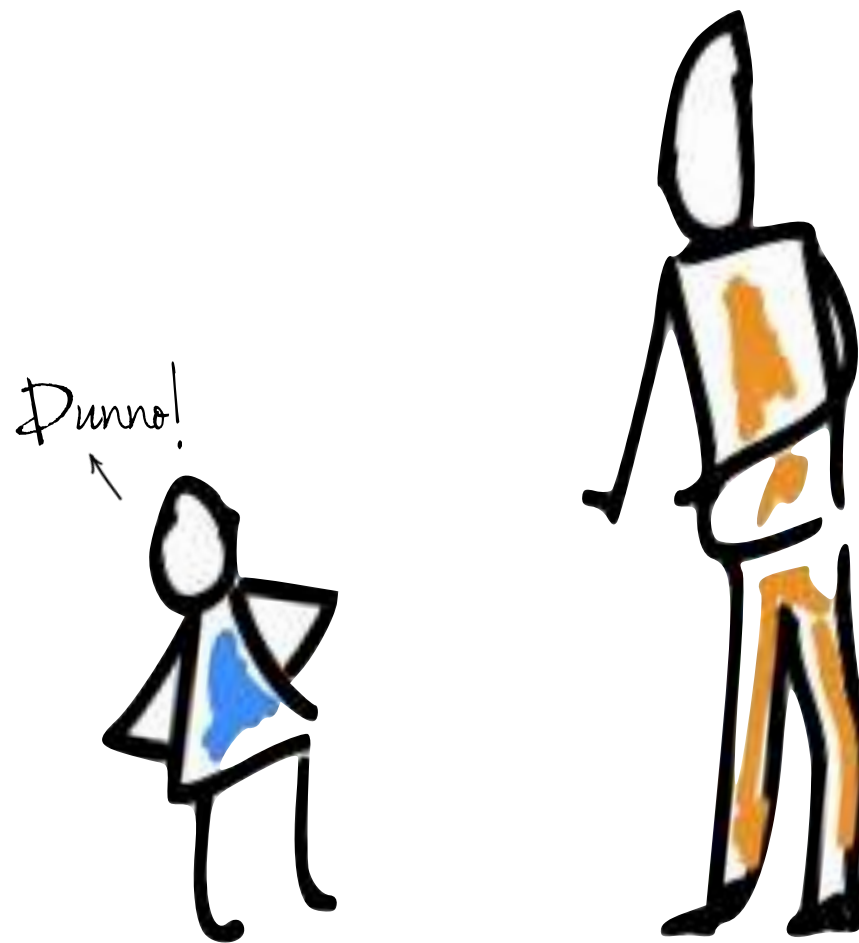
Why do we have seasons?



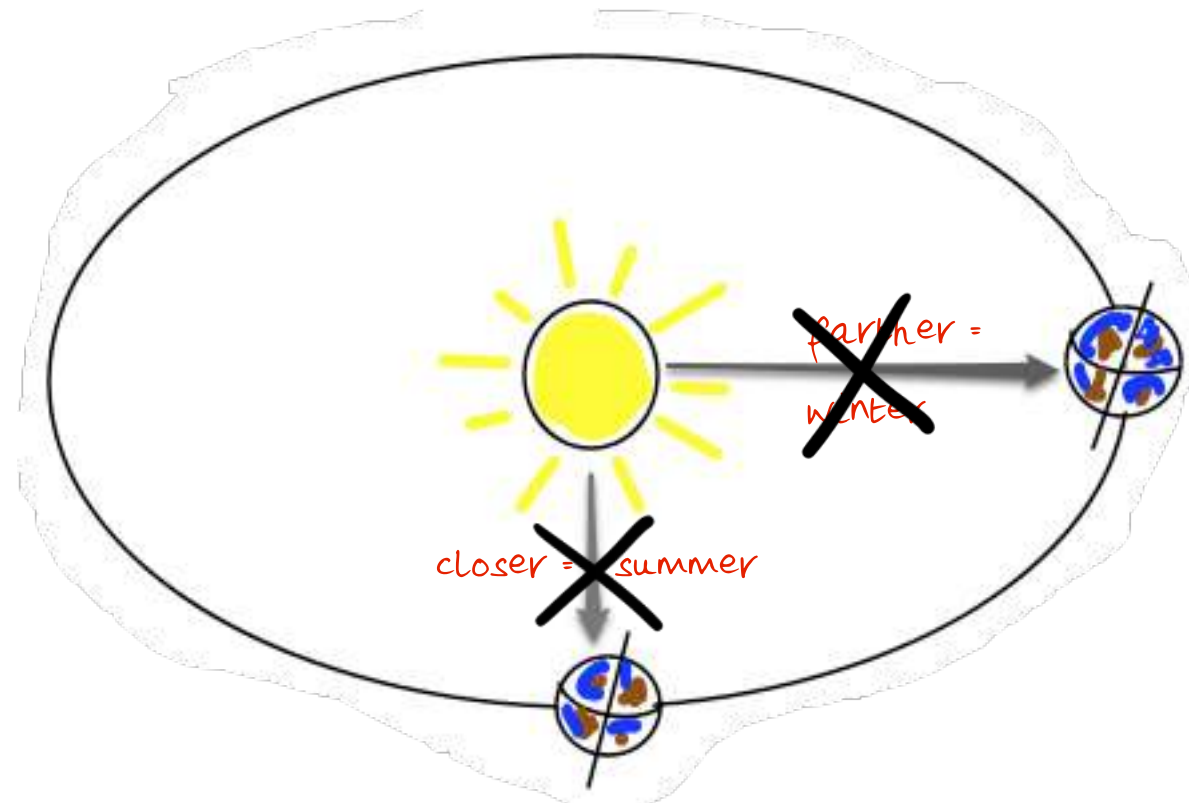
23 out of 25 students immediately gave the same answer that the earth is closer to the sun in the summer than it is in the winter due to the elliptical orbit of the earth.



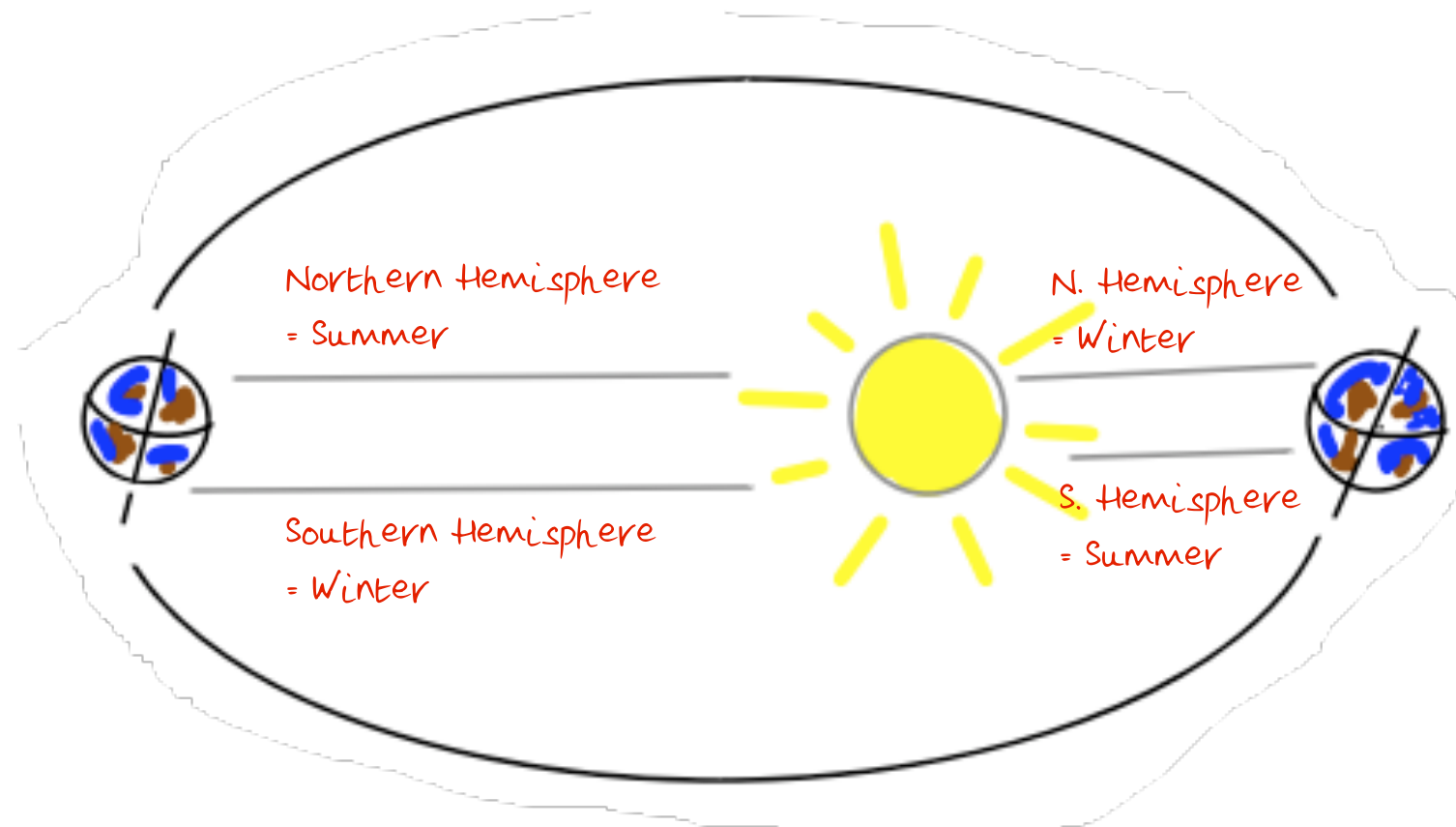




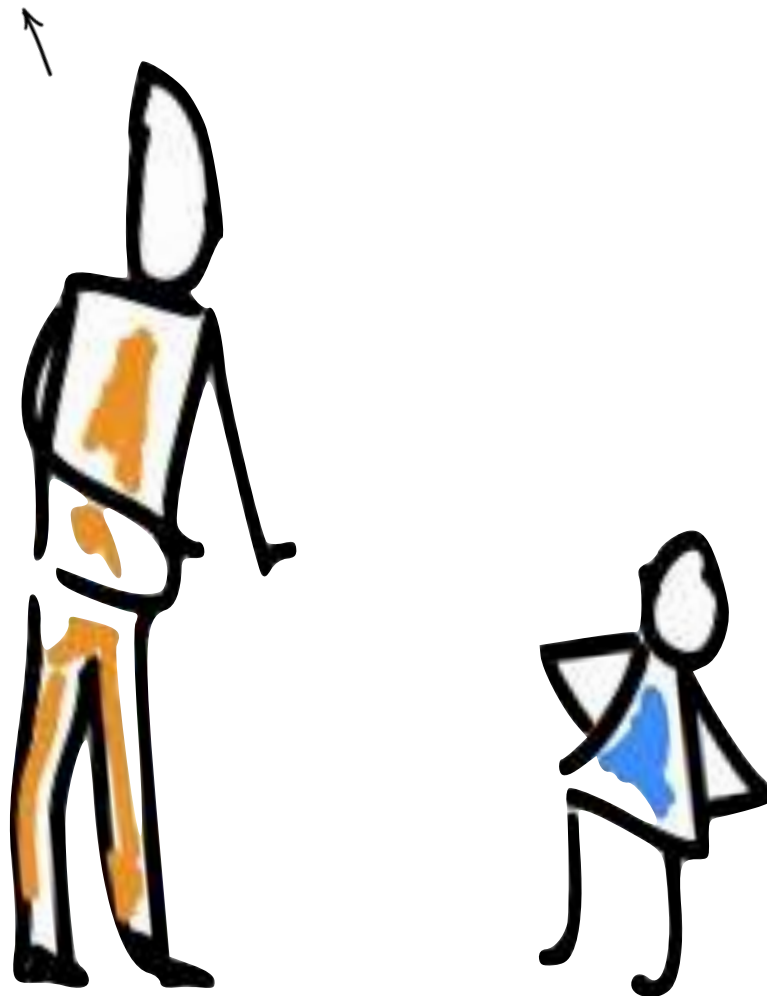
This argument does not hold water because if it were so then at that point in time both Southern and Northern hemispheres would have the same season and we know this is not true.



The Earth's axis is tilted at an angle of 23.5 degrees.
The tilt of the Earth means the Earth will lean towards the Sun (Summer) or lean away from the Sun (Winter) 6 months later.
In between these, Spring and Autumn will occur.

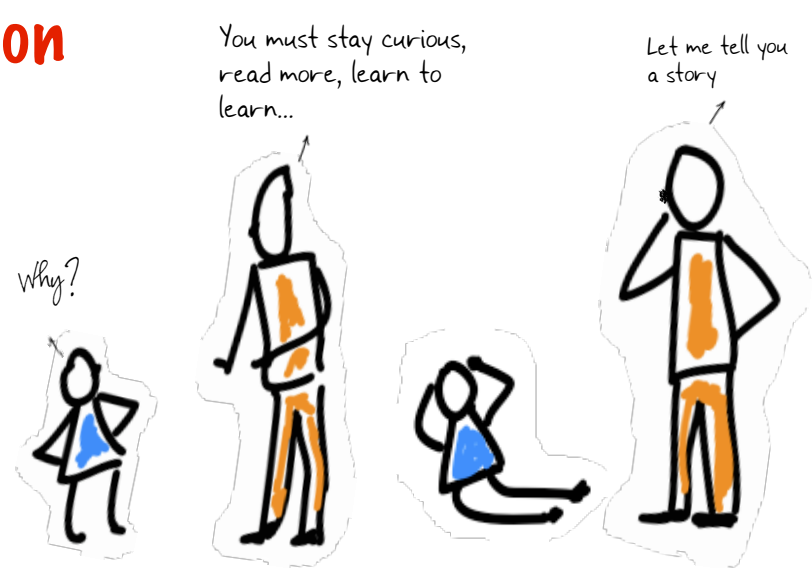


Don't just rely on your intuitive thinking,
be sure to check your cognitive bias.





1. Exposition

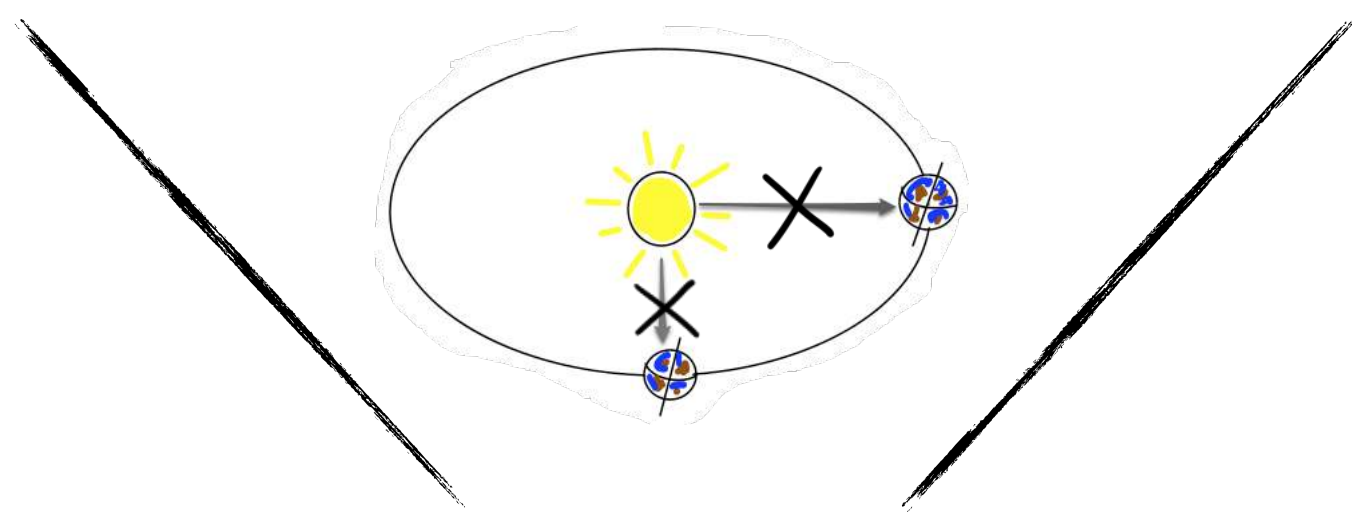


Structure > Conflict > Resolution

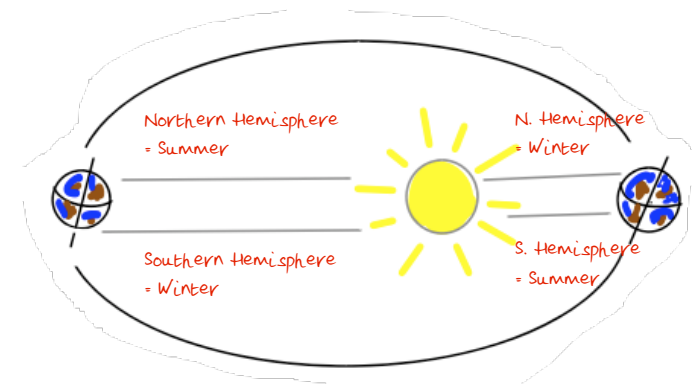
2. Rising Action



3. Climax

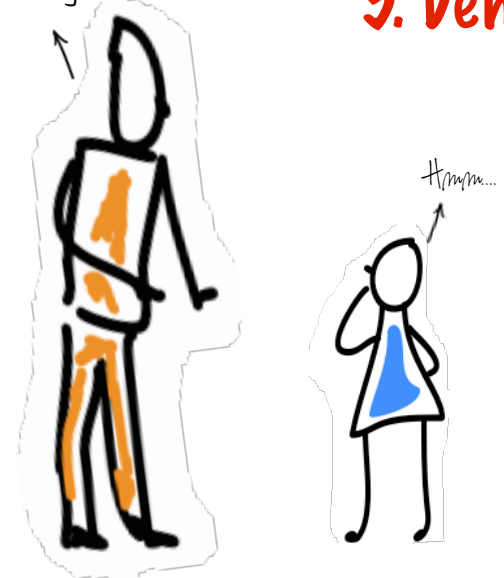


4. Falling Action

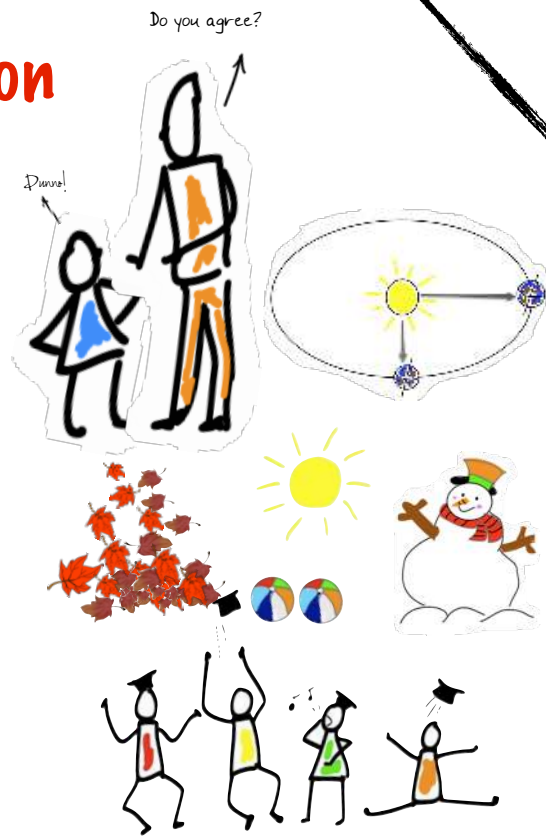


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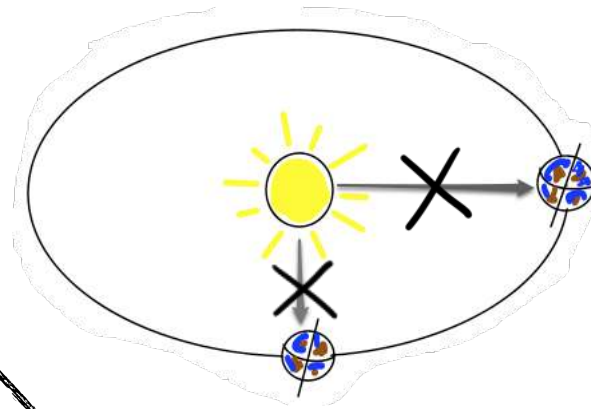
5. Denouement



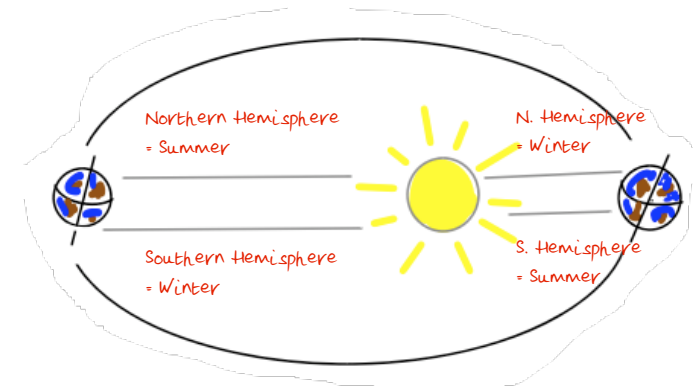
2. Rising Action



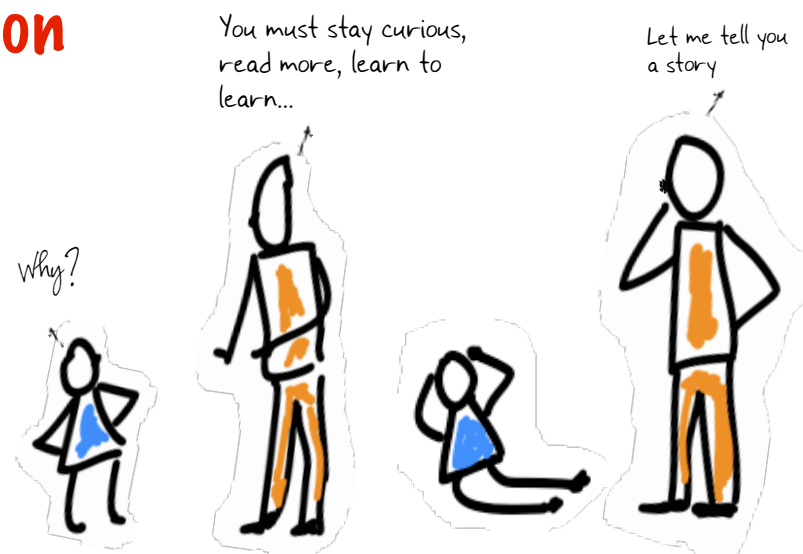
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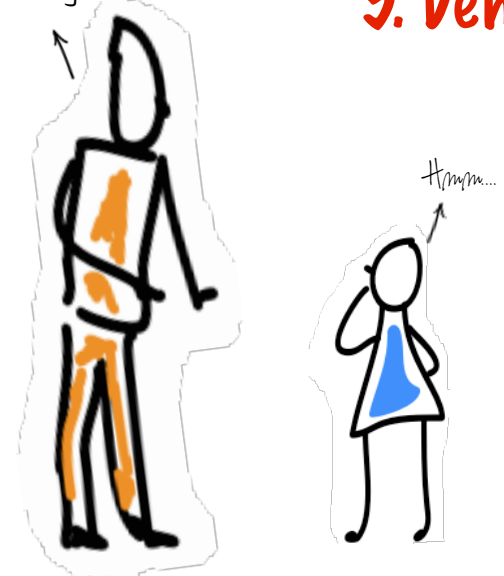


1. Exposition



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Structure > Conflict > Resolution

Key Elements of a Story

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- Joseph Campbell

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- Persuasion - Ethos, Pathos, Logos
- The Rider, the Elephant, the Path

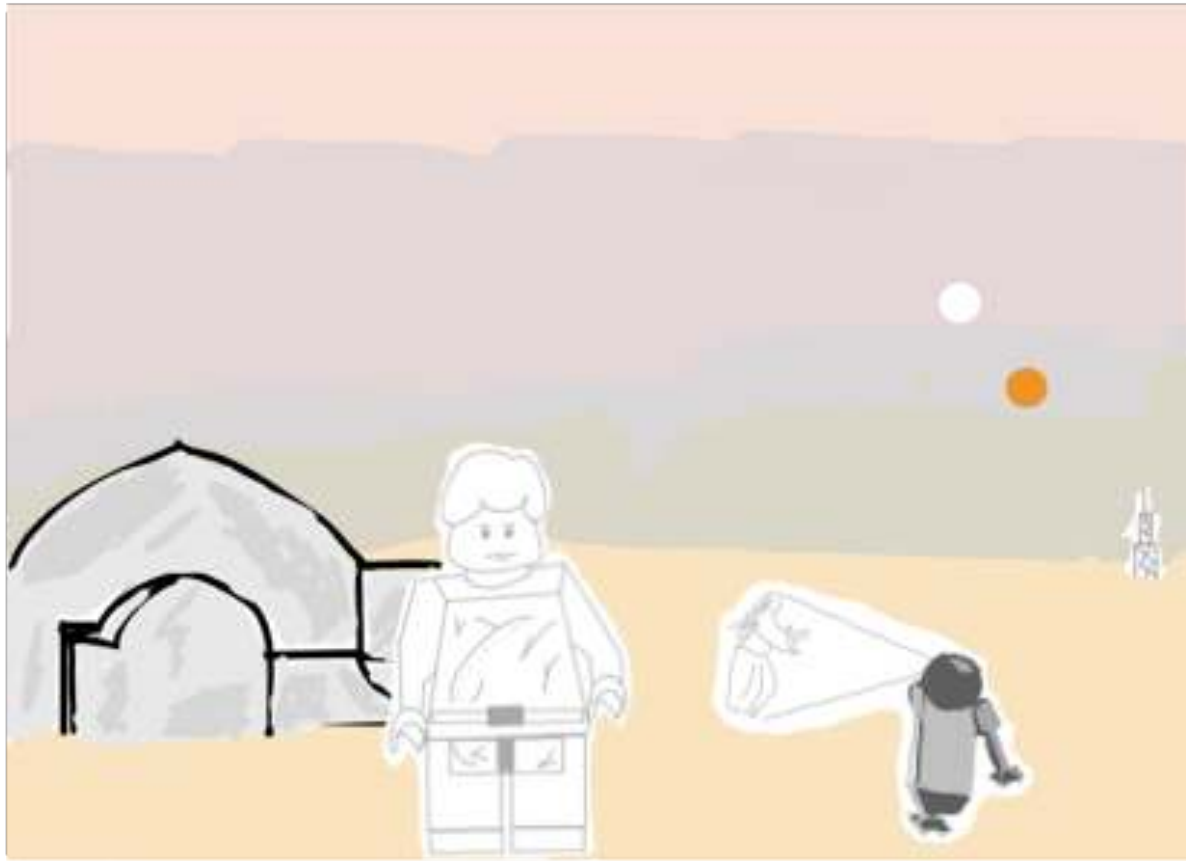


According to Joseph Campbell, the journey of the archetypal hero in mythologies consists of

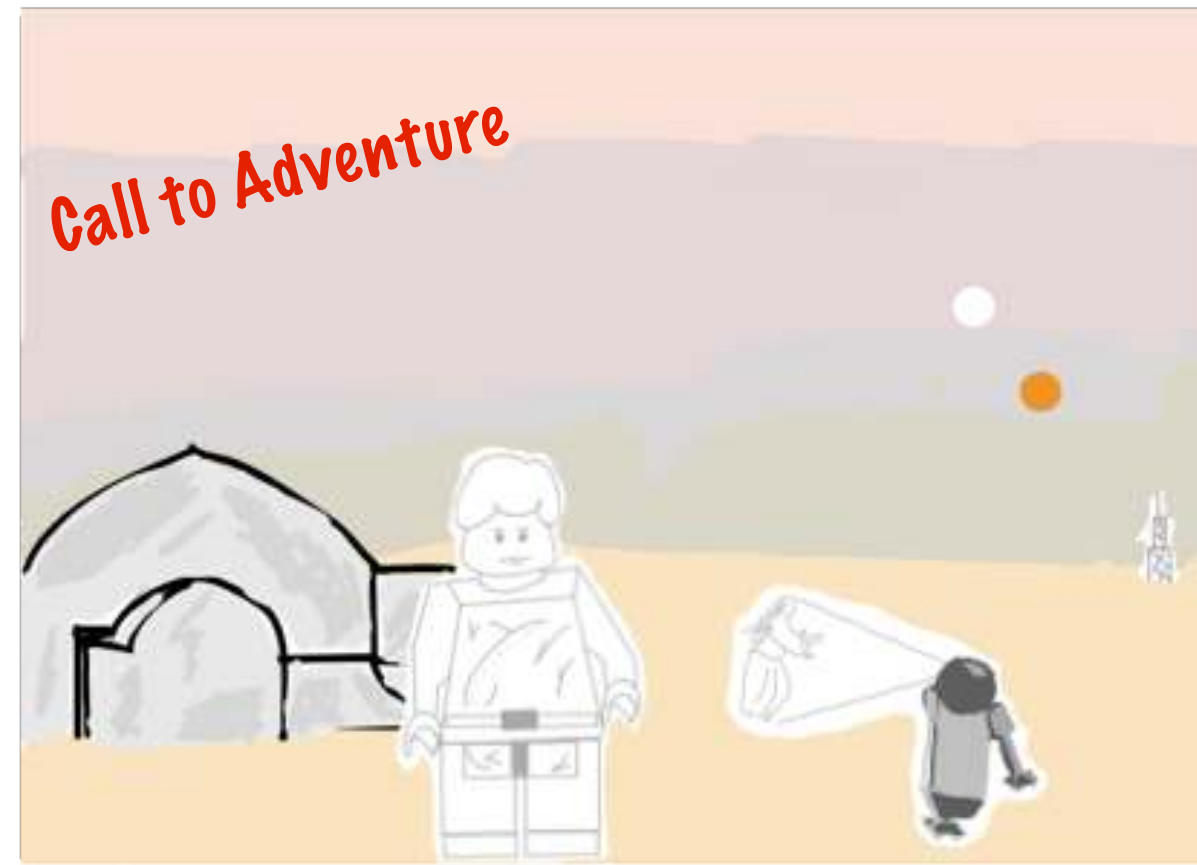
- Call to Adventure
- Refusal of the call
- Divine intervention or Epiphany
- Journey of Trials & Tribulations
- Return and Master of the two worlds

The hero's journey can be within - transformation of self

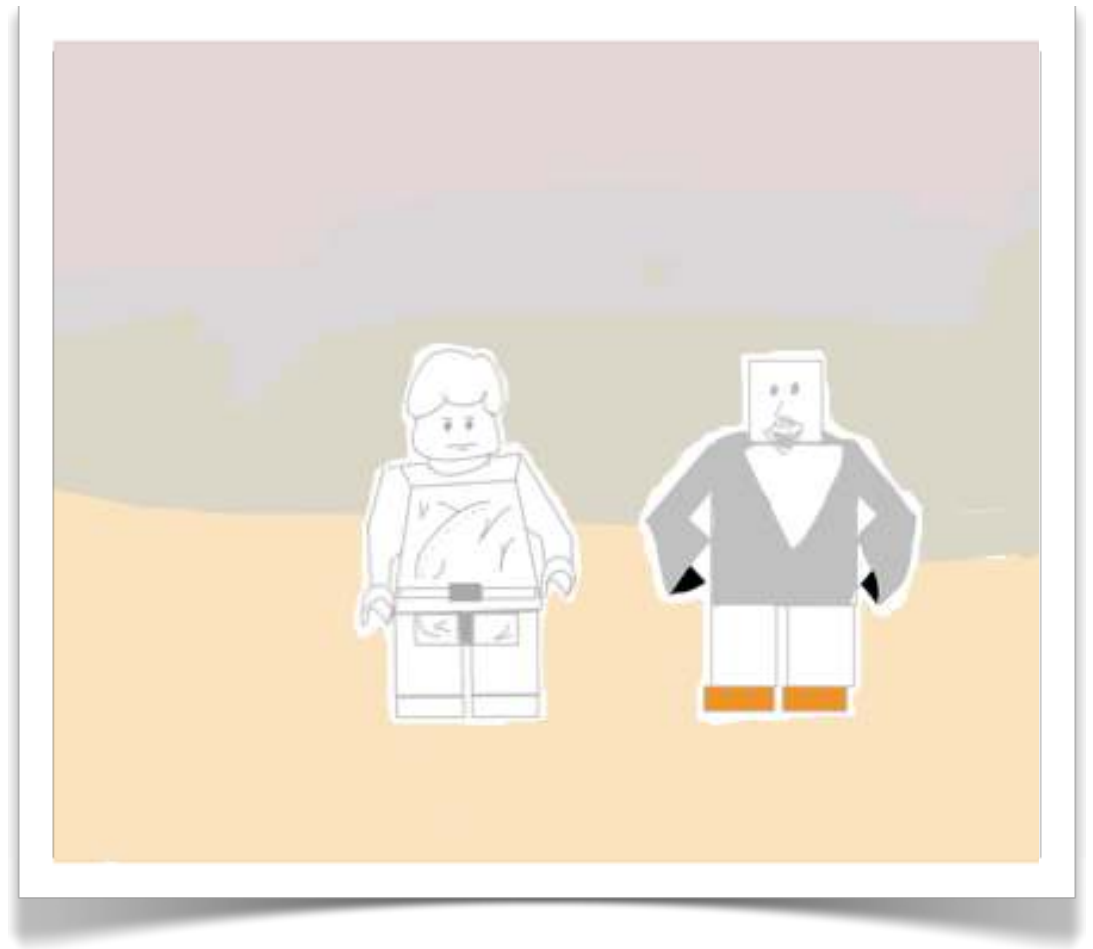
Let's look at an example...



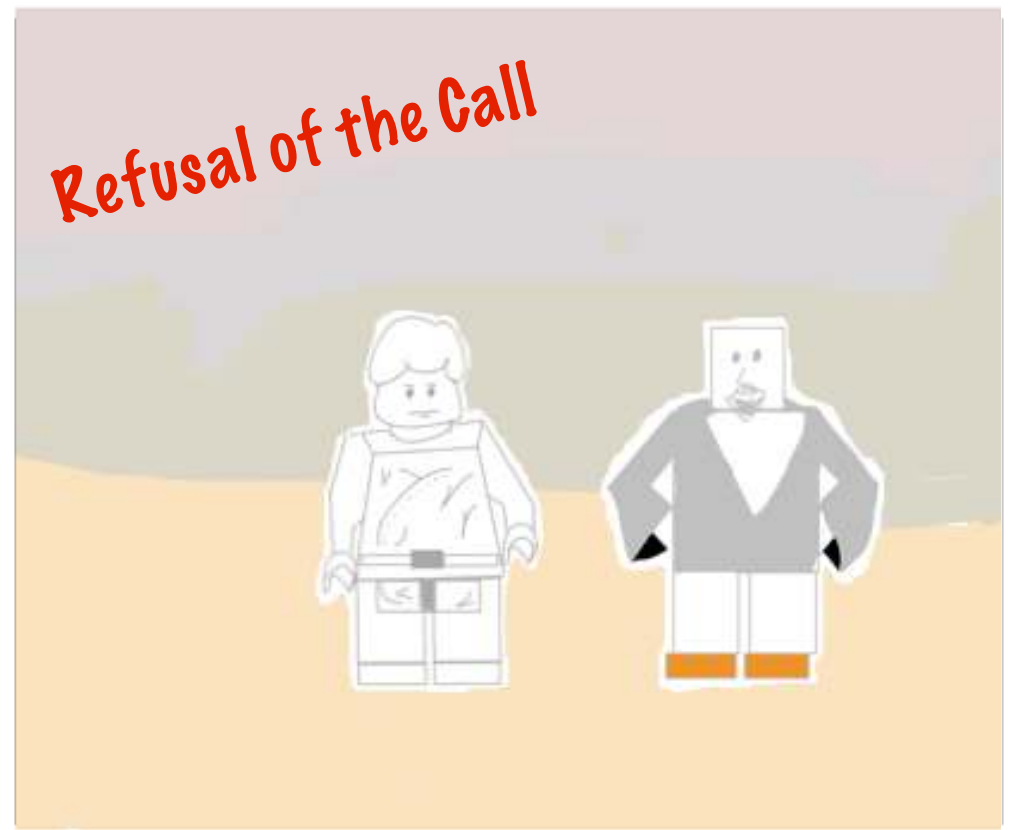
Structure > Conflict > Resolution



Structure > Conflict > Resolution



Structure > Conflict > Resolution





Structure > Conflict > Resolution



Structure > Conflict > Resolution

Structure > Conflict > Resolution



Trials & Tribulations

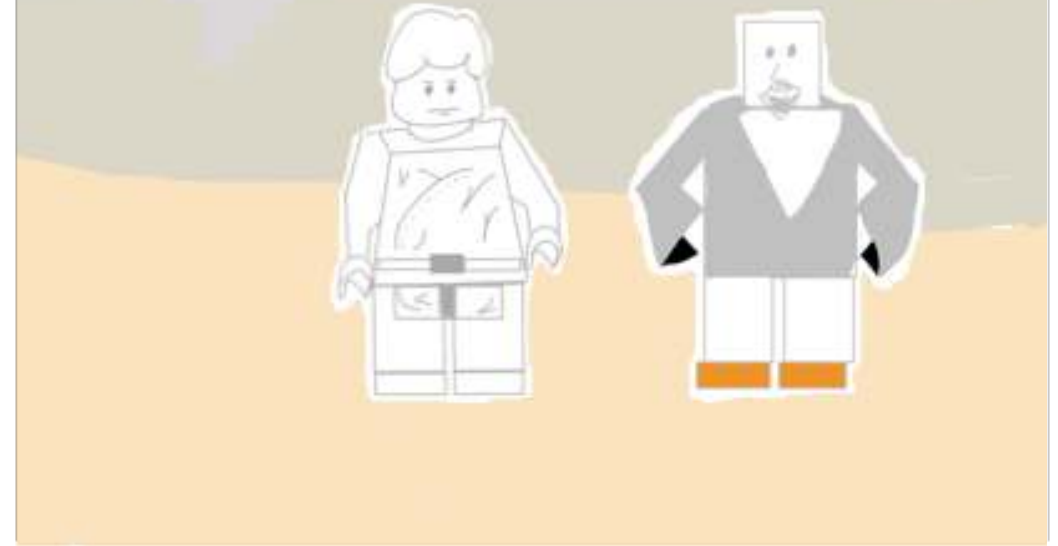


Structure > Conflict > Resolution

Call to Adventure



Refusal of the Call



Intervention



Trials & Tribulations



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Conflict and its resolution moves the story forward... convincingly

- Conflict could be between protagonist and antagonist
- Or conflict could be with-in the protagonist

Let's look at two examples...

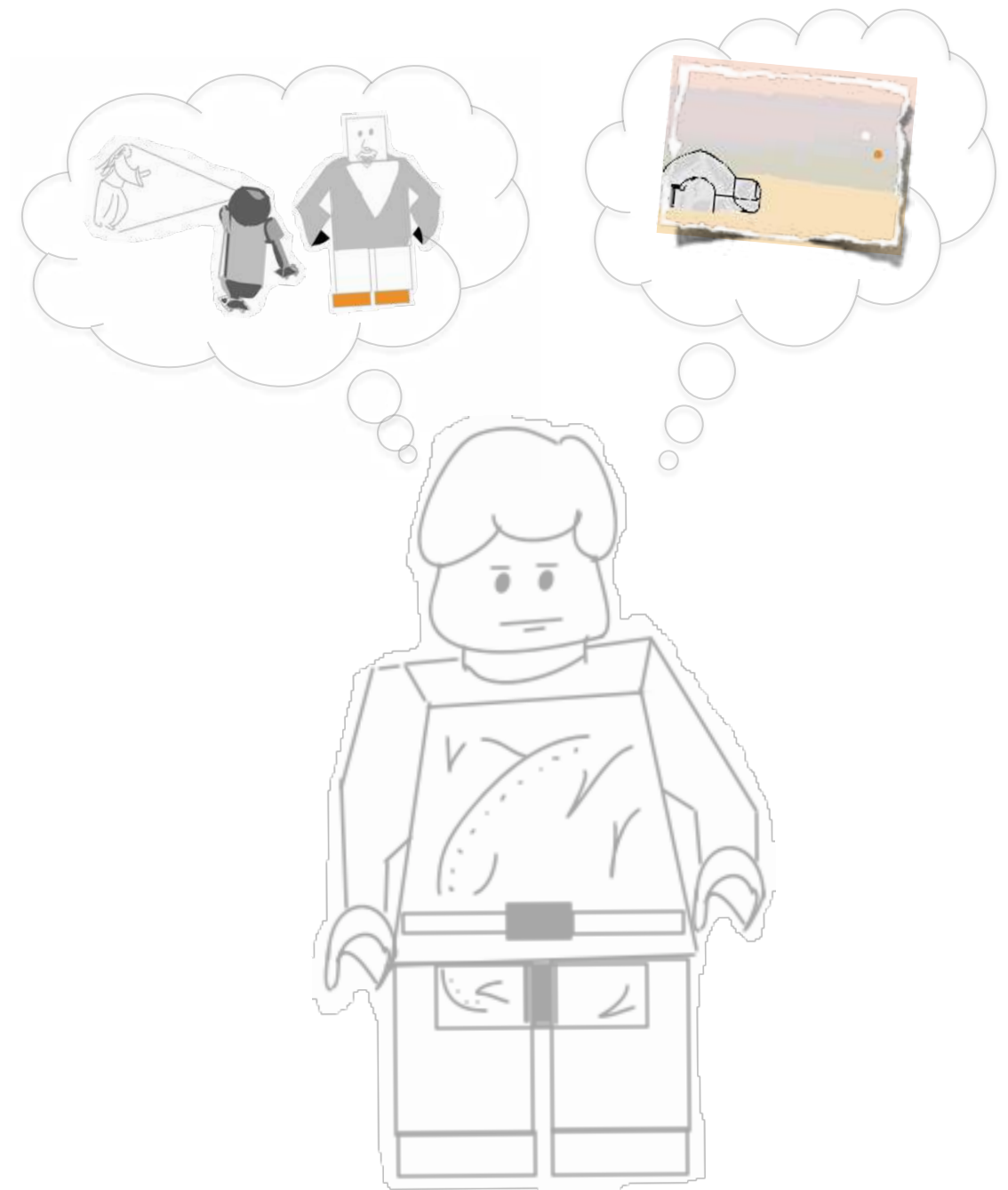
You must stay curious,
read more, learn to learn...



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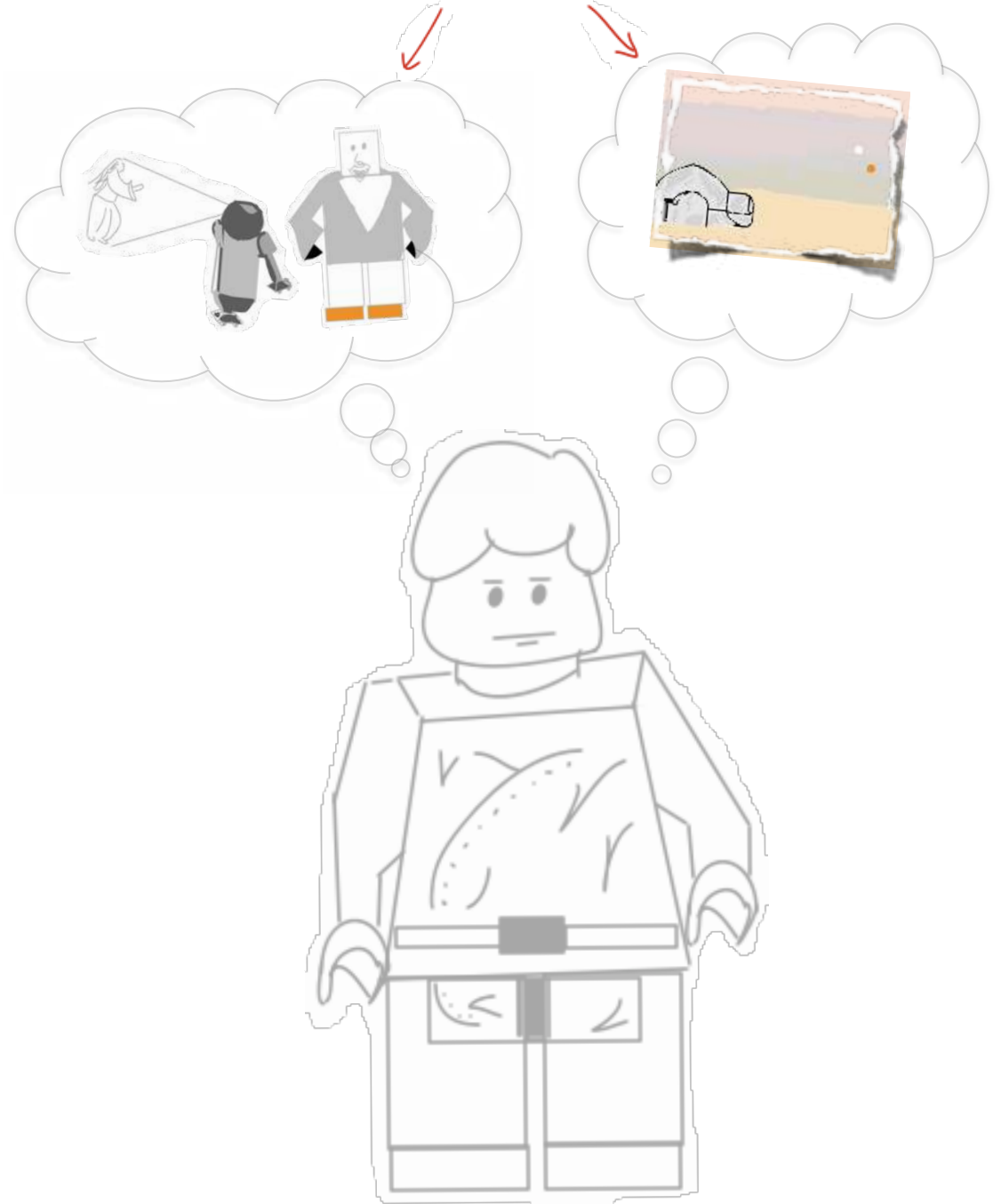


You must stay curious,
read more, learn to learn...

Conflict
Why?



Conflict

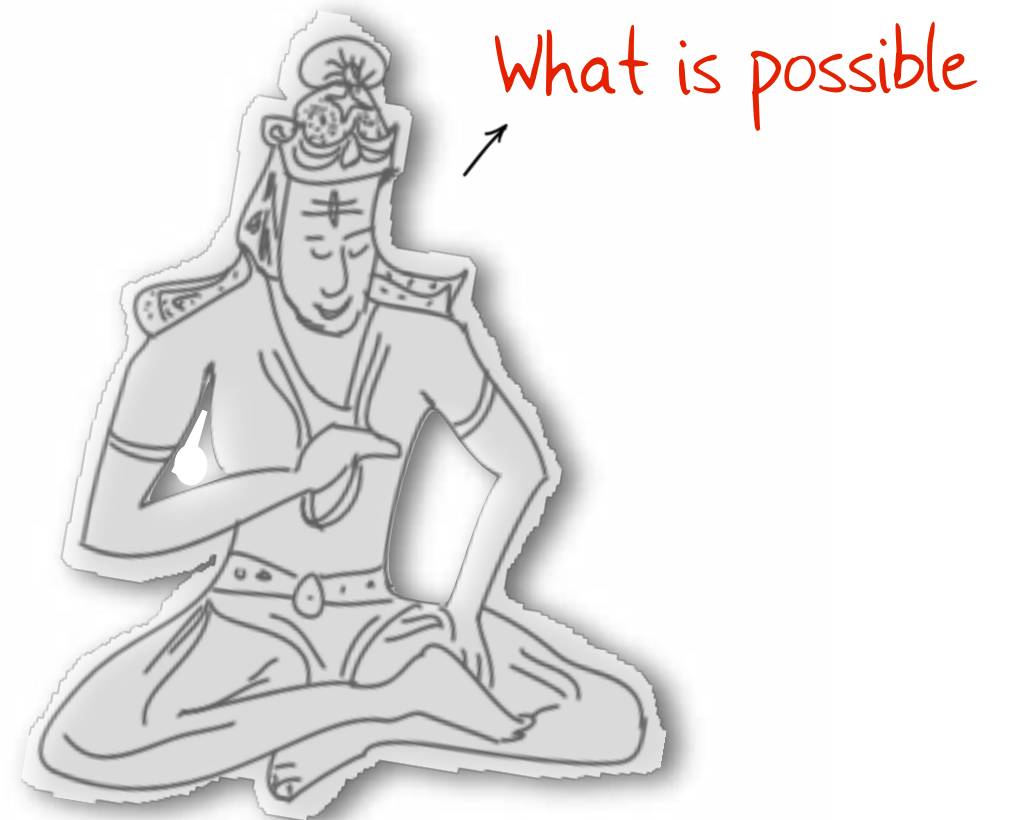
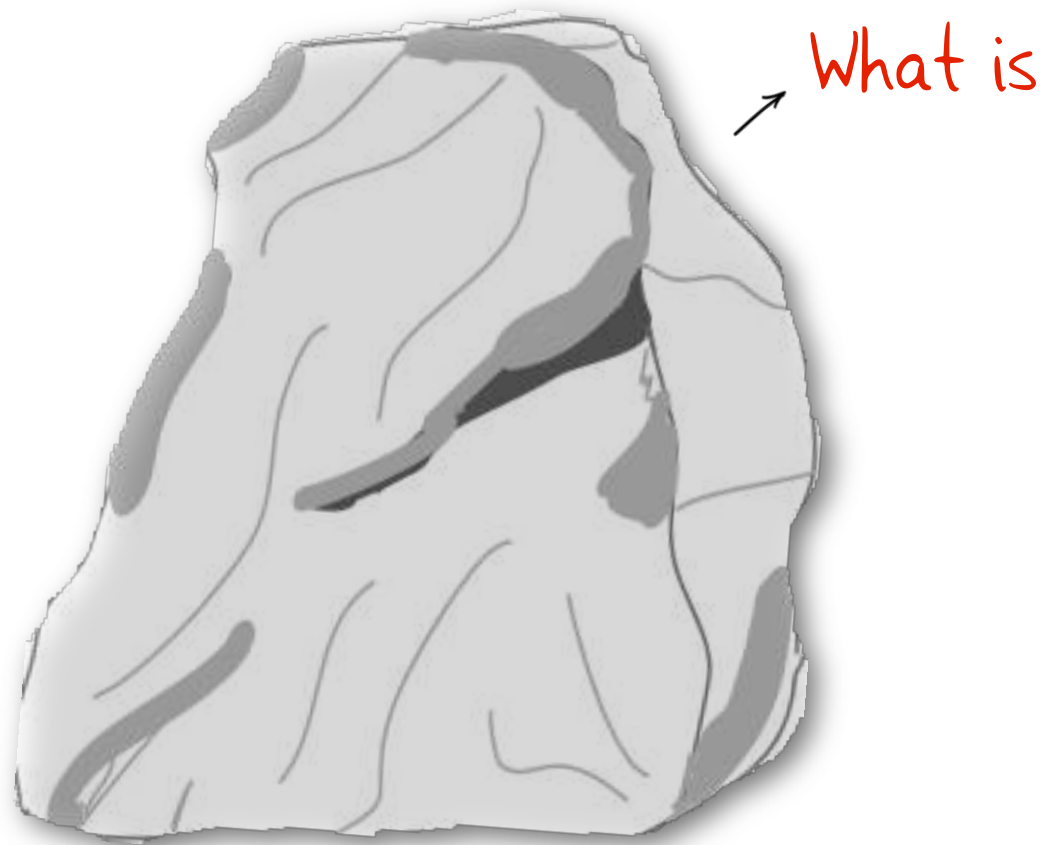


Structure > Conflict > Resolution

To put the story so far, in perspective...

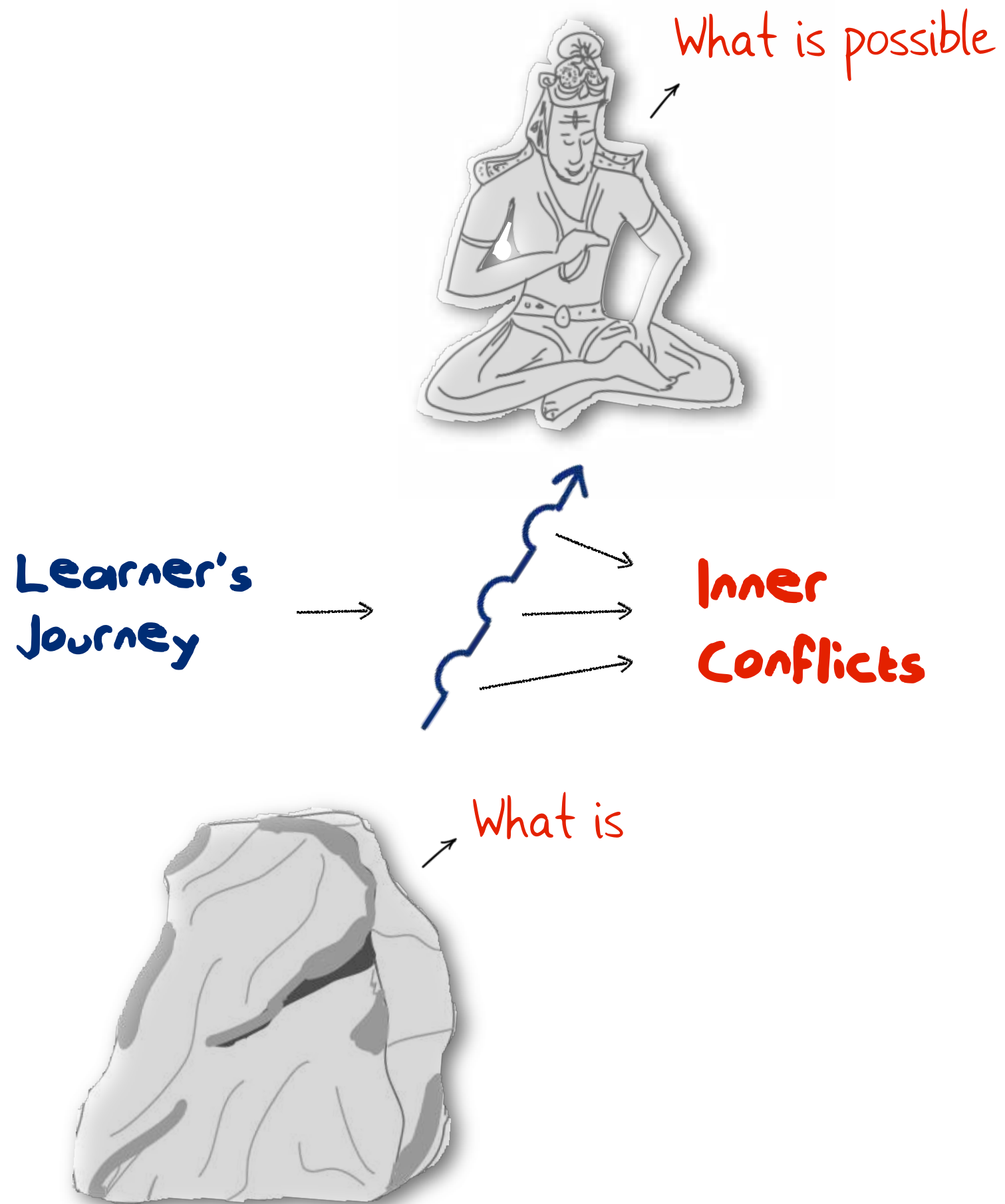
Stories can inform, inspire and transform

**In the context of education, a story can help a learner imagine...
'what is possible'**

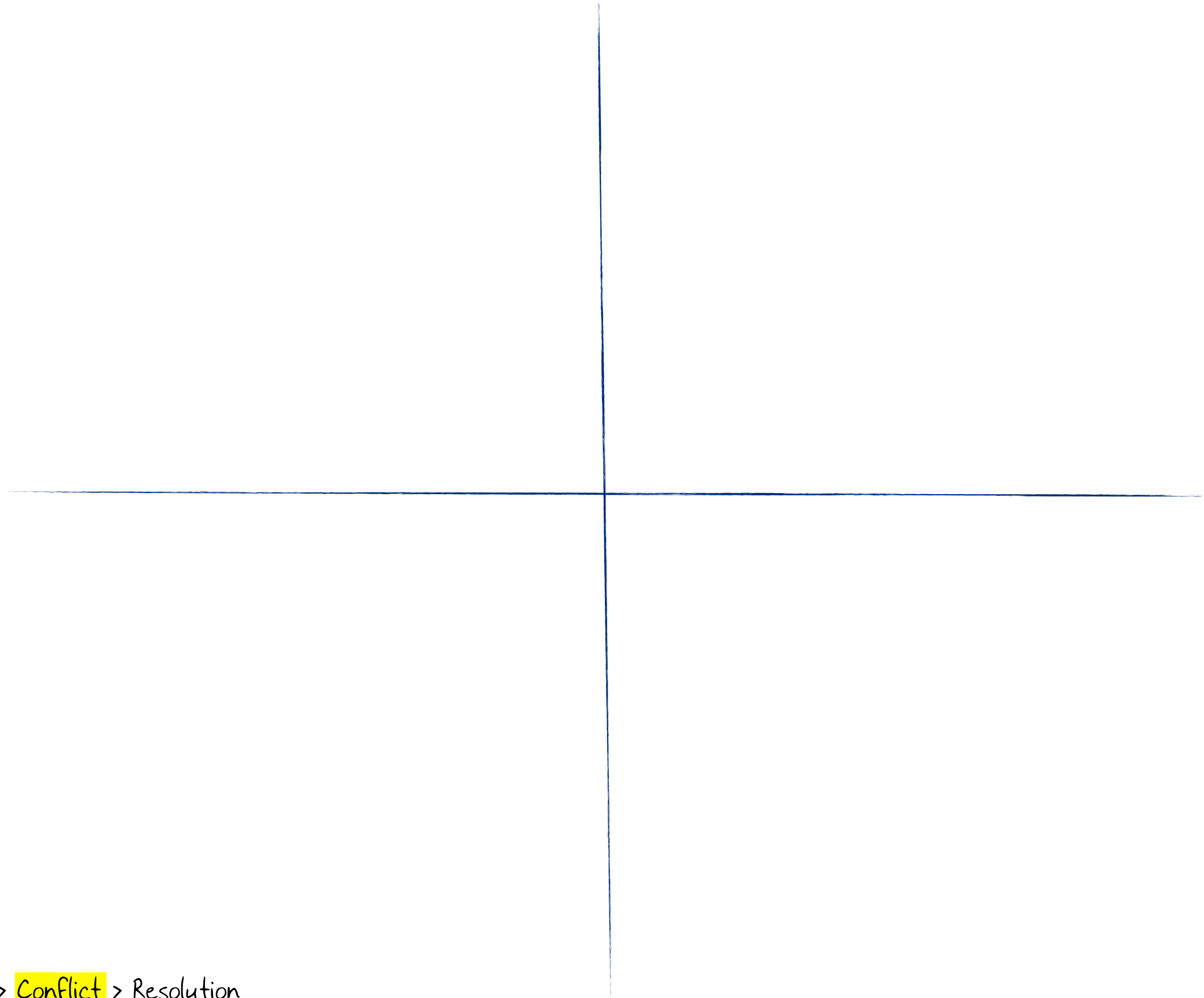


The learner is the 'hero' who has to undertake the learning journey towards 'what is possible'

**In this learning journey, the 'learner hero' has to resolve
'inner conflicts'**



Inner conflicts of a learner could be...



Structure > Conflict > Resolution

Inner conflicts of a learner could be...

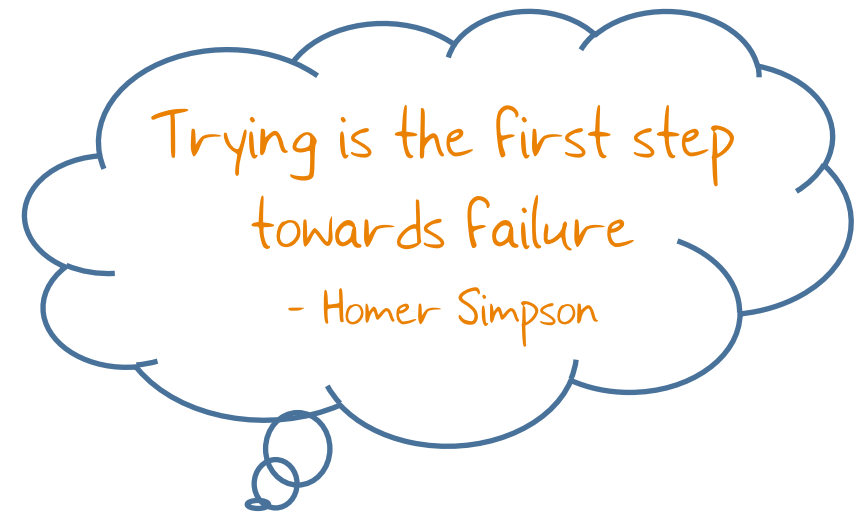


Cynicism, Skepticism

Inner conflicts of a learner could be...



Cynicism, Skepticism

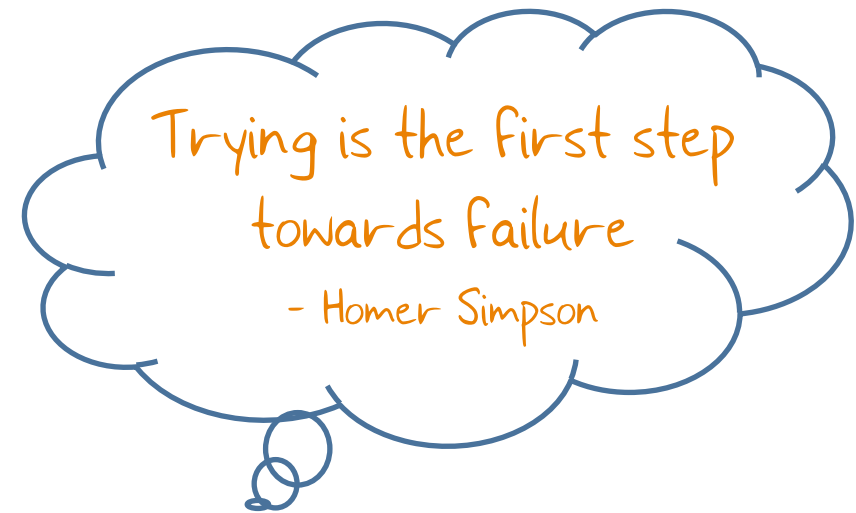


Fear of Failure or Ridicule
(what will other's think of me)

Inner conflicts of a learner could be...



Cynicism, Skepticism



Fear of Failure or Ridicule
(what will other's think of me)

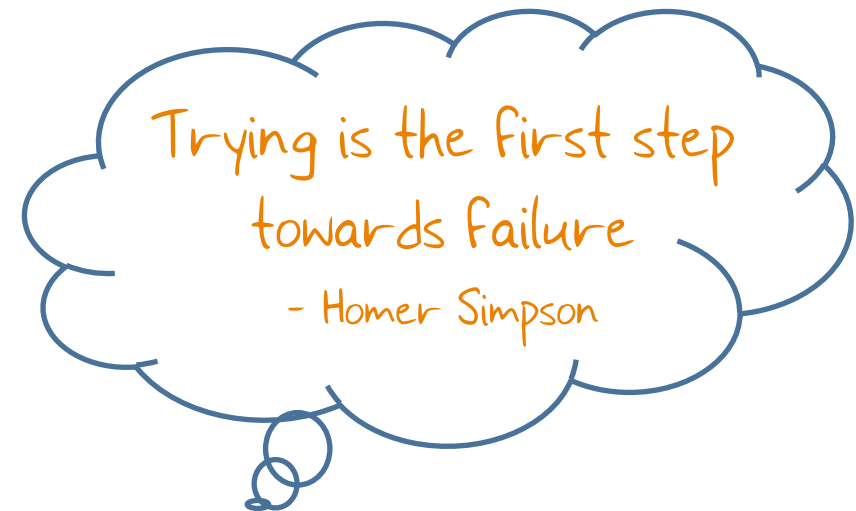
Inertia to Act or lack of
energy and enthusiasm



Inner conflicts of a learner could be...



Cynicism, Skepticism



Fear of Failure or Ridicule
(what will other's think of me)



Inertia to Act or lack of
energy and enthusiasm

Rigid Mindset
(habits die hard)



Inner conflicts of a learner could be...

Lack of Self-Efficacy

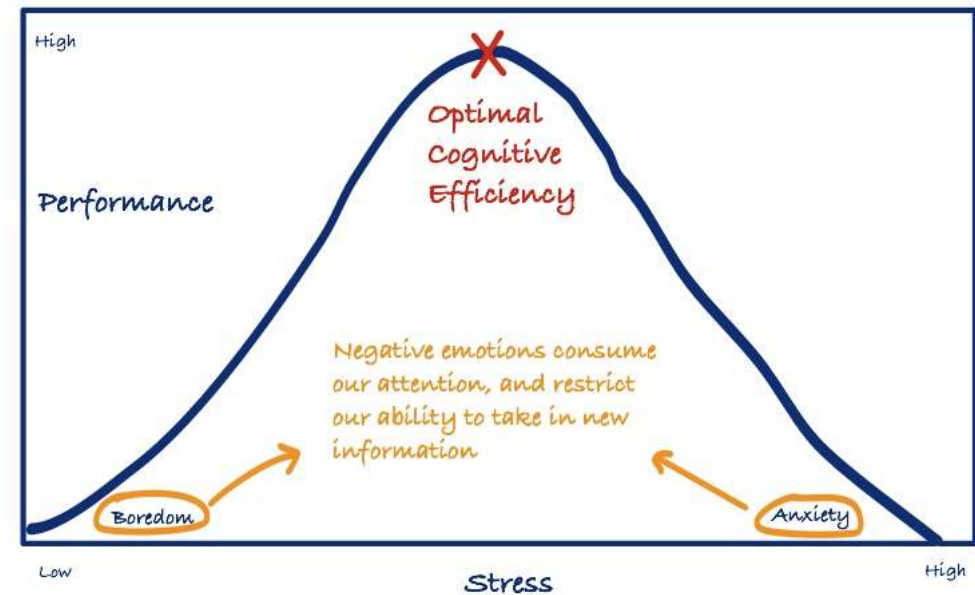
Self-belief about lack of abilities,
that in-turn leads to lesser effort
being put into learning



Inner conflicts of a learner could be...

Lack of Self-Efficacy

Self-belief about lack of abilities,
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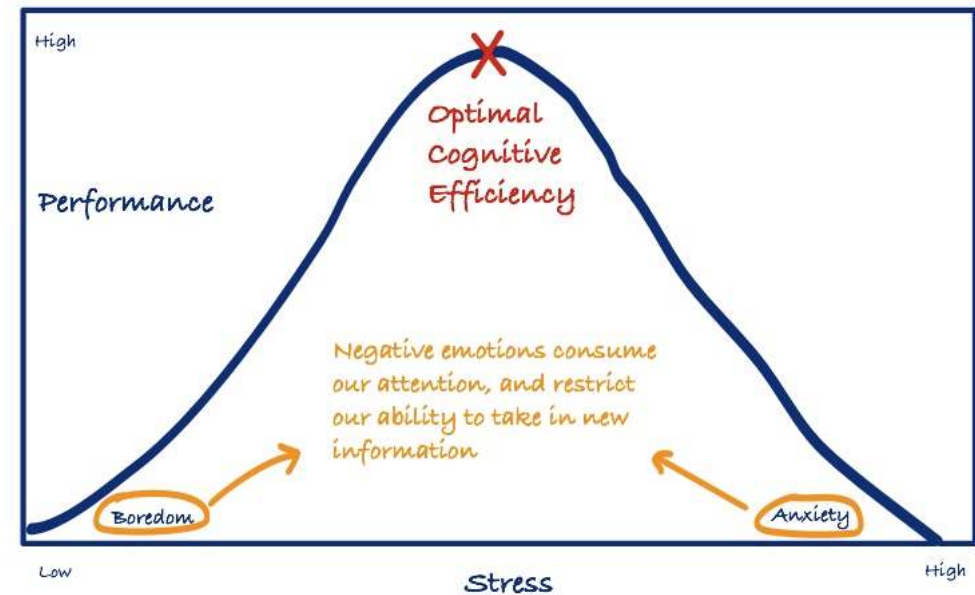


Boredom + Anxiety

Inner conflicts of a learner could be...

Lack of Self-Efficacy

Self-belief about lack of abilities, that in-turn leads to lesser effort being put into learning



Boredom + Anxiety

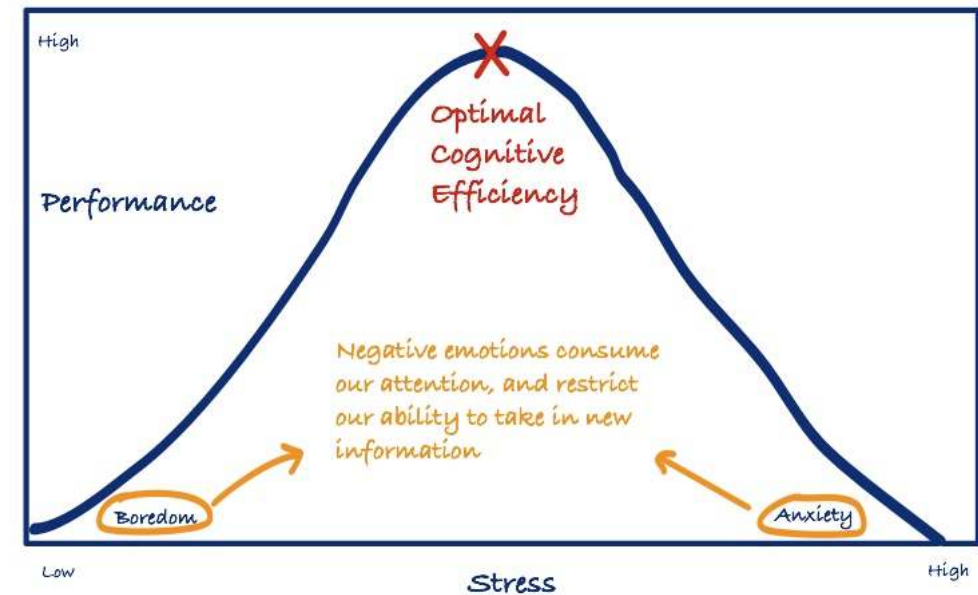


Ambiguity or Lack of Clarity

Inner conflicts of a learner could be...

Lack of Self-Efficacy

Self-belief about lack of abilities,
that in-turn leads to lesser effort
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Boredom + Anxiety



Ambiguity or Lack of Clarity



Focus on Problems not Solutions

What can we learn from the art of story-telling about how to 'resolve' learner's inner conflicts ?

Key Elements of a Story

1. Structure

- Aristotle
- Gustav Freytag
- Joseph Campbell

2. Conflict

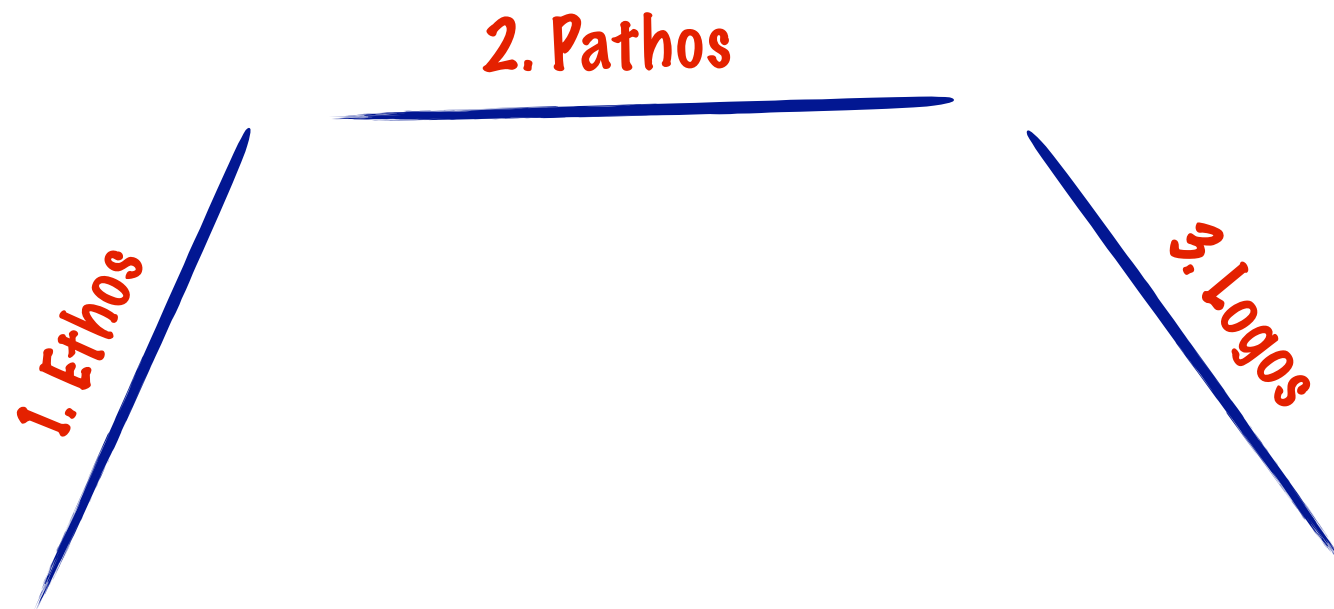
3. Resolution

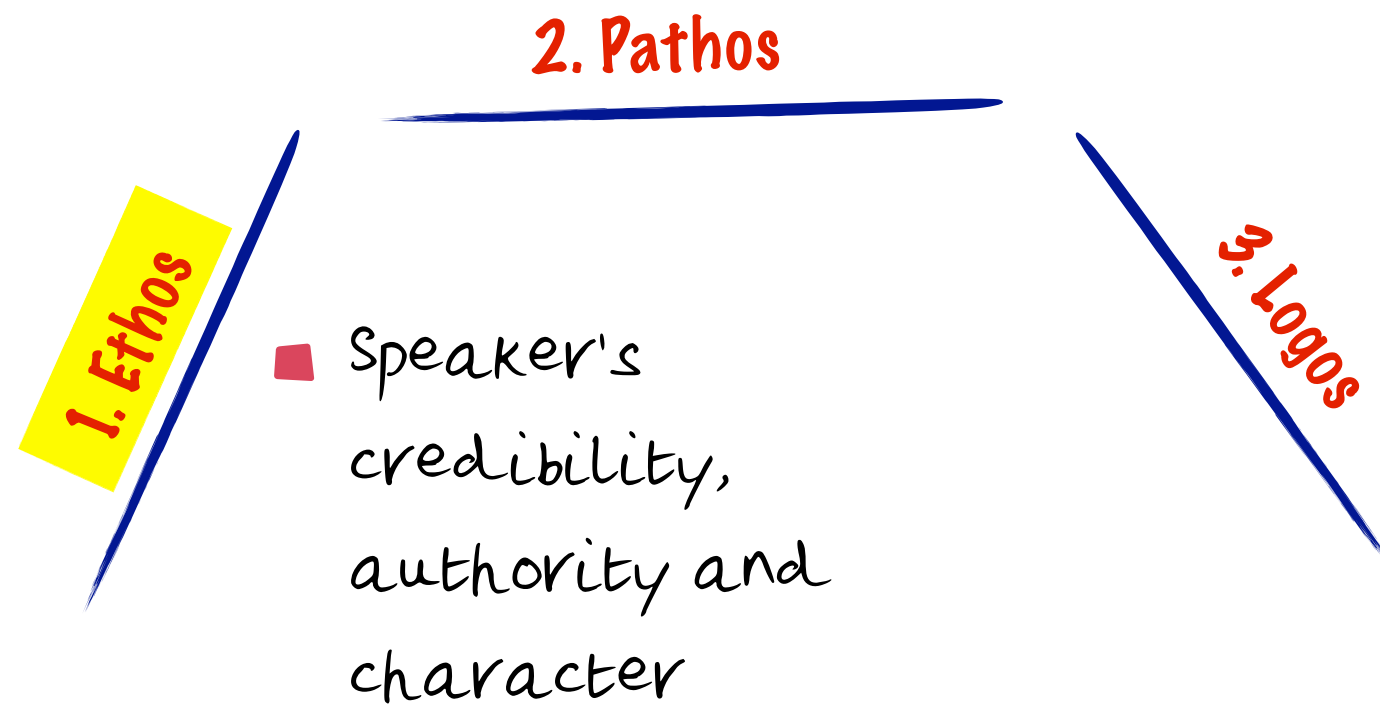
- Persuasion - Ethos, Pathos, Logos
- The Rider, the Elephant, the Path

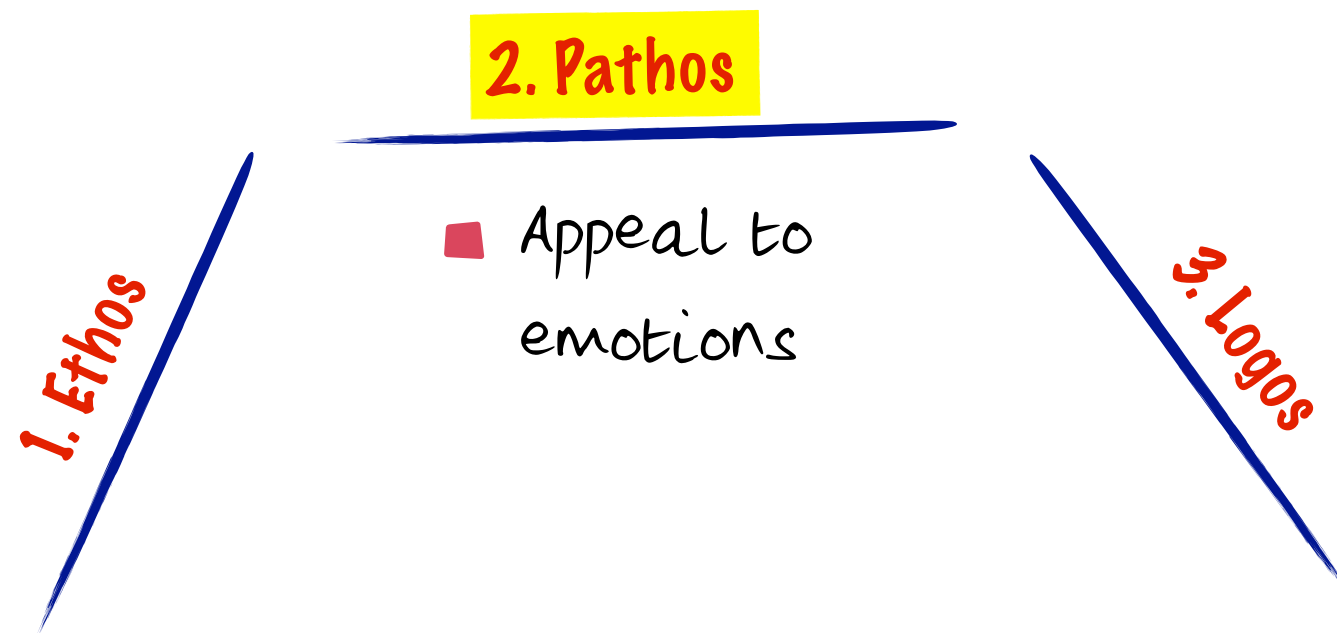
Resolution could be through persuasion

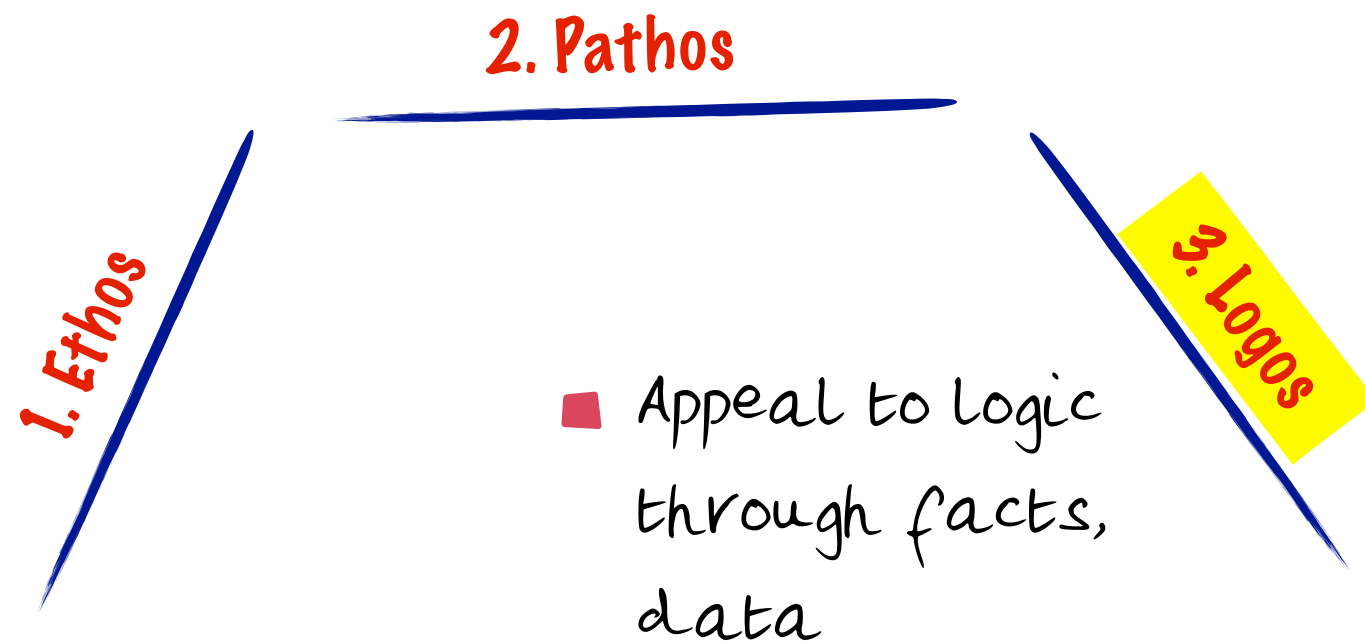


According to Aristotle a persuasive argument has three components









Let's look at an example...

1. Ethos (ethical)

"See how I am still so curious,
eager to learn new things and
make it a point to read for at
least an hour every day."



You must stay curious,
read more, learn to learn...

Conflict

Why?



1. Ethos (ethical)

"See how I am still so curious, eager to learn new things and make it a point to read for at least an hour every day."

2. Pathos (emotional)

"Let me tell you a story..."

Conflict
Why?



You must stay curious, read more, learn to learn...

1. Ethos (ethical)

"See how I am still so curious, eager to learn new things and make it a point to read for at least an hour every day."

2. Pathos (emotional)

"Let me tell you a story..."

3. Logos (logical)

"According to American Society of Training and Development (ASTD), the amount of knowledge in the world doubles every 18 months."

You must stay curious, read more, learn to learn...

Conflict

Why?



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In their book 'Switch - how to change things when change is hard' authors Chip and Dan Heath take a deeper look at inner conflicts...

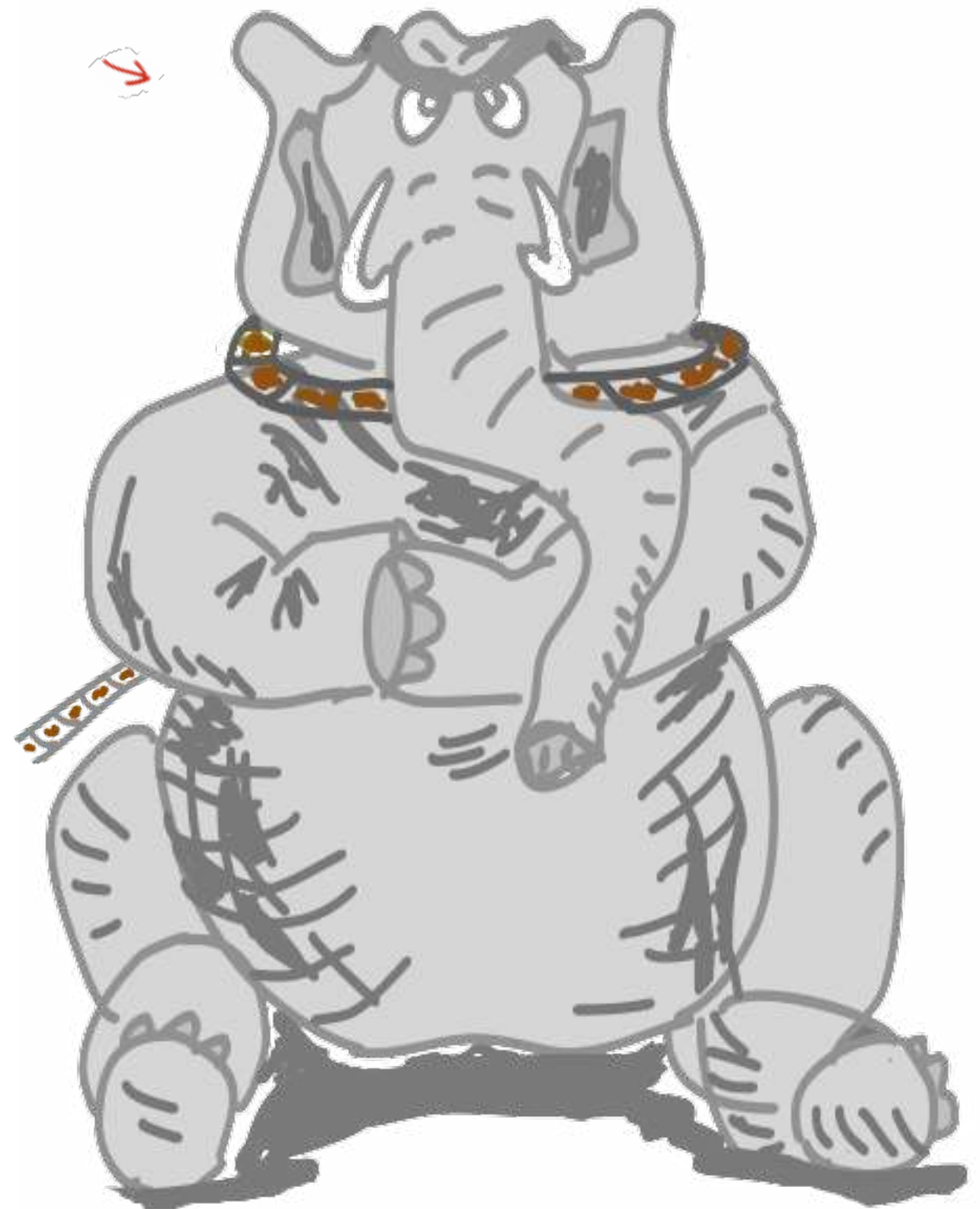
They look at the inner conflict as a dilemma between 'HEART and MIND' and use the analogy given by psychologist, Jonathan Haidt...

Your Mind or rational side is
THE RIDER



Structure > Conflict > Resolution

Your Heart or emotional side is
THE ELEPHANT



THE RIDER (mind or rationality)

(+)

- is a visionary (thinks long-term)
- good at planning and direction
- accepts delayed gratification

(-)

- Over analyzes (analysis-paralysis)
- Limited strength (self-supervision is exhausting)



THE ELEPHANT (heart or emotions)

(+)

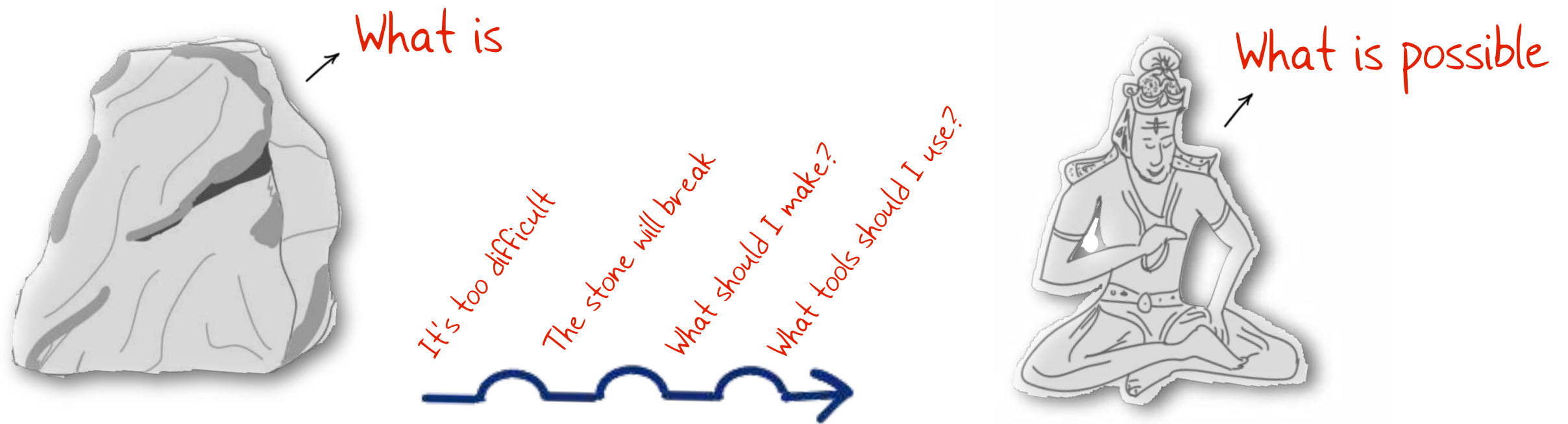
- can provide energy and enthusiasm
- responds well to positive emotions
- love, compassion, empathy, loyalty

(-)

- lazy and unpredictable
- desires instant gratification
- negative emotions (loss of energy or focus)



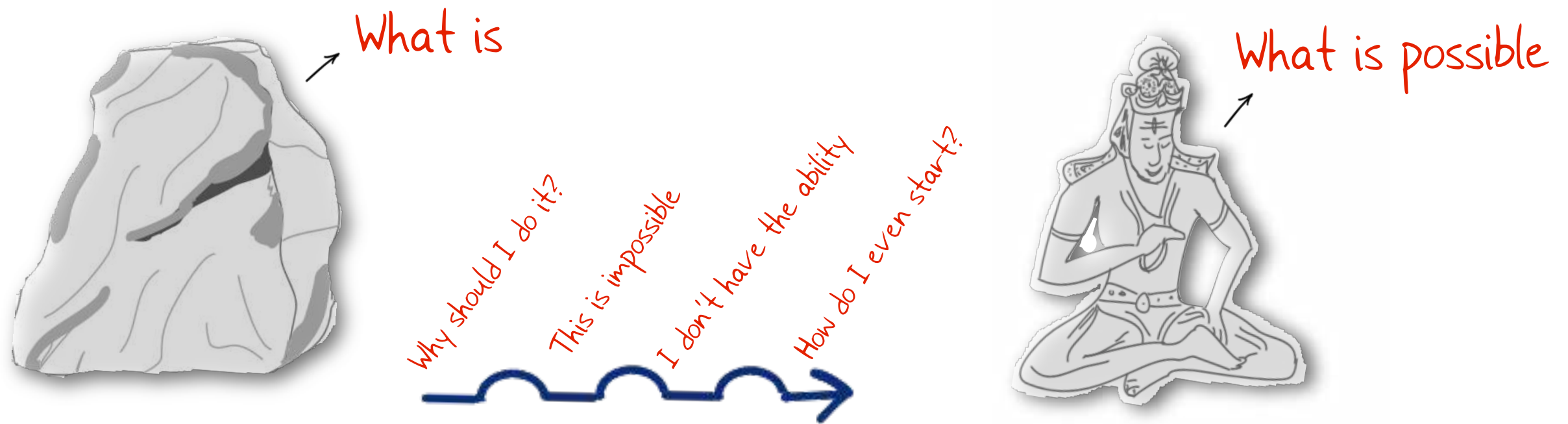
"What looks like Laziness is often Exhaustion"



THE RIDER

- Changing habits is tiring (self-control is exhausting)
- Prefer to maintain status quo
- Sees only problems on the path of change
- Too many choices (analysis paralysis)

"What looks like Resistance is often Lack of Clarity"



THE ELEPHANT

- Why change? No emotional connect with change
- The challenge is too big
- I don't have the ability (lack of self-efficacy)
- How should I go about it - what steps?

To Resolve the Inner Conflict,
and bring about change (from 'what is'
to 'what is possible'), **you need to appeal
to both the rider and the elephant**



What role can Stories play in 'Directing the Rider' and 'Motivating the Elephant' ?

Direct the Rider

Role of Stories

- Stories that demonstrate change is possible
- Focus on solutions (and not the problems)
 - i.e. don't focus on what is broken and how to fix it
 - instead focus on what is working and how to do more of it
- Stories that explain the critical steps

Let's look at an example...



Once upon a time there was a boy who was heart-broken because he got 'F' grade in Math and Science.

He thought to himself he was no good at studies...

The story should go on to explain how he changed his mindset...



- Instead of looking at the bad grades he considered his 'A' grade in English
- How did I get an 'A' in English?
 - Good study habits?
 - Hard work?
 - Multiple performance opportunities (writing, debating)?
 - Deep interest and confidence?
- He then applied the same learning approach to other subjects
- He got a 'C' in Math and Science and a 'B' in History!

Motivate the Elephant

Role of Stories

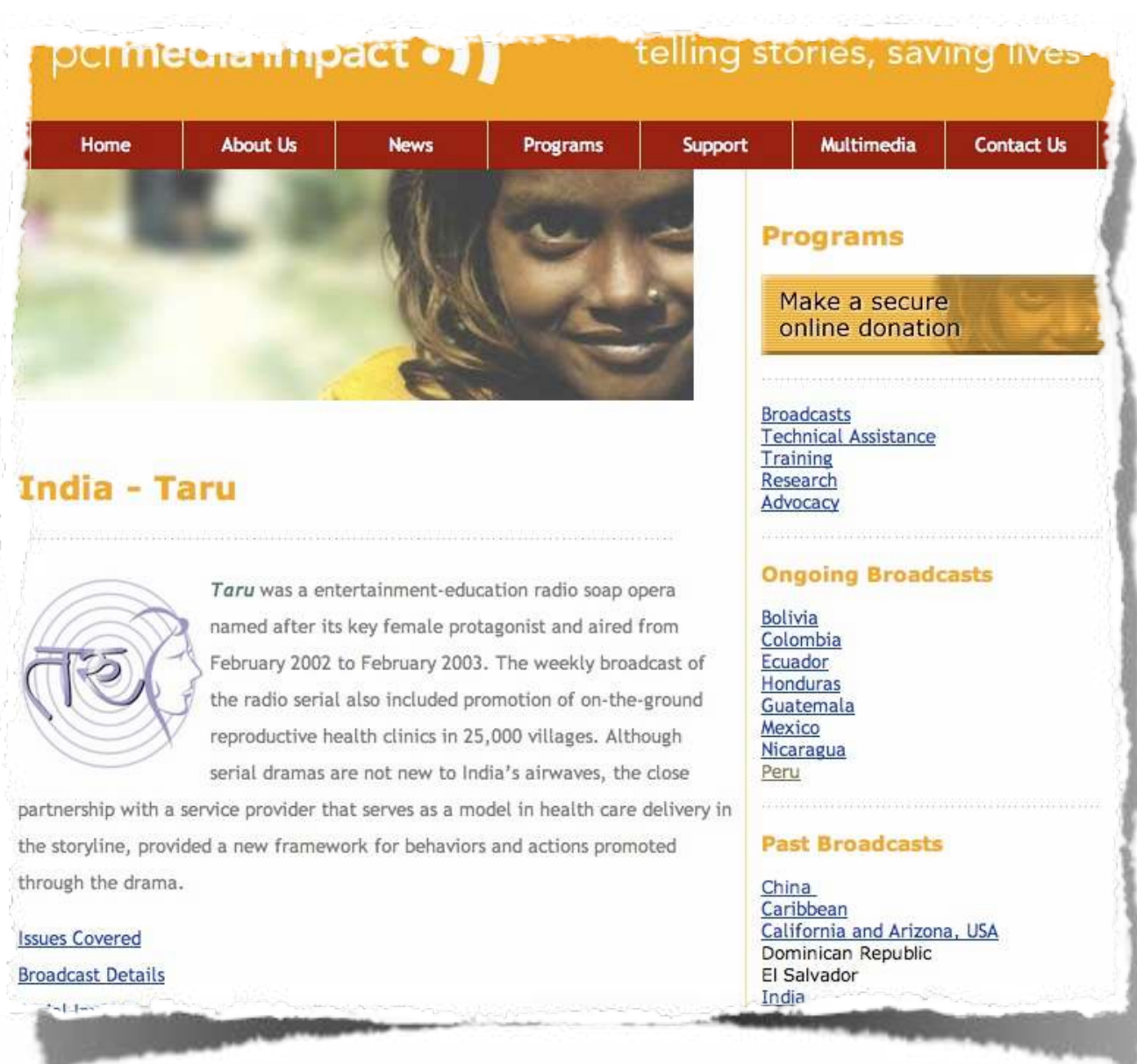
- Stories that provide an emotional connect
- That inspire hope
- That help achieve some 'quick wins'
- That 'grow the person' - help them gain self-efficacy

Let's look at some examples...

Stories inspired by Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Tele-novellas and Radio-dramas narrating stories of model behaviour have been very successful in bringing about social change like,

- radio drama, 'Taru', in India, about female reproductive health
- radio drama, "Twende na Wakati," or "Let's Go with the Times," in parts of Tanzania, about HIV and AIDS
- "Ven Conmigo," or "Come with Me," in Mexico, on adult literacy



http://www.population.org/old/programs_india_taru.shtml



<http://www.population.org/>

Principles on which these stories are based (according to Bandura)

- Contrasting Role Models - positive, transitional and negative
- Characters demonstrate how to manage set-backs or enlist support
- Personal Relevance - from audience perspective
- Aspirational Linkage (i.e. based on audience's aspirations)
- Vicarious Motivators
- Environmental Support - tell the audience what support is available for making the change and where to look for it

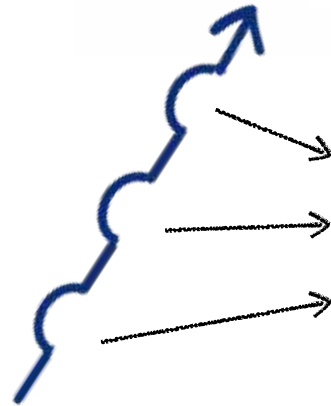
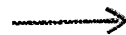
To conclude...

Stories help a 'learner hero'
embark on a journey towards
self-confidence and
understanding...



What is possible

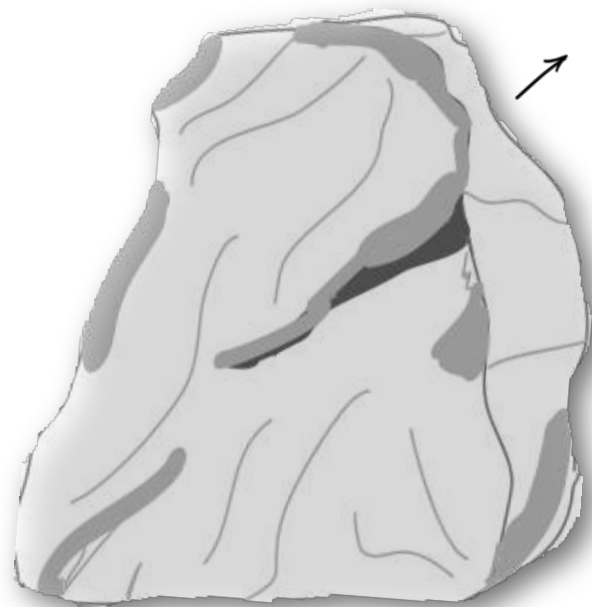
Learner's
Journey



Inner
Conflicts



Resolution



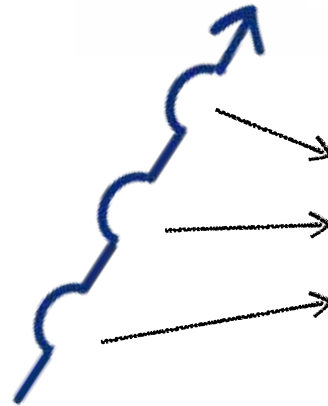
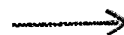
What is

Stories help a 'learner hero' embark on a journey towards self-confidence and understanding...

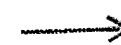


What is possible

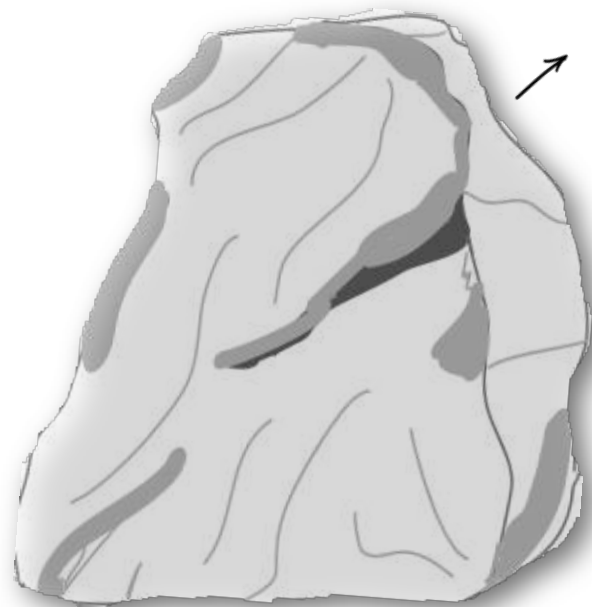
Learner's Journey



Inner Conflicts



Resolution



What is

...by creating inspired moments of learning that combine - full attention, enthusiastic interest and positive emotional intensity.

Do you remember stories that made history come alive for you, or biographies that got you back on your feet when you were down?

- ◆ **We can all learn from 'hearing' stories - parables, moral tales, stories of adventure...**
- ◆ **We can also learn by 'telling' stories - sharing our own 'hard knocks of life' tales, that helps us make sense of our life situation (blogging for catharsis!)**
- ◆ **And, best of all, stories can make the learning experience a lot of fun**

References

- ◆ **'Narrative Perspectives on Adult Education' - Rossiter & Clark**
- ◆ **'Social Intelligence' - Daniel Goleman**
- ◆ **'A Private Universe' - projects about misconceptions in Science**
- ◆ **'A Hero with a Thousand Faces' - Joseph Campbell**
- ◆ **Wikipedia - Panchtantra, Kohlberg, Aristotle and Freytag**
- ◆ **'Switch' - Chip & Dan Heath**
- ◆ **Lecture by Albert Bandura - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjlbKaSXM3A>**

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