

Stories in Your Family and Community

Past and present



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Edinburg Historical Society
June 2016

First, an introduction

Cynthia Kurtz

14 year resident of Edinburg

~5 years Curator of EHS musums

Started career studying
ecology and animal behavior



Since 1999: Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI)

It's about narrative – Everyday stories

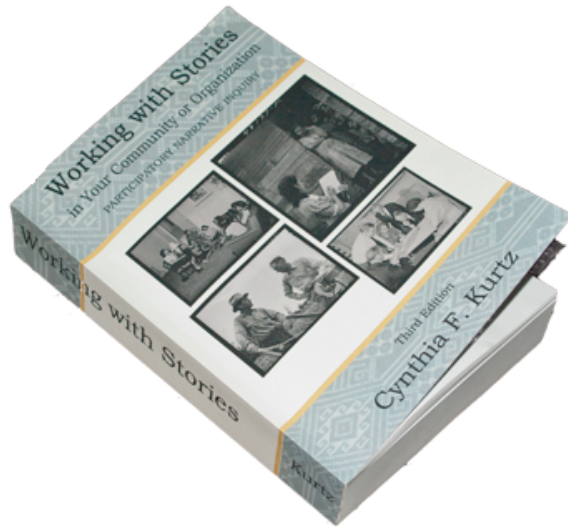
and inquiry – Finding things out, thinking about things

that is participatory – Everybody gets involved

A quick overview of my work



Story colored glasses blog – 2008

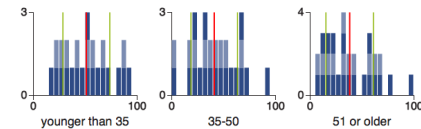


Working with Stories textbook – 2008,
2009, 2014



Narratopia card game – 2015

NARRAFIRMA



NarraFirma software – 2015

Second textbook and book
of essays in progress...

Suprising responses!



“Once upon a time. How’s that?”

“That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it.”

(after telling a story) “But that’s not a story! It really happened.”

(after telling several stories) “Lots of things have happened to me, but I don’t have any *stories* to tell.”

What is a story?



A story is a **communication** we create to inform, persuade, or entertain.

The best stories
reach out and touch
their audiences.

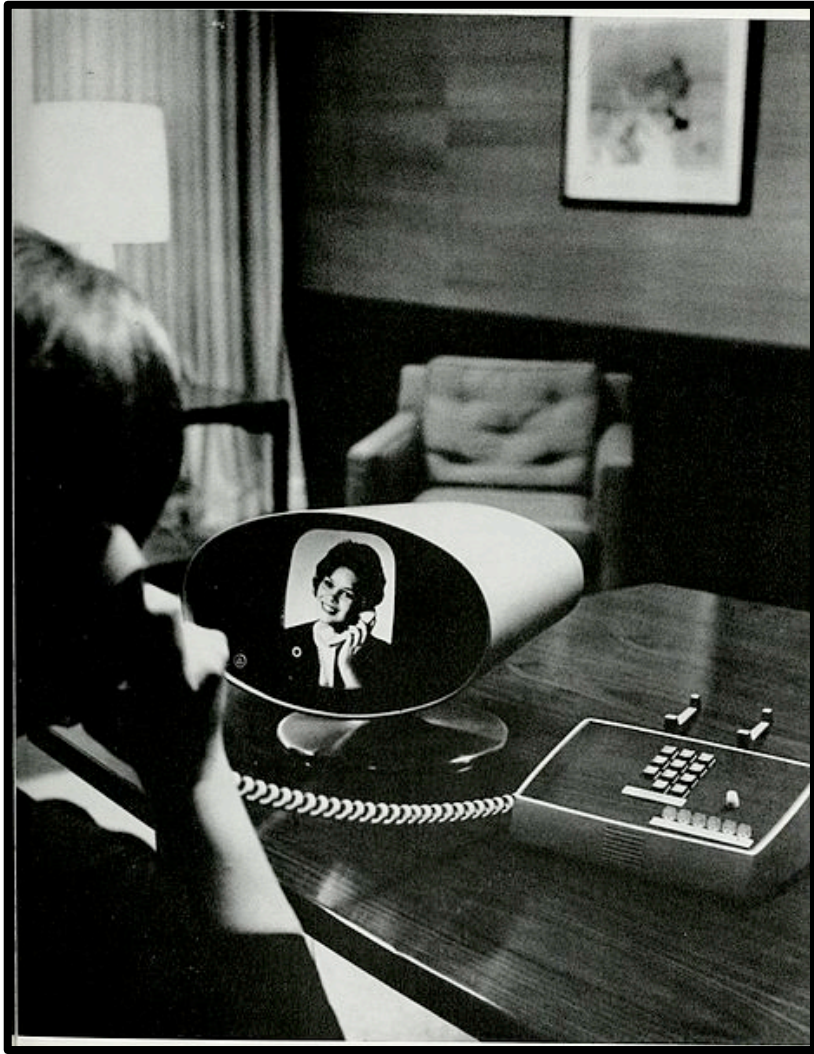
What is a story?



A story is a **mental structure** we use to remember, learn, and imagine.

The best stories help us **make sense** of our lives.

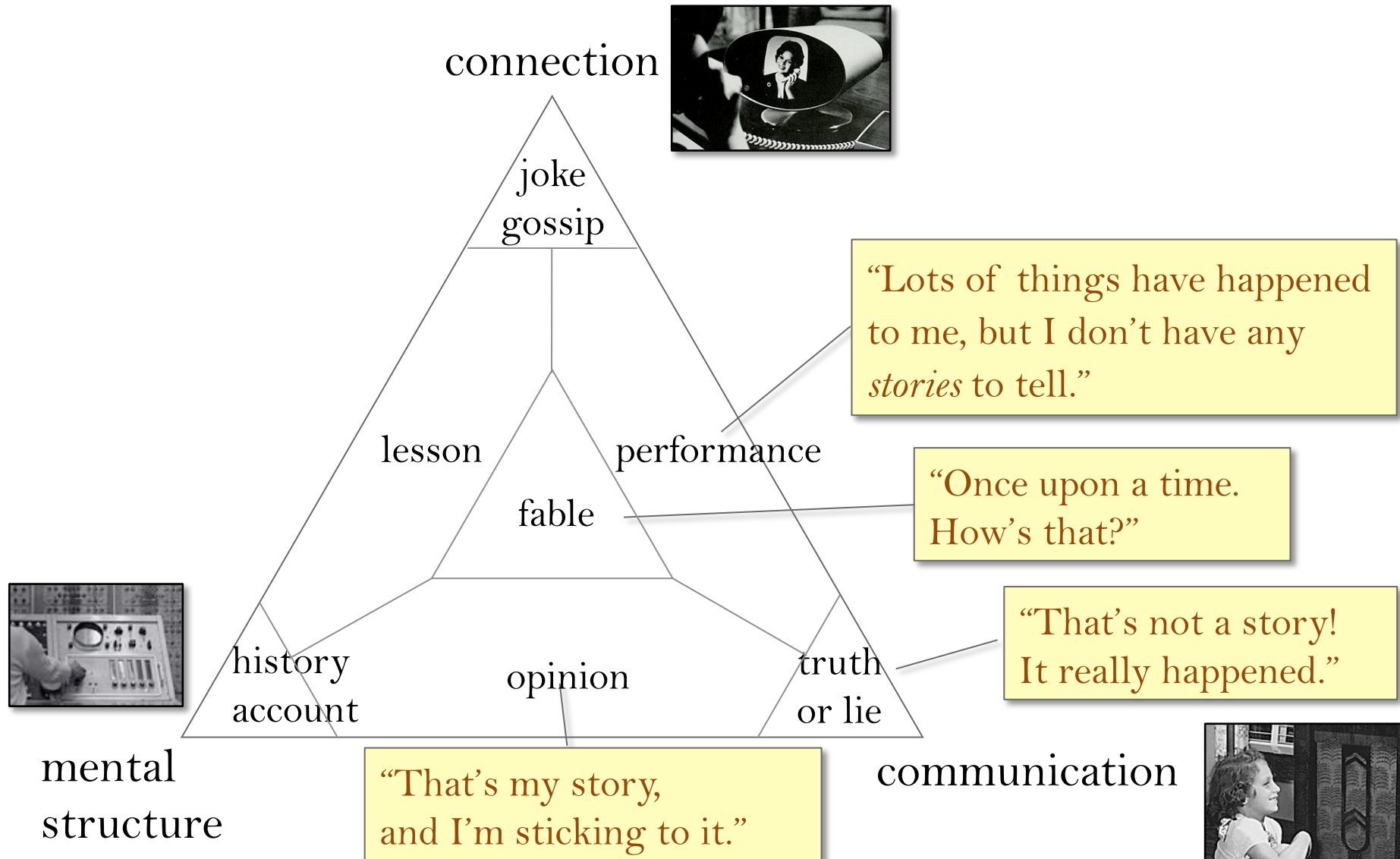
What is a story?



A story is a **connection**
we use to get to know each
other and build relationships.

The best stories
help us see the world
through **each other's eyes**.

What is a story?



Historical and contemporary storytelling

Once upon a time, when people **made more of their own things**, they created more stories about their life experiences. They told these tales ... to give each other insights, to entertain each other, and to engage each other in times of celebration, trial, mourning, or reverence. But primarily they did it to **connect** with each other....

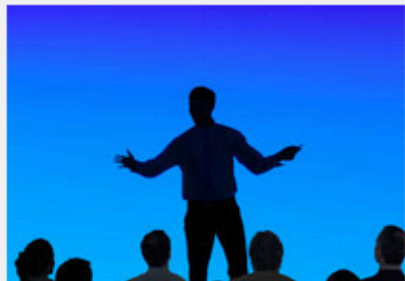
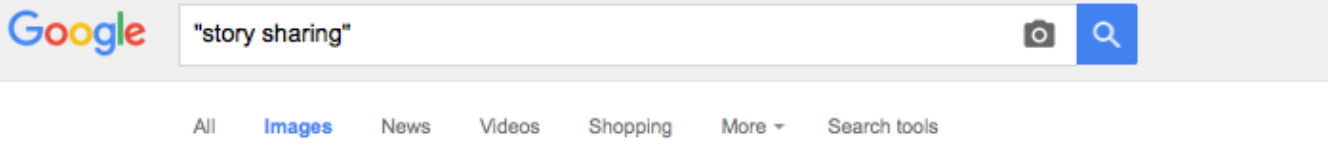
Since that time, for all the wonderful progress made in communication technology, the world has grown alarmingly less personal. People have **given over much of their individual power** to the collective, and have let themselves be increasingly distracted from personal storytelling by flashier but ultimately **less gratifying** activities that compete for their attention.

Jack Maguire, *The Power of Personal Storytelling*

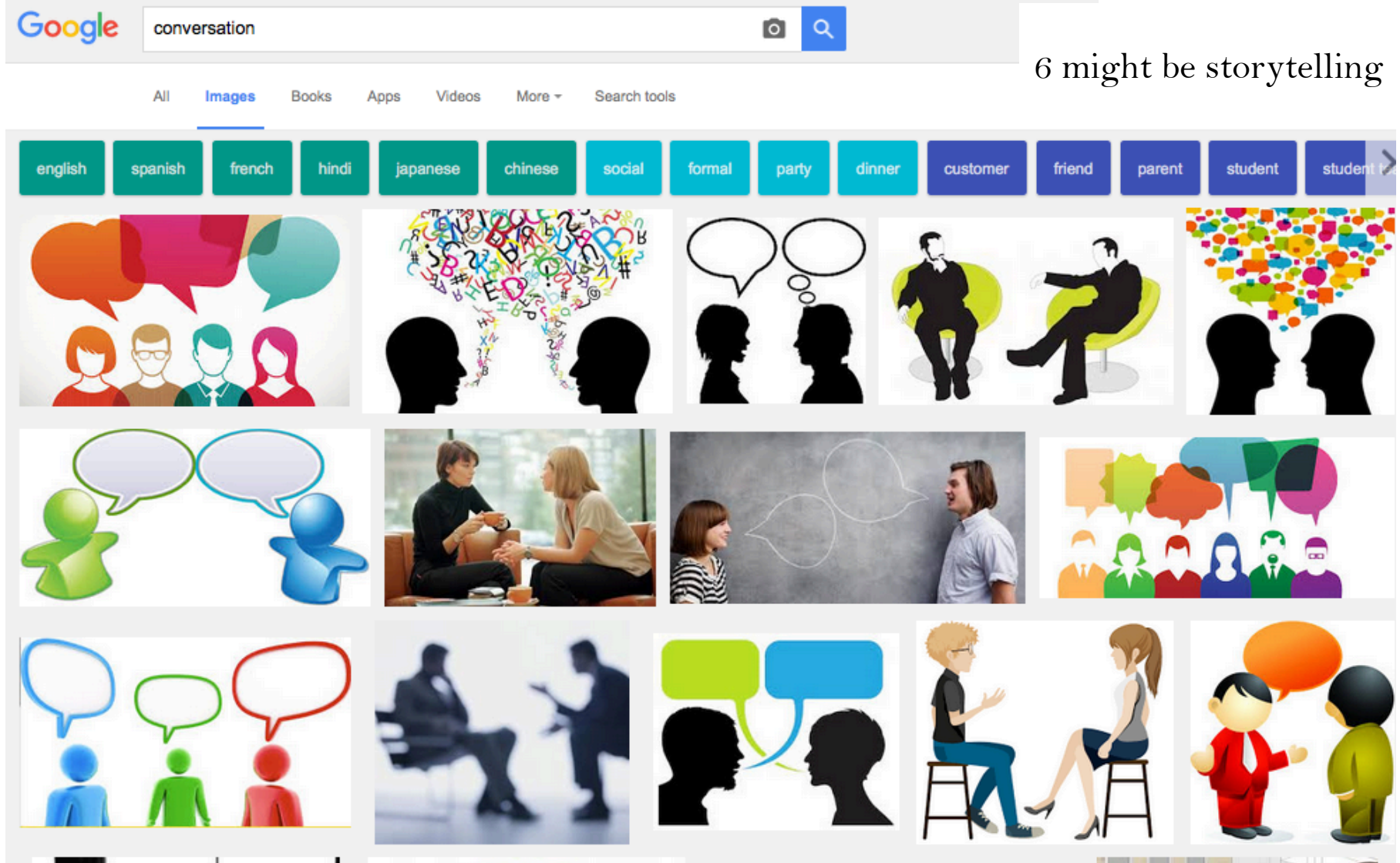
A screenshot of a Google search interface. The search bar contains the word "storytelling". Below the search bar, the "Images" tab is selected, showing a row of category buttons: visual, illustration, advertising, graphic, banner, multimedia, marketing, transmedia, branding, content marketing, leadership, and packaging. To the right of the search bar, there is a list of related terms: "11 performance", "1 self-expression", and "2 persuasion".

How about “story sharing”?

8 self-expression
3 performance
2 connection



To find natural everyday conversational storytelling...



Which is more important?

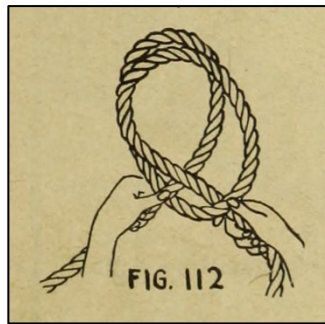
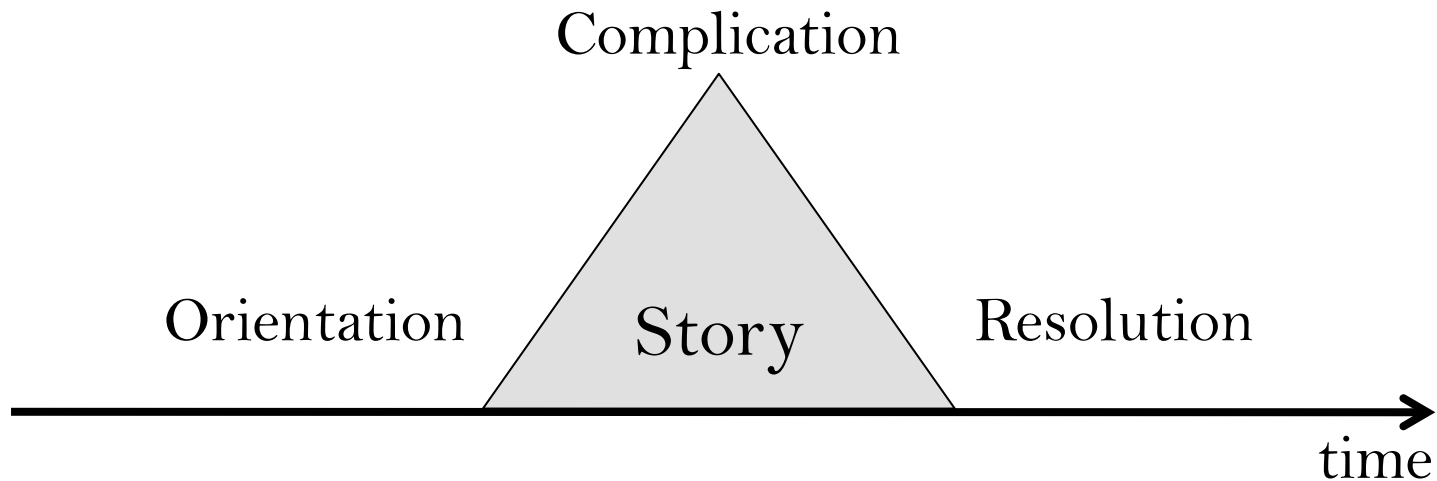
Saving stories?



Or saving storytelling?



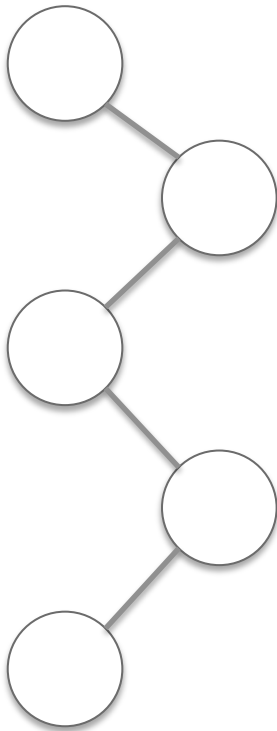
What does a story look like?



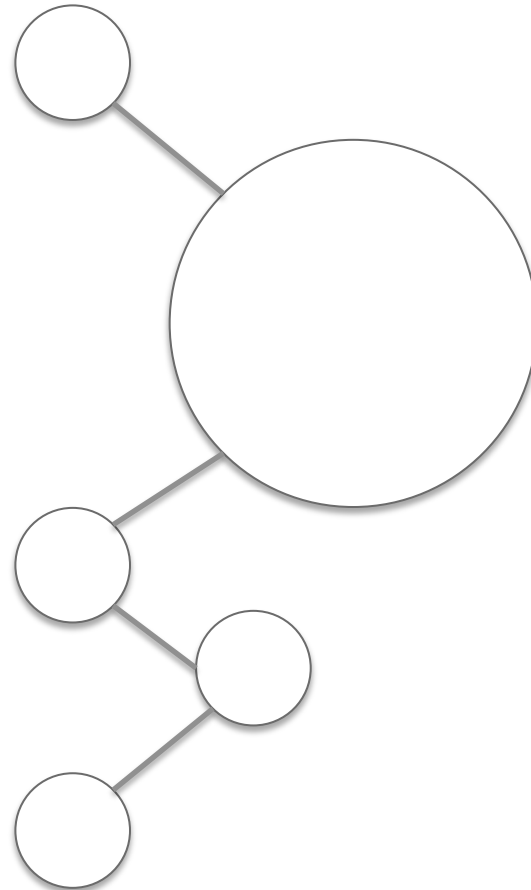
It's like a knot.

What does a *conversational* story look like?

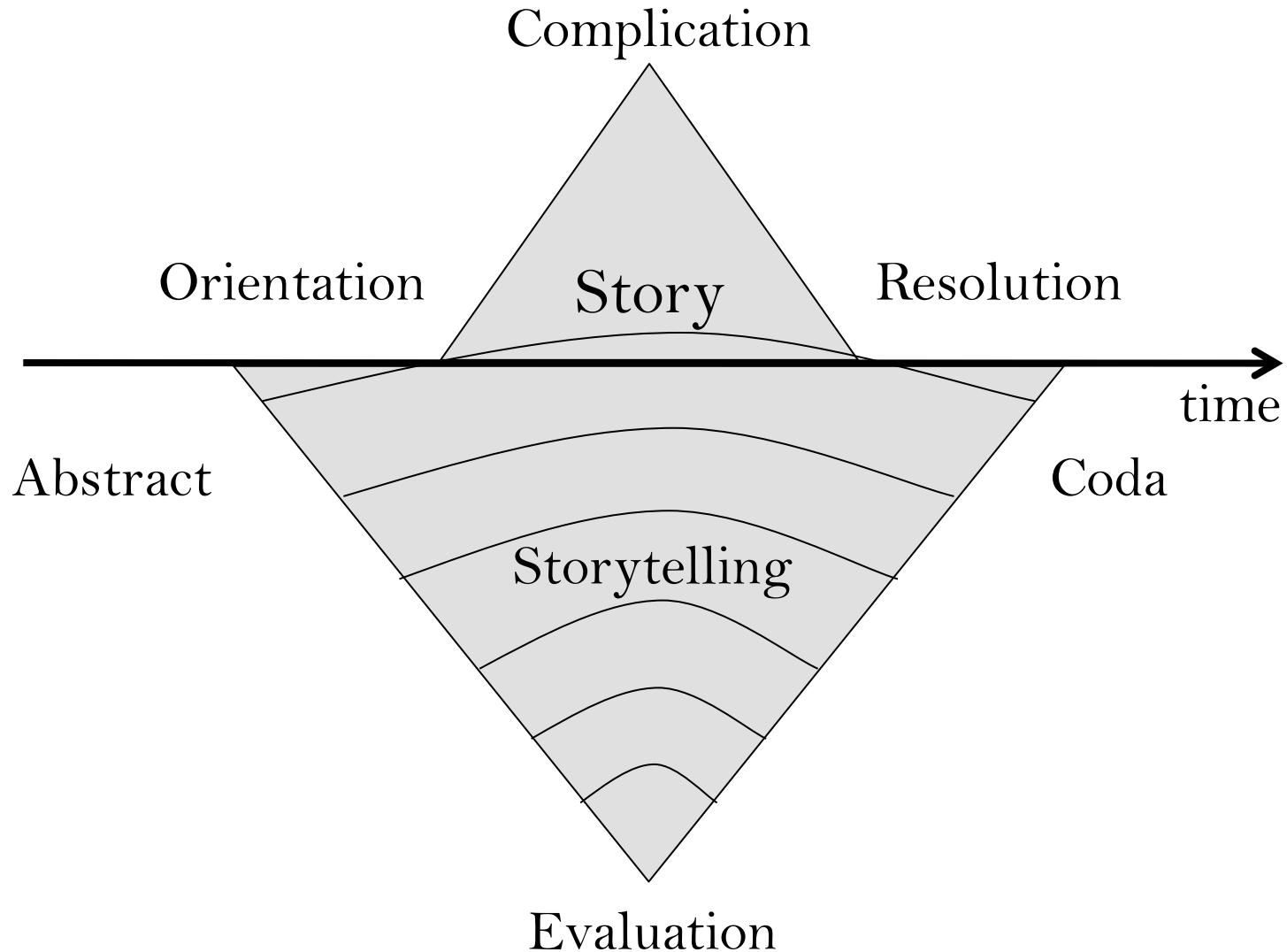
Conversation = tick-tock
Turn taking



Story = holding the floor
Privilege + danger = ritual



The shape of a conversational story



Taking apart a conversational story

I think, I mean I've always found, I mean
I've noticed that —

in a presentation, in — this would be a *big*
presentation, like 100 people listening to one
person, that when the speaker says — they
come to the end of their talk, and they say,
right, any questions?

That I don't know if you find the experience I
do, but there is quite a pause.

[Audience] Um-hmm.

Taking apart a conversational story

And I certainly used to find that I hated that pause.

And indeed, I knew what question I was going to ask even before they invited questions, so that — my hand would go up first, I'd be the first one to ask a question.

Sometimes I didn't actually mind if it was a really dumb question, or almost even worse, an even irrelevant question. But it kind of really got going.

And I like to think I actually in a way acted as a bit of a service, kind of just lubricating other questions — someone's asked the first one, the other ones just flow, that sort of thing.

Taking apart a conversational story

But I've noticed that — it's not so much that, but the thing I've really noticed is — a level of discomfort with silence.

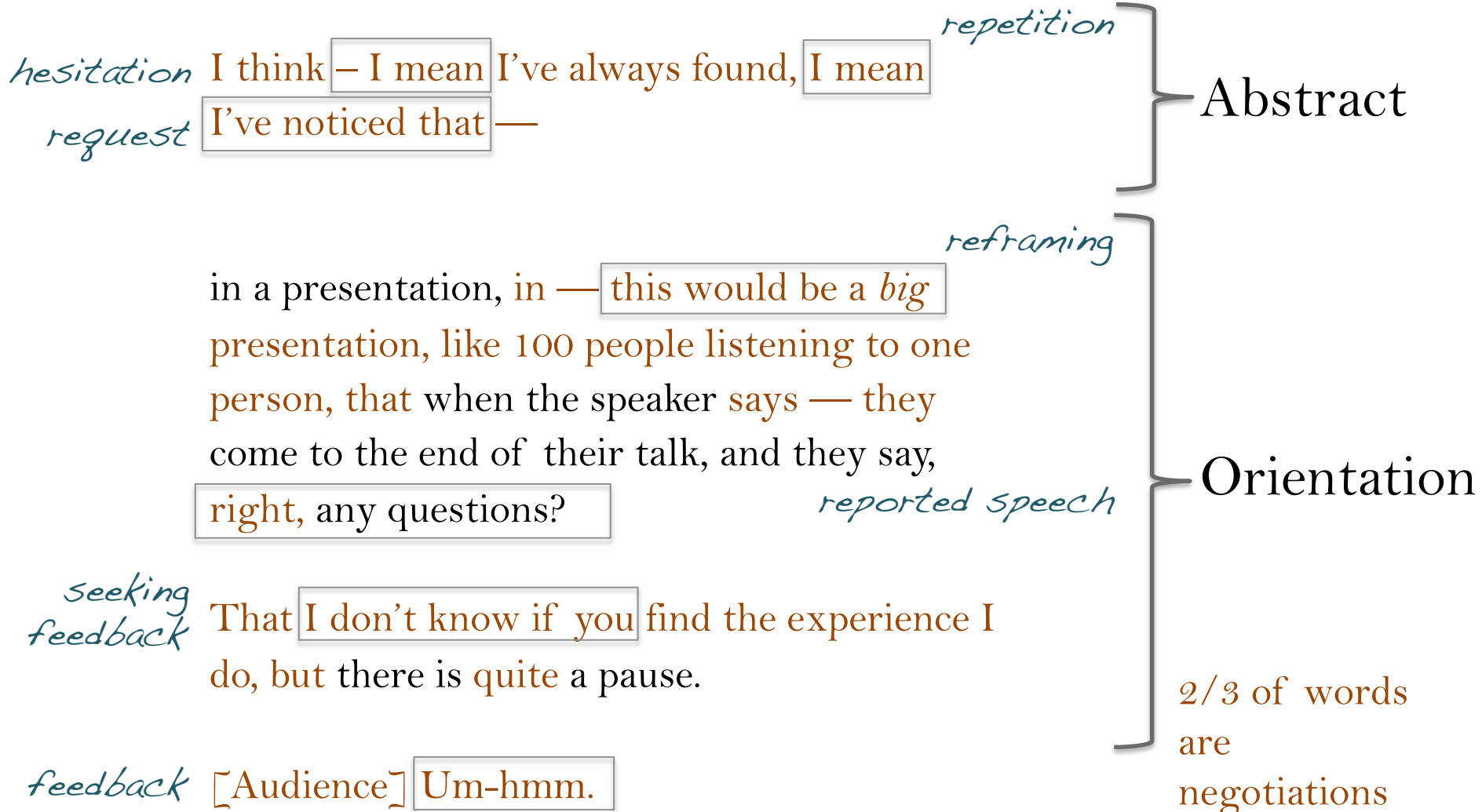
[Audience] Hm.

You may have actually noticed I was the first to speak. I mean, I didn't actually even realize that.

And it's funny, isn't it, that what I said is about — in a way the silence between people sometimes is really important for learning, leaving the space, I think.

Don't know if you've had the same feeling.

Taking apart a conversational story



Taking apart a conversational story

And I certainly used to find that I hated that pause.

qualifiers

And indeed, I knew what question I was going to ask even before they invited questions, so that — my hand would go up first, I'd be the first one to ask a question.

explaining

Sometimes I didn't actually mind if it was a really dumb question, or almost even worse, an even irrelevant question. But it kind of really got going.

And I like to think I actually in a way acted as a bit of a service, kind of just lubricating other questions — someone's asked the first one, the other ones just flow, that sort of thing.

more explaining

Complication

Taking apart a conversational story

more qualifying

But I've noticed that — it's not so much that, but
the thing I've really noticed is — a level of
discomfort with silence.

[Audience] Hm.

meta-comment on story

You may have actually noticed I was the first to
speak. I mean, I didn't actually even realize that.

Resolution

*mixed
qualifiers
and
intensifiers*

And it's funny, isn't it, that what I said is about —
in a way the silence between people
sometimes is really important for learning,
leaving the space, I think.

Don't know if you've had the same feeling.

seeking confirmation

Coda

Why do we do this?



It's like **wrapping paper**.

We wrap stories and gifts in **social ritual**.

Both rituals send the **signal**:

I'm reaching out

I'm **vulnerable**

Be kind

Don't attack

At least wait a while

More storytelling rituals

Response stories

People **build long chains** of connected stories.

Response stories say:
I felt that way too
We are alike
We are **together**

Like **reciprocal gift exchanges**.



More storytelling rituals



Co-telling

Stories told by multiple people:

- show we were part of what happened
- strengthen connections

Like “going together” on a gift.

Signs of a healthy story sharing culture

When story sharing is **healthy**:

- **Everyone** gets to tell stories
- Everyone gets to *finish* their stories
- But everyone has to **negotiate**
- People know **which stories** to tell when and where and to whom
- People use stories to **account** for their actions and to **judge** others
- People use stories to make **decisions**



Stories in a healthy story sharing culture

When story sharing is healthy,
it's easy to find:

- Response stories
- Co-tellings
- Retellings
- Elaborations
- Mistake stories
- Counter-stories
- Sacred stories
- Condensed stories



When story sharing happens: Common quiet simple tasks



Might as well share stories **while we** spin, knit, weave, quilt, sew, cook, can, carve, whittle, etc



When story sharing happens: After-parties



The quiet time
after the big event

When story sharing happens: Milestones



Marking important days
by **looking back**
into the past



Where story sharing happens: Places of relaxed purpose

Something to do,
with **permission** to linger
and connect



Where story sharing happens: Multi-purpose places



- Available
- Filled with story eliciting cues
- Clear rules about responsibility

Where story sharing happens: Edges



Inviting

Places between
places, where people
bump into each other
and stop to chat



Improvised



Lifeless

How to support story sharing in a conversation

Practice asking questions whose answers are stories.

Instead of asking:	ask:
What was it like when you were a kid?	What was the best (funniest, scariest) moment of your childhood?
What makes you proud of our family?	When have you felt the most proud of our family?
What do you like about hunting?	How did you get started hunting?

Help people choose a moment in time

Ask “What happened?”

How to support story sharing in a conversation

While someone is telling a story:

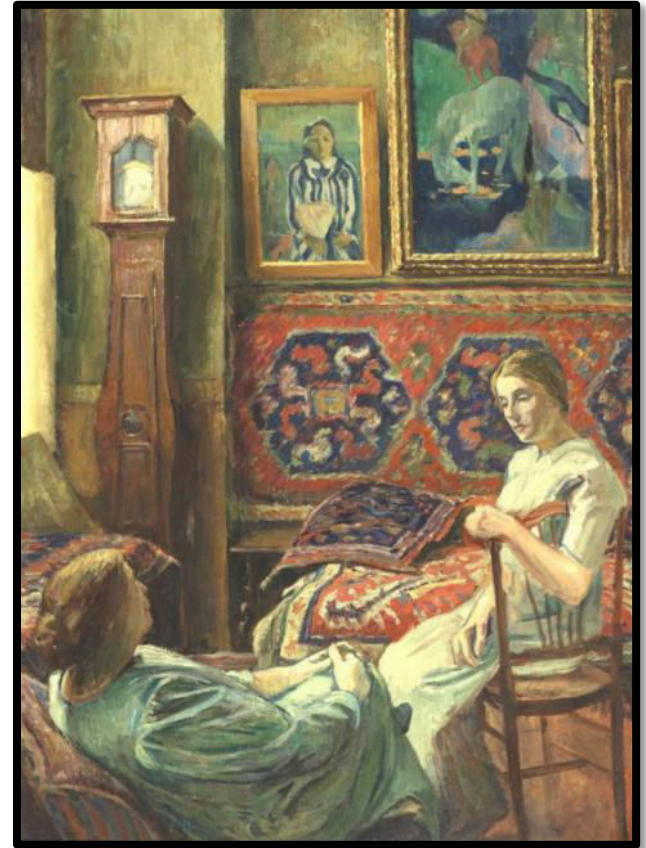
- Be an **active audience**
- Respond to vulnerable points
- Use body language to show you're listening

Ask questions that show **respect and curiosity**:

“Did she ever do that again?”

“Why do you think he said that?”

Respond with a connected story of your own.



How different people tell stories

I tell stories

I think
I tell stories

	Yes	No
Yes	Story performers	Non-story tellers
No	Natural storytellers	Reluctant storytellers

How to preserve your family's stories

Keep it **simple**! No need for “multimedia”

Audio is better than video

Use **reminders** – objects or photos

Bring people together so they can **remind** each other

Ask **connecting questions** that bring out more stories

Search for “**oral history**” on the internet



How to preserve your family's stories



Don't – Ask “for” a story

Don't – Say “thank you *for*” a story

Call attention to the story
as an *event*, not a thing

Don't – Say you are “collecting” or
“gathering” stories (even if you are)

Don't – Say “that's a *good story*”

Don't – Say “that would make a great
movie”

Narratopia – the conversational story game

To **remember** how to
share stories

To **practice** sharing
stories

To remember how much
fun it is

To practice speech or
composition

To **preserve** stories



Narratopia – the conversational story game

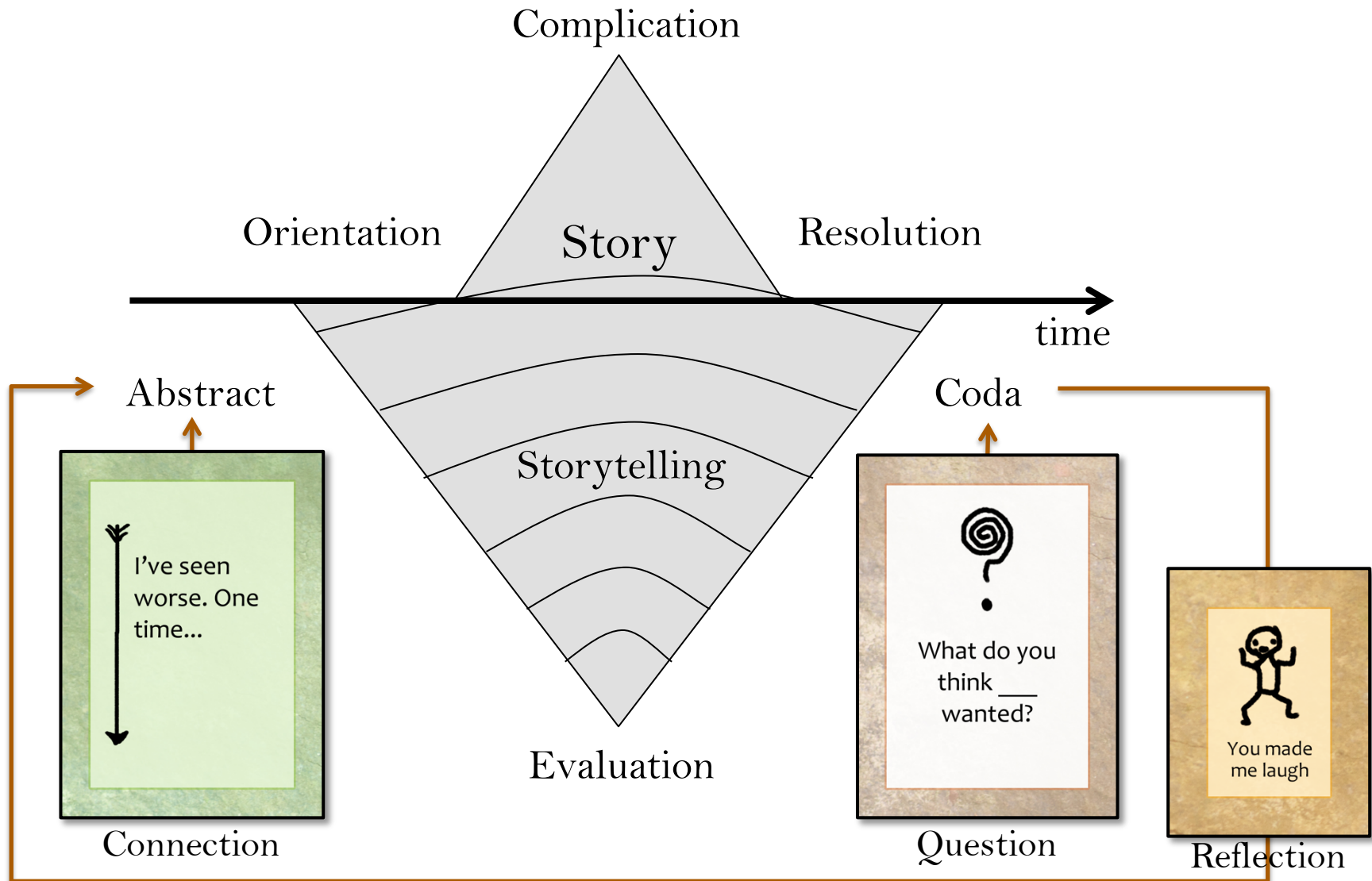
Connection
cards build a
web of stories

Question cards
explore
meaning

Reflection
cards prime the
storytelling
pump



Narratopia – the conversational story game



Questions?

cfkurtz.com
workingwithstories.org
storycoloredglasses.com

narratopia.com
narrafirma.com

