

# The lecture is not dead: using storytelling to enhance lectures

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# Pedagogical buzzwords

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**Active  
learning**

**Student -  
directed  
learning**

**Problem -  
based learning**

**Flipped  
classrooms**

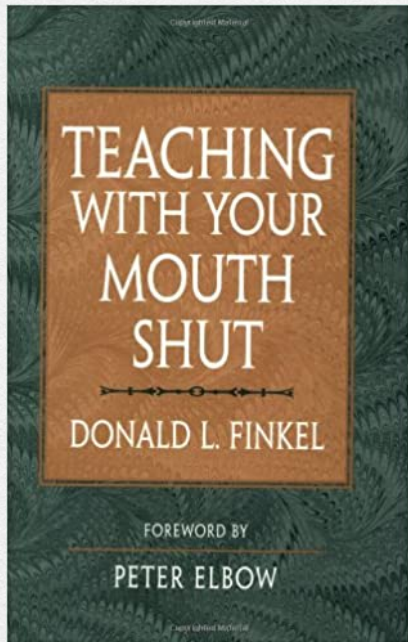




Answer Sheet • Analysis

# It puts kids to sleep — but teachers keep lecturing anyway. Here's what to do about it.

July 11, 2017 by Valerie Strauss



Heinemann; Eighth Printing edition (March 15, 2000)



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## Points of View: Lectures: Can't Learn with Them, Can't Learn without Them

Talking Biology: Learning Outside the Book—and the Lecture

Daniel J. Klionsky

Published Online: 13 Oct 2017 | <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.04-07-0055>



# Complaints about lectures

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1. They are outdated, antiquated
2. They promote passive learning
3. A student scribbling down notes is not learning
4. It doesn't require complex thinking
5. They transmit facts but nothing more



Lecturing is the oldest and *still the most commonly used* teaching method in higher education – it is practical and efficient, particularly in large class sizes

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Over 3,500 TED  
Talks with over 3  
billion annual views





# Reframe the question

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Instead of asking,

*“How do we replace lecturing in the classroom to  
enhance learning?”*,

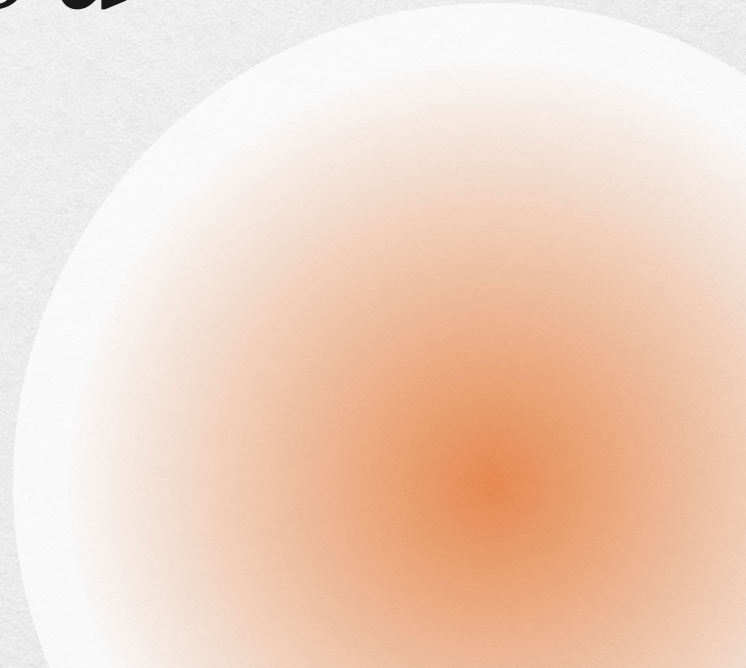
let's ask

*“How can we enhance lectures to improve  
learning?”*



Why do you  
lecture?

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# Why do I lecture?

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1. Introduce a concept
2. Provide background information
3. Highlight the problems
4. Provide historical overview
5. Highlight the journey in scientific developments, not just the discovery
6. Provide a bigger picture overview that helps the importance sink in
7. It “gets to the heart of why a lesson is worth learning”
8. Get them excited about the content
9. Open their eyes to new questions, help them see connections between ideas, and provide new perspectives they may not have considered



# *The Power of Stories*

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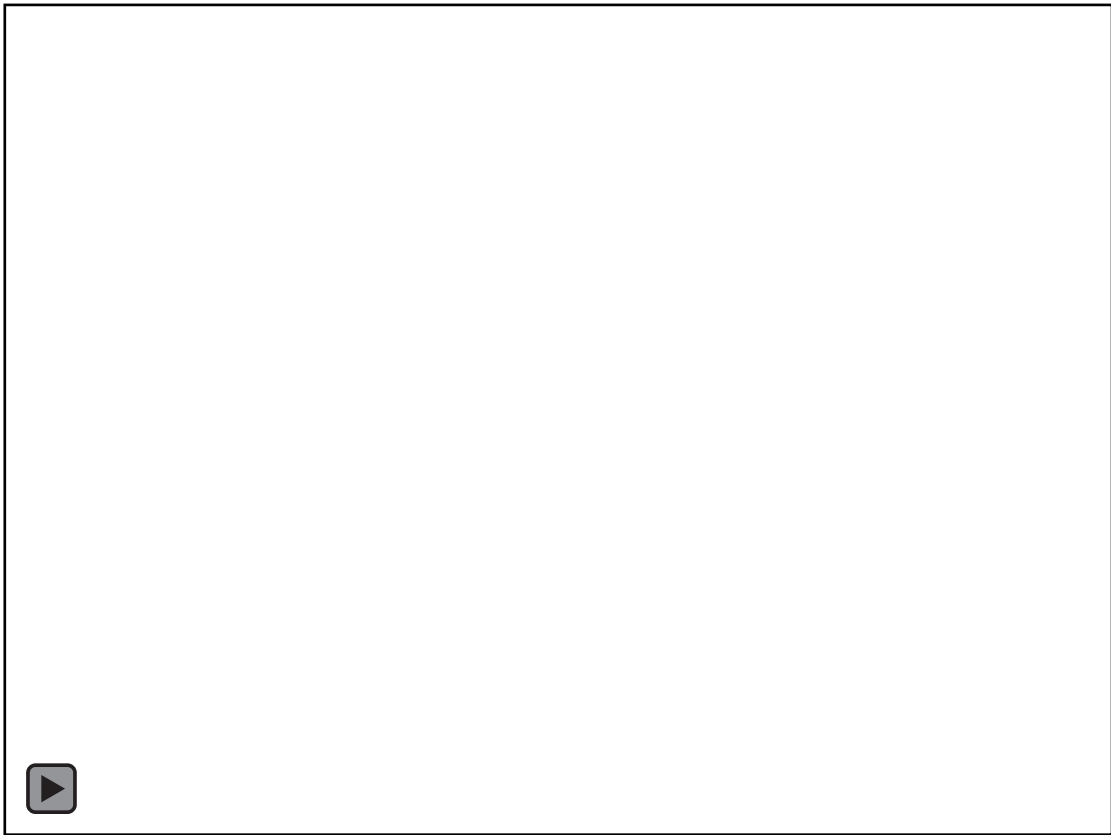
Throughout history, stories have been an effective way of transmitting not just information but also values and attitudes to an individual or to a community.



What stood out in the  
TED Talk?

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From a biological standpoint, stories move us forward in three major ways:



**Relate to each  
other**



**Whole - brain  
connection**



**Integrate and  
remember**



# HOW STORYTELLING AFFECTS THE BRAIN

## NEURAL COUPLING

A story activates parts in the brain that allows the listener to turn the story in to their own ideas and experience thanks to a process called neural coupling.

## MIRRORING

Listeners will not only experience the similar brain activity to each other, but also to the speaker.



## DOPAMINE

The brain releases dopamine into the system when it experiences an emotionally-charged event, making it easier to remember and with greater accuracy.

## CORTEX ACTIVITY

When processing facts, two areas of the brain are activated (Broca's and Wernicke's area). A well-told story can engage many additional areas, including the motor cortex, sensory cortex and frontal cortex.



# Storytelling improves learning

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1. Learning is more than just facts. It is having *mental organization* , a framework of understanding. This is what facilitates retrieval and application of knowledge.
2. One needs to develop their own way of thinking, build on their own prior knowledge, and *construct their own framework* to truly learn and form long lasting memories.
3. Short-term and working memory has limited capacity.
4. *Reducing cognitive load* improves learning.



# The value of storytelling in the classroom





# Using stories in the classroom

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1. Have a beginning, middle, and end.
2. A good story has a good hook, a strong opening.
3. Have a theme.
4. Keep it simple. Don't try to include too much information. Reduce it down to a nugget that can be remembered.
5. Try to include emotional hooks.
6. Be relatable, make real life connections.
7. They work at any time during a class period.
  - a. At the beginning, it sets up interest and intrigue, helps them see from the very beginning why what they're about to learn is important
  - b. In the middle, it helps students make connections with concepts they just learned
  - c. At the end, it summarizes and puts concepts into a greater context
8. As the storyteller, you are performing. Make eye contact, move your body around, pause occasionally for effect –give them a chance to think about what you've just said
9. Not everything needs to be a story.



# TIPS for using stories in class

Use real stories that students will find relatable

Don't be afraid to include emotion

Test out stories to make sure they are effective

Make sure there is a clear beginning, middle, and end

Keep it simple to hold focus and make it memorable

Great stories can come from experiences, news, history, or pop culture

Have a strong character

Have a strong opening to grab their attention

Include stories that use images and data to improve critical thinking skills

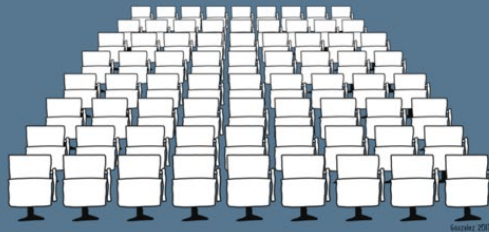


check out [sagepub.com](https://www.sagepub.com) for great storytelling materials

**Storytelling is *just one tool* in the instructional toolbox that can be a part of a larger sequence of instruction**

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THINK OF YOURSELF LESS AS  
A TEACHER AND MORE AS A  
DESIGNER OF MEANINGFUL  
EXPERIENCES.

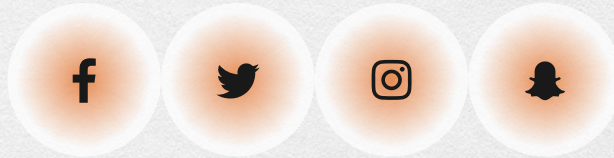
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# Thanks

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*Do you have any questions?*

Email me at [kfphill@vt.edu](mailto:kfphill@vt.edu)



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