



## START WITH WHY

### *Lesson 1 Workbook*

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE (aka "WHY AM I READING THIS?")

Students will begin understanding why it's critical to start with WHY in their stories. This workbook will provide helpful links to expand on the concepts presented in lesson 1 of STORYTELLING IN THE DIGITAL AGE as well as exercises to begin discovering the WHYs of your stories so that you can make the greatest impact. Students will also come to understand the teachings of Joseph Campbell and how he discovered a pattern of storytelling that has spanned cultures and millennium.

## OVERVIEW

You've just started learning why starting with WHY is critical to being an effective storyteller. Every good business has a mission statement that helps inspire its workers. Every good essay or article starts with a compelling thesis. Leading from "why" is a helpful tool to convey the promise of your stories and get your audience invested in what you're about to tell them.

The length of your story and how your audience is consuming it will determine how directly and early to start with your "why" – for instance, if you're writing a novel, then you may get a longer period of time to layer in your WHY (i.e. Moby Dick's very first line of *"Call me Ishmael"* didn't have to be re-written to say *"I'm writing because I tried to kill an unkillable white whale."*). By the end of Act 1 of most feature films clarify why you're watching - *to find out if he can get the girl before she marries the wrong man!*

But if you're creating for a digital medium or in a very short format, know that you have a very short window to get your audiences attention. I was at a Facebook summit in 2018 and they said in regards to videos on Facebook "If you're not engaging your audience within the first 3 seconds, you might as well not publish it." For digital junkies watching social videos, I honestly think 3 seconds is too long to wait! Most of your audience is scrolling their feeds while standing in line at Starbucks -- they need to be hooked quickly. If you're creating for a digital medium, never underestimate the short attention span of your audience - vague stories and premises typically don't perform well in digital, and waiting too long to get them interested and you may never get the chance.

You shouldn't give away everything up top -- you simply want something compelling and immediate hook to help them understand why stopping on your story is worth their time.

## LINKS

### **HOW GREAT LEADERS INSPIRE ACTION – SIMON SINEK (Author of Start With Why):**

*I reference this in regular life all the time, not to mention think about this every time I tell a story. Sinek's book is great, but even this 20 minute TED talk has changed the way I approach stories.*

[https://www.ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en)

### **JOSEPH CAMPBELL - THE HERO MASTER**

Campbell's book *Hero with a Thousand Faces* was a formative book in my life (not to mention just a few well known creators...). Check out some of these links to go down the mythical rabbit hole:

Joseph Campbell Foundation - Helpful resources, recordings and teachings of Joseph Campbell:

<https://www.jcf.org>

## EXERCISES ON "WHY"

*The following prompts will begin sharpening your "WHY" muscle -- getting you to notice how other creators masterfully weave theirs into their stories. Headlines are a skill in and of themselves, and a really good way to hone the craft of "WHY". Even if you're not working in a digital medium, these first exercises will help you create short WHYS out of any story.*

1) Click on any news website you want (i.e. CNN) and read the headlines -- each is giving you a why the article is worth your time. Write down the five most compelling headlines you find:

2) Click on the headlines above and read how the writer begins their essay and how soon they give you a reason to keep reading on. Write down & analyze how they create a WHY

*Practice this exercise with several different websites and newspapers with different styles of writers. Begin to notice differences between WHYS and which compel or intrigue you most. Some may take very direct approaches, others may hone in on a beautiful and specific moment to build off of -- start recognizing the moment you realize you're into the story -- or not.*

*3) Think about three of your favorite personal stories or those of your friends -- then write a short compelling headline and then an opening paragraph for each that gives your audience a compelling reason WHY they should keep reading. Imagine your audience is very busy and doesn't know who you are.*

*4) Pick your three favorite books, movies or stories. What is the WHY of each? How & when is it delivered by the creator? (Think about the moment you become engrossed in the character or story)*

## YOUR STORY:

The following will help you hone in your WHY – both from a creator's standpoint, as well as in helping you understand the why of your current story.

### 1. Why are you a storyteller?

*Creating from a place of "why" is a helpful tool for any creator to understand as early as possible – and it's okay if this evolves throughout your life. For instance, some people tell stories to make others laugh. Others want to educate people about something. I'm a creator because I'm here to help connect and awaken people to a higher level of consciousness – all the work I create ladders up to that "Why" (or at least strives to). And if you don't consider yourself a "storyteller", that's okay – think about answering: why are you on earth? What's your mission in life?*

### 2. Why should your audience care about your current story you're telling? Why should they care about your main character(s)?

### 3. Consider your answer for question #2. With this WHY in mind, what is the most compelling way to introduce the why of your story AND the why of your character early in your story? *(think about the opening scene of the story // think about how your main character is introduced and why we need to keep watching/reading/listening about them?)*

Great job! Keep on consuming story with a discerning eye and ear for the WHY and it will begin to become second nature to lead into your stories with WHY.