Good design, like good storytelling, brings ideas to life. Design Is Storytelling is a playbook for creative thinking, showing designers how to use narrative techniques to create satisfying graphics, products, services, and experiences. Whether crafting a digital app or a data-rich publication, designers invite people to enter a scene and explore what's there. An intriguing logo, page layout, or public space uses form and communication to lead users on dynamic journeys.

Design Is Storytelling explores the psychology of visual perception from a narrative point of view. Presenting dozens of tools and concepts in a lively. visual manner, this book will help designers amplify the narrative power of their work. Use this book to stir emotions, build empathy, and convey action; to construct narrative arcs and create paths through space; and to evaluate a project's storytelling power. Prompts for students and teachers make this a great classroom companion.

ELLEN LUPTON has authored and coauthored numerous books on design, including Beauty—Cooper Hewitt Design Triennial, How Posters Work, Beautiful Users: Designing for People, Graphic Design: The New Basics, and Thinking with Type. She is senior curator of contemporary design at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York City, and director of the Graphic Design MFA program at MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art) in Baltimore. She received the AIGA Gold Medal for Lifetime

Cover design by Jason Gottlieb





By using a female voice as the protagonist, Lupton makes us realize how accustomed we are to the gender imbalance in graphic design. Critical voices such as hers are what we need in graphic design.—Ruben Pater, author of The Politics of Design

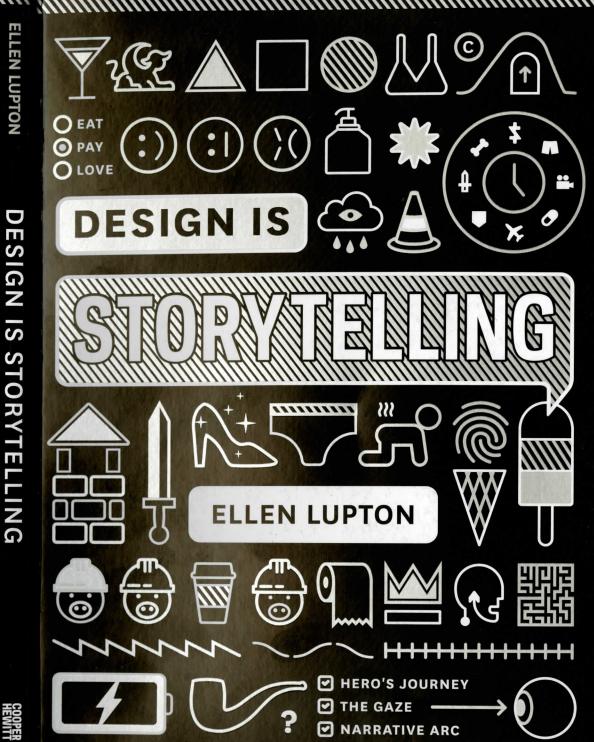
This playfully illustrated toolkit for creative storytelling makes invisible patterns visible.—Liz Danzico, Chair, MFA Interaction Design, School of Visual Arts

> Good design connects people through shared experience. This book helps designers peel back the layers of narrative to make delightful, powerful work. - Jason Santa Maria, Design Director, State

Good design takes you on a journey from confusion to clarity and from disengagement to delight. Ellen Lupton tells the stories behind these journeys, and reveals a new way of thinking about the process of design. - Michael Bierut

> Funny, functional, and feminist! -Little Red Riding Hood





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Storyboard

Telling stories with a sequence of images is an invaluable skill not only for filmmakers, comic book artists, and graphic novelists, but for any designer working with time and interactivity. The purpose of a storyboard is to explain action with a concise series of pictures. To construct a storyboard, designers plan the arc of a narrative and decide how to summarize the story in a limited number of frames. How does the story begin and end? What is the setting? Where are the story's points of greatest intensity? Do characters or other objects walk, run, or roll into the scene—or do they magically appear in a blast of confetti? Storyboards for animations or videos indicate camera movements in addition to plot points.

Illustration by Hayelin Choi

Action



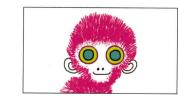










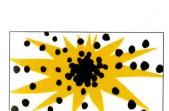


























Storyboard

designing a satisfying story There is a famous joke that is funny because it refuses to be funny: "Why did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side." We expect a punch line, but all we get is a mundane activity lacking any compelling motivation or outcome.

In a satisyfing narrative, the main action is signficant or noteworthy, yielding a transformation or shift in the world of the story. The character can change, or she can change the people or events around her. By solving an important problem, the character sees herself in a new way.

A satisfying story includes conflict and suspense. Questions create uncertainty, making readers curious. The story is the process of answering the question and resolving the uncertainty. If the answer comes too easily, the story is dull. Stories thrive on obstacles, delays, and moments of revelation. A story is a winding path, not a straight and efficient line.

Like stories, many jokes function by flipping our understanding of an initial situation. The set up puts a picture in our minds; the punch line shatters that picture. Woody Allen recounts this joke in his movie Annie Hall: "A guy walks into a psychiatrist's office and says, hey doc, my brother's crazy! He thinks he's a chicken. Then the doc says, why don't you turn him in? Then the guy says, I would but I need the eggs." The punch line changes the premise implied in the set up.

Storyboards are tools for planning the transformative action of a story. In a few simple frames, a good storyboard expresses a progression from beginning to middle to end. It conveys an intriguing path and a significant change. It indicates Chicken is an active character, shaping the course of events. necessary details and the point of view of each scene (near or far, first person or third person). Learning to tell a story in six frames is a good way to master the essential elements of narrative form.

READ MORE Uri Shulevitz, Writing with Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1985).

Ingredients of a Story

ARC The action has a beginning, middle, and end.

CHANGE The action transforms a character or situation.

THEME The action conveys a greater purpose or meaning.

COHERENCE The action builds on concrete, relevant details.

PLAUSIBILTY The action is believable, following its own rules.

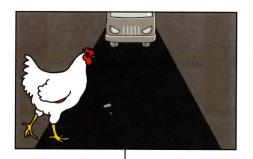
Here's the beginning of a story: "Chicken steps into the road, and a truck approaches from the distance." What happens next?

- 1. MAGIC CHICKEN In this version of the story, a magic balloon lifts Chicken to safety. The magic balloon is a cheap way to solve the story's central problem. Using it requires no skill or ingenuity from our hero (or from the storyteller). It's also implausible. An inflated blob of latex wouldn't move quickly enough to save Chicken from a speeding truck. Even fantasy tales should mesh with our basic expectations about physics.
- 2. DEAD CHICKEN The truck hits Chicken. End of story. This turn of events—dramatic as it is—fails to quench our thirst for meaning. The dead bird is not only a defeated protagonist but also a passive one. She hasn't completed the story's action, and she hasn't controlled her own destiny. Furthermore, she is carrying around a useless and redundant fish. This "red herring" adds neither action nor meaning to the narrative.
- 3. TOUGH CHICKEN This is the best version of the story. Here, At the beginning, she appears to be a solitary, oblivious bird adrift in a dangerous world. When she halts traffic and guides the baby chicks to safety, she becomes a player on a bigger stage and contributes to the social good. The action yields a greater purpose or theme, altering our initial assumptions.

Illustrations by Jennifer Tobias

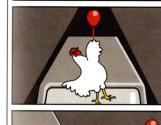
HOW DOES THE CHICKEN **CROSS THE ROAD?**

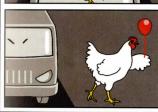
There are three ways this story could end. Which one feels more satisfying and complete?



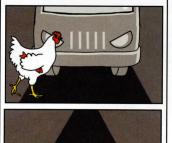
1. MAGIC CHICKEN







2. DEAD CHICKEN





3. TOUGH CHICKEN





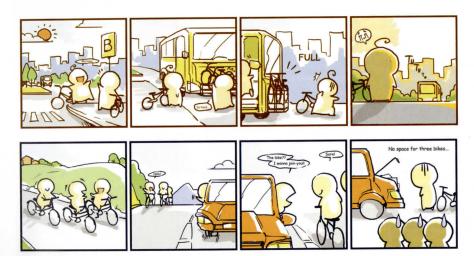


Storyboard

THINKING WITH STORYBOARDS Designers use storyboards to communicate their ideas to clients and collaborators. Designers also use narrative illustrations to think through a problem, sketch ideas, and empathize with users as they confront everyday challenges.

Storyboards are a crucial tool in the humancentered practice of industrial designer Mengyan Li. She starts her design process by searching for "problems and opportunities" that involve users in personal situations. To brainstorm product concepts for cyclists, Li imagined situations where people get frustrated trying to bring their bikes on a car or bus trip. Li says, "Storytelling is the most effective tool to make audiences enjoy a presentation, make them patient and curious to accept an idea, help them better understand an instruction, and keep them awake in lectures. People love cute stuff." Her storyboards convey the emotional quality of a user's experience.

In addition to creating illustrations of people interacting with a product in a physical context, designers produce storyboards to plan the actions that take place on a digital screen when a product is being used. The storyboards created by user experience designers range from simple, blackand-white wireframes to fully developed flats, which represent a product's visual language in rich detail. Wireframes or flats often follow the sequence of a user's journey, from an "inciting incident" or call to action (the event that triggers engaging with the product) through a series of steps required to successfully achieve a goal or complete an action.



PLOT, CHARACTER, AND SETTING These poignant and appealing storyboards depict frustrating situations for cyclists. Each story brings us into a scene infused with real emotional consequences. A cyclist going to work can't get on the bus

because there isn't enough room for her bike. Three friends enjoying a ride in the country meet another friend in a car. The driver wants to take everyone to the lake—but the car's trunk is too small for all the bikes. Illustrations by Mengyan Li.

ACT 1 Action

