

# What's Your Storyline?

by Craig "Hackin' 'Boo" Harrison

Your assignment is to write and deliver a story. Your story will surely have characters. Perhaps your story is about you or someone you know. Or a group of people. Question: What's your storyline?

By definition, the storyline is essentially a sentence that describes the plot of your story (or drama, book, play, or movie).

Everyone loves a good story! But what makes a good story? Should it be believable...or unbelievable? Unique or universal? Or can it be both? Should it be familiar? Familial? Funny? Indeed, what makes a story meaningful, memorable, or magical?

## Compelling Storylines

We love stories with interesting storylines. They go somewhere. We love stories that are transformative — where one or more characters are transformed, and thus the reader/listener too! We love stories that defy the odds, that have twists and surprises, and result in triumph or justice, breakthroughs or epiphanies. Think about your favorite stories. Don't they fit this profile?

## Storylines

A story's storyline (its plot) is key. What's yours? As you craft your next stories what storylines will you mimic or model your story after? Better yet, is it original? Here are some familiar storylines, and some less familiar ones too.

## We love stories...

- ❖ Of the triumph of good over evil
- ❖ Of characters overcoming long odds to achieve their goals
- ❖ Of underdogs winning contests
- ❖ Of princes who marry princesses (and vice versa)
- ❖ That go from 'rags to riches'
- ❖ Of the return of the native (homecomings)
- ❖ Of strangers in a strange land
- ❖ Of discovery
- ❖ Of self-discovery
- ❖ Of strange bedfellows
- ❖ Of commoners doing extraordinary things
- ❖ Of role reversals

The storyline is the thread that runs through your story. It's what holds it together and leads the listener through to the end. Is your storyline compelling, easy to follow, and ideally one that resonates with the listener?

Now, can you say it in a sentence?

## Pitch Perfect Storylines

When writers entice motion picture or television executives at pitch meetings, they've got to spin the story of their project in a sentence or two at most. Vince Gilligan, who created the TV series *Breaking Bad*, described his show about a high school teacher who broke bad as "Mr. Chips becomes Scarface." That's an evocative storyline! (For more on compelling storylines and pitch meetings, read Peter Guber's book *Tell to Win*.)

## Whose Line Is It Anyway?

Bringing it back to stories we're familiar with, Illinois-based storyteller Linda Gorham recently distilled a few well-known children's fairy tales into six-line descriptions. Can you recognize each story from its storyline?

- ❖ Ashen Cindy trades cottage for castle.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Pigs capture wolf while feigning abandonment.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ Rumpelstiltskin catches attitude when name revealed.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ Little Red evades big bad wolf.<sup>4</sup>

It's your turn. Can you similarly synopsise your speech or story? For your next story, what's its storyline? Lining up its storyline is a key to successfully spinning your next story. Once you've got it you can make like Johnny Cash and *Walk the Line!*

## Craig "Hackin' 'Boo" Harrison

tells stories of humor and humanity. Some of his storylines are straight and narrow and others are crooked and twisted. The story of his nickname combines the storylines of Jack and the Beanstalk with that of the young George Washington and the cherry tree. For more, visit [www.HackinBoo.com](http://www.HackinBoo.com).

- 1 Cinderella
- 2 The Three Little Pigs
- 3 Rumpelstiltskin
- 4 Little Red Riding Hood

