

The background of the slide is a photograph of a night sky filled with stars. In the lower portion of the image, the dark silhouettes of evergreen trees are visible against the starry sky.

The Art of Storytelling

How crafting meaningful narratives shapes
identity, connection, and well-being

Emily Esfahani Smith

Today's session

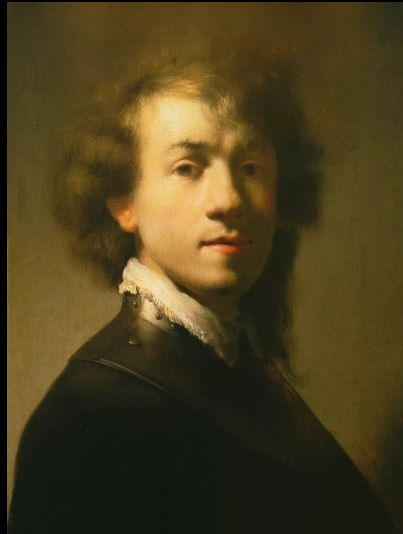
Storytelling and identity

How we tell our story

How we change our story

Activities

Storytelling and identity



Rembrandt's self-portraits through the years

Who am I? What's my story?



Judith Leyster, "Self-Portrait"

How do you tell your story?



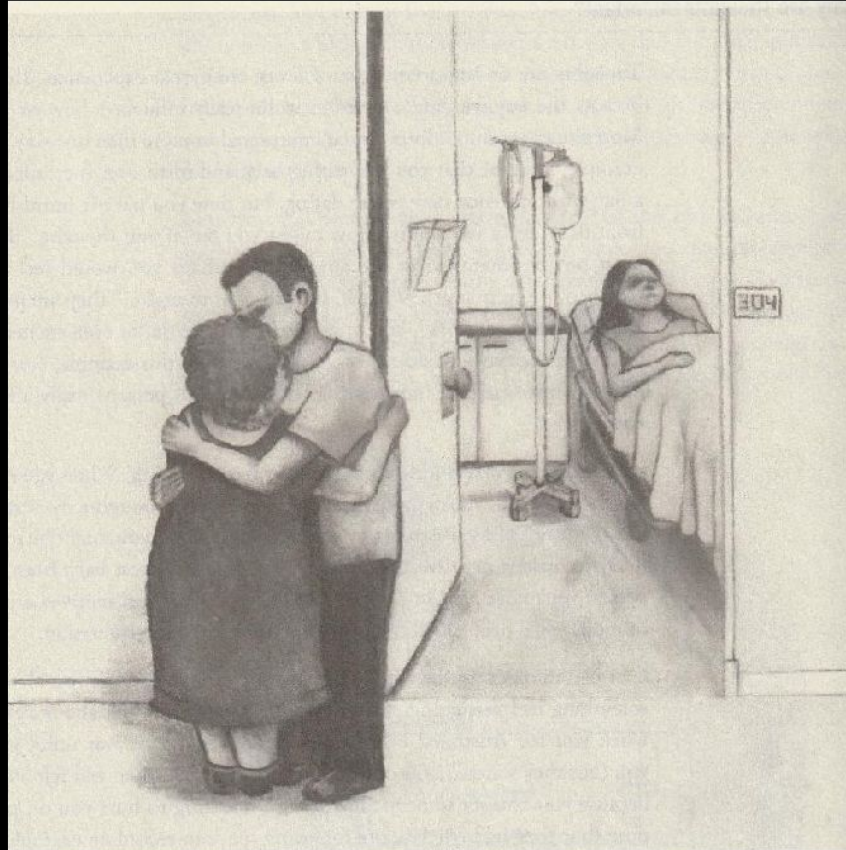
Peter Paul Rubens, "Daniel in the Lions' Den"



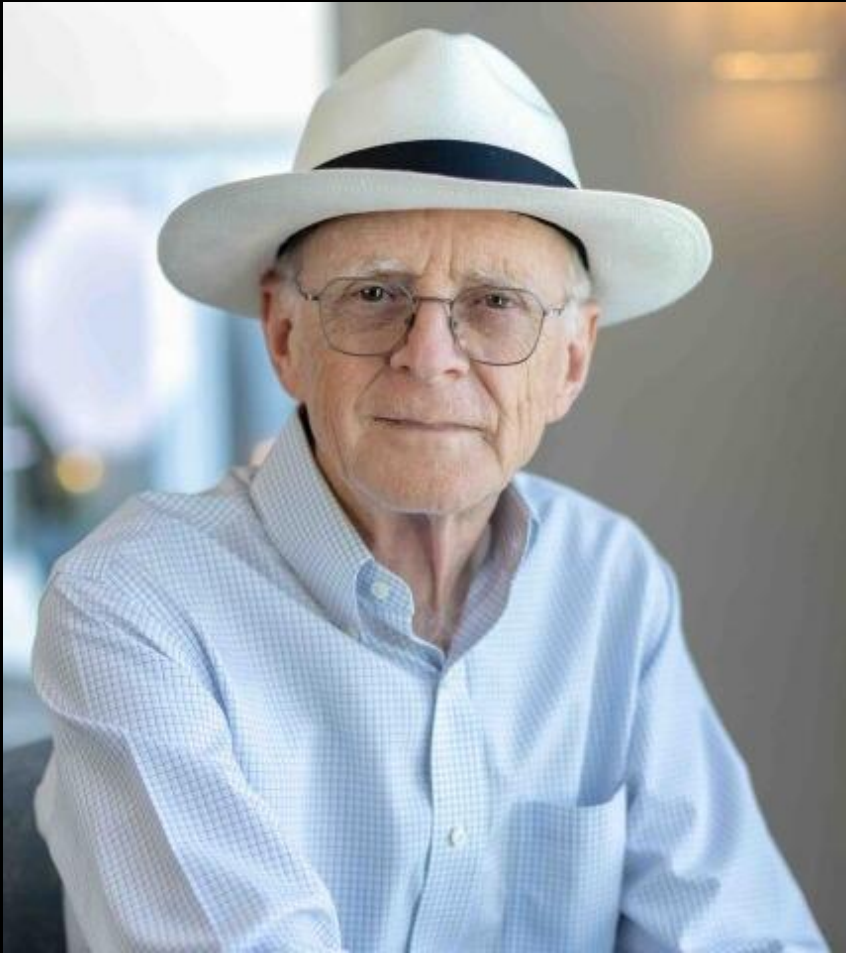
Briton Rivière, "Daniel in the Lions' Den"

Same story, different perspectives

What story am I telling?



Expressive Writing



“Over the next four days, I want you to write about your deepest emotions and thoughts about the most upsetting experience in your life. Really let go and explore your feelings and thoughts about it. In your writing, you might tie this experience to your childhood, your relationship with your parents, people you have loved or love now, or even your career. How is this experience related to who you would like to become, who you have been in the past, or who you are now?”

Pennebaker's Instructions

- Find a time and place where you won't be disturbed. Ideally, pick a time at the end of your workday or before you go to bed.
- Promise yourself that you will write for a minimum of 15 minutes a day for at least 3 or 4 consecutive days.
- Once you begin writing, write continuously. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. If you run out of things to write about, just repeat what you have already written.
- You can write longhand or you can type on a computer. If you are unable to write, you can also talk into a tape recorder.
- You can write about the same thing on all 3-4 days of writing or you can write about something different each day. It is entirely up to you.

Pennebaker et al. research findings



Vermeer, *The Geographer*

Positive Experiences

“Think of the most wonderful experience or experiences in your life, happiest moments, ecstatic moments, moments of rapture, perhaps from being in love, or from listening to music, or suddenly “being hit” by a book or painting or from some great creative moment. Choose one such experience or moment. Try to imagine yourself at that moment, including all the feelings and emotions associated with the experience. Now write about the experience in as much detail as possible trying to include the feelings, thoughts, and emotions that were present at the time. Please try your best to re-experience the emotions involved.”

Burton, C. M., & King, L. A. (2004). The health benefits of writing about intensely positive experiences. *Journal of research in personality*, 38(2), 150-163.

Writing Your Story: Prompts

Think about your life as if it were novel. What would the main chapters be? Write one or two sentences summarizing each chapter. (5-10 minutes).

Think about the significant experiences in your life. Pick one and write your deepest thoughts and emotions about this experience. How did this experience change you? What did you lose from it? What did you gain? (10 minutes)

Write the next chapter of your novel—the story of your future. When you look ahead at your life, what sort of person do you hope to be, and what sort of life do you hope to lead? (5 minutes)

Rewriting Your Story

Is there a different way to think about this?

What am I leaving out?

If someone I love had the same facts, how would that person tell the story?

What personal strengths did I display or develop?

Is this where the story really ends?

A deep blue night sky filled with numerous stars of varying brightness. Some stars have distinct diffraction spikes. The bottom of the image shows the dark silhouettes of evergreen trees against the horizon. The text "Questions? Reflections?" is centered in the sky in a white, serif font.

Questions? Reflections?