

# 6 RULES OF GREAT STORYTELLING

ADAPTED BY ROCK YOUR WORLD FROM PIXAR AND BRIAN G. PETERS

## THE MAKING OF GREAT STORIES



### GREAT STORIES...

1

ARE UNIVERSAL



2

HAVE CLEAR  
STRUCTURE & PURPOSE

3

HAVE A CHARACTER  
TO ROOT FOR  
(AN UNDERDOG)



4

APPEAL TO OUR  
DEEPEST EMOTIONS

5

ARE SURPRISING AND  
UNEXPECTED



6

ARE SIMPLE AND  
FOCUSED



**Rule 1: Great stories are universal:**

This means that a great story explores an element of the human condition--something that most or all humans experience such as birth, growth, emotions, change, conflict, etc) Great stories make you experience the feelings that the author intended you to feel because you can relate to it in an interesting and authentic way.

**Rule 2: Great stories have clear structure and purpose:**

In Brian G. Peters' Medium article, he mentions that "...a favorite way to develop a compelling story is to use 'The Story Spine' formula created by professional playwright and improviser Kenn Adams." He notes that Pixar has used this method in many of their films as well.

Structure:

THE STORY SPINE

THE STORY SPINE	STRUCTURE	FUNCTION
Once upon a time...	Beginning	The world of the story is introduced and the main character's routine is established.
Every day...		
But, one day...	The Event	The main character breaks the routine .
Because of that...	Middle	There are dire consequences for having broken the routine. It is unclear if the main character will come out alright in the end.
Because of that...		
Because of that...		
Until finally...	The Climax	The main character embarks upon success or failure
And, ever since then...	End	The main character succeeds or fails, and a new routine is established.

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Purpose:

When reading a great and compelling story, you should be able to identify its purpose. Great stories usually exist to teach the reader something about the human condition. Great stories have great purpose.

**Rule 3: Great stories have a character to root for (an underdog):**

Readers tend to love an unexpected or challenged character to root for--especially characters who mirror the human condition by not succeeding at first and by those who experience loss but who manage to grow and eventually triumph.

**Rule 4: Great stories appeal to our deepest emotions:**

Great stories make us feel strongly and readers can easily point to scenes that stirred such strong emotions. Emotions are often conveyed by dialog, gestures and actions--there tends to be a lot of showing, not just telling how a character is feeling. This permits readers to empathize with the character(s) in more authentic ways than just being told how a character feels.

**Rule 5: Great stories are surprising and unexpected:**

Compelling stories tap into big ideas in ways that aren't easily predictable. They make us notice how extraordinary many things are that humans tend to take for granted. For example birdsong may not seem like a big deal, but in a warzone, birds singing can symbolize hope. Great stories help readers think differently about things in a lasting way.

**Rule 6: Great stories are simple and focused:**

If you find yourself having to reread chapters or feel lost in a plotline, then the author has made things too complicated. Great works don't require dozens of plot twists or characters. There should be an easily identifiable beginning, middle and end.