



# THE STORY SPINE

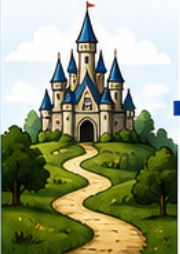






★ A SIMPLE SPINE. A POWERFUL STORY. ★

Every story is about change. Show it. Build it. Make it mean something.



Great stories follow a pattern. Use the Story Spine to build stories that connect and matter.

Created by Kenn Adams & popularized by Emma Coats of PIXAR

<p><b>1</b> <b>ONCE UPON A TIME...</b></p> <p>Introduce the world and the main character.</p>  <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> In a small town lived a curious middle school student...</p>	<p><b>2</b> <b>EVERY DAY...</b></p> <p>Show the routine. What's normal in their world?</p>  <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> Every day after school, they walked home, did homework, and played video games.</p>	<p><b>3</b> <b>UNTIL ONE DAY...</b></p> <p>Something changes. The normal world is disrupted.</p>  <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> One day, they found a mysterious camera in the attic.</p>	<p><b>4</b> <b>BECAUSE OF THAT...</b></p> <p>The character reacts. Choices lead to consequences.</p>  <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> They started filming everything around them, seeing the world differently.</p>	<p><b>5</b> <b>BECAUSE OF THAT...</b></p> <p>More consequences. Things get more complicated (or better!).</p>  <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> Their videos inspired friends, and suddenly they had a choice that would change everything.</p>	<p><b>6</b> <b>UNTIL FINALLY...</b></p> <p>The climax. The problem reaches its peak and is resolved.</p>  <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> They shared their story with the whole school and made a difference.</p>	<p><b>7</b> <b>AND EVER SINCE THEN...</b></p> <p>The meaning. What changed? What does it mean now?</p>  <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> Ever since then, they knew their voice—and their stories—mattered.</p>
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★ **AND EVER SINCE THEN... IS THE HEART OF YOUR STORY.** It's not just the end of the plot—it's the truth your story is about. This is where the theme lives. This is the meaning.



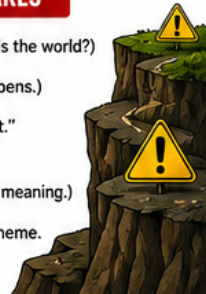
**✓ WHY THE STORY SPINE MATTERS**

- ✓ Gives your story a clear structure.
- ✓ Helps your audience follow your story.
- ✓ Builds emotion and meaning.
- ✓ Makes your message memorable.
- ✓ Helps you discover your theme.



**✗ COMMON MISTAKES**

- ✗ Starting too late. (Where is the world?)
- ✗ No change. (Nothing happens.)
- ✗ Skipping "because of that." (Your story feels jumpy.)
- ✗ Ending too soon. (Missing meaning.)
- ✗ Telling the plot, not the theme.



**MR. FRANK SAYS...**

Don't just tell me what happened. Help me feel why it matters.

**PLOT = WHAT HAPPENED**  
**THEME = WHAT IT MEANS**




**QUICK WORKFLOW**

- 1 GET AN IDEA**  
What's your story about?
- 2 BUILD YOUR SPINE**  
Fill in all 7 beats.
- 3 EXPAND IT**  
Write your scenes and script.
- 4 SHOOT IT**  
Capture the moments.
- 5 EDIT & SHAPE**  
Make the story clear and powerful.
- 6 SHARE & REFLECT**  
What did your story mean? Why does it matter?


**STORY SPINE CHECKLIST**

- Did I introduce the world and my main character?
- Did I show their normal life?
- Did something change their world?
- Did choices lead to consequences?
- Did I build to a satisfying resolution?
- Did I show what changed and what it means?
- Is my story truly about something?



**★ PIXAR'S 22 RULES OF STORYTELLING**  
A few favorites that connect to the Story Spine:

- ★ You admire a character for trying more than for their successes.
- ★ You gotta keep your audience in mind.
- ★ Be honest.
- ★ No work is ever wasted.
- ★ Stories can be remade.
- ★ And ever since then... that's the truth



**REMEMBER:**  
A STORY WITHOUT MEANING IS JUST A SEQUENCE OF EVENTS.  
A STORY WITH MEANING CHANGES PEOPLE.

**NEED EXAMPLES?**  
SCAN HERE!




★ TELL BETTER STORIES. INSPIRE MORE PEOPLE. LEAVE A MARK. ★