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Story Problem Solving

Brian D. Kalina
Buffalo State College, kalinabrian@gmail.com

Advisor
Dr. Cyndi Burnett

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Story Problem Solving

by

Brian D. Kalina

An Abstract of a Project
in
Creative Studies

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

May 2018

Buffalo State
State University of New York
Department of Creative Studies
Abstract

This project paper will explore and define the relationship between the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) and the timeless concept of storytelling. Since the beginning of time, people have been sharing stories to relate their experiences and their solutions to overcome challenges and obstacles. CPS is a more modern methodology that aids people in their approach and their ability to generate plans and solutions to overcome challenges and obstacles. Therefore, the premise of this project is to seek answers to the questions; (1) How might we look to stories as frameworks for solving our problems? and (2) How might we marry the Creative Problem Solving Process (CPS) with storytelling to give us tangible tools and techniques to help us realize those solutions? During the course of this project, the main result of exploring those two questions is a new creative problem solving methodology called Story Problem Solving (SPS).

Keywords: Creative Problem Solving, creativity, hero, literary fiction, plot, story, storytelling, story craft, Story Problem Solving

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May 7, 2018
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Dates of Approval:

May 7, 2018

Dr. Cyndi Burnett
Associate Professor
International Center for Studies in Creativity

May 7, 2018

Brian D. Kalina
Graduate Student
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______________________________
Brian D. Kalina

May 7, 2018
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SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Purpose and Description of Project

The purpose of this Master’s project is to define and create a usable framework to solve problems based on the use of literary fiction. The project will illustrate the parallels between the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) process and a wide variety of classic stories from many time periods and cultures with the goal of solving a problem, completing a challenge, or overcoming an obstacle. I call this new process Story Problem Solving or SPS.

Sharing stories is a natural, human endeavor that dates back to the beginning of time. They help us to pass along information from one generation to the next. One of the main functions of a story is to teach a lesson so that we are better equipped to deal with a similar problem should we encounter it ourselves in the future. In fact, I believe that stories are simply the retelling of how someone else overcame a challenge and solved a problem. Many times, after experiencing the recitation of someone else’s story we become inspired with new ideas on how to solve our own problems and/or how to approach it. Therefore, the core of this project seeks to answer these questions:

(1) How might we look to stories as frameworks for solving our problems?

(2) How might we marry the Creative Problem Solving Process (CPS) with storytelling to give us tangible tools and techniques to help us realize those solutions?

CPS is a universal framework that describes the natural way in which humans creatively solve problems (Puccio, Mance, Switalski, & Reali, 2012, p. 71). Since both CPS and storytelling are concerned with creative ways in which a problem is solved, it makes sense that
the two are linked in some way. This project will explore the ways in which problem solvers can utilize a wide variety of components, principles, and constructs, found in storytelling to provide new tools and techniques within the CPS process.

In the context of this project, the term “storytelling” refers to the structures, arcs, and frameworks of stories mostly found in fiction. It is also important to note, that while the act of writing is certainly a creative act, and writing at the literary level requires skill and practice, the quality of the writing in order to solve a problem is not the focus. In other words, you don’t need to be a great writer to understand and benefit from the power of a great story. If you have ever been moved, inspired, scared, or in any other way been motivated to think differently or take some action based on hearing someone else’s story – then you already know just how transformative a story can be.

**An Overview of Story Problem Solving**

What is the Story Problem Solving Process (SPS) and how does it work within the construct of CPS? It should be noted that SPS does not replace CPS, but rather is a new sub framework of CPS. In other words, one still follows the stages of CPS (Clarify, Ideate, Develop, Implement) as well as the rules of divergence and convergence. SPS is a suite of tools to help solve a problem in a memorable and engaging manner and works across the entire CPS continuum. This makes SPS distinct from individual tools and techniques. The value of SPS is its ability to facilitate (either alone or in groups) CPS from problem to solution. Another advantage of SPS is that it helps the problem solver visualize the problem, the possible solutions, and makes it easier to stay on task. While SPS may be used to help write better stories, SPS does not
use CPS as a means to create literature. The purpose is to craft plot lines into a blueprint as a means to implement a solution.

SPS draws on a wide variety of stories that have been classified by their structure. For example, Beowulf falls under the classic story arc known as “Overcoming the monster” and follows a well-established plot line. Other stories such as *Aladdin* follow the “Rags to Riches” structure. *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Lord of the Rings* adhere to the Voyage and Return, and The Quest plot lines respectively. These story arcs (and many more to be explored during the project) have recognized patterns and structures. Additionally, a myriad of literary devices is used within these stories to further the plot such as: suspense, misdirection, cliffhanger, anachronisms, and flashbacks and flash forwards. SPS uses these story arcs, plots, structures, and literary devices as tools to help the problem solver achieve a goal.

It should be noted that there a wide variety of structures that can be applied to stories. Universally, as Aristotle (trans. 1998) described in *Poetics*, all stories have a beginning, middle, and end. Other models of story structure follow Freytag’s Pyramid (Lamb, 2008) and include: Exposition, Climax, Dénouement, and Resolution. SPS will follow CPS in the crafting of stories by following the stages: Clarify, Ideate, Develop, and Implement. In parallel, SPS will have its own progression and will be defined in the pages that follow.

**Personal Goals**

1. **Deepen my knowledge of CPS and various tools associated with CPS.** Some of the tools in the CPS tool box will be applied directly to SPS while others may be modified to
work better in the SPS framework. This project will help me gain a better understanding of the tools and their applications.

2. **Create a new and usable approach to storytelling.** While I have attended many storytelling workshops/classes at conferences and beyond, I have noticed that those classes are actually designed to enhance presentation skills. My goal is to be more truthful to the idea of storytelling. Additionally, I plan to go beyond theory and create tangible tools and templates that can be used individually (self-facilitated) and in groups (with a facilitator) to generate solutions to problems.

3. **Enrich my knowledge of literature and storytelling.** Through the course of this project I will gain more knowledge of literary theory and the elements that make a compelling story. I am personally interested in this topic and in the future (not as part of this project), will translate the knowledge gained to look at how storytelling may be used in business settings and beyond.
Rationale for Selection

For as long as I can remember, I have always been enamored by and drawn to great stories. I received my B.A. in English from the University of Illinois and then went on to become a writer at various advertising agencies in New York City. While pursuing my Master’s Degree in Creativity at the International Center for Studies in Creativity at Buffalo State, I began to see the connection stories had with Creative Problem Solving. As such, I researched and wrote a paper on the subject entitled: CPS Process Compared to The Hero’s Journey: The Dramatic Retelling of Creative Problem Solving Through Mythic Adventures.

I truly believe in the power of story. Stories can motivate and inspire us. They can cause us to see and consider a completely different point of view. Sometimes they can simply remind us that we are not alone, that someone else has been in our situation, and more importantly, that it is possible to emerge victorious and/or change for the better. Stories can provide us with a path forward or a blueprint to guide us on our own personal journeys.

Stories are similar to problems in that they often come from an emotional place. However, it would seem that many proposed solutions are rational in their nature. As such, the plan often fails. Or, in the case of groups, is not sufficient to spur action. I see this project adding to the quality of life in several ways.

First, many people do not have a simple and engaging way of tackling their problems. While CPS can provide the straightforward process to solve a problem, there are a large number of people who are scared of the idea of having to be creative. They get caught up in the word “creative” and shy away. As a result, when individuals say that they are not creative, they will
not even attempt to engage in a novel solution seeking process. Since we can all relate to stories, some of the pressure of having to be creative on demand is alleviated.

However, relating to stories and having the ability to craft one are not the same thing. Where does one begin and how does one proceed? Therefore, the second way in which SPS can add to someone’s quality of life is by providing an easy to follow framework that allows for self-facilitation and ready-made templates. Doing so, will transform the daunting task of writing a story into a manageable one.

Lastly, the aspects mentioned above leads to the most important outcome. SPS helps individuals and teams be more creative! SPS demystifies the art of story craft and makes it accessible. After all, if creativity and storytelling are universal concepts, then the ways in which we achieve them should be universal as well.
SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE

Introduction

Many works have been written on the topic of CPS, story and storytelling. However, I decided to focus the bulk of my energy reading and researching the ones that dealt specifically with story and storytelling. And while one could spend years exploring this topic, I further narrowed my search to the works that I felt would offer the greatest insight and support while crafting SPS. The following annotated bibliography focuses on those works.

Annotated Bibliography


For many years, there have been numerous theories and speculation about the exact number of unique stories (or rather story types) in the world. *The Seven Basic Plots* by Christopher Booker is an attempt to do exactly that. As the title suggests, Booker asserted that there are seven basic plots known as; “Overcoming the Monster, Rags to Riches, The Quest, Voyage and Return, Comedy, Tragedy, and Rebirth.” What's remarkable about this book is the depth and detail Booker provides in support of these specific stories. Not only are these seven types of stories defined, they are backed up with examples of specific stories found in literature and movies that follow the story structures. For instance, when discussing “Overcoming the Monster” stories, we are given the Sumerian tale *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the James Bond film *Dr. No* as examples.
Yet, Booker takes the concept one step further. The seven basic plots are also deconstructed to show their common story structures. Again, by way of example when discussing “Rags to Riches” stories we are not only given *Aladdin*, *Cinderella*, *David Copperfield*, and *Jane Eyre*, we are shown the five common stages found in all of the stories. Each of the seven basic plots are analyzed in this manner. And while the story structures vary with each basic plot, the amount of detail is consistent. This became indispensable in the crafting of the templates in SPS. As the main goal of the project was to make storytelling useful in its application to solving problems and overcoming challenges, a step-by-step template or story form was critical to create.

It must be noted that while Booker detailed the five common stages for each story plot, I did not merely “copy and paste” them into the SPS templates. They were simply used as blueprints and springboards for my templates. Sometimes I would add a stage and many times revised the name of a specific stage to make SPS more approachable. Lastly, not all of the seven basic plots are included in the SPS Story Library. In fact, two plots, “Comedy” and “Tragedy” were intentionally omitted.

“Comedy” is defined in literature as a “work which is designed to amuse and divert through its depiction of (traditionally) everyday characters and situations and its delivery of a happy resolution” (Cuddon & Habib, 2014, p. 135). In other words, a comedy is a story with a happy ending like, “and they all lived happily ever after” or a story that features a pattern where the plotline becomes more and more complicated, yet is all cleared up by one event that wraps the whole work with a neat little bow. In fact, Booker wrote, “[Comedy] is not simply any story
which is funny. A story may follow the plot of comedy without it being intended to be funny at all” (pp. 107-108). So, not only are the plotlines in Comedies confusing, the name itself may be misleading to the problem solver. Furthermore, even though the goal of SPS is to guide the problem solver to a solution where they do live happily ever after, I felt that other stories were more helpful and tailored to specific types of problems that need solving.

“Tragedy” is defined in literature as a “work concerned with the fortunes and misfortunes, and, ultimately, the disasters that befall human beings of title, power and position” (Cuddon & Habib, 2014, p. 731). Or, as Booker wrote, “it ends in death… a death that is violent, premature… unnatural… a death that show that something has gone hideously or, as we sat, tragically wrong” (Booker, 2004, pp. 153-154). In light of these definitions and the intent of SPS to solve a problem, defeat and/or death found in tragedies didn’t seem appropriate to include in the SPS Library.


Joseph Campbell’s work is quintessential in understanding the structure of the myth story. This book, written in 1949, examined the vast commonalities found in mythological stories and has become the blueprint for thousands of stories since. Campbell focused mainly on the plot structure of myth and the travels of the protagonist throughout a story. In the book, Campbell details seventeen distinct steps the hero takes from beginning of a tale to the end which is commonly referred to as “The Hero’s Journey.” Furthermore, Campbell was able to distill countless numbers of stories that follow this structure into one structure and described it as the “monomyth.” This is significant because it showed that while there has been a myriad of stories
passed down for generations, there is a common thread that weaves them all together – the steps in which a hero pursues a goal and overcomes a challenge.

After becoming familiar with *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and studying CPS, I began to formulate the theory that stories and creative problem solving were inextricably linked. I posited that in its most basic form, stories are simply the retelling of how someone has been able to overcome a challenge, obstacle, or problem. I explored this theory further and it has become the foundation of SPS. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was instrumental in this project as it suggested that stories had a probable structure beyond, Aristotle’s basic structure that every story has a beginning, middle, and end. As a result, I began to research other works that discussed plot structure such as Vogler’s (1998), *The Writer’s Journey* and Tobias’ (1993) *20 Master Plots and How to Build Them*.


*The Literature Book* is a reference book that concisely presents more than one hundred works of literature (including film, plays, and poems) from around the globe and dates as far back as 3000 BCE. Present day novels, plays, and poems are also included in this book. In addition to the basic plot points and structure of the various stories, *The Literature Book* put those stories into historical context. Themes and symbolisms found in these works are put under a microscope and help illuminate the subplots of these stories.
The Literature Book has been a valuable tool in refreshing my memory about the specific details of a story, the characters within the story, their obstacles and challenges, as well as the strategic paths they took to overcoming the barriers in their way.


The Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory is a reference work that simply defines the meaning of words found within the process of storytelling and story crafting. This dictionary was instrumental in generating ideas concerning the various tool cards such as “Plot Twists” and “Guided Imagery.” A deck of cards (called Story Spark Cards) will be found in the self-facilitated version of SPS and are meant to act as creative stimuli in the crafting the stories to overcome your issue, problem, and/or challenge.


The Storytelling Animal explores the “why” we tell stories and the purpose they serve beyond escapism. Gottschall stated, “The human imperative to make and consume stories runs even more deeply than literature, dreams, and fantasy” (p. 18). And while stories do provide us with a way to escape our own reality, the fiction we read and watch (on any sized screen) are designed to give us pleasure. However, Gottschall raised the question that if stories are designed to give us pleasure, then why do so many stories deal with unpleasant topics like; threat, death, despair, and anxiety? His answer is very much aligned to the foundational concept of SPS – stories are a way of helping us navigate the world in light of all the obstacles and challenges in
our path. In fact, “fictional worlds are horroscapes” (p. 49) and “may temporarily free us from our troubles, but it does so by ensnaring us in new sets of troubles – in imaginary worlds of struggle and stress and mortal woe” (p. 49). Furthermore, “even the lighter stuff is organized around problems and readers are riveted by their concern over how it will all turn out” (p. 49).

The important point is that The Storytelling Animal supports the concept of SPS. A piece of writing must have a “knotty problem” for it to be a story and having a “knotty problem” makes it ideal for the use of CPS and therefore by extension, SPS.

The Storytelling Animal also examines some of the neuroscience (at a high level) behind what happens in our brains when we read stories. For example, when we read stories, “massive creative effort is going on all the time” (p. 3). More specifically, the writer gives the reader some, but not all of the information needed to visualize a scene. The brain simply fills in the rest with our own imaginative power that draws heavily from our own experiences. This is important in that creating stories, as well as reading them, are part of the creative process. Stories are not as passive as one would think. On the contrary, the active participation of the reader is what brings a story to life. The actions a person has taken in the past and will take in the future are largely sculpted by the stories they encounter. This notion was helpful in crafting the SPS process as it led to the idea of adding an epilogue activity to each story for self-reflection and future actions.

Gottschall referenced Samuel Taylor Coleridge and reminded us that, “experiencing a story – any story – requires the reader’s willing suspension of disbelief” (p. 4) which is reminiscent of the first guideline of divergent thinking: defer judgement. However, there is more to the functionality of story. Suspending belief or judgement helps us craft stories and learn from
them so that we can have some “practice in dealing with the big dilemmas of human life” (p. 83)
Furthermore, through story we can work through and generate a variety of tactics to deal with the
different threats, problems, and crises we are facing or likely to face in the future.

This book does a great job of distilling down the complex subjects of story structure and
scene construction into easy to understand and useable pieces of information. In addition, the
book is well organized and deconstructs other important aspects of writing and telling stories.
For example, the chapters are divided into sections about the evolution of story through time, the
timeline of stories (beginning, middle, and end), story premises themes and tone, point of view
and voice of the story, and of course, plot and subplot. More importantly, Lamb’s work also
supports SPS in its vision to be a companion to CPS. The intent of stories is universal and not
time bound to any period. “The challenge then – as it is now – was to transcend the constrictions
imposed by the tribe in order to invent new ways of thinking and solving problems” (p. 4).

*The Art and Craft of Storytelling* was helpful in this project as it helped me in choosing
the types of stories to include in the SPS Story Library. It listed stories by genre and had short
yet informational descriptions of the genres and the categories of stories that could be found
within a specific genre. For instance, the genres included were defined as Historical Fiction,
Romance, Science Fiction, Mysteries and Thrillers, Fantasy, and Autobiography and Memoir to
name a few. Examples of stories found within the categories were also listed. Within the Fantasy
Genre, the categories included; Heroic fantasy, Arthurian legends, Urban fantasy, and Alternate history.

In addition to the describing various plot structures, *The Art and Craft of Storytelling* was also helpful in defining a variety of literary devices. When developing the different Plot twists to be found within SPS, this information was key. (Another source that was instrumental in this aspect of SPS was the *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory.*) Lamb referred to three approaches to storytelling with respect to the use of time as literary device. “Forward March” described a plot that moves in chronological order. “Total Flashback” where the story beings in the present, rewinds to the past and proceeds from there. “Zig Zag” where the story may incorporate small flash backs or flash forwards. While developing the individual SPS story structures this was a great guide. It helped to frame how a story may be told and where the story should begin or end.

With regards to story structure, Lamb presented “The Ten Commandments of Scene Sense” (pp. 102 – 109). The ten commandments are: Honor the Law of Cause and Effect, Create Credible Motivation, Avoid Dead Ends, Maintain Credibility, Keep Your Eye on the Goal, Remind the Reader of the Central Conflict, Conjure Up Interesting Obstacles, Take Two Steps Forward, One Step Backward, Increase the Tension by Raising the Stakes, and Simplify Your Scene’s Players. These ten commandments not only served as guidelines for creating the individual SPS story structures but was a natural mirror for the four stages of CPS (Clarify, Ideate, Develop, Implement). And more importantly, they aided in the overall common structure that I created (and simplified) for SPS using an acronym for the word “STORY.”
(S) Situation

(T) What problem are you trying to solve?

(O) Options and Obstacles

(R) Refine your ideas

(Y) Your solution(s) and criteria for saying, “Yes!”

Lastly, *The Art and Craft of Storytelling* was helpful in detailing the three conflict based stories found within SPS; Person vs. Person, Person vs. Self, and Person vs. Culture. In addition to descriptions of these types of conflicts, examples of stories exhibiting these conflicts were included as reference.


*The Story Factor* is largely about how to tell stories with the intent of inspiring or influencing others. Annette Simmons is a professional storyteller and trainer. Her work focuses on how storytelling improves communication, especially in the business world. The book features chapters like, “What Story Can Do that Facts Can’t”, “The Psychology of Story’s Influence”, “Storylistening as a Tool of Influence”, and “Story Thinking as a Skill.” However, the very first chapter, “The Six Stories You Need to Know How to Tell” was of most interest and use for me in this project. I first encountered this chapter as a page on Simmons’ website (annettesimmons.com) and immediately knew that these kinds of stories should be included in SPS.
After delving deep into the six stories and reading the book, I ultimately decided that only three of them would be relevant to SPS; “Who I Am” stories, “Why I Am Here” stories, and “Vision” stories. These types of stories were selected because they would be most helpful in guiding someone through the process of crafting a story to solve a specific problem. The other three stories that were not selected were, “Teaching” stories, “Values in action” stories, and “I Know What You Are Thinking” stories (while interesting) failed to make the connection to SPS and CPS. For example, “Teaching” stories are used when you need to impart some information about what and how you want something done. For the purposes of this project the stories must be useful to the problem solver in working through their own problem and self-facilitate themselves through that challenge.


When it comes to getting into the specifics of plotlines and story structures, *20 Master Plots* is another great resource. The twenty plots detailed in the book are; Quest, Adventure, Pursuit, Rescue, Escape, Revenge, The Riddle, Rivalry, Underdog, Temptation, Metamorphosis, Transformation, Maturation, Love, Forbidden Love, Sacrifice, Discovery, Wretched Excess, Ascension, and Descension. With each plotline, Tobias includes an outline for how the story appears and plays out, as well as examples of those stories found in literature and film.

*20 Master Plots* covers a lot of common ground found in the works by Booker and Simmons. In fact, Tobias wrote, “In its most basic sense, a plot is a blueprint of human behavior” (p. 11). Once again, we can see the link that stories have to how people solve problems.
In some cases, the plots described in this book overlap with Booker and Simmons, while in other cases Tobias adds more detail to these types of stories that are ideal for inclusion in SPS. Overlapping plotlines such as, “Quest, Adventure, Pursuit, Rescue, and Transformation” were included in SPS – but may end up headlining a different title. The important point is that when creating the SPS Library of stories to choose from, I tried to account for any scenario in which a problem needs to be solved creatively. This book was instrumental in making sure that the proper stories were included.

Lastly, it is important to note that similar to “Tragedy” in Booker’s (2004) *Seven Basic Plots*, “Revenge” stories, “Wretched Excess” and “Descension” stories didn’t seem appropriate to include in the SPS Library and were omitted.


*The Writer’s Journey* is an extension of Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Christopher was a story analyst in Hollywood and was tasked with evaluating thousands of stories, novels, and screenplays for many prominent movie studios. He first encountered *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* while a student in film school and felt that Campbell had “broken the secret code of story.” While working for the Walt Disney Company, Vogler wrote a seven-page memo called “A Practical Guide to *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*” in which he related The Hero’s Journey to classic and current films. He would later use these principles as a story consultant on Disney’s *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*. 
In addition to updating Campbell’s work with examples from the movie-making world, Vogler simplified and distilled the seventeen-step process into a more manageable twelve-step process. I used Vogler’s version of Campbell’s Hero Journey to explore the link between story and CPS.

*The Writer’s Journey* is an important book in this project as it provided insight into story structure and character development as well as tangible examples from movies such as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Star Wars*. This was extremely helpful in framing SPS and creating different prompts throughout the process to aid the problem solver. While creating the templates found within SPS I would refer back to Vogler’s notion that the guide is “a form, not a formula”. In other words, use the stories to help facilitate CPS rather than blindly following prescribed steps in hopes of achieving your goal. Problems like stories are unique and require personal creativity to be considered worthy of pursuing.


*The Art of Storytelling* deals more with the actual telling of a story to a live audience and how to keep them engaged from beginning to end. Walsh offered fourteen steps to effective storytelling. Each step is detailed throughout the book and was helpful in crafting the SPS process, as well as drew important parallels to CPS. The fourteen steps (p. 16) are as follows:

1. Select a story
2. Push through the story
3. Envision the scene with present-day feelings and concerns
4. Tell the story from the view of someone at the scene
5. Establish the story’s central truth
6. Find a memory hook
7. Tell a story within a story
8. Plan your first words
9. Know how the story ends
10. Research the facts
11. Eliminate endless detail
12. Add description to the story
13. Include audience participation
14. Arrange practice audiences

While the last two steps don’t specifically apply to SPS, the first twelve gave me insight into the storytelling process.

Although this book is quite concerned with public speaking and the presentation of stories, it provided many practical tips, tricks, tools, and techniques that were relevant and extremely helpful in thinking about how to craft stories. After all, at the heart of a good presentation is the intent to exact a behavior change from those in the audience. The goal of a presentation should always be about motivating someone to do something. If your goal is to simply impart some knowledge or pass along some information, then a lecture would be more applicable. Furthermore, if we look back to one of the widely accepted definitions of creativity; that creativity is a combination of novelty and usefulness (Stein, 1953) and view that definition
through the lens of Dr. Sydney Parnes who wrote that “without the ability to synthesize, evaluate, and develop our ideas, we achieve no effective creativity” (p. 137), we are brought to the conclusion that “useful” refers to the notion of accomplishing a goal and puts creative thought into creative action. Therefore, the study or oral storytelling and presentation must be considered in the crafting of SPS. Especially, since SPS is a framework that is in concert with CPS.

*The Art of Storytelling* offers useful information on topics like visualizing the scene and became helpful in developing the prompts that I would use in the Imagery cards.
Bibliography

In addition to the sources mentioned above about story, story craft and structure, as well as storytelling, there have been a wide variety of sources that were helpful to me during this project. Those works are listed below.


Nielsen, D., & Thurber, S. (2016). *The secret of the highly creative thinker: How to make connections others don’t*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: BIS.


SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN

Plan to Achieve Goals

In order to achieve the goals of this project, I identified two important stages of SPS. The first stage was concerned with crafting SPS. The second stage translated the process, components, and mechanics into a useable format so that people could put the theory into practice. As mentioned earlier, these two stages (or chapters) materialized in the PLOT and STORY acronyms. In order to craft and define the Story Problem Solving Process, I applied CPS to my process. More specifically, the following steps have been completed in pursuit of this project.

The vision for this project has been clarified as: It would be great to create a useable framework for problem solving that brings a well-established form of creativity – storytelling. After gathering data concerning existing storytelling workshops and my own personal experiences I converged on the following two challenge questions: (1) How might we look to stories as frameworks for solving our problems? (2) How might we marry the Creative Problem Solving Process (CPS) with storytelling to give us tangible tools and techniques to help us realize those solutions?

First, I researched, curated, and synthesized many types of recognized story plots from around the world, such as; Joseph Campbell’s (1949) Hero’s Journey and Mono-Myth, Ronald B. Tobias’ (1993) 20 Master Plots, Christopher Booker’s Seven Basic Plots, Seven Basic Conflicts found in Literature, and, Annette Simmons’ (2009) Six Persuasive Stories.
Next, I generated ideas concerning the common story elements found in the selected plots mentioned earlier. I later converged upon these story elements by way of clustering the story elements into the STORY construct. I used the following criteria to converge: Is it simple yet still be able to afford depth of story? Is it engaging and inviting to work with? Will it yield stories that are powerful and actionable?

Once that was complete, I generated story sketches and a brief synopsis to explain the idea for each type of story. The next step was to examine the story structures for each plot and lay them out to work within both CPS and STORY within SPS. In doing so, I noticed that something was missing. While it all seemed very logical, I wondered, where was the creative element? I extended the ideation stage to explore the key questions, prompts, tools, and techniques needed to clarify, ideate, develop, and implement your story. This led me to the idea of creating libraries full of divergent thinking questions for each part of STORY; Exposition, Options and Obstacles, Plot Twists, Actions, and Guided Imagery. I particularly liked the idea of the guided imagery and the idea that these libraries could materialize as various decks of cards. This would then allow for spontaneity and creative stimuli to further the SPS process.

The development stage was concerned with refining the above through the lens of making it easy for an individual or workshop participant to understand and practice using the concepts in a short amount of time. Lastly, I created a detailed project timeline to ensure progress would be made as well as complete the project on time.
### Project Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/19</td>
<td>Begin Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/19 – 2/24</td>
<td>• Craft and define the Story Problem Solving Process (SPS)</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>• Research relevant story elements</td>
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<td>2/25 – 2/28</td>
<td>• Converge on stories to be included in the Story Library</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Write Story Synopses</td>
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<td>• Craft Story Structures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Create the PLOT and STORY process</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/28 – 3/3</td>
<td>• Refine SPS within the context of CPS</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Generate probing questions and prompts for each stage</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/3 – 3/5</td>
<td>• Create prototypes for STORY Maps</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/5 – 3/10</td>
<td>• Develop Story Spark Cards for SPS</td>
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<td>3/11</td>
<td>• Develop templates and materials for upcoming workshop</td>
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<td>3/11</td>
<td>• Plan the workshop session</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/12 – 3/19</td>
<td>• Write up Sections 1, 2, &amp; 3</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/20 – 3/25</td>
<td>• Continue to develop materials and mechanics of SPS</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/26</td>
<td>• Conduct SPS Workshop and gather feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>3/26 – 4/1</td>
<td>• Evaluate/Refine SPS based on feedback from workshop</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/2 – 4/16</td>
<td>• Write up Sections 4, 5, &amp; 6</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>4/18 – 4/28</td>
<td>• Edit and Revise Final Project Paper</td>
<td>16</td>
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**Total Project Hours: 161**
SECTION FOUR: OUTCOMES

Introduction

The goals of this project were: 1.) To make the use of storytelling more tangible and helpful in solving problems; 2.) To add a new set of techniques to the CPS suite of tools; and 3.) To create the supporting materials needed to facilitate (either alone or in groups) the Story Problem Solving process. The common thread running through each one of these outcomes is practicality and usefulness. Storytelling at its core should have a purpose. As such, the criteria for success in achieving these goals is whether or not they could be put to practical use. If, on the other hand, the solutions crafted during the project were too abstract, then the goal would not have been reached and the outcome would need to be revisited and developed further.

There have been many important outcomes of this project. The first is an overarching framework for using stories to solve problems. This framework is comprised of two main chapters: PLOT and STORY. They help the problem solver keep track of where they are in the process.

The second important outcome is that now there is a new tool and technique that may be used within CPS. While there is no shortage of tools and techniques associated with CPS, SPS provides a new way of solving problems. Additionally, SPS can stand on its own as a creative problem solving tool. Yet, its foundation is firmly rooted within CPS.

The third important outcome of this project was the creating of tangible tools and templates. For example, the Story Library, the Story Structures and Maps, the Story Templates,
and the Story Spark Cards take the project from an abstract idea to a concrete tool. The following is a more detailed description of the outcomes of this project.

**The Two Main Chapters of Story Problem Solving**

SPS is comprised of two main chapters or stages: PLOT and STORY. Since one of the aims of this project is to create a usable framework to solve problems based on the use of literary fiction, I created these two acronyms that not only fit the overall theme of SPS, but are easy to remember.

The first chapter, PLOT, lays out directions for how to work through the entire SPS process. The second chapter, STORY, is more concerned with the story structures themselves. In order to make the process approachable and ultimately useful, it was important to me that there was some unique structure to the process. Furthermore, if a problem solver was new to CPS, or not familiar with CPS, the PLOT and STORY acronyms help to demystify the process by using language that is found in literary theory and associated with storytelling. The following details each step, the key question(s) the step is trying to answer, the purpose of each step, and how that step relates to both storytelling and CPS.

As mentioned earlier, the PLOT acronym is designed to take one through the steps of SPS:

(P) Problem – Define the **problem** you are experiencing or need to solve for.

(L) Library – Consult the **library** of eighteen story arcs found in the SPS Library.

(O) Opportunity Statement – Craft the **opportunity** statement using the classic CPS statement starters (How might I…?, How to…? What might be all the ways…?).
(T) Template – Using the templates, work through the story structures and prompts to facilitate the process of SPS.

The STORY acronym is designed to walk the story solver step-by-step through the SPS process to arrive at a narrative blueprint to solve the problem or challenge at hand.

(S) Situation – What is the situation or setting? The purpose of this step is to understand the current reality and the desired vision. This step is all about gaining insight into the history of your problem and the backdrop of the story. Consider this step to be the exposition of the story and is directly related to the Clarify stage of CPS.

(T) What are you trying to solve? In this step, you are revisiting the opportunity statement created during the PLOT stage. The purpose of this step is to refine your opportunity statement and arrive at a clear and concise question that the rest of the story will focus on answering. This step also is directly related to the Clarify stage of CPS.

(O) Options and Obstacles. What might get in your way? What might you do to overcome your challenge? The purpose of this step is to dive deep and explore the different ways the story may play out. Stories often take us in many directions before it is clear what the protagonist might do in the end. This step is directly related to the Ideation stage of CPS.

(R) Refine your solutions. Once you have generated different ideas and options that might be helpful in solving your problem, how might you make them stronger? What unforeseen hurdles or plot twists may suddenly appear now that you are on the road to success? It is time to refine those ideas into workable solutions. This step is directly related to the Develop stage of CPS.
(Y) Your solution and criteria for saying “Yes!” to your proposed story and ideas. How do you know if you have a viable solution to act on? How might you decide if that solution is the correct one? The purpose of this step is to ensure that your solutions can be implemented. As such, this step is directly related to the Implement stage of CPS.

The Mechanics of Story Problem Solving

SPS is identical to CPS in that it starts by identifying a wish or a goal and ends with an action plan. However, like all good stories the middle is where things get interesting. A library of story arcs and structures will be available along with a short synopsis to aid in their selection. Additionally, a library of questions and prompts will aid in the crafting of the exposition to your problem, as well as questions and prompts for options and obstacle, plot twists, actions the characters may take, and guided imagery to add unexpected, yet deliberate creativity to the process.

There are eighteen different stories in the Story Library to choose from. I comprised this list of stories by conducting research, by drawing on the knowledge I gained while earning a Bachelor’s Degree in English, as well as my experience as a writer for the past twenty-two years. Specifically, these types of stories can be found in the works referenced in the annotated bibliography. The eighteen stories are as follows:

1. Overcoming the Monster
2. The Quest
3. Voyage and Return
4. Rebirth
It is important to note that many of the stories we encounter through literature and movies have more than one type of structure at play. For example, an Overcoming the Monster story may also have elements found in Person vs. Person stories. Rags to Riches stories may also include plot points found in Escape stories or even elements in Coming of Age stories. While the addition of more than one plot structure can make for a richer story, it can add a layer of complexity that may render it useless in the goal of overcoming a challenge. As a result, when developing the story structures and templates, it was
important to keep them single minded with one central story as the focus. To illustrate the components and outcomes of the project I will use the “Rags to Riches” story in the following sections.

**Outcome 1: Making SPS Tangible and Helpful**

The goal of using storytelling in a tangible and helpful way to aid in the solving of problems required the creation of a simple format. Yet, simply creating a story flow for each type of story would not be enough. I needed to define what each story’s purpose was and why one would choose it. The next step was to then write a description of that story and provide an example from either literature or film. All of the stories and their descriptions can be found in the Story Library.

As mentioned earlier, the story structures found within SPS are single minded and follow the basic flow of CPS: Clarify, Ideate, Develop, and Implement. I felt that an easy to follow template would be a great way to accomplish this goal. Yet, distilling the core elements of each story structure into manageable “chapters” and then incorporating them into the framework of CPS proved to be a challenge in many cases. It was an iterative process filled with trial and error and many hours of design work. The basic questions I worked through were: What were the core elements of each individual story? How many chapters were needed to tell that story? How might each portion of the story be translated into CPS? Is it the structure too complicated? Is the structure simple enough to be useable, yet not too simple that it seems childish? And finally, is it too formulaic? This last question was an important one to tackle. The framework needed to
follow some sort of formula, yet not so be fixed that it lacked the need for imagination and the room to invite creativity. After all, SPS is a creative problem solving tool!

After determining the initial challenge to be solved, the problem solver would then choose the appropriate story from the Story Library to use as the model to work through the challenge. In order to do so, two key components would need to be created; 1.) Synopsis of the story; 2.) Structure of the story. The following is the synopsis I wrote for “Rags to Riches” stories.

*It was a simpler time. You were once the leader in your field, class, or community. You were on top and no competitor dare try and take your place. However, the world and the market are fickle places. Circumstances out of your control have diminished your standing. The winds of change have not been favorable. This is a common story and one that is relatable to many people. But this is not where your story ends. You still have much to offer the world and those around you still have room in their heart for you. This story humbly picks up where you are now and reminds us all of why we fell in love with you in the first place. Example found in literature/film: Aladdin*

Upon closer examination of the synopsis above, it is important to note the while Aladdin is an example of a “Rags to Riches” story, the synopsis is not specifically about the story of Aladdin. I felt that it was important to craft the synopses in a way that was broad enough for an individual or team to recognize their problem, yet specific enough to be actionable. Additionally,
it was important to clearly describe why one might select this story and include an example of a possible, positive outcome.

The next piece that needed to be created was the corresponding story structure that maps out the milestones and chapters found in that story. This would then be translated into a workable template with questions and prompts to facilitate the process. As mentioned before, I did not want to simply “copy and paste” the story structure that other authors have crafted. I simply used them as a guide and made sure that my story maps were useful in solving a problem. While Booker used five “acts” to describe the “Rags to Riches” story (pp. 65-66), SPS uses six chapters to map the story and adds a point in the story to identify the task or challenge facing the problem solver. Furthermore, while crafting the chapter titles according to the STORY acronym (with additional descriptive paragraphs to coincide with each chapter) it became clear that more than one chapter may fall within a specific stage of SPS. By way of example, the following is a comparison of two story maps found in SPS, “Rags to Riches” and the “Who I Am” stories.

The first three chapters of the Rags to Riches” story fall within the “Situation” stage, while only the first two chapters of the “Who I Am” story are in the “Situation” stage. This is partly because of how the story organically progresses and partly because how much exposition is needed to set up and understand the problem. Recall that “Situation” stage (or “S” in STORY) relates directly to the Clarify in CPS. As such, a different amount of backstory is required by the problem solver when approaching these particular problems.

Another example of this can also be found within these two specific story maps. The “Rags to Riches” story has only one chapter within the “Y” stage of STORY, while the “Who I
Am” story has two chapters in this stage. Remember, “Y” meaning “Your solution” and “Criteria for saying YES” to your solution and that this stage is directly related to the Implement stage of CPS. Finally, by being open to exploring different story maps for each type of story, I was able to reach my goal of providing a framework while not being formulaic.

To further reach my goal of making SPS tangible and useful, the story maps needed to be designed and templates would need to be provided. In addition to these templates, I also created decks of cards that can be used as creative stimuli to aid in the crafting of the final stories. As these two important components overlap with the third outcome: To create the supporting materials needed to facilitate (either alone or in groups) the Story Problem Solving process, I will discuss them later during the third outcome section.

**Outcome 2: Adding a new set of techniques to the CPS suite of tools**

There are so many tools and techniques found within the world of CPS that it seemed that impossible to create something new. However, the beauty of CPS is that it encourages new thinking and invites new tools and techniques. With this in mind, the second goal of this project began as a challenge: How might we marry the CPS process with storytelling to give us tangible tools and techniques to help us realize those solutions? The answer to that question clearly resulted in the formation of SPS.

SPS is a new set of techniques that can now be added to the CPS suite of tools. Up until this point, my own research has revealed that storytelling in this form has not been documented as a means to creatively solve problems. The common thread between SPS and CPS is the use of questions as stimuli to provoke new ideas. However, the type of questions found in SPS is what
makes it unique. They are rooted in literary theory and are useful in eliciting new ways of thinking through your problem. For example, instead of using the term “Clarify”, SPS asks, “What is the situation?” and frames the line of questioning and prompts around the components of “Exposition.” As such, some questions examples include:

“You are the hero of your story. Yet, who is your arch enemy in this tale?”, “Describe the setting and landscape around you.” and “On your quest, who are your trusty companions?”

The Ideate stage, has been renamed, “Options and Obstacles.” This is a cue for the problem solver to think through what actions they may take as well as any hurdles they may face. Some example questions include,

“You meet your opponent out in the middle of the street. What happens next?”, “How would Alfred Hitchcock (or Tom Sawyer, Captain Nemo, James Bond) solve your problem?”, and “Write some dialogue between you and another character in your story.”

The Develop stage in SPS is called, “Refine your ideas” which is akin to the editing stage in creative writing. Yet, “Refine your ideas” goes a step further and appear as either additional challenges for the problem solver to consider or prompts to further your thinking. In doing so, the ideas that have been crafted in the story thus far can be pressure tested and/or validated. The challenges found within this stage of SPS take the form of “plot twists.” The plot twists are derived from classic situations found in literature and then followed up with some specific probing questions. Here are some examples,
“Unexpected Gift – You receive a present that may help you in your quest. What is it? How might it help? However, this gift may also have a dark side that causes more problems. What new object in your story can ruin your plans?” and “Quicksand! – Time stops and you are stuck in your current solution. What would happen if you were not able to advance? Who or what can pull you out of this sticky situation?”

The Implement stage has also been renamed and coincides with the “Y” stage of STORY. “Y” stands for “Your solution” and “Criteria for saying Yes!” This reminds the problem solver that he or she must get to a solution and that they are going to ask themselves whether or not their proposed solution act solves their problem. A set of questions will come in the form of “Actions” and lend more details to the action plan that will be a result of the story. Furthermore, similar to the “Plot Twists” found during the “Refine your ideas” stage, “Actions” are presented and then accompanied by some more specific probing questions. For example,

“Break it! – What would happen if you split the task into more sizeable chunks?”, “Set the timer. – Give yourself a deadline or set an alarm to get yourself up and moving.”, and, “Grab! – What can you take? An opportunity? A meeting? A ride? How will taking something help solve your problem?”

There are several more techniques that add to the richness of SPS. “Imagery” prompts are an element that can be used to augment each of the stimuli mentioned above. Again, the “Imagery” prompts come directly from literature and film. Some examples of the “Imagery” prompts are:
“What time is it? – High noon? Crack of Dawn? The clock struck midnight... It's the witching hour and...”

“Describe the weather – It was a dark and stormy night... The pavement was so hot, you could fry an egg in the middle of the road...”

“What would the soundtrack be at this moment in the story?”

In the case of the “Imagery” prompts they can work in conjunction with the other stimuli. For example, by adding “Imagery” to the “Situation” you would get something like,

“Describe the setting this scene is taking place. What is the weather like? What time of day is it? What is the music you hear in the background?”

Adding imagery is the technique that helps bring the story to life and helps in visualizing the possible scenarios, additional challenges, and potential solutions.

Another technique found in SPS is the practice of adding a title to your story. Crafting a title for your story helps solidify and summarize what the solution is about. This may also be helpful in evaluating the story – especially if more than one narrative has been created using SPS.

Finally, SPS offers one more technique to the process. This is the practice of writing an epilogue. An epilogue is typically used to tell the reader what happens when the book or film ends. In the case of SPS, the epilogue may be used to visualize the solution more clearly or can be revisited after the solution has been executed. This is akin to reflection about what you have done well and what you might do better next time so that in the future you can look back on the story to see how it was used to solve the problem. The epilogue writing technique ties directly
back to the initial premise of the project – that stories are simply the retelling of how someone overcame a challenge and solved a problem.

**Outcome 3: Supporting materials needed to facilitate SPS**

From the beginning of the project I had the clear vision that I wanted to create physical pieces for a problem solver to interact with when crafting a story to work through a problem. In many ways, the third outcome of this project is strongly connected to the first outcome (Making SPS Tangible and Helpful) yet has some meaningful differences. In meeting my first goal of (tangibility and usefulness) I wanted to move the concept of storytelling away from the abstract and make it more concrete. The outcome of that goal is the process and structure of SPS. This third goal is more concerned with the creation of tangible materials that may be used to facilitate SPS. The supporting tools that I created were the story maps for each story, a template with specific prompts and probing questions to work through the selected story, and several decks of cards that align with each component of the STORY acronym.

Throughout the project, I tried many different layouts for the story maps. I tested two of them with a group during an SPS workshop that I facilitated. The results and feedback of that session will be discussed later in the Evaluation section of this paper. However, the actual materials will be discussed here.

The story maps and templates work together as one. As mentioned earlier, I made prototypes of various maps, but in the end, I chose the following design.

There are several important design elements that are included in the story map and template that are helpful in SPS. The final outcome is a workbook with all eighteen story lines
found in the SPS Library. At the top left of each page the title of the storyline is clearly visible.
In the figure above, we can see that this is the “Rags to Riches” story. Underneath the story line title is the synopsis of the story and the structure of the story mapped out with the title chapters and the descriptive paragraph that coincides with each chapter. As mentioned earlier, these follow the STORY acronym. While I could have simply just numbered each chapter in sequential order, I added a few other design elements that can be of useful.

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**Figure 1. Story Map and Template**
In addition to numbering each chapter, they are color coded according to the STORY acronym. Furthermore, the colors were deliberately selected to match the four color traditionally used to indicate the four stages of CPS. Blue for Clarify, orange for Ideate, green for Develop, and magenta for Implement.

The colors are also used in each deck of the Story Spark Cards that align with each stage of SPS. For example, blue is used in the Exposition cards, orange is used in the Options & Obstacle cards, green is used in the Plot Twist cards, and magenta is used in the Action cards. The imagery cards use the color, grey. This too, was a conscious choice as I wanted to keep them neutral so that the Imagery cards can work with any of the other cards in any of the aforementioned stages.

![Figure 2. Story Spark Cards](image)

It is also important to point out that each chapter of the story is plotted on a graph according to the emotional stage typically felt by the reader during the progression of the story. The range of emotions are depicted with three different emoticons; Happy, Neutral, and Sad.
This is helpful in the facilitation of SPS in several ways. The first is that it helps to ground the problem solver in the difference between the current reality at the beginning of the story and the desired vision at the end. SPS is not only designed to help solve a problem, but to conclude in a better place than when you started. Visually representing this through the emotional graph helps to drive the problem solver to a more positive outcome. Another way in which the emotional graph helps to facilitate SPS is in the selection process to identify the appropriate story, as well as through the progression of solving the problem. The emotional graph of the story can help the problem solver self-identify where they may experience significant conflict and discomfort, as well as where they may need the most help.
The right-hand side of the template is a worksheet for the problem solver to either capture their thoughts and notes for each stage of the story, or a place to actually craft their individual story. As mentioned earlier, there is a prompt to craft a title for their own story. The chapter titles are then pulled through into the worksheet with the corresponding color and chapter number for easy reference back to the story map. Additionally, under each chapter heading are several...
specific probing questions and prompts to facilitate the process. Of course, the problem solver is free to draw a card from the appropriate deck, and pair it with an Imagery card for further creative stimulation. In the case of working with a larger group, the problem solvers may draw different cards and discuss the results of their thinking to further generate ideas and develop the story.

![Figure 4. Story Template](image-url)
Evaluation and Feedback

Once the SPS tools, techniques, and templates had been designed, it was time to put it to the test. While creating a formal SPS workshop was beyond the scope of this project, I needed a way to test the all of components, mechanics, and outcomes of the project. As such, I conducted a four-hour, informal SPS workshop with seven colleagues. During the workshop, I gave each participant two different types of templates and invited them to decide which one was more useful to them. Both templates had spaces for the participants to place the cards from decks provided. Only one template had the worksheet to capture their notes and story. The story line that was most appropriate for their problem was the “Who I Am” story.

Upon the conclusion of the workshop, I facilitated a feedback session using the CPS tool, POINt. The following is a summary of the findings from that discussion. Several of the suggestions have already been incorporated and were leveraged to reach the outcomes discussed
earlier. Others require some more thinking and further development which I will address in the “Next Steps” section of this paper. One final note regarding the templates used during the workshop. Unanimously, each participant chose to work with the template that incorporated the worksheet.

**Plusses**

The breakdown of the story line into the separate chapters was extremely useful in working through the story. One participant said that it would have been “very hard to keep track of where we were in the story without it.”

The tools and templates were, “very well thought through and made perfect sense.”

“The worksheet allowed me to take notes to refer back to throughout the story.”

**Opportunities**

It might provide a “whole new filter” and “a structure for me to think in different ways.”

It might keep more people engaged through the use of surprising elements that pop in storytelling.

It might help solidify the problem that needs to be solved.

**Issues**

- The spaces for the cards got in the way and are not necessary. Therefore, *How might we simplify the template?*

- It would have been helpful to show an example from literature for each kind of story. For example, since the movie Forest Gump is an example of a “Who I Am” story, it might be
good to illustrate that story within the SPS story map. Therefore, *How might we add more context to each of the stories?*

**New thinking**

- Add visuals and illustrations along with the stories and the chapters
- A glossary of literary terms
- A template to capture the lessons learned from using the story to overcome a challenge
SECTION FIVE: KEY LEARNINGS

Introduction

For this project, I have identified several personal learning goals: 1.) To enhance my knowledge of CPS; 2.) To augment my knowledge of literary fiction; and 3.) To increase my communication and presentation skills. As a self-identified lifelong learner, my approach was to use the project as a springboard from which to dive deeper into these areas with the vision that I will continue to pursue these learning goals well after the project is complete.

Learning Goal 1: To enhance my knowledge of CPS

I entered this project with a firm grasp of the process, as well as the tools and techniques associated with CPS. However, there is so much more to learn. From the very outset of this project I wanted to combine the elements of CPS with SPS. In order to do so, I needed to dive even deeper into CPS. I needed to go back to the beginning of my studies and think about how someone without any knowledge or training of CPS would understand the concepts. This forced me to breakdown each stage of CPS into the simplest of forms so that they could be easily translated into SPS.

Here are some specific features of CPS that I learned through this project. I learned that while the language of CPS is very important and meant to be descriptive, examples of each stage are equally important. I learned that the language of CPS is action oriented. Each stage of CPS is titled with a verb – an action that the problem solver should take at each stage of the process (Clarify, Ideate, Develop, Implement.) This is important as the CPS is driving towards action and not merely creative thinking. I learned while the tools and techniques are typically associated
with one stage or another, in reality they don't need to be so constricted. This freed me up to take the elements from one tool and apply to various stages of SPS. For example, Forced Connections can be applied to both Ideate and Develop, or an Evaluation matrix can be used equally as effective in both Clarify and Implement.

Finally, in working through this project, it became clear that while SPS is derived from CPS, it wasn’t imperative to use all of the language associated with CPS in the final product. The reason for this is that the main audience for SPS are people who are most likely not familiar with CPS and it seemed too unwieldy to introduce two problem solving methodologies at once. If, however, one was familiar with CPS then the foundation of SPS would be immediately recognized as such. This is especially true in the use of certain language lifted directly from CPS. For example, phrases like, “It would be great if…” and “How might we…?” appear within the framework. Lastly, while SPS has applications for groups and organizations to facilitate in their problem-solving process, it is also intended for individual use. Therefore, the language, tools, templates, and techniques needed to be crafted in a way that can be easily understood and adopted.

**Learning Goal 2: To augment my knowledge of literary fiction**

I have been interested and studying literary fiction throughout my entire life. Yet, the more you discover, the more you discover what you don't know. This project has helped me to learn the deep structure of story and the reasons why we tell stories. I learned the fine line between having a formula and being formulaic. I also learned the importance of understanding the motivations of each character in the story – not just the protagonist.
This project has also taught me to how to introduce novelty in a way that advances the story. By breaking deconstructing stories to the bare essentials, it became clear where the twists and turns are best situated to propel the action and where it may slow the story down, or worse, become an unnecessary diversion.

The most important lesson I learned about literary fiction is the subtle balance of data and emotions. If a story is filled only with factual pieces of information the story is dry, boring, and will not resonate with the reader. If on the other hand, a story only contains emotions, drama, or conflict, the reader is left to question the true meaning of the story. Both elements are needed, especially if stories are to have the power and ability to help us solve the challenged set before us.

Learning Goal 3: To increase my communication and presentation skills

The ability to creatively solve problems, and craft a story, are great skills to have. However, once you have those skills one must have the ability to communicate those stories and solutions to others if your goal is to implement change. Through this project I have learned how to take my idea of SPS and present it in a way that others can adopt. After all, if the methodology and tools of SPS are never used by others, then the project was merely an exercise of my own creative thinking. As mentioned earlier, I truly believe in the power of story to help solve problems and make meaningful change in people’s lives. Therefore, it was imperative to learn the art and skill of translating SPS in my head to SPS into the hands of others.

While working through this project I learned how others learn a process and how they interact with a new framework for solving problems. I also learned that many people are not
familiar with the language and framework of CPS, but (in many cases) follow the process organically without any training. I learned how to design templates and worksheets are useful when in the event that a facilitator is not available to explain them. And finally, through the study of story, I learned how to effectively craft and tell stories, and even more importantly, which kind of stories are most useful to convey a specific message.
SECTION SIX: CONCLUSION

If I think about this project in the most basic of storytelling structures (beginning, middle, and end) I would say that while it seems like this project and its story have come to end, but in reality, it is merely the beginning of the middle. The journey has been amazing and raised many challenges for me to consider and overcome. Yet, there are still many more pages to be written.

What I can say at this point is that this project has proven my hypothesis. Stories truly are the retelling of how a problem has been solved or a challenge has been answered. Furthermore, SPS is viable framework to use storytelling as a method to address and solve for those obstacles we encounter in life.

I have achieved what I have set out to accomplish. I have defined and created a usable framework to solve problems based on the use of literary fiction. I have illustrated the parallels between the Creative Problem Solving (CPS) process and a wide variety of classic stories from many time periods and cultures with the goal of solving a problem, completing a challenge, or overcoming an obstacle. And, I have learned an immeasurable amount about two subjects that mean so much to me. More importantly, I feel as if I have not only added to the universe of CPS tools and techniques, but a new way for people think about and solve problems in the world.

Next Steps

I am excited about the possibilities of exploring and developing SPS beyond this project. What I see myself doing now is to continue to refine the templates and tools that are now found within SPS. I plan to make the materials more visually engaging. I also plan on writing sample
story summaries from examples found in literature and movies for each of the eighteen story
lines.

Based on my work throughout this project, I have defined some new goals and visions for
SPS. It would be great to create a presentation and a workshop to introduce SPS to many more
people with the hopes of socializing the process and methods. What I see myself doing is
delivering a workshop either at a creativity conference such as the Creative Problem Solving
Institute or at a storytelling conference to market the idea as well as gain even more constructive
feedback. Ultimately, I see myself writing a book on the subject and becoming a recognized
expert in both creative problem solving and storytelling.
References


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