



PART II: THE POWER OF NARRATIVES

FROM SHADOW TO LIGHT:
RECLAIMING YOUR STORY

A diverse group of people, including men, women, and children of various ethnicities, are sitting in a circle around a campfire at night. They are all looking up at the sky, where the Milky Way galaxy is clearly visible. The scene is illuminated by the warm glow of the campfire and the cool light of the stars. The background shows a dark forest under a starry night sky.

WE GAIN OUR IDENTITY
THROUGH STORIES



The preeminent anthropologist and systems theorist Gregory Bateson (1972) once wrote, “People in a family act to control the range of one another’s behavior.”



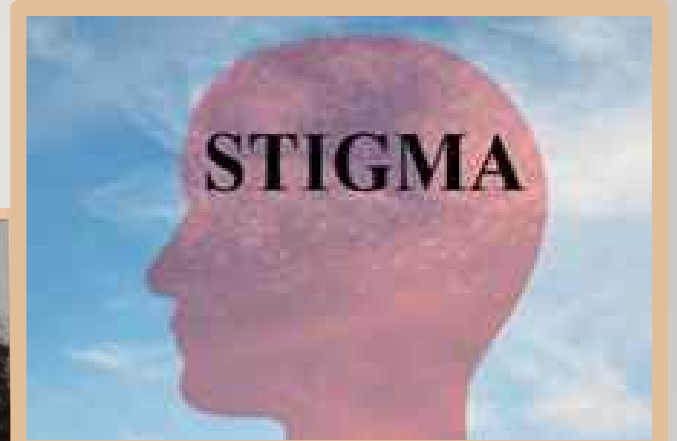
We are Born into Stories

- People don't make up their life narratives from scratch.
- We are all born into stories, and those stories shape our perceptions of what is possible; but we don't usually think of the stories we are born into as stories.
- We think of them as *reality*.

STIGMA SHAPES OUR REALITY

Our self-image is profoundly affected by experiences of media portrayal, racial discrimination, the internalization of gender and sexual identity norms, the psychological effects of mental illness, and the lived realities of poverty and discrimination.

These factors shape our internal narratives about who we are and what we can achieve, influencing our sense of agency and potential outcomes.



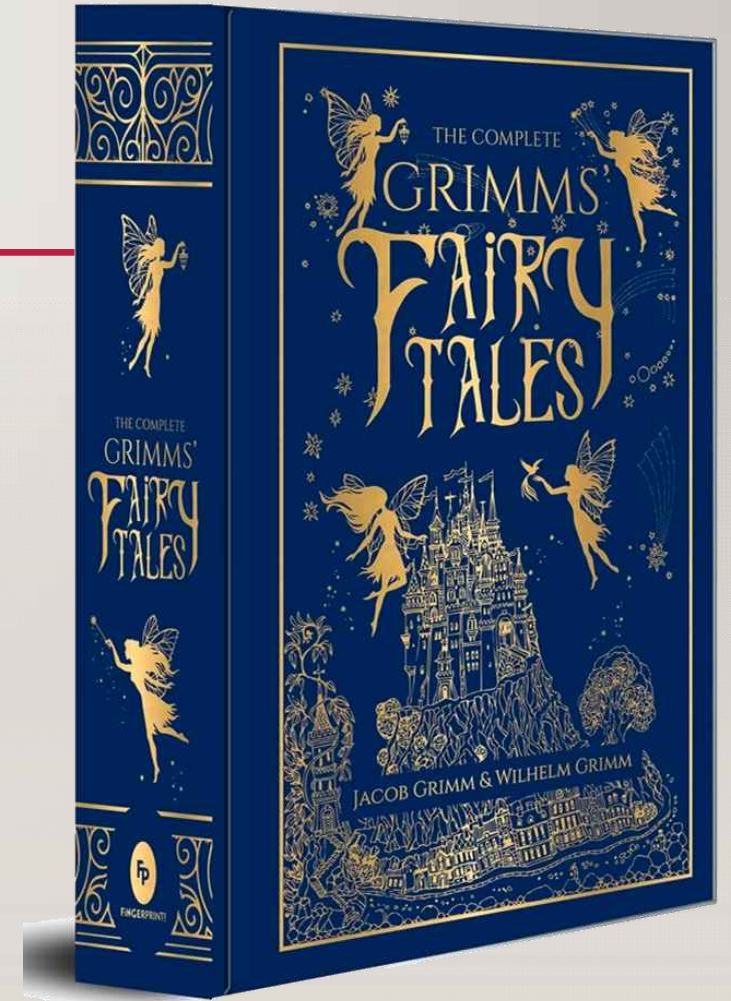
WHAT ARE INTERNAL STORIES?



- Internal stories are the narratives we create to make sense of our experiences.
- They guide our understanding of who we are and how we relate to the world.
- Trauma often disrupts these narratives, introducing fear, shame, or self-doubt.

THE POWER OF STORIES

- Humans are natural storytellers. We seek them in books, movies, and conversations.
- Stories help us make sense of our lives, shaping our identity and influencing well-being.
- Research shows that the beginning and endings of stories are critical—they help us frame success, failure, and growth.



WHO WROTE
YOUR STORY
TO THIS
POINT?

WHO WILL
WRITE YOUR
STORY FROM
THIS POINT ON?





WHAT IS THE ARC OF YOUR STORY?

WHERE YOUR STORY STARTS AND ENDS MATTERS

“Every telling is an arbitrary imposition of meaning on the flow of memory, in that we highlight some causes and discount others. Every telling is interpretive.”

– Michael White



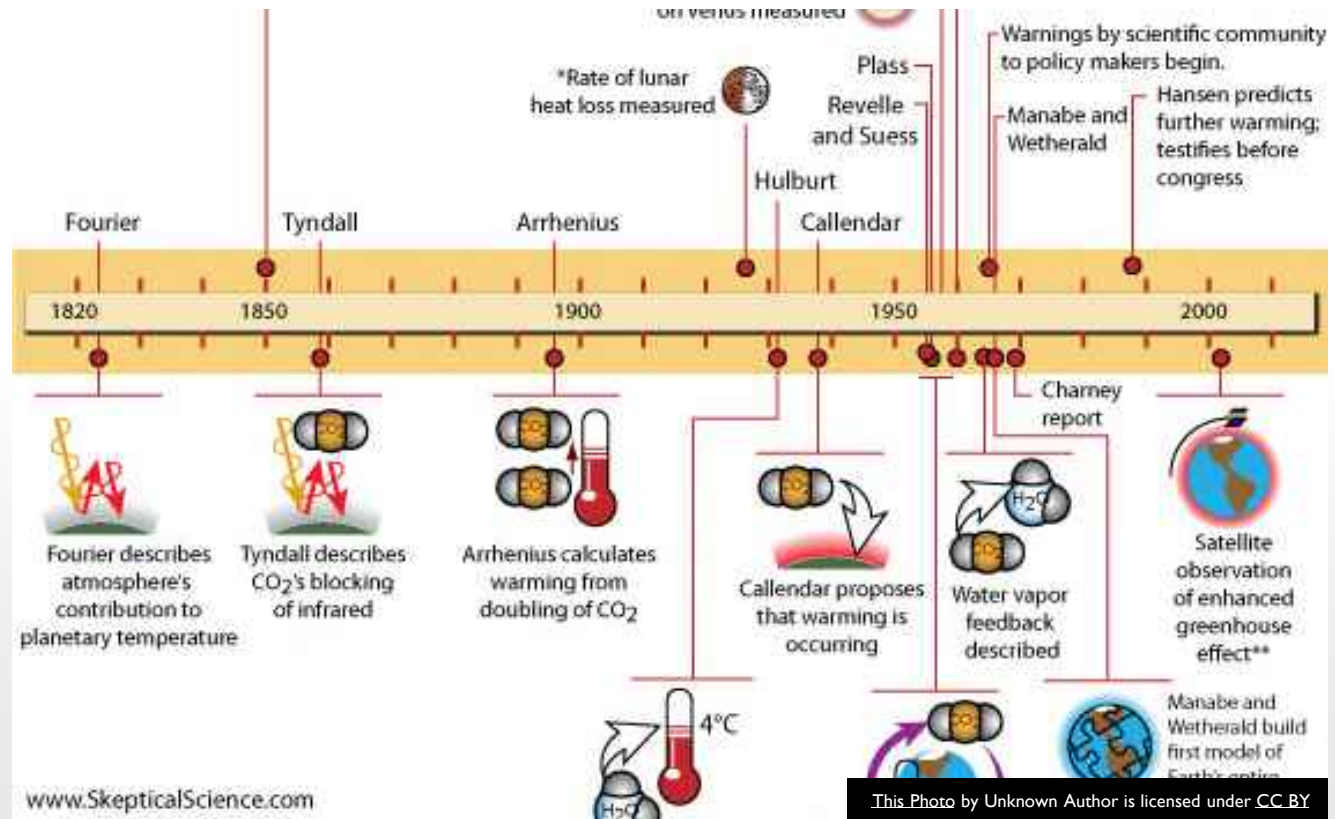


STORY FORMS:

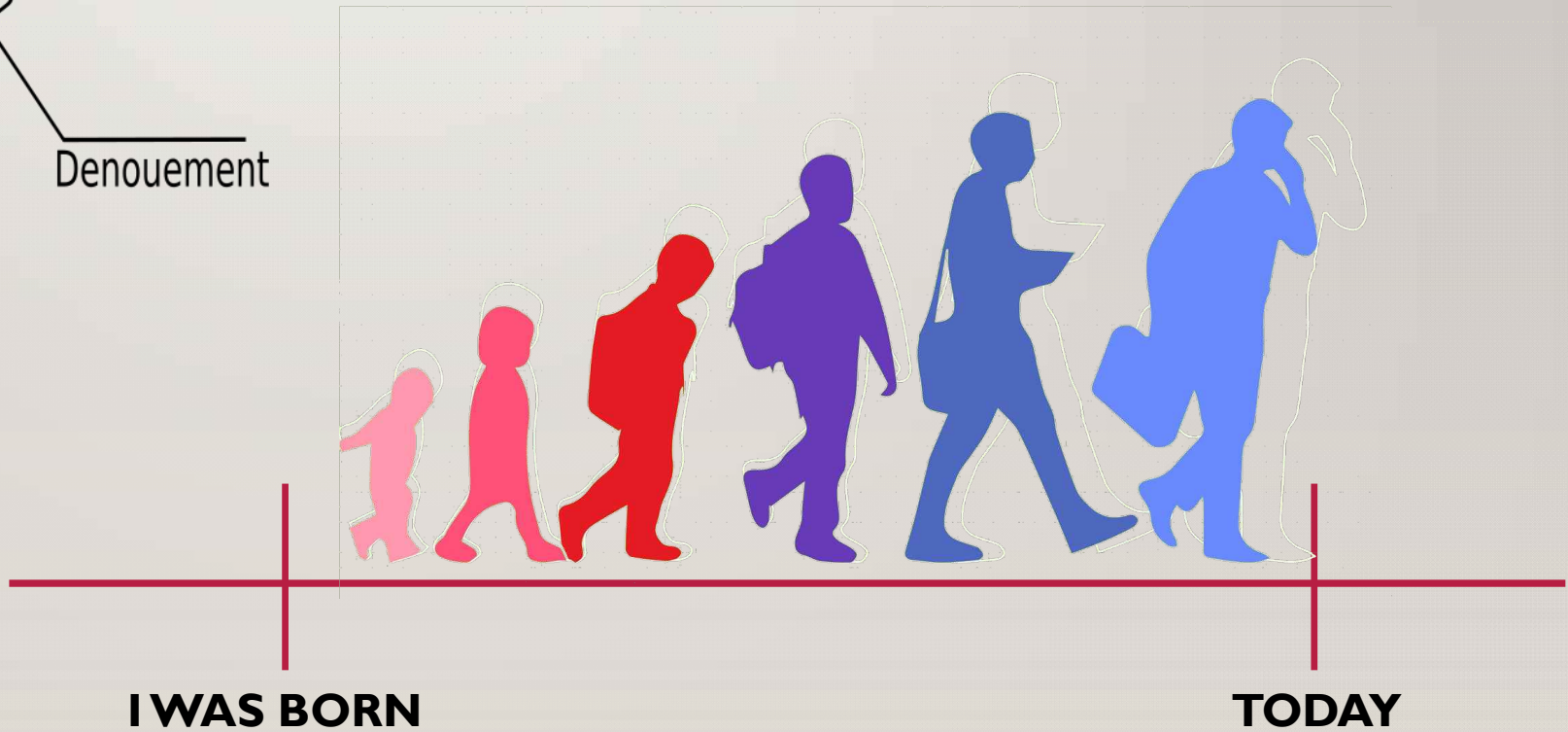
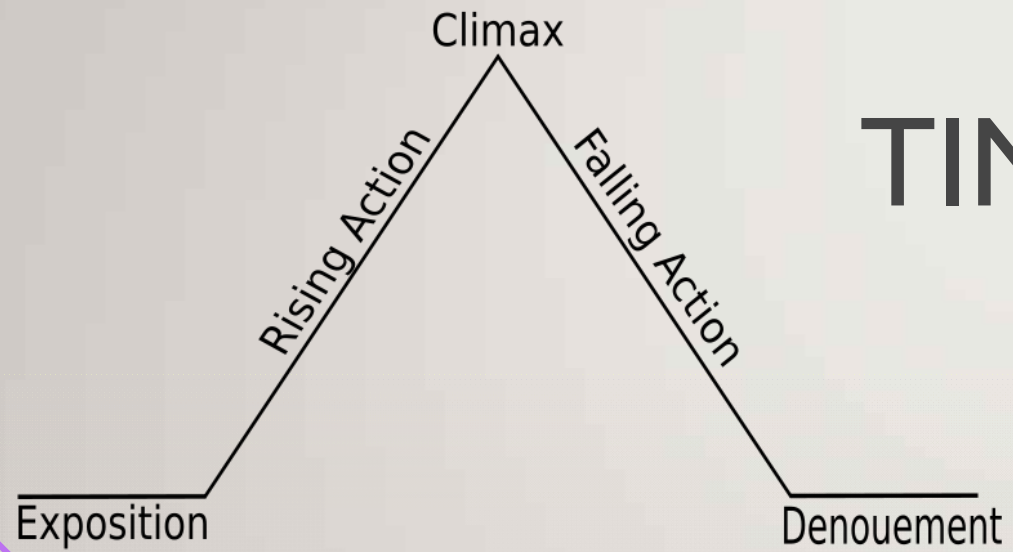
- Ascending:
 - We came here with nothing, and we thrived.
- Descending:
 - We were doing well, and then we lost it all.
- Oscillating:
 - Includes ups and downs—a lesson in resilience
 - How we came back from that low point
 - Somethings turn out well, and others don't,
 - We are not doomed by our problems.
 - Everything's not going to be good all the time.

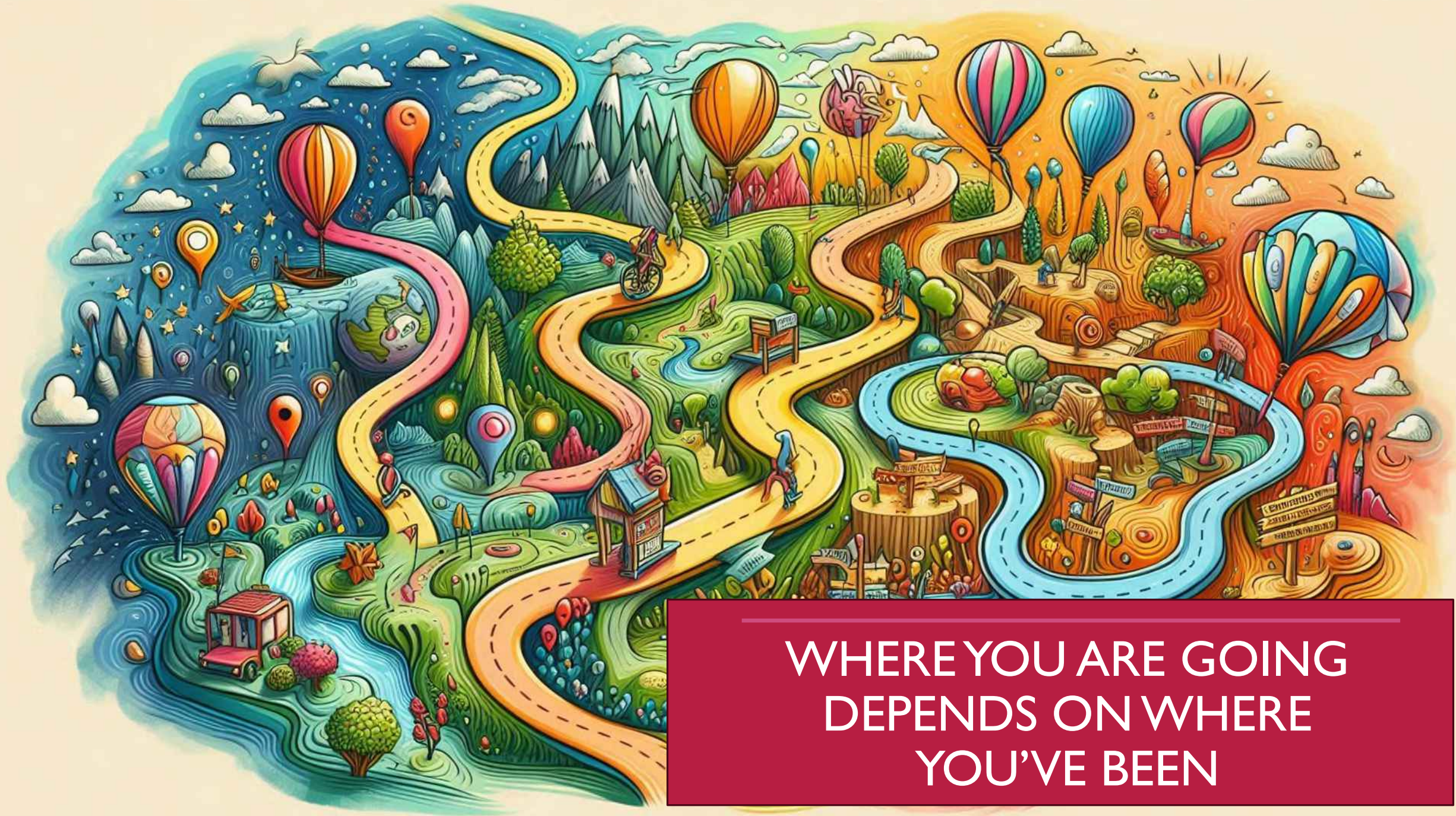
TIMELINES MATTER

Where your story begins and ends helps determine how you see yourself and the world.



TIMELINE EXERCISE

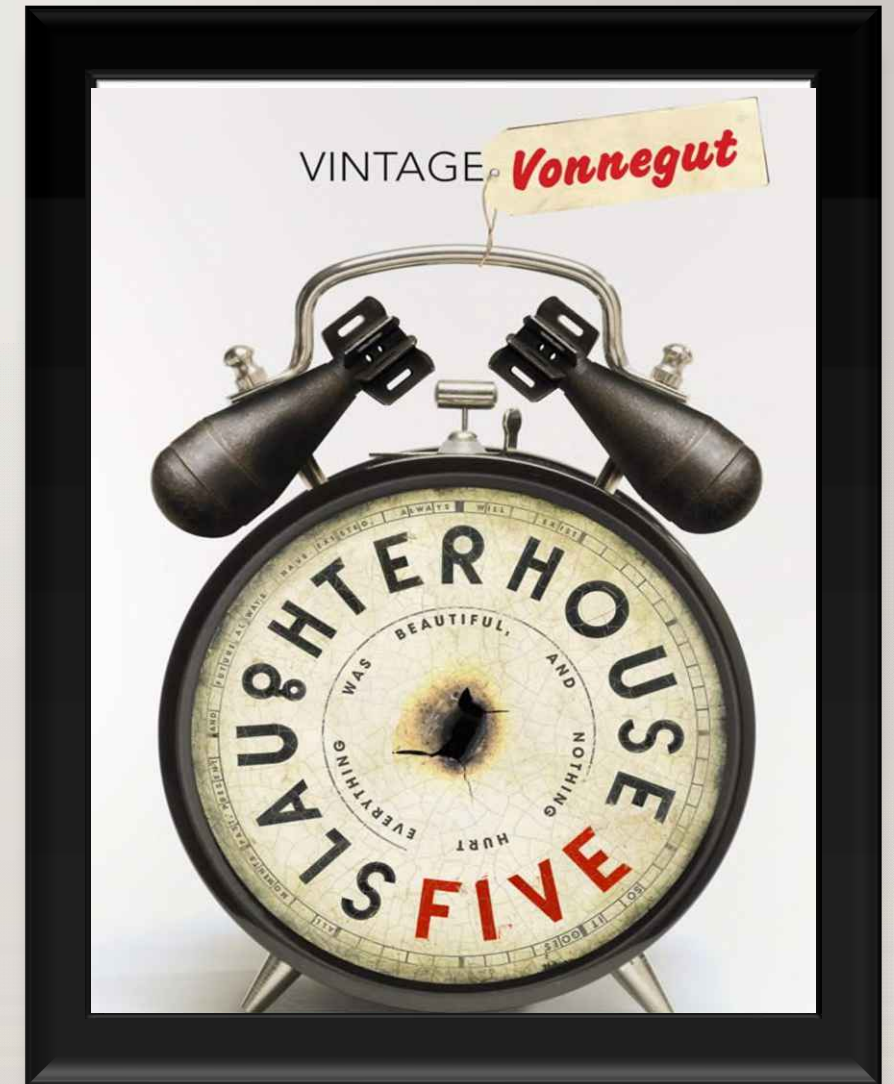




WHERE YOU ARE GOING
DEPENDS ON WHERE
YOU'VE BEEN

THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA ON OUR STORIES

- Trauma affects how we perceive and narrate our lives.
- It can distort our internal stories, shaping how we see ourselves, others, and the world.
- Understanding these changes can help us heal and rewrite our narratives.



THE
ADVENTURES
OF
HUCKLEBERRY
FINN

MARK TWAIN

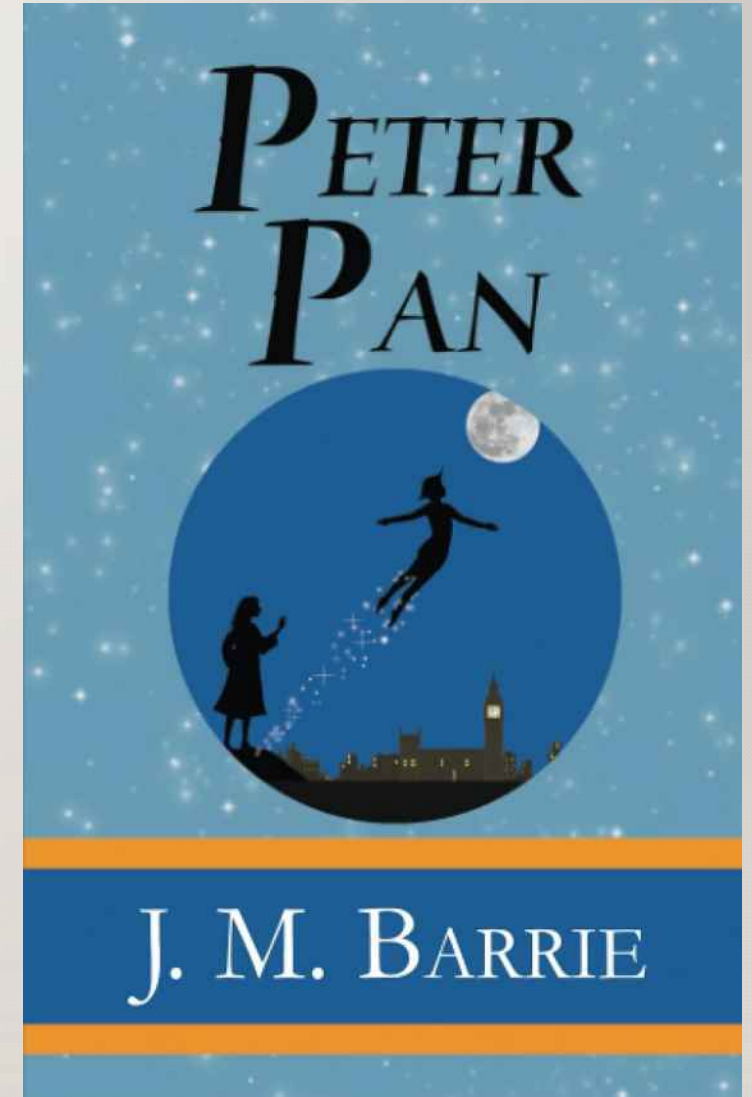


FAMILY STORIES AND RESILIENCE

- Family stories are as vital as personal ones in creating identity.
- They remind children they are part of a larger community and history.
- Sharing family narratives fosters a sense of belonging and helps children understand their place in the world.

THE ROLE OF COHERENT NARRATIVES

- Parents can help children craft detailed and coherent stories about challenging experiences.
- Narratives that integrate thoughts, emotions, and events promote understanding and healing.
- Narratives connect past, present, and future selves.
- These stories improve emotional well-being and build resilience over time.

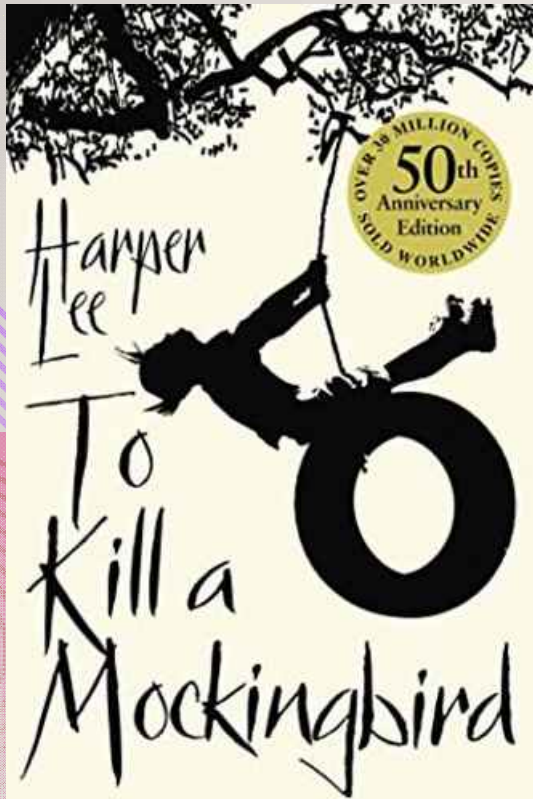


HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS IDENTITY

- Trauma can fragment our sense of self, making us feel disconnected or *broken*.
- Narratives may shift to focus on weakness or blame: *I'm not good enough* or *I deserved this*.
- These stories can fuel feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.



INCLUDE GROWTH AND REDEMPTION

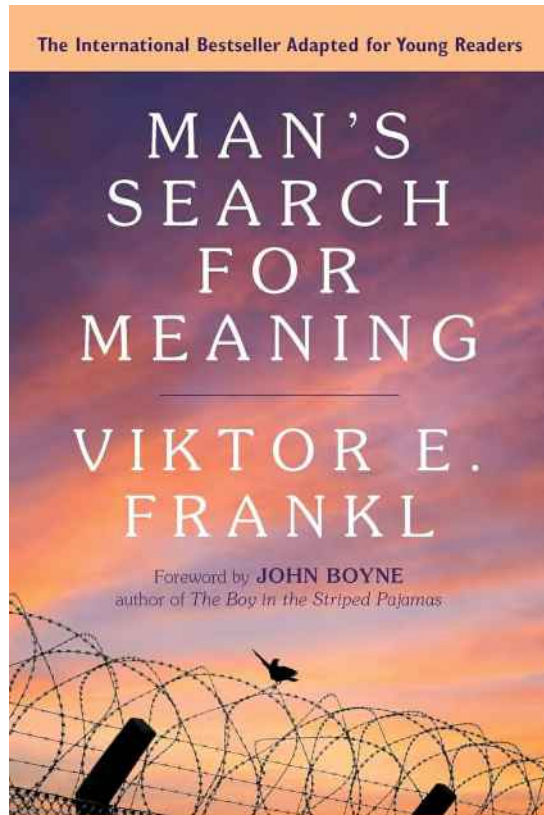


- Stories that include elements of growth and redemption:
 - Contribute to you and your children understanding yourselves and the world in a more profound way.
 - Help you and them find meaning in difficult experiences.
- Such framing helps children develop optimism and problem-solving skills.

BALANCE EMOTIONS IN FAMILY STORIES

- Acknowledge both negative and positive emotions when recounting family stories.
- Example: *It was a hard time, but we learned to stick together.*
- This balance teaches children emotional honesty while fostering hope and resilience.





PRACTICAL TIPS FOR USING FAMILY STORIES

- Share stories about how family members overcame adversity or helped others.
- Encourage children to ask questions and participate in storytelling.
- Use storytelling moments to connect lessons to their current challenges.

THE ROLE OF FEAR AND SAFETY



- Trauma often rewrites our internal story around fear:
 - *The world isn't safe.*
 - *I can't trust anyone.*
- These narratives may lead to hypervigilance or withdrawal, impacting relationships and daily life.

MEMORY AND TRAUMA NARRATIVES

- Traumatic memories can feel fragmented or incomplete, disrupting the story's coherence.
- Flashbacks and intrusive thoughts may replay the trauma, keeping it central to our narrative.
- A lack of resolution leaves the story *unfinished*, contributing to ongoing distress and a more impoverished autobiographical self.



NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL PATTERNS



- Trauma amplifies negative emotions in our narratives:
 - Shame: *I'm flawed.*
 - Guilt: *It was my fault.*
 - Hopelessness: *Things will never get better.*
- These emotions can dominate our internal dialogue and infect our sense of self.

TRAUMA DISTORTS RELATIONSHIPS

- Trauma may influence stories about relationships:
 - *I can't depend on others.*
 - *People will always hurt me.*
- This can lead to isolation, mistrust, or difficulties in forming healthy connections.



SILENCE AND AVOIDANCE



- Avoiding our trauma stories is common:
 - We suppress memories and feelings.
 - We avoid triggers and reminders.
- Avoidance can reinforce the narrative of fear and control the person's life.
- Those unable to recall traumatic events tend to have an impoverished autobiographical self.

BREAKING THE CYCLE: HEALING THROUGH RE-AUTHORING

- Healing begins with acknowledging the trauma and its impact on your story.
- Therapy and self-reflection help reframe the narrative, focusing on growth and resilience.
- From *I'm a victim* to *I'm a survivor who overcame*.



CREATING A COHERENT NARRATIVE



- A coherent narrative integrates the traumatic event into a broader life story:
- *This happened, it hurt, but I've learned and grown.*
- Coherence allows the trauma to become a chapter, not the entire book of your life.

THE POWER OF SUPPORT AND CONNECTION

- Sharing your story with trusted individuals fosters understanding and healing.
- Support systems help you challenge distorted narratives and build new, empowering ones.
- *I'm not alone. I have people who care about me.*





RECLAIM YOUR STORY

- Trauma changes our internal stories, but it doesn't have to define them.
- Through reflection, therapy, and connection, we can re-author our narratives with themes of strength, growth, and hope.
- We are the authors of our stories, and we have the power to give meaning to our struggles, and in doing so, give meaning to our lives.

15 MINUTE BREAK to STRETCH & CONNECT

