Reawakening the love of story:

Learning to live through story telling and listening

by

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Bachelor of Education, Simon Fraser University, 2008
Bachelor of Arts, Simon Fraser University, 2006

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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This project examines the nature of story sharing, both the telling and listening, and why story should be used to create powerful learning experiences. After reviewing a variety of academic sources, the project focuses on the process by which a person creates story and the process by which a person listens to story. This project is largely ethnomethodical, drawing on personal experience and honest reflection. To that end, it is noted that story telling and story listening is not new to teaching and learning. Rather, this project hopes to reawaken the love and practice of story, and to sublimate the self-empowering aspects of story and the honor it brings to both teller and listener.
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I would like to acknowledge that my life story is based on so many other life stories.

My immediate family. A father who has journeyed all over the world and takes leaps of faith and big risks with people every day, challenging him and others to go beyond their boundaries. A mother who has spent her life serving others and working to make healthier communities. Sisters who have shared adventures and discoveries with me. Rachael and Erika you continue to impress with the risks you take in love and life. A niece, Olivia, who is finding her own path in life and whose sense of humor is the best. A nephew, Jason, who shares his feelings and ideas. My cup overflows with the love I have for you all.

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My colleagues and professors. This journey has been long and intense, and it would not have been the same without you all.

I am honored to be in your life story, and to have my life story include you.
Dedication

To my Popsy who passed away during the completion of this Master’s. You were a central figure of our family story. Without you we can still continue because what you left was so strong: A devotion to family, pride in hard work, and a joy in playing cards.

To my Dad who instilled the love of drama, courage to perform and the willingness to take risks.

To the cats I have had in my life, especially Kisa. You have allowed me to learn unconditional love without fear of rejection (partly because you all wanted food from me). Kisa, no one else could put up with you. This one’s for you, kitty-o.

Meow, meeow meeeow meoow. Meeww meow mewoow.
Chapter 1: Introduction

The Decision

I did not initially know what I was going to focus on in my Masters. I have been teaching for four years, with classes of my own as well as being a Teacher Teaching on Call. Of my own classes, I have taught such a wide variety of classes and grades in such a short time that I myself am surprised. Foods 8-12, Drama 8-12, English 8 and Communications 11 and 12, Socials 8, grade 4/5, Alternate Education, Learning Resource and Science 8, to list a few. I wanted a thesis topic that would be useful to the remainder of my career as well as applicable to any subject area that I teach, as I do not know what subjects I will be teaching in the future. With this in mind, I thought back to my classes and teaching moments that meant the most to me. The ones that, at the end of the day, I felt like I had been uniquely useful to someone in a way that only I could have been. Sometimes these were moments of revelation, when a student realized and revealed a part of herself to the class in a moment of vulnerability and discovery. Or other moments of when a student was inspired to continue learning on his own, like showing up in class with the next book in a series. Or moments when I felt students were becoming fuller human beings, intellectually, emotionally and physically. Or moments of clarity, when a student realized who he was as being a product of his past, and that his future was his choice. Many of these moments I realized had occurred while teaching Drama.

I began trying to distill what it was about Drama that was so powerful for me. I consider the fundamental gift of drama to allow an actor to tell a character’s story and connect with three different groups. These three groups create multiple opportunities for genuine connections through telling a story. The first group is the audience. An actor who can project the story of the character allows the audience to participate in that story. The audience feels and thinks along
with the character, anticipating events and reactions. In this way everyone in the room has ownership over that story. The audience has been transformed from voyeur to participant.

Secondly, there is also the acting partner whom the actor connects with. Done well, the actors in a play will journey in a parallel creation of their character’s stories. This takes commitment of each actor to simultaneously remain in the moment listening to the partner as well as keeping character goals in mind as motivation for reactions. The characters will act of their own volition and react to one another, weaving their stories together and apart.

Thirdly, and perhaps the most difficult, an actor learns to tell the character’s story to his or her self. It is the work of the actor to create the character’s history and understands his/her motivation. Then the challenge, especially the more distant an actor is from the subject matter of the script, is to empathize with the character. When an actor connects in this way, the performance becomes grounded and authentic. The audience is no longer watching an actor playing a character but observing a living character.

These three connections are a lot to coordinate, encourage and acknowledge. It is not that they happen only in Drama, but they happen more naturally as a result of the curriculum. In other subjects the information is emphasized. Learning facts, memorizing data and processes, being critical and opinionated from a scholarly point of view are major learning goals. In contrast, the three connections Drama can create, from my experience, would be considered the aesthetics of curriculum, the awareness of the senses, being the emotional connections and awareness to the information. The space and time to create stages of emotional awareness and honesty between strangers, partners and self is what I want in every class I teach.

It seemed that my moments of teaching clarity were held within stories created between myself and students, when one of us was sharing a story or trying to understand the story of
someone else. With this realization, I chose my thesis project topic: Stories, the telling of and listening to. I began to wonder what and how stories had been present in my life, and began to reflect on my childhood.

**Stories as a Child**

As a young child I developed a love of listening to stories. Sharing a room with my younger sister, every night we would either compromise or argue over which story vinyl we would listen to. During the day I would hide her Rainbow Bright record, and she would hide my Naughty Amelia Jane record. We had cassettes of Robert Munch stories which we would record over with our own voice reading the words. Sitting in the car for long road trips and listening to Baba Yaga or Peter Molly and Peanut Butter Trolley was normal. I learned to become a listener of stories at an early age, becoming lost in my imagining the reality of the characters.

**Stories from Family**

Summer family vacations meant asking my Dad for a story around the campfire. I still remember the one about two children who, at night, are drawn into the woods and down into a tree to a new world. My Dad is a captivating storyteller, using character voices, hand gestures and voice intonation. It always seemed magical that he could create stories out of thin air, never disappointing our waiting minds. My sisters and I would also volunteer my Dad to come on class end of the year sleepovers to tell everyone a bed time story.

We would also ask my Dad for a story about when he went travelling as a young man of 17 and 19 around the world. These stories always involved some misunderstanding due to language barriers or a ploy on my Dad’s part to get somewhere or something for free. These adventures seemed so bright and intriguing, better than looking at a travel magazine. They also revealed a side of my Dad that was separate from the person that I knew. Before my Dad existed,
there was a young man with sun bleached hair, quick to smile and follow adventure. I could see this man in my Dad, but only as a shadow. I think my sisters and I all knew that there were adventures going untold, and we always tried to draw out new stories from him.

My Grandparents would tell stories of their own. My Grandma about working in the fish plant or partying in downtown Vancouver with her girlfriends. My Grandfather about being on the tumbling team in high school or working at Hotel Vancouver. My three Aunts would tell stories of their childhood, each giving a different version of my Mother. There was the story of how my parents met, their early careers and lives. There were also the stories half spoken of but never told, ones you knew not to ask about. I was aware that my sisters and I each had a different set of stories, unintentionally, so that we each had a very different view of our parents and larger family.

As a teenager I was introduced to old time radio dramas by my Dad. Every Sunday night at ten on the radio, these old radio dramas captured my imagination as I fell to sleep. They connected me to a different era of storytelling, when families would sit together around the radio and collectively share in the experience. I think it was at this stage when I realized that most teenagers my age had not immersed stories into their lives the way that I had.

As I became an Aunt myself, I saw my niece and nephew’s fascination of stories. My niece especially would ask for stories about family members, about pets we used to have or of herself as a baby. It seemed as though these stories that involved her or people she knew gave her a position in the world. I began to realize how stories, of your own or shared between others, situates a person to create more stories of their own.

**Story of Objects**
Even as I write this, I look around my home and see objects that belonged to past family members. Each of these objects holds a story and connects me with a community of people. On my wall hangs an old velour wall hanging of a lion looking out over the Serengeti that belonged to my Great-Grandmother. While living in Hope she bought them from a travelling salesman to give as Christmas presents, but this one she kept (or couldn’t give away do to its tackiness).

There are so many other objects. I use a dishware set from my paternal Grandmother, listen to records that have my Mother’s and Aunt’s name scrawled on them, tools from my Grandfather, a couch from my Mother’s friend, and a sweater knitted by my Grandmother’s friend. These objects are a constant reminder of the stories behind them, a reminder of the people that stand behind me. If we search and listen, some of the objects in our lives can reveal stories about our founders.

**Story as Teacher**

I am an avid reader. Classics, fantasy, historical fiction and young-adult novels all hold my interest. The novels I read became my stories. I would often have moments of vague memories, difficult to place until I realized it occurred in a book and not my own life. I had learnt that storytelling takes two parts: a teller and a listener. I had become such a good listener that I integrated novels into my life story. I once reminisced with a friend all the memories I had: “I remember this time when I was lost in the woods and had to forage for plants to stay alive. This other time I was shocked to find out that I was connected to a group of six other people who all held an elemental power that needed to be developed. Or this other time I was caught in a struggle with two political factions trying to gain power.” She was confused, of course, until she realized I was referring to the memories of novels I had read. I view the novels that I have read
as part of me, as I allowed these stories to have a huge impact on the development of my character.

The stories I grew up with impacted my creation of self. The story records I listened to formed a sense of wonder and curiosity. There were records about toys coming to life when the people left the nursery or the half Brownie half person who helped other people. The language confusion with the British narrators, wondering what a Gollywog and a rubber girl was. Places mentioned that seemed fantastical, such as Spitsbergen in the North or Swiss Alps. The story of The Little Red Hen instilled a strong sense of justice, confirmed by the swindlers getting away with stealing from the vain Emperor. I learnt that justice was not always fair but it was what you had earned by your actions. I could have listened or read all of these stories and not have been changed personally. Instead, I used the experiences of characters to inform my life decisions, integrated their epiphanies as my own. I began to problem solve with their critical skills, take interest in their hobbies and carry their hopes. I allowed stories to transform who I was.

**Story as a Teacher**

At this point, story has been present throughout my childhood and within my family. I have been taught by and through story. Now I wonder how story has revealed itself in my own position as a teacher. As a teacher of four years, which consists of many different subject areas and a multitude of classrooms as a Teacher Teaching on Call, I have already met many students. I did my Practicum in the Lower Mainland, taught on the northern end of Vancouver Island (and I do not mean Campbell River, that is not the northern end), as well as the Fraser Valley. These communities are very different demographics but I have seen a trend among students. In general I have witnessed students failing school because they are disconnected from the material and cannot envision how it relates to their lives. The students who are successful are those who do
the work regardless of feeling disconnected. During a District driven grade four reading
assessment students were asked to connect to the story about a child who learnt to overcome the
challenges of having a prosthetic arm. The majority of my students responded that they couldn’t
connect because they didn’t have a prosthetic arm. This experience spoke to me of our
curriculum stressing the efferent learning and information of subject areas rather than
encouraging the aesthetic view and connecting the self to the subject areas.

I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to teach Drama, grades eight through twelve. I
struggled with my own feelings of inadequacy teaching an area I had no formal training in,
while trying to weave my own dramatic skills with the standards the previous teacher had left.
Perhaps as a result of these pressures and doubts I was forced to consider and validate my
teaching to a greater extent than I ever had to do with my trained subject area. Reflecting on my
teaching Drama has revealed the emerging trends in my teaching style and pedagogy of trying to
create authentic connections with my students. I chose to teach Drama with a focus on
emotional awareness and personal connections. I did a lot of assignments delving into characters
and having students make personal connections and reflect on their own performances. There
was an emphasis on emotional safety because I was asking students to become vulnerable and to
share with others. There were moments of raw feelings and genuine openness. I remember the
first such experience when I realized the impact this class was having on students. Two girls had
a history of bullying one another and dichotomizing the class into binary racial groups. They
both had stories of mistreatment, which meant they were quick to defend themselves and their
friends. One day in class they had a moment of clarity, a moment when I think they suddenly
both really listened to the other and realized they had a lot of pain in common. This occurred ten
minutes before the end of class, and continued ten minutes into the next class. It was so powerful
that I supported them and their close friends to stay and finish this dialogue of realization. They
didn’t become best friends after that, but they had a shared understanding of one another’s
stories. I saw a gentleness come into their words and actions that wasn’t there before, as though
they now asked themselves “maybe this person is feeling the same way as I am” before reacting
to people.

**Story Listening**

Everyone needs a community where they can share their story. People need others to
listen to them, validate their feelings and acknowledge their experiences. Have you ever been
sharing a story, when, part way through, you realize your audience is not paying attention? You
stop talking and they don’t even notice. You feel devalued and underappreciated. The telling is
as important as the listening. Being the listener takes a lot of energy. You must be present in the
moment, willing to give the teller your full focus and attention. You need to visualize the
unfolding events. You need to find ways to connect to the story in order to connect to the teller.
You need to be patient, allowing the teller to process at his/her own pace. You need to realize
that the telling of the story is for the benefit of someone else, not you. You need to look ahead
and realize that if you ever want someone to listen to your story, you must listen now to someone
else.

Children need a community of listeners, indicated by their use of multiple online
communities. If a child does not feel they have found a community at school or at home where
they are genuinely heard, they look for connections with people through social websites or blogs.
For me the most depressing part of this choice is that many times these websites are not even
healthy communities. Bullying is rampant, a false persona is often created, and support for
unhealthy choices is given. The fact that children are choosing to remain on these websites indicates how strong their need for a community is.

When you know no one is listening to your story, what happens? I have already taught and been called to fill in for teachers during crises that involved a student attempting or accomplishing to take his/her life. I have supported my students as they dealt with breaking families, bullying, depression, sexual abuse and their own children. I remember doing surveillance of hallways on a day a student had completed suicide. The staff had been told the facts of the situation, but administration had decided that the students would be informed during their first class in order to have the support of the teacher. As I met with students in the hall I heard them already talking about the student and what happened. They knew more than I did. Why? The student had posted his suicide note on a public website. This was the student’s last attempt to finally have someone listen to his story and acknowledge his feelings.

Understanding how much storytelling and story listening do in creating sense of self and community, I begin to acknowledge how sacred the practice of story is. Are humans not communicating and social beings by nature? Are not stories, spoken of and listened to, the form of our connections? Today we speak of stories in many forms, using media, the written word and pictures to convey our experiences to others. I have naturally woven storytelling and listening into my classrooms and teaching pedagogy, but what are the results.

Objective

By the completion of my Masters, I hope to accomplish clarity of mind and action. I already have a strong personal opinion about story telling and listening, which will ground me as I research into the history of storytelling, and the effects on both teller and listener. In becoming cognizant of storytelling and listening I want to use it with more power in my teaching. I
acknowledge that I will be looking at experiences and reflecting on ideas from a specific and chosen stance. Others may look and reflect on the same articles or experiences completely differently as a result of their stance. Therefore, I will endeavor during my project to validate my own journey and opinions by using an ethno-methodological stance during my project. Hopefully as happened as a result of teaching Drama, I will find my voice and practice stronger at the end. I suspect that the stance I have chosen will allow me insight into my own practice, the learning process of my students and the psychological needs of humans. How and why does story sharing, both the telling and the listening, create powerful learning experiences and connections?
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Prologue

In the writing of this literature review, I have read a myriad of texts: scholarly articles from linguistics, education, nursing and philosophy departments, an educational book from the 1950s, a current British Columbian Educational Resource Package, perspectives of narrative authors, articles exploring kindergarten through to adult education, a training journal and story organizational website. I did not initially plan to read such a wide variety of sources, it just happened that way. As I began my research, I quickly realized that there would be no article directly correlating to my subject and approach. I did find, however, many articles that could connect if viewed from a certain perspective. For example, Louise Rosenblatt’s (2007) article does not refer to story teller or story listener, but her ideas of writer and reader I found to be compatible with my growing understanding of the story process. I also did not initially read the nursing therapy articles. It was only when I realized how often I was seeing their titles during my research that I decided to read through them. It became clear that I would be weaving together sources from various fields to realize the full picture of story sharing.

As I began the writing stage, I tried valiantly to proceed in an academic prose. It became obvious to me that I could not continue in this way. After reading so much on story telling and listening, it was difficult to now shift my stance on the subject to an informational, linear style. I thus chose to steer from the norm and create a story that wove the information into a plot line of the formation of a community and its development of story telling and listening. My sources became characters within the story, their research and ideas advancing the plot. This includes informational headings such as The Process of Story Making, Teaching Through Story,
Efferent/Aesthetic and Story Through Time. Thus, I have woven various times, disciplines and styles in this Literature Review.

The Desire for Story

Once upon a time, people lived alone, separate and isolated. They lived life, created memories and thought of the future. But everyone remained alone in their worlds. There came upon them each an urge for something...or someone else. Individuals began to migrate towards one another, pulled as if by a magnetic force of desire, each reaching for the other. Although they could not yet fathom their purpose, each person wanted to tell of their past experiences, to share with someone else their fears and triumphs. Having come from diverse locales, they each had various ideas of how to go about communicating, not many of which were similar to another’s ideas. Rosenblatt, a woman in the newly formed community, realized that a shared form of communicating was needed, one that mirrored the worldview of their group (2007, p.3), and thus helped create a language that was appropriate to their new community.

So the people lived, and spoke, and shared their daily lives as a group, but still something was missing. They again began to feel that magnetic force. One man, Krishnamurti, spoke to the others, explaining that “we are not happy people, we are not vital, joyous; at home, in business, at church, at school we never experience a creative state of being, there is no deep release on our daily thought and action” (1953, p.12), thus illuminating what was lacking in their lives: a creative state of being. This magnetic pull they all felt towards another was to create and to share their creation with another. Another fellow, Bruner (2004), agreed with Krishnamurti, and further expressed that “‘world making’ is the principal function of mind, whether in the sciences or in the arts” (p.691). Lickorish (2009) found that the formula for this world making, when expressed verbally, slowly evolved to mean a person “must tell a sequence of events that occur in
a *different time* and/or *a different place*” (p.21). This forces the teller to not merely commentate on events occurring, but to weave together various situations or ideas into a coherent whole. There became a difference between reality and imagined reality. Only a created reality was a story. Bruner further developed the idea that the best way to describe lived time was through the narrative format (2004, p.692), and the easiest form of narrative being the autobiography. Autobiography is a form of story because it reimagines the events of a life and plots the major experiences. It re-shapes the past in order to deliver to the future an image of an individual.

Reis and Sprecher (2009) found that storytelling is used for three primary reasons: to create intimacy through sharing and building a sense of similar history, to seek validation of their views and emotions, and to resolve problems (p.3). Weaving story at the beginning of a relationship brings people together as well as clarifies and confirms ideas throughout a partnership. So the people began to share episodic experiences with others and they felt closer, connected. As people told stories of their lives, they found that others had a better understanding of the teller’s ideas and values. Schiffrin also notes that “stories are often told to justify one’s own actions” (1996, p.171), both as the event unfolds as well as in the future dealings with the event. Furthermore, “people develop stories that characterize their relationships” (Reis & Sprecher, 2009, p.2) to outsiders. In this way partners emphasize and confirm their roles, even reshape a shared memory with another by recalling only certain details of an event. By idealizing one’s partner through the telling of only particular stories, the health of relationship is supported. Reis and Sprecher (2009) also found that stories were useful at the closing of partnerships, as a greater sense of self control could be felt and advertised to others (p.3), thus empowering the ex-partner with a sense of control.
The people were beginning to feel satisfied in their interactions with others, whether within or after a relationship. Finally, each individual felt that he or she was able to express ideas and experiences. As story was used more frequently by the people, something began to shift within their psyche. As people began to make story out of their lives their perceptions of themselves slowly changed. How and why was this happening?

**The Process of Story Making**

The people perceived themselves through segments of situations, where they acted and responded towards others. These segments are in relation to the community’s cultural reality: values, history, life choices, socio-economic status, and media (Hell, Bosman, Wiggers & Stoit, 2013). All of these *tableaus* are by nature disconnected stationary scenes, as are the perceptions of the self frozen in the person’s mind. It is only in the weaving together of these tableaus that a full play is enacted and understood, that a full person is pieced together and understood in a larger context. When an individual recalls these tableaus and more importantly expresses them through a story, they become *schema*. “Schema are typified as organized representations of one’s experiences” (Hell, Bosman, Wiggers & Stoit, 2013, p. 248), the mode by which they are organized being storytelling. An interaction between new information and the personal reservoir of information forces an individual to reorganize and evaluate themselves (Hell, Bosman, Wiggers & Stoit, 2013; Rosenblatt, 2007). The connections they make depend solely on the experiences they have had. Consequently, a group of similarly aged children could make drastically different connections to a story because they have had different life experiences. People in the community found that through storytelling they could better connect their personal tableaus and new information. Through this processing, the tableaus become *schema*, organized representations of an individual’s identity.
Reading and writing is akin to telling and listening. There are two aspects of telling a story. Firstly, that it forces a person to view themselves as an author, a creator of story. Following this, the performance of the story itself contains the power to create, which becomes self-actualizing and empowering. People began to take control of their lives, as Rosenblatt explained that authors, or narrators, control “what is brought into awareness, what is pushed into the background or suppressed, depends on where the attention is focused” (2007, p. 4). Once deciding on her focus, the narrator takes a stance (2007, p. 5), or position towards her life and in relation to the audience. The narrator, in sculpting her story, focuses on key events in a certain way for a specific result. The same event could be used for a comedic effect or a dramatic story; the effect lies in the delivery of the narrator. The author selects the tableaus of her life that she wishes to share with others. Schiffrin (1996) explains that “our transformation of experience into stories, and the way we carry it out, is thus a way to show our interlocutors the salience of particular aspects of our identities” (p.199). In this way people are constantly changing identities depending upon the stance they take towards their own lives in response to varying situations. In deciding what and how to share, a narrator is always influenced by a web of public and personal knowledge (Rosenblatt, 2007; Schiffrin, 1996). If an author is aware of these elements, for example her cultural opinions and experiences, she can employ them in order to ensure the audience will understand and connect with the story. Otherwise, if unaware of her influences, a narrator will unwittingly be controlled by social forces.

Also, in framing their life experiences or ideas into a narrative format, a person perceives his life as having a beginning, middle and end. Events are now seen as cause and effect, linked together towards an end. In order to fulfil the story format, an author is forced to see the connection between various life events, and themselves as an evolving character.
Secondly, telling a story forced a person to view themselves as others viewed them. An author must be able to analyse and consider her life events and how they may be perceived by others. Recounting one’s life is twofold: “it is selective achievement of memory recall; beyond that, recounting one’s life is an interpretive feat” (Bruner, 2004, p. 693). This final act of sharing with others pushes the individual to reveal moments of his life in a focused and purposeful manner. “When we perform an action through speech, we are acting toward another person with some possible effect on that person” (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 196), again empowering the teller of the story. Rosenblatt further explained that during this stage of focus, “any process will be affected also by the physical and emotional state of the individual, e.g., by fatigue or stress” (2007, p. 4). This shifting and readjusting process is why, as Alphonse (2003) explained, humans are constantly evolving entities, often multiple persons at one time. Stories are means by which these different selves are connected, the changes explored and honored.

Lastly, the words and actions of a story are by nature juxtaposed with silence and stillness, and this unspoken dialogue is just as meaningful. Personal truth is a complex, constantly shifting concept. Jeanette Winterson (2013) believes that, “for a writer, what you leave out says as much as those things you include. What lies beyond the margin of the text” (Quotes about Narrative, 2013) is still a force of meaning. As much meaning can be found in exploring the silence and stillness. The teller, in the process of choosing and revising from her myriad tableaus which to include in her story will alter, be it slightly or greatly, all of these tableaus into schema. For the listener, wondering at the silences and considering the teller’s creative process opens another story. Winterson gives a final thought on silence, in that “perhaps we hope that the silences will be heard by someone else, and the story can continue, can be retold” (Quotes about Narrative, 2013) by our listeners. Here again the people’s yearning for a
creative release and connection, a validation of personal feeling and experience with another was so strong even their silence and stillness had meaning.

So the people had grasped the idea of autobiography, sharing their life stories with others. Some individuals took the creative leap and began telling stories of imaginary characters and places. Their inspiration was still their own lives, or the lives of others that had shared with them. For these people, a lens of curiosity and artifice was used when looking at the past and future. Certainly, wonder and uncertainty go hand in hand. A sense of uncertainty was needed to create the space for wonderment and creativity to expand their reality into the created reality.

**Formatting Story**

This first community of people eventually came in contact with another group. Each wished to share a story with the other. One sat down, waiting for the listeners to gather around. The teller proceeded to “to tell topic-centered narratives, [which focus on a single object or event]” (Hell, Bosman, Wiggers & Stoit, 2013, p. 287). The listeners did not seem to appreciate the story, reacting in ways the teller did not expect. When the turn came for the other group to share a story, their teller was “more apt to tell episodic narratives [which narrate an episode]” (p. 287), which was not at all what the first community thought was a well told story. The two communities realized that even the format of storytelling relies on the cultural background of teller and listener, that “every culture has its own definition of story” (What is Storytelling, n.d., section 4). For example, Blum-Kulka comments that “Jewish American families […] support the monologic telling of a story event when the story is known to more than one participant (a shared story event). On the other hand, in Israeli families […] narration may unfold collaboratively (in the polyphonic mode) even when telling unshared events” (as cited in Hell, Bosman, Wiggers &
Stoit, 2013, p. 286). Both the teller and the listener have different expectations to fulfill. These findings confirm the earlier assumption by Cazden (1988) and Michaels (1981) that the thematic structure of a story differed according to student background. A student’s natural story structure depended on their cultural background. These cultural features of storytelling, as Allen (2013) explored in his research, are shared from teller to listener subconsciously, namely through role modeling. When two First Nations story tellers taught culturally diverse elementary classes, both tellers used recurring patterns to convey messages. These included: conveying the majority of plot development and pronouncements through characters, recognizable character voices, repetitive action patterns, the use of recurring verses with clear significance to the story’s theme as well as the use of epilogues to ensure the audience’s understanding (p. 186). Although these formats of story were new to the students over time they were mirrored and used in their own story telling. Over a longer time period, after becoming conscious of the techniques, students personalized their story telling methods.

The one shared element between all cultural story formats is the absence of a fourth wall. In dramatic performances, there is at times a fourth wall or barrier between the audience and actors. In story sharing, the teller and listener are there together, aware of each other’s reactions, emotions and presence. What the listener is expected to do may differ, but they are always there.

Story telling in this way is an organic and greatly present act. The listener reacts to the teller through socially understood cues, such as laughing, nodding, finishing sentences or keeping eye contact. These cues will of course be dependent on the culture of the story teller and listener. The teller will respond to his audience, by elaborating on confusing sections, adapting the word usage to the age of the audience, or using more expressive gestures to enhance understanding. It is also the teller’s responsibility to ensure the story is at the level of the
audience’s level of understanding. It is important to note that over-simplifying language learning “inevitably leads to distorting the linguistic context and... the multimodal nature of the linguistic instruction” (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984, p. 105). Adapting language learning to ensure challenging vocabulary and concepts are in the reach of the listener is the delicate balance the story teller must make. It is important for a teacher to investigate his/her own cultural modes of story sharing, telling and listening, and be open to and create open spaces for various story telling structures.

**Teaching Through Story**

The community of people by now had an instilled sense of story telling and listening. Their cultural information was largely supported by this process of sharing and expressing. So too then did their education use the method of story sharing. The teacher who uses story as a viable means of expressing ideas, for both themselves and their students, must agree to certain premises. In narrative therapy, Alphons purports that the “client and therapist are equals who actively strive together to achieve a common goal (2003). When teaching takes on story sharing as a process of learning, both child and adult are seen as actively structuring the event” (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984, p. 96). Each participant shapes the learning event as it occurs. Teacher and students must share an understanding or their intent and purpose, as both “are equal in that neither is more or less important than the other to the attainment of the goal they share” (Alphonse, 2003, p. 9). Pre-dialogue and explanations need to occur before a story is attempted. The teacher must acknowledge that to teach requires a student, one of whom will shape how the lesson is taught. A student also must agree that a teacher is needed for the unique learning that is to occur. “They mutually influence one another in a myriad of overt and covert ways regarding how the common task is to be done” (Alphons, 2003, p. 9). Body language, prompts, willingness
and enthusiasm are only some of the ways both can be aware of the other. Just as the generic
teller and listener of story must work together, so too the teacher forms a bond with the student
(Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; What is Storytelling, n.d.). The first premise, therefore, is
that teacher and student are in a co-operative partnership.

A teacher using story also takes a holistic view of education. Just as spiritualism in New
Age nursing atones that “a person is a biopsychosocial-spiritual entity, always developing,
emerging, and moving toward transcendent wholeness” (Mitty, 2010, p.59) so too the teacher
agrees that “learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on
connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)” (British Columbia Ministry of
Education (BC MOE), 2008,). Both professional views are concerned with the full spectrum of
their student/patient. The professional recognizes when any level of growth occurs, whether
mental, spiritual or physical, the student/patient moves towards a higher goal within a web of
relationships and realities. Krishnamurti reiterates that “the purpose of education is to cultivate
right relationship, not only between individuals, but also between the individual and society; and
that is why it is essential that education should, above all, help the individual to understand his
own psychological process” (1953, p.34). For this to happen, the student must be guided in
exploring his/her own identity (BC MOE, 2008; Krishnamurti, 1953), which can be achieved
through story sharing and exploration of oral traditions. Another aspect of nursing therapy that
connects with teaching is the goal of revising the client’s narrative of the self (Alphons, 2003), in
relation to his past, present and future. So too a holistic approach to teaching encourages students
to consider their life knowledge, revise with new knowledge and build upon this framework.

Lickorish believed that “there’s a gift of a story in pretty much anything, and if we’re
observant we can catch it and draw it out” (2009, p. 22). The teacher’s role is to create situations
where a student is comfortable, challenged and encouraged to create story. Case studies, critical incidents, role playing, public speaking and simulations are among the story-based techniques. Harste, Woodward and Burke described “the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic processes or strategies engaged in by both participants” as tracking (1984, p. 96). The teacher, being aware of the student’s language scaffolding, could better guide the student in language learning. For example, a student’s use of self as an object, the use of metaphors, voice tense (past, present or passive) in a story all indicate a level of understanding. It is this partnership that is the tracking, as each respond to one another in creating connections between prior and new information. The teacher can also draw attention to ideas the students would otherwise never consider, just as “use of such differences in construction underlies many common therapeutic interventions such as reframing, teaching logical disputation, deconstruction, and interpreting” (Alphonse, 2003, p. 11), which can lead the student to a new understanding and appreciation of different views. Inspired by Harste, Woodward and Burke’s figure (1984) of transactional language learning, figure 1 offers a visual description story sharing. Here, the partnership between teller and listener are apparent as the meaning comes about only as a union of their active involvements. The process is also cyclical, as at any point it begins, but must continue throughout the stages in order to find completion. The meaning of the story, though shared in the partnership, is also personal as each takes that meaning and alters it when experiencing and connecting to a new story.
Story sharing as a learning tool is a great responsibility, as the teller and listener become intrinsically connected (What is Storytelling, n.d.), both on an informational/emotional level and private/public level. The teacher must remember that “telling a story provides a self-portrait: a linguistic lens through which to discover peoples’ own … views of themselves as situated in a social structure” (Schiffrin, 1996, p.199). When two narrators are co-creating a story, turn-taking rights, question/answer exchange and their global situating (Schiffrin, 1996) can show the listener how they view themselves individually and in context to one another. In fully utilizing story, a student puts himself in a vulnerable position. It is the teacher’s role to bring to the forefront and explore that social structure with the student. Story “is both validating and valuing … peacemaking and transformative” (Mitty, 2010, p.58). The teacher must be cognizant of his position as a witness and guide of both a student’s personal and public information. Lickorish encourages teachers to “balance conscious and unconscious learning” (Lickorish, 2009, p.22), keeping a mix of overt learning and hidden. This could be in the form of academic and formal assignments coupled with informal discussion and exploration.
Efferent/Aesthetic

Rosenblatt further explored this idea with her terms of efferent and aesthetic learning. Rosenblatt began to understand that there were two kinds of reading stances occurring, efferent and aesthetic. This is akin to dichotomies of informational/emotional, private/public, mind/heart, doing/being. Although she spoke of reading and writing, her concepts can be understood as a central premise for story telling (writing) and story listening (reading). Efferent is “the kind of reading in which attention is centered predominantly on what is to be carried away or retained after the reading event” (Rosenblatt, 2007, p. 5). This concept connects with holistic nursing ideologies of “doing” and “being”. Mitty explains that “doing is traditional, technological, evidence-based nursing practice” (2010, p.59). Here, the reader and nurse are goal oriented. They are already thinking of the future, planning ahead to ensure success. Within the present moment, the nurse or reader is already mentally, actively, in the future. Therefore “the meaning results from an abstracting-out and analytic structuring of the ideas, information, directions, conclusions to be retained, used, or acted on after” (Rosenblatt, 2007, p.5). In this vein the listener has primarily based his understanding of and connections to the shared public knowledge. The connections made in this process are tenuous as they rely on a future event to occur to solidify themselves into the listener’s mind. If the event changes, or does not transpire, those connections, ungrounded, may easily be forgotten or pushed aside for new information.

The second kind of stance was aesthetic. Here, “the reader adopts an attitude of readiness to focus attention on what is being lived through during the reading event…and after the reading event” (Rosenblatt, 2007, p.5). This stance connects to the “being” in holistic nursing, “being means presence, “being with” ” (Mitty, 2010, p.59). The reader, or nurse, is in the present moment, making connections with others as well as their own personal experience and
information. As a result of these grounded connections, the listener can later draw on this new store of knowledge whenever needed. When this occurs, it is done so in an inspirational and organic way. The listener’s connections, and therefore the information, come from within. In this way a story becomes a part of a listener’s inner dialogue, or schema, in interpreting what will happen in his/her life. Rosenblatt further explored the power of personal reading, as she found that “someone else can read a text efferently for us, and acceptably paraphrase it. No one else can read aesthetically, that is, experience the evocation of a literary work of art for us” (2007, p.6). To aesthetically learn is to experience; become one with the information. It creates a deeper understanding of new information and can inspire more connections to be made in the future. This is the power of the story, and why it must be given opportunity to be lived and experienced. The people integrated story sharing into the educational system, finding a balance between aesthetic and efferent learning.

**Connecting to Private Knowledge**

Author Jeanette Winterson (2013) viewed the power of story to reside in the gift it gives to express the unspeakable. She reflected that “all of us, when in deep trauma, find we hesitate, we stammer; there are long pauses in our speech. The thing is stuck. We get our language back through the language of others” (Quotes about Narrative, 2013). An individual unable to create his own story can still find release through another’s. In this way, the story creates connections within the listener, acting as a guide to understanding his own confused tableaus. People found that story did not only connect reader and listener, it connected the listener to himself. Even for the teller who can speak, there are some tableaus left untouched. Winterson (2013) understands that “there are so many things that we can’t say, because they are too painful. We hope that the things we can say will soothe the rest, or appease it in some way” (Quotes about Narrative,
2013). As the creator and teller of a story, the process of creating and sharing the story allows the teller to connect indirectly to those tableaus too painful to explore openly.

The use of story as a free form of expression was also seen as a viable means of accessing student’s knowledge. Rosenblatt found that “the more accessible the fund of organismically-linked words and referents, the more fluent the writing” (Rosenblatt, 2007, p.7), or in the community’s case, story sharing. Not being worried about public approval of style, format or meaning, an individual can more easily access their personal inspiration. Like free writing, free sharing a story can encourage tellers to connect public knowledge willingly and quickly to their personal knowledge. The easier this inspiration comes shows that the student has instilled the information within their own personal knowledge and taken ownership of it, that their “individual linguistic reservoir must be activated” (Rosenblatt, 2007, p.8). The knowledge is who they are rather than belonging to another.

Harste, Woodward and Burke warn that “when a behavioral perspective is taken, the danger lies in deducing that what children need is simplified language environments and that these are ‘natural’ for language learning. Instructionally this leads to setting up environments where all of the systems of language are not allowed to transact as they normally do” (1984, p.97). This manipulating of environment also manipulates the language learning, and forces what should be a fluid and responsive progression into a formulaic and possibly stagnant process.

**Bicultural Linguistic Reservoir**

The community found that as each new generation listened to the stories of their ancestors and society, they became the values and world-views expressed therein (Bruner, 2004, p.694). Story telling then became a way to welcome and introduce new members of the
community to the values and expectations of the people. Older adults, through conversation and sharing of stories, transmit this new culture (Mitty, 2010, p.60). As the new member listened and processed, connecting new ideas with his personal repertoire of experiences, he would begin to build connections between his two worlds. Hell, Bosman, Wiggers, and Stoit (2003) explained this process through schema theory. Their research suggests “that cultural background knowledge potentially influences a broad spectrum of language behavior, including text comprehension, recall and production” (2013, p.295). A bilingual speaker is navigating a very different language world than the language teacher. An understanding of this dual world view is integral for a teacher to become the bridge between these two languages.

Not being able to understand a story, a listener still strives to find meaning and connection. As Hell, Bosman and Wiggers found, bilingual “children revert to existing knowledge in mind in their attempts to deal with a culturally less familiar topic, and use the retrieved information to create a meaningful story” (2013, p.296). These links will often reveal themselves as word swapping, grammar mistakes, or pausing. Rather than assessing this as a student’s failure to grasp the knowledge, these signs should be viewed as the student’s personalizing of information. This step goes beyond language learning to cultural learning. As language and cultural learning occur, children are more able to retrieve information more accurately and connect with the second culture more readily. Bilingual children speaking of more culturally relevant and sympathetic topics will use more complex sentence structure and vocabulary, such as more conjunctions (Hell, Bosman & Wiggers, 2003). Story telling can be a powerful tool for bilingual speakers and young learners as each must constantly transform their life tableaus to organized schema within the cultural framework in which they find themselves. Encouraging bilingual speakers and young learners to express their connections through story
telling allows the teacher to view the detailed scaffolding between a student’s two cultures (Hell, Bosman, Wiggers & Stoit, 2003).

The learning process bicultural speakers of any age go through is similar to the language learning of monolingual children. Bilingual speakers are living in a dual world of two cultural backgrounds that are often pushed farther apart. Monolingual children, like bicultural speakers, are encouraged to become fluent in the new language and culture, forced to situate themselves in only one when expressing their views. Depending on the situation, the bilingual speaker decides which linguistic reservoir to draw from. This ability to live in two cultures is often forgotten in the face of mandated curriculum.

And so as the immigrant learnt more of the community, he was encouraged to tell his own stories, at first relying heavily on his past experience as the basis for the plot, “connect new knowledge with lived experience and weave it into existing narratives of meaning” (Rossiter, 2002, p.2). As he became more instilled within his new community, his stories gradually shifted stance, drawing on more of his new experiences and the shared knowledge of the community. It was a sign that, once an immigrant naturally structured his own life in the adopted culture’s story format, he now saw himself belonging to the new culture. This process could occur slowly over multiple generations, resulting in grandparents and grandchildren personalizing different schema and storytelling formats.

The Transformational Power of Telling Story

And so it was that people told stories, and people tell stories. This community became aware that something was happening to them, something mysterious and, in a sense, magical. Firstly, they realized that the act of storytelling had power over the past. Through sharing a life
story “we become the autobiographical narratives by which we “tell about” our lives” (Bruner, 2004, p. 694). Through the stance that we take towards our own lives, we shape our lives. As a narration draws inspiration from life, people found that “narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative” (Bruner, 2004, p. 692). His past self began to change as he focused on specific experiences and emphasized certain traits. Their past self, through memory, begins to display only those traits or scenarios that uphold the author’s version of self.

By reshaping a past self, people will begin to enact that view. Storytelling guides our path into the future (Bruner, 2004, p. 708), as “we do not “come into” this world; we come out of it, as leaves from a tree” (Krishnamurti, 1953, p.6). Story telling and story listening allowed the people to emerge from their life tableaus as aware, coherent and enabled beings. For once able to create and tell a story, once able to listen and interpret a story, individuals were able to process the whole of their lives, past, present and future. Oyserman and James (2011) explored aspects that needed to be in place for this future transformation to occur. In creating a story that will affect the future self, the story must be three fold: believable, connectable, and actionable. The story of future self cannot be forced, but come naturally from the narrator to encourage a sense of control. The future self will also need to be realistic goal, one that the narrator can envision achieving. McMahon and Watson reiterate that “a believable story is one in which individuals can see a relationship between their future story and their present and past stories” (2013, p. 283). Bruner emphasized that the power of story was so strong that “a metaphysical change [was] required to alter the narratives that we have settled upon as “being our lives” (Bruner, 2004, p. 709). A person’s life narrative can become so fixed, so real, that a drastic realization must occur to shift perception of self.
Krishnamurti (1953) believed that creation occurred only when the intellect was still. This speaks to the moment when the author has rehearsed or thought through the story and finally presents to others. In this moment of sharing, when the author is in the moment and also has convinced the listeners to be in the moment as well, creation occurs. This state of being in ‘the story as you tell it’ speaks to a transcendence from your everyday human state. An author becomes other, even if that other is themselves once again, living in a story based on memory. Just as the story teller is transported into a state of creation, so too the story listener. While listening, “the links we find with our own experience afford us new insights and new resources for change and problem-solving” (Lickorish, 2009, p. 21). The listener undergoes change alongside the teller.

**The Transformational Power of Listening to Story**

As the community of people had become adept tellers of story, they also had realized that a second aspect was needed: the story listener. Just as there is an art to telling stories, there is an art to listening. People soon realized that something was amiss. Sometimes a teller would tell a story and only later realize during conversation that the listeners had understood differently than what was intended. The community had created a shared language, but had they created a shared knowledge? A person said cat, one thinking of his orange striped kitten, the other of their grandmother’s blind, often stinky cat. Both were valid truths of the person’s lived reality, but each changed the vision of the story.

What was occurring in the minds of listeners? Harst, Woodward and Burke (1984) explained the transactional view of language learning: “meaning resides neither in the environment nor totally in the head of the language learner, but rather is the result of on-going
sign interpretation” (p. 93) between listener and teller. As a result of there being “no direct
linkage between “sound-image” and “meaning” language becomes open and conservative” (p. 93). A listener becomes an interpreter of words. From one listener to the next, the word tree will have different connotations as they make personalized connections between the word and their life experiences. This may seems then to be completely chaotic, as a story teller will never know what the story listener will understand. Even cross-generationally sound-image and meaning can change, as a divide grows between age groups (Bruner, 2004, p. 699) who’s life experiences are drastically different. A reference or joke told by an adult is often not understood or seen as humorous by the younger group. Yet, when there is an understanding between teller and listener, when we share the same meaning of a word, it shows that “we are members of the same interpretive community and that language and language learning are social processes” (Harst, Woodward & Burke, 1984, p. 93).

Secondly, a person takes a stance in reading just as much as a person takes a stance in writing (Rosenblatt, 2007), and subsequently in listening and in telling story. As a person listens to a story unfold, “each additional sentence will signal certain options and exclude others, so that even as “the meaning” develops, the selecting, synthesizing impulse is itself constantly shaped and tested” (Rosenblatt, 2007, p. 4). The listener fills silent moments with her own voice, creating and discovering, posing the question she herself needs to answer (Rossiter, 2002, p. 3). Being aware of this process can enlighten the listener to their own personal story and stance.

People began to realize that they were, as Krishnamurti expressed, “searching for … an intense passion of self-forgetfulness, this identification with something in which [they could] lose [them]selves completely” (1953, p. 83 ). Author Randy Ingermanson explains that people don’t desire to read or hear about powerful emotions, they want to “become somebody else for a
few hours, to live an exciting life, to find true love, to face down unimaginable terrors, to solve impossible puzzles, to feel a lightning jolt of adrenaline” (Quotes about Narrative, n.d). This moment of becoming is that which Krishnamurti (1953) described. A willing listener is someone who wants to disappear. He or she is willing to imagine and envision the time and place of events, to hear the voices of characters. Lickorish agreed, claiming that “human brains naturally make meaning and connections, so we identify with characters and storylines” (Lickorish, 2009, p. 21). As the story unfolds so too does a listener’s imagination. Their role “is to actively create the vivid, multi-sensory images, actions, characters, and events—the reality-of the story in his or her mind … The completed story happens in the mind of the listener” (What is Storytelling, n.d., section 5). The powerful listener wants to create this other world with the teller.

The unifying bond that is created between teller and listener during story sharing happens because each wants to be someone or somewhere else while sharing. A person “can't love someone without imaginative sympathy, without beginning to see the world from another point of view” (Quotes about Narrative, n.d) explores author Julian Barnes. A person “can’t be a good lover, a good artist or a good politician without this capacity ([someone] can get away with it, but that's not what I mean). Show me the tyrants who have been great lovers” (Quotes about Narrative, n.d). The very act of becoming someone else, to feel their joy or anger, to understand their motivations and reactions, is to awaken and broaden listener’s emotional reservoir. In turn, these emotions become a background for their linguistic reservoir and thus the new connections that will be made with future knowledge and experience.

People also found that the more skilled the listener, the less important the skill of the story teller. “Stories are powerful because of what they invite us to make” (Lickorish, 2009, p. 21); the welcoming nature of the process itself becomes the magic. As Allen (2013) found,
students naturally role modeled the cultural features of their story teller. At first echoing the patterns and format and then taking ownership over the information by transforming the practices, students develop a shared sense of reality.

Invariably, people saw that certain individuals were better disposed to listening than others. Furthermore, the age of listeners and what they have experienced changed how they understood the story. Harste, Woodward and Burke found that “children are at different ‘cognitive stages’ given their familiarity with the context of situation” (1984, p. 102). A group of similar aged children will make different connections because they are at different stages. This would also correspond to adult language learning and connecting.

**Story Through Time**

The community has now lived through a time with and without story. Without it, they felt a creative absence in their individual lives. With it, they found a creative awakening in their shared lives. As Rossiter explained, “narrative is deeply appealing and richly satisfying to the human soul, with an allure that transcends cultures, centuries, ideologies, and academic disciplines” (2002, p. 2). People all have a personal “physic geography” (Bruner, 2004, p. 703), and story making becomes the map by which they guide *themselves* through this land. Story sharing becomes the process by which an individual guides *others* through his land. It has now been within the community, in different forms, for longer than a single individual can recall. “Forever” is the answer given when asked how long they have been telling and listening to stories. The community has not always been treated story sharing with reverence. Without story, their cultural values shifted, changed with social goals. At times in their history, the personal journey of self-awareness and growth through story sharing has not been important. Esthetic
learning and informational practices became the norm. With the disappearance of story sharing from their lives, the people instinctively reacted, although unknowingly. They once again began to feel a magnetic pull towards something, a void they were compelled to fill. Between three generations of people there became a gap in cultural knowledge. The youngest no longer held the same values, the oldest no longer understood the motivations of the young. There was a disconnect in school curriculum, as traditional texts and methods were no longer successful. The educational system preferred esthetic learning, as it was quantifiable and therefore justifiable. Website communities flourished as people attempted to fill their ever present creative need for telling and listening. These sites offered the possibility of sharing private information on a public platform, reshaping their life tableaus to portray a specific type of person. In contrast to face to face story telling, these website communities were not genuine, either in story telling or listening. They were, as Krishnamurti (1953) described, superficial representations of our need to create and connect. People had forgotten that, at its best, story sharing “is an opportunity to engage hearts and minds” (Lickorish, 2009, p. 23) of both listener and teller, to join them in a partnership of transcendent creativity out of the miasmic realities of life. “What is essential for man, whether young or old, is to live fully, integrally … to understand the entire process of one’s own consciousness, both the hidden and the open” (Krishnamurti, 1953, p. 65). It is this goal that the community will need to rekindle. Story sharing is still there within them, as the need for a creative release will always be within humans. Time will continue, and at some point story sharing as a significant means of communicating, of living, will be revived, reawakened.
Chapter 3: Project

Initial Reasoning

The intent of my thesis question was to explore what occurs when you share story, both telling and listening. I wanted to validate teachers already using story and to encourage non-users to see its value. After reading, critiquing and synthesizing ideas around this topic from academics in my Literature Review, I felt the next logical step would be to experience the sharing of story myself. When I thought back to other moments of story in my life, they were usually informal settings of talking to family or friends with spur of the moment stories. My experience of University academics is that these informal learning moments are not deemed significant enough to be used as university learning moments. My attempts in past university courses to use creative, spontaneous, ‘outside the box’ activities to express my learning were met with instructions to write an academic reflection or essay. The authentic process of creation and the creation itself was not important. Often being creative and meeting academic standards meant doing twice the work. I continually felt that, regardless of how outside the box a Professor encouraged me to be, university standards had to be met at the cost of creativity. Therefore my first thought of performing a story to a live audience was quickly thrown out. I unpleasantly envisioned having to force a genuine and organic process into a formal, cited procedure. I would balk at every step. Consequently, I knew that my project would need to fit both the rigors of the academy and those of my personal creativity. I needed something that was both interactive, creative and could follow an APA arrangement. Thus the choice to follow the Choose Your Own Adventure (CYOA) written format seemed a solution. For my capstone paper that comprises my project, I have decided to write a CYOA novel based on that series begun in 1979 by Edward Packard ("History of CYOA," n.d.).
Connection

I read these novels as a child, and found their plot lines to be incredible, imaginative and often fantastical. When later listening to my Dad’s stories about his travels, I would often get the same sense of being on an adventure, except this time I couldn’t make the choices-my Dad already had. Life is made of so many choices. Big life changing ones and every day unnoticed choices. Perhaps I have always been intrigued by the idea that you could explore the paths of each choice you were given. Certainly, my childhood interest with the CYOA books influenced my decision to choose this as my project format.

Style

The books are based on reader participation where at integral events of the plot line the reader is given the power to decide what to say or do, thus changing the course of the story. Besides the official site, the website by Chris Swinehart (2009) is a wonderful resource for a visual breakdown of the CYOA format. Although I had multiple novels to look at, I finally decided to focus on the first book in the series, “The Cave of Time” by Edward Packard (1979). My first step was to map out the novel myself in order to create a visual. This was a significant step for me as I began to comprehend the flow of the plot line. An equivalent visual is provided in figure 2.
As is evident, a CYOA book will have multiple endings, usually around forty. This book has its first choice on page three. It has four main plot lines with various endings branching off, occurring quite quickly. The character either dies, conquers, or lives out a different life than first imagined. The early books had an obvious writing style of blunt wording and action motivated plot lines. A page often ended with a choice which sometimes made the plot events seem sudden or unexpected. The choice increasingly revealed itself to be the best choice as I wrote the Literature Review and visualized the story sharing process. As explored in my Literary Review, the process of creating a story can be powerful and complex (Hell, Bosman & Wiggers, 2003, Lickorish, 2009, What is Storytelling, n.d.). There are three main reasons I have chosen this as my project, story creating, listening and sharing. Each of these and their example in action are details in the following sections.

Story Creating

To tell story well takes planning, reflection and critical awareness. People have an inclination to this communication process, as supported by Bruner (2004) in that “‘world making’ is the principal function of mind, whether in the sciences or in the arts” (p. 691). I felt
compelled to make my own world through story. Also, as I read Bruner’s ideas that the best way to describe lived time was through the narrative format (2004, p. 692), I felt compelled to include autobiographical points in my story. I had never written an autobiography, or really delved into my life choices as a series of events that connected to one another. The original plan was to use my own life choices and have the reader remake the decisions. I also wanted the paths to reflect life choices. To this end, I planned to have some plot lines branch off of one another and continue in linear paths. Some choices would ultimately loop back around to the first choice, and some connect to another path’s choice, as in life a decision made once must sometimes be made again, or one path may lead to the same end as another. I intended to mirror the original series, where a character sometimes got what was wanted, but also sometimes died a horrible death or just lived a completely different life. However, I also anticipated the type of endings of the paths. I wanted some of the endings to have been options in my own life, as well as creative possibilities. I was cognizant of Rosenblatt’s advice that “the more accessible the fund of organismically-linked words and referents, the more fluent the writing” (Rosenblatt, 2007, p. 7).

I wanted this process of writing to be fluid and natural rather than stilted and forced. I did not want to be held down by worries of formatting and APA style. I made the choice to write the book first and then go back and do the formatting.

**Story Creating in Action.** I quickly found that a strict autobiographical format was not working. Firstly, I just couldn’t visualize a person reading about my life and being interested. Secondly, I couldn’t fathom how to use my life choices, which happened at various times, as plot events in a constricted time frame. I still wanted to use my life experiences in order to mirror the personal journey that story can be for its teller. As I stepped away from the idea of an autobiographical structure, I also had to decide which life moments to include or exclude. Bruner
explained that recounting one’s life is twofold: “it is selective achievement of memory recall; beyond that, recounting one’s life is an interpretive feat” (2004, p. 693). I found that I was choosing how to present myself to my audience and in so doing was reliving certain aspects of my life. In the end, I largely included major places of travel: Thailand, India, Norway and British Columbia. The person I am presenting is a person who travels to far places, often without being familiar with the language or culture. I also wanted to include my sense of humor and imagination, hence the hair balls, Yogi master and unicorns.

I found that I also began to include aspects of other people’s lives. It began when I was writing while visiting my Grandmother, and I thought how hilarious it would be to include her in the book (my Grandmother has an illogical fear of cats). After sharing this with my cousin, I realized how this choice would engage any audience who knew my Grandmother. I asked myself ‘why not include more people, to draw them into the story?’ My niece, my friends, and my cousin are some of the people I purposely wrote into the book. I started to feel that I was honoring those people and places when I included them, which made it a difficult decision not to include someone or a place. I think this is an example of the power of story creating. I was proud of what I was making and the person I was showing to an audience. I was venerating those people and places that were important to me by their inclusion into the book. I was fuelled to create, often leaving the other sections of my Masters in order to work on my book. I began to feel that this single area of my Master’s was where someone could find me, Darcie Greenland. I felt like I was living the academic theory of story by creating and sharing it with others. I realized how powerful my learning had become by personally connecting to these abstract ideas and concepts, and further more by expressing these connections to someone else. Perhaps living a goal of English 10, that “oral language helps students build more sophisticated understandings,
explore relationships among ideas, and explore questions in their reading and writing” (BC MOE, 2007, p. 25).

**Story Listening**

To listen to story well takes planning, reflection and critical awareness. Their role “is to actively create the vivid, multi-sensory images, actions, characters, and events-the reality-of the story in his or her mind … The completed story happens in the mind of the listener” (What is Storytelling, n.d.). The other half of story is the listener. As I began to realize throughout the Literature Review, language acquisition is both a verbal and auditory process. Language learning is a process by which a person connects firstly and most strongly to new ideas that reverberate with their own life experiences and values, and lastly and most loosely to foreign concepts and vocabulary (Mitty, 2010, Rosenblatt, 2007). With this in mind talented story tellers will of course adapt and shape the story to reach the audience, but beyond that, the power of the story is out of their control (Rosenblatt, 2007). In this way I thought the CYOA novel would be an excellent metaphor for the process of story listening. Just as the listener focuses on certain parts of a language experience (Rosenblatt, 2007, p. 4), the reader can focus on plot choices and choose what happens to the character. The author attempts to control or guide what happens by creating the choices and consequences, but ultimately it is up to the reader which path is taken.

To further the metaphor, I set up different types of choices for the reader. I wanted to reflect the different choices that a story listener makes, some conscious and some subconscious, while being an audience member. There are some choices that are big choices that will obviously alter events. There are some choices that are small, every day decisions that a person would hardly notice making. There is even a choice of chance, of flipping a coin to decide where to go.


**Story Listening in Action.** During the editing stage, it was interesting to have others make the choices and give suggestions for how the choices could culmination. Different people were excited by different choices. For example, I sent my niece a first draft of the book with only one plot choice written. She telephoned back demanding the ability to choose not to feed Kisa (which I hadn’t written yet). She showed how “human brains naturally make meaning and connections, so we identify with characters and storylines” (Lickorish, 2009, p. 21). Her connection was with a specific choice, and the ability to be able to choose her area of interest was exciting. Also, as I read the story to other members of my family, their excitement depended on how well they knew the characters or places. My cousin, who knows my cat well, thought the whole premise of the book was hilarious and interesting. She connected quickly and easily with the characters. My friend, who shares many travel experiences with me, enjoyed the places of the book. The various people I shared with show that those listeners who are eager and know how to connect will find a way to do so.

**Story Sharing**

Beyond the writing of and reading of the book, the CYOA novel also allows for another aspect of story sharing: the interactive telling and listening of story. As a story teller speaks and gestures, the audience articulates and responds in kind, as “we perform an action through speech, we are acting toward another person with some possible effect on that person” (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 196). There is an energy that is created between the two groups. This “opportunity to engage hearts and minds” (Lickorish, 2009, p. 23) can also be created when you read aloud a CYOA novel and have the audience make the choices. They are a part of the story with you, in a partnership of choice and creative unfolding.
**Story Sharing in Action.** Whenever I was getting bored or tired of writing the book I paused to read it to someone. The result of the book was instant. I became excited and animated, often not even reading from the pages but just telling the story from memory. My listener would be excited, laughing or commenting on what happened. We would brainstorm other possible ideas. These moments of sharing are what fuelled my writing process and what I looked forward to as I wrote. The power of sharing is evident. I don’t need to, but I will have the book printed as a novel so I can share it with others. Sharing motivated me to go beyond the assignment requirements. I thought of people reading the book and looking at the pictures. I spent a lot of time choosing, editing and formatting photographs because I thought people would enjoy them. Knowing that your story will be shared motivates dedication and pride.

**Teaching Through Story**

For the teacher to utilize story as a teaching method, to reveal both content and the self, takes planning, reflection and critical awareness. Both teller and listener need to be taught to be good partners of story, “for students to become more competent communicators, they need to receive deliberate teaching and formative assessment of oral skills” (BC MOE, 2007, p. 86). Now that I have created my own story and shared it with an audience, I have had certain realizations. If I want my students to have a powerful story experience, I need to make space for the personal in an assignment. This realm of story is where pride in oneself and honoring others can occur. Also be mindful that too much structure can suppress the creative process, but too much freedom can also be overwhelming. I will also need to remember that I had issues perceiving my own life experiences being worthy of a book or an official format. I am a creative person by nature, but I realized that when I do create it is outside of me, a representation of an idea rather than me as a person. Shifting an assignment from only being a representation of other
to include the self creates a space for the student to connect personally. As a teacher I will be mindful of story being used both formally (in structured assignments with marked criteria) and informally (free storytelling, peer discussion, etc.) in the classroom.

My hope is that in reading The Yellow Diamond CYOA novel you are better able to understand the process of story creating, telling, listening and sharing. Also that it will be invigorating, captivating and expressive, and you will realize that story telling in its verbal form can be even more powerful. There are places in the curriculum that allow for story sharing, certainly that encourage it. I am convinced that it is worth the time to hear students’ stories. I will continue to make space for story, encouraging the creation, the telling and the listening of story. I have found my own world view shifted as a result of my Master’s work, processing new information in relation to my own experiences. I also feel empowered by perceiving my life as a story that I am the author and editor of. So, as you read my CYOA novel (found in the appendix), you have the choice to read it aloud and share the fate of the character with someone else. I won’t wish you ‘happy reading’, because not all the endings are happy. I will wish you ‘interesting reading’. Bon Voyage!
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A NOVEL BASED ON THE
CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE™

YOU’RE THE STAR OF THE STORY!

The Yellow Diamond

BY DARCIE GREENLAND
DARCIE GREENLAND

PHOTOGRAPHS BY VARIOUS PEOPLE

COMPILED BY DARCIE GREENLAND
The concept, format and style for *The Yellow Diamond* were influenced by *The Cave of Time*, a ‘Choose Your Own Adventure’ by Edward Packard.
THE YELLOW DIAMOND
Do not read this book straight through from beginning to end. These pages contain many different adventures you may have involving the Yellow Diamond. From time to time as you read along, you will be asked to make decisions and choices. After you make the choice, follow the instructions to see what happens to you next. Your choices may lead to success or disaster.

You thought your cat was just your cat. Kisa (pronounced Keesa), is just an ordinary house cat. She is a little tubby (ok, she’s fat), she has a short crooked tail (she has to tuck it to the side when she sits) and she meows a lot (basically all the time). She enjoys listening to Cat Stevens and CBC Radio Cross Country Checkup (much to your ire). You are about to find out that she is not all that she seems, nor is any of what you assumed about your pets.

Beware! What you choose will affect the lives of yourself and others. Nothing is as it seems.
You are pouring yet another bag of cat food into the storage container as your cat, Kisa, meows and weaves in between your legs. She would love to be fed a second time today, and she is making sure to tell you. It isn’t that she is incredibly fat, but after your parents looked after her for two weeks, and she tricked each of them into thinking she hadn’t been fed yet and thus got two meals a day, she has never gotten rid of the extra weight. Plus she is an indoor cat and sleeps all the time.

*Figure 1. Kisa Sleeping. 2014*
You finish with the cat food, folding the empty bag into the recycling. Kisa is still talking, meowing as she sits in front of you, waiting expectantly. You consider her request. You could just give her a small amount. A snack, really. It might get her to stop meowing.

*Figure 2. Kisa Staring. 2014*

If you feed Kisa a snack, turn to page 3

If you tell Kisa to be quiet because she isn’t getting any food, turn to page 10
“Alright, alright, here, you can have a small snack today,” you tell her as you scoop out a bit of food. As Kisa hears the shake and crunch of the cat kibbles, her persistent meows become excited, and she goes to her food bowl in anticipation. As your hand turns the food into the bowl, Kisa begins to eat the food before it even hits the bowl. Actually, she doesn’t eat the food, she inhales it. You can’t even hear her chewing the food. Within seconds the food is gone, and Kisa is licking the bowl.

Figure 3. Kisa Eating. 201

Turn to page 38
With a sigh, you bookmark the page of your book and get up to check Kisa. As long as she isn’t throwing up on the carpet, you are fine.

You knew that this was a high possibility after she scarfed down her ‘snack’ so quickly.

When you reenter the kitchen, Kisa is crouched down and heaving up her food. A cat throwing up is really one of the most pitiable sights. It’s embarrassing, vulnerable, frustrating and gross all at the same time. As she finally finishes a clump of unchewed cat kibble in a mucousy mess in front of her, you get a paper towel. You know that if you aren’t quick about this she will start eating her third snack of the day.

If you are quick enough with the towel, turn to page 5

If you are too slow with the towel, turn to page 15
As you gather the steaming clumps of cat food, Kisa urgently tries to go around your hand to eat the mess. “Kisa, stop it,” you demand, trying to push her away with the other hand. “There is no way that you are eating this.” With a final wipe of the floor, you gather the towel and the mess, turning for the garbage can.

As you are about to dump it all into the bin, something catches your eye. Something in the brown gooey mess sparkles briefly, reflecting the light. That is odd. You know Kisa eats grass, insects and whatever falls on the floor while you are preparing food, but she doesn’t usually eat objects. You are curious to see what it is, but you really don’t want to dig into the regurgitated cat kibble.

If you look inside, turn to page 39

If you throw it away, turn to page 47
You use all of your aeroplan miles and book a flight into Chiang Mai, Thailand. The air is hot, the streets crowded beyond movement. You find a taxi, which is called a tuktuk; a small three wheeled vehicle with open sides. You give the driver your destination, the temple Wat Umong, and the tuktuk zooms off, weaving in and out between both cars and people.

When you arrive at the Wat, you notice the bustle and hurry of the streets melt away. Walking along the path takes you through a wooded park where the hot sun filters through the green leaves of the trees.

There are small signs on the trunks of the trees, with white handwriting in both Thai and English. “Detachment is a way to relax”, “All things arise, exist, and expire.”

You can tell that this is a universe set apart from the daily worries of regular life.
You wonder what will happen. Kisa steps up to the jewel, speaking into it. “Yes, Commander. I will do as you have instructed. Agent Crooked Tail is on the chase,” and greedily Kisa eats the jewel. Kisa looks at you and explains “That is my communication device. You are not usually home when I perform this task. It must be thrown up, answered, and re-swallowed. I must now leave you to fulfill my mission.” She runs and jumps up onto her cat scratcher. She then leaps over to the door handle, turning it as she sails past it. The door opens, and she walks out.

You are shocked. Usually Kisa can’t even make it up to the cat scratcher. You realize her ineptitude at jumping and running has all been a ruse for her secret life as a Cat Agent. You need to know more, but you don’t know if you are losing your mind or not.

If you decide to follow her out the door, turn to page 8
If you decide to go back to your book, turn to page 38
As you run out the door, you can see Kisa disappearing beneath a hedge. There is a humming noise, a flash of light, and Kisa yelling out, Whooohoo!

When you peer behind the bush, you see a circular device in the ground. Kisa has dug away the leaves that usually cover it; it reads along the top: “Transportation Device, Meow 500”. You wonder how Kisa fit through, as the device is only as large as her water bowl. A lit panel along the side reads: Destination, Stokmarknes, Norway. There is also a button labelled ‘Base Cat Camp’.

This is getting stranger by the minute. You have an idea of where Norway is, but have never heard of Stokmarknes. Should you go there, the Cat Camp, or call your parents for advice?

If you travel to Stokmarknes, turn to page 9

If you travel to the Cat Camp, turn to page 29
You hesitantly push the button, and a beam of light shoots out of the circular portal. It scans your body, enlarging to envelop you. You feel a shimmering, molecular tingling. As you are sucked into the Meow 500, you lose track of time until suddenly your knees hit the ground and a blinding flash of light hurts your eyes.

When you open them, you are now on top of a hill overlooking an island town on the edge of the ocean. A short bridge connects it to another small island. Houses painted orange, yellow, blue or green dot the countryside.

You can hear a group of hikers close by, speaking in what you assume is Norwegian.

Figure 4. Stokmarknes Panorama. 2001

Turn to page 34
After pushing Kisa aside, your phone rings. It is your niece, Olivia, calling and she found a picture of a cat that looks exactly like Kisa sitting in a temple in Thailand. You tell her it is a mistake, and she replies “No, the cat has a crooked tail and is fat. It is definitely Kisa.”

Olivia texts you the picture, and sure enough, there is Kisa. She is sitting next to a Buddha that is really skinny. Your niece tells you it is the Fasting Buddha. You don’t know what to think. How is that picture possible?

You turn to Kisa, and find she has gone under the bed to hide. She won’t be coming out any time soon. Looking at her crouching in the dark corner, you notice a slip of paper on the floor. You pull it out and read it: “Agent Crooked Tail, your mission is to travel to Thailand and deal with The Crimson Cat.” You are very confused about what to do.

If you travel to Thailand, turn to page 6
If you visit your niece, turn to page 30
Figure 5. Fasting Buddha.2000
Turning a corner, you see the Fasting Buddha statue. Walking up to it, you are surprised at the difference between most Buddha statues you have seen. On a base, he sits with legs crossed and hands placed on top of each other palms up, in front of his chest. His bones show through, creating a stark contrast with the thriving world.

Looking at the photograph, you see that Kisa was sitting very close to where you are now standing. You step closer to the statue, and notice slips of gold foil pressed to his skin. One of the strips reads: “Cat Crooked Tail, your target’s location is behind the largest Buddha head.”
Reaching out tentatively towards the cat’s head, you stop suddenly as the cat says “Do not touch the fur.”

“What?” you whisper in shock. Did that cat just speak to you?

It looks at you, saying, “I am Crimson Cat. I have been struggling with irritable bowel syndrome until the Guru Crooked Tail came to speak with me. I am now meditating to reach enlightenment.”

“Sorry, irritable bowel? You mean you pooped everywhere but your litter box?” you ask.

Crimson Cat responds, “Yes, alright, do not remind me. But Crooked Tail showed me how my search for Catvana will help me focus my pooping. She truly is the Guru of all Cats.”

You realize you have been living with an enlightened cat, whose sleeping was actually meditating. You vow to dedicate the rest of your life learning from Kisa Crooked Tail and trying to reach Catvana.

The End
Figure 6. Crimson and Buddha. 2014
When you get the towel and turn back towards the throw-up, Kisa is licking the floor where it used to be. “Oh, did you really have to?” you ask her. She looks at you like the answer is obvious.

You decide to take a nap on the couch. In the middle of a dream, you hear voices. “Yes Commander. All of our Cat Forces have been dispatched to Afghanistan. Our goal is to keep the peace now that human forces are leaving the country.” You sleepily open your eyes, and you see Kisa speaking into the Cat Stevens record cover. On the cover Cat Stevens’ face is alive and animated, speaking back.

“Excellent, Agent Crooked Tail. All of us here at the Cat Base are very pleased with your progress. Besides overseeing the Cat forces in Afghanistan, we want you to recruit your person for the next job. Further orders await at the teleporting device. Commander out.”
Cat Stevens’ face becomes its usual frozen figure.

“I am aware you have been watching and listening,” Kisa says to you as she turns. “It is time for you to come with me.”

*Figure 7. Cat Stevens, 9 Lives Vinyl Cover. 2014*

If you decide to follow her, turn to page 22

If you decide to investigate the Cat Stevens’ record, turn to page 28
Kisa replies “I knew you would. Come closer to the Litter Teleporter.” With the final grains of litter cleared away, she hits a series of buttons. A bright light shoots out of the circle, enveloping you and Kisa. The last sound you remember is Kisa’s meow.

You wake up on a windy beach, the grey ocean in front and the forest behind you. As you look around the world seems grey, damp and cold. Kisa jumps onto a log and gives a loud meow. After waiting a moment, there is a rustle in the bushes and another cat appears. “Ah, it is you, Tiffin the Jungle Cat. What orders do you have for us?”
Unlike Kisa, the new cat is sleek and fit. He lies down as if there is no catastrophe, and answers in a high pitched voice: “We must find and muzzle the dog Demon Disco. He has been controlling the North Island. We will use this human as a diversion.” You are surprised. Should you agree with their plan? Maybe you should hike through the forest do some surveillance first.

Figure 8. Tiffin the Cat. 2010

If you agree, turn to page 45

If you hike through the forest, turn to page 21
Kisa steps forward, saying “I am Agent Crooked Tail. We are on a mission to stop the dog Demon Disco. Will you stand in our way?”

You can see the cougar’s claws flexing as it thinks. It opens its jaws, revealing sharp fangs. “You are the Crooked Tail I have heard so much about? I am honored to meet you.” The cougar sits back on its haunches. “I respect the mission you had in India. That must have taken all of your skill.” Kisa looks happy, and is about to respond, but is cut off.

Tiffin speaks. “We cannot waste time with pleasantries. Do you have information about the Demon?”

The cougar licks its paw, answering “Yes. I know that his base is the Elementary school. He has hypnotized all the children. I can take you there. Or we could split up and I take the human with me for a two tailed attack.”

If you agree to go all together, turn to page 23

If you pair off with the cougar, go to page 26
After he tells you what to do, you take a deep breath and walk towards the café. You pass more lumbering people, but they don’t notice you in their Disco haze. You mimic their behavior, trying to blend in.

Entering the café, you see Demon Disco. Kisa and Tiffin were right. Disco is sitting on the couch, people listening and doing everything he barks. He is ordering people: “Scratch me. Slower. Get me a snack. Where are you going? Hey, sit back down. Scratch me.” He won’t let anyone leave, which also means that you can’t get close to him because of the crowd of people.

Figure 9. Disco the Dog Licking His Face. 201
“Let’s sneak up unnoticed through the woods” you suggest, motioning towards the dark forest.

Tiffin looks at you and squeeks, “Crooked Tail, the human has a point. We will find what information we can first, then plan and proceed with an attack.”

As you all hike through the forest, the damp soaks into your pants and beads onto the fur of the cats. The ground is mossy which muffles your steps, but also creates an eerie silence.

You feel as if someone is watching you, but when you look behind no one is there. Kisa is getting really muddy as her stomach hits the leafy ground. You still feel eyes upon you, but can’t figure out where it comes from.

Suddenly the cats stop, spin around and run in front of you. Bushes rustle in front and a large tawny cat paw appears. Slowly, a cougar emerges. You freeze. You have heard that cougars hunt their prey and are only seen when their meal feels the teeth and claws ripping through their skin.

If you run for it, turn to page 24

If you stay and let the cats handle the cougar, turn to page 19
Going into the bathroom, you see Kisa in the litter box. Usually she just goes on top and doesn’t bother burying her poo. Now she is digging carefully in the centre, right to the bottom of the box. She reveals a flat, circular machine that reads “Litter Teleporting Device, the intimate way to travel”.

She turns and speaks to you. “You must help me with my next mission. I do not know what it will entail, but the Commander thinks it is important. It says here that our destination is Port Hardy. Will you come with me?”

You don’t know what to say. If this is true, then you may be in over your head. You have no idea what could happen in Port Hardy.

If you say “Well, of course Kisa. Port Hardy it is” turn to page 17

If you reply “This is too much to deal with. I think I should sit down,” turn to page 27
You nod your head. “Alright, let’s all go.” Kisa walks with the cougar, the two of them discussing her past missions. Tiffin tries to join them but is ignored. The light begins to change, as more sun filters through the canopy. You all stop at the edge of the forest.

Disco is out in the park, children running and screaming all around him. You can hear him barking orders maniacally, “Scratch my head. Throw the ball! Let me chase you!”

Beside you, Tiffin meows a great high pitched roar. You know he has been jealous of the cougar’s attention to Kisa. He screams, “I will stop the Demon Disco! Attack!” He breaks cover, leaping over the grass. After a pause, the three of you follow. Disco sees you all coming, and commands the children to fling rocks. Disco is too busy with the cats to hypnotize you as you pick up children and throw them onto the wooden play structure.

Suddenly, you notice the silence and the children growing still. Demon Disco has stopped barking. His uncontrolled barking frenzy has ripped his vocal chords. He lies on the ground, tired and wheezing through his small esophagus. You have freed the North Island from his barking hypnotism.

The End
There is no way this cougar is going to eat you. Turning quickly in the wet leaves, you start running into the forest.

“Where are you going? Get back here!” Tiffin yells. You keep running.

Now you can hear Kisa’s warning, “The cougar is safe. But only if you are standing still!” But you can’t stop running. The last feeling you register are the cougar’s claws digging into your back, and the world goes dark.

*Figure 10. Pouncing Cougar. 2013*

The End
You are relieved that your ears are stuffed full of cat fur from Kisa and Tiffin. Suddenly, right on cue the two cat agents come sauntering by outside the window. Instantly, Demon Disco notices and loses all control. Jumping up and growling, he yells “Cat, cat, two cats. Get the cats.” He runs to the window, slobbering on the glass.

You leap forward. Disco is so focused on the cats he doesn’t notice you. In his distraction you are able to slip on the barking collar. You wait, and the next time he barks the collar shoots a burst of air into his face. He quickly realizes what has happened, and growing silent, the people wake from their Demon Disco daze.

*Figure 11.* Disco the Dog Standing. 2012

The End
“Kisa, Tiffin, we’ll see you at the school later. Let’s go, cougar,” you say, walking ahead.” The two house cats go another way, disappearing in the ferns. “So, are you a Cat Agent as well?” you ask the large wild cat.

“No, I just scout the wild parts where house cats do not go. The commander calls for my help only once in a while,” replies the cat.

“Oh, so you don’t really care about this whole Cat Force?”

Shaking its head, the cat replies “No, let me show you what I really care about.” The cat stops, and crouches on the ground. “Get onto my back and I will take you there.” You get onto its back. “Hold on, we need to travel a fair distance.”

If you want a long ride, turn to page 49.

If you want a short ride, turn to page 48.
You go out to the porch and sit down, looking at the lake. You are not sure what to do. You hear a noise behind you, and a flash of light. Kisa must have gone without you. You sigh. Life is difficult, especially when you need to make an important decision. The lake looks great today. You decide to spend some more time relaxing and thinking.

![Figure 12. View of Lake. 2013](image)

With this one decision, you set the course for the rest of your life. You spend the remainder of your time sitting in a chair, looking off into space. You do not ever need to make another decision again. The hospital does that for you.

The End
“In a minute,” you reply. When Kisa leaves, you go investigate the record cover. It all looks normal. As you trace the letters, there is a bumpy feel like sandpaper on your fingertips.

Suddenly, Cat Stevens’ face animates, stating in a bland voice: “Yes, your request to travel to the Cat Base has been received. Your transit will commence on the count of three meows: Meow, meow, meow.” A vortex tunnel appears, swirling Stevens’ features. You are drawn in without any control.
She looks at you and says “Oh, dear, it is so nice to see you. Do you want a drink?” You nod your head. “Good, you can go get me one too. When the cats do it, there is always fur in the glass.”

“Yes Grandma,” you reply as you turn to get her a drink. This new job is not as exciting as you thought it would be.

Figure 13. Grandma Sitting. 2013

The End
You arrive at your sister’s house and great your niece. “Hey, what was that picture? What do you think it means?” you ask her.

She shrugs. “I’m not sure, let’s check out the website again.” She turns to the computer, and you sit with her as she searches for the picture.

You hear scratching as her cat Mushroom jumps onto the couch, climbs the shelf, and then catapults onto the cabinets. She stares down at you with boredom, her paws hanging over the side. “Hey, I wonder if Mushroom is a Cat Agent too?” you joke.

Figure 14. Mushroom the Cat. 2014
You find yourself standing in a large control room. Cats wearing headsets sit at consoles. On the screens are maps with small flashing lights. You hear someone saying “Cat Agent Six Toes is approaching his target. His tracking device is beeping strongly.”

You realize that the lights on the screens represent Cat Agents all over the world. You did not know this was such a large operation. Who could be in charge? Ahead is a raised platform, with steps leading up to what you assume is the main station. Here is your chance to find out the identity of the commander.

None of the cats even notice as you walk up the steps because they are so focused on the screens. A large chair that resembles a cat scratcher is in the centre of the platform. You clear your throat, “Ahem, Commander? Can I be of assistance?”

The chair swivels around to reveal your Grandma. You are shocked. She has always had an unreasonable, unfounded fear of cats. When she visits your house she makes you put Kisa in the bedroom.
Without warning Mushroom hurls herself off the cabinets and you are afraid to move as she scratches her way up your jeans. Claws clinging through your fabric, she addresses you: “I am Cat Agent Ninja. It is cataclysm that you both have discovered about the Cat Force. Either join us, or be silenced,” she warns.

Without thinking, Olivia quickly replies, “Totally, we are in. What should we do?”

“Let me ask.” Mushroom wretches up a hair ball, but inside it is a yellow diamond. She meows and the gem sparkles. “Commander, this is Agent Ninja. Two humans have discovered the Force. What are your orders?”

“Ahh, perrrfect,” answers a voice. “They can drive you to Chilliwack where you will meet Agent Crooked Tail and await further instructions. Commander out.”

“You heard the leader. Let’s go, taxi drivers,” Mushroom demands. You and your niece look at each other, and you know that somehow, one day, you both will be more than taxi drivers in the Cat Force.

The End
“I must be hallucinating. I need to get some fresh air,” you decide. Slipping the crystal into your pocket, you walk outside.

Kisa follows you, down the path along the lake. She is usually too afraid to even go outside, but she is persistent today. You hear a high pitched squeak that you know comes from one of the mightiest birds, the eagle. Looking up, you see it turning on the wind draft. Cinching its wings in, it drops a hundred feet, swooping in closer. Before you can finish your warning, “Kisa, look out! There is an…” Kisa meows in a distress as she is picked up by the eagle. You always thought she would be a good meal for any wild animal, but you never thought it would happen.

Figure 15. Bald Eagle. 2014

If you look away, turn to page 35
If you watch the massacre unfold, turn to page 36
You crouch behind the bushes, watching what enfolds. The teenagers are following a trail, being careful not to walk on the sensitive moss.

There is a low growl from your left, and you quickly look over. There is a wolf hiding behind a small shrub. It is obvious that it is planning to attack the hikers.

You wonder why there is a wolf on an island, but remember that the Norwegian government has recently decided to re-introduce the wild canine to the environment. This wolf must have swum across from the mainland and made this its territory. You better do something quickly, or the teenagers are going to be attacked.

*Figure 16. Wolf Behind a Bush. 2014*
You can’t watch what is happening. With the meows and squeals coming from the sky, you can imagine what is taking place. There is a flap of wings as the eagle flies up to its perch in a nearby tree.

Something soft glides against your cheek. You look up to the nest, and see that soft grey fur floats down, kissing your cheeks as you cry.

The End
You can’t look away as Kisa is taken into the sky. The eagle swoops again towards you and with its other talon picks you up. What you thought was a normal sized eagle is actually enormously large.

Kisa looks over and says “The crystal that you would not give back will be activated in five seconds to take me to my next Cat Force mission, which you must now accompany me on.” A flash of light bursts from your pocket, and a maelstrom of wind and colour engulf you all.

Turn to page 42
As you watch, Kisa comes from the right, leaping to intercept the canine. “Wolf, you must stop this attack!” she proclaims, her fur puffed out and making her twice her usual size (which is pretty big).

“Cat, who are you?” growls the wolf, stopping in his tracks.

“I am the International Cat Ambassador. I am here to talk a peace treaty with you. Are you not Wenlief the Wolf, son of Lief the Great?” questions Kisa. She is now sitting calmly in front of the wolf.

“Yes, and on behalf of my pack, let us talk,” replies the wolf. You realize that you are witnessing the alliance of two species, across continents. You decide then and there to become an environmentalist, dedicating your life to the re-introduction of wild species back into their environment.

The End
None of your other cats were ever this weird about food. Shaking your head in disbelief, you leave the room and pick up your book to read, sitting down on the couch. Even if life is hectic and stressful, you can always rely on a book to ease your mind. You begin to sink into the struggles of the characters and plot of the story. Their worries become yours, but you know that the problems will be solved by the last page.

You are rudely pulled out of your focus by a heaving gurgling sound coming from the kitchen. You know what is happening. With a sigh, you put down the book.

Flip a coin, if you get heads, turn to page 47
Flip a coin, if you get tails, turn to page 4
You gingerly move the kibbles around, searching for the shiny object. You pick out something hard and smooth. Running it under water, you clear away the spit and see that it is a small sized yellow diamond. It glistens as you hold it, and you notice that it is actually pulsing in a regular rhythm.

“You must place it on the ground. It is imperative that I re-swallow that communication device.”

Who said that? Did you imagine it? You peer closer at the jewel.

“I will repeat, the device is activated and needs to be answered. I must re-swallow it.” You look down and realize Kisa is staring at you. As you watch, she opens her mouth and gives instructions, “Place it on the ground so I can eat it.” You are not sure how to react. Are you imagining this?

If you place the jewel on the ground, turn to page 7

If you put it in your pocket and go to clear your mind, turn to page 33
Searching, you see small Buddha statues lining the paths, arms or heads broken off from some European conqueror. There, amongst other smaller heads, is a large smiling Buddha head, without body. No one is around, so you step over the bodies and look behind the head. A cat is lying on the ground, eyes closed. Its fur is long and black, but you notice in the sun it has a shimmer of red. Is it alive or dead?

*Figure 17. Buddha Heads. 2000*

If you check the cat, turn to page 13

If you get some help, turn to page 46
The next moment you blink, a hot sun, dusty breeze and smoky pollution bombard your senses. The eagle is soaring above green mountains, a village nestled within a valley. You can see banners of triangle fabric, blue, red, green and yellow waving in the wind. As the eagle circles lower, a sign reads Daramsala. You realize you are in the Tibetan refugee village of India.

As the eagle sets you both down, Kisa instructs you, saying “Stay out of trouble in this monastery. I will return to use the crystal and transport us both back.” As she walks off, you decide to look around. There is another cat sleeping on the floor, and you wonder if this cat is related to Kisa’s mission. Should you approach it?

If you approach, turn to page 13
If you continue looking, turn to page 43
Figure 18. Buddhist Prayer Flags. 2008
You settle down for a long ride. Passing trees and jumping over streams, the cougar is racing through the forest. You wonder how far you need to go, when you hear him say “I hear someone in distress, quickly!” He bounds across boulders to avoid the mud. “My job is to protect those animals who hike the Cape Scott trail but get stuck. Too many animals are lost carelessly.” Rounding a bush, you see the animal. Covered in mud, he looks pathetic and tired.

Climbing off the cougar, you approach the dog. “What is your name?”
“Disco, and I made my owner take me on this hike but I got stuck in the mud and can’t make it,” wines the dog.

“Are you sorry for being so bossy?” you ask, the cougar stepping up beside you.

“Yes, never again,” promises Disco. “I thought I knew best what people should do, but I was wrong.”

The cougar licks Disco clean. “I didn’t think we would save the day, but it seems that we have.”

The End
“Alright, let’s go” you exclaim. You follow the cats to the main street. You notice that people seem to be in a daze, walking slowly and mumbling to themselves. Disco rounds a corner, barking orders at someone to open the café door for him.

Before he can see you, Tiffin shouts “Hide behind that dumpster!” You all three dive into hiding, but instantly you are concerned. You have inadvertently found the worst place to be. The fish packing plant. The smell is putrid, already getting into your clothing. Kisa is getting distracted, and Tiffin doesn’t look any better.

“Cats, what is happening?” you demand.

Tiffin licks his lips, distracted, but replies “Disco is at the café. He has hypnotized all the people of Port Hardy to be at his bark and call. However, everyone is dying because he doesn’t think to allow them to eat or drink. Here is the plan.” Tiffin pulls out a collar from the dumpster. “You must put this barking collar on him.”
The cat is either dead or dying, so you run to get help. You find a monk in a saffron coloured robe amongst the trees. You hurriedly try to explain that there is a cat in danger, but he is confused. You realize he doesn’t speak English. He gets a police officer to translate.

By this time there is a crowd gathering, people curiously watching the crazy, gesticulating tourist.

Someone in the crowd walks up and says the words “Doctor” and “treatment”. You agree, knowing that the cat does need medical attention. Before you know what is happening, you are taken away to an asylum where they treat you for delusions and ravings. The treatment they give you actually makes you go mad, and you end your days muttering about talking cats and secret agents.

The End
When you look back, Kisa has gotten into the garbage and is now eating her puke. “Ah, Kisa, that is so gross!” you explain, pulling her away. As she walks away, it looks like she has something in her mouth. You follow her, and watch as she places the crystal on the floor.

*Figure 20. Kisa Walking. 2014*
The cat takes off, jumping over logs, passing by trees and ferns. You come to a slow stop as you reach a clearing. “This is my life’s work,” explains the cougar, “protecting these wild creatures. An Animal Alliance of the North Island keeps humans away.” You look through the foliage and see a blessing of unicorns. There are five of them. “Now that you have seen them, will you leave your life behind and help me?” asks the cougar.

You agree, knowing that you could never go back to your old life. You forget about Tiffin and Kisa, their mission and the Demon Disco.

*Figure 21. Blessing of Unicorns. 2014*
A giant Buddha sits in the centre of the floor, a red robe around his waist. He has large drooping earlobes and a serene look on his face. Sitting down to wait for Kisa, you take out the crystal. It begins to glow and pulse in your hand.

“Hmm, the glow of life,” a deep voice says. Looking up, the Buddha is grinning at you. “You are here on a mission that is not your own, wondering what to do with your life,” the Buddha intones. You realize that you have always been searching for a path in life. Even your cat Kisa has a mission. What this statue says feels true. The Buddha continues, “Do not wonder, glancing to the past and guessing to the future. Instead, be in the moment of yourself.”

“You have the crystal out.” Turning, you see that Kisa is back. “I have completed my mission and it is time to go home.”

“No,” you reply, “I have realized that my life has so far been a series of indecisive moments. I also know that going back will only continue to exasperate my problems. I have decided to stay here and learn the practices of the Tibetan Buddhist. Good luck on your future missions,” you finish, giving her the transportation crystal.

The End
YOU ARE THE HERO OF YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

You are going about your day as usual, feeding your cat, reading a book, talking with your niece. Something out of the ordinary happens. You are asked to go on an adventure. Should you think about it, or just agree?

What happens next is up to you. You make the choices. Where should you go? What should you say? If you don’t like how your choice turns out, read from the beginning again to experience over ten different endings.