



The Art of Storytelling

What is a story? What is storytelling?

How do you tell a story in pictures?

Have a plan. Capture the decisive moments. Do the work.
Have a clear understanding of the story you want to tell.

How do you do it in one image?

Overall, telling a story in a single picture requires careful planning, attention to detail, and creativity. By choosing a strong focal point, using composition and lighting effectively, and adding context where necessary, you can create a powerful image that tells a compelling story.*

So I asked chatGPT for the definition of a *story*

A story is a **narrative that tells about a series of events or experiences that happen** to one or more characters, and typically involves some kind of **conflict or problem that the characters must overcome**. Stories can be fictional or based on real events. A well-told story often includes **a plot with a beginning, middle, and end, along with well-developed characters who have their own goals, motivations, and conflicts**. It may also include **themes or messages that convey deeper meaning or insights about the human experience**. Ultimately, a story is a means of communicating ideas, emotions, and experiences to an audience, and can be a powerful tool for creating connections and understanding between people.

And then I asked chatGPT for the definition of *storytelling*

Storytelling is the act of conveying **a narrative or a sequence of events** through words, **images**, or other forms of media. It is a way of **communicating ideas, experiences, and emotions to an audience** in an engaging and memorable manner. Storytelling has been an integral part of human culture for thousands of years, and it continues to be a powerful means of transmitting knowledge, values, and traditions across generations. **Stories can be fictional or based on real-life events**, and they can take many forms, including books, films, songs, and oral traditions. The art of storytelling involves not only the content of the story but also the way in which it is presented.

How does a portrait tell a story?

- When the narrative tells about a series of events or experiences that happen
- When conflict or a problem that the characters must overcome is revealed
- When we see well-developed characters who have their own goals, motivations, and conflicts.
- When we include themes or messages that convey deeper meaning or insights about the human experience

How does a landscape tell a story?

- The same rules still apply: narrative of events or experiences; conflict or problem to resolve; goals, motivations and conflicts; themes or messages that convey deeper meaning or insights about the human experience
- Scale
- Is there a process of nature, or some detail that'll express the story strongly?

What is the decisive moment?

Photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of
the significance of an event
as well as of
the precise organization of forms
which give that event its proper expression.

Where does this idea come from?

Finding the decisive moment makes storytelling easier in a single frame
(the significance of an event) –
but there are other keys to carry a story forward
(the precise organization of forms).

Keep visual distractions to a minimum and choose a strong focal point

There is less need to look around the image
for what matters

It creates curiosity; giving people
just enough to use their imagination

Start with you WHY / Know Your Story

What is your idea?

Who is your audience?

Why THIS story?

How best to create this story?

It starts with PLANNING

Landscape stories: scouting, weather, light, time

Travel/documentary: know the culture, events, and behavioral patterns

What props, gear, or even costuming do you need?

Powerful Emotions

(right up there with decisive moments)

Body language, facial expressions, interaction with props

Having empathy with the subject

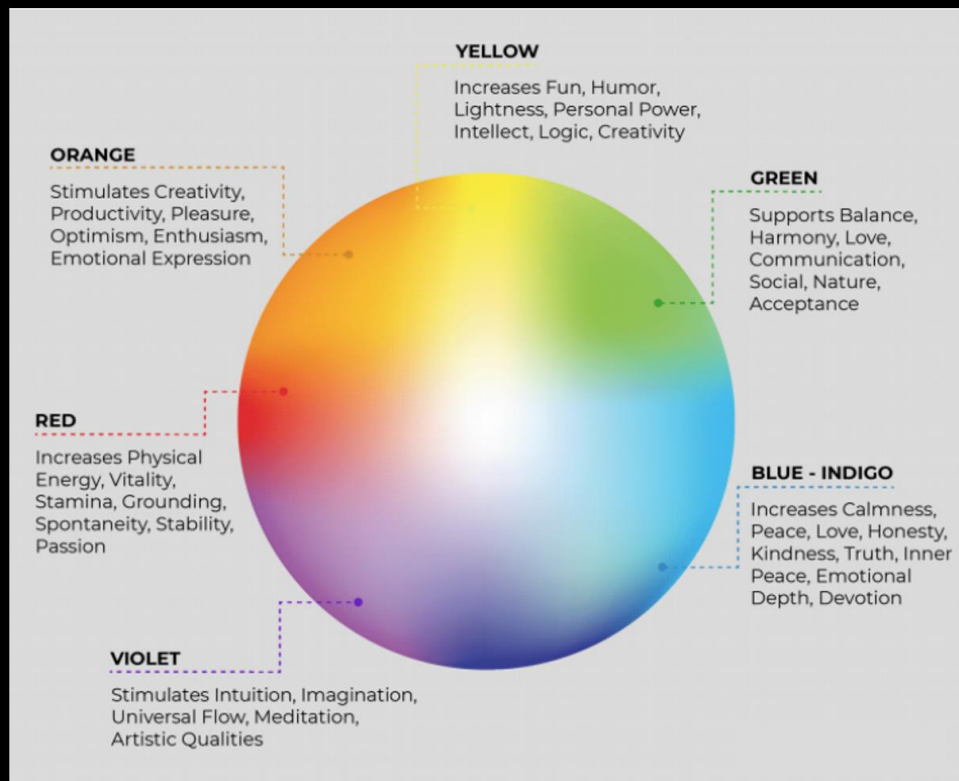
Harness symbolism

Choose strong subject matter; shoot what you love and
your love will be revealed in your work

Use Color

warm vs. cool for passion/energy vs. calm/sadness

complimentary colors make the image pop more



How Much Do You Want to Reveal

Open Stories - the viewer can understand the narrative by themselves. Their past emotions and experiences will affect the way your story is seen. Open to interpretation. Single images lend themselves to open stories.

Closed Stories - quite easy to read; no room for second interpretations. Everyone likely comes to the same conclusion - it's clearly understood. Fixed beginning and end.

Include Details

What elements should I include in the photo to help with the narrative?

Titles and Captions

If your image needs more context to fully convey the story, you can add text or captions – if possible on whatever platform your story resides on.

A Wonderful List of Photographer Storytellers to Follow on Instagram

(click on the links to go right to them)

Jason Peterson - [@jasonmpeterson](#)

Joel Sartore - [@joelsartore](#)

George Steinmetz - [@geosteinmetz](#)

Lynsey Addario - [@lynseyaddario](#)

Donald Miralle - [@donaldmiralle](#)

Ami Vitale - [@amivitale](#)

Humans of New York - [@humansofny](#)

Dan Winters - [@danwintersphoto](#)

Diana Robinson - [@dianarobinsonnyc](#)

Raphael Rodolfi - [@raphaelrodolfi](#)

Brad Trent - [@bradtrent](#)

Matt Dayhoff - [@mndayhoff](#)

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Steve Simon - [@stevesimon](#)

Joe McNally - [@joemcnallyphoto](#)

Mary Ellen Matthews - [@maryellenmatthewsnyc](#)

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