

Overarching Question: What is my story?

Overarching Challenge: Use the format of your choice to effectively tell your story.

Lesson Question: What makes a great story?

Lesson Challenge: Describe the most important qualities of great stories.

Lesson Summary: Throughout this journey you've been exploring how you might better tell your story. This lesson will explore the qualities of the great stories and will help you think about how you might tell your story. This lesson will also give you ideas about how you might respond to the course challenge: what is my story? In this lesson, you'll practise describing the most important qualities of great stories.

Big Idea: Knowing the qualities of a great story can help you more effectively tell your story.



Lesson Question: What makes a great story?

Lesson Challenge: Describe the most important qualities of great stories.

Start Your Thinking

Throughout these lessons you've been exploring how you might better tell your story. This lesson will explore the qualities of the great stories, and will help you think about how you might tell your story. This lesson will also give you ideas about how you might respond to the overarching challenge: what is my story?

Think of a story that you easily remember. It could be the story from a book, an Elder, a movie, or even a song. What was the story? How was it told? What did it make you feel?

What story do you remember?

How was this story told?

What did this story make you feel?



Think About the Lesson Challenge

If you were to travel around the world, you would probably discover that stories are important in all cultures. And if you could travel back in time, you'd most likely notice that stories have been around since Time Immemorial.

Stories don't need to be written down to be great or important: great stories can be told by a movie, a song, a totem, a grandmother's words, or a carefully made blanket. Great stories can help us remember, invite us to think and learn, and make us feel.

Anishinaabe comedian Ryan McMahon says that stories are important because "they are the foundations of our cultures; they allow use to share teachings, and to share our understanding of the world. Whether you're a person Indigenous to these lands or not, storytelling is a powerful tool through which to better understand Indigenous experiences and realities in this place we now call Canada."¹

In this lesson, you'll practise describing the most important qualities of great stories. Before moving on to the next part of the lesson, pause and think about the stories that are important to your family, your people, or community. When you think of all the stories that you've heard, what are the differences between the really great stories and the not-so-great stories? You may express yourself in whichever way you feel is best (for example, words, symbols, or images).



Not-so-great stories are...

Really great stories are...

¹ <https://next150.indianhorse.ca/challenges/indigenous-mixtape>

Grow Your Thinking

In the next part of this lesson, you'll practise identifying the qualities of great stories.

BUILDING MY TOOLBOX

What makes a great story? If we could listen, watch, and read all of the great stories ever told, we would discover that they have many similarities. All great stories:²

- ✓ **Have a character.** While this is usually a person, the character in a great story could also be a place, thing, or even an idea.
- ✓ **Describe universal experiences or situations.** A great story describes some aspect of being human that many people would understand or empathize with. This could be a theme like birth, growing up, conflict, death, or learning about identity.
- ✓ **Have a purpose.** A great story is told for a reason. There are many reasons why great stories are told: to make us think, to ask a question, to share knowledge and wisdom, or to describe an important person, place, or thing.
- ✓ **Describe and appeal to emotions.** Skilled storytellers use stories to describe their emotions. Great stories also make people feel emotions like anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise.
- ✓ **Surprise and challenge.** Great stories invite people to see something in a new or different way.
- ✓ **Are simple and clear.** Stories don't need to be big or complicated to be great. The very best stories use images, words, and language that are easily understood and that clearly send the storyteller's message.

And remember: when you're telling a story, it can be told in any way or format that matches your strengths and communicates what you're trying to say!

Try this strategy: As you listen to a story, try focusing on how the story makes you feel. Don't worry about writing down everything that is in the story. Just quickly note an important word or two that you can use later to help you think about the parts of the story and what made it great.

Word power!

As you read, watch, or listen to a story, write down any words you'd like to better understand. Look up the definitions of the words and write down their meaning in the space below.

Word	Definition

² Adapted from https://medium.com/@Brian_G_Peters/6-rules-of-great-storytelling-as-told-by-pixar-fcc6ae225f50

Practise the Tools

Watch the story, "Maq and the Spirit of the Woods." This short animation tells the story of Maq, a Mi'kmaq boy who learns about his potential in some surprising ways. As you watch, use this chart to note any details that could be used to explain why this is a great story.

https://www.nfb.ca/film/maq_spirit_woods/



Qualities of a Great Story	Ideas From the Story
Story: Mac and the Spirit of the Woods	
Story format: Oral story with animation	
Before listening: What do I already know about this story?	
After listening: What new information or ideas did I just hear?	
Qualities of a great story	Details from the story
Character Who or what is the main character of the story?	
Universal experience or situation What life experience or theme does the story describe?	
Purpose Why was this story told? What was the author's reason for telling the story?	
Emotions What emotions might the storyteller have been feeling? What emotions does the story make us feel?	
Surprising and challenging What does the story make us think about?	
Simple and clear What words, images, or ideas clearly send the storyteller's message?	

Lesson Question: What makes a great story?**Practise the Strategy**

For more practise, use the thinking strategy on page 7 after reading, watching, or listening to one of these stories:

“I Am But a Little Woman”

https://www.nfb.ca/film/nunavut_animation_lab_i_am_but_a_little_woman/

**“I Remember”**

<http://www.our-story.ca/winners/writing/5815:i-remember>

**“Family Making Sleds”**

https://www.nfb.ca/film/family_making_sleds/



You can also use the tool after reading, watching, or listening to one of these people describing their stories:

Maize Longboat (video game designer): <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/telling-the-story-of-first-contact-with-a-futuristic-video-game-1.5047127>



Angela DeMontigny (fashion designer): <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/indigenous-fashion-looks-beyond-fringe-feathers-and-beads-1.4713243/concept-of-indigenous-luxury-challenges-fashion-stereotypes-1.4714155>



The Grizzlies (movie): <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/a-perspective-changer-reflecting-harsh-realities-in-the-grizzlies-1.5153406>



Leonard Sumner (musician): <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/unreserved-celebrates-indigenous-music-at-the-juno-awards-1.5051861/how-a-dress-in-a-pawn-shop-led-to-a-juno-nomination-for-leonard-sumner-1.5052778>





Qualities of a Great Story	Ideas From the Story
Story	
Before listening: What do I already know about this story?	
After listening: What new information or ideas did I just hear?	
Qualities of a Great Story	Details from the Story
Character Who or what is the main character of the story?	
Universal experience or situation What life experience or theme does the story describe?	
Purpose Why was this story told? What was the author's reason for telling the story?	
Emotions What emotions might the storyteller have been feeling? What emotions does the story make us feel?	
Surprising and challenging What does the story make us think about?	
Simple What words, images, or ideas clearly send the storyteller's message?	

Lesson Question: What makes a great story?

You can use this thinking strategy whenever you have something you need to say, or a story to tell. This strategy can help you decide which story you might tell, and how you would tell it. Remember that a story can take any format. It can be a poem, a letter, a drawing, or a speech—however your voice can be heard! When you're trying to decide how to tell your story, think about ways of telling stories that match your strengths and what you'd like your story to say.



Qualities of a Great Story	Ideas for My Story
Character Who or what is the main character of my story?	
Universal experience or situation What life experience or theme do I want to describe?	
Purpose Why do I want to tell this story?	
Emotions What emotions am I feeling? What emotions do I want people who hear my story to feel?	
Surprising and challenging What emotions do I want people who hear my story to think about or learn?	
Simple and clear What words, images, or ideas can I use to clearly send my message?	
What would be the best way to tell my story?	



Reflect on Your Thinking

Think About the Lesson Challenge



Think back to the beginning of this lesson. What have you learned that might help you describe and tell great stories?



Can you think of other times and situations where you could use these tools?

Think About the Overarching Challenge

Remember our overarching question: What is my story? After you've finished the English lessons, you'll select the format of your choice to tell your story.



How might the tools in this lesson help me tell my story?

