



# the Power of Metaphor

Story Telling & Guided Journeys for  
Teachers, Trainers & Therapists

**Michael Berman and David Brown**

*"The Power of Metaphor is an essential part of our Professional Development library at the college and is widely consulted by ELT teachers and trainers."*  
– Fiona Balloch, *Principal, Oxford House College, London*

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**Power**  
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*Story Telling & Guided Journeys for  
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**MICHAEL BERMAN AND DAVID BROWN**



**Crown House Publishing Limited**  
[www.crownhouse.co.uk](http://www.crownhouse.co.uk)

First published by

Crown House Publishing Ltd  
Crown Buildings, Bancyfelin, Carmarthen, Wales, SA33 5ND, UK  
[www.crownhouse.co.uk](http://www.crownhouse.co.uk)

and

Crown House Publishing Company LLC  
6 Trowbridge Drive, Suite 5, Bethel, CT 06801, USA  
[www.chpus.com](http://www.chpus.com)

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First published 2000; reprinted 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008

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Crown House Publishing Limited.

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**British Library of Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue entry for this book is available  
from the British Library.

**10-digit ISBN 1899836438**  
**13-digit ISBN 978-189983643-7**

**LCCN 2002115593**

Printed and bound in Wales by  
*Athenæum Press, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear*

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In this book you will find a collection of stories, ancient and modern, and journeys of the imagination that can lead you through the story that your life was meant to be.

Stories have always been a powerful tool for communicating information from one generation to the next and for educating the young. If they were not highly successful for this purpose, the art of story telling would not have survived.

Whenever people meet, stories are told and they have been told since time immemorial. Story telling is an oral tradition and because of the issues which have been worked through by the telling of the stories, story telling has contributed to the creation of the great epics of the world. The storytellers themselves have been described as the bridge to other times, and ancient teachings and the telling of the stories helps to keep these teachings alive. The children of future generations learn from the storytellers and apply lessons of the stories to their own lives.

The earliest stories were probably chants or songs of praise for the natural world in pagan times. Later, dance and music accompanied stories. The storyteller would become the entertainer for the community and the historian, musician and poet too. The oral tales that were passed on from one generation to the next by word of mouth included epics, myths, parables, fables, fairy tales and folk tales.

The art of story telling was particularly popular from around AD 400 to 1500. Storytellers would travel around visiting markets, villages, towns and royal courts. They gathered news, swapped stories and learned regional tales in the process. When popular tales began to be printed cheaply in pamphlets known as chap-books and sold by pedlars, their popularity started to wane. With the advent of the mass media, the storyteller has unfortunately become more or less extinct.

Story telling is also an effective vehicle to deliver messages to the subconscious where the 'aha's of metaphor take place. It is our ability to make metaphorical connections that allow us to learn anything at all. When something new is like something we've done before, we take what we know from the first situation and

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transfer our knowledge to the new situation. Metaphor instils the learning of content or process on a very subtle, often subconscious level. When the subconscious is activated or accessed, the material enters the mind with no resistance. As a result, metaphors can effect dramatic change in an individual.

Each time you ask someone to stretch their awareness of time and space you are inducing a light state of trance and each story that starts with "Once upon a time" provides an example of this.

A story can be called a metaphor if the listeners can relate to it and draw a parallel between the action in it and their own lives. It has been suggested that if a picture is worth a thousand words, then perhaps we can regard a metaphor as being worth 1000 pictures.

According to psychologists, our memories seem to work best when we can see things as part of a recognised pattern, when our imaginations are aroused, when we can make natural associations between one idea and another, and when the information appeals strongly to our senses. An imaginative story, rich in vocabulary, that appeals to the senses, which works as a metaphor, and is cumulative in nature, clearly fulfils all these criteria. Cumulative tales have definite stages and in each stage characters and activities are added on. The result is a rhythm and a repetition which is hypnotic in quality. This helps to induce alpha brainwaves and the optimal state for learning and remembering. The process can also bring about a form of regression to childhood days and recreate in us that emotional state of curiosity, which as adults we tend to lose.

It is emotions, not logic, that drive our attention, meaning-making and memory. This suggests the importance of eliciting curiosity, suspense, humour, excitement, joy and laughter. Story telling can provide an ideal means of achieving this.

If you're shy at the thought of reading stories aloud, try the following: record the story and play it back for yourself; climb a hill out in the forest and read it to a tree or some kindly squirrels; or tell it to yourself in the shower or in your car. If you can tell a story rather than read it, this leaves your hands free to gesture, allows you to make eye contact with your audience and to calibrate for their responses.

An example of how story as metaphor can be used in an educational setting is presented below. It was designed for students of English as a Foreign Language about to embark on a course in the UK, to promote positive expectations.

### **The Learning Place**

This is the story of Alessandra, a young woman who leaves her parents' home to make her own way in the world. She's looking for something more than the familiar everyday routine of her family, the challenge of the new and unfamiliar. So she travels to the Learning Place, a special place visited by seekers of all kinds, in the land known as Dan Glen. She arrives in autumn, just as the leaves are beginning to change to colours of deep red, orange and yellow, and the trees themselves are turning within for the winter.

Alessandra's feeling a bit nervous because she's never been to Dan Glen before and doesn't understand the language spoken there. So when she arrives and hears the people speaking so quickly, she gets frightened and thinks perhaps she's made a big mistake. Many learners are based in the Centre besides herself and she notices they don't appear to be afraid. In fact, they seem to be enjoying life to the full and this helps to reassure her.

Alessandra walks around the Centre feeling rather lost until she meets one of the welcome guides who helps new arrivals to feel at home. The guide's name is Karelov. Karelov is a kind, gentle man who soon makes her feel comfortable listening to his native language. She's surprised at how relaxed and confident she feels with her guide. Her understanding of the new language grows quickly, and before long she's beginning to use the language too. Karelov recognises that Alessandra has all the abilities she needs to do very well.

With Karelov's support and encouragement, Alessandra begins to open her mind and heart to all the new opportunities around her. Karelov spends many hours with Alessandra and the other new arrivals. He tells them lots of stories, he plays lots of games and listens with patience and interest. They all learn quickly without even realising it's happening and Alessandra's confidence quickly grows. She makes friends with the other new arrivals in her group and she recognises that their situations are similar to her own.



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One of these friends, Eduardo, invites her to the annual festival of dance in Dan Glen. Karelov has taught them the traditional dances and they demonstrate their skills at the festival with ease and delight. Even the natives are impressed and congratulate them on the naturalness and ease of their performance.

During one of the breaks, a traditional dance instructor called Killjoy asks them how many hours and days they must have struggled to reach such a high standard. He can't believe it when they tell him that it was no struggle at all and that they enjoyed every minute of it. He thinks they must be lying. Alessandra and Eduardo become a little confused and wonder if they did something wrong. They can't understand all this analysis of their learning which just happened so naturally.

At this moment Karelov and his partner Bella, who are also attending the dance, invite the young couple to join them in a dance for four. They tell Karelov about their conversation with the old dance instructor and Karelov smiles. He explains that unfortunately there are still teachers like Killjoy in the Centre with old-fashioned beliefs about how learning takes place. Killjoy, it seems, has forgotten that learning can be an enjoyable experience and that when people feel relaxed they can produce their best work. Alessandra and Eduardo realise from their own recent experiences that what Karelov is saying is true and a smile of recognition appears on the young couple's faces as they join Karelov and his partner for the dance.

The next day Karelov announces to Alessandra and the rest of the group that their initiation is now complete. They have all mastered naturally and with ease a basic understanding of the language and they are ready to move on. Their understanding of themselves and

others has grown and so has their confidence. The friendships will last, the pleasant memories will remain, and the ending is just a beginning. As Karelov concludes his remarks, he invites everyone to hold hands and to join him in a circle, a circle of strength and unity.

Alessandra has since become a fine teacher herself and Eduardo is now working as an interpreter. And we leave them to continue their journey through life, following easily and naturally the best guide of all – the Karelov who resides within them.

Each of the stories presented in this collection is followed by a script for guided visualisation. These can be used with individual clients and/or when working with groups. The rest of this introduction deals with the background to, and the benefits to be derived from, the use of this technique.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) has made us aware of the main Learning Styles – visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, olfactory and gustatory. But what about the use of intuition? Acceptance of intuition gives us greater access to information, augments the limited perspective of our five familiar senses, and prompts us to transcend our linear view of time and space. Intuition entails listening to the inner voice, and guided journeys provide a means of accessing this resource.

Arnold Mindell refers to ‘a world channel’ through which communication takes place in ways that cannot always be reduced to the physics of seeing, hearing, moving, touching, smelling or tasting. This offers further evidence for the case to be made for a sixth Learning Style, which is the subject of this book.

So what are guided journeys? Basically, they involve creating pictures in your mind while following a script. Although the form of the ‘journey’ is controlled by the script, the content remains unpredictable. The process is a means of moving what Carlos Castaneda called ‘the assemblage point’ and of entering a state of non-ordinary reality. What we call ‘reason’ is merely a by-product of the habitual position of the assemblage point. Dreaming (and/or visualisation) gives us the fluidity to enter into other worlds and perceive the inconceivable by making the assemblage point shift outside the human domain. It can be argued that the

This pioneering book combines the power of metaphor and the dynamics of story telling. The metaphor is powerful because it parallels life; the story is dynamic because it captivates. When a metaphor is embedded in a story, the captivation of the listener activates the subconscious, and the metaphor is absorbed.

*The Power of Metaphor* provides a collection of just such resonant stories and guided visualisations for use with groups. Tracing techniques of story telling back to their original roots, it first promotes a deep understanding of the uses



of metaphor, before presenting a series of enjoyable and thought-provoking stories. Each story takes the form of a guided journey that leads the listener along an imaginative path. Each forms a script for an inspiring story session that will enhance the learning of its listeners.

Packed with original stories and visualisations, *The Power of Metaphor* is an invaluable resource for teachers, trainers and therapists.

If you are looking for new approaches to group work, or if you are interested in the art of story telling, this book will illuminate and stimulate.

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Crown House Publishing Limited  
[www.crownhouse.co.uk](http://www.crownhouse.co.uk)  
[www.crownhousepublishing.com](http://www.crownhousepublishing.com)

Cover design: samizdat  
Photograph: Hugh Robinson

Education/Business/Psychotherapy

ISBN 978-189983643-7



5 1 9 9 5



9 781899 836437