

Foreword by *Judith DeLozier*

the Magic of Metaphor



77 Stories for
Teachers, Trainers & Thinkers

Nick Owen

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Metaphor*
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Trainers & Thinkers*

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Introduction

Overview

“Why would you be interested in a book of stories?”

The Magician looked at the Young Apprentice and replied: “What is magic?”

“The art of transformation and change.”

“Good. And what is the role of a magician?”

“The Magician’s role is to assist people to make useful and beneficial changes in their lives.”

“And how can this be achieved?”

“By developing greater awareness that all things have a structure, that change is always possible, that there is always more than one perspective, and that the essence of useful change lies in having both creativity and access to a greater number of choices.”

“And what is the responsibility of the enlightened Magician?”

The Young Apprentice recalled his studies. “The responsibility of the Magician is to use her power wisely, ethically, and with humility.”

“And what are the key principles?”

The Little Magician considered a moment before replying. “There are five key principles.

- A Magician must think systemically and look for the connections between things that are not always apparent. For this reason a Magician must always treat information in its wider context, for nothing exists or makes sense in a vacuum.

- A Magician must always be aware that her knowledge is provisional, that there is always something more to discover, and that there is always more than one way to achieve any outcome.
- A Magician shares her knowledge, for this is an enlightened pathway to empowering others and to achieving immortality.
- A Magician always follows the four Rs: respect for self; respect for others; respect for ecology; and responsibility for all her actions.
- A true Magician believes that none of the above are true, but acts *as if* they are true. She trusts the evidence of her senses to interpret the responses she gets to whatever she does; and she always considers which next choice will be the most appropriate in that particular situation.”

“You have learned well,” said the Magician. “And these are some of the reasons why a Magician collects and uses stories.

“For all stories are true and yet not true. Every story is complete in its own context, its own reality. Every story therefore reflects a system, a map of the world. Yet just as that map is complete in itself, it is also incomplete because it represents only one among many perspectives.

“Stories offer us a way to see and understand our world in a new light, from a different angle. By challenging our readers and listeners to accept the limitations and shortcomings of their own maps, new insights become possible. Knowing this, you will understand how stories are an important and powerful way to generate creativity and greater choice in our lives. And why Magicians, curious to discover more tools, spend time in bookshops.”

About this Book

People often ask, “Where do you find stories?” Stories are everywhere: in books and newspapers, in the movies, in everyday

events, in dreams, in the minds and mouths of people, and, above all, in our own lives.

This book is a collection of some of the stories, anecdotes, and extended metaphors that, in my work, I have used in a wide variety of communication contexts. Stories can be used to affirm, change, or challenge people's ideas, attitudes, beliefs, visions, behaviours, skills, and sense of purpose. Contexts in which stories may be applicable are education, business, communication and presentation, health, change work, relationships, the arts, sports, personal development and therapy, and, of course, simply for pleasure.

Resonant stories are essentially reframes. Like putting on different pairs of glasses, stories allow us to look at life and experience in ways that can shift our perspective, range, and focus. Different lenses in the frames allow stories to zoom in, or take a distant view, on their subject. Filters can be attached to a lens to change colour, mood, and energy levels. At their most magical, stories can challenge and disturb our existing frames of reference, our accustomed map of the world, and shift us away from our limited thinking towards new learning and discovery.

The stories that are in this book can be used in a variety of different interpersonal and professional contexts, and they can also be read simply for entertainment.

Framing and Meaning

Without a frame information has no meaning. Consider the following situation. Large black rain clouds have gathered and are now partly obscuring the sun. What is the meaning of this situation? We cannot know until we have understood the context, until we put a *frame* around it.

It could mean a disappointing holiday for a sun worshipper. Or it could mean an excellent time for planting seeds. It might be a disaster for a farmer whose wheat is ripe and ready for harvesting. It might equally be a blessing for a traveller in a waterless desert.

The stories in the book work best when they are told in relation to a particular context. For example, in a situation where a person has moved into a stuck and unresourceful state as a result of a past memory or present experience, the following story might be useful.

Two monks were on a pilgrimage. They had already walked many miles, avoiding where they could the society of people for they were from a particular order of monks that were forbidden to speak to or touch women. They had no wish to offend anyone so they kept to the by-ways and lived off the land.

It was the rainy season and as they walked across a broad plain they were hoping that the river they had to cross would not be impassable. From afar they could see that the river had burst its banks; nevertheless they were hopeful that the ferryman would be able to take them across in his boat. But as they neared the crossing point they could see no sign of the boatman; the boat, it appeared, had been swept away in the current and the ferryman had stayed at home.

There was, however, a woman.

She was dressed in fine clothes and carried an umbrella. She implored the monks to help her cross, for her mission was urgent and the river, though wide and fast, was not deep.

The younger monk ignored her and looked away. The elder, however, said nothing but swept her up onto his shoulder and carried her across, putting her down, completely dry, on the other bank.

For the whole of the following hour as they journeyed on through thick and tangled woods, the younger monk berated the elder, heaping scorn upon his actions, accusing him of betraying the order and his vows. How dare he? How could he? What was he thinking of? What gave him the right to?

Eventually, the monks entered a clearing, and the elder monk stopped and looked square into the eyes of the younger. There was a long moment of silence.

Finally in a soft tone, his eyes bright and gentle with compassion, the older monk simply said: "My brother, I put that woman down an hour ago. It is you that are still carrying her."

The situation of stuckness is the frame that gives the story its power and meaning.

The frame around each of the stories in this book is for you to decide. Stuckness is one of many possible frames for this story. This is a sourcebook of magic, and the meaning of each story will depend on the context in which you tell it, who you are, and who you tell it to.

Meaning and Interpretation

The best stories are multi-layered and capable of rich interpretation. Some stories can contain within them apparently contradictory meanings, such as that entitled "The Quarryman", where it is possible to draw completely opposing conclusions. Depending on personal experience and curiosity, every reader will read different, and sometimes complex, meanings into each story, anecdote, or metaphor.

Perhaps the word metaphor, as used in this book, needs some explanation. I would describe most of the stories in this book as extended metaphors. They are indirect, yet powerful, vehicles for reframing experience from unusual or unexpected perspectives.

Metaphors are not simply poetic or rhetorical embellishments, but powerful devices for shaping perception and experience. If we change the metaphor in which a concept is expressed, we change the frame, making it possible for the concept to be understood differently. It is precisely this change of perspective that allows us greater choice in how we perceive and act upon the world.¹

Ideas from one set of concepts have been *carried across* or *transferred* (the literal meaning of the Old Greek word *metaphor*) to another set of concepts. This new frame suggests that we re-appraise our existing thinking about the original concept. Our ability to *think about* our thinking allows us to take a meta-position

to it and see the original situation with greater perspective, clarity, and wisdom.

One other facet of metaphor that makes it a particularly powerful tool is that it enables a storyteller to take complex concepts that are difficult to explain and recreate them in much more concrete forms. Metaphor allows us to externalise abstract thinking and translate it into a sensory-based tangible representation. This is perhaps what Leonard Shlain is referring to in Chapter 1 of his book *The Alphabet versus the Goddess*,² when he writes that “Metaphor [is] the right brain’s unique contribution to the left brain’s language capability.”

The power of stories

Every story creates its own highly contextualised world. And every story combines an inner logic and narrative sequence expressed through words (left brain preference) together with aspects of creativity, cohesion, and pattern forming expressed through tone and emotion (right brain preference). In this way both hemispheres of our intellectual brain—the neo-cortex—are stimulated. These factors considerably contribute to our understanding of the following: the attraction of stories as meaning-carrying vehicles, the memorability of stories, and the appeal of stories to different ages, cultures, and information-processing styles.

At a deeper level, stories are archetypes. Stories, metaphors, and myths carry the history, the culture, the values, and the customs of the people. They are a form of social glue that serves to entertain, instruct, and challenge the listener or reader. And because they strike deep chords in shared communal experience, they operate at both conscious and unconscious levels, conveying “messages” directly and indirectly. And it is the connection with the unconscious that challenges and disturbs our comfortable sense of self and identity, our programmed behaviours, our over habituated maps of the world. Or, alternatively, confirms them.

Stories also operate through time and space. A biblical parable, a Zen koan, or a Sufi anecdote can each affect powerfully contemporary

3.04 *The Littlest God*

It wasn't long after the Gods had created humankind that they began to realise their mistake. The creatures they had created were so adept, so skilful, so full of curiosity and the spirit of inquiry that it was only a matter of time before they would start to challenge the Gods themselves for supremacy.

To ensure their pre-eminence the Gods held a large conference to discuss the issue. Gods were summoned from all over the known and unknown worlds. The debates were long, detailed, and soul-searching.

All the Gods were very clear about one thing. The difference between them and mortals was the difference between the quality of the resources they had. While humans had their egos and were concerned with the external, material aspects of the world, the Gods had spirit, soul, and an understanding of the workings of the inner self.

The danger was that sooner or later the humans would want some of that too.

The Gods decided to hide their precious resources. The question was: where? This was the reason for the length and passion of the debates at the Great Conference of the Gods.

Some suggested hiding these resources at the top of the highest mountain. But it was realised that sooner or later the humans would scale such a mountain.

And the deepest crater in the deepest ocean would be discovered.

And mines would be sunk into the earth.

And the most impenetrable jungles would give up their secrets.

And mechanical birds would explore the sky and space.

And the moon and the planets would become tourist destinations.

And even the wisest and most creative of the Gods fell silent as if every avenue had been explored and found wanting.

Until the Littlest God, who had been silent until now, spoke up.

“Why don’t we hide these resources inside each human? They’ll never think to look for them there.”

Primary source: Peter McNab.

5.12 *The Happiest Man in the World*

A man who had every material comfort, money, and possessions, nevertheless felt that something significant was missing in his life. He felt a yearning and inner emptiness. So he went to someone reputed to be a fine healer.

The Healer said, "This is a normal and everyday malady for many people who have more than they need. If you wish to be cured it is not a difficult thing, but it will take patience and some courage. Are you ready for the challenge?"

The man said he was ready.

"Then your task is simple. All you need to do is find the happiest man in the world and wear his shirt. Once you have his shirt you will attain the peace you seek."

So the man set off in search of the happiest man in the world. His search took him to all corners of the world. He found many happy men, and women too. He heard great amounts of laughter and saw copious smiles, but every happy person he found always said there was one happier than she or he was.

Finally the man found a mountain, on which many agreed the world's happiest man lived. From far away he heard peals of laughter rolling down the mountain and across the valleys. The man was so happy that even the flowers were smiling and the trees were singing.

"Are you the happiest man in the world?" asked the pilgrim.

"Indeed I am. There is none happier than I anywhere in the world," said the happiest man between gales of laughter.

"Then, so that I may find peace and tranquillity in my life at last, may I respectfully make a request?"

"Go ahead, my friend."

“Would you be so good as to give me your shirt? I will reward you handsomely for it.”

The happiest man in the world howled with glee. His laughter seemed uncontrollable. So much so that the traveller was rather affronted.

“I don’t see what’s so funny about my request.”

“Well,” said the happiest man, “if you had any powers of observation you would have noticed that I’m not wearing a shirt. In fact, I don’t possess a single one.”

“Then what am I to do? My Healer, who is one of the most respected in the world, said that this was the only way I could be cured from my yearning.”

“Then you will indeed be cured. For it is the desire to seek for something that may be unattainable that marks out the achiever from the non-achiever. For the higher you set your expectations of yourself the more you will approach your full potential.”

And saying this the happiest man in the world removed the cap from his head and it turned out to be none other than the healer himself.

The man was somewhat confused, disappointed, and even a little angry about this. “Why didn’t you tell me this when I first came to see you?”

“Because you had to reconnect with real experience in the world. You were not then ready to understand these things. You had to submit to the experience of life in all its ways and forms in order to understand that happiness and suffering are interconnected sides of the same coin.”

Primary source: Idries Shah.

General source: Sufi tradition.

The Magic of Metaphor presents a collection of stories designed to engage, inspire and transform the listener and the reader. Some of the stories motivate, some are spiritual, and some provide strategies for excellence. All promote positive feelings, encouraging confidence, direction and vision.

Containing sixteen suggestions for effective storytelling, advice on organisation, style and storytelling skills, and a selection of seventy seven stories that can be adapted and developed, **The Magic of Metaphor** is an inspirational sourcebook for counsellors, health workers, psychologists, professional speakers, managers, leaders and NLP practitioners, as well as for teachers, trainers and therapists.



Anyone with an interest in therapeutic story-telling should buy this book.

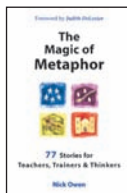
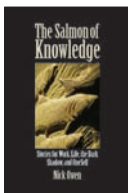
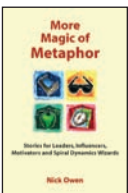
– **Andy Young, RMN, LLB(Hons), LLM, PG Cert HE, Senior Lecturer in Mental Health Nursing, Sheffield Hallam University.**

A treasure trove of wisdom and fun! Stories for leaders to use on every occasion to enhance their effectiveness.

– **Richard D. Field OBE, Industrialist, Leadership Coach and Student.**

The Magic of Metaphor is a brilliant book. I can highly recommend it.

– **Dr. Herbert Puchta, author and NLP Master Practitioner.**



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