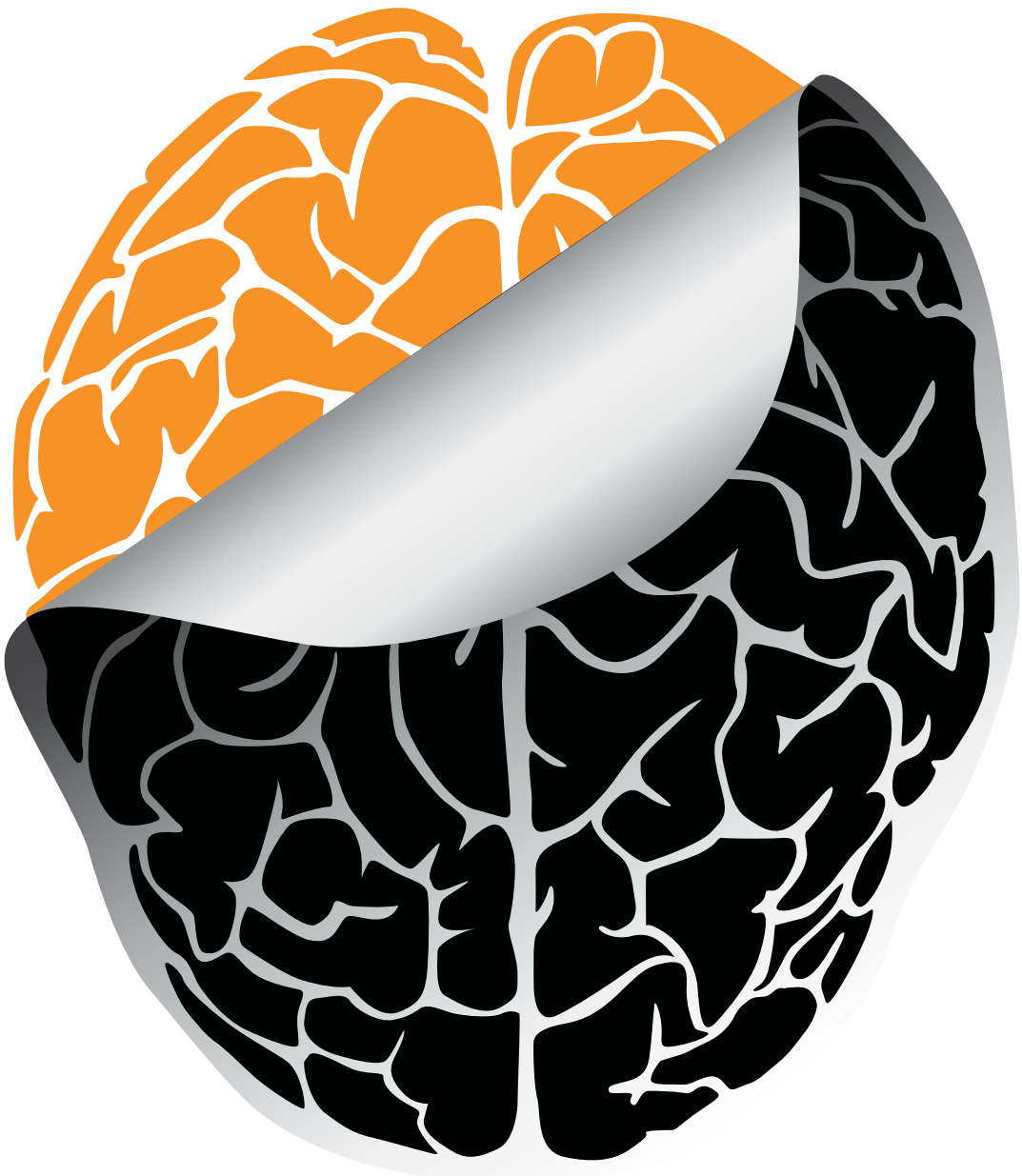
STORYTELLING

it can change your mind



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"You may tell a tale that takes up residence in someone's soul, becomes their blood and self and purpose. That tale will move them and drive them and who knows what they might do because of it, because of your words.

That is your role, your gift."

- Erin Morgenstern, The Night Circus -

HUMAN BEINGS

HAVE BEEN TELLING

each other

STORIES SINCE THE

FIRST BONFIRE.

We huddle close and tell tales of ghosts and mysteries; we crack up our friends with the crazy things that happen to us; we pull our children onto our laps and use stories to explain the world to them. We reach for the form instinctively:

“ONCE UPON A TIME,”

“YOU’LL NEVER BELIEVE THIS ONE,”

“IT ALL STARTED WHEN…”





SO WHY, AFTER CENTURIES OF STORYTELLING,

is there an influx of new apps, conferences and bestsellers about the art?

Because even in this high-tech world, storytelling is the sharpest tool we have.

AND NOW WE HAVE THE NEUROSCIENCE TO PROVE IT.

Our brains are designed for stories. They're the best way for us to grasp deep truths. Understand a complicated sprawl of facts. Imagine an experience we've never had. Care about something entirely new to us.




STORIES CUT THROUGH THE NOISE.

WE REMEMBER THEM,

&

WE LOVE RETELLING THEM.

THEY STITCH OUR LIVES TOGETHER.

PGAV DESTINATIONS
Global Leaders in Planning and Design

We are a storytelling organization. This was deeply ingrained in our practice long ago by my predecessor, Fred Guyton, who taught us to design with storytelling . . . by telling us stories. His lessons stuck. Even in the late 1960s, our earliest destination projects like Busch Gardens Williamsburg were conceived with rich narrative elements.

Through the years, we've refined our storytelling approach through projects at museums, zoos, theme parks, and resorts. We've enriched the experience of some of the world's most powerful brands. I am confident that this approach is one of the key reasons for our lasting success. And because we're still learning, we launched this project.

This book captures some exciting new understanding of the power of story through neuroscience, social sciences, and the words of some of the world's best storytellers. And as it turns out, we gained some great perspective from within our own PGAV Destinations team. They never cease to amaze me.

We are pleased to share this exploration of the storytelling art with our colleagues and friends in the destination industry. Chances are that you and your team are already accomplished storytellers. But like us, I hope that you'll use this information to engage your guests even more deeply in your powerful stories.

Mike Konzen
Chairman and Principal, PGAV

"Some of our staff recently organized a storytelling session within our office called Spot on Story. The program was done in the style of "The Moth," with the topic: The History of PGAV, told from the perspective of several team members. It was fascinating and fun. In the end, I laughed until I cried, and I went away thinking a good bit about storytelling."

– Mike Konzen

AN UNDERWATER NARRATIVE

Georiga Aquarium
Atlanta, Georgia

"the guest gets a little peek into a large exhibit, and then they turn a corner and go through a long tube and see a lot of animals overhead, and then they leave thinking it's over, because we have revealed a lot already," says PGAV Vice President Al Cross. "We draw them into an intentionally mundane corridor that looks like it's leading to an exit. And then they turn a corner and enter a room with some of the largest windows in the world. It's the OMG moment. With that surprise, you have them sucked in, and they cannot tear themselves away."

Once Upon A Time

"There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories."

~ Ursula K. LeGuin

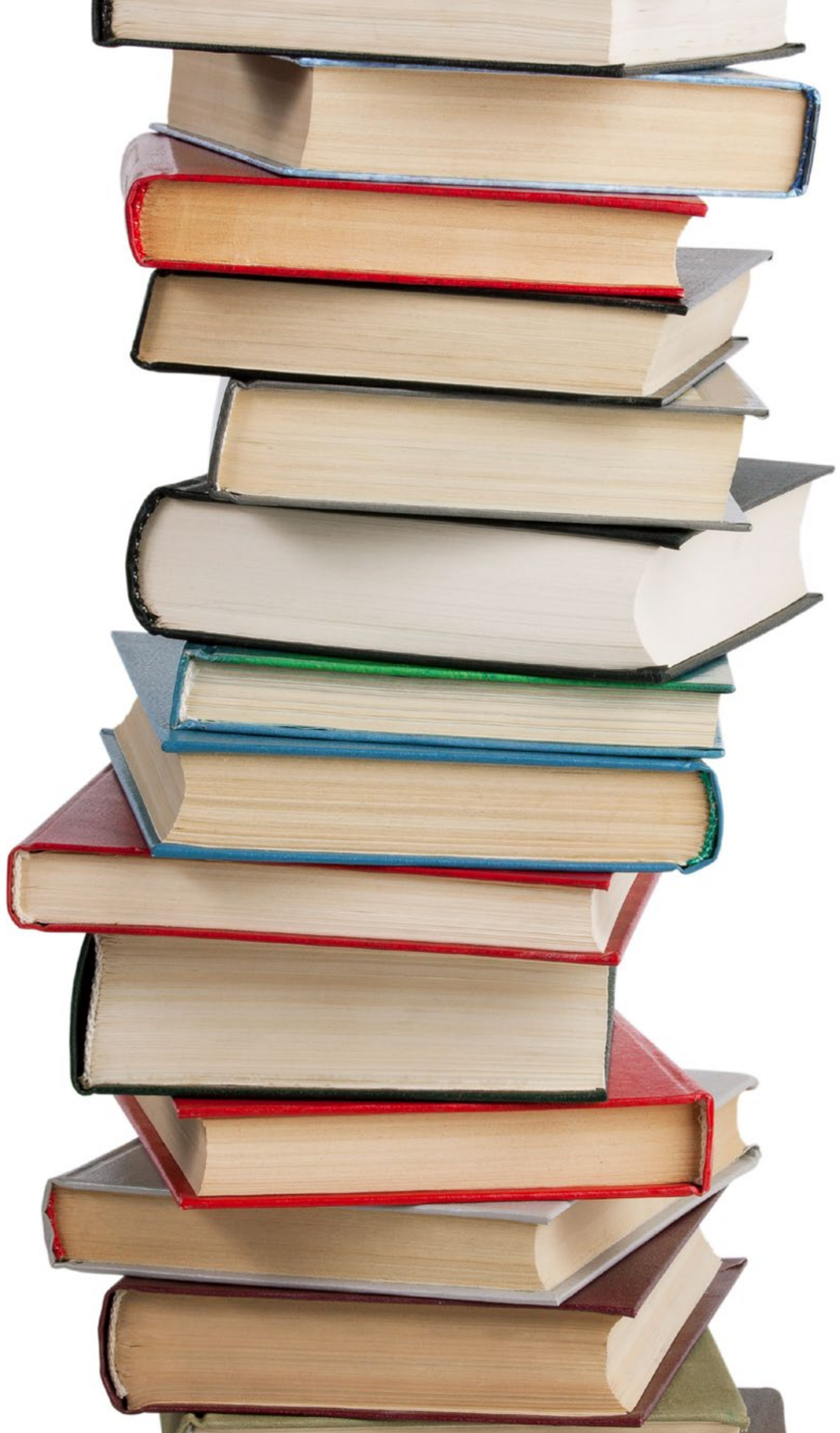
HERE IS WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF STORY.

More than 17,000 years ago, somebody scratched a wild horse into a cave wall at Lascaux. People stared, rapt, at that horse and the bison and cattle around him. Such scenes grew more elaborate, telling tales of the hunt, of life, of death. Egyptian hieroglyphs turned such pictures into words, and the words grew into epics like Gilgamesh and the Mahabharata. Words found the stage in ancient Greece; turned into heroic poetry with The Song of Roland; invented the novel with The Tale of Genji. The discovery of the printing press spread the stories of the Bible, and then of Shakespeare and Tolstoy and J.R. Tolkien. Stories were captured on film, giving us The Battleship Potemkin and Citizen Kane and The Wizard of Oz. Now they've gone digital in social media, shrunk to Twitter miniatures, exploded into 1,000 different simultaneous narratives.

BUT THEY'RE STILL STORIES.

And their tellers—from Aesop to Chaucer to J.K. Rowling—still wield power over us. Stories have been inked, danced, photographed, and blogged. But though the media change, the archetypes don't. Stories are quests and adventures; they're about discovery, rebirth, redemption, and transformation.

According to PGAV Vice President Ned Diestelkamp, "PGAV has designed destinations honoring quite a few heroic journeys, from the astronauts flying into space on the Atlantis shuttle to Turtle Trek, an experience that chronicles the amazing life of the sea turtle."



Joseph Campbell found a "hero's journey" in the myths of every culture he studied. A reluctant hero is thrown into a strange and wondrous land, where he confronts danger. He retreats to seek wisdom and learns he has the power to overcome what he fears. That's what's happening in Tolkien's Ring trilogy; in Star Wars; in just about every Disney film ever made.

AND THAT'S WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE STORIES YET TO BE TOLD.

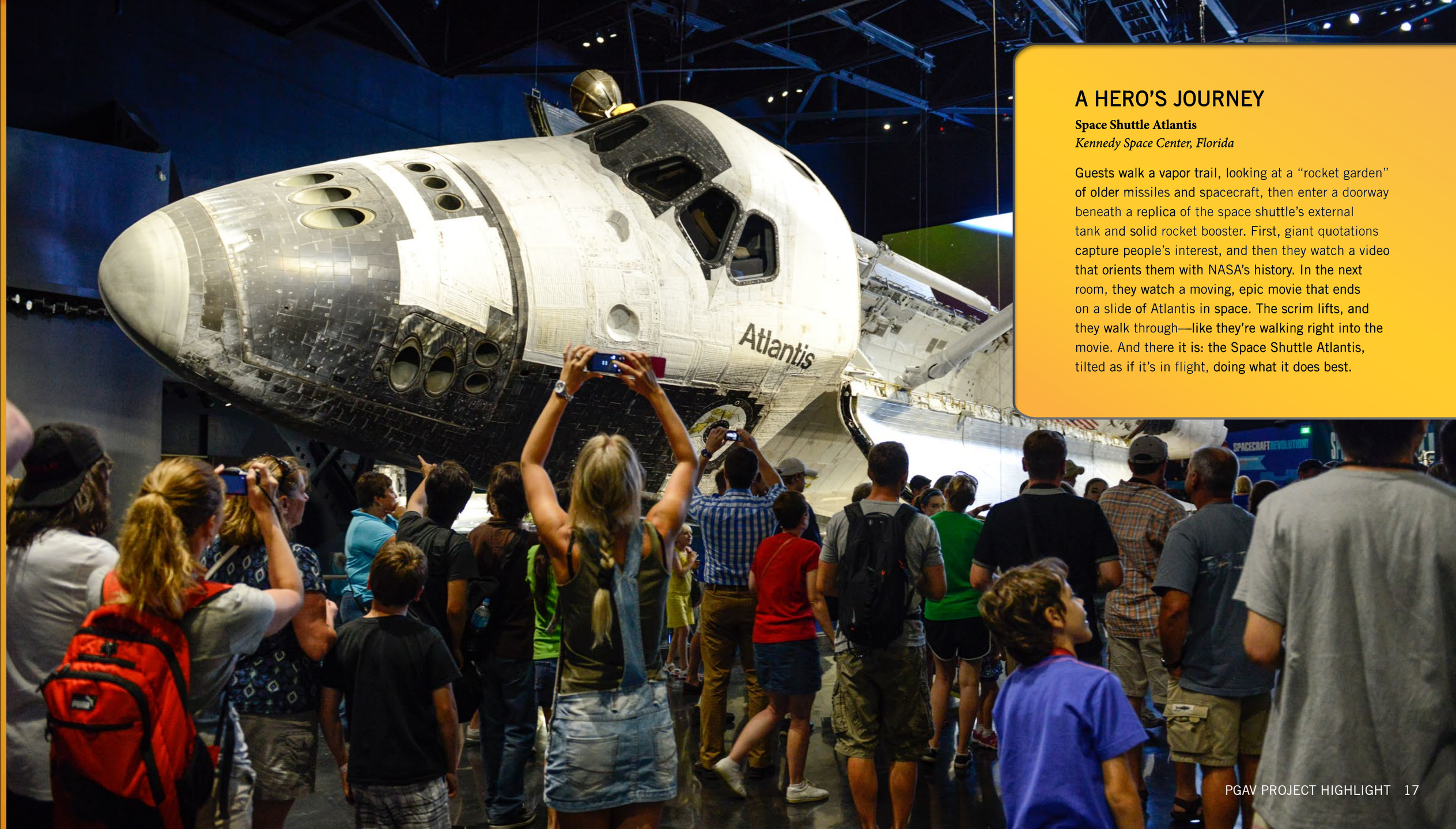
The arc of obstacles, danger and redemption is universal. That said, stories also play very particular roles in different cultures, binding a group's members together and reminding them that they are part of something larger than themselves.

"Paul Revere galloping to Lexington at midnight, Betsy Ross sewing the flag, Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on the bus…these stories resonate with anybody born in the U.S.A.", says designer Kelly Giles.

Even a family's stories, passed down from one generation to the next, give each member a sense of belonging.

Stories change the way we see the past and the future, ourselves and each other. The good ones can be told across cultures, across ages, across backgrounds, even across centuries. It's fun to see Richard III set during World War II, but nobody has to rewrite Shakespeare, or Homer, or the Bible, before we can understand the characters' acts and desires.

Great stories are timeless.



A HERO'S JOURNEY

Space Shuttle Atlantis
Kennedy Space Center, Florida

Guests walk a vapor trail, looking at a "rocket garden" of older missiles and spacecraft, then enter a doorway beneath a replica of the space shuttle's external tank and solid rocket booster. First, giant quotations capture people's interest, and then they watch a video that orients them with NASA's history. In the next room, they watch a moving, epic movie that ends on a slide of Atlantis in space. The scrim lifts, and they walk through—like they're walking right into the movie. And there it is: the Space Shuttle Atlantis, tilted as if it's in flight, doing what it does best.

Aesop's Brain

"We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative."

~Barbara Hardy

TO UNDERSTAND **WHY** STORY IS SO IMPORTANT,

PGAV'S DESIGNERS FIRST HAVE TO

UNDERSTAND **WHY** THE BRAIN CRAVES IT.

First, and most obviously, the brain loathes chaos. It wants everything tied together neatly, like with like, causes with effects.

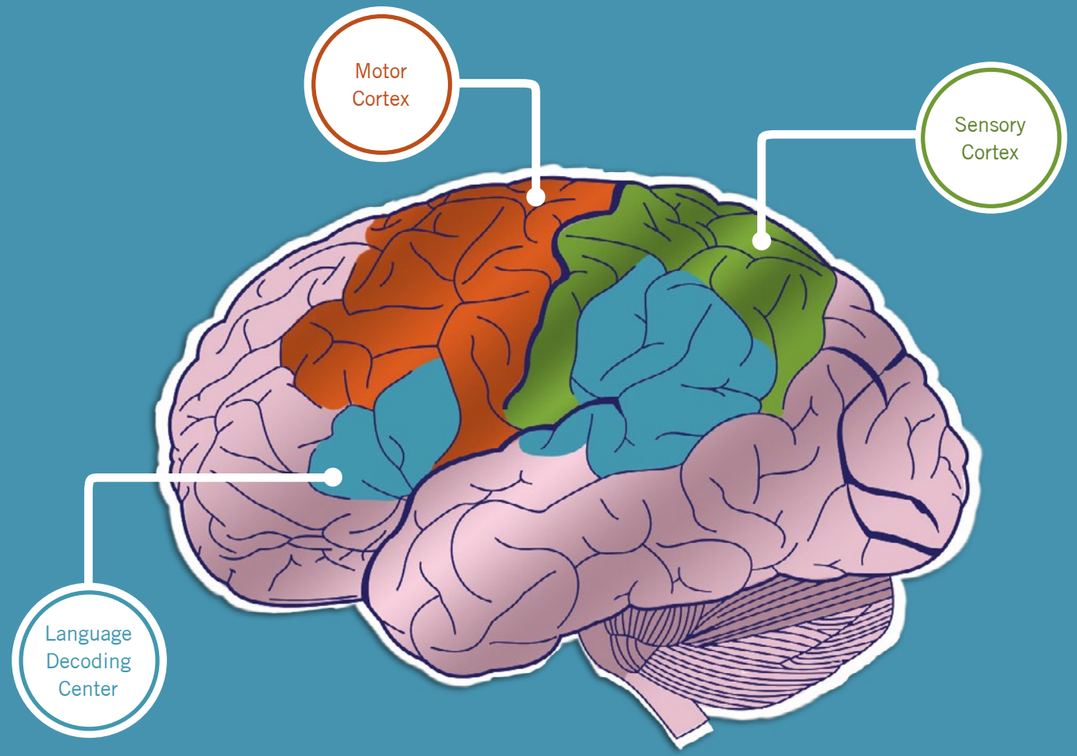
"We scan the world for relationships and patterns," says Vice President Emily Howard, "and once our brain finds part of a pattern, it gets anxious until the pattern's complete."

That's why we can't stand to put a thriller down one chapter before the end, and why an audience will yell in wounded outrage if the movie theater's power goes out just when the hero's about to triumph.

Curiosity is built into our brain, and it demands satisfaction.

STORYTIME

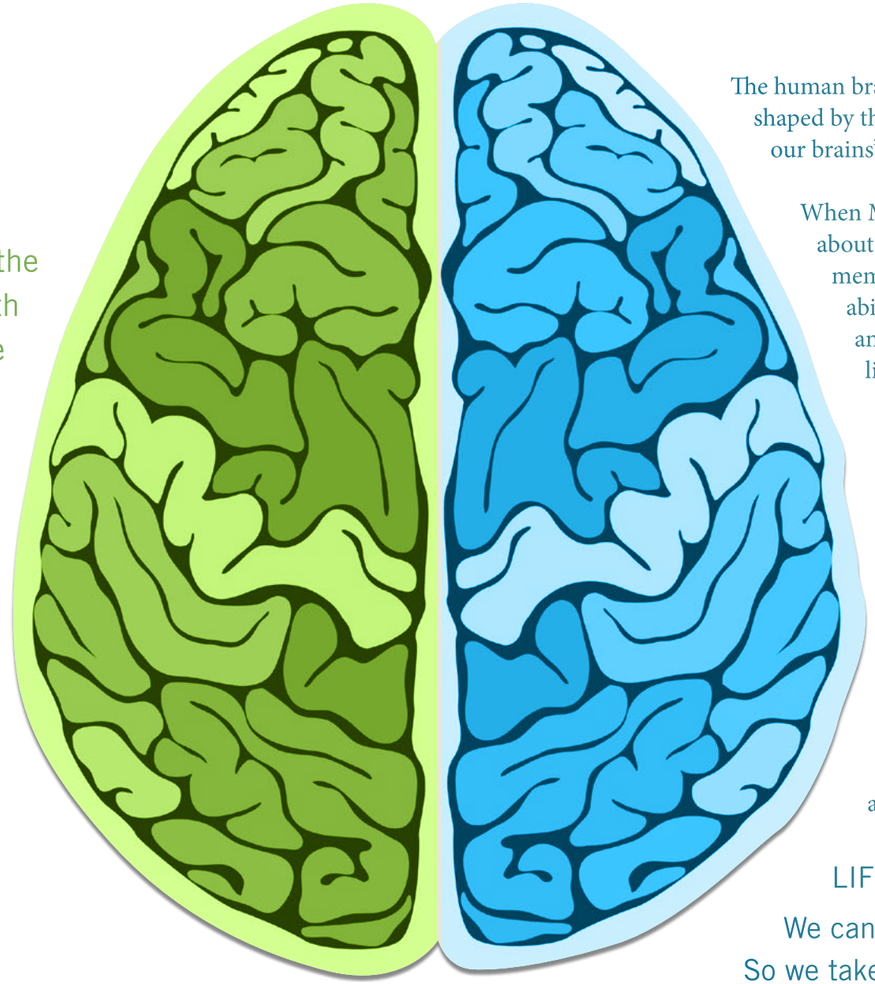
Neuroscience researcher Jaak Panksepp describes human motivation as a "seeking system." Unlike a heat-seeking missile, though, our brain hunts what's coolest: new knowledge that intrigues us; solutions to what puzzles us.



Researchers at Washington University have shown that we respond to stories with far more of our brain than we use for most tasks. **Bullet-point facts activate only one part of our brain: the language-decoding center. A story lights up areas all over the brain. Details about how something looked or tasted light up our sensory cortex; action revs our motor cortex.** That's because we understand a story by simulating what's happening inside our mind. In the Washington U. study, when people read the part of a story in which a little boy picked up his workbook, blood flowed to the part of the brain associated with grasping an object. When readers reached the point at which the little boy walked, blood shifted to the part of the brain that deals with location in space.

STORIES ARE A WHOLE-BODY EXPERIENCE.

They're also whole-brain, tying the left-hemisphere logic of plot with right-hemisphere empathy for the characters. And in split-brain studies, when the left hemisphere is presented with bizarre behavior that was directed by the right hemisphere, it acts like a guilty 5-year-old, spinning an absurd tale to explain what happened. We're that desperate for the story to make sense.



The human brain is hard-wired to seek stories, but it's also shaped by them. Language and narrative start to organize our brains' growth while we're still in diapers.

When Mr. Rogers put his sweater on and told children about his day, he was helping to build their working memory and their frontal cortex's organizational ability, reinforcing their capacity for relationship, and calming their fight-or-flight amygdale, so their little brains could grow strong and balanced and their emotions would be stabilized.

He was also entertaining them.

Ask architect Justin Stichter: "Stories are fun. They make us laugh or cry. They beg to be shared."

A new field, interpersonal neurobiology, investigates how our brains grow when we tell each other bits of our life stories. It turns out, the brain doesn't even make much distinction between our own experience and somebody else's. The same areas light up either way.

LIFE'S SHORT.

We can't experience everything for ourselves. So we take other people's stories as our own.

STORYTIME

Even the U.S. Department of Defense is researching stories and the way they shape our brains. Its "Narrative Networks" program investigates how a human brain physically changes, in order to work new information into a narrative that makes sense.

LODGING WITH LUCY

Hotel Gold River
Port Aventura, Spain

Guests to Port Aventura's Far West Node can spend the night in a narrative:

As Lucy and her family were traversing the Santa Fe Trail to California in 1858, they struck it rich when they discovered gold nuggets – leading to a mother lode. Settling in Sullivan, Colorado, they purchased land and began to mine the gold, which attracted hundreds of prospectors and speculators from across the globe. With the arrival of the railroad, the town came alive with saloons, shops, restaurants . . . and Hotel Gold River. Be Lucy's overnight guest and experience Sullivan at the height of its Gold Rush glory, and meet a wonderful cast of characters.

The Purpose Of Story

Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today.

~ Robert McKee

Once you know how story evolved and why our brains crave it, you can begin to understand the way that PGAV's team has observed stories in our everyday lives:

TO

Make scattered bits of experience and information coherent.

Break what's complex into manageable bits.

Identify patterns in the world around us.

Share knowledge and learn from each other's experience.

Anchor our beliefs.

Give our lives a continuous, recognizable shape.

Teach our children how to live.

Remind us how we fit into the world.

"There will always be a beginning, middle and end, in some fashion," says exhibit designer Alex Guillossou. "People need an introduction of some sort, and they need that conclusion. There are so many different ways of delivering that arc today, those basic elements can be hard to recognize—but they still have to be there."

Stories work like glue, making information stick. When flat data hits us, most of it just bounces off. But a story with a nice narrative arc?

Plots are little loops of cause-and-effect, and our brains fasten onto their logic.

Ever try to remember a story that's out of chronological order? It's nearly impossible. Even in today's nonlinear stories—fragmented, interactive, with multiple points of entry—each bit still has a structure that lets our brain make sense of it.

bottom line

STORIES MAKE PEOPLE CARE

Emotional stories are poignant to us because our brains release oxytocin—nicknamed "the tenderness molecule"—as we empathize with the characters. Sad stories also trigger a release of cortisone, which helps us pay closer attention. And when we're searching for a match between the story and our own experience, we use a part of the brain called the insula. It's distinctly human; even Lassie didn't have one. The insula is what lets us think about "the moral of the story" and connect it to our own lives.

Once we've made that connection, we've turned off the critical, judgmental part of our brain. Now we're far less likely to pick out anachronisms, mistakes, and inconsistencies, because we're committed to the story. We're letting it affect us and become part of us. Soon we're donating, volunteering, vowing to return.

Paul Zak, a neuroconomist who teaches at Claremont Graduate University, showed his students a short video in which a father describes his son's battle with brain cancer. Oxytocin levels in their blood shot up. So did their willingness to donate their payment to charity.

STORYTIME

Uri Hasson, a neuroscientist at Princeton University, co-directed a 2010 study that showed the brains of listener and storyteller actually coming into sync as the story was told. If the storyteller felt a certain emotion, the same part of the brain became active in the listener. Their brains melded. That's deep connection.

STORIES ABOUT OUR OWN EXPERIENCE CAN ACTUALLY SHAPE SOMEONE ELSE'S MIND, PLANTING IDEAS, THOUGHTS, AND EMOTIONS. STORIES MIGHT, IN FACT, BE THE ONLY WAY TO TURN OUR EXPERIENCE INTO SOMEONE ELSE'S.

THE ANIMALS MOVE IN

Glacier Run

Louisville Zoo, Kentucky

Glacier Run recreates the town of Churchill, Alaska, abandoned and frozen in time. As sea ice melts and habitats shrink, Arctic animals such as polar bears, sea lions, and sea otters have moved in and overtaken this once bustling town on the edge of the wilderness. Guests navigate the paths of this often surprising and thrilling village, and come incredibly close to these creatures to connect with their plight.

Elements Of Story

Are you telling your destination's story as powerfully as you could be? Here are the essentials we've learned to heed.

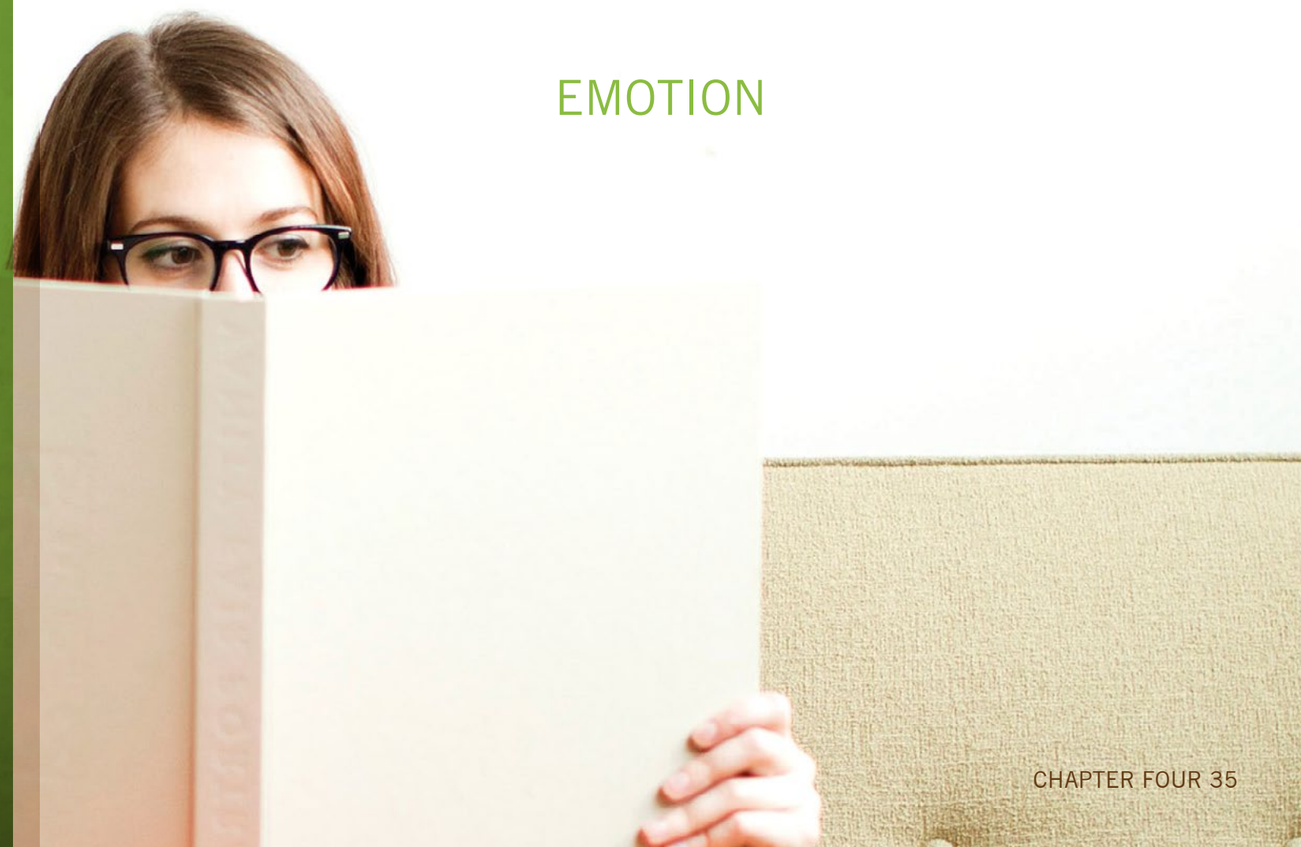
AUDIENCE

ARC

CHARACTER

PACING

EMOTION

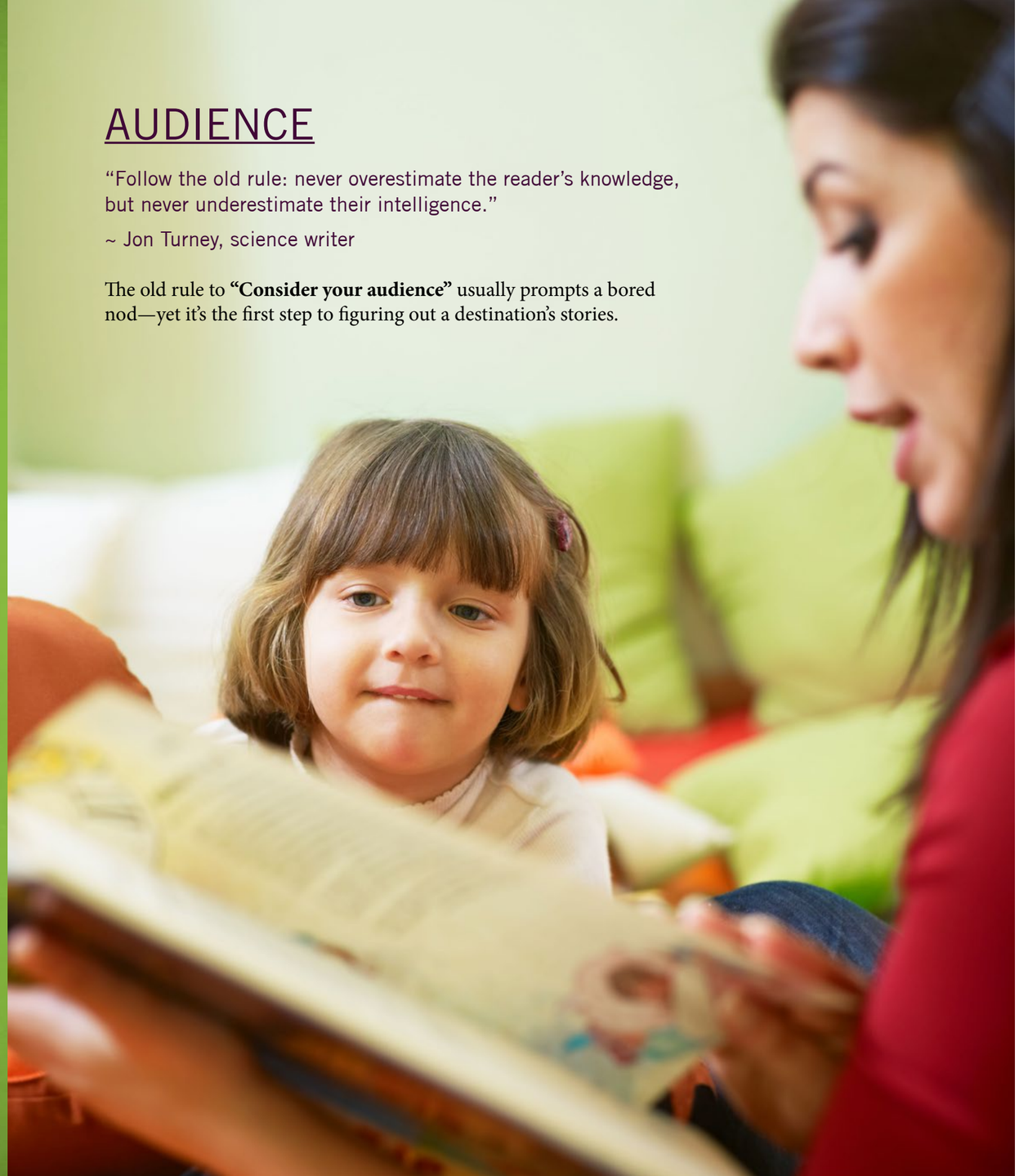


AUDIENCE

"Follow the old rule: never overestimate the reader's knowledge, but never underestimate their intelligence."

~ Jon Turney, science writer

The old rule to **"Consider your audience"** usually prompts a bored nod—yet it's the first step to figuring out a destination's stories.



"Start with a nugget," suggests exhibit designer Carol Breeze. "A familiar story, a single fact, an abstraction, a value, a character. Sometimes the client says they don't need a story. We still create one, because we need it, as designers, to create a cohesive experience. Then we help them see how the story is going to help them achieve their goals."

What **demographic** are you trying to reach?

What **emotions** do you want to elicit?

Are you creating an **action thriller?**

A romantic **adventure?**

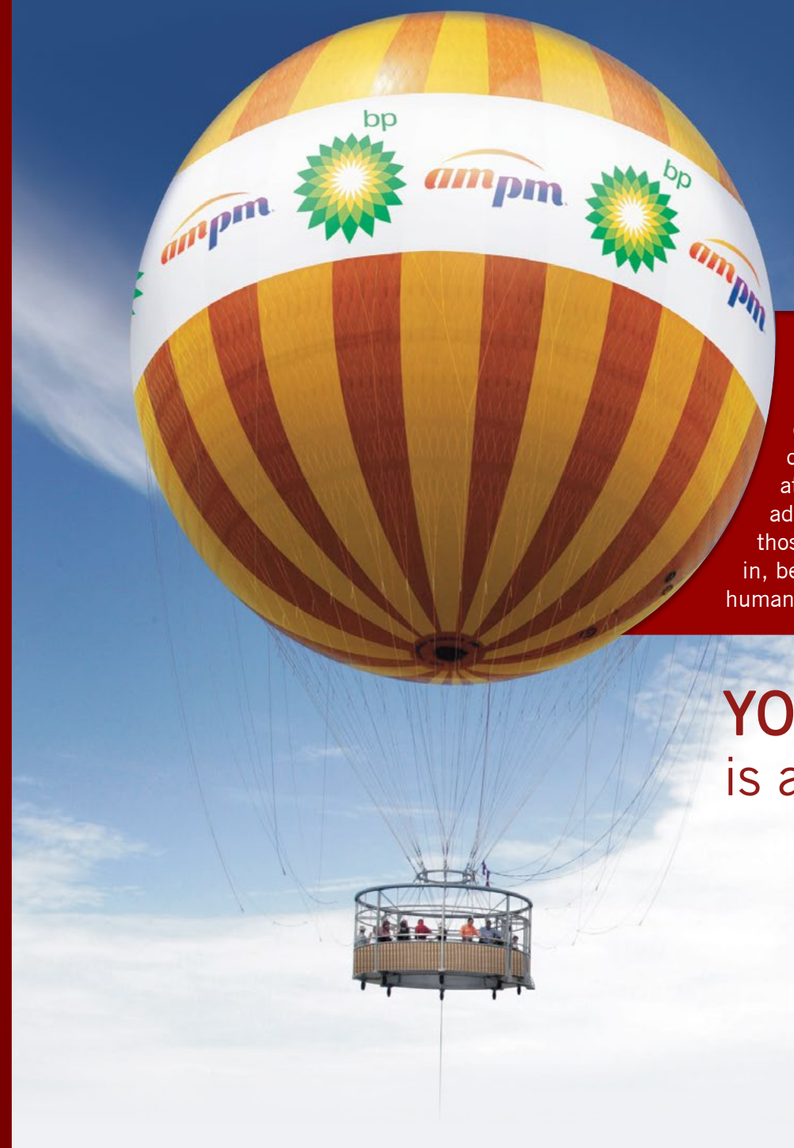
Do you want your guests **serene and reflective** or **guessing madly?**

Once you've thought through that much, you can begin to craft stories that will trigger the response you're after.

Some destinations already have hundreds of tales just waiting to be told. Others need a meta-story that will tie everything together, create a sense of place, explain an issue or arouse a certain emotion.

EVEN FABRICATION'S NOT FROM WHOLE-CLOTH, THOUGH.

"Generally we have to find the basis of stories that are already in people's consciousness," says senior attraction designer Jim Wible. "We draw from preexisting references—emotional triggers, historical touchstones—so we don't have to teach our visitors the whole thing."



After all, stories might take a million different forms, but the categories hold steady. Heroes go on quests, slay dragons, fall in love, escape a trap, defeat evil, figure out who they are, or at the very least, have a rollicking good adventure. A story that follows one of those patterns has universal appeal built in, because it taps desires and struggles all human beings share.

YOUR AUDIENCE is already interested.

ARC

"Man is the storytelling animal....
It's the thing that defines us.
We tell stories to understand ourselves."

~Salman Rushdie

A good storyteller gathers a ridiculous amount of information and then sifts through it, letting stray facts fall away.

STORY IS THE ART OF ESSENCES.
Where's the plot that will intrigue and inspire your audience?
What details are compelling enough to immerse them in the experience?

"At a historic site, we often start by mining for the real stories that are already there," says Vice President Tom Owen. "What we look for is human emotion, not facts and figures. We're looking for the challenge a person faced, how they dealt with that challenge, what they were feeling at the time—and then talking about that in terms today's visitor can relate to."

Once you find your story, you have to figure out the best way to tell it. A game or pictures or a video? An elaborate high-tech simulation, or a simple story told by another human being as darkness falls? Whatever form you choose, you need a narrative arc that your visitors can follow, using it to orient themselves.

"When you're taking people into a new environment," says Owen, "story becomes a tool that helps them know how to feel and what to think in that situation."

STORYTIME

In a classic study of jury decisions, psychologists Nancy Pennington and Reid Hastie found that jurors had an easier time understanding information—and were more persuaded by it—when it was delivered to them in chronological order.

The traditional narrative arc hooks people with a little drama or intrigue, builds conflict with action and dialogue, reaches a climax, then comes to a resolution, leaving the characters changed in some way that will matter to your audience. The story has a voice and a point-of-view, believable characters and a vivid setting. Often it unfolds in chronological order, maybe with a few flashbacks.

Not all stories have to be linear, though, or flat enough to press between a book's covers. Destination designers even storyboard the way guests' experiences will roll out as they move through a theme park or museum: what do they see and feel now? What about now? What will that make them want to do next?

"At Glacier Run, at the Louisville Zoo, you walk through this town that's perched on a glacial cliff, and certain themes keep recurring, because we built in a bunch of smaller stories," says Wible. "It's more like a daisy than a linear progression. As you walk down the pathway, you might go into the trading post, and inside there are small stories the characters support that help tell the story of the town. The experience isn't linear. Life often isn't."

Ireland's Greatest Pub Crawl Theater
Storyboards

THE TRICK

The trick, whether you're creating an arc or a branched tree or a multimedia, multiplayer experience, is to find a balance between what's familiar and what's novel. In Western stories, there's often a rule of three: Three guys walk into a bar; three wise men cross a desert; three riddles are posed, three tasks set. The device of repetition brings a sweet familiarity, helping people recognize the story's form and settle in to wait for the payoff. But they'll also want jolts of novelty, suspense and surprise. And they'll need an ending that's a payoff, because that completes the pattern. The restless brain has been stilled, then hijacked into a new experience, then satisfied.

That's any story's happy ending.

CHARACTER

"Give the reader at least one character he or she can root for."

~ Kurt Vonnegut

Great characters pull us into a story, even if they're just Pop and Lolly running a candy shop at Niagara Falls. Your human characters have to be fully human, though. The villains ought to be, if not sympathetic, at least compelling, and the heroes must have flaws.

"The secret is to make them feel real," says designer Amanda Yates, "and you do that by not overthinking it. We all have a tendency to overgeneralize and make things ideal. What you want instead is some humor wrapped into your characters, some mistakes. People mess up. There has to be a forgivable quality to your characters."

The Verbolten roller coaster at Busch Gardens Williamsburg has a plot—a country drive through the Black Forest that runs amok—and characters, Gerta and Guenther, a sister and brother who live in the village and work for the auto-tour place. She runs the gift shop; he's a mechanic. As they move through the queue, guests go into warm, cheerful Gerta's shop and find she's gone to Oktoberfest, but she's left her TV on to welcome them and send them on to her brother's garage. It's a mess—stacks of suitcases, trees he's collected from the forest—and guests hear him snoring in the back room. Gerta and Guenther disarm people, and the ride's all the scarier because of it.

"A team of Clydesdales delivering the first case of beer to the White House after Prohibition—that's a story," says PGAV Vice President John Kasman. "But so is the heritage of the company, and the impact it's made on generations of workers and families. At the Anheuser-Busch Tour Center, we told the human story behind the brewing. People can relate to the first beer they had with their grandfather. Someone once used a beer coaster to send a postcard; it became a tiny historical narrative."

CHARACTERS CAN BE SKETCHED WITH FAR FEWER STROKES:

In Georgia Aquarium's exhibits, guests briefly meet an old guy called Hurricane Hank and an eccentric who decided to collect paintings of fish, both of whom add a little color and personality to the information. All characters, though, need some kind of motivation. Kurt Vonnegut used to tell his writing students, "Make your characters want something, even if it's only a glass of water." Then, once they want something, throw a few obstacles in their path. Put them in a desert. Smash the drinking glass. Raise the stakes, so people can root for your characters.

Even nonhuman characters should be facing challenges to which people can relate. In the Antarctica dark ride, a baby penguin named Puck is born in the preshow. Puck has a coming-of-age experience crossing the ice floes, encountering dangerous predators and a bit of magic before he reaches the other penguins. Niagara Falls' improbable hero is Chip, a beaver with a chip in his front tooth to make him memorable. He falls asleep doing a history report on the Falls, and his teacher, an owl, flies him through the story of Niagara's creation.

Once you have your characters, you can choose your point of view. Does your guest get the big picture or see the world through the eyes of one of the characters? Glacier Run was designed as an old Canadian mining town perched on the edge of a glacier. But visitors see the town from the point of view of the polar bears who lost their habitat and moved into town.

"We twisted it," explains senior creative designer Dave Cooperstein. "Normally it's people looking at animals in their habitat. We said, 'What happens if the polar bears take over the town?' When you're there, you feel like you are in their town. It's a way to tell the story of man's imposition on the environment: The bears are walking around inside the warehouse, climbing into the truck, and you're on the loading dock."

Animal exhibits have evolved by gradually closing the distance between animal and spectator.

First, audiences demanded a closer look at the animals, then a chance to actually touch them or swim with them. The latest phase is to feel what it's like to be that animal. Zoos are deliberately blurring the boundaries, letting viewers into the animal's habitat.

PGAV zoological designer Stacey Tarpley emphasizes the power of "sharing the air—it's totally different looking at a tiger through net and not behind glass. You can hear the little chuffs as he breathes."

In Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin, a trackless vehicle runs on magnets and gives riders a penguin's point of view.

The Cheetah Hunt at Busch Gardens Tampa loops down and hugs the ground, streaking past the Cheetah Run grassland just the way a cheetah hunts. When people ride SeaWorld Orlando's Manta Coaster and swim with the manta rays afterward, a soaring grace fills their landlocked bodies.

The intimacy of such an experience changes a guest's point of view, sometimes forever. Kids visiting the polar bear exhibit in Brookfield Zoo's Great Bear Wilderness play a game, jumping from one piece of ice to the next, and as the game goes on, the "ice floes" spread farther and farther apart. The kids giggle and groan and make wild leaps—and they realize just what the polar bears face in the Arctic.

After interviewing Gay Talese for The Paris Review, Katie Roiphe wrote, "His method is to go as deeply as possible into character, to burrow into a single psyche, as a way of capturing the spirit of the times."

A DESTINATION CAN DO THE SAME.

PACING

"It's about controlling the flow of information—
arriving at the right length and the right speed and in the right order."
~ Tom Stoppard

When you're telling a story, you're managing people's thoughts, making them think about what you want them to think about. Which is rather a lot of power.

Set your pace deliberately.

An overarching storyline holds a vast area together, providing continuity.

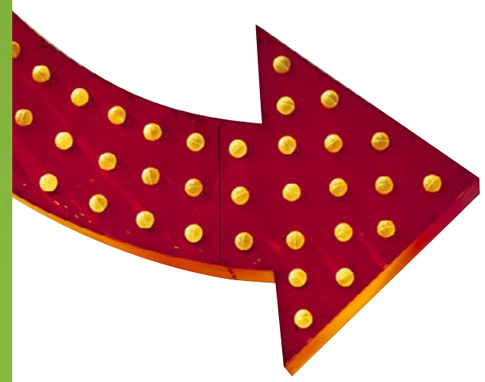
"Then you add a lot of little stories," Vice Presidnet Bill Castle says, "varying the scale, because the trick is, the more of them there are, the bigger the place seems."

Make sure to pace them and vary their rhythm, mixing sweeping sagas with shorter tales and tiny slivers of story. Today's guests want immersive multimedia narratives, and they also want vignettes that can be conveyed in half a minute or Vine's 6 seconds. Whatever their length, your stories should stay fairly simple, grounding the audience with structure and pattern before building in surprises, novelty, and drama.

At Washington University's Dynamic Cognition Laboratory, psychologist Jeffrey Zacks studies the chunking of information. He's found that "if you put commercial breaks in the right places, at places where it made sense to divide the chunks, people remember the story better." The same holds true at a destination: Pauses in the big story should make sense, and your shorter stories can be pauses that help guests absorb the entire experience.

Stories should also vary the mood, lightening it with humor before introducing suspense or tugging on the heart-strings. Use them; manipulate your visitors' emotions shamelessly. A good story is one that makes its audience want to know what happens next.

IT'S AS SIMPLE AS THAT.



Granted, not everybody will follow the prescribed path. Design would be a lot easier if all visitors walked through a destination in exactly the same way, at exactly the same speed.

But lining people up and giving them orders isn't a great way to start a relationship.

So you tell smaller stories from every direction, to catch your guests wherever they choose to wander. Each story should stand on its own and support the larger story. Each guest will create his own beginning, middle, and end.

An important way to pace the experience is with your graphic design,

WHICH MUST BE STREAMLINED.

"On a panel or a block of text, you don't want the line length too long," points out Doug Nickrent, a senior exhibit designer at PGAV. "You don't want to confuse them with so much on a wall that they can't organize their participation. With fewer words and more images, you can advance a story without bogging visitors down in too much work. There's a big difference between participation and work."

Audio's another important tool: "It sets a rhythm for the experience," Nickrent says. "If you want to tell a slowly unfolding, emotional story, you'll use different sound cues than if you're building fast to a dramatic climax. Audio's not just music; it can be the pacing of the narration, the narrator's voice, and the sound effects." Designers look for beats, moments when a visitor might naturally notice something, and amplify those moments, using them to reinforce the message and make sure it registers.

You also need physical breaks—spaces where someone can pause and rest, look over her shoulder or into the distance, absorb the experience. But don't let the pace lag overall. Writer Brenda Ueland says, "The secret of being interesting is to move along as fast as the mind of the reader (or listener) can take it in. Both must march along in the same tempo."

Emotion

"Some of the best stories are those that appeal to the sense of wonder."

~Jon Turney

A good storyteller reaches for the emotion in the story and holds it aloft, so it doesn't drown in a sea of facts. Saying "The king died and then the queen died" is merely a plot, novelist E.M. Forster once pointed out. Saying, "The king died and then the queen died of a broken heart"—that's a story.

Cheetah Hunt
Busch Gardens Tampa

HOW DO YOU FIND THE EMOTION?

Look for the universal themes. The emotion will be there. Mine it.

Use fear (not the paralyzing sort, just a tingle); use desire; use humor. Time their placement. At Alpengeist, a runaway ski lift at Busch Gardens Williamsburg, the scary part's pretty serious, so there's a lot of visual comedy thrown in along the way—like skis stuck in roofs—to break the tension.

"Humor is hugely effective in creating the highs and lows of the narrative," says senior designer Jeff Havlik. "Something won't be dramatic unless somewhere else you have given people a chance to breathe."

Surprises help, too, because they spurt a little extra adrenaline into our brain, which helps a memory form and endure. At the Curse of DarKastle dark ride, the startle of the ending that seals mad Ludwig's fate helps guests remember his story for years to come. "The purpose of a surprise at the end," says Paul Smith in Lead With a Story, "is to sear the entire story into your audience's long-term memory."

REMEMBER,
EMOTIONS ARE NOT RATIONAL.

They kick in before we've had time to analyze what's happening to us. They set the stage for what's coming next, prepping the brain and body for action, change, response. As writer Lisa Cron points out in Wired for Story, "the reader expects to feel something, all the time."

"We are living an epic," Nickrent says, talking about one of his favorite projects, the Space Shuttle Atlantis. "Two thousand years from now, just like you and I read Odysseus, people will be talking about the first humans who stepped off the Earth. You can't possibly overstate that."

"One of the main things we do is defend the emotional reason that story exists," he continues. "Our job is to find the thing that keeps that story fresh and relevant. When you delve into the story, that's what you're looking for. And when you find it, you go, 'Aha!' and then you just hold onto it like a bulldog."

Because if you can't hook somebody's heart,
YOU'RE PROBABLY NOT TELLING THE RIGHT STORY.

STORYTIME

"Engagement is a real thing," notes Washington University psychologist Jeffrey Zacks, "and you can measure it physiologically. There are differences between print and film and other media, in how you reach engagement, but the piece that's doing the most work is always the story."

Great Bear Wilderness
Brookfield Zoo

MAKE SURE TO GIVE VISITORS ENOUGH CONTEXT
to understand a story's twists and turns.

"I do not believe in the Suddenly," remarks Wible, "where you are coming around the corner, and suddenly something just happens. That's a hard leap for people to make." Clues need to be seeded well in advance, so even the surprises feel inevitable, once they're sprung.

But that doesn't mean you can't stun your visitors. Awe's the most powerful emotion of all. Confronted with the majesty of the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls, a visitor freezes in her tracks. Her internal clock stops ticking, she forgets her to-do list, and she feels like she has all the time in the world. No longer distracted and divided, she's living entirely in the moment.

AND IT'S A MOMENT SHE'LL NEVER FORGET.

Table Rock Welcome Centre
Niagara Falls Canada

THE MATCHBOOK OF REGRETS

Mark Twain Home & Museum
Hannibal, Missouri

One hot afternoon in Hannibal, MO, a young Samuel Clemens was strolling by the city jail when an inmate called out from behind the bars, "hey, you got a light?" Taking pity on the prisoner, Samuel handed him a box of matches and walked on, enjoying the summer day. The paper the following day was smattered with the news that the latest resident of the city jail had accidentally burned it to the ground. This and other deeply influential stories from the childhood of one of America's most famous authors are evoked through found artifacts as guests stroll the same streets as a young Mark Twain and visit some of the favorite haunts of the riverboat traveler.

Putting It All Together

TELLING THE STORY

A real, live storyteller who knows how to tell a story and has a compelling story to tell? There's nothing better.

As project manager Diane Lochner says: "Our concept for The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center incorporates a black box theater where both professionals and guests can tell stories, because all the technological bells and whistles in the world won't come close to that kind of emotional power."

Storytelling is an art. It requires planning—a careful sequencing of ideas, so the right words flow in the right order. But it also requires a storyteller who's developed a personal style. The teller must find the perfect tone for each point in the story, varying pitch and inflection and pace, changing facial expression, using body language and strategic silences. He or she must seize the audience's attention and keep it, striking a common chord, touching sympathies, leaving the listeners with something new that now belongs to them.

Stories change for the site, too.

So many historic events have taken place at Fort Ticonderoga that every year for seven years, the team interprets a different year. If it's 1755, the French are occupying the fort. So the interpreters wear French period clothing they've made themselves, and they let guests behind the scenes to watch that process. Guests get to peek inside the meta-story, watching the social construction of reality as well as the practical construction of boots and shirts. They get so interested, they call and add information—"Did you know this?" The next time that year's interpreted, it will be fuller, richer, different.

Skilled interpreters command their material, and they tailor it to each audience, letting the story out for an expansive group of fascinated professionals; taking nips and tucks for a wild group of 7-year-old boys.

One story does not fit all audiences.

EXPANDING THE STORY

"What interests me is the democracy of storytelling.
That it goes across genders, it goes across borders,
it goes across boundaries…
You become alive in a body that's not your own."

~Colum McCann

We're in a world where movies can be told from 10 perspectives at once; where people step into virtual worlds at any of a hundred entry points; where we're often left hanging on a cliff. Reality TV shows us splinters of people's lives with no sense of what led up to this moment or what consequences will unfold from it.

Yet the ancient art of storytelling is more crucial than ever.

Thanks to digital technology, narratives can take new forms. The story can be told through many media at once, and it doesn't have to move smoothly and inexorably from beginning through middle to end along a single plotline. It's playful, interactive, and immersive. It uses games and holograms. It integrates technology and story so seamlessly that the technology dissolves, and all anybody pays attention to is the content.

That integration's critical, because today's audiences see behind the curtain. They're quick to mock clumsy or outdated technology.

"The engagement level has changed," notes John Kasman. "Younger generations see storytelling differently, because of their ability to understand all the messaging they're bombarded with every day. That makes us choose more subtle ways. I don't think the answer is always that because there's more around us, we have to be louder. An escape has to be different from your daily life. Sometimes that means it's quieter."

Space Shuttle Atlantis
Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex

At other times, it's richer and more intense, full of interactive touch screens, sound and light, games and physical movement. Three-dimensional video mapping uses a liquid canvas, beaming light from multiple projectors so any surface—a tower, a bridge, a tunnel, a dome, a building façade—can be turned into something altogether different. The video's backdrop can be entirely unexpected. Images flow like water, pooling and dissolving and appearing somewhere else.

THE ACTION MOVES.

Space Shuttle Atlantis
Kennedy Space Center Visitor Complex

That technology works as metaphor, too:

We never know, anymore, where a story's going to emerge. A visitor enters a site and holds up a phone, and that triggers different parts of an exhibit to turn on. Every artifact has a dozen stories connected to it, and now they can all be told. If the visitor waves the phone at a torn and grimy baseball in a display case, she might learn how George Sisler of the long-losing St. Louis Browns broke a Major League Baseball record that stayed broken for 84 years. Or she might learn about the little boy Sisler signed the baseball for all those years ago, and the extraordinary life he had. Or she might learn about the cork and rubber inside the ball, and how the seams are stitched…

Multimedia, which used to mean sounds and words and images, now includes a fourth dimension of sensory experience to enhance the story, and a backdrop of social media to reinforce and spread it. Everything's linked, and while more recent technologies make hypertext look medieval, it's still useful, letting people click their own path through branching information and share the bits that resonate.

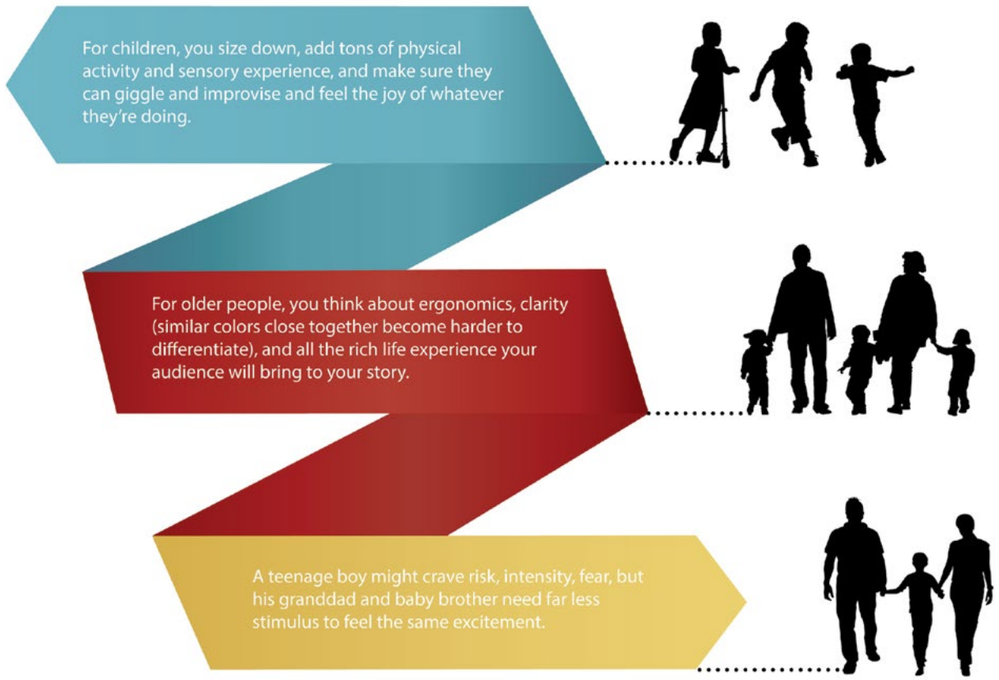
CHANGING THE STORY

"Use the time of a total stranger in such a way that he or she will not feel the time was wasted."

~Kurt Vonnegut

Theme parks and zoos and museums are some of the last places on Earth with general audiences. These aren't niche destinations. You have to make sure everybody enjoys them together. But that doesn't mean the experience has to be the same for each person.

It gets easier every day to tailor stories to particular audiences, customizing and personalizing the experience.



SeaWorld Aquatica
Orlando, Florida

"That's a real challenge in a destination you want to be broadly appealing," notes Owen. "You might skew one experience in a certain direction, promote it as more intense than the others. That's a built-in flag—and sometimes the warning sign also serves to hype the attraction."

Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin
SeaWorld Orlando, Florida

WITH NEW SENSING TECHNOLOGY, rides can even be modified by situation.

"The theme park can know who you are as you walk through the gate," says Wible. "You'll be asked whether you want the more thrilling ride (higher Gs; we crank the motion base up) or the less thrilling ride, the one that doesn't come as close to the sharp pointy objects."

A dark ride can lower the volume and raise the lights for passengers with autism. An exhibit's context can change for a group of homeschoolers. Infrared sensors can detect a visitor's presence and turn on embedded codes in an exhibit according to his preferences. Invisible intelligence even lets aspects of the narrative change, as the individual interacts with a wireless sensing network that's talking back to him.

Soon the trick won't be customizing the experience but finding new ways to learn about that guest and surprise them afresh with every visit. And once a connection's made, it can stay alive long after guests leave the destination.

"People care about the big messages in the world," says Vice President John Kemper. "They care about conservation and connecting to animals, and they want to do things that matter. If you can connect to that impulse, and to the authenticity those animals or issues represent, it helps advance your story."

LIVE A LEGEND

Journey To Atlantis
Seaworld Orlando Florida

The legendary Lost City of Atlantis has risen amongst an ancient Greek village. A charming fisherman, magical golden seahorse, treacherous sirens, and sea hags wage an aquatic battle throughout the city. Riders are immersed in spectacular special effects and aquatic surprises along their flume ride until they plummet from the city on one of the steepest, fastest, and wettest drops to be found. But the adventure doesn't end. Unseen forces pull riders back to the mystical city only to send them blindly careening down a hidden serpentine roller coaster drop to a breathtaking splash into the water surrounding Atlantis.

Tell Me Another!

Once you tell a story, the world has changed, because that story's part of it now. Somebody might tell a story that refers to your story, or rewrite its ending, or reach a new insight your story made possible.

A STORY IS BIGGER THAN ITSELF.

At PGAV, we know we're telling stories not just for our clients, but in the service of much larger ideas and dreams. The survival of a species. Equality and social justice. The preservation of truth. The safeguarding of the future.

Ask architect Dave Myers: "The Atlantis attraction's real mission is to inspire the next generation of space travelers."

"Turtle Trek is a story with a sense of purpose, a call to action," says John Kasman, "and I think that's why it sticks in people's heads. When you build in those messages, you're giving people the opportunity to use the story. You're arming them to be advocates."

"THAT'S WHY WE GO TO DESTINATIONS.
WE GO TO LEARN ABOUT THE WORLD,
and when we do,
IT CHANGES US FOREVER."

Carol Breeze
Senior Designer

EXPERIENCING ELEGANCE

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