



Storytelling Now listen here, buddy

First person Anyone can learn to tell a tale so that the world listens, says Pixar story consultant **Bobette Buster**

The psychologists Marshall Duke and Robyn Fivush of Emory University carried out a study in 2010 called "Do You Know?" in which it was revealed that the single best predictor of a child's emotional health and happiness was story. The more a child knows the story of their family, the stronger his sense of control over his life.

So here is my story. I grew up in Kentucky, a region renowned for its great storytellers, when storytelling was the entertainment of the day. Everyone from the shopkeeper,

farmer and pastor had a story to tell. More to the point, they had to tell it. Then in the early 1980s, the US Library of Congress asked people to capture the native American art form of oral history before it was lost. I began to interview my elders, and found myself on a journey of time travel, carried by the lyricisms and witticisms of stories from the remote Appalachian hillsides. Once my interviews were safe in the archives of the Kentucky Museum, I headed for Hollywood where I found my own tribe.

Everyone has a story to tell, and everyone can learn to tell it well. My first book, *Do Story*, is based on my 20-year career in Hollywood – working with Pixar, Disney and Sony Animation, as well as directors such as Tony Scott (*Top Gun*) and screenwriters such as Larry Gelbart (*Tootsie*) – plus the work

I've done with my cinema students at the University of Southern California, and around the world. I connect people to their voice, to what it is they want to say. I help reveal the story behind the story.

One of the 10 fundamental principles of storytelling is "Tell your story as if to a friend", as illustrated in the film *The King's Speech* (2010). Just before the stammering George VI delivers his Declaration of War speech, his therapist Lionel Logue advises: "Speak to me as a friend." In the same way, you must make your story personal. The audience only wants to connect.

Another key concept is juxtaposition: the process of distilling your story to two colliding ideas. All of Pixar's blockbusters employ this powerful storytelling device. *Toy Story 2* (1999), for example, juxtaposes Woody and Buzz Lightyear to ask: "What are we worth?" Woody might get millions as a collectors' item, but Buzz is stacked up a dime-a-dozen. By the end of the film we see that worth is better measured by our love.

Last year I was brought in as a story consultant to the Disney Channel on a new series called *Sofia the First*, for children aged two to five, about an ordinary girl on the poor side of town who becomes a royal princess when her mother marries the king.

To distinguish Sofia from Disney's other princesses, I advised them to make her "un-princessy". She could be a new role model to children, her message that "we're all royal inside". I advised the team to create cross-over events such as when the