STORY DETOURS

52 Interventions to Change the Story

Story Detours are simple instructions meant to help in moving creative strategic thinking off our well-worn tracks.

Having trouble with your strategy?

Feel like you've been telling the same story for too long, without enough impact?

Have a strategy, but stuck on how to tell the story?

Draw a Detour card when you're stuck crafting a story-based strategy, and follow the instructions to experiment and give your imagination a different route to take.

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It's hiding in plain sight

Remove a central visual element, while making it clear that it has been removed and is now absent.

Rearrange the chapters

Challenge an underlying assumption by changing the order of events in the story.

Manipulate the metaphor

Stories use metaphors to show and not just tell the details of an issue. Identify one metaphor in the story, and swap it out for a new one.

Add something invisible

Shine an extra bring light on an aspect of the opposition's (or status quo's story) that they are trying to hide or ignore. Reveal just how important it really is.

Make the impossible possible

What needs to change about the current story, such that your goal is now possible?

Change history

Underlying assumptions often rest on a particular reading of history. Consider how else you could tell the story by looking at a different historical perspective.

Stay quiet

Expose that secrets are being kept.

What would mars think?

How would beings on another planet see it?

Anything IS possible

Remove all thoughts of impossibility and restriction. What is your wildest dream?

Imagine.

Take Action.

Repeat.

It's not important

Make the least important point the most important.

Introduce a new character

Who would that underlying assumption be, if it were brought to life?

Or what if a location was personified ?

Add that character to the story.

Get dirty

Introduce a filthy environment to the story. Or expose how 'clean' something is as a possible cover up to something 'dirty.'

What's your body say?

Consider what part of your body is effected the most by this issue. Turn it in to a character!

The Breakup

Show the end of a vital relationship and all the details of what follows.

Make the invisible visible

Identify assumptions about one of the characters in the story. Add or change imagery or words that challenge those assumptions.

Make the invisible visible

Choose a character in the existing story to remove visually, but retain their presence through dialog, visual implication, or other hints.

Change the identity of one or more of the characters

Take a character and change something central about their identity to see if it changes the story (age, sex, gender, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, geographic location, hair length, health/illness, accessibility, language, education level, height, class status, employment, etc.).

Make them an expert

Choose one character who is being portrayed as lacking expertise (or is never shown as an expert). Make that character an expert, in a way that either challenges an existing underlying assumption or champions a new assumption.

Bring it to life!

Personify an object or a location and add them to the story.

Not them

Who wouldn't you ask to be a spokesperson?

Consider bringing them in.

Trade actions, not places

Describe the literal actions of the characters in the story (use verbs). Now tell a story where all the characters are now doing the actions that one of the other characters was doing.

Sticks & Stones

Use name calling to exaggerate the characteristics of a character. (ie, butthead, village idiot, thief, liar with pants on fire, monster, superhero, savior, etc.)

Change the hero

Same goals, different villain.

Victim Unbound

Make the casted victim the hero. Or consider casting the villain as a possible hero.

New opposition roster, new name

Introduce a new character and cast them to the villain corner. What is hit group of villains called now?

Divide to conquer

Redefine the villain by breaking the villain corner apart and selecting one character to be the new super villain.

Reinforcements!

Add one or more characters to the hero corner. Now name that new coalition, and adjust the rest of the story accordingly.

Collateral Damage

Consider characters in the story who are indirectly effected by the actions of the villain(s) and add bring them into the frame of the story.

Faker

Laser focus on exposing the falsehoods.

Highlight the differences

Emphasize just how different the various perspectives on the issue are.

Introduce a super-villain

Look at the characters in your story whom you've casted as villains. What 'super human' like powers do they seem to have?

Make the future bright/dark

Change aspects of the story necessary to change the foreshadowing. (If the current story foreshadows a positive ending, switch things up to make it negative and vice-a-versa.)

The future is now

Tell the story as if someone from the future has returned to the past. What would they say and do? What kind of emotions would they convey?

Impossible future

What is the most impossible positive ending to your story? Imagine that it is possible and create a story with this change at the center and the start.

Past as prologue

Rearrange the sequence of events in the story to echo a well-known historic story or event.

Just kidding

Think of a story that has nothing to do with the one you are trying to tell. Consider how could you connect the two unconnected stories to broaden your support. For example your subject line, post header, tweet is about how a particular city is horrible to vacation in but really the story is about how great the area is for living in. Think 'click bait'.

The Butterfly Effect

Add something to the BEGINNING of the story, that drastically changes the events that follow in the story.

Clean it up

Sketch out your story in 4 boxes. Then take an eraser and/or white out and see how the story changes when you take parts of the story out.

There are no mistakes

Look back at your 'mistakes' and check to see if there are actually opportunities there.

Child's play

How would a 5-year-old talk about this? Find one and tell them the story and then ask them to tell it back to you.

The old switcheroo

Change the tool or weapon being used by a character. Consider how your replacement image combines with what your audience already understands about the rest of the story, to produce a new message.

Let's get out of here

Change the setting in which the story is taking place but don't change anything else about the story. Where does your new story need to take place in order to really attract your audience.

Imagine it as a commercial

Focus on the highlights of the story and tell it in 4 main points.

Intermission time

Add a scene, vignette, or intermission to the story that connects it to other issues that may help broaden the audience.

Zoom in

Choose one small part of the existing story to focus on, expand and flesh out.

Zoom out

Widen the frame so that the existing story is now a smaller part of a larger story.

Loop it!

Introduce repetition to emphasize particular parts of the story or to help explain the cyclical nature of the issue at the center of the story.

If we were ants

Play with scale and make large items so big that the people carrying them look like ants on the ground.

The GIFs of life

What are the words or phrases that explain the main issue(s) in your story. Make a list of those words and/or phrases and then look them up on gipy.com. How can you incorporate what you find into the story you are trying to tell.

Laser Focus. Victim casted characters only.

Deliberately leave out the heroes and villains.

Walk it out

Go outside and go for a walk to consider how you could bring the outside in.