



Hollywood Storylines for Nonprofit Crowdfunding



About CauseVox

CauseVox is a crowdfunding and peer-to-peer fundraising platform for nonprofits and social good projects.

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The 6 Classic Hollywood Storylines	5
Overcoming the Monster	9
Rags to Riches	12
The Quest	15
Voyage and Return	18
Rebirth	21
Tragedy	24
Wait, There's More!	27
The Classic Story Arc	28
Choose Your Own Adventure	30
Use CauseVox For Storytelling	32

With so many messages competing for our attention on so many mediums, the burden is on you, more than ever, to create unique and compelling content and new ways to tell stories.

But for many nonprofits, the term “storytelling” induces a slight panic attack. Here are some of the most common reasons why:

“We don’t have a big enough staff or budget.”

“Our cause isn’t sexy. People don’t get what we do.”

“But we already send emails to our list and have a blog.”

“Storytelling is not really our thing.”

We totally get that many nonprofits already face lots of challenges in fundraising and capacity. But storytelling *should* be everyone’s “thing,” you don’t need a huge staff or budget, and you don’t need a hot issue to make a connection.

What you do need is an imagination, a willingness to experiment, and a well-stocked Netflix queue for inspiration. Think about some of your favorite movies and TV shows – the ones you watch again and again, that you binge-watch on weekends, and repeatedly refer to in everyday conversation.

There's a reason shows like *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* become a part of the cultural zeitgeist, and why movies like *The Wizard of Oz* and *Field of Dreams* resonate decades later: they use classic storylines that have been around for thousands of years, and appear in every form of storytelling since the beginning of time, from mythology and fairy tales, to documentaries and detective shows.

“A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species Homo sapiens; second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to narrative, and the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives, from the small accounts of our day’s events to the vast incommunicable constructs of psychopaths.”

- Reynolds Price

This eBook will explore these classic storylines and how they can be applied to your own campaigns, and you'll see soon enough that you may have a Cinderella story on your hands. Pass the popcorn!

The 6 Classic Hollywood Storylines



Once upon a time...

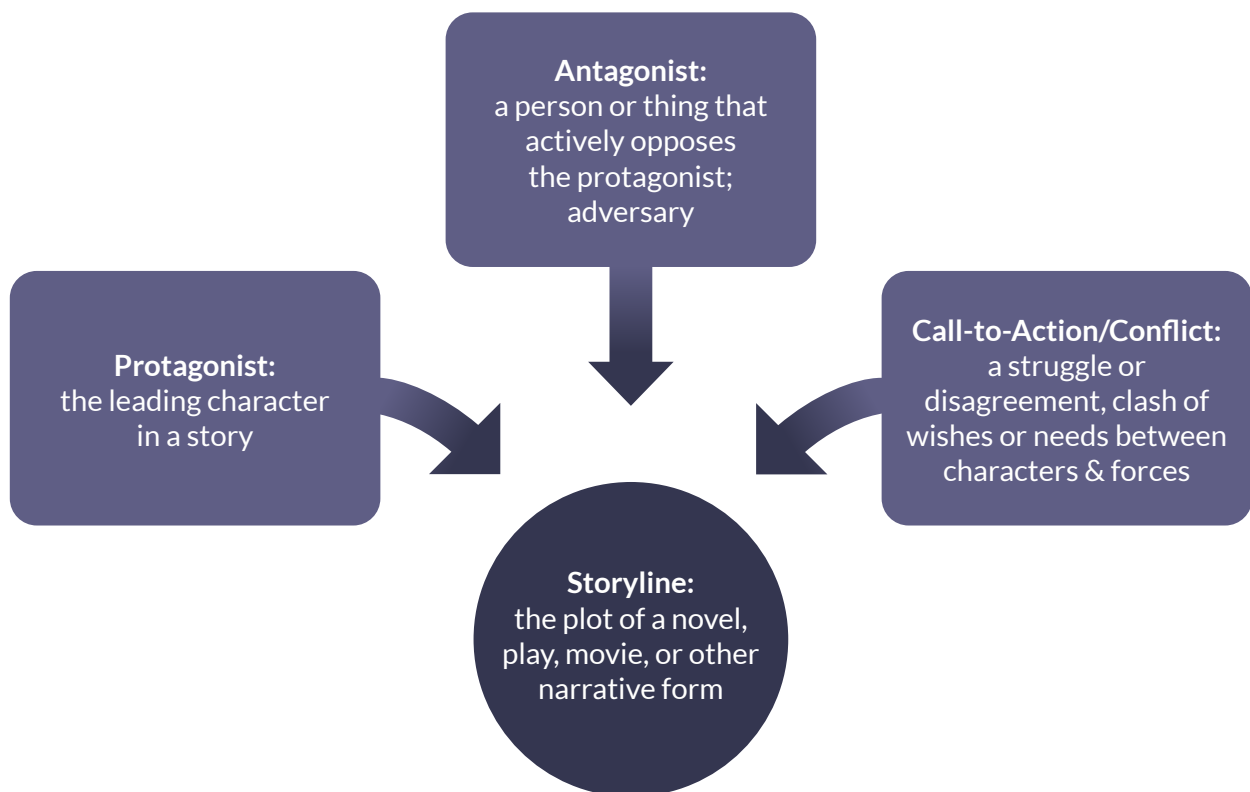
According to Christopher Booker, author of [The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories](#), every story in film, literature, and mythology throughout time is based on one of seven plotlines.

The Odyssey, *Star Wars*, *Batman*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Gravity*, *12 Years a Slave*, and *Breaking Bad* are all just different Hollywood versions of these classic storylines, each with a hero or heroine on a journey, overcoming obstacles and dark forces. While comedy is one of seven very important plotlines in Hollywood, this book will focus on the six that make for great nonprofit storytelling.

So if you're in a communications rut, it's time to let your imagination take over, your inner child resurface, and revisit the fundamentals of a good story. You still believe in fairy tales, right?

Storytelling 101

Unless you write for fun in your spare time, it may have been awhile since you sat down to write a real story. But don't be so quick to brush it off as just whipping something together with a beginning, middle, and end. Here's a refresher of basic story elements to get you started:



The 6 Plot Types

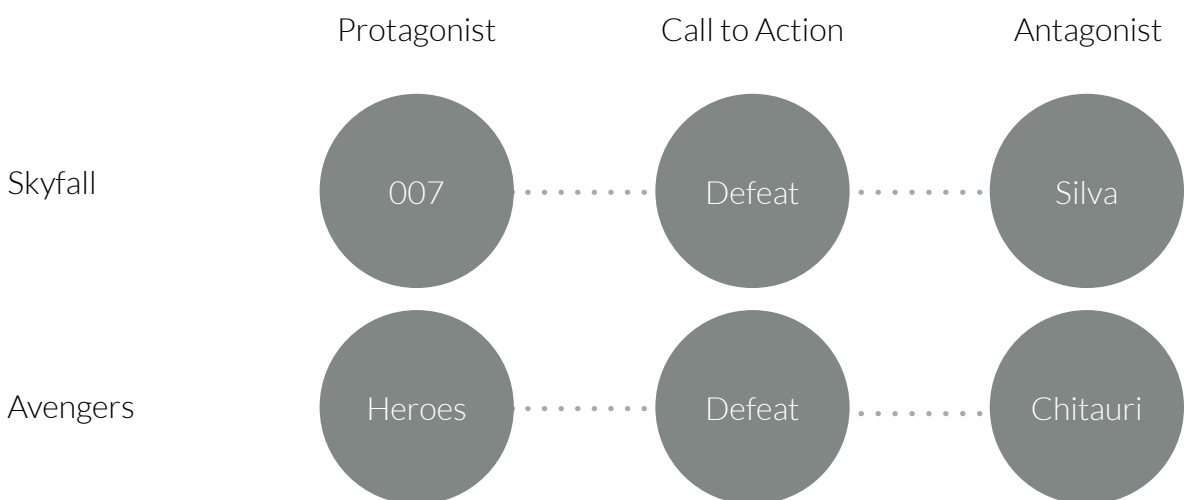


Overcoming the Monster

In this storyline, the protagonist sets out to defeat a deadly force or antagonist that threatens him or his home and community.

You've seen this in movies and shows like James Bond and *The Avengers*. Let's break down the story into its core components:

Hollywood Storyline Elements

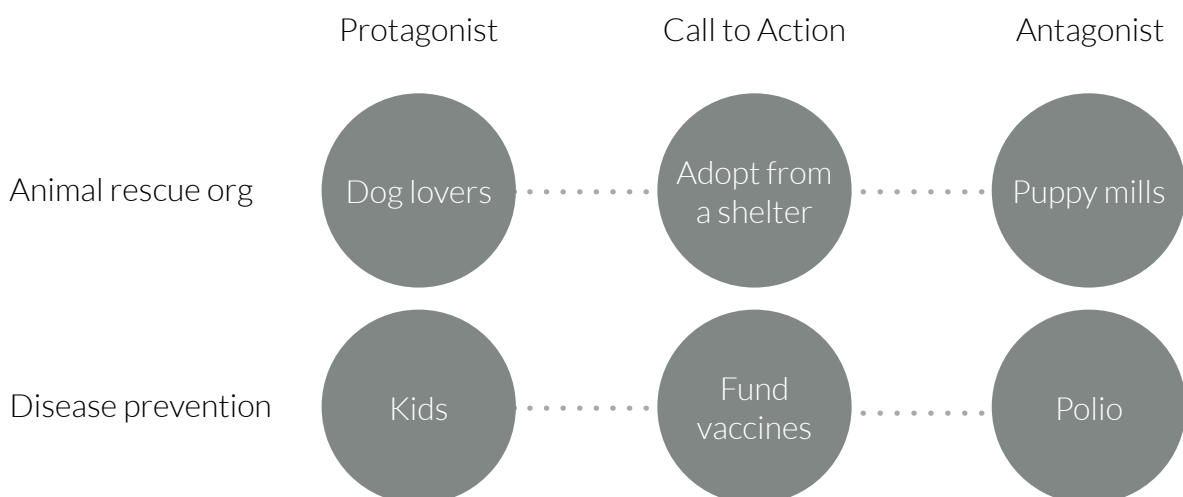


Overcoming the Monster

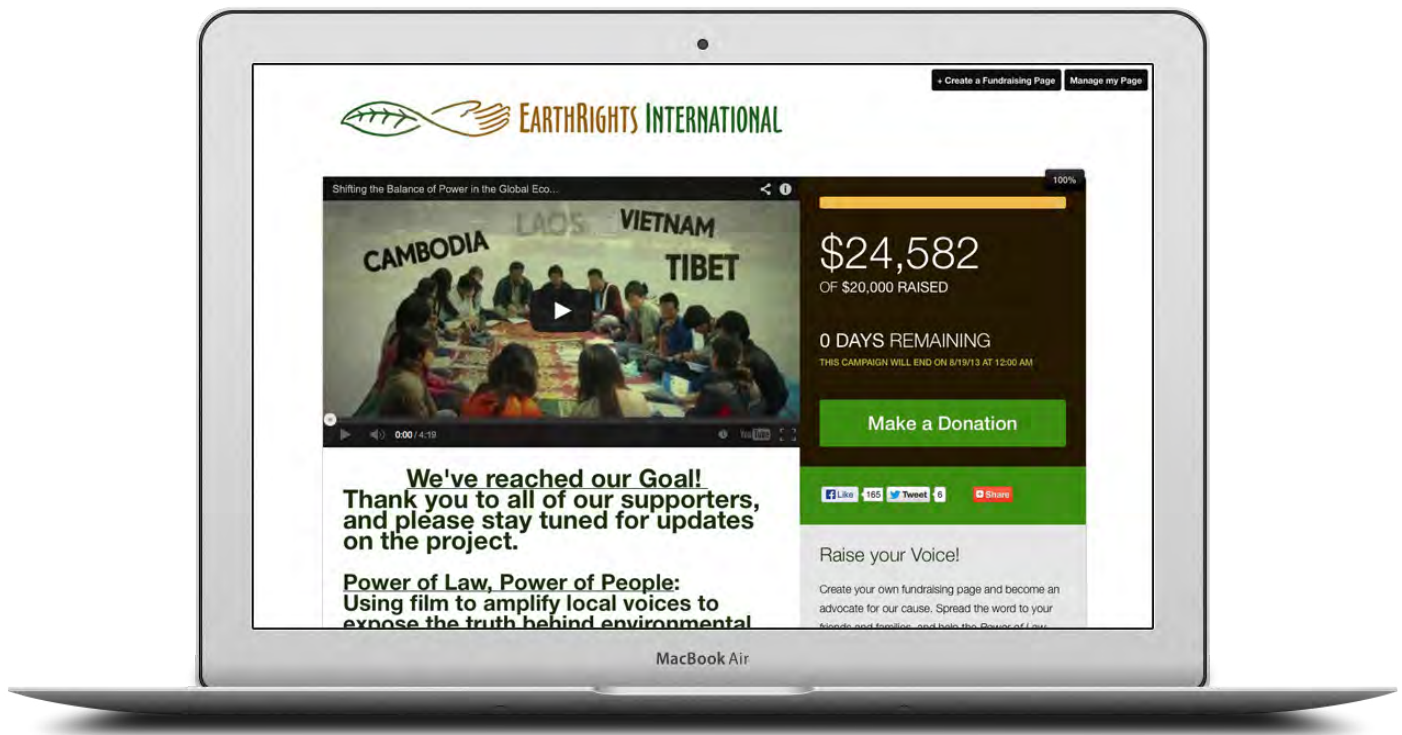
Each movie has a protagonist or **protagonists – the good guys**. And each is given a **call-to-action**, which is to defeat the **antagonist – the bad guy**. Most stories using this plot follow this very basic story arc, with the protagonist as the victor at the end, but after a close brush with death.

In nonprofit storytelling, overcoming the monster is also a popular and easy theme, because the very nature of social causes is to defeat a force that keeps the world from being a better place. The monster, or antagonist, can be everything from deadly diseases and animal poachers to child soldier recruiters (Kony) and big oil companies.

Nonprofit Storyline Elements



CauseVox Crowdfunding Example



[Earthrights International](#) (our protagonist) set up their first crowdfunding campaign on CauseVox and raised nearly \$25,000 in just a couple of months to fund their documentary film series (call-to-action) to fight corporate human rights abusers (antagonist).

Ideas in action

- ▶ Embrace the idea that you're the **underdog**, people love an underdog!
- ▶ Juxtapose before and after scenes in video or through photos and illustrations to show a theory of change with good defeating "evil".
- ▶ Rally supporters to realistically defeat an "**enemy**" or imposing threat like illness or hunger through legislation, funds, or programming.

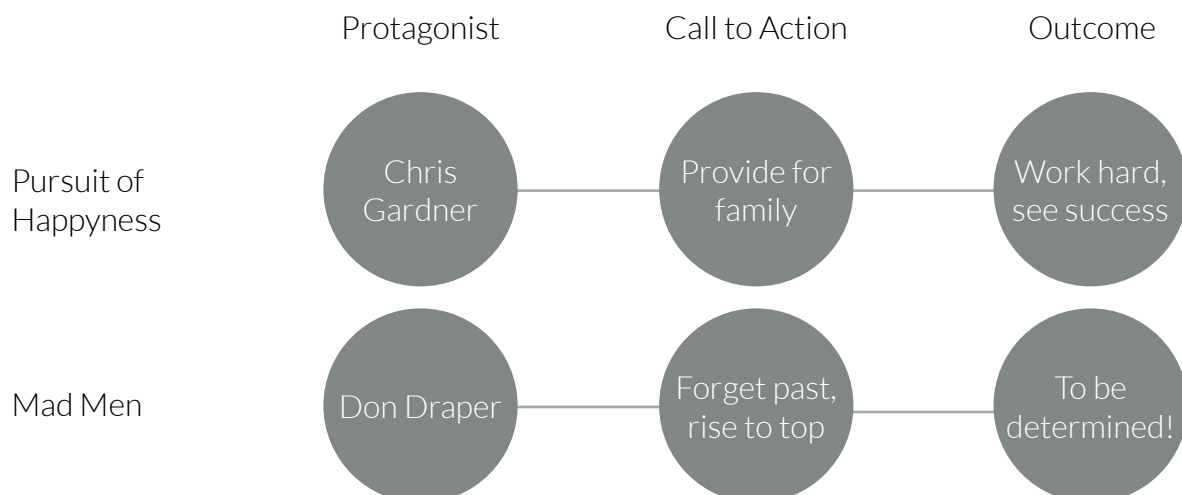


Rags to Riches

Our protagonist starts out as poor and downtrodden, but rises in the world through wealth, status, love, and more. The journey may include momentary loss of it all yet a hero grows up because of it.

You've seen this plot in *Cinderella*, Don Draper in *Mad Men*, and *Slumdog Millionaire*. Here's the breakdown:

Hollywood Storyline Elements



Rags to Riches

We've got a protagonist trying to rise in the world, and in this case, both involve making money to provide for a new lifestyle. The *Pursuit of Happiness*, which is based on a true story, our hero lands a great job and provides for his son. But in *Mad Men*, Don Draper's rise in the ad world and his temporary happiness at home are threatening to disappear as his past continues to haunt him.

In the real world, we've seen great rags to riches stories in Detroit's comeback after bankruptcy, and homeless people finding a new purpose and success through organizations like Back On My Feet and Dress for Success.

Nonprofit Storyline Elements



CauseVox Crowdfunding Example



[Project Renewal \(PR\)](#) raised more than \$77,000 to help provide 1,475 nights of shelter for New York City’s homeless population. And that was just the start of a journey to a better life.

Ideas in action

- ▶ Show the **journey to success** and growth for one of your cause’s celebrity champions or advocates.
- ▶ Use first-person essays or StoryCorps-style audio features.



The Quest

One of the most popular story plots in film, mythology, and literature – a protagonist and companions set out to acquire an important object or reach a destination, encountering perils and obstacles along the way.

Quests are in many of the most beloved films and TV shows, like *Star Wars*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Lord of the Rings*. Here’s how it works:

Hollywood Storyline Elements



The Quest

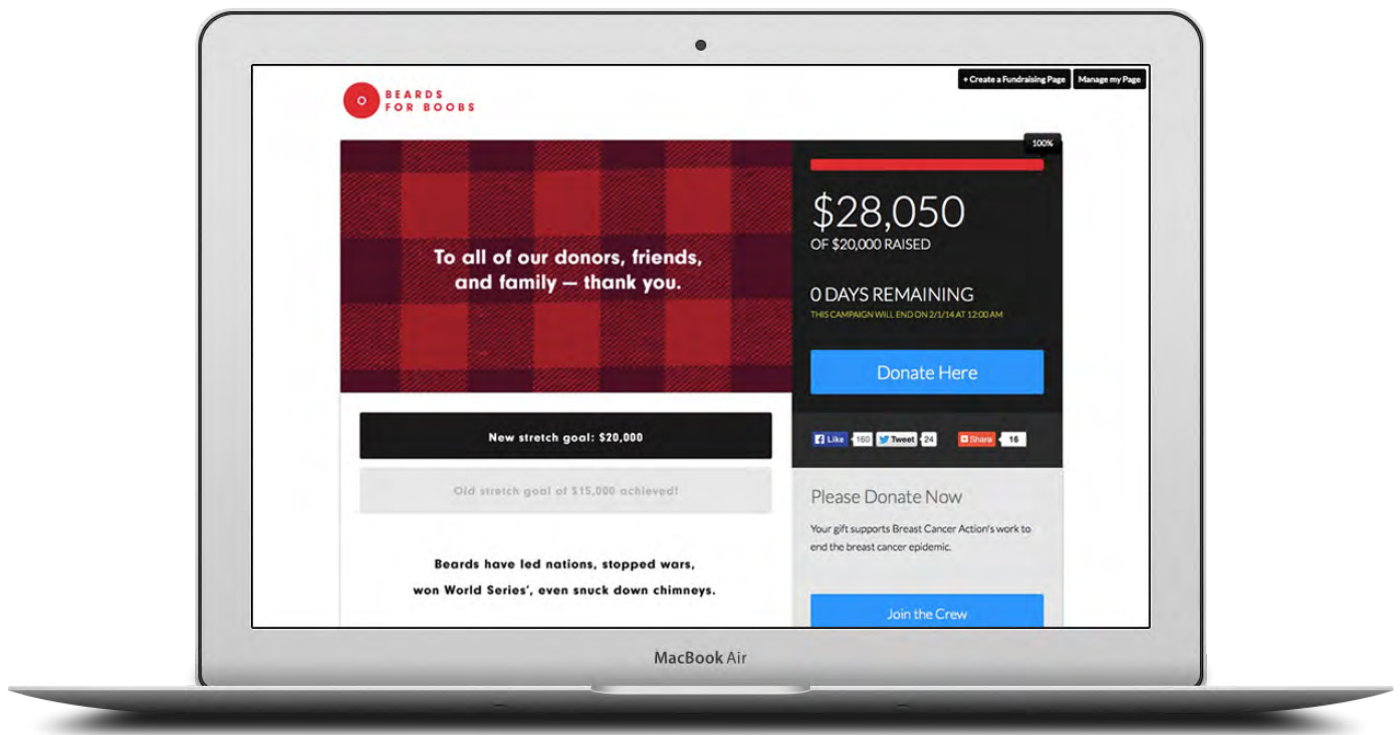
These examples may appear to be very different, but they each have the same basic elements: characters have a call-to-action or adventure to win something, and along the way, they have obstacles, challenges, assistance from others, and must battle against adversaries.

Back to reality: Christopher Columbus faced dangers on his journey to the New World, and NASA astronauts went to the moon and back. All nonprofits are on a quest to solve a pressing problem, or to **achieve something great** – and all need the help of companions (supporters) to reach the final destination.

Nonprofit Storyline Elements



CauseVox Crowdfunding Example



[Beards for Boobs](#) raised \$28,000 to support young men growing beards in the month of November to support breast cancer research. We loved that the guys showed their support for women, and that women supported their beard-growing. Granted, a quest to grow a beard may not sound particularly challenging, but we hear it is for some guys out there. ;)

Ideas in action

- ▶ Think of your mission as a quest, and **map out the journey** (literally: make a map!), recruit companions (partners, supporters), and stock up on supplies.
- ▶ Encourage supporters to use **personal fundraising pages** as a diary of their crowdfunding mission.

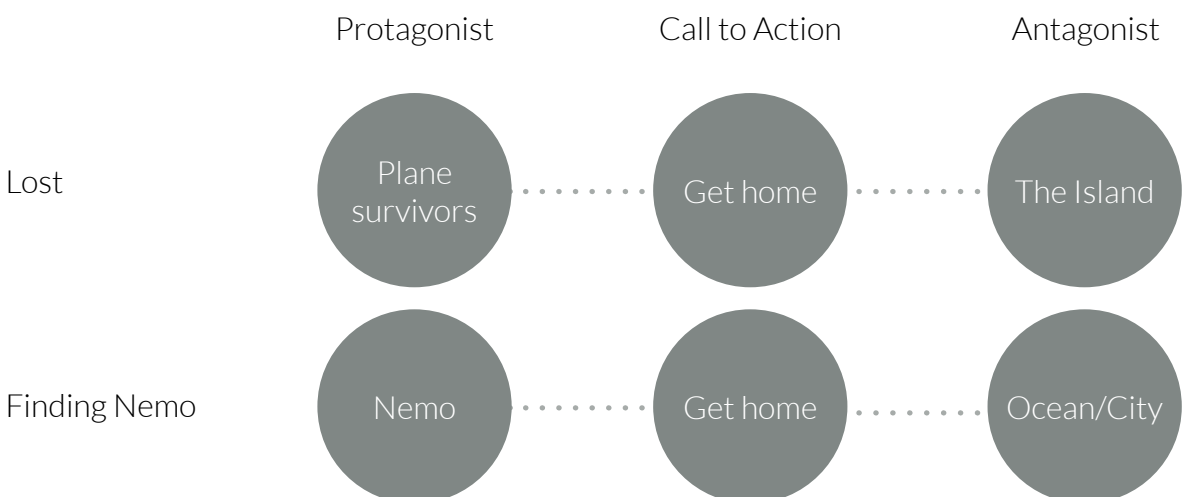


Voyage and Return

This storyline is so similar to voyage and return, that some films could essentially be swapped to fit both. But here, the protagonist is thrust into a strange land and encounters obstacles along the way, before finding his way home.

You're watching a voyage and return in *Alice in Wonderland*, *Cast Away*, and *Lost*.

Hollywood Storyline Elements



Voyage and Return

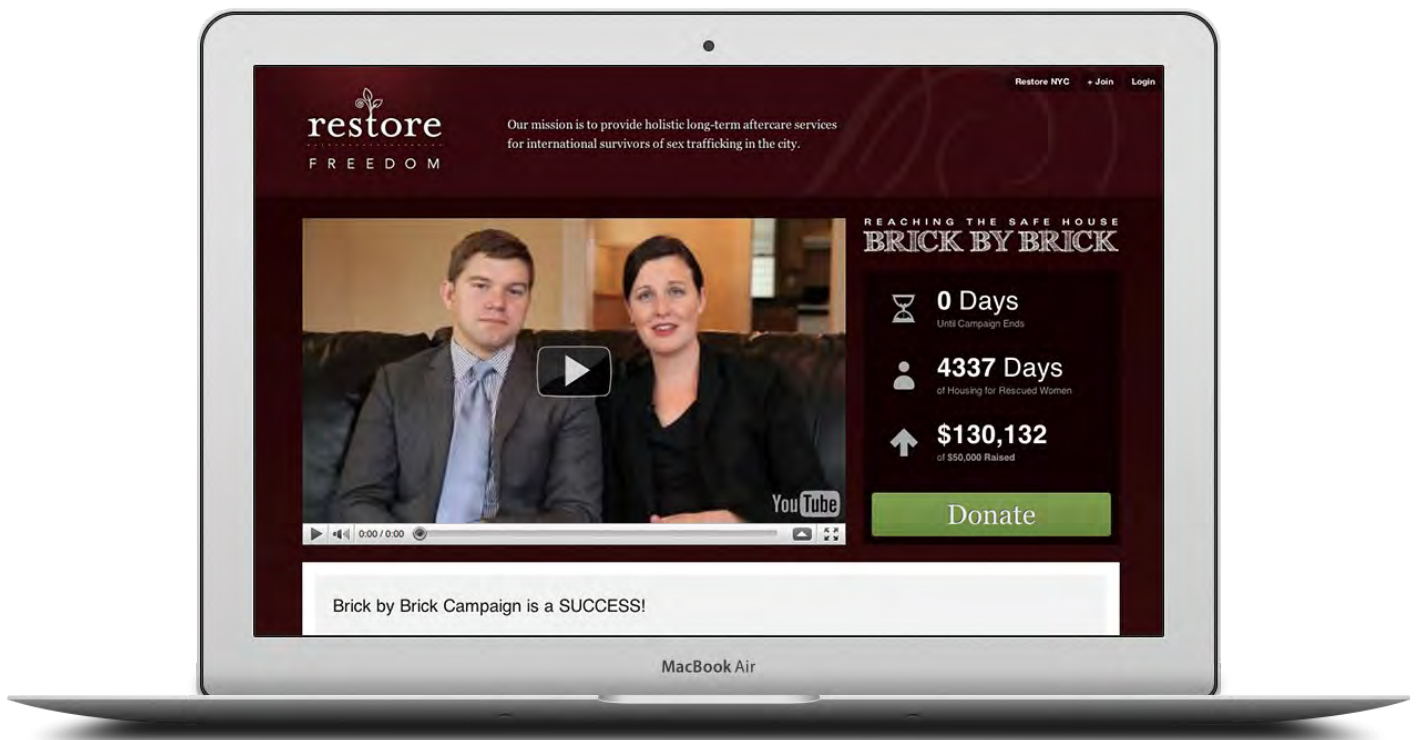
In both of these examples, the protagonists aren't looking to bring home a prize or reach another destination – they somehow got **pulled away from home** and are looking to return, encountering various adventures along the way, and growing from it.

For nonprofits, this story appears in drug addiction and recovery journeys, and soldiers returning home from conflict: our protagonists must **learn to live a normal life again** after experiencing trauma, mentally, physically, or emotionally in an alternate world.

Nonprofit Storyline Elements



CauseVox Crowdfunding Example



Restore raised \$130,000 in their [Brick By Brick campaign](#) to launch and operate a safehouse for victims of sex trafficking. The organization also provides holistic long-term care for survivors, helping them to readjust to life out of the shadows, and out of danger.

Ideas in action

- ▶ Create **diary-style blog posts** (video or written) from the people you're supporting.
- ▶ Live tweet a journey or event.
- ▶ Have a **welcome home/celebration party** at the end of a campaign.



Rebirth

In another popular storyline, the main character(s) has an inner transformation that leads to a new perspective on life.

One of the most classic versions of this plot is *It's a Wonderful Life*. You will also recognize transformation for good in *Remember the Titans* when the winning football team unites a newly integrated school in Virginia.

Hollywood Storyline Elements

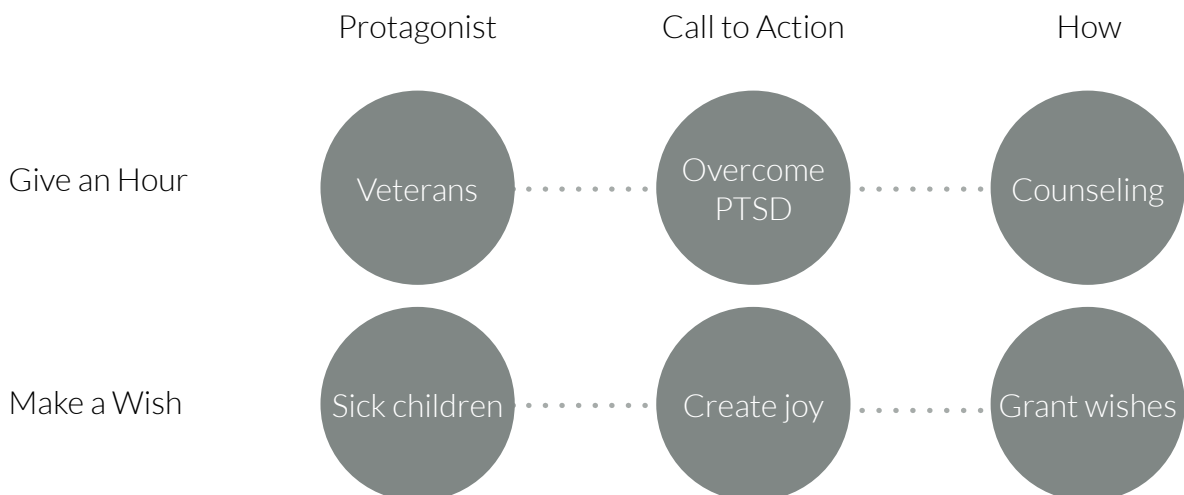


Rebirth

In Dickens' classic, Scrooge has a major transformation from a miserly old man to a generous godfather figure with the help of three ghosts of Christmas. And in *Invictus*, Nelson Mandela works towards goodwill in post-apartheid South Africa through a rugby team rising to the challenge.

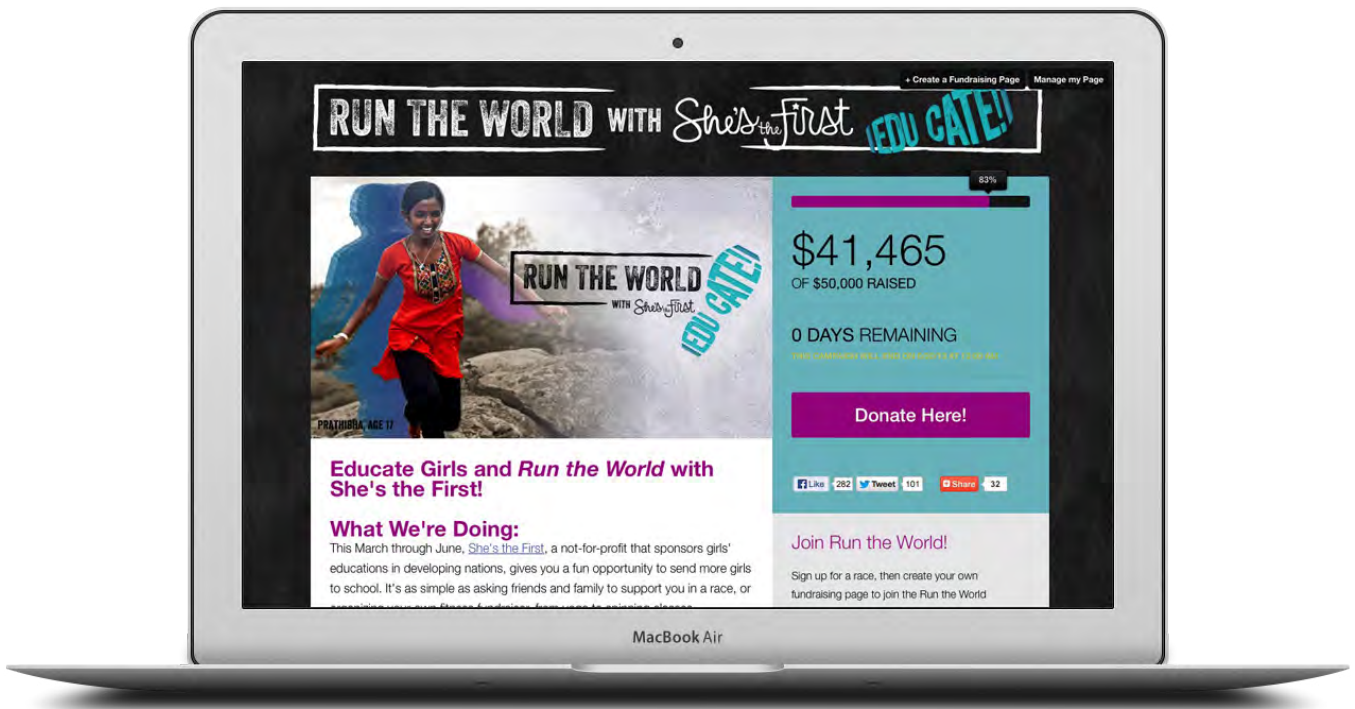
Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is an organization that is all about rebirth, by helping people overcome addiction. And Project Rebirth was created after September 11th to help first responders and victims deal with their grief and move forward.

Nonprofit Storyline Elements



In these two nonprofit examples, the organizations help veterans and sick children have a different kind of life, by counseling and granting wishes, respectively. The veterans work towards creating a more stable emotional state, and the children get to experience things that they thought otherwise impossible because of their illness.

CauseVox Crowdfunding Example



In 2013, She's the First used CauseVox to raise more than \$40,000 for their [Run the World](#) crowdfunding campaign – linking fitness to their mission of helping girls in developing countries become the first in their family to graduate from secondary school. By completing their education, these young women open many more doors and have more opportunities to follow their dreams.

Ideas in action

- ▶ **Flashback videos** or tweeting past events as if they were today.
- ▶ Q&A interviews before and after with someone going through a “rebirth” process.
- ▶ Letters to my former/future self.
- ▶ An **interactive timeline** of milestones and achievements.

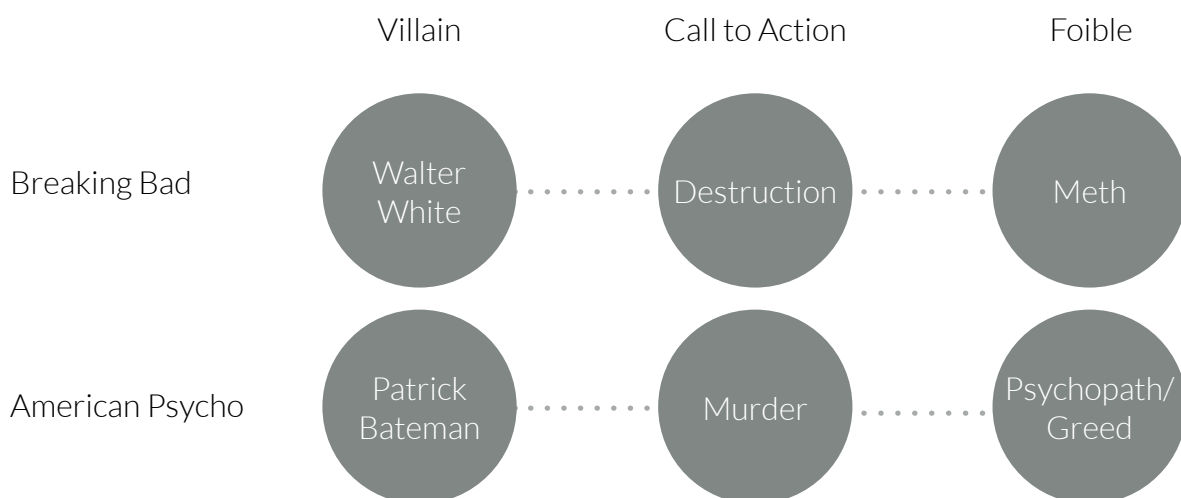


Tragedy

In a tragedy, our protagonist is actually more of a villain who delves deeper into darkness and human foibles before **ultimately falling too far**, and often dying.

Tragedy isn't just for Shakespeare – fans of *The Godfather* or *Dexter* will recognize the hero's journey into despair.

Hollywood Storyline Elements

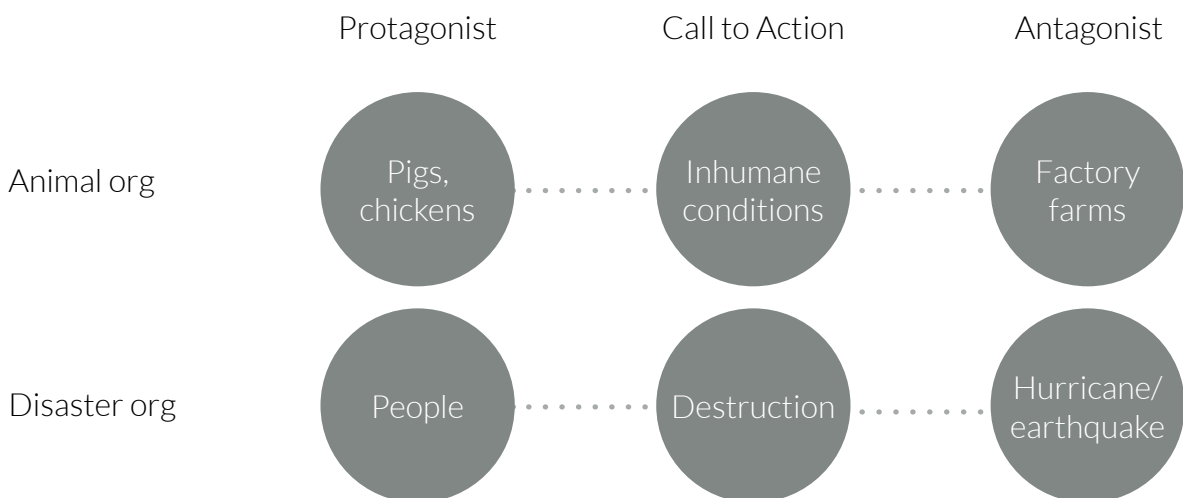


Tragedy

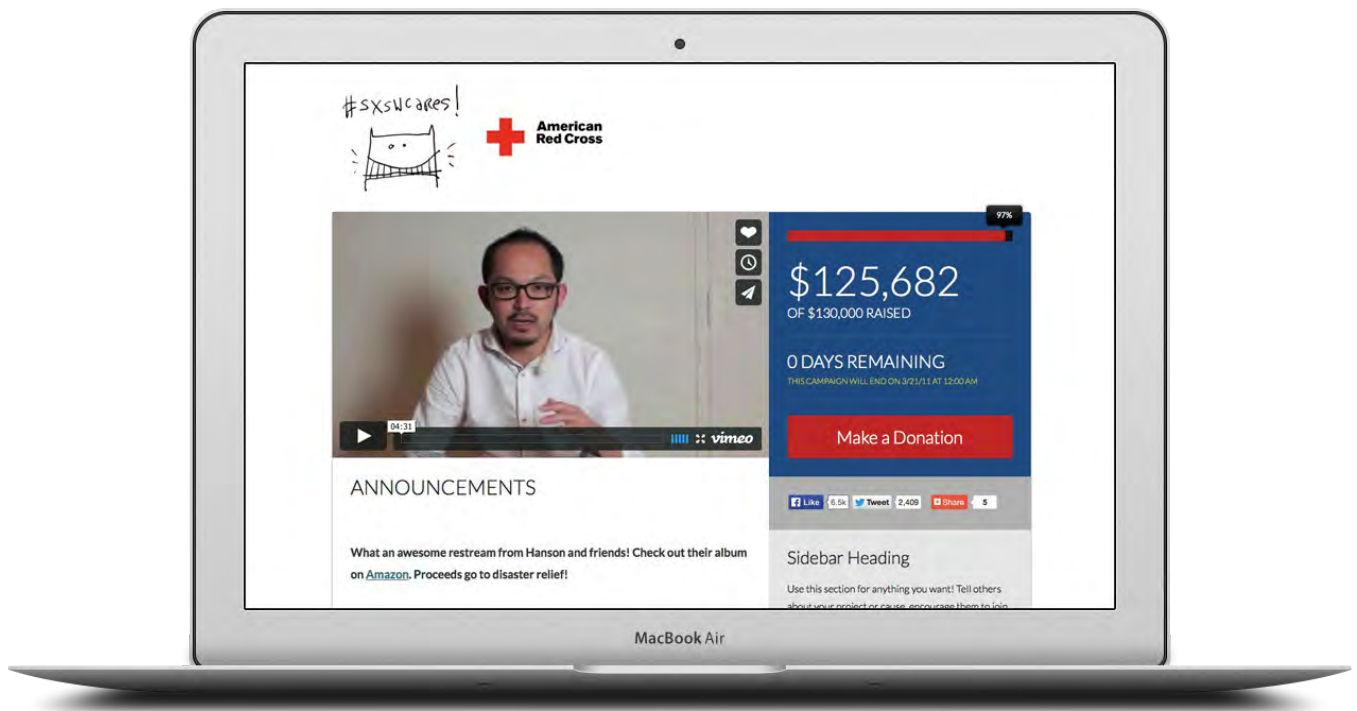
In one of today's most watched shows, *Breaking Bad* epitomizes the tragic hero, who starts out good, but goes to the dark side, bringing down others with him. *American Psycho* is a great example of how materialism and a psychopathic nature leads the protagonist on a downward spiral.

Similar to overcoming the monster, the villain in social causes is usually **disease, nature, poverty, or some other antagonistic force**. For years, ASPCA and Children International have been using tragedy-based storytelling to motivate donors. Perhaps it all started with those Sally Struthers ChildFund commercials.

Nonprofit Storyline Elements



CauseVox Crowdfunding Example



After a devastating tsunami hit Japan in 2011, CauseVox worked with [SXSWCares](#) to rally attendees of the conference to raise more than \$125,000 for the American Red Cross in just 10 days.

Ideas in action

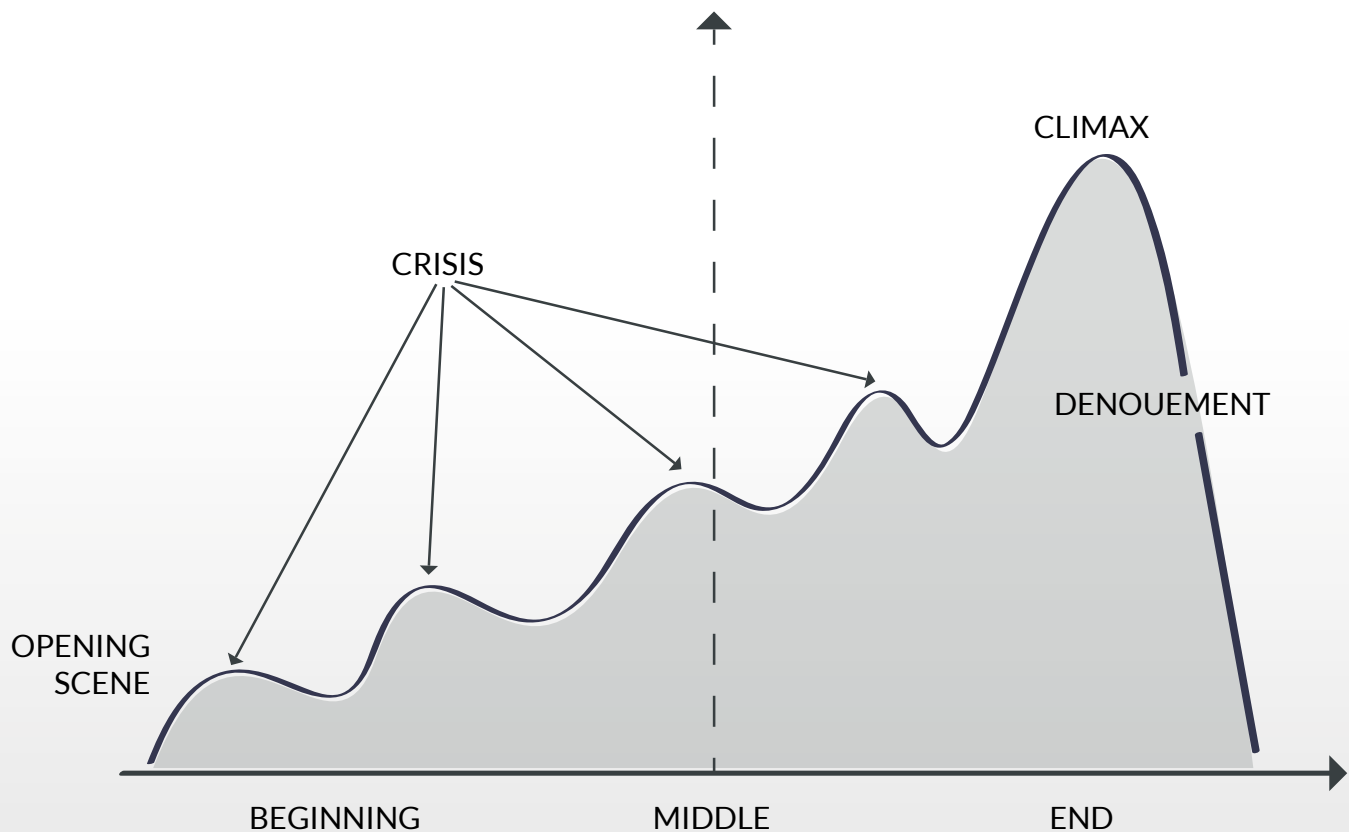
- ▶ Tread lightly with sad and dark storytelling to avoid the dreaded “**poverty or charity porn.**”
- ▶ Be strategic with imagery and personal stories to make a point and show what happens if you DON'T make progress on your mission.

Wait, there's more!

The seventh official storyline is comedy, but after doing quite a bit of research, we realized that it hasn't quite found its place in nonprofit storytelling like the other plots. That being said, more causes are using humor in their marketing and communications, bringing a light-hearted feel to an industry that has traditionally been known to be more serious in nature. Here are a few to check out:

- ▶ Malaria No More's "[Comedy Fights Malaria](#)" streaming event.
- ▶ Audubon California's "[Stupid Bird Humor](#)".
- ▶ Metro PSAs in Melbourne, Australia: [Dumb Ways to Die](#).

The Classic Story Arc



You may have noticed that the basic plots share a lot of the same elements: a protagonist fights evil forces, companions and mentors help along the way, and a triumphant return home or to a true self. That's because most stories played out in folklore and film follow a classic story arc, which brings us back to our **beginning, middle, and end – or three acts.**

Despite some variation depending on the plot, a classic story arc is why nearly every movie made these days makes at least one person remark on how cliché the ending was, or why even the TV shows with the wildest plot twists have us comparing them to other, similar shows (*another* “I’m your father” revelation?!).

Beginning

As the figure above shows, your beginning, or Act I, opens the story, usually with some context about the protagonist and his current situation. It's also when the conflict or call-to-action or adventure first occurs, and preparation begins – the hero gathers companions, seeks out advice from a mentor, and collects tools or weapons.

Middle

The middle of the story, or Act II, features a lot of action and the bulk of overcoming obstacles.

End

As we enter the end, or Act III, we reach a climax (Good guy defeats bad guy! The cancer is gone! Homeless person gets a house!), and it's now time to tie up the loose ends. The final stages of the plot, often called the dénouement (pronounced dānoomän) brings us back to a “normal” state of affairs, reuniting our protagonist with his family and home, and looking forward to what's next.

The various stages within the three-part story arc can be more developed in the 12 Stages of the Hero's Journey, as made famous by Joseph Campbell. Learn more about that [here](#).

Choose Your Own Adventure



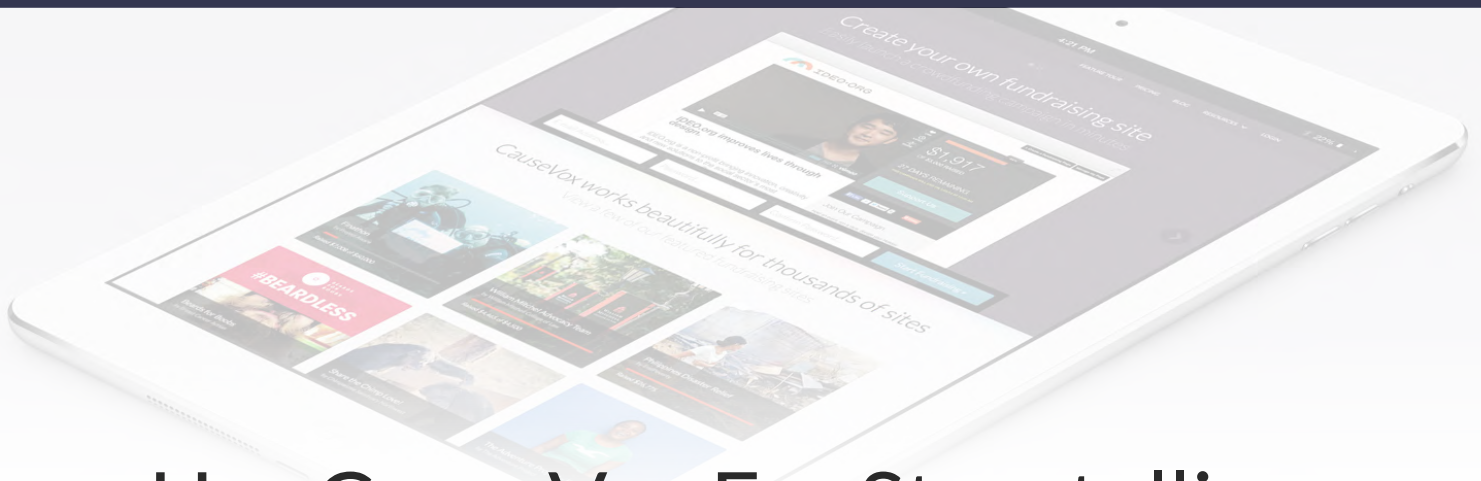
Choose Your Own Adventure

The options for creative storytelling are endless. Whether you stick to the classic plots, or create your own, use video or the written word, remember to keep your crowdfunding goals in mind, as well as your audience.

Experimentation is a must, but you don't always need to reinvent the wheel. Check out our [blog](#) for more posts on using storytelling for nonprofit communications.

The most important element of nonprofit communications is creating a memorable and moving story that compels people to support your cause – where will your journey take them?

Use CauseVox For Storytelling



Use CauseVox For Storytelling

At CauseVox, we believe that everyone has a unique story that can be used for crowdfunding. Storytelling gets you donations, and we have a few powerful features to help you take advantage of that.

- ▶ Fully customizable fundraising site to integrate with your branding and design.
- ▶ Blogging tools to help you use content and stories as a way to drive traffic and donations.
- ▶ Personal and team fundraising pages so your supporters can use their own story to help you fundraise.
- ▶ Free guides, toolkits, case studies and resources, in addition to our frequently updated blog to help you be as successful as possible.

Ready to use storytelling to power your crowdfunding campaign?
[Sign up on CauseVox today.](#)



www.causevox.com