

Driving change for better cities

The Storyteller City

How to use storytelling to
engage citizens in local
projects

19 November 2025

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Story is king (or queen)

From a reliable source ...

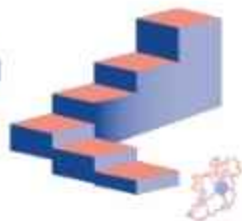


**Jenny Koutsomarkou,
Head of Unit Communication &
Knowledge, URBACT Secretariat**



URBACT IV-- the EU-funded programme dedicated to the cooperation of European cities

Capacity building activities & tools



Knowledge uptake and sharing



Networks of European cities

*Since 2023,
65 networks, 525 partners,
32 countries*

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Why this webinar?

-How to use/adapt storytelling in an urban context

-To equip city administrations with storytelling tools and techniques for local policy-making



Guide on storytelling for city administrations

Early 2026

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31 March - 01 April 2026 - Nicosia, Cyprus

Register now!

urbact.eu/city-festival-2026

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Δήμος Λευκωσίας
Nicosia Municipality



[Featuring

Sandra Rainero



Brian Marrinan



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 FEATURING ... Cities involved in URBACT networks

City of Altea (ES), Paloma Verdù

City of Getafe (ES), Fernando Gonzalez Ferreira

City of Ravenna (IT), Emanuela Medeghini

[How to engage with us?

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Event code

STORY2TELL

Enable answers by SMS

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[Once upon a time....

- Storytelling involves sharing **social information** through various forms, including **spoken, written and symbolic languages**
- Storytelling is a key way we **learn and make sense of the world**

Old man: If you knew the story so well, what did you need me for?

Girl: To listen

The Witcher –Season 4



[Since the dawn of mankind...

- Our brain interprets the environment to build a world model
- Curiosity and self-awareness drive our survival and adaptation
- Need to “control the narrative”



U

[Stories are all about connections

- We **connect** words or images to form a **coherent story**
- We tend to find **cause-effect** links even if none exist



[From around the campfire to cities STORIES

- Revolve around **CHANGE/ TRANSFORMATION**
- Reflect culture, memories, values and behaviors
- Build **connections** but also define **boundaries**



Stories: from magic to science

- Stories are one of the oldest **technologies** used by humankind
- Many scientific disciplines help framing stories, also in urban settings



[ACCORDING TO ...

STORIES

- Ethno/anthropology** → Transmit culture and shared identity
- Sociology** → Bind communities and shape movements
- Psychology** → Help us process experience and build empathy and cognition
- Behavioral Science** → Influence perception, decision-making and action more than data alone
- Neuroscience** → Light up multiple areas of the brain, we feel them as if they were real

Storytelling ... in URBACT style

Above and beyond the delivery of stories to engage citizens

Participatory and action learning approaches to storytelling in cities

1. Story-telling
2. Story-making
3. Story-doing



[The stage is yours ...

COMMUNICATING A NARRATIVE

- Explains the city of real people, places and emotions
- Makes data and decisions relatable
- Turns abstract goals into engaging, human-centered stories

Story-TELLING



Behind and above ...

CO-CREATING NARRATIVES

- The story created **by/with people** involved in or affected by the **CHANGE**
- Gathers **diverse voices** and perspectives
- Builds **ownership, trust and authenticity** of the story

Story- MAKING



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[Policy and practice align
through narrative

ACTING IN WAYS THAT EMBODY THE STORY

- Letting people **experience** your story
- Uses **multisensorial** formats **for impact** in real life
- Great for making abstract ideas **tangible** and memorable

Story- DOING



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One critical walk in Altea

Paloma Verdù

Municipality of Altea (ES)



euroaltea · Segui già

Audio originale



euroaltea · 8 sett

[EN] 🌐 Altea takes a big step forward with the URBACT Daring Cities Critical Walk.

Experts from different fields explored key spots to imagine a future with better mobility, accessibility, and social cohesion. 🚶 🚶 🌟

Inspired by Ravenna's experience, we are shaping a new long-term vision for Altea, where citizens will play a central role. 🧠 🗣️

💡 URBACT connects us with Europe and drives us to build the Altea of tomorrow: more open, inclusive, and sustainable.

#URBACT #DaringCities #Altea
#UrbanTransformation #EuroAltea



Piace a 10 persone

10 settembre



Aggiungi un commento...





Getafe – a Jane's walk story

Fernando Gonzales
City of Getafe



mapa de participación para
comenzar a identificar
lugares en el barrio

27 marzo
10.00h desde
Cinesa San Cristóbal

ANOTACIONES

• **Methodology:** The opinions of the residents were also collected on sheets provided for this purpose.

el tronco 1 2 3 4 5

del 1 2 3 4 5

ECyS 1 2 3 4 5

ra del tren 1 2 3 4 5

¿algún lugar??

¿mapa más con una R grande y

¿documentos aquí por qué deberían tenerlo en
cuenta?

5 - Plaza de colores 1 2 3 4 5

6 - Plaza del comercio 1 2 3 4 5

7 - Gran parque 1 2 3 4 5

8 - Plaza del mar 1 2 3 4 5

¡PONES NOTA!
Del 1 al 5, qué te parece cada
espacio???

Describe tu género y edad:

Edad:

Mas. 2 Fems. 2 NC

¡No te lo lleses!
No lo tires!!

Se agradecerá que al acabar
el recorrido o cuando te quede
que otra, nos devuelvas este
documento.

Nos servirá para conocer tu
interpretación del espacio
público! -)



• **The Tour:** a one-hour walk through the neighbourhood, with POINTS OF ANALYSIS



First attempt – focus: Pedestrian spaces in one neighbourhood

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Diffusion:

- leaflets for social media and paper delivery.
- 2 videos for social media.



EPIU Getafe Hogares saludables es un proyecto europeo del programa Unión Innovativa Acción (UIA) de la Comisión Europea.

Se quiere identificar y reducir la pobreza energética en el municipio de Getafe para crear hogares saludables.

Trabajamos en los barrios de La Alhóndiga y Las Margaritas.



Una ruta a pie para conocer las características que debe tener un hogar saludable y recibir asesoramiento sobre cómo aplicar medidas similares en tu hogar.



- **The Tour:** a one-hour walk through the neighbourhood, with POINTS OF ANALYSIS

Second attempt- open to all citizens –
Topic: energy efficiency (Healthy Homes Routes)



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ACT



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Second attempt- No show!

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Third attempt- same message, the same content, the same walk of previous one – different audience





Inside the magic of storytelling

The mechanics or ingredients of (good) storytelling

The arc, the mountain, the circle and the spine

THE HERO'S JOURNEY



THE STORY SPINE

THE SIMPLE FOUNDATIONS OF MANY STORIES

BEGINNING

ONCE UPON A TIME...

EVERY DAY...

THE EVENT

BUT, ONE DAY...

MIDDLE

BECAUSE OF THAT...

BECAUSE OF THAT...

BECAUSE OF THAT...

THE CLIMAX

UNTIL FINALLY...

END

AND, EVER SINCE THEN...

OPTIONAL

AND THE MORAL OF THE STORY IS...



It's all about change... with 9 key ingredients

Arc / Narrative

- A neglected riverfront → years of debates → co-design → a crowded promenade

Hero / protagonist (s)

- A group of residents who mobilise neighbours to create an urban garden

Conflict / Opponent (s)

- A cycling lane faces opposition from shop owners worried about parking loss

It's all about change... with 9 key ingredients

Tension / Suspense

- The municipality launches a participatory budgeting process for a new playground and two designs compete, one nature-based and the other tech-based

Transformation/ Change

- A once-vandalised square becomes lively after youth co-design their sports area

Stakes / Risks

- If we don't use the old aqueduct again our city will pay a higher price for our water scarcity

[It's all about change... with 9 key ingredients

Emotional resonance

- **A mother enthusiastically explaining how a car-free school area lets her child walk to school independently**

Reward

- **Neighbours meet for the first time at the community picnic after the courtyard has been renewed**

Ending / next step / morale

- **The city has finished the old station renovations, but now residents are invited to co-manage the space**

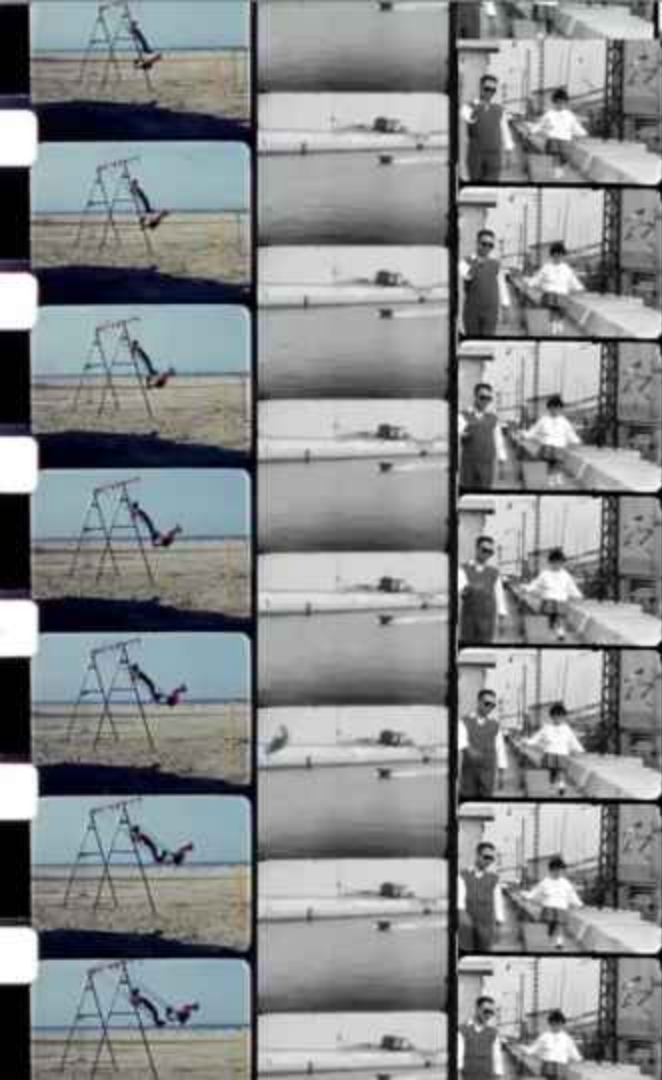


Storymaking in Ravenna

Spot the ingredients and
write them in the chat



How to use storytelling to engage citizens in local projects



COLLABORATIVE STORYTELLING TO ENHANCE CITIZENS CENTRIC URBAN REGENERATION

OUR CHALLENGES:

- design narration of the evolution / change of an urban neighborhood
- discover / rediscover the stories of residents;
- enhance ownership / identity of the place

DARE set up various activities aimed at telling stories: video interviews, podcasts, storymaps, guided tours...

CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE THROUGH LOCAL MEMORIES AND STORIES

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UNROLL THE MEMORY

Public call for the collection of
amateur and family films in
Ravenna

dare / avviso n.6

Srotola

la tua memoria

Porta i tuoi film di famiglia
e le fotografie che riguardano Ravenna:
noi li digitalizzeremo gratuitamente.

Raccontiamo

la Darsena, insieme



Bando pubblico di raccolta
aperto fino al 16 gennaio 2021

Info: 3519012185
info@dare-ravenna.eu

UE 2020-2023

LEADER



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WHAT WE ASKED FOR?

- > **Amateur and family films** in 8mm, Super 8, 16mm, and 9.5mm formats
- > **Amateur and family videos** (Video8, Hi8, BVU, etc.) made in the areas of the Darsena
- > **Family and amateur photographs**





THE DARSENA AS A SET

The Darsena, with its distinctive industrial beauty, has often been used as an effective backdrop for countless family photos during outings and Sunday walks



GUAR DARE DENTRO

Le immagini del quartiere Darsena negli archivi privati

Mostra diffusa
di fotografie, proiezioni,
sonorizzazioni

Ravenna,
20 maggio – 19 giugno 2022

© Fondo Claudio Gennari
Ritratto della moglie
Adriano Paschini sul
tetto del Consorzio
Agrario
Anni '70

From 20 May to 19 June 2022, the Darsena district of Ravenna was transformed into an **exhibition space with 5 site-specific shows** spread across locations where cultural events do not usually take place:

- ▶ a perimeter wall along the Candiano Canal

- ▶ the historic headquarters of the National Shooting Range

- ▶ a social housing apartment

- ▶ a garden in public housing

- ▶ the grandstand of the former racecourse

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THE SETRAMAR WALL

Large-scale photographic reproductions displayed on a perimeter wall surrounding a company's premises, telling the stories of people's bonds with a dense and layered area such as the Darsena: a place of production and work, strongly marked by its industrial character, yet also a place to live—a living space where one can walk, stroll, and play



COURTYARD IN VIA FIUME

An exhibition of large-format images posted on the walls of a building, with others placed among the green flowerbeds—photographs that emerge like wild grasses and spontaneous flowers, representing moments of family everyday life experienced outside the home

**DARSENA CITIZENS
WERE OUR GUIDES**



Ascolta il podcast di Sguardi in Camera



Puntata 3 - Darsena dentro

May 17 · Guardare Dentro, Darsena Gulli



Save on Spotify

05:43



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THE MEDIUM IS THE STORY

Techniques and forms of city storytelling –
Examples from cities



Short interviews,
documentaries,
social reels

Example:

Digi-inclusion
URBACT Network



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[video animation by the URBACT Retailink network



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Visual storytelling



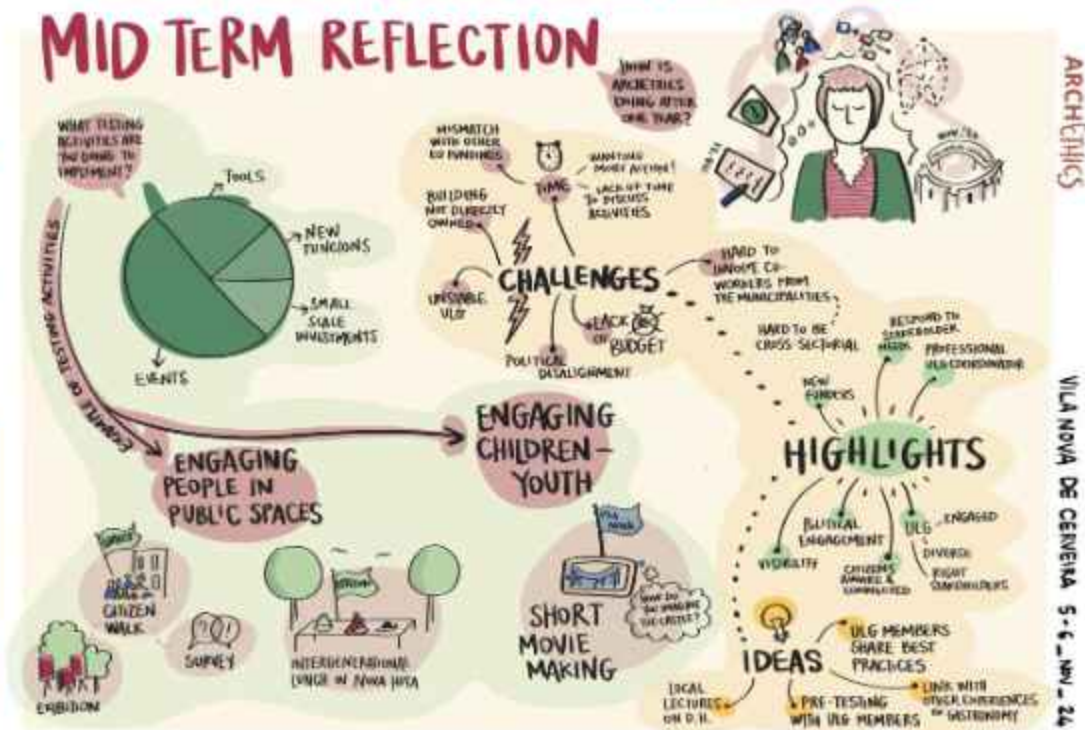
Kraków. Kierunek: Miasto dla Wszystkich

July 11 at 3:00 PM

The old dragon is sleeping soundly in the cave beneath Wawel Castle. 🐉
Like every resident of Krakow, it likes peace and quiet so it gets annoyed and growls angrily when tourists overuse its patience. 🗣️
Tourists, join us in making sure that Krakow continues to be such a beautiful and atmospheric place. 🏰
Respect the rules! #RESPECTKRAKOW



ARCHETHICS (DISSONANT HERITAGE) MID TERM REFLECTION



ARCHETHICS

VILA NOVA DE CENIMA 5-6 NOV 2024

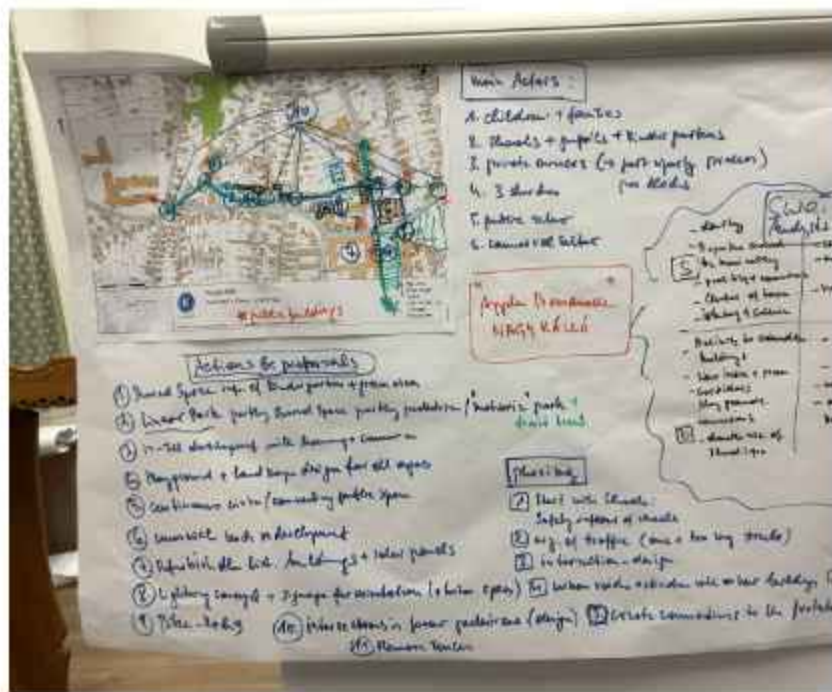
KRAKOW CAMPAIGN FOR NIGHT'S BEHAVIOR

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A photograph showing two women from behind, looking at a large map or display board. The woman on the left has long blonde hair and is wearing a black face mask and a dark patterned top. The woman on the right has short grey hair, wears glasses, and a dark patterned top. She is pointing at a specific location on the map with her right hand. The map is large and appears to be a street map with various colored markers (red, green, blue) indicating different areas or points of interest. The setting is an indoor community meeting space.



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Public events, citizens' storytelling, podcast, hackathons

UTRECHT – FOOD STORIES



VERONA – STREET CULTURE (RE-GEN)



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MILANO – YOUTH ENGAGEMENT – WISH CITIES



HACKATHON- Vila Do Conde



URBACT UNIVERSITY - MALMO

Data and jargon unfolded

Let the music play!

Edited on 05/04/2023

Share



Sandra Rainero shares her passion for the ONSTAGE Transfer Network where communities let arts and culture bring them together. Music to our ears... imagine...

Imagine to be at the **RCDE Stadium** on a late-spring afternoon in Barcelona. Almost 10.000 people have queued for some time to be there. The players are on the field, there are over 5000 of them. Amongst them, Nysh, a 15 year – old from Bolívia, is ready to play... but don't be fooled... there's no referee whistling the kick-off tonight. The crowd has gathered for a musical performance in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Catalan Association of Music Schools. Nysh has been playing the bassoon for six years, an instrument she discovered at the Ramon y Cajal primary school, then at the **Escola Municipal de Música Centre de les Arts** (EMMCA).

Home > All URBACT Articles > Ana and Her Way To School

Ana and her way to school

Edited on 12/03/2025

Share



This is a story about Ana. I met her, when I was paying a visit to one of the SCHOOLHOODs cities. Ana told me what she likes about school and what she does not like. To my surprise, she likes her way to school the least about going to school. Talking with her I found that on her way to school she lacks fun, other children and doing the trip at her pace, 'her way', as she names it. Ana told me as well that she can't wait to get to school after the summer break though. She said "I DID not like how I go to school. In the past." Since now, Ana and her parents joined a work group that is making the well-being of children their top priority. Starting with how children go to school. Ana was enthusiastic to tell me about how they will change the way pupils come to school. "No more car trips", she smiled, "Okay, maybe some," she admitted, "But we will walk, scoot, cycle to school. And meet in front of the entrance to play before the school bell calls us in."

But let's start this story at its beginning. When Ana told me that it is her way to school that she likes least of all about school...

Before- after – Boulevard Anspach Brussels



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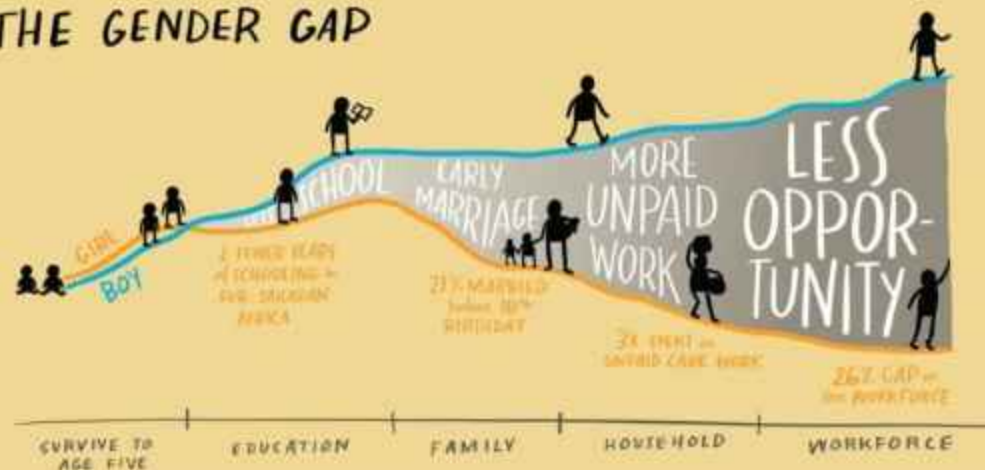


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Data explained

BEST DATA STORYTELLING EXAMPLES

THE GENDER GAP



EXAMINING INEQUALITY - GATES FOUNDATION

apex

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**It's the small things,
everyday deeds of
ordinary folk that keep
the darkness at bay**

**Gandalf, The Hobbit: An
Unexpected Journey (2012)**

Five tips to start building your storytelling practice

1. OBSERVE

**Observe your
“story-worthy”
moments**

2. EXPERIMENT

**Experiment
with formats to
attract and
retain diverse
audiences**

3. AUDIENCE

**Build a small
habit: Who am
I speaking to?
What do I
want them to
feel or do?**

Five tips to start building your storytelling practice

4. TOGETHER

Share and learn together- collective storytelling is more powerful

5. AT EACH STEP

Celebrate progress and analyze the reasons why it resonates with others



**The Force will be
with you. Always**

Obi-Wan Kenobi, Star Wars:
A New Hope (1977)

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