

STORY WARS EXERCISE 1: STEAL A STORY

These exercises are designed to be used as companions to the book *Winning the Story Wars*. Most of them assume that you've already set your brand's storytelling strategy (your values, moral, hero, archetype and brand gift) and are now ready to launch stories in the real world.

EXERCISE #1: STEAL A STORY

Prerequisite:

Chapters 1 - 6 of *Winning the Story Wars*

Stories rarely come out of thin air. Dig into any great story, no matter how original or fantastical, and you'll usually find its roots in a story that already exists.

Here's one way to uncover the skeleton of a story you can steal and make your own.

Step 1: Take a look at your Moral.

(Need help finding your moral? Chapters 5-6 will help.)

Ask yourself, "What is it I'm trying to say here?"

Step 2: Prove it.

Your moral is a truth about how the world works. Because it's true, it must have played out in the lives of real people — many times over. You can find your story by:

Looking within. What specific experience have I had in my own life that made me believe without a doubt that this moral is true?

Looking to others. Present your moral to others. Ask them if they believe it to be true. For those who say yes, ask what experiences they've had that first gave them that belief.

Mining culture. If your Moral is compelling, other storytellers will have already written stories to prove and spread it. You should be able to find the echoes of your moral in folklore, myth, even summer blockbuster movies. Scan the storytelling landscape for stories that people will already know that prove your Moral.

Step 3: Analyze Your Story.

If your search in Step 2 led you only to dead ends, it may be time to question whether your Moral really is true. But if you did uncover a story or two, make that your raw material.

Roughly outline the plot of one of the stories you've discovered that may share your moral. Identify key characters and its moments of conflict and resolution.

Step 4: Make it Your Own.

Stories can be infinitely mutated and adapted — as long as their core remains intact, they are likely to resonate. So start applying your story strategy to your raw material. How can you make the protagonist familiar to your hero? How is your protagonist a cheat? By running your raw story material through the exercises in the Basic Training beginning on page 211 of *Winning the Story Wars*, you can make the story you've stolen your own.

I'd love to hear your feedback — was this useful in building your story? Share your stolen story in the comments [here](#) or chat with me [@jonahsachs](#) on Twitter.