“Sapience” The (Attempted) Making of a Modern Myth: Storybuilding as a Component of Social Justice

by

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To the best of my knowledge, the plan of conduct for this research conforms with the policies and procedures for the use of human subjects at Union Institute & University.

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Kate Pond for the Master of Arts degree, Union Institute & University, December, 2020.

Title: “Sapience” The (Attempted) Making of a Modern Myth: Storybuilding as a Component of Social Justice

This autoethnographic exploration, describes and reflects upon my attempt to crowdsource a modern myth on the origins of racism in America. It draws on my work in narrative studies with a special focus on stories and their role in human development. Part one is analysis of the ‘functions’ of story as both plot variables and sociological actions. It explores narrative theory concerned with plot generation and the sociological, or cultural function of stories. Part two analyzes the results of the crowdsourced data collected to compose a modern-myth. Part three is an original composition which draws narrative elements from the results of the project. The project seeks to validate the necessity of storytelling as an important component in social justice work.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I believe that no one achieves anything alone. We all stand on a foundation that was laid for us by others. As such, it is necessary to recall the names of those individuals that shaped us. My narrative work has been informed and influenced by well-known scholars including Joseph Campbell, Vladimir Propp, Emma Kafalenos and more. I would also like to recognize those who shaped my beliefs about what the work of a humanities scholar should be. I am grateful for my first English Literature professor, Cynthia Carlton-Ford, who tolerated my puns, covered every one of my papers with revisionist red-ink and marked them with A’s anyway. She taught me that I don’t have to get it ‘right,’ if I have something interesting to say.

This project would be unimaginable without the many people who exchanged hours of their time in exchange for my personal improvement. I would be remiss not to first thank my most ardent cheerleader, Woden Teachout, whose guidance and reassurance at every step of this journey made me feel like I could accomplish anything. Her constructive criticisms, offered always without hubris make her an exemplar of what a mentor should be. I would also like to extend an armload or two of gratitude to my co-worker, and truest friend, Lauren Fisher, who reminds me regularly that I can do hard things. I also want to thank my kids for all the nights that mom was absent in your presence, with her head in a book. You both inspire me to reach higher, and learn more. Saving the best for last, I want to acknowledge my husband, Kevin Pond. This has been a long race, and I never would have made it without you. Thanks for saving me from a DNF babe.
At the outset of my narrative study at the master’s level, I buried myself in fairytales, folktales and myth. I thought I would research a foundation of stories in preparation for narratological analysis of more modern works which would lead to writing a fiction book. I thought I would finish my degree program with a completed manuscript starring a fictional character of my creation. However, while researching the narrative scholarship, and the current issues at the forefront of humanities studies, I stumbled across the work of Miranda Fricker and the concept of epistemic injustice. I read her 2007 book from the Oxford Press and decided I wanted to completely change my thesis project. Instead of writing a hegemonic YA novel about another ‘normal’ kid, I shaped a project that would attempt to align narrative ideation and epistemic power. I wanted to come out of this project with a fully-formed, collectively ideated and approved, modern myth. I envisioned a myth that could help explain the presence of racism in America, and that would be able to claim authorship by a diverse collective of writers. I failed to do what I set out to accomplish. Still, I offer this work as a first step in what I hope might be a career of bringing storytelling and story receiving into the national conversation about race and power in America.
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Introduction

Some questions seem, at first, childishly simple. What is a story? And why are stories important? Epistemological literary theorists, concerned with defining what is or is not known, have made arguments suggesting that “Narratives project a false order on the disorder of human existence” (Meretoja 89). Ontological approaches, concerned with existence and hierarchy, such as neuroscientific or cognitivist approaches like Galen Strawson’s Psychological Narrativity thesis, say people cannot help but experience life in narrative terms (Meretoja 89). Our disordered human lives, both real and re-imagined, are organized and recounted through these forms of thought-sharing we call narrative. Aristotle has been called the first narrative scholar. He did identify three elements of plot, and provide the scholarship with idea that “character is defined through action,” (Barry 225). While Aristotle was waxing poetic about plot, most likely there were other humans across the globe, gathering and discussing how we shift the chaos of thoughts into elegant, recognizable, narrative structure. We’ve surely been pondering these ‘Aristotelian elements’ of narrative since before our first stories were catalogued in clay. Undeniably, the human experience is swathed in stories. All we do becomes fodder for narrative: from the moment of our unlikely birth, to the day our loved ones gather recalling our lives in memoriam, humans are driven to recall and redesign the events of our existence. We prove we were here; we prove our lives mattered with stories. We tell our stories within the structure of other stories, framed on and on -seemingly endlessly-through time, like cosmological nesting dolls, holding our varied versions of truth in their ever-expanding confines. Gently twist one story-doll open, and you are likely to find
limitless others waiting inside. Scholars have been trying to answer these questions of ‘what is a story’ and ‘why do stories matter’ for centuries.

Consider the aforementioned nesting dolls. Let’s call them the Matryoshkas of story. Structuralist theory would look at one doll and assume that there must always be a larger doll encapsulating the one they were examining. Whatever the example of literature, structuralism assumes there would likely be some grander idea or concept into which the example would nest. In structuralist theory, meaning is merely one attribute of many elements in a literary composition, and no singular story could be understood in isolation (Barry 41). Narratives are influential products of culture, and as such are influenced by culture. This perceived relativism of meaning may be the influence that allows narratology to dissect stories with one foot in epistemology and another in ontology; narratology offers a scholar the opportunity to ponder and research how stories function in our lives, and the functions within stories acting as modalities of communication to transfer information. For a narratologist, stories act as both a way of thinking, and a tool for thinkers (Barry 240).
Chapter 1 Function: noun, func·tion |ˈfəŋ(k)-shən,
: the action for which a person or thing is specially fitted or used or for which a
thing exists: PURPOSE
: a variable (such as a quality, trait, or measurement) that depends on and varies with
another (Merriam-Webster.com)

As a theoretical approach, or a way of thinking about stories, narratology attempts
some lofty goals in two realms of study. The first realm is inhabited by the types of
theorists heavily influenced by structuralism. These scholars focus on understanding the
large, abstract, concepts that can be gleaned from within literary works, examining
narratives to deduce broad similarities (Barry 241-242). These theorists use analysis to
generate scaffolds, or definitive patterns, for narrative structure. They work to explain the
order of occurrence for events in the plot - the ‘what’ of story - and they try to discern
patterns in those occurrences - they build blueprints for ‘how’ stories are told. These
scholars are concerned with the functional polyvalence of story events, often referred to
as the fabula, that are the causally related structural components of story. The second
type of theorist also examines narratives to find similarities, but the patterns they seek are
patterns of ‘why’ stories are told: such scholars examine the semantics of story to
understand what function the story plays in our culture, and how the culture expresses
itself through story. These scholars are concerned with the reader’s interpretive process,
their “perception of sequential events,” often referred to by narratologists as the syuzhet,
pronounced ‘soojay,’ but which is known simply as plot to most readers (Kafalenos,
“Narrative Causalities” 2). Both sides of narratological scholarship use analysis of
literary works, including their themes, conventions and symbols, to provide opportunities
for deeper understanding of the human experience.
Through these modes of study, narratologists such as Aristotle, Propp and Genette have offered interesting theories about how stories ‘must’ proceed and what sociological functions are hastened through storytelling (Barry 224-240). Two such scholars have become the pillars supporting my own study: Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell. Working in separate genres of literature, and on seemingly separate sides of narratological theory, these two men managed to generate scaffolding for fairytales and myths, respectively; and their theories are still utilized as computational processes by scholars, authors and amateur storytellers. Both men centered their study around the concept of function: one, a formalist using structural analysis in Russian folk and fairy tales to find the smallest variables of story (the motifs) and provide a formula for story generation, the other comparing myths from cultures around the globe in order to prove a formula for plot generation (Campbell “Hero With A Thousand Faces” 28-29).

Between these two scholars I see a metaphorical bridge. I see Propp’s work as mainly ontological. He gave the narratological scholarship a formula for generating stories by applying a set of variables (his thirty-one functions), a type of commutative and distributive properties to story (Propp 24-59). Campbell’s work I consider mainly epistemological, attempting to understand the connection between our development, our cultural beliefs, and our myths. Taking the work of both men into account with the work of Hanna Meretoja, who argues that “It is problematic to draw sharp opposition between living and telling, but it is equally problematic to simply identify them with each other,” (Meretoja 103), I posit that a merger of the two processes could help me generate a story with the capability to relate potential (fictional) solutions to far-reaching ethical (lived) issues. I want to believe that, like a mathematical function, it’s possible to insert the right
variables, perform a computation, and find an acceptable answer to those questions: what
is a story and why do stories matter?

Like Campbell, my scholarship in literature is fused with the study of human
psychological development, because like Campbell I was influenced greatly by the work
of Carl Jung. Jung’s theory of the ‘collective unconscious’ resonated for me during my
undergraduate studies in positive psychology (‘The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man,”
Jung). I want my work, as Campbell’s does, to focus on the ways in which stories can
and do make us better people, improved versions of ourselves both individually and
collectively. Like Propp, I see tremendous value in the ability to computationally predict
the actions of characters in a fictional work, and I also see how that might help us predict
human behaviors outside the realm of fiction. There is promising work done in recent
years with Artificial Intelligence research. Studies of narrative generation, capitalizing on
Propp’s theory, seek to generate better predictability in AI software (Finlayson). The
work of both Propp and Campbell has offered me a means to better understand this
communicative process known as narrative. I theorized, based on Finlayson’s work with
AI, that a merger of both Propp’s and Campbell’s theories about narratives could prove
interesting. These two concepts could help me create an effective means to generate a
new, ‘modern myth’ to help support the evolving sociological needs of modern people
(Campbell “Pathways to Bliss” 70-74). It could be argued that we are more ‘connected’
through web-based media. And yet, outside of defined subgroups within America, one
would be hard-pressed to say that we function communally. As Joseph Campbell
realized, we are in need of stories that can provide us with instructions for living in this
new world (Campbell “A Thousand Faces” 334).
But what kind of stories? ‘Story’ is a term that can encompass many different types of writing. Separating stories into their varying genres provides more than just additional decimal places for Dewey. Ask any reader or writer what genre they prefer, and it becomes clear that part of our individual and community identities are constructed through the relatable tropes within these narratives (Jung; Sollod, Wilson & Monte 166). Campbell, who focused his study in the genre of myth, said that myths serve four functions over the course of human development. The first is the “reconciliation of the consciousness to the preconditions of its own existence,” the second function of myth is to present an image of the cosmos to “maintain and elicit the experience of awe,” thirdly, myths seek to “validate and maintain the sociological system,” or provide a shared sense of right and wrong, and finally, myths, “carry the individual psychologically through the stages of his life” (Campbell “A Thousand Faces,” 25). We create and share myths with our community members to ‘catch them up’ with the way things were, the way things are, and the ways in which the individual can help to keep things in working order. These mythological stories can be ontological tools capable of, as is the case in the cultures of India, Greece, Rome and countless others, building and maintaining great societies.

Propp spent years analyzing Russian folktales to discover the irreducible elements of stories, perhaps because the folktale form of story is quite simplistic in its presentation, and therefore the most likely to result in easily identified variable elements (Propp 5). It is my opinion that both men were doing great work; they were moving towards a goal which held a high level of import to humanity, but which offered a low level of potential success. In this way our work is nearly identical.
In the conclusion of what is perhaps his most renowned book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell said that the mythology of the ‘old religions’ has no place in our modern world (334). Citing science as having “dissolved the validity” of mythological symbolism. He said, “Man himself is now the crucial mystery” to be solved (Campbell 337). A more pertinent question might be which problem about man needs solving first? Why does man need to orchestrate a complex hierarchy of qualifying factors- race, class, etc.- that places a select few at the top, while countless others struggle and fight amongst themselves in the dregs of society? In an age where it is, for all practical reasons, possible to live without war, famine, or poverty, why is there still an innumerable amount of needless suffering in the world? Do our ‘old religions,’ as Campbell called them, defend us from this suffering or contribute to it? How do we make clear the effects of a society’s choice to subjugate and criminalize the very existence of a segment of the populace while holding others aloft as an exemplar for the agreed definition of ‘human?’ Stories are important tools that seek to answer these questions by presenting alternate experiences. Stories work to relate ourselves to each other and to help us empathize with the experiences of those outside our individual perception of the world.

Dominating the conversation, for the last decade or two, but most especially this year, is the idea of writing works that amplify the experiences of marginalized groups (Conolly et. al. “Covid-19 and The Key Role of the Humanities and Social Sciences in the United States” August, 2020). Using this as a directive for my work, and believing authors are duty-bound to use our talent to expose ugly truths, I designed a project that would explore the moral and ethical implications of racism through storytelling.
Capitalizing on the ease of access to share opinions on social media, I designed a project that would build a story using Propp’s structure, and that offers sociological functions as suggested by Campbell. I decided to use crowdsourced ideation to write a myth that helps explain the existence, and perpetuation, of racism in America. I decided to construct my very own ‘creature’ from the bits and pieces of deconstructed stories offered by ‘average’ Americans.

The myth I envisioned used a structure for story generation based on Emma Kafalenos’ 2006 interpretation of Propp’s work. In her book *Narrative Causalities*, Kafalenos was able to distill a ten-step scaffold from Propp’s thirty-one functions. Kafalenos’ work effectively simplified Propp’s morphology so that it can be used with any genre of literature, not only folk and fairy tales. Working from this modified ten-step structure, Kafalenos distilled further to a structure that looks something like this:

A -disruptive event/reevaluation of a situation
C -decision by the C-actant to attempt to alleviate A
   C’ -C-actant’s initial act to alleviate A
H -C-actant’s primary action to alleviate A (or a)
I -success or failure of H
K -equilibrium

I decided to use these story ‘functions,’ or fabulas, or steps, to deconstruct stories submitted in response to an online survey. My goal was to assess these results for
similarities, then cross reference and compile a syuzhet, or complete story, from the morphological similarities in story submissions.

**Literature Review**

Writer Jeff Howe first used the word ‘crowdsourcing’ in 2006 in an article for ‘Wired’ magazine (Howe, 2006). Crowdsourced products are built from varying skills and opinions, and are drawn from a decentralized pool of intellectual resources. Even as a tool for streamlining marketing, crowdsourcing relies on the intelligence of the crowd. Crowdsourcing has been an effective tool used to simplify complex projects by breaking them into actionable, small tasks, and dividing the workload over a large group of people. It has been used to collect data across many disciplines. Crowdsourcing has streamlined projects like designs in city planning, managing urban traffic flow, and perhaps most recently to track data (like the spread of Covid-19) in the healthcare field. In fact, crowdsourcing is generally referred to as a ‘business’ tool. It has not been widely utilized for creative work, such as composing fiction writing.

Across several studies researchers found that the ultimate product from crowdsourcing is often of a “richer and more intelligent” design than one that has been brought forth by a limited resource, like a single person (Steils & Hanine 2016). A project in 2015 used crowdsourcing techniques to obtain design concepts for various applications including a design for an outdoor recreation area for the elderly. This research found that ideas generated through crowdsourcing were able to take low-quality ideas and enhance them into high-quality concepts. Crowdsourcing appears to work in
the same way that oral storytellers have- the best pieces of data from many sources are refined and reused to improve a product.

According to one study, the variety of skill presented through crowdsourcing results in a higher level of innovation and creativity in project results (Steils & Salwa 2016). As noted by many successful authors who advise burgeoning writers to ‘read everything,’ the act of creative writing requires profuse and varying input (King 145). When drawing from the crowd, any gaps in skill of one user will be ‘filled-in’ or supported by the strengths of another. A project that used crowdsourcing to collect ideas for story generation could potentially be more creative than one completed in abject solitude.

Much like a community building anything as a unit, the process of crowdsourcing allows for a distillation of opinions and skills. The project completed in 2016 called ‘Mechanical Novel’ proved that the wisdom of the crowd could provide effective collaborative work (Kim et al. 2016). Citing that the most difficult part of a ‘group project’ is the process of workflow, the researchers set out a strategy to tackle this problem. In a mechanical process of “looped reflection and revision,” participants were free to work creatively rather than expend any thought or energy on how to proceed. Story elements were created, voted upon, and then revised according to a democratic process. This structured approach to creativity resulted in highly creative short fiction work.

Anonymous participants in the ‘Mechanical Novel’ project were engaged through a platform on Amazon called ‘Mechanical Turk.’ This platform is a site used by businesses, researchers, universities and consumer product groups for tasks like:
transcription or ‘rating’ videos, categorization and spreadsheet tasks, as well as other
types of survey data collection. The tasks are labeled as HIT, or ‘human intelligence
tasks.’ These tasks would not be accomplished efficiently by computer software- they
require human minds. In exchange for their expertise Mechanical Turk users are paid a
fee for their participation. Workers being paid for their contribution likely helped to
guarantee effective project participation.

In a benchmark study to show that their process had merit, the researchers of
‘Mechanical Novel’ created two experimental conditions. The first condition tasked
workers with writing a story by reflecting on a first draft and creating a revision. The
second condition involved workers writing stories by voting for components to include or
edit in a story. The story-creation part of the project looped these two conditions:
reflecting on crowd progress, and revising through actionable, low-level tasks. The
resulting five original short stories have a story structure developed through mechanical,
social computing. The project stands as a huge success for the concept of using
crowdsourcing to create art.

In 2013, Dunn and Hedges published in the International Journal of Humanities
and Arts Computing, an extensive look at how crowdsourcing could be used in
humanities research. Among some of the more interesting findings of their research is the
observation that the use of the ‘collaborative digital social marketplace’ to conduct all
manner of integrative knowledge transactions would be inevitable (Dunn & Hedges
2013). While they describe their own work as neither ‘comprehensive’ nor ‘statistically
representative’ their findings do provide a clear outline for using crowdsourcing in the
field of humanities research. They argue that in order to attract quality content
generation, the ideas of ‘gamification,’ contests, and even extrinsic rewards can be damaging to the outcome. This informs my approach of using free sources like Google Form to send out the call for submissions and my decision to not monetize or commodify the process of story sharing, as it is an exchange of experiences.

Inductive reasoning allows me to draw some conclusions from the small body of literature that relates to crowdsourcing creative endeavors. Since ideas can come from a variety of skill levels, crowdsourcing makes it possible to distill those ideas. It can provide richer design than would have been possible by one person. I posit that based on the existing literature, using crowdsourcing to generate literary content could be very similar to the organic process that resulted in our first myths. Due to the intrinsic drive many possess to tell and share stories, no monetary exchange needs to take place for people to participate.
Chapter 2- The Trials and Victories of Initiation: Analysis of Survey Submissions

From the beginning, I knew this project would be a challenge, but I was hopeful that quantity of submissions would make up for any lack in quality. I was prepared for the difficulty in analyzing many short works of literature composed by what, at the outset, I termed ‘average people’ who did not necessarily consider themselves writers. I was not prepared for how skewed my results would be, and how those results might potentially corrupt the concept of the whole project.

In order to obtain a collection of short-stories from which to draw narrative conclusions, survey respondents were given the following writing prompt:

Imagine you are babysitting. Despite a few arguments, like who should have control of the 'big screen' in the living room, you have had a great evening. The young boy and girl you have been tasked with watching, while their parents are out for the night, are bright and polite children. You are very close with the family, and they trust you completely.

While eating their dinner, and unbeknownst to you, the kids watch a few TikTok videos inspired by the current national conversation about race, and racism in America.

Later, as you are tucking them in for the night, the kids ask you why racism exists. You tell them it's complicated. They ask you to tell them anyway. They ask for a ‘fairytale’ or bedtime story to help explain why racism exists in America. You take a breath. You are pretty shocked
by this request from a couple of nine year-olds. But, they need a story, and you are their favorite babysitter. You muster up some courage and begin.

'Well, you see kids... Once upon a time...'

I developed a survey intended to retrieve both demographic information, and a short-story submission. I hoped demographic information would help me in the process of analysis. Afterall, the humanities scholarship has an undeniable history that is dominated by the voices and opinions of upper-class, white men. I chose to collect information about age, race, gender, education and income levels to attempt to level the playing field. I wanted the contributions to be reflective of the many voices in America, in 2020. I planned to collect stories as to be representative of the demography of America reflected in available census data: 60% white, 13% black, 18% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and percentages hovering at around 1% of varying combinations of ethnicities including American Indian and Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander. As Oppenlaender et al. found in their study, demographics pertaining to age, gender, education and income levels could help me to identify various ‘archetypes’ of contributors (Oppenlaender et al. 2020). The demographic data provided will allow me to assume certain potential ‘truths’ about survey respondents.

Besides story submission and demographic information the survey also asked respondents questions relating to their experience with both ‘storytelling’ as an activity and an identifying characteristic. Respondents were asked questions such as: “Do you think of yourself as a storyteller, why or why not?” Overwhelmingly survey respondents did see themselves as storytellers. Over 76% of participants identified as a ‘storyteller.’ The contributors who did not refer to themselves as storytellers had varying reasons for
this self-perception. One respondent cited a preference for “facts and research” over story. Another claimed to be a “bad writer.” One respondent declared a preference for written story over oral storytelling. I found this an interesting qualification of the question, as I had only intended to capture a general positive or negative connection to storytelling and this singular respondent sought to make the distinction between written and oral storytelling. Reflecting on this response piqued my interest and would affect my final product. I had not considered the importance or the variability of skill, between one sharing stories orally or in writing. I was inspired to include the concept of an ongoing need for written works of fiction as one of the themes in “Sapience.”

Not wanting to perpetuate racial stereotypes, or work in a manner counter-productive to my ultimate aim, respondents were also asked to declare, on a value scale of one to ten, how “knowledgeable they felt about issues surrounding race in America.” This question was posed to capture data pertaining to the relevance of respondents story submissions in terms of racism. I posit that a person who doesn’t perceive themselves as informed about issues surrounding race in America would not be able to clearly convey a synoptic story version of those events. I wanted to be able to focus my analysis of the story results through a narratological lens. Contributors who did not feel they were actively anti-racist might require me to analyze their text through a lens of critical race theory as well, since this theory seeks to transform the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado 1). As the results will show, I ended up incorporating a bit of critical race theory into the final analysis.

According to Dunn and Hedges there are eight characteristics to consider when pursuing crowdsourced tasks: the crowd, the task, the recompense, the initiator, the
process of capture, the call, and the medium (Dunn & Hedges 150). Since the ‘crowd’ I wanted to ‘capture’ data from would be Americans of diverse backgrounds, they could be found on nearly any web-based platform. I ‘initiated’ the survey through my personal social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The ‘task’ was conveyed through a short script that was attached to the survey link. This script explained the project, asked for survey responses, and encouraged further sharing of the survey. This created a chain of ‘initiators’ who spread the survey through various online communities. The ‘call’ for submissions included information about the ‘medium’ that would hold the results. I clearly conveyed that the stories would be collected, modified, and collated to create a new story that would seek publication. I decided the ‘recompense’ for respondents should be mainly intrinsic: the knowledge and self-satisfaction of contributing to a creative project. This was based on the work of Jonas Oppenlaender et al. whose results, from the first extensive worker-oriented study, found that ‘paid platforms’ for crowdsourced materials often led to results that were neither original or effective due to the propensity of “professional Turkers” or “Super Turkers” (Oppenlaender et al. 2020). These “professional” contributors offer responses solely for the monetary recompense. I chose to avoid the process of securing funding to pay participants, whom research showed would likely provide less-than-optimal results.

The survey was open and capturing data for two weeks. During that time I conceptualized the framing story and began a rough draft. That draft, which was about one page in length, included only the idea of an old storyteller sharing a story with a younger person. When the survey closed I collated the stories and I read each contribution, individually, three separate times. The first reading allowed me to ascertain
the overall plot of the story. Completing a second close reading allowed me to apply the morphological coding to story events. The third reading occurred on a separate day and acted as a safety net. I wanted to check that, for instance, what seemed like a disruptive event in the course of the second reading still held merit in the third experience of the narrative.

Using Kafelenos’s morphologic coding, I analyzed the stories for their basic “A” through “K” components. Any story, according to Kafalenos, moves through six base steps: there is a ‘disruptive event’ which interrupts some type of established equilibrium (A); then there appears some actant, the character that will create a shift in the story events. This person will decide to act (C); then act (C’); and then have a ‘primary action’ that affects the ultimate outcome of the story (H); the next step is either success or failure of the actant’s action (I); finally there is the step when all is right again and hopefully for the better: equilibrium (K). I noted that, many of the stories shared through the survey had a phenomenon which I don’t believe would have happened around a campfire telling stories face-to-face. Some of the story resolutions involved the dominant group of fictional people successfully creating a culture that values the subjugation of another group. Effectively the stories ended with unsolvable subjugation.

But the endings aren’t the only place where morphological problems occur. Coding these stories for their functions proved difficult, a much more arduous task than I had envisioned. The idea of a story beginning in a state of equilibrium was consistent across the tales. However, in three of the stories the ‘disruptive event’ is not as much an event as an idea or cultural agreement. According to Kafalenos, there should be a clear disruption to the equilibrium (5). These writers however, were not bound by Kafalenos’
elegantly simplified morphology. After spending a few days reading and rereading trying to identify and code the functions I realized that I was going to have difficulty pulling similar fabula, or specific story elements, from the thirteen submissions. Kafalenos’ work is so beautifully simple, and it allows for identifying causal relationships in the fabula (events) in stories outside the fairytale genre. Rather than assume that Kafalenos’s morphology is problematic, I posit that these emotionally complex stories were charged with what I’m calling ‘personalized specifics’ that made it difficult to find any narrative overlap. It is possible that the individual experience of racism in America is a unique perspective that does not allow for such a simplification. (This seems especially probable due to the lack of open communication around issues of race in the various circles we citizens find ourselves in: workplace, familial relationships, etc.) To generate one story from these thirteen syuzhets, I’d most likely need to use them inspirationally, rather than variably, or mechanically.

Although responses from the survey were fewer than I would have liked, the literary data retrieved is rich, and offers much to analyze. This is not surprising as the majority of respondents claimed to feel comfortable referring to themselves as “storytellers.” In addition to their short story submissions, participants were surveyed for several demographic criteria. The results are somewhat predictable, owing to the process by which the survey was distributed. Yet many of the demographic responses are surprising. There are patterns in the data which could be seen as revelations about the nature of human behavior pertaining to conversations about race in America.
For instance, the majority of respondents fall into the age range of 25-44 years, and none of the respondents were under 25 years old. This suggests two things: first, that by sharing the survey via social media platforms by two women (myself, my advisor) in this age range, respondent ages were unwittingly narrowed; second, there is a potential for some kind of correlation between age and perceived life experience that could give a respondent a perspective that, at least to them, has some cultural value, or perhaps acts as social capital; the subjective emotional ties that allow for trust in relationships (Bourdieu, 1998; Kloos et al. 2012).

Other criteria pulled from survey data suggest some of these same conclusions.
The educational level of respondents is high: much higher than I had anticipated when the project began. The majority of respondents have a bachelor’s degree at minimum, and most also have a Master’s degree.

There is also a clear pattern in the income data. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics the average weekly income for “full-time workers age 25 and over, is $788 for high school graduates (no college) and $1,416 for those holding at least a bachelor's degree” (bls.gov, 2020). Most of the respondents to my survey fall into a weekly income range of between $350 and $849 U.S. dollars, and over 40 percent of respondents earn between $1201 and $2500 U.S. dollars each week. The self-reported data of respondents’ age, education and income all match approximately the national averages reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Of the thirteen respondents to the survey, almost all reported identifying as the ‘race’ known as white. The chart of survey data is shown below. This is perhaps the single most interesting phenomenon of the project. After all, it is representative of one aspect of division when it comes to conversations about race: self-segregation. This result
also supports my supposition that people who hold a higher place in the hegemony believe they are allotted a right to ‘testimony’ – they believe their opinions have cultural validity due to their perceived social status (Fricker 15).

What is clear from the data, is that given the writing prompt, the anonymity of the project, and its online platform, these people are comfortable discussing why white people still have a problem with race in America. Are they acting from a place of antiracism? Perhaps. The results from Pew research that prompted my decision to create and distribute this survey would not align with my results. Pew found that white survey respondents did not perceive difficulties for Black Americans to the same level of severity as perceived by Black Americans (Pew, 2019). My literary data shows that survey respondents are keenly aware of racial disparity in America and, based on their story submissions, they can identify both causes of racism and potential aggravating factors of its continuance. I suggest that the people who responded to my survey are writers who feel it is necessary to actively work against racism. The evidence is clear in the results of the survey question: ‘How knowledgeable do you feel about issues surrounding race in America? On a scale of 1-10, an answer of ‘one’ being ‘I don’t like to
get political,’ (which is colloquial jargon for ‘I am privileged enough to be able to choose to ignore issues of race’), and a ‘ten’ being ‘I am actively anti-racist.’ Most of the survey respondents self-reported as an eight or above; four reported they see themselves as very highly conscious of America’s race issues; four perceive themselves as actively working to dismantle racism.

The gender distribution of the respondents was surprisingly even. Of participants who answered the gender question, five respondents identify as male, six as female, and one identifies as genderfluid. This data point was the closest to what I would have hoped for in the responses, and yet due to the even distribution, when considered among the other demographic points of interest it neither contributes nor detracts from my conclusions.

Only four of the respondents chose to leave comments about the project. One person felt their ‘fairytale’ was just a recounting of historical events; another said they “loved participating in” the project and hoped it would be shared widely. One person stated, “Thank you for offering a creative and thoughtful way to explore racism, its harm, and ideas for the hope that racism will one day be eliminated.” This comment, I feel,
encompasses what I had hoped to accomplish with the project: a way for people to think about, and talk about racism and its harm.

One respondent offered a comment that might be perceived as negative, although it is honest feedback. Their statement, “The premise is a bit lofty and comes across as pompous,” was at first jarring. I had not set out to create feelings like this; I only wanted to push people to consider the details of how racism has planted itself so comfortably in America, and what we may be able to do about uprooting it. However, after reflecting for some time I realized that this one piece of data is potentially the most informative on a few different points.

First, although I had tried to conceive a writing prompt that would generate a brief and ‘lofty’ or ‘sweet’ story of racism- due to the fairytale connotations- I had not considered that to do so may come across as flippant. This is my ‘whiteness’- my privilege - showing itself in the details of both the conception of this project and the reactions to my writing prompt via the submissions. I had not asked even one friend of color to review my survey before I sent it out. Like my peer group of respondents, I am subject to epistemic injustice and believing that my knowledge and thoughts are relevant above others’ thoughts and knowledge. The simple act of seeking a different viewpoint may have helped facilitate the creation of a ‘better,’ or at least more enticing writing prompt; perhaps resulting in more numerous responses to the survey. Second, this response helped me to see that the writing prompt I offered my respondents was essentially acting as the ‘disruptive event’ in the story structure. Once I realized this was the case in story three, I could perceive that almost every response was partially subject to this phenomenon. Finally, this statement asked me to reevaluate my approach to this
project. In future attempts to collect data and cooperatively create a story, it would be in the best interest of data collection to offer a detailed graphic organizer. Such a document could ask for specific literary elements in addition to some type of story prompt. This would better serve the construction of the final composition.

When analyzing the stories against Kafelenos’s scaffolding of story, I found it easy to assign elements of the submissions with the proposed order of fabula or events. (On a side-note this project proved for me that both Propp’s and Kafalenos' painstaking works offer a wonderful tool for story analysis.) Besides submission thirteen, the story submissions did not fully establish a sense of beginning equilibrium. Due to the nature of responding to a writing prompt about racism, authors most likely assumed their reader would already have an established schema for the beginning equilibrium. Especially in the nation’s current political climate, one would find it difficult to get through a day without encountering news around the subject of race. The struggle for racial equilibrium is saturated throughout our media outlets. This same phenomenon, of skimming over the beginning equilibrium, is evident in many of the simplified folktales Propp first worked with, especially in the ‘everyday tales’ (Propp 24). Where the contributing authors showed amazing creativity was moving through the other steps in the sequential syuzhet path. For instance, every author generated an actant or group of actants of one kind or another. They created characters who felt disgust at the behavior of others and whose emotional reactions drive the stories forward. Singular characters like respondent twelve’s “Wise Willow,” or group efforts such as writer one’s “Kingdom,” push the plot along and bring resolution. Interestingly, in story submission three, the author is the
actant- who moves the story along by breaking the ‘fourth wall’ and directly addressing the reader multiple times as if engaged in conversation.

Some of the most interesting data came in the “Success or Failure” step of the story structure. For reference, full text of the submitted stories are listed in the appendix, respondents’ I-fabula are in table A.3.5, but I will discuss an overview of the results. There are endings which I would call a fabula-failure. The characters resolve the story in a way that leaves most of them unhappy, but most of the stories do not begin as if white supremacy maintaining cultural dominance is inevitable. It seems clear that without the second story prompt, which asks specifically for a resolution that includes abolition of racism, authors did not feel comfortable providing this type of resolution. The second prompt simply asked writers to contribute, if they wanted, a means by which humanity might extricate itself from the clutches of our racially-charged existence. Of the thirteen respondents, only five attempted any writing for the ‘alternate ending,’ and of those five only three stories resolved in any kind of specific, actionable way that sought to eliminate race-based prejudice. I find this interesting, mostly because the prompt asked respondents to generate a story they would tell to two nine-year old children at bedtime; perhaps these people did not possess the schema for that type of activity. Of the seventeen total story resolutions, nine of the stories conclude with racism still playing a part in the suffering of humanity; five stories saw at least some potential ending to the use of ‘race’ as a way to control people, and two stories ended with what can best be described as a literary shrug: maybe racism could end, but no one knows how that might happen.
The lack of diversity in the survey results could be explained by a correlation between a perceived amount of cultural success and a sense of ‘entitlement to a perspective,’ among other reasons. In other words, people who perceive themselves in a specific way (more educated, better suited to speak on a topic) may feel they have information or valuable opinions about topics such as social problems. This is akin to what analytical philosopher Miranda Fricker calls “credibility excess” (17). The results of the survey seem to suggest that while these specific white people can clearly see a cause of systemic models of racism, and they can empathize with the manner in which systemic racism affects large portions of the population, they cannot (when taken as a group) readily see themselves as part of efforts to change things. I see that this may be reflective of real-life, or narratologically speaking, the ‘actual world’ (Bell & Ryan 3). We have, inarguably, been culturally developed by a racist society. We are all products of systems that are maintained by racist ideologies. Recognizing this, is part of the work of anti-racism: naming racist practices, in an effort to eliminate them (Kendi 9). Many people, given a certain level of self-awareness, can witness their individual part in the collective subjugation of others. But perhaps sociological issues such as this are too overwhelming for a ‘solution’ to be readily called from our consciousness.
Chapter 3: Returning With the Elixir; Composing the Story

I started with the title. Using a thesaurus and my own literary ponderings, I settled on a word that would encompass what I envisioned this project to be. Months prior to analyzing any data, I knew I wanted the title of the story to be ‘Sapience.’ I wanted my work to imagine a possible world where humans had gone beyond sentient behaviors of ‘feeling, perceiving and experiencing the world deeply, and subjectively’ (Merriam Webster), and begun to move into a time of a great depth of knowledge. I wanted to relay the idea that if we only possessed ‘enough’ of a specific type of knowledge - such as understanding that ‘race’ is a myth - our physical differences might cease to cause division. This is an idealistic goal, and perhaps dangerously close to one side of what Ibram X. Kendi calls the “dueling consciousness,” (31), but I am writing fiction; I’m allotted the liberty of imagining people as better versions of what I’ve enacted or experienced.

The word ‘sapience’ first appeared in English use around the 14th century. A Middle-English word derived from the present participle of the Latin *sepere*, which means ‘to be wise, or to have taste,’ (Merriam Webster). This noun form of the adjective then means ‘having the characteristic of, or showing great wisdom’ (Merriam Webster). I chose this synonym for knowledge because of the various connotations assigned to the word. First, it is directly related to the taxonomic classification of our species: *Homo Sapiens* literally means ‘rational man’ (Merriam Webster). However, after three years studying the scholarship of psychology, I would call into question whether we bi-pedal, large-brained primates have the capacity to regularly act from a place of rationality. As Schopenhauer argued, we tend towards the irrational, much more often than not
Also because this word is tied to the classification of humans, I thought it might be nice to imagine a time in a not-to-far future where we have begun to settle into honoring what I like to call ‘the knowing of each other,’ or what Martin Buber referred to as recognizing the other as ‘thou’ (Buber 250-51). I want to imagine us someday holding space for each other, and recognizing our duty to care for each other, if nothing else, as struggling cohabitants of a dying Earth. Therefore setting this story in the ‘Time of Sapience’ I have situated a reality that recognizes, and cherishes knowledge above physical characteristics: a future where ‘race’ is not recognized.

I want to be clear. I don’t want to perpetuate the idea of what Kendi would call, ‘race neutrality’: this would be dangerous in our current political climate (18). I based this idea of a world ‘beyond race’ on Robert Wald Sussman’s 2014 book, *The Myth of Race*, which informed much for me personally and professionally on my scholarship path. First and foremost, Sussman identified the idea that ‘race’ is an illegitimate idea with no basis in science; “race is not a biological reality” (UNESCO 1950; Sussman 1). Sussman also lays out in this text a historical progression that follows racist policies and practices that secured wealth for ‘white’ Europeans, who became the American wealthy elite. I fully recognize that race, even if a social construct, is a deeply powerful one. It is how we all refer to each other, and is after all still utilized as a demarcation in demographic research data, including governmental census data, and my own survey data for this project. However, for the purposes of imagining a possible world (Bell & Ryan, “Narrative Semantics” 18), where we have an understanding beyond race, and have developed beyond labelling ourselves based on skintones, I chose to approach the idea in
much the same way as my respondent ‘Mary Michel’s’ character, the ‘Wise Willow,’
who recognized that a garden could not exist without a variance of colorful blooms. In an
effort to convey that the story takes place after we have come to a world, perhaps not
perfect, but certainly beyond races, ‘Sapience’ is the mot juste (right word) for my title.

The rough draft poured out of me easily enough. I had expected to draw on
specific literary elements from my survey/project participant-contributors but found this
impossible: there was a proliferation of symbols, style, archetypal references, and
overall themes across submissions, with no clear emerging literary elements. So I used
the submissions for energetic inspiration and found that perhaps my best approach to this
story was to pull elements from the submissions that aligned with the scope of a story that
had the potential to one day be considered a myth. For instance the theme of “Sapience”
seems to emerge from a distillation of the thematic clues across the thirteen submissions-
story sharing is powerful. Most of the story submissions contained some element of
stories causing harm. I decided to capture the inverse, and focus on how stories can heal.
Another element that was present in more than one of the submitted stories that carried
mythologic significance was the concept of a ‘world before’ and the descending of fear
into that world. Other story elements I included in the final piece: the wisdom of
respondent twelve’s “Wise Willow” as a maternal figure dispensing knowledge, as well
as the imagery of flowers from the same story.

After sending the rough draft to my respondents for their evaluation, I received
even fewer results from the follow-up than I had from the initial survey. I believe the
cause of this result to be two-fold: either participants may have expected to see a revised
version of their own story, or they didn’t desire to read a ten page short story without
some type of compensation (Monetary? or otherwise). Perhaps some of the respondents don’t often check their emails, or perhaps they read my draft and did not respond. Either way, my initial attempt to contact participants for feedback on my rough-draft was not received in any manner resulting in a depth of analysis. Therefore, I proceeded to make revisions based on analysis of the submitted works of my ‘average’ people.

I had assumed the use of a web-based survey would yield a high number of short (as in one or two paragraph), amateurishly composed stories. In fact, I was counting on this hypothesis. Inspired by Propp’s monumental task, I had set my sights on capturing 100 stories. Supposing that if I could obtain 100 responses I would have enough story ‘bodies’ to sort through. I could then decode them, using Kafalenos’ scaffolding, and sort them for literary devices. Through this I hoped to find their strengths and similarities. Then I could, like Dr. Frankenstein, build a new living creature from the parts of the deceased by depositing elements here and there in a blank scaffold of plot. Instead, what I received has turned out to be much deeper and richer than I could have hoped for. The thirteen stories I have been gifted provided me with a wealth of inspiration to compose my own tale.

The first element I pulled from these stories is a sense of timelessness. The prompt I gave asked respondents to compose a fairytale. True to the genre, seven respondents deployed the classic “Once upon a time” sentence starter. Respondent number one set the tone for the project with her opening line “Once upon a time there was a group of people.” This arrangement of adjectives, nouns and a past-tense verb draws the reader in, as it is intended to do, and is repeated in some fashion by the other respondents as well. The fourth respondent again asks the reader to accept a timeframe
that is outside historical context, simply by stating in the first noun phrase “When people first came about.” Respondent five tackles timelessness with the noun phrase “one morning.” Respondents seven and ten chose to situate the beginning of their stories as “When our country was very young,” and “A very long time ago,” respectively. Overall, I saw a pattern of timelessness, or an understanding that the story events take place outside the current experience of time, and I chose to keep this element and use it in my own tale.

Fairytales historian Marina Warner says that “There’s a profound respect in the (fairytale) genre for what words do in the world, as well as in the stories,” (Warner 41). Based on the use of one version or another of the phrase “Once upon a time,” survey respondents certainly agreed that some words have transportative properties. In my own adaptation of a story to tell the tale of racism in America, I used several devices to achieve a sense of timelessness. First, I situated the first-person, observer-narrator as a traveler. This choice of story point of view ensures for the reader that the story itself is not about the narrator (Leguin 68), and I hope this will provide for the reader a connotation of transport and movement across time. Second I use allusions to ‘familiar’ concepts and ideas with unfamiliar words: for example the ‘Fabricator’ in my story. I used the word because I wanted to imply some kind of device that transfers knowledge or entertainment, and because as award-winning writer Emily Hiestand understands, “each word is a house of history” (Hiestand; Kramer & Call 200). The word ‘fabricator’ itself can mean ‘one who creates,’ and it also carries a connotation of fallacy, or lying. I chose this word, in part, to help the reader draw the inference that what is presented through popular media outlets cannot always be trusted. But I also wanted to convey a world outside of our experience of the actual world. The reader can feel a sense of the meaning
of the word ‘Fabricator’ as a named object that provides some kind of information in the context of the ‘Sapience’ storyworld. The overall setting of the piece I created, through the inspiration gained from my survey respondents, is a setting existing outside a named time; therefore it can be said to convey a sense of timelessness.

Another strong element in nearly every story submission is that of fear and/or chaos creating a downfall for story actants. While the concept of fear is only implied in submission number thirteen, nine other respondents use the idea of fear as an instigating event that leads to racism running rampant. Respondent number two for instance, the only writer to paraphrase a version of their story rather than compose a full piece, states the reason for racism as being the attitude “That we should be scared of and angry at people who look or talk differently from us.” Respondent number three, whose fourth-wall-breaking work resembles a postmodern narrative essay more than a fairytale, states “When people fear the unknown, or what they don’t understand, they feel it is a danger to them and seek to destroy it.” Respondent six went as far as to title their work, “The Birth of Fear,” and created a story where humankind once lived without fear, and that the ‘birth’ of fear was the disruptive event that caused disequilibrium in the world. This story also presents fear as a ‘mind sickness,’ which can be transferred from person to person. This declaration reflected as truth for me, so much so that I chose to use this idea of a ‘viral attack’ of fear, to some extent, in my own composition. Again and again the authors of these short story submissions explored the ideas that fear leads to violence, and that dispelling fear would lead to acceptance. Respondent number eight offered a simplified, child-appropriate tale involving bears with different colored eyes. One eye color of bears attempted to oppress the ‘other,’ different bears. This story is important
because its author recognizes that fear facilitates action on both sides. The brown-eyed bears in the story are afraid of the green-eyed bear, and their fear causes them to treat the green-eyed bear poorly. The Green-eyed bear develops fear after being treated poorly, and thus everyone’s experience of life is lessened through fear. It is only when, in response to the second writing prompt, the brown-eyed bears choose to experience their new green-eyed neighbor with wonder rather than fear, that things end happily with an all-bears-welcome picnic. I recognized that in order to distill a story from these submissions, I would need to center the action around fear.

In “Sapience” I chose to pull pieces from the story submissions to create a conglomerate of these fear and chaos concepts. I liked the idea of ‘viral fear’ and decided to merge it with elements from respondent six’s story which posits that the spirit of ‘chaos’ desires only to destroy people’s happiness, and does so through making people afraid of each other. I settled on a notion of fear as both: a being of some kind, and a mildly infectious virus that could spread from person to person. Stephen King says in his wildly popular book On Writing that, “Description is what makes the reader a sensory participant in the story,” (173). I decided to use a classic literary symbol and describe fear as a shadow. This description helps to convey the idea that fear can obscure reality. By establishing the notion that there existed a period of time ‘before fear’ where humans were better able to get along, the event of the ‘shadowy fear’s’ arrival acts as the disruptive event in the story’s plot which drives the action forward. My choice to represent fear as a shadow also alludes to the symbolism of the perennial battle of good and evil being represented by darkness and light- a trope taken from myths across the
globe. This choice should help to create familiarity with the story, which ultimately should help to engage the reader as well.

Although the collection of story submissions did not align any specific symbols or archetypes, one element that seems clear, in nearly all the stories submitted, is the idea of a transition from peaceful accord to some type of shared detriment. This is first and foremost indicative of the genre these writers were working in. Fairytales are readily defined by these four characteristics: they are short, they are ‘familiar’ (they seem like stories one has heard before), they portray a presence of the past, and they employ language that is “evocative, simple and often sensuous” (Warner xvi-xix). Nearly any fairytale taken as an example would include the element, or fabula, of a beginning that is defined through equilibrium (Kafalenos 7). In fact the minimal plot as defined by Tzvetan Todorov, colleague of Propp, is “The movement from one equilibrium through a period of imbalance, to a new equilibrium that is similar but not identical to the first” (Kafalenos 5). All thirteen submissions included a story that began in equilibrium, and moved into imbalance. What is strange is that for several stories there was not a clear movement through this three-part cycle. Instead of ending with characters moving into the “new equilibrium,” several stories stopped in the imbalance event. Due to the nature of the writing prompt, which asked for a fairytale that attempts to explain the enduring cultural phenomenon of racism, this is not surprising. In reality, or what we can call the actual world, there has been no actant who decided to act to alleviate the imbalance of systemic racism and was fully successful. Because of this fact it may be difficult for survey respondents to imagine a fictional, or possible world, where such a thing can be done. In essence, when I asked my respondents to replicate an event timeline from the actual
world, I believe I may have inadvertently tied their hands where the plot is concerned.

Only a few respondents envisioned possible worlds where racism ends, or at least some of the systemic racist practices are abolished. Respondents three and five, in an attempt to find an ending, engage the reader directly. Respondent three directly addresses the reader:

“What can we do about racism then,” and “I am sorry there is no easy answer.”

Respondent five also directly addresses the reader -- “Do you think the ‘normals’ are right?” and “Do what you can to help” – in which is actually an appeal by the author- not the narrator. Perhaps this happened because the line between author and narrator can be murky in fairytales, due to what Warner calls their ‘familiar nature’ and ‘evocative language’ (xix). Regardless of why the respondents were seemingly unable to bring equilibrium into their resolutions, I knew that my composition would need to ‘solve’ racism in some way by the end of the story.

Using these submissions as a springboard, I tried to include some elements of each story that would help to tell a tale with a complete cycle of events, from equilibrium to imbalance, and back again. I posited that using the literary device of a framing story would allow me to introduce and execute a ‘neat and tidy’ resolution to the problem of racism. I would simply tell the story of the story. In their resolution, respondent one stated that “Every group felt supported and represented equitably.” Respondent number two resolved the story by saying “I’d emphasize that the younger generation is where the hope is: I’d tell them a story about how the kids from both sides of the ‘butter battle’ dividing line started playing with each other.” Respondent three offered the very insightful “The other lesson you should take from this talk is that adults do not always have all the answers.” Respondent four said that “Racism itself is a misinterpretation of
history,” and that it is “spread by lies, told through the generations.” I combined all of these ideas and settled on the notion that the sharing of the story, of how humans came to live in”Sapience,” was the event which triggered healing. I knew it would be advantageous to set the story from the perspective of a younger person- someone who has never known a world with ‘races’ defined and separated. This person would be seeking the story, and another character would be sharing the story. In this framing, I hoped to focus on the action of sharing, and lessen the importance of the content. This notion I pulled from the survey story submissions as well.

Of the thirteen submitted stories, nine included the idea that a story (or in some cases multiple stories) affects the story actants. Stories act as both powerful weapons and ameliorative salve in these nine tales. Respondent number one mentions the “Spreading (of) stories that weren’t true.” Five of the survey respondents included the idea of the spreading of falsehoods through narrative means as one of the events that furthered the action of racism/segregation in their story. Respondent two, however, solves the ‘problem of racism’ by saying “I’d tell them (the racists) a story,” presumably one that would help to convey why they needed to let go of their bigotry and hatred. This was also the path chosen by respondent twelve, whose ‘Wise Willow’ character tells a story to all the flowers in her garden, and that story is the resolving act that brings a close to the division among them. To me the most intriguing version of this ‘story sharing’ idea was perhaps that of respondent thirteen. This writer’s response to the second prompt (asking for a resolution to America’s problem with race) is, “However, in our recent history a new story seems to be developing. There has been a glimmer of hope sparked by education and the unlearning of the system set forth by European and all the lies that it was founded
on. So the next chapter is still being written.” These few lines along with the sage advice of author Stephen King who says “everyone has a history, and most of it isn’t very interesting,” (227), gave me the idea for my own composition, and the role that story should play in it.

Having established the idea of framing a story within a story, in a timeless setting, with a naive learner and a sage, ‘Baba Yaga-ish’ storyteller, I just needed to author a tale that would solve racism. Even with Propp’s structure to build upon, and Campbell’s sociological instructions to guide me, I was slightly crumpled by the weight of such a task. I read the story submissions again and again, “carnivorously,” trying to ascertain “what can be admired, absorbed, and learned” from their contents (Prose 31). Yet the task of penning a parable for equity felt insurmountable. I tried several versions of some sort of fable, or cautionary-type tale, simplified stories meant to teach the negative aspects of living in a racist society. They all turned out too childish, too patronizing. They never seemed to carry the right amount of weight for the subject matter. And I was growing afraid that creating an oversimplified story ‘solution’ for such a complex social problem would potentially alienate some readers: a lesson I learned from respondent feedback to my story prompt. I accepted that for many varying reasons I could not do justice to the idea. I would not be able to pen a quick and instructive story that would explain how humans came to live peacefully race-free. That’s when, like an epiphany, it dawned on me. The actual story- the long or short disquisition of how we ‘defeated racism’- didn’t really matter. What I mean by that is that the specifics of the story are essentially unimportant.
I reviewed the reasons that we as people read stories, or write them, or suggest that someone read a story we find enjoyable. It is often because we find something within the story that speaks to us. We writers hope to impart a bit of knowledge about our perception of the world through the words and experiences of a fictional ‘other.’ Author Francine Prose wrote that: “reading a book can make you want to write one” (9). For me, it is this reciprocal process - the act of story sharing - the telling and the listening that helps us to understand each other. Stories allow us to explore worlds outside our singular experience. They help us to understand and bring order to our ‘disordered’ (Meretoja 89) actual world because they allow us to imagine the potential outcomes of possible worlds (Ryan & Bell 15). We can be anything in a story. As medical doctor and professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, Richard Brockman, said in his 2013 article “The Psychology and Neurobiology of Story,” “the less one is certain about something the more one resorts to narrative” (Brockman 2013). Visualizing our potential through narrative, examining paths of action in fictional ‘possible worlds,’ may be how we work through difficulties and discover actual solutions.

If stories are how we share pieces of personal experiences, then myths are the stories that we share to convey cultural experiences. They are both ontological tools. We use myths to build and shape our cultures, as Joseph Campbell professed in numerous lectures. “Why should it be,” he said, “that whenever men have looked for something solid on which to build their lives, they have chosen not the facts in which the world abounds, but the myths of an immemorial imagination?” (Campbell “The Masks of God” 4). I ask: Could there have been a Rome without the myth of Romulus and Remus?; Could there be an America without the mythological “Lady Liberty?” What myth shall
we pen to build the next incarnation of our world? If we want to imagine a world encultured in acceptance we shall need a story, pulled from that “immemorial imagination,” and which includes diverse experiences of the world through the perspective of more diverse people.

I believe I managed to create a story that encourages the practice of story sharing: a framed metanarrative. In an attempt at inclusion, it refrains from any specifics as to the contents of the story inside the story. All the reader will know is that the story will be shared over and over for ages, in different incarnations. Although “Sapience” cannot be described as a myth because it is not yet used as an instructive sociological tool, I think that the project was a success. The final narrative relays the importance of sharing stories. Perhaps that is enough of an ontological lesson to come out of this project.
Conclusions

The narrative scholars Alice Bell and Marie-Laure Ryan state that, “A narrative plot is not a single state of affairs; it is a succession of actually occurring events leading to changed states of affairs,” (Bell & Ryan “Narrative Semantics” 19). I conducted a survey asking for submissions of fictionalized accounts of “actually occurring events” expecting to find similarities in their narratological anticipatory plots. I conceived this project hoping for stories that could create a plot capable of “leading to changed states of affairs.” What I received are thirteen stories so unique as to not fit politely into the plot-scaffold I had planned. While I didn’t find what I hypothesized in the submissions-- lists of symbols, recurring archetypes, or plot patterns for instance -- I did find overarching elements that I could extract and put into my own work. Celebrated American author Ursula K. Leguin says that, “Plot is a marvelous device. But it’s not superior to story, and not even necessary to it” (94). These submissions are ripe with story. They offer a sequence of events and convey specific experiences in a chronological order.

There are several things that went awry in this project. I chose to use a writing prompt that would elicit an emotional response, and as a result I may have unintentionally alienated potential respondents. I chose not to use any paid or unpaid engines for driving the survey into specific demographics, and as a result I got a highly educated, white response- reflective of my social media peer group. I chose to attempt to complete this project in a short amount of time, and through anonymous, online, non-verbal interactions. All of these choices contributed to the: a. Lack of responses, b. Lack of diversity, across several criteria, in respondents, c. lack of clarification on some story elements. I believe this project could be quite successful when attempted again by: a.
adjusting the survey to collect more specific story element data through the use of a
graphic organizer, b. Using some form of engine to drive the survey into target
demographics to help with compiling a more diverse population, c. using online mediums
like Zoom, where possible and if necessary, for follow-up interviews which can provide
clarification on story elements from respondents, and d. Allotting a longer amount of
time for data collection, among other changes that could benefit the outcomes.

There is much, however, about this attempt to collaborate on a new myth of which
I am quite proud. First and foremost, this was a wonderful exercise in writing-as-process.
As a writer I feel the step-by-step nature of this project was experientially educational.
The act of depending on other people to provide me with story ideation - even if it did not
happen in the manner which I had planned - was expansive and affirming. I feel a sense
of connection with the respondents, and on some level I feel more connected to the
community of creative people who want to work against racist ideologies. I learned that
although (as Longfellow and many others have suggested) pain and suffering can be fuel
for creative fire, it is possible to create with joy as well. That is the beauty of stories: for
better or worse, they allow us to pull another human into the experience of our own
minds.

My affinity for Joseph Campbell stems from a personal belief that stories,
especially those which contain truths about the struggle of human existence, are meant to
belong to all of us. My frustration with my discipline lies in the reality that we
(humanities scholars and white people in general) do not work hard enough to represent
the collective of authoritative voices, across skin tones, genders, and geography that are
different from our own. For my research project, I wanted to share authorship with a
group that would be reflective of our global humanity, and which would contribute to fashioning a new myth: a living myth. I wanted to write something we can all believe in, because in essence, we would all place a part of ourselves into it. I thought it would be an undertaking accomplished in a tidy manner, by the end of my degree program. But now I think it should become a call to drive change through story creation. What would the world be like with a myth that is reflective of the world as it could be, rather than a story about how all the awfulness of systemic racism came to be?

I wanted to believe that simple computation would help me write a new instructive story to help heal modern man. I believed that working with homo-sapiens, remember our genus and species means ‘rational men,’ and asking direct questions would give me simple answers. I believed that simple answers could be arranged to build a rational argument against racist ideologies. I thought I could place that rational argument into a story scaffold and help to ‘fix’ what I see as one of the biggest problems in America today.

In conclusion to this project, where homo-sapiens and writing are concerned, I think I shall follow the advice of American author and activist Anne Lamott. In her 1994 book *Bird by Bird* she offered this: “The rational mind doesn’t nourish you. You assume that it gives you the truth, because the rational mind is the golden calf that this culture worships, but this is not true. Rationality squeezes out much that is rich and juicy and fascinating” (105). I hope that by abandoning the architecture of what I had set out to do, and behaving somewhat irrationally, I managed to squeeze out something ‘rich and juicy and fascinating.’
Part II - Sapience, A Modern Myth

They say it began as a children’s story. An idea in the mind of some starry-eyed kid who probably hadn’t yet seen what absolute terror folks are really capable of.

But I heard from a guy at one of the meetings last year, that the idea of Sapience came from an adult, not a kid like everyone always says.

It doesn't really matter now. The point is that once upon a time no one had ever thought of it, and then one day, like magic- someone did.

I wanted to find a copy of it, that’s all. I never thought I’d find a real storyteller. I’d only ever seen fabrications about them, never figured there were any real, living storytellers left. It seems though, that this wilderness up here is packed with more mysteries than are dreamed of in the fabricators’ stories. I chanced upon this tiny, broken but somehow still-standing - well I suppose you’d call it a house, while trudging through some of the deepest snow I’ve ever seen (more than two feet!). That’s where I met her.

The house was barely bigger than a cargo hold, it was more like a hut, or a small cabin, really... and from the outside it looked as if nature was trying to digest the wood and reclaim the space it occupied. Vines curled around the tiny porch and the eaves. The northfacing windows were flanked in lichen, and moss. The small patch of remaining white pines seemed to curl around it, as if guarding the little shack from prying eyes. The whole of it, hut, vines and pines, almost seemed to expand, like it was breathing as I approached. If it had been a living thing, that hut might have scurried off into the woods.

I knocked at the door. I reached down and checked my wrist-fabricator. I was at the right coordinates, or near enough. The place seemed empty. It looked abandoned. Thinking back now, there seemed no way for a shack that small to have enough space
inside for a person to take as long as she did to answer the door. I was already walking away, nearly tripped over a fat, round, stone on the path, when I heard the door creak open. The sound sent a sharp panic down to my gut. I held my breath and turned slowly around.

That’s when I noticed the smoke trailing up from the tiny chimney. I hadn’t seen it before. The door swung open and hit the front of her house with a clack. She stood, eyeing me in the threshold. A warm orangey glow peaked from the interior behind her.

I’d never seen anyone like her before. Even if you pressed me to guess her age, I don’t think I could. When I first saw her, I thought she looked near death. She was leaning on this long, gnarled staff. It looked to be a length of sea-softened wood. I remember thinking, that’s weird- the nearest bit of ocean is miles away. But she clung to that staff like it was the only thing holding her up. I was surprised when she spoke. She seemed so youthful, her voice was like a giggle, exuding a wealth of childish spirit.

She didn’t ask me what I was doing out in those woods, she just waved me in. Told me to sit by her fire. The crooked woman gestured to a crooked stool. I eased myself down. She took my damp jacket, hat and mittens and hung them on hooks near the mantle. Then she offered me a soft, woolen shawl to wrap around my shoulders. It took a great effort to pull off my boots, but I stretched my swollen toes thankfully toward the blaze. Rubbing my hands together, I drank in the warmth from her hearth.

I glanced around. The hut was, indeed, quite tiny. The heat from the fireplace and the plants tucked in every corner, made the room feel almost tropical. I remember feeling relieved, and safe- even with all the weird stuff she had all over the place. Bundles of dried herbs and flowers hung from the ceiling. Her kitchen shelves were crammed with
what seemed like hundreds of variably sized jars and bottles. There was no bed, just a large, plush, red chair near the fire. It appeared she ate, slept, and lived only in this tiny room.

She pushed at the logs of the fire with the point of her staff, stoking the coals. Sparks leapt from the logs and new flames licked the sides of the hearth. Then she turned away from me, adjusting a large black kettle to rest closer to the hot coals. She pulled two cups, from where I don’t know. Then she set down a sachet that looked most likely to be tea. I hoped it was tea. I hadn’t come here for anything more than the story. I told her I had come a long way. I’d been hiking nearly 15 miles a day, for the last 28 days, looking for her. I’d gotten a tip that there was a storyteller up north, hidden among a patch of old pines, who maybe had a copy, not a fabrication, of Sapience. Then I asked her if she’d be okay with me recording our conversation. She chuckled and smiled her approval.

Steadying her frame with the sea-softened staff, she eased herself down onto that plush, red chair- and she began to speak.

“I am sure, as a seeker of stories, you have some idea that before Sapience humans used to separate themselves in various ways. But, did you know... they’d argue with each other over things as simple and unavoidable as the geography of their birth.”

She looked right at me, seeing my disbelief. I smirked, and a laugh rumbled up from her belly. It traveled out through her mouth like the smoke trailing from her fire. I half-wanted to reach up and grab that laugh. But it rose up and floated away into the night.
“I know. It sounds absurd- but honestly, it’s true. They’d kill each other because of the silliest things. Some say they didn’t know any better. I think they just liked the killing. Maybe the sound of it?”

She reached her hand out to me, and then closed it swiftly, making a sound like ‘SQUELCH!’ that made me jump.

“Or the smell? Ooh… Filthy death smells like metal, and mud…Yes, the smell perhaps. Whatever the reason, I think mostly they needed an explanation for their bloodthirst.”

I told her that I’d studied the teachings of the fabricator. It said that before Sapience there were many books written that told ancient humans how they should behave. They would have had guidelines by which to live. They would have known better.

Before I could say more, she furrowed her brow and thrust both hands downward, dismissing me.

“Those books all said the same thing- take care. Of the Earth, of each other; but sick with hatred- the ancient humans even argued over which book was right. They righteously killed each other over that too. I think of the world back then…” She trailed off. She blew a slow breath as she looked into the fire. It was obvious her mind was momentarily somewhere else.

“So many lives taken; so often. I think the whole world must have been like a sick, dying forest. Everything out of balance, choked with heaps of decay. Too much rot for the green to keep up with.”
She stared into the fire for another moment and breathed a long sigh, an exhausted sigh as if there were an invisible weight on her shoulders. I could not yet understand that sigh.

I told her, The fabricator teaches us that humans used to have governing agencies—groups of authority figures whose job it was to make sure things were disposed of properly. There wouldn’t have been piles of bodies. *How absurd*, I thought.

“So many lives wasted; And so many resources diverted to clean up the messes they made; And every time they tried to make things right- more bloodshed, more loss. The world was a terror. Everyone was living … a waking nightmare.”

The kettle screamed. And I noticed how tense my shoulders were. I took a breath. She seemed to pop from the same chair that she had needed to ease gently into only a few moments ago.

She unfolded the sachet of herbs and dumped them into a teapot. As she poured the bubbling hot water with her right hand, she tapped a rhythm on the table with her left. I dismissed the thought as soon as it came, that she was planning something.

She placed the teapot, two cups, and a loaf of some greyish flat bread onto a tray and carried it over to me. I rose up and took it, setting it down on the small table between us. She sank into her red chair. It appeared to swell, enveloping her, just a little.

“I think we should share some bread. It will help to make us closer.”

I was not very hungry but I also knew, from the fabricator, that these types of rituals are important in certain cultures, and more than anything I did not want to appear ungrateful.
I pulled a chunk from the bread. Then I tore it in two and bowed my head as I handed half to her. She smiled, received it, and I asked for her name.

“Names.” She motioned with her free hand, dismissing me again.

“Another thing we used to fight and kill for. I try not to use them. I like to let the receiver choose my name, tell me, if you would, what name you would like to call me.”

She leaned close in to me, and raised her eyebrows. Her face was bright, angelic. I was certain that she would do me no harm. But I felt the stir of discomfort - the hot prickle in my nerves that accompanies impending danger. I tried to imagine a kind and curious name for her. My mother had once told me an ancient story of a great warrior who sought to live forever. A name came to my mind. I told her; ‘Siduri,’ and she seemed to soak it up. She leaned back into her chair, smiling wider than I thought possible.

“Si-du-ri,” She breathed. “Ah. It sounds like an exhalation. I love it. And I shall call you ...nothing, for we are but two. Who else would I be speaking to?”

She laughed again. Her torso jiggled with vibrations of her joy. I wondered if she weren’t composed of laughter; if it didn’t fill her form and balance her against the pull of gravity. Is that why she seemed to float? Is that what balanced the thick amber cords of hair that seemed to swirl around her shoulders and wiggle to her waist all on their own? Does the laughing keep her young? It must- because her body seemed to crumple but her face was light and new.

“You marvel at me, but old ...Siduri... will tell you a story now. Huh? That’s why you came, yes? Not for my nettle tea, or this pungent teff bread. It is good though- yeah?”

She leaned over and patted my arm. I took another bite, and smiled my tasty approval.
“Hard to get teff up here, I have to hike to town, and special order it, but I prefer the taste of it. Ya know? Wheat is so… empty.”

She stopped herself, and gathered up her shoulders. She rose from her chair on the strength of that driftwood staff and floated towards the hearth. She grasped a log from the neat pile of wood, and placed it effortlessly into the hot orange flare. I’d swear she put her hands right into the flames. Although it didn’t seem to harm her.

“Maybe you thought a warm spot by my fire would cure you of the confusion that you are so …readily …drenched in. Those fabricators. Blech!” She spat onto the floor.

“And, maybe it will. Maybe that gadget there,” She motioned to my voice recorder.

“Will help you replay this story as many times as you need until it makes sense.” She brought her two hands together by her heart, and clasping them, she gestured skyward.

“Divinity knows, I’ve been replaying it for years, and I still find new sense in it. So I will tell you. I will. Some of it is hard to hear though. The details of how we came to live in Sapience, and not as what men used to call ‘races…’ the details are … sometimes a jolt to the heart.”

She paced silently from the hearth to her chair and back several times. I still think she was trying to decide how to start, or what parts to leave in, and what parts to take out. How does one release a story into the world? I’m certain she was just being cautious.

“Drink your tea, it’s good for removing toxins. Now, hold the cup tight- it will keep your hands warm. And do not be afraid. Tell me if you want me to stop.”
I scrunched my face up in confusion. *It's just a story.* I thought. And I checked my recorder. It was fully charged, and recording.

“When the world was young,” Siduri began, “all humans lived together. Unaware of any differences among them, they spent their days drinking in the still-soft sunshine, gathering sweet berries from the bushes, and collecting fat-filled nuts that fell from the trees. Some of the people birthed babes. All of the people cared for the babes. Their days started when the sun broke the dawn, and ended as the moon rose over the hill. Everyone helped to care for each other. There was an occasional argument over petty things, as humans are still inclined to disagree, like me with my distaste for wheat. But no one sought to hurt another because there was plenty of everything that was truly necessary.”

She smiled with the heavy knowledge of possibility. I leaned in and sipped my tea. It tasted like the ocean smells—briny and crisp. I tried to imagine a world where no one argued and there were no shortages— it sounded ridiculous. Siduri smiled at me, and continued.

“Every year when the nights grew long, and the days were short, there was more time for stories and dancing by fires, and less time for working. And so the people would celebrate.

For weeks the adults would gather extra wood to burn, extra food for the celebration, along with extra for their winter stores. The children would collect flowers to make their homes welcoming and bright. In a few short weeks the entire village was exploding in color and ready for the festivities; which they called ‘the night of many colors.’ The children would string the flowers together, like this;” She pointed up above her head.
There was a garland of marigolds strung over the low rafter.

“And then the children would march around singing, and hanging a little section of the colorful blooms across the threshold of each home. By the time the sun was going down, and the fires were beginning to burn, the whole village looked like a twinkling rainbow patchwork; a beautiful garden!

One year, after an exceptionally abundant harvest, the village decided to celebrate by doubling the amount of festival. This would mean they’d need double the amount of flowers. The elders sent the children out into the meadows, to find the blooms. Although their grain and tuber harvests had been abundant that year, the autumn flowers were not many. The children had to wander farther and farther from their familiar grounds, searching for them.

As they walked over the precipice of one particularly tall hill they saw, for the first time, an entire valley of brilliant blooms the likes of which they’d never seen. These flowers were easily double the size of the ones that grew near their village. Overjoyed by the sight, the children began to hurry down the hill towards the explosion of color.”

I smiled. I wanted to picture it. I closed my eyes and tried to imagine how wonderful that would feel—running down a gentle slope, leaves and stems slapping my knees and thighs as I raced downward—and the smell of the blooms would be delicious!

“How fun!” I blurted. But Siduri looked mournfully at me, and continued.

“As they descended the hill, the children in the front of the group began to yelp and cry. The children at the back of the group thought, at first, these were joyful noises, but then they began to feel it too. Pain. A pain that blossomed slowly, like a blush...
cheek. Every step was agony, but they had begun running down the hill with such excitement, it became hard to fight gravity. They couldn’t help it. They fell.

Before long all the children had reached the bottom of the hill. Among the strangely fragrant, giant blossoms, the children were all crying. Some were rubbing their bodies in an attempt to alleviate the surge of pain—a burning was moving from their feet,”

She reached down and touched her ankle and stroked along her calf, “up their legs, into their sides, and which was beginning to take hold in their chests, right in the cradle of their hearts.” Her hand clutched at her chest—her eyes widened, she slumped forward. I felt sad. Those poor children. Siduri asked me if I wanted to stop, I told her no, and she continued.

“On that brilliant autumn day, as the children looked around at each other they began to feel something they'd never known before; the hot burning pain from their hearts began to take over their minds.

As if seeing fully for the first time, the children began to notice their differences. Some had darker hair than others. Some had slimmer noses. But what they seemed to notice most readily, was the fact that they all had different shades of light-creamish to dark-brownish skin. Noticing the difference and feeling that hot pain in their hearts, they began to point at each other—someone was to blame for this hot pain; they each blamed the other. Though they did not name it yet, that hot pain in their hearts would become known as fear. The fear would give way to judgement, and judgement would separate them from each other for far too many years to come.”

She reached for the teapot and refilled my cup without asking if I wanted more tea, but I did.
“While the children pointed and argued they were distracted. They barely noticed a shadow rising over them. Believing the shadow to be night descending, the children forgot about flower-gathering. And seeking comfort, they began to rush back to their homes. The hot pain in their hearts made their entire world look foreign and fearful. Nothing around them looked familiar—so they chose to travel with the other children who looked the most like them, believing that to do so gave them some security, some protection from the now fearful world. But the shadow was not fearful, and seeing opportunity, followed them back to their village.”

She explained to me that this was called ‘segregation,’ where people separate themselves, either by choice, or by decree based on certain criteria, like skin tones. I could not imagine it.

“How would they build happy families?” I asked, “How would they know all the colors possible of our skin, and hair, and eyes?” It seemed make-believe to me, like Dragons underground hoarding gold—unfathomable!

“As I was saying, the different groups of children reached the village just as night was falling, which left the shadowy being undetected by the children’s parents. The children ran towards their parents, crying. Each child pointing accusations across the village square towards another—blaming them for the pain in their chests, and the darkness now filling their minds. The good and protective parents, wishing to ease their children’s pain, accepted these half-truths. They dismissed any culpability of their own children and unknowingly welcomed the shadow to live in their village.

The time of the shadow was dark indeed. Where once there had been fireside celebrations with all people sharing stories of good-knowing and togetherness, now there
were only stories of separation, blame and ignorance. The more times these stories were
told, the stronger their ‘truth’ became. Until they weren’t even thought of as stories- but
simply truth. It was ‘true’ that certain skin colors were thieves. They would take whatever
they wanted, and if they wanted it badly enough- they didn’t care who they had to hurt to
get it. Everyone of every color, found themselves wrapped up in that shadow, and wore it
like a mantle, into the greatest maelstrom mankind would ever know- the battle against
each other’s existence.

Years passed welcoming generations upon generations of children who grew into
responsible, protective, truth-telling parents, who never knew what the world was before
the shadow-time, before the constant pain in their hearts. They all still had flower
festivals. They all still danced and sang out stories, but they told of us-and-them; the
ways in which their differences made them stronger, braver, better than others. Their
stories and songs celebrated their heroes: epic ballads, justifying the blood spilled in
village after village. Not one of them knowing that the shadow that wrapped itself around
them generations ago, kept them separate; it kept them in constant pain.

Life went on.

What once was a village of all people, living and singing together, became tribes
of others, fearful of faces they had forgotten were family.”

She cast her head down, pausing for a moment. I stared into my teacup, and
wondered about this story- about the truth of it.

I asked Siduri, “How could such a thing be? People not only living separately, but
harming each other for nothing more than skin color?”
She told me, they named it- ‘race’ and decided it was a good enough reason to hate each other.

“But how? Or Why? What if those children hadn’t been so greedy, or if they had sent just one child down the hill, maybe the shadow would never have followed them.”

Siduri smiled, and told me those were good questions. Then she passed me another chunk of bread, and returned to the story.

“After many eons, and many children who were born believing that this shadow-existence was just, right, and ‘as it should be,’ there came the children who would prove to be the light capable of casting out the shadow- for good. Somehow they were born without the pain in their hearts. The children were twins, born to a family of modest means. One was robust and cried out often from the moment of birth. They called this child Bhala. The other was small, believed to be too fragile to survive; But did survive, and surprisingly developed a beautiful singing voice as they grew into young adults. This child they called Funda.

From the time they were small, the twins didn’t listen to the warnings of their elders. They would toddle into the areas of other tribes, and when their parents scolded them, reminded them of the pain in their hearts, the children laughed because they did not feel any pain, they had none.

When the twins started games together, other children would want to play and did play- forgetting the pain in their hearts for a few moments. As they grew into maturity their elders warned them, games that they played as children could be dangerous as adults- ‘tribes were separated for a reason.’

‘What reason?’ the twins asked, laughing.
But the elders only replied that the twins were being disrespectful. The elders only referenced the stories they all knew, they offered no proof of any real need for the tribes to remain separate.

These twins were more curious than any two children since that first group of children raced downhill into hot pain. They were smart too. They spent most of their waking hours in the village library. When they had read all the books in their library, they wanted to know more- they decided, as many young people do,” She smiled at me, like a kindly aunt who was so proud of my accomplishment. I blushed and smiled back.

“They decided to take a journey to visit every tribe’s library. Their hunger for knowledge was insatiable, a bottomless hole of intellectual need.”

Siduri pushed herself up from her chair and walked towards the corner of her tiny hut. There, on a shelf, was what looked like a small stack of some kind of boxes; like the boxes when you transact a new set of fabricator entertainments, but these were made of something else, something organic maybe? The boxes looked soft almost like skin. Along the edge of one of the boxes, I saw a glint of gold. I squinted in the darkened hut and realized what it said. In bold, large letters along the edge was the word- Sapience. Siduri was pulling the soft, red-skinned copy of Sapience from her shelf, from a small stack of real books.

She clutched it to her breast with both arms, closed her eyes, smiled, and inhaled. She said nothing. She simply carried the book back to her seat, and held it tenderly as she eased back into her plush chair.

Smiling at me again, she continued.

“Where was I?” She asked. I told her the twins were on a journey.
“Oh, Yes! Of course.

The twins traveled for many years. They read the contents of over one hundred libraries- some smaller, others larger than the library from their home tribe. Funda would read the books and think, think, think... while Bhala recorded all the instances of similar stories in each tribe.

By the time they were thirty, they had many volumes of notes- enough to fill their own library. In every tribe they had found stories that sounded quite similar. But only one story in particular was found in the library of every tribe. A story still so famous, that I bet you know it, or a version of it. It told of a group of eager children who were killed by an enemy tribe for stopping to smell their sacred flowers.”

“Oh!” I gasped. Siduri shook her head knowingly. I had heard that story as a girl. I mean it was similar. It was one of those nursery stories that was meant to remind you not to be greedy. I knew something about those flowers sounded familiar!

“Yes,” Siduri continued, “The twins also wondered how every tribe had this same story.

‘Bhala’ said Funda, one day.

‘Isn’t it strange that no matter where we go, every tribe has written down this same story? What do you think it means?’

‘I am not sure Funda. I think it might mean that it is not a story at all. Perhaps it is real?’ Bhala wondered.

The two sat talking long into the night. As the sun began to peak over the edge of dawn, they had made what would prove to be a very important decision. They had decided to create a new story and to place a copy of it on the shelves in every library they
could find. After reading so many stories, the twins believed that if all of the tribes shared one story, perhaps they would have something in common. They believed that no one could fear or hate a person who shares the same story in their heart.

And so, the twins began to write the story that would eventually be known as Sapience. The twins kept the hill, and the children in the story. They kept the flowers, and the sweet, intoxicating smell of the blooms. Bhala scribed in the best penmanship possible, as Funda hurriedly chattered away, adding details when Funda was at a loss for words. In a matter of days, intoxicated on their idea, they had created the perfect story.

It explained how the shadow had fallen, the original source of fear and chaos. It beautifully offered a resolution to the conflict of judgement and separation. It was wholesome. The plot balanced hefty servings of both joy and tears, and evil was eliminated by the power of love. It was the kind of story that everyone should read. The twins thought that it was a good story. So they set off on the journey to add a copy to every library, in every village.”

Enraptured, I found myself holding my breath. I was so eager to know what would happen. As I looked at Siduri, she absently thumbed the papers, what she would later tell me are ‘pages’ of the book upon her lap. She would do this for a moment, and then she would pet the cover. You would have thought the thing was alive, the way she loved it. I asked her, “How did they do it?” And she told me.

“Well, the first few copies were easy to place. The twins had brought gifts of honor and been welcomed as scholars in the tribes they’d visited before. But, as the years went by, it was more difficult to gain access to libraries. This was partly because of the advent of the fabricator, which led people to believe they didn’t need paper-bound stories
anymore, so many of the libraries had closed. But partly the twins’ journey was difficult because of the shadow being. Ever-present, and always watching for rays of light, the shadow being would quickly darken the places the twins tried to illuminate.”

“What did it do?” I asked, “The shadow-being?” Siduri told me that for some of the people, the shadow was like an invisible weight, that made life harder. For others, it was an invisible platform that elevated all their achievements.

“Imagine,” She said, “No matter how hard you worked at anything, you’d never truly succeed. Or, if you found yourself on this Earth having success, you could not trust that you had earned it of your own accord. That is what the shadow did. It blanketed humankind as both a suppressive regime, and a shoddy buttress. Before Sapience, everyone was suffering.”

I tried to wrap my head around these two truths, but found it so hard to believe how both could be. The shadow time must have been terrible. It sounded terrible. I must have made a face, because Siduri put a hand on my shoulder, and said, “It turns out alright you know?” She smiled.

“I think I know what might help. I have some cookies in the crockery. Help yourself. Over there.”

She gestured to the countertop. I walked over. Among the various bottles and jars was a large, grey piece of ceramicware. I lifted the lid. Inside, awaft with cinnamon, was a stack of lumpy oatcakes. I took one, thanked her, and sat back down.

“ Darkness and shadow will not last forever. Eventually there must come a light. Those special children, those twins, were undaunted by the darkness. But as they began gaining in years, they became concerned that they might not have time to spread the story
as far, or as wide as they had intended. So, the twins began to leave instructions. Hidden in some of the copies of their story, they told the reader to remember, or copy the tale. They asked readers to take it, and share it widely.

Soon there were versions of their story spread far and wide. The story was even shared one night on that brand-new invention, the wretched fabricator. They did leave some important parts out, I still think the book is better, but… When the twins saw how far their story had traveled, they knew it would never be stopped. The light they had sparked, would someday, cover the earth, and cast out the shadow.

They died, mere moments apart, at the age of one hundred and six, their hands holding a manuscript copy of Sapience,” She clutched the book with both hands, “In the fiction section, of the Midtown library on Heart Avenue, in a suburb outside of some bustling city, the name of which I have forgotten.

What I remember is the story of their story. I have shared it with you, and now as I was instructed, I must ask that you share it too.”

Her hands shaking slightly, she held out the book, and simply said, “Take it.”

I swallowed hard, trying to stop the tears that I knew would crest over my eyes. I reached out and touched it. The cover felt- smooth, and before it was even near my face, I could smell it. It smelled a bit like mildew, and like the bags the messengers and couriers carry- ancient leather, made from animal skins! The soft leather wrapped around the stack of paper pages, all organized, numbered, and bound together with thread, and adhesives.

I opened it. Inside the cover was this handwritten message:

This is your story now. Owning it carries an the obligation to share it. Use whatever means you can; paint it into portrait, or sing it into a song,
weave it through a garment and share it with someone you love. Write it into a poem, or sculpt its image into clay; whatever means may speak to you. When we share the idea that the only thing separating our tribes is our own ignorance, if we share the story of Sapience with another, we shine a light that helps to beat back the shadow of fear, judgement, and hatred.

I looked at Saiduri, searching my mind for the right words, but all I could ask was, “Why? Why me?” She blinked back tears, and sat quietly for what felt like a long time. Then she told me.

“Because, once you have heard the possibility of what we could be, if we could ever clear the world, completely, of the shadow… you will ache for it.

It will hang in your heart, and keep that hot pain of fear away. And you will need to share it.

So you take the story. Take it with you, but leave it in all the places you go. You are one of us now. One of the shadow warriors who deal in kindness and fireside stories. We are the ones, keeping the darkness at bay.”

She rose from her chair, and asked if I’d like more tea. I nodded, and muttered an alright, too absorbed by the soft-covered copy of Sapience in my hands to say more. We drank tea, and shared other stories, including several translations of Sapience-inspired stories that Siduri had in her collection. We sat pleasantly, sharing by the fire until early the next morning.

I packed my things, and pulled my boots back onto my feet. Siduri put oatcakes in a package for me, and gave me a thermos of nettle tea, for the long journey. When I
headed out of the hut on that cold, blindingly bright morning, I felt a lot of things. I felt tremendous sadness to be leaving my new friend and mentor. Luckily, I also felt filled with hope. I had knocked on that door the night before, convinced I would find nothing-and then, there I stood, my pack heavy with promise. The weight on my shoulders now, the responsibility of sharing the story, was a burden I was happy to carry.

I hope that as you receive this story, you recognize that you too are now ‘one of us.’ You are now a shadow warrior, tasked with sharing the story and spreading the light. So, as my friend Siduri said: take the story. Take it with you, but leave it in all the places you go. You are one of us now. One of the shadow warriors who deal in kindness and fireside stories. We are the ones, keeping the darkness at bay.
Appendix A

Notes

A. The narratological elements in the final draft of “Sapience”

**Themes:** There is no such thing as separateness, but we are each separately responsible for sharing our stories with each other; There should be emphasis placed upon preserving and sharing the written word; Stories can take many forms and all of those forms are valid means of communication. Etc.

**Focalisation/Viewpoint/Perspective:** Telling the story of being told the story about why we must keep sharing stories.

**Narrator:** A traveler, a truth seeker, unnamed

**Analeptic:** The world is already in a state where racism is no longer a cultural issue.

**Proleptic:** The storyteller will give the story of Sapience to the narrator, and the narrator will spread it out into the world.

**Packaging:** Embedded meta-narrative
Story Submissions

A.1

The following are the short compositions submitted through a web-based survey distributed over social media platforms during September, 2020. I have made no revisions to these pieces. They are copied directly from the submission forms and printed here in their entirety. The authors chose pseudonyms for themselves. Following the stories, is my literary analysis of the works, and how the various morphological components will be used to pen a new creation.

Respondent #1

“M.Frizzle”

Once upon a time there was a group of people called the E’s. They decided to leave their country to "discover" a new place to live.

After a few months of sailing, the E's "found" land they assumed no one had claimed. Little did the E’s know that there were already many groups of people that lived on that land, they were called the I's. Many E's and I's were hesitant to play with each other because they looked and acted differently. You see, the E's had white skin, the I's did not. Their skin was darker.

After some time passed, the E's numbers had grown in size, not just that, but they had started being really mean to the I's. Some E's started spreading stories that weren't true about the I's to other E's and those stories continued to spread. These mean stories were spread to more and more E's. I's also heard the stories and couldn't understand why the E's would think of them that way. This made the I's not trust the E's. The E's and the
I's started to fight. The E's often won those fights because they had more advanced technology. This could be considered where something called ‘white supremacy’ or thinking that white skin makes a person smarter, better than, and/or more able than anyone that doesn't, started in this country.

Many, many years past and The E's had generations of people that took over the land. They also made rules that were unfair to anyone that didn't have white skin. These new generations of E's decided to start farming land. The land they had was so much to take care of that they couldn't do it alone. Rather than spend money to hire and pay people to help them, they decided to pay people to steal other people from their countries. The people that were stolen were called the A's.

For 339 years The A's were forced to work for the E's for no money, very little food, and no freedom of their own whatsoever. It was very sad for the A's. Then a very tall, bearded man showed up and got a lot of people to listen to him. He said that the A's shouldn't have to work for the E's if they didn't want to. The E's were really mad over this, so there was a big war. The tall, bearded man's side won the war and made slavery stop.

Then some E's got involved in making rules for everyone to follow. However, these rules were not fair to anyone that wasn't an E. This was because some of the E's still believed that the color of their skin made them better than everyone else. Not all E's thought this way though and have fought against those rules in order to get them changed.

However, no matter how many rules change, the negative side effects have already happened. And, changing rules sometimes doesn't change the way people think about others. So, some E's still decide to live in the land of racism. The land of racism is
a horrible place. In the land of racism, E's think they are better than others because of their white skin color. With that said, there is a mystical place that exists called the land of Equity. In this place everyone is represented and people with a variety of skin colors live there and treat each other with honor. This is the place many want to live. In order to get there everyone in the land of racism has to take the journey and live in the land of equity. Not everyone in the land of racism is willing to take that journey, which is why racism still exists in the United States.

Prompt#2

Alternate ending:

In order to get there everyone in the land of racism has to take the journey and live in the land of Equity. This takes a lot of work from everyone. However, lots of hard conversations were had. Everyone who wasn't an E was given opportunities to share their truths of how generations of E's had hurt their people. The E's honored the speakers by not interrupting them, reflecting on the biographies, and leaning in to the hurt that was caused. After the conversations, the kingdom decided to have the same number of elected representatives from the different groups that made up the population of the kingdom. The representatives worked together to come up with a charter for the Land of Equity. It was decided that no one person would be in charge and that all decisions in the kingdom would be decided by the groups of representatives. Every group felt supported and represented equitably. Because of this everyone in the land of equity lived happily ever after.

Respondent #2
“Klesh”

Sorry, limited time, I’ll paraphrase - I’d modify the setting of Doctor Seuss, “The Butter Battle Book”, and how sometimes people think very small differences that don’t matter at all are a really big deal and that we should be scared of and angry at people who look or talk differently from us.

Prompt #2

To continue the above, and since it’s for kids, I’d emphasize that the younger generation is where the hope is: I’d tell them a story about how the kids from both sides of the ‘butter battle’ dividing line started playing with each other, even though the grown-ups didn’t think it’s ok, and saw it was fine, and eventually more kids did that, and eventually even the grown-ups had to stop their silly fighting and accept everyone as they are.

Respondent #3

“Chris”

You know what? No, no fairytales, no dumbing down or hiding this behind the curtain of fantasy. You asked me why racism exists? It is very very simple.

Fear. When people fear the unknown, or what they don't understand, they feel it is a danger to them and seek to destroy it, to eliminate that perceived danger. Fear is why racism exists and fear is why racism will always exist. What can we do about racism then?

We can work to eliminate racism when we are confronted with it. Empathy and compassion, understanding it is not just about equality but also equity. That all people
are born into a place in the world that they had no choice in and the best people work hard to make it better for everyone while the worst isolate themselves in greed. In life you will find most people are somewhere in the middle.

I am sorry to say there is no easy answer to Racism because no matter how rational you speak to someone who is Racist, their fear may be so overwhelming that you might never get through to them. They may never tolerate the danger of differences.

The bottom line is that it is always worth trying to help, but some people will always refuse your help.

The old saying being, "You can lead a horse to water but you can not make it drink."

The other lesson you should take from this talk is that adults do not always have all the answers.

Goodnight.

2nd prompt

Hah hah, no.

**Respondent #4**

“Zorro Caracol”

Forgetting the Truth

When people first came about, everyone was one color; all people were black. Over thousands of years, as they spread out further and further from each other across the world, some peoples' skin changed color to suit the different climates, and for some other reasons.
These places became filled with people that all looked more or less the same, so it was all anyone there knew. The people stayed in these places, and rarely encountered people of different colors, so they became unknown to them. Some people from these places would travel to other places and bring back stories about people of other colors. These stories were often less than truthful and would scare the listeners, and misinform them.

Many people who traveled around the world were interested in becoming rich, and they discovered they could use their culture to take from other cultures, people of other colors. And so they did. And in order to make themselves the hero of their own stories, they convinced themselves that they themselves were superior to people of other colors and were entitled to take whatever they wanted, including the people themselves, enslaving them.

White people, especially, believe and propagate these lies. They think they are the ultimate evolution in humanity. In reality, random events led them to be able to overpower other cultures. They did this with brute force, and the invisible germs they carried with them. These germs devastated entire nations of people with plague and death. The greed was armed and boundless.

Racism comes from fear and greed and misunderstanding. It is spread by lies, told through the generations, and beliefs that permeate culture, that are unfounded in reality. Racism itself is a misinterpretation of history, told from the perspective of a self-deluded culture. It has bred global distrust and mistreatment.

**Respondent #5**
“Bree Gold”

The Spotted Ones.

The people of Landland woke up one morning and realised that some of them had spots on their faces. Someone's mom could have spots on their face, and they may not, but their sister might have them. It seemed random. Miss Picket round the corner has them. The milkman has them. The man on the TV selling WonderGlue has them. The kids at school have them, even one of the teachers. But one morning, everyone was talking about it. The news was even talking about it. The reporters with spots on their faces weren't talking about it, there wasn't any reporters with spots on their faces on the channel that was talking about it the most angrily.

One child, with spots on their face, watched this happen with mounting worry and fear. People started to shout, people started to cry. The child with the spots started to look at their spots in the mirror and wonder why people were so angry about them. At school, the spotted ones would group together and wonder what was going on. What is going to happen to us? When will this go away? By the end of the day, everyone with spots had experienced something to do with their spottedness. Even the old people at home alone, not leaving their houses had seen someone on the TV have something to say about the spots and what their kind should be doing. Of course, no one with spots was allowed to say anything about it. Only the "normal" people, as they called themselves.

By the end of the first week, the spotted ones became very sad and confused by how the "normal" people were treating them. They had been their friends, family, teachers, leaders, famous people, one day, then the next, they were haters. All because of some spots. Some "normal" people didn't say anything bad, but they didn't stop the others
from saying bad things either. Some tried to, but they were shouted down and scorned, so stopped trying to help. Those who kept on, were treated as badly as the spotted people, until they stopped talking, because the "normals" trusted other "normals" until they did something bad, something they didn't extend to the spotted ones. They were wrong straight away, on sight.

Do you think the "normals" are right?
Do you think the spotted ones are different?
Maybe one day, the spots won't matter, but until then, help out a spotted one, stop a "normal" from being mean. Do what you can to help.

Respondent #6
“Ares Apparently”

The Birth of Fear

Once upon a time, when the Earth was old but humankind was new, there was no fear. Everyone was equal and the same. But one day someone fell gravely ill. Although they were healed, they were forever changed after, for the sickness had taken root in their mind, and they felt a new thing.

Fear.

This new thing confused and angered them, and made them hate others for reasons they could not help.

“They are different from me, and that means they are dangerous,” they said, and so passed the sickness in their mind from one person to another. The people, which had been as one people, began to divide and hate each other.
Respondent #7

“Sholle”

When our country was very young, we did not have all the machinery we have now that could plant and tend our crops and build our buildings or do anything else that needed doing. So, someone, somewhere thought much more could be done if we had a group of people whose job it was to do all those things. They brought people here from Africa to be the ones to do the work. The people from our country wanted to make as much money as possible, so they decided that the African people would be their slaves. A slave is someone who does work but does not get paid for that work, except for having a place to live and food to eat. An awful lot of the people who owned the African people did not treat them very well. As a matter of fact, they treated them very badly. The owners made up terrible rules for the slaves, things like it was against the law to teach a slave to read. That way, since slaves couldn't read, many people got the idea that they were dumb and couldn't learn and because of that, the people who owned the slaves started thinking that they were better than the African people. This was not true, but since so many people thought it was true, they taught their children that the African people were not as important as the American people. This was the way things were for hundreds of years. But, little by little, some of the American people began to realize that the African people were just people, the same as they were.

Respondent # 8

“Iris”
Bears

Well, once upon a time, a bear with green eyes wanted to walk through a forest, to find his favorite place to fish for salmon and look for berries. This was a usual route, so he was not expecting any trouble. Once inside the forest, he was met with a few brown-eyed bears. "You cannot come through this forest. Go away. You are not wanted here," they told him. "But, why?" asked the green-eyed bear. "This is the way I always go." "You are not wanted here, you have green eyes. You are not a real bear," they yelled at him. At first, the green-eyed bear was sad. They had just told him that he was not a real bear. His feelings were hurt, he was indeed a bear, a great bear. Then, he became mad. He stood up tall, his voice a bit shaky, but clear, he said: "This is not your forest, I can walk through this forest. I am a bear, and you cannot tell me that I am not a real bear." They laughed in his face. "You are not a real bear. You have green eyes, and only real bears belong in this forest. You must not have been born around here, we all have brown eyes. Go away," they yelled. They laughed when they saw the green-eyed bear's bottom lip quiver. He was indeed about to cry. He was so mad, so sad, and so very scared. What if these bears were going to hurt him? There were more bears with brown eyes, and he was all alone. He turned around and walked back out the way he had just come, the laughing and chants of the brown-eyed bears making the trees rattle. All alone, and very scared, the green-eyed bear walked slowly away, thinking about how much fun he would have had fishing for salmon and looking for berries. His bear tummy grumbled in hunger. He began thinking about himself, and about all of his bear traits. He had bear paws, claws, and a very good nose for smelling. He had nice thick bear fur, and yes, it was true, he had green eyes. He had always had green eyes, and he had grown up here. He did not
know where his mom and dad were born, they had been bear orphans, an old family story about his parents being released in the area, a very, very long time ago, before he was born. He did not know the details, nor did he care. He was a bear. He was a bear that was told that because he looked a little different, he did not belong. He climbed back into his cold and dark rocky den, and went to sleep, his fur wet from tears, his belly empty, and his heart very, very sad.

Prompt #2

When the brown-eyed bears came across a bear with green eyes, walking through the forest, they were curious. They had never seen a bear with green eyes before, and cautiously approached him. "Are you a bear?" they asked. "Yes," the green-eyed bear said, a bit fearfully so. No one had ever questioned his bearness before. He was scared. Were they going to hurt him? Instead, one of the brown-eyed bears said, "You have lovely eyes, like the color of the water. I have never seen eyes like that before. Tell me your name. I am Sam." The green-eyed bear smiled. He wrinkled up his little black bear-nose. He was proud of his green eyes, and yes, he thought his eyes did look like the water. He noticed this when he caught his reflection in the water. "Thank you," said the green-eyed bear. "I like my eyes, they are a bit different, aren't they? But I can see very far away with these eyes. I am Ivan." "Welcome, Ivan. What makes you a bit different, makes you a good bear. Please, come join us. We found some great big berries in this new patch. Would you like to join us? We were scared at first, because you look a bit different, and... and I guess," Sam stumbled on his words, looking down onto the ground. Sam sighed, but continued, "I guess we thought that because you are different, that we were less like bears, but that is silly. What makes you beautiful, does not make me less
beautiful. I am sorry, Ivan. Will you forgive us, Ivan, and be our friend?" And that is exactly what happened that day, they became friends. They swam, and fished, and ate berries, and found object shapes in the clouds. Ivan's green eyes were very good, and he could see very far.

**Respondent #9**

“SK”

The Night People

Once upon a time, a long time ago years before our great great grandfathers were born, life was simpler. There were less families living on the street. There were fewer streets in the towns. There were many less towns in the states. And in all of the states, the few people that lived near one another worked similar jobs, married at around the same age, and all dressed and looked similarly. Most of the jobs were farming or had to do something with growing and trading food. Food was like gold. It’s value was more important than anything, except the love of children. Those children that the farmers loved had them working out in the field. You kept what mattered to you most close to you. So the farmers had their children help with the farming so they could keep their eyes on both. The farmers often had to explain to children what would happen to the missing carrots and corn when returned to the fields in the morning. When the farmers explained that there were some animals that were as dark as the night so they could not be seen. And those animals would come and steal their food. Children began mistreating the family dogs, cats, and other animals that they would see so that their family’s hard work would not be taken away from them. The children felt great responsibility to help their
hardworking fathers. So the children would leave their beds at night and stand watch in the fields. The fathers, and mothers who also worked in the fields, had to rethink their strategy as they did not want their loving children to abuse animals, whether innocent or not. Instead, they explained that these animals were not the pets or other animals they saw around the farm, in the woods, or in their academic books. But these were animals that looked like people. But they did not have their own means to make or buy food for themselves. The parents also described them as very dangerous and scared the kids back to their beds so they would not be out in the night. This helped for a while. Over time, people from different parts of the planet that were new to these people made their way. The small streets, towns, and states grew with more people. Some of these people looked very different from what these simple farmers and their children were used to. It was not long before dark skinned people that looked like humans lived nearby and were seen during the day. Children saw their parents not be nice to any person who was new to the land, who looked different, and was a threat to what simple profits they could make. Children talk amongst themselves, as they do, their parents having told similar stories. These dark-skinned people of the night were now seen more during the day. They were referred to as “animals that stole” food from the hardworking farmers during the day. And this is why racism exists in America.

Prompt #2

Once upon a time, a new president was elected. He defeated one of the most racist and hated white men of power in the world. This new president was truly a representative of all people. He was an older man and helped influence those of his generation to be open minded and more caring of different people. But it was Vice President, a woman of
color, whose stardom as a positive politician and influence captured the hearts of the people. Together, and with her eventual ascension to President of the United States, helped unite the people of her country. Not only did this help eliminate racism, but countries from all over the planet were so taken by her that she helped settle centuries of violence and tension among those that fought over religious, cultural, and economic differences. Peace was brought upon the world for all.

**Respondent #10**

“The Old Storyteller”

*The Coming of Chaos*

A very long time ago there lived a people who were warm and loving and who thought that the differences they saw in others made those others marvelously special. They felt that those differences were created by the gods to make the world more interesting and beautiful, like a garden with a great variety of flowers.

But there came into the world an evil spirit, a spirit being whose name was Chaos, that was malignant and hateful and who wanted to destroy the happiness it saw in the people. The evil spirit knew that to destroy such happiness would require a plan. So it thought and thought and it realized that the way to accomplish its evil goal was to first make the people afraid and the most insidious way to make them afraid was to make them believe that different wasn't good, that different was dangerous. It began whispering in the ears of the people this lie, that the differences they once saw as interesting and beautiful were in fact dangerous and ugly. And it told them that ugly people weren't to be trusted and that some differences were signs that those people weren't even quite people at all. And it
whispered to the people that those that were different should be hated and driven out of places where the real people lived, even if it took violence. Now, the people had never committed violence on one another, but the spirit being whispered to them that it was the only way to be safe, to be happy.

And so where there had once been true happiness, acceptance, and love, there was now bigotry, fear, and hate. And when the people thought about what they had lost and how their happiness was gone, the spirit being whispered, "Your happiness was only an illusion. There is no happiness...there is only survival."

And so the evil spirit had succeeded in destroying the peace and happiness that had existed among the people...and it was greatly pleased.

Respondent #11

“Oh yeah, who's asking?”

Broken Compass

Once upon a time, in a land far across the ocean, a man invented the compass. A compass can help you find your way, but in this story, it caused many to be lost.

Dark knights lined up in the halls of the kings of this land promising to use this magic new wonder to go on a quest and bring them back great riches- gold, diamonds, spices, and even a fountain of youth. The kings all wanted to be the richest and most powerful and so they sent these men on boats to find it.

When the dark knights arrived in our country, it was vast and full of people who dressed and acted in ways they had never seen before. They were hungry and lost and there were no gold or spices to be found, so they blamed the people for stealing and
hiding the gold. They killed them and stole their food. They took them as prisoners and slaves. They burned a path through the forests of this land leaving scars as deep and wide as the Mississippi.

The lands across the ocean suffered wars and upheaval and many who lived there were very unhappy. The kings claimed to now own the lands across the ocean, so they directed their unhappy subjects to move there. When they arrived, the land was eerily empty now. Most of the people had died of diseases brought by the dark knights, but they believed God had intervened for them because they were Christians.

Like the dark knights, they found living here hard. The cursed compass led the people across the ocean to Africa where they purchased captives to use as slaves. They knew slavery was wrong, having nearly ended it in their own countries, but it would be ok if the slaves weren't Christians.

Some of the native people who still remained, became friends with the new settlers and helped them while others decided it was best to fight these strange invaders who didn't know how to share the land. Over years and decades the fighting worsened and the settlers learned to fear and hate anyone who looked like the natives of this country or anyone different at all.

The black slaves became Christians, but the people from across the ocean were greedy and didn't want to release them, so then they said it was ok to enslave anyone with black skin but not white, because these people are subhuman, that they wouldn't be able to live as free people and possibly, didn't even have a soul for Jesus to save.
The numbers of settlers grew, the nation of the USA formed and they became powerful but more paranoid. They banned anyone from teaching slaves to read and laws were created to make it difficult to free slaves. They broke treaties with former native allies and forced them to live on pieces of land so small they couldn't hunt or live as they had for centuries. The natives were forced into debt and poverty, which then the settlers blamed on the natives.

Some settlers hated the slavery of black people and some simply feared it spreading and wanted a country without so many black people, so they fought a war with the people making money from it. The slaves were freed but they were poor and unwelcome. They took the compass and traveled across the US looking for a safe place, but nowhere accepted them and everywhere they felt lost.

White people then drafted cruel and tricky laws to control the black people, to keep them separated from them, and to exploit their labor. Black people would get around these laws though, so white people who hated black people and thought they didn't deserve to do as well as they would turn to violence. These people claimed to be knights too, dark knights, but without allegiance or loyalty to any king or government. These dark knights claimed white Protestant people built this place alone, ignoring all the work everyone else had been doing for a very long time, and no one else- black, Hispanic, Asian, Native-American, Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Atheist- should be treated as equal or given a chance to prove their worth. They spread lies and fear about others that blanketed the nation in darkness, haunted it with ghosts of the past, and our compass is broken, so we haven't found our way out yet.
Respondent #12

“Mary Michel”

The Rainbow Reflection

Once upon a time, there was a garden that brought joy and reverence to all that feasted their eyes upon it. No matter the season, the garden was sure to be a myriad of color and form as the blooms emerged one after the other.

For a long time, the flowers saw only those like themselves, and they believed this was as it should be.

As time went on, the climate changed, and with that shift the pattern of the blooms changed. The spring blooms saw the summer, summer looked upon fall, and they were unsure how to react to those unlike themselves.

Some flowers had the confidence to admire the blooms that were different, while others huddled in their own familiar patch, either blending with their own kind or murmuring utterings of dislike and disgust of the varieties of blooms around them. Some even suggested they were there to rob them of their own nutrients. Others proclaimed the different blooms would steal their sunshine.

The grumblings grew louder. So loud, that Wise Willow leaned her branches closer to hear. She too had enjoyed the splendor of each of the flowers as they emerged and bloomed. But she had revelled in the beauty of the various flowers blooming all at once.

Wise Willow’s heart ached when she heard that some of the flowers, while beautiful to the eye, were ugly and wilted on the inside. It never occurred to her that the array of colors and variety could be perceived as anything but magical and harmonious.
Willow could take no more of this. She shook her branches to get the attention of the chattering flowers. They continued to ramble amongst themselves. Wise Willow began to tremble, from the end of her branches to the deepest part of her roots. At last, she had their attention.

She spoke to the flowers.

“Many years I have feasted on the beauty of each and every one of you. Imagine my delight when all of your splendor bloomed before me at once. While I did appreciate your monochromatic bursts, they cannot compare to the rainbow of color I now see. Have you not admired the rainbow above? The harmonious combination of colors that reminds you that you have received the water you need and are then blessed with sunlight. How have you missed the reflection of the rainbow all around you? How have you failed to notice how perfect and natural it is when you coexist, just as the rainbow does?”

The silence of the flowers was felt throughout the garden. From then on, the only song that was heard was a peaceful harmony among all living things.

**Respondent #13**

“Human”

The Jealously Greedy Little Man

Once Upon A Time, there was a Jealously Greedy Little Man, his name was European. This man often competed for ideas and power within his own family who looked much like him, spoke similar to him, and they often shared many ideas and beliefs about how the world was for their taking. European felt so strongly in the belief that the human world was a construct of power, and he figured he must strive to gain and then
wield as much power as possible before he departed the earth. Of course the power lust was not resigned to just his lifetime, but to build a structure of power that would sustain his children, and their children, and their children’s lifetimes as well. This Jealously Greedy Little man wanted to ensure that the power would be established for infinite generations to come.

So, European set out to ‘explore’ the planet and conquer as much as he could. He developed systems of money and ways to rank and value all the other humans they encountered, passing judgment onto all those people and their way of life and the physical differences in their humanity. European realized that one of the quickest ways to gain this alluring power was to use violent means and make up false truths about our humanity to make him feel that he and his kind were more than or better. These lies and aggressive behavior were used to take advantage of others, and gain and retain a dominant life over other humans. Remember he was, after all, a Jealously Greedy Little man.

It was this greed and obsession with being important and powerful that birthed the idea of reducing others whom he labeled as inferior to less than human and ultimately the same as property. European began to buy and sell other humans and treat them like a mule, valuing them for their labor which if applied a certain way could generate more wealth and power.

Then he brought this system of value, judgement, and power with him to the shores of America where it was quickly established as the dominant construct of the land, consuming the people who had been living here before European’s arrival. With him he brought the humans that he had oppressed into property and established a community and
societal understanding that the world was full of people; who have more, and people who are less. According to the Jealously Greedy Little Man the easiest way to identify the lesser, was by their darker shade of skin. Creating a fallacy that has been with us ever since... Hence Racism in America.

Prompt #2

However, in our recent history a new story seems to be developing. There has been a glimmer of hope sparked by education and the unlearning of the system set forth by European and all the lies that it was founded on. So the next chapter is still being written.
A.2

Emma Kafalenos’s Polyvalent Narrative Functions

A (or a) destabilizing event (or reevaluation that reveals instability

B request that someone alleviate A (or a)

C decision by C-actant to attempt to alleviate A (or a)

(The C-actant is the character who performs function C.)

C’ C-actant’s initial act to alleviate A (or a)

D C-actant is tested

E C-actant responds to test

F C-actant acquires empowerment

G C-actant arrives at the place, or time, for H

H C-actant’s primary action to alleviate A (or a)

I success (or failure) of H
A.3
Morphological Data from Story Submissions
A.3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>A: disruptive event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 &quot;M. Frizzle&quot;</td>
<td>E's don't want to pay laborers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;M.Frizzle&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>The journey to equity is a lot of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 &quot;Klesh&quot; one story across both prompts.</td>
<td>The things we see as differences are not a big deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 &quot;Chris&quot;</td>
<td>The Prompt IS the disruptive event?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 &quot;Zorro Caracol&quot;</td>
<td>Untrue stories spread to provide an upper-hand to one culture over others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 &quot;Bree Gold&quot;</td>
<td>People wake up one day with spots on their faces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 &quot;Ares Apparently&quot;</td>
<td>Fear comes into the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7 &quot;Sholle&quot;</td>
<td>Africans are brought to America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8 &quot;Iris&quot;</td>
<td>The brown-eyed bears block the green-eyed bear from feeding grounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Iris&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>Brown-eyed bear engages and seeks understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 &quot;SK&quot;</td>
<td>Animals come to steal peoples' food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;SK&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>New president gets elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 &quot;The Old Storyteller&quot;</td>
<td>Chaos' enters the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 &quot;Oh yeah, who's asking?&quot;</td>
<td>A man invented a compass, and kings send boats to find riches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 &quot;Mary Michel&quot;</td>
<td>Climate change causes flowers to shift their 'bloom patterns' and now they all bloom at once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13 &quot;Human&quot;- long exposition, good lead-in</td>
<td>White men carried a system of value-judgement into the new world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### A.3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>C: decision by the C-actant to attempt to alleviate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 &quot;M. Frizzle&quot;</td>
<td>Tall Bearded Man gets everyone to listen to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;M.Frizzle&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>The kingdom decides to create a representative body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 &quot;Klesh&quot; one story across both prompts.</td>
<td>Kids hear the story 'butter battle'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 &quot;Chris&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;No fairy tales, no dumbing this down&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 &quot;Zorro Caracol&quot;</td>
<td>Whites decide they are 'better' to convince themselves they are entitled to take what they want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 &quot;Bree Gold&quot;</td>
<td>One child becomes worried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 &quot;Ares Apparently&quot;</td>
<td>Feeling a sickness, and relating it to a difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7 &quot;Sholle&quot;</td>
<td>Slave owners make up rules to keep slaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8 &quot;Iris&quot;</td>
<td>Green-eyed bear stands up to talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Iris&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>Brown-eyed bear asks Green-eyed bear his name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 &quot;SK&quot;</td>
<td>The children want to be helpful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;SK&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>Vice president works to capture the hearts of the people (metaphorically)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 &quot;The Old Storyteller&quot;</td>
<td>Chaos wants to destroy happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 &quot;Oh yeah, who's asking?&quot;</td>
<td>The compass gets men to Africa, where they take slaves because its totally fine to take slaves that aren't Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 &quot;Mary Michel&quot;</td>
<td>The Willow tree cannot stand listening to flowers argue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13 &quot;Human&quot;- long exposition, good lead-in</td>
<td>The white men decide they are the ones who will 'have more' by making others 'worth less'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>C’: C-actant’s initial act to alleviate A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#1 &quot;M. Frizzle&quot;</td>
<td>Bearded man tells everyone that the treatment of the A's is wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;M.Frizzle&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>Representatives draw up a charter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 &quot;Klesh&quot; one story across both prompts.</td>
<td>Kids decide to play together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 &quot;Chris&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;What can we do about racism?&quot; Author breaks the fourth wall almost speaking directly to the reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 &quot;Zorro Caracol&quot;</td>
<td>White people propagate and share the stories and lies about their superiority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 &quot;Bree Gold&quot;</td>
<td>Child starts to wonder what will happen to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 &quot;Ares Apparently&quot;</td>
<td>people keep others away from them who cause the fear to intensify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7 &quot;Sholle&quot;</td>
<td>The rules create a negative perception of Africans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8 &quot;Iris&quot;</td>
<td>Green-eyed bear states his 'barness' and stands up for himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Iris&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>Brown-eyed bear welcomes Green-eyed bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 &quot;SK&quot;</td>
<td>The children stand in the fields to protect the food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;SK&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>Vice-president helps unite the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 &quot;The Old Storyteller&quot;</td>
<td>Chaos whispers to people that 'different is dangerous'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 &quot;Oh yeah, who's asking?&quot;</td>
<td>People pass laws that say it's fine to enslave anyone with black skin, but not anyone with white skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 &quot;Mary Michel&quot;</td>
<td>Willow tree speaks to the flowers to try and stop the fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13 &quot;Human&quot;- long exposition, good lead-in</td>
<td>White men deem the darker-colored skin tones to be 'less' than the whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>H: C-actant’s primary action to alleviate A (or a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#1 &quot;M. Frizzle&quot;</td>
<td>A war is fought to decide a &quot;winner&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;M. Frizzle&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>It's decided that no one should make decisions without consulting all parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 &quot;Klesh&quot; one story across both prompts.</td>
<td>eventually all the kids forget about differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 &quot;Chris&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I'm sorry to say there is no easy answer&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 &quot;Zorro Caracol&quot;</td>
<td>H- is unclear, part of this 'story' is arranged like an essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 &quot;Bree Gold&quot;</td>
<td>Storyteller is the actant- prompts the reader to choose what should happen next</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 &quot;Ares Apparently&quot;</td>
<td>To try to feel better, they pass the sickness from one mind to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7 &quot;Sholle&quot;</td>
<td>These perceptions create a 'reality' where Africans are less-than wites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8 &quot;Iris&quot;</td>
<td>Green-eyed bear goes back to his den, sad and hungry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Iris&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>Brown-eyed bear invites the green-eyed bear to join the other bears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 &quot;SK&quot;</td>
<td>The adults choose to protect the children by lying to them and telling them that 'night people' are the thieves, not animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;SK&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>Vice-president 'settles centuries of violence'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 &quot;The Old Storyteller&quot;</td>
<td>People decide that violence is necessary to protect their happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 &quot;Oh yeah, who's asking?&quot;</td>
<td>A war is fought to decide a &quot;winner&quot; and Slaves are freed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 &quot;Mary Michel&quot;</td>
<td>Willow tree draws a comparison between rainbows and flowers and shows how all colors help to make the world beautiful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13 &quot;Human&quot;- long exposition, good lead-in</td>
<td>This falsehood has been ingrained in our culture, BUT a new plotline is developing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents</td>
<td>I: success or failure of H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#1 &quot;M. Frizzle&quot;</td>
<td>no matter how many rules change, people's minds don't change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;M. Frizzle&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>Every group of people feels supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 &quot;Klesh&quot; one story across both prompts.</td>
<td>The grown-ups follow the kids' lead/ people stop fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 &quot;Chris&quot;</td>
<td>It's always worth trying to help, but some people won't take that help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 &quot;Zorro Caracol&quot;</td>
<td>Unclear - part of this 'story' is arranged like an essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 &quot;Bree Gold&quot;</td>
<td>unknown/it is up to the reader to act successful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 &quot;Ares Apparently&quot;</td>
<td>Fear is successful, so Racism persists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7 &quot;Sholle&quot;</td>
<td>Some people do realize that Africans are no different than whites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8 &quot;Iris&quot;</td>
<td>FAILURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Iris&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>They become friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 &quot;SK&quot;</td>
<td>Dark-skinned people are called 'animals that stole' so... success for the white people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;SK&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>&quot;peace is brought upon the world&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 &quot;The Old Storyteller&quot;</td>
<td>Chaos succeeds, and is very happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 &quot;Oh yeah, who's asking?&quot;</td>
<td>Slaves take the compass and travel the world, never feeling like they belong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 &quot;Mary Michel&quot;</td>
<td>The flowers stop arguing after the Willow scolds them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13 &quot;Human&quot;- long exposition, good lead-in</td>
<td>The next chapter is unwritten/still being written...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A.3.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>K equilibrium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 &quot;M. Frizzle&quot;</td>
<td>Some people stay in the land of racism- racism will exist forever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;M. Frizzle&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>2nd- Everyone lived happily ever after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 &quot;Klesh&quot; one story across both prompts.</td>
<td>2nd- People are accepted for who they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 &quot;Chris&quot;</td>
<td>Adults don't have all the answers- Racism will always exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 &quot;Zorro Caracol&quot;</td>
<td>No equilibrium- racism will always exist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5 &quot;Bree Gold&quot;</td>
<td>possible, but uncertain that racism could be eliminated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 &quot;Ares Apparently&quot;</td>
<td>Racism continues- no equilibrium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7 &quot;Sholle&quot;</td>
<td>equilibrium is implied (things are getting better)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8 &quot;Iris&quot;</td>
<td>Equilibrium, but life is worse, racism continues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Iris&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>2nd- Equilibrium! Life is better/racism ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9 &quot;SK&quot;</td>
<td>Equilibrium is racism continues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;SK&quot; 2nd Prompt</td>
<td>2nd- Equilibrium without racism, but without details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10 &quot;The Old Storyteller&quot;</td>
<td>Equalibrium is everyone sufferring, racism continues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11 &quot;Oh yeah, who's asking?&quot;</td>
<td>equilibrium, with sufferring, racism continues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12 &quot;Mary Michel&quot;</td>
<td>Peace and harmony prevail! Racism ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13 &quot;Human&quot;- long exposition, good lead-in</td>
<td>Racism exists, but 2nd prompt- maybe we could change that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A.4 Survey Story Prompt

“Imagine you are babysitting. Despite a few arguments, like who should have control of the 'big screen' in the living room, you have had a great evening. The young boy and girl you have been tasked with watching, while their parents are out for the night, are bright and polite children. You are very close with the family, and they trust you completely.

While eating their dinner, and unbeknownst to you, the kids watch a few TikTok videos inspired by the current national conversation about race, and racism in America.

Later, as you are tucking them in for the night, the kids ask you why racism exists. You tell them it's complicated. They ask you to tell them anyway. They ask for a ‘fairytale’ or bedtime story to help explain why racism exists in America. You take a breath. You are pretty shocked by this request from a couple of 9 year-olds. But, they need a story, and you are their favorite babysitter. You muster up some courage and begin.

'Well, you see kids... Once upon a time...’”
Bibliography


