

# DO STORIES PROMOTE LEARNING MORE THAN NON-STORIES?

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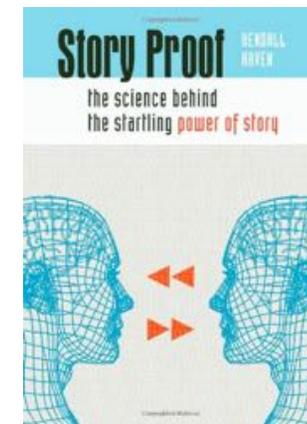
## Background

- Anecdotal evidence and common sense say that we remember stories better than non-stories.
- Example: The Rabbit
  - [bit.ly/rabbitstory](http://bit.ly/rabbitstory)



## Background

- Haven claims “story structure is an information delivery system powerhouse, evolutionarily hardwired into human brains.”
- Haven, K. F. (2007). *Story proof: the science behind the startling power of story*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited.

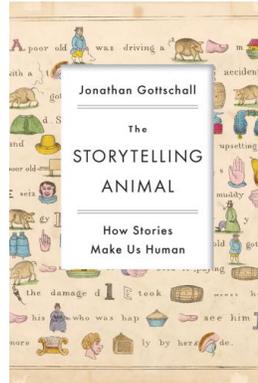


# Background: Story Grammar

- **Basic Story Grammar**

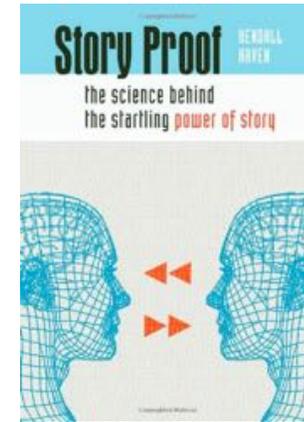
- **Character +**
- **Predicament +**
- **Attempted Extrication**

- **Gottschall, J. (2012).** *The storytelling animal: how stories make us human.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.



# Background: Story Grammar

1. Character
2. Character Traits
3. Character Goals
4. Motive
5. Conflicts and Problems
6. Risks
7. Struggle (internal external)
8. Sensory details



# Background: Research

- **“Students who had story grammar instruction performed significantly better on basal, story grammar, and theme questions, and on written retells, than students who had traditional instruction.”**

- **Dimino, J., Gersten, R., Carnine, D., & Blake, G. (1990).** *Story Grammar: An Approach for Promoting At-Risk Secondary Students' Comprehension of Literature.* *The Elementary School Journal*, 91(1), 19–32.



# Background: Lack of L2 Research

- **“No reported studies have investigated the effects that the structure of narrative texts have on the reading comprehension of foreign-language (L2) readers in American schools and universities.”**

- **Riley, G. L. (1993).** *A Story Structure Approach to Narrative Text Comprehension.* *The Modern Language Journal*, 77(4), 417–432.



# Introduction

- It's a valid research topic in L1 reading studies.
  - We need L2 research in this area.
    - This is my first attempt.

# Procedure

- Two groups of university students read separate variations of one text.
- The Story Group (SG) read a variation embedded in story grammar, i.e., with a character who faced conflict and tried to resolve it.
  - It was the VS (Version Storified)
- The Non-Story Group (NSG) read a variation with the same facts, but not embedded in story grammar.
  - It was the VF (Version Factual)

# Procedure

- After reading and a delay, SG and NSG Groups took identical quizzes about the text.
- The SG and NSG groups got statistically similar results on the quiz, but in one subset of the SG Group, learners performed better.

## The Smartest Dog (VF)

Dr. John Pilley is a scientist. He works with animals, especially dogs. For a long time he worked with a dog named Yasha. When Yasha died, Dr. Pilley didn't want any more dogs. But when he retired from his job, his wife gave him a new dog. The dog's name is Chaser.

Chaser is a Border Collie. There are many kinds of dogs in the world. Some of the most popular dogs are Labradors, Golden Retrievers, and Poodles. But the smartest dog is the Border Collie. A Border Collie is a sheep dog. Sheep dogs are good at listening to the voice of their masters. Dogs can understand words and follow simple instructions, but Border Collies are really good at this.

Chaser is especially famous for understanding and learning words. She is still learning today with Dr. Pilley in South Carolina of the United States. Why is Chaser famous? After working with

Dr. Pilley, Chaser learned 1022 English words. Other dogs have learned many words. For example, Rico is a Border Collie who knows about 200 words. But Chaser knows more words than any other dog. On top of that, she knows the difference between nouns and verbs.

Because of this, Chaser has been on TV many times, and there

is also a popular book about

Chaser. The book is called "Chaser: Unlocking the Genius of the Dog Who Knows a Thousand Words."

The story of Chaser is not over. Dr. Pilley is still working with her, and maybe one day she will know 2,000 words. In any case, we know one thing. Chaser is not just the most famous Border Collie. She may also be the smartest dog in the world.



What are the best pets to have?

### THINK ABOUT IT

Write your discussion and comprehension questions.

### WORD FOCUS: LIST NEW OR HARD WORDS

verbal

He's a \*\*\* person. He talks a lot.

## The Smartest Dog (VS)

Dr. John Pilley was sad. For many years, he worked with Yasha. He worked with Yasha as a scientist, but they were also best friends. As time passed, Yasha became very sick. Dr. Pilley tried to help Yasha, but Yasha didn't get better. Then it happened. Yasha died, and Dr. Pilley cried and cried. For 16 years, he worked, studied, and played with Yasha, but 16 years is old for a dog. After Yasha's death, Dr. Pilley decided to never get another dog again.

A few years passed, and Dr. Pilley retired from his job. One day, he came home, and his wife came to meet him. She kissed him and said, "I have a gift for you." The gift was a new dog. Dr. Pilley was very happy. It was a beautiful black and white dog. Dr. Pilley named the dog Chaser.

Chaser is a Border Collie. There are many kinds of dogs in the world. Some of the most popular dogs are Labradors, Golden Retrievers, and Poodles. But the smartest dog is the Border Collie. A Border Collie is a sheep dog. Sheep dogs are good at listening to the voice of their masters. Dogs can understand words and follow simple instructions, but Border Collies are really good at this.

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### Chaser Quiz

Choose the best answer. Write your answer (A, B, C, or D) on the right.		A	B	C	D	ABCD
#	Example: Please write the ___ answer in the answer box.	best	worst	silly	interesting	A
1	What kind of dog is Chaser?	Poodle	Labrador	Collie	Retriever	
2	What kind of work does Dr. Pilley do? He is a ***	scientist	school teacher	writer	trainer	
3	How many words does Chaser know?	200	2,000	1,000	1,022	
4	Chaser knows the difference between ***	balls and toys	nouns and verbs	dogs and people	good and bad	
5	Before Chaser, Dr. Pilley had a dog named ***	Border	Rico	Yasha	Carolina	
6	Where is Chaser from?	United States	South America	Canada	Scotland	
7	Who gave Chaser to Dr. Pilley?	His wife	His mother	His friend	His co-worker	
8	Who knows more words?	Chaser	Rico	Yasha	Carolina	
9	What kind of dog is a Border Collie? It's a ***	hunting dog	pet dog	fighting dog	sheep dog	
10	Many people know about Chaser. The story gives 2 reasons. What are they?					
A.	Have you heard about this story before today?	A. Yes		B. No		
B.	How interesting was this story to you?	A. Not interesting	B. A little interesting	C. Interesting	D. Very Interesting!	

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Results

EFL Group	VS N = 6	VF N = 9	DELAY
Scores	71%	73%	20
Native/EFL	VS N = 13	VF N = 15	DELAY
Scores	75%	69%	20/145
Natives	VS N = 7	VF N = 6	DELAY
Scores	79%	63%	145

## Conclusions

- It's hard to make the different story and non-story versions.
  - Hard to create. Hard to quantify the differences.
- Even with (N = 13; N = 15), we needed more participants.
  - This is especially true for the subdivisions of groups.
- Need more control over time variables.
  - Time reading. Time taking the quiz.
- What about other variables, enjoyment, interest, flow?
  - Future questionnaires should include these.

# Thank You

- Thank you for coming.
- If you'd like to collaborate on "story grammar" research,
  - Contact me at editor 😊 [beeoasis.com](mailto:editor@beeoasis.com)
  - Let's try more experiments.
- For a PDF of this talk, please visit
  - [www.ilinguist.net](http://www.ilinguist.net)