I love to tell the story

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Introduction

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away…

These words, immortalised by George Lucas (1977) herald the beginning of a story, a narrative, an epic. A story connects people. It's how we explain the past, it's how we shape our identity, and it's how we form a picture of what the future may hold for us. Everyone relates to a story. If you don't believe it, just start telling a story in class and observe the stillness that suddenly settles on the restless young bodies and minds as they connect with the characters and plot.

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Storytelling has always been part of the fabric of life. Myths and fables, heroic deeds, values and morals, have all been passed from one generation to the next in narrative form as stories, poems, dances and songs. Our students are familiar with narratives. Ask them to identify the complication and resolution of *Hamlet* or *Farmer Schulz's Ducks* and you may receive blank stares, but ask them to identify the villain in *The Dark Knight* or *Nemo*, and they will answer without hesitation. Our children, like those of past generations, learn through narrative, but with one defining difference. In the past, tribal elders, patriarchs, matriarchs, parents and church leaders were the chief storytellers. These individuals had the moral and spiritual wellbeing of their children as a priority. Today, many of the stories our students listen to are told by people who have no concern for their values or morals and no interest in their eternal safety. Tinseltown is profit driven and so it produces what sells, and what sells is a good story, an epic.

Have you ever stopped to ponder the elements of a story that make it so appealing? What is it about the characters, the villains and the heroes, the complication, the interplay of good and evil and the final triumph of the resolution that makes us sigh with satisfaction? Eldredge (2004, p.13) maintains that the answer is found in Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT) "He has planted eternity in the human heart."

In each of our hearts, Eldredge claims, God has embedded a yearning to unfold and understand the real story, the story that brings purpose and meaning to life. Have you noticed that every great epic, the classics of literature and the silver screen all contain the same basic elements? They often begin in an idyllic environment, into which comes a chord of dissonance, a sinister echo from the past. There is usually a period of oppression, during which the common people catch fleeting glimpses of hope. And then one is called, often from obscurity, to tackle the villain head-on, to "outwit, outplay and outlast" (Burnett, 2000) the evil forces, and the epic reaches its glorious climax, its last battle, its final confrontation. Sound familiar? It should, for this is the blueprint of the original epic, the one God has planted in our hearts. Oliver (2006, p.13) calls it a metanarrative, our worldview story of the great controversy between good and evil, based on the Bible.

As Christian teachers, we have a perfect opportunity to share this original epic with our students: not just a glimpse here and there, but in its entirety. This brings us to an important question. Does our curriculum reflect the whole epic? If our focus is too narrow, the true meaning and purpose will be lost, for it is in the context of the whole story that each part takes on meaning. The metanarrative deserves a closer examination, so, as with all good stories, we will start at the beginning.

The beginning, in this case, goes back beyond the events described in Genesis. In order to understand the metanarrative, to give meaning and purpose to the grandest story ever told, we have to go back in time, right back into pre-earth history, to discover the key character. This key character is also the Master Artist, the Poet Laureate, the Pulitzer Prize Novelist, the Academy Award Script Writer and Producer, the Nobel Peace Prize Winner and the Alpha and Omega of the greatest epic ever written. Does this sound too good to be true? This is the reality of God, yet even this partial description fails miserably to describe the Supreme Being who is God.

While secular society denies the existence of the Master Storyteller, Christians exercise their faith and accept the reliability of the biblical narrative as the word of God (2 Tim 3:16, 17). Without this belief, there is no story to tell. But God, living in harmonious accord with His created beings, the angels, is only the start of the story. It is important to note that God does not surround Himself with robotic followers, incapable of free choice. God instead takes the risk

of creating beings who will serve Him out of hearts of love. Consequently, the worst scenario is realised when dissonance creeps into this Utopia. The seed of pride is nurtured in the heart of Lucifer, the shining star among the angels. Note this description paralleling the King of Tyre found in the book of Isaiah:

> How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God…I will be like the Most High. (Isaiah 14:12-14, *NKJ*)

This biblical account, along with others (see Ezekiel 28:12-19, Revelation 12; 7-9) is accepted by Seventh-day Adventist Christians as the explanation of the origin of sin. The importance of this point lies in a simple exercise of logic. If there is no sin in the world, there is no need of a Saviour; a hero to rescue sinners. Put plainly, the absence of sin would render Christ's sacrifice meaningless. This simple truth may help explain why our students may be reluctant to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. Unless they understand the origin and nature of sin, they may not feel the need of a Saviour. Without the whole story, individual chapters may not make sense.

So there is war in heaven and Lucifer and his followers are expelled forever (Rev 12:7-9). Therein lies our initial complication, the first conflict, the first hint that all is not well in the Universe, and all heaven waits with baited breath while Lucifer and his henchmen regroup and define their battle plan.

Then God gives a most astounding display of His power. In the face of impending evil, He creates this world, an earth of boundless beauty, delicate design and perfect order, and He inhabits it with intelligent life, patterned after who He is. The Genesis account reveals an omnipotent God with an overwhelming compulsion to create life with His words and sustain it with His breath (Genesis 1, 2). It is into this perfect environment that God places the masterpiece of His handiwork—Adam and Eve. At this point, a sinister echo from the past reverberates in the newly formed paradise. We know the story; how Satan, alias Lucifer, disguised as a serpent deceived those first inhabitants of earth, tempting them with his clever lies to distrust their Creator (Genesis 3). It is here that the complication impacts our perfect planet. It is from this point that the downward spiral of helplessness and hopelessness begins for humanity.

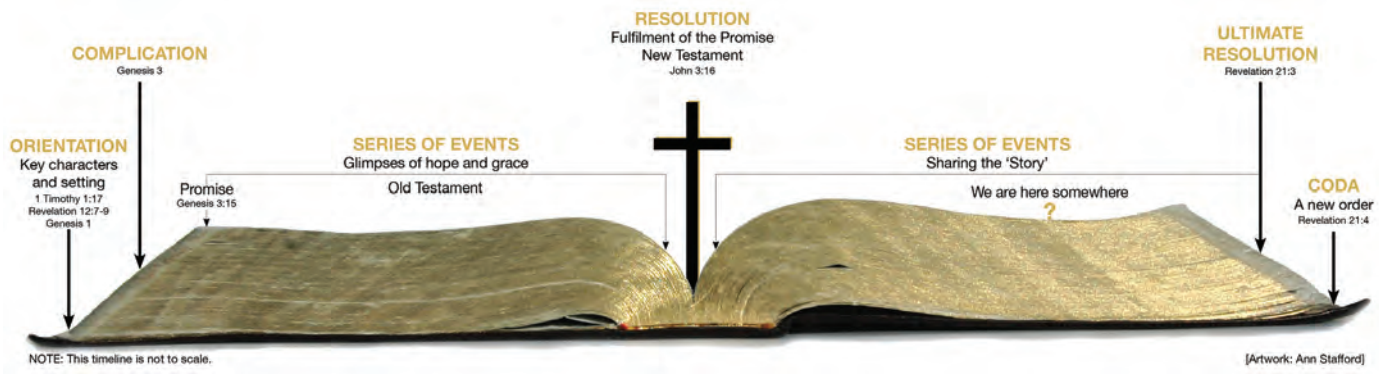
Yet all is not lost. Into this despair comes a covenant (Genesis 3:15), the promise of a Hero, and as the metanarrative unfurls, we catch glimpses of hope in the grace God pours out on those who trust Him. All of our teaching of Old Testament stories should be grace-infused and hope-inspired. Salvation is not the domain only of the New Testament. It is the grand theme of the Old Testament also (Exodus 20:2).

Take the story of Abraham, a life lived out in the vortex of grace. At each stage of his life Abraham is the recipient of unexpected grace, but never is grace more evident than in that final climax when Abraham stands ready to sacrifice *his* only son, his promised one (Genesis 22:1-13). So often we emphasise Abraham's willing obedience in this story and forget the real agenda set by God. Tyner (2006) puts it beautifully. "He [God] is the One who provides the sacrifice, including the sacrifice that gives us eternal salvation – doing for humans that which is impossible for us to do for ourselves." This is the real message of Mt. Moriah, that God not only demands the sacrifice, but He provides it. The theme is continued in the lives of Noah, Rahab, Ruth, Gideon, David, Hosea and countless others. Each life, each incident, is a testament to the grace of God, a foretaste of the promised One.

> ***"All of our Old Testament storytelling should be grace-infused and hope-inspired"***

And so the metanarrative unfolds over time. Faithful believers pass the story and its promise down through the generations, and each generation wonders, "Will we be the ones to witness the coming of the promised One?" When the God-ordained moment arrives (Gal 4:4,5), His coming is so at odds with the expectations of the oppressed that it goes largely unnoticed, except by a few common shepherds (Luke 2:8-18), some foreign emissaries (Matt 2:1,2) and a couple of elderly nobodies (Luke 2:25-32, 36-38) who have read the ancient prophecies and actually know what they are looking for. For thirty years, while the promised One grows, the world of humanity is oblivious to His presence. Then He begins His mission, and His listeners see glimpses of what they long for, hear echoes of what they have hoped for, and wonder, "Could this be the One?"

It is impossible to be unmoved by this Hero. As He journeys around the countryside, healing the sick, raising the dead, challenging the common laws and mores with His stories, He is either loved or feared, and the fear burgeons into hatred. The ruling class, whose ways have gone unchallenged for centuries, anticipate an uprising and begin plotting His demise. How wrong and how right they are to fear this Jesus: wrong because their idea of an uprising includes radical insurgents, angry dissidents and political manipulation, right because the uprising results in a revolution that still lives on in the hearts of its followers two millennia later.



It is with horror that we witness our Hero cursed and spat upon, beaten and mocked (Matt 27:27-31). It is with awe that we observe His self-control, born out of His all-encompassing love, as He allows Himself to be led to that roman cross, the cruellest of all deaths. And so He hangs on a cross, this God-man who split time in two. Forever after, the inhabitants of earth will mark their time from this one event. This is the pivotal point of our story, where heaven and humanity meet in the selfless sacrifice of God and are reconciled to each other. If we have told the story well, our students will grasp the significance, and lift their hearts in worship.

The death of a hero always results in the deepest despair, but that despair bursts wide open as the stone is rolled away. The resurrection (Luke 24:1-7), the gift of the Holy Spirit and the ascension (Acts 1:6-11) follow in quick succession, with a promise from Jesus to return and take His followers home (John 14:1-3).

> ***Are our students aware that the steps of their existence are choreographed into the greatest story of all times?***

At this point in the metanarrative, we may be tempted to stop. After all, the supreme gift has been offered, accepted, and the resolution is complete—or is it? Just as an epic has plots and sub plots, so does the story of Salvation. Once again the eons pass, and once again heaven waits in anticipation. The epic is passed on by storytellers in the Colosseum and catacombs of Rome, by Waldensian pedlars in the alpine villages of Europe, by martyrs burned at the stake, by a humble printer in Germany, by bible smugglers across the English Channel, by beggars and scholars, by commoners and royalty, and by Christian teachers determined that the story will not be lost. And the final, ultimate resolution of the narrative? It is a resolution that not only gives hope for the present, but holds out to each of us the promise of a never ending story; of eternity spent in the presence of an almighty, all forgiving, all loving God (Rev 21:3, 4).

Some narratives have a coda, an optional element where the pattern of everyday life "is no longer quite the same as when the story began. The new order incorporates some new knowledge that has been gained from what has happened" (BOS NSW, 1994). The metanarrative has a coda. Simply put, it is this: God alone is worthy of worship. God is validated as the supreme ruler of the universe and sin is eradicated forever. "One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation" (White, 1888, p. 678). Only the remnants of one reminder linger. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, forever carries the scars of His love for us in His head, His hands and His feet (White, 1888, p.678).

Knowledge of the Story of Salvation carries with it responsibility. Are we being intentional in how we share the greatest epic ever told? How can we ensure that our students are hearing this amazing epic in a way that will touch their lives for eternity? The following strategies may contribute in a positive way:

1. Plan faith development curriculum so that students have an opportunity to engage with the biblical metanarrative each year of their schooling.
2. Write a cohesive curriculum structured on the great controversy between Christ and Satan that is age appropriate from infants to the final year of school.
3. Ensure that all teachers are fully aware of the implications of the whole epic: the great controversy between Christ and Satan.
4. Use examples of the great epics of literature and theatre to demonstrate how they are mere reflections of the story God has planted in our hearts.
5. Continually point out to students where in the epic particular biblical events and stories fit.
6. Use the biblical metanarrative as a platform from which to teach narrative writing.
7. Joyfully live out the Story of Salvation as a witness to our students.

8. Pray consistently our students will listen to, understand, and unreservedly accept the Story of Salvation.

Are we giving our students the opportunity to discover the Saga of Salvation unfolding around them? Do they realise they are part of the cast? Are our students aware that the tune of their lives contributes to the symphony, that the steps of their existence are choreographed into the greatest story of all times?

We live in a world of reality *and* virtual reality. Many of our students become absorbed in the epics they hear and see on the three screens—cinema, television and computer. One of the insidious drawcards of computer games is that our students can be absorbed into an epic. They can live out the saga in virtual reality, and sadly, many discover a sense of purpose not felt in the real world. Here is our calling as Christian teachers. To point our students towards the reality of the story God is telling: to introduce them to the ultimate hero of all times. Why let our students live out man-made epics in virtual reality when they can know and experience the ultimate reality, the original epic? Why not introduce them to the metanarrative that can change their young lives, give them courage and knowledge to face the twenty-first century, and instil in them hope for a certain future? This is the story that should dominate our teaching.

A teacher was given a task by God. Her brief: to bring her students to the realisation that they were saved children of God with a sure and safe future. She pondered the task. She divided her content, and developed her strategies. She began with a gripping presentation on worldviews, and her students applauded. She continued with a research project on the reliability of scripture, and her students were convinced. She taught apologetics of the Christian faith, and her students became skilled at argument. But still she wasn't satisfied. Something was missing. Then, with a knowing smile born out of personal experience, she gathered her students around her and began to tell them The Story, and as they listened with growing wonder, the Author and Hero stepped right out of The Story and into their hearts and lives. TEACH

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Food challenges—a 200 page resource for teachers

The Sanitarium Nutrition Service has teamed up with the Victorian Home Economics and Textiles Teachers' Association (VHETTA) – now known as Home Economics Victoria (HEV). They produced a 200 page teachers' resource or workbook, ***Food Challenges***, which encourages students to appreciate great food, and above all, take lifetime ownership of their own health.

Written by experienced teachers (Dr Jane Lawrence, Dr Gayle Savige, Alison Kuen) with an understanding of curriculum requirements across the country, the resource takes a fresh, fun and engaging look at food. Designed for upper primary and lower secondary students, it is an invaluable resource for the teaching of Home Economics, Food Technology and Health. Since its release in 2006, it has been a best-selling resource and continues to generate interest nationally.

Each of the 12 chapters looks at a different situation or occasion and features hands-on food production, design challenges, nutrition investigations and case studies. Some of the chapter headings include: "Are your brekkies brilliant?"; "Is your canteen helping"; "Culture and diversity"; "School camp cuisine"; "What's for dinner?"; "Watching your budget". This resource challenges young people to be informed, aware and confident decision-makers and consumers.

For just **$39.95**, this full-colour, beautifully designed book is a celebration of fresh, delicious and healthy food. To view a chapter of ***Food Challenges*** and download an order form, just visit our website **www.sanitarium.com.au/nutrition/resources.html**

For more information about this resource, contact Angela Saunders (Senior Dietitian—Sanitarium Nutrition Service) on 02 4348 7625.



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