

The Story Routine: Main, Side, and Hidden

A routine for exploring the complexity and depth of an incident, document, painting or photograph

After closely looking at or reading the source document, identify and begin to elaborate on:

1. What is the *main* or central story being depicted or documented?
2. What is the *side* story (or stories) happening on the sidelines or around the edges that may not necessarily involve the main characters?
3. What is the *hidden* story—that other story that may be obscured, neglected, or happening below the surface that we aren't readily aware of initially?

Purpose: What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

This routine helps students dig into events and explore documents in more depth by constructing different narratives related to those events. This may raise new questions of inquiry and wonderings to be explored. The routine also encourages students to identify additional points of view, beyond those of the central characters, which might not be fully represented or portrayed.

Application: When and where can it be used?

This routine asks students to identify and begin to tell multiple narratives stemming from a photograph they are looking at, a story they are reading, a work of art they are examining, an historical event being discussed, or a newspaper account under review. Use this routine when you want to go beyond the main story itself or want to explore new perspectives or alternative accounts of events, perhaps of marginalized actors. The main story is that which is being centrally presented and often the purpose or main intent of the account or image. Often instruction stops with the main story, but that needn't be the case. The side story encourages learners to look at what may be happening on the sidelines and to explore the perspective of those supporting the story and impacted by it but perhaps not playing one of the major parts. Alternatively, a side story might be the action happening right alongside the main event but is being overshadowed by it. The hidden story or the other story usually doesn't present itself directly. One needs to go beneath the surface to identify what isn't being stated, what is obscured, or what perspective isn't being heard or seen.

Launch: What are some tips for starting and using the routine?

To uncover these narratives requires both looking closely and looking beyond. As such, it may be useful to combine this routine with See-Think-Wonder, focusing on the See and Think steps to identify the main story as well as what might be happening on the sides. Wonderings could then explore the possible hidden stories. Alternatively, three columns (Main, Side, Hidden) could be drawn on the whiteboard and the class could identify the characters that exist for each section. Once the characters are identified, events and actions can be charted for each column as well. Using this information, students can then craft their own versions of the main, side, and hidden story either orally or in writing. Such accounts would be based on the information identified but enhanced by details that are creatively imagined to produce a work of historical fiction. Alternatively, students might select an emerging side or hidden story to research and present this factual information to the rest of the class to help in understanding the complexity of the event being explored.