

THE ART OF THE TALE



Engage Your Audience, Elevate Your Organization,
and Share Your Message Through Storytelling



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What to Remember When Sharing Multicultural Stories

The only way for stories to stay alive is for them to be heard, remembered, and shared. But what if you want to tell a story that's from another culture?

In recent years, there has been growing concern in the storytelling community about people appropriating stories from other cultures. This is a complex issue without a lot of simple answers, and speakers tend to have strong feelings about it one way or the other. Can a man tell a story from a woman's perspective? Why or why not? What defines culture? What about race? Ethnicity? Religion? Who's to say where one culture ends and another begins? How long do I need to be a member of a certain "culture" or geographic region before I can tell "their" stories? (For instance, do you need to be of European descent to tell Grimm's fairy tales? Why or why not?)

When considering telling multicultural stories, do your research. For instance, some stories are sacred to different religious groups or spiritual practices and are intended for use only in that context. Simply say to the teller, "That story really connected with me. I'd love to share it with others. Would I have your permission to do so?" Then, if the answer is "yes," when you share the story, mention its origins and that you received permission to tell it.

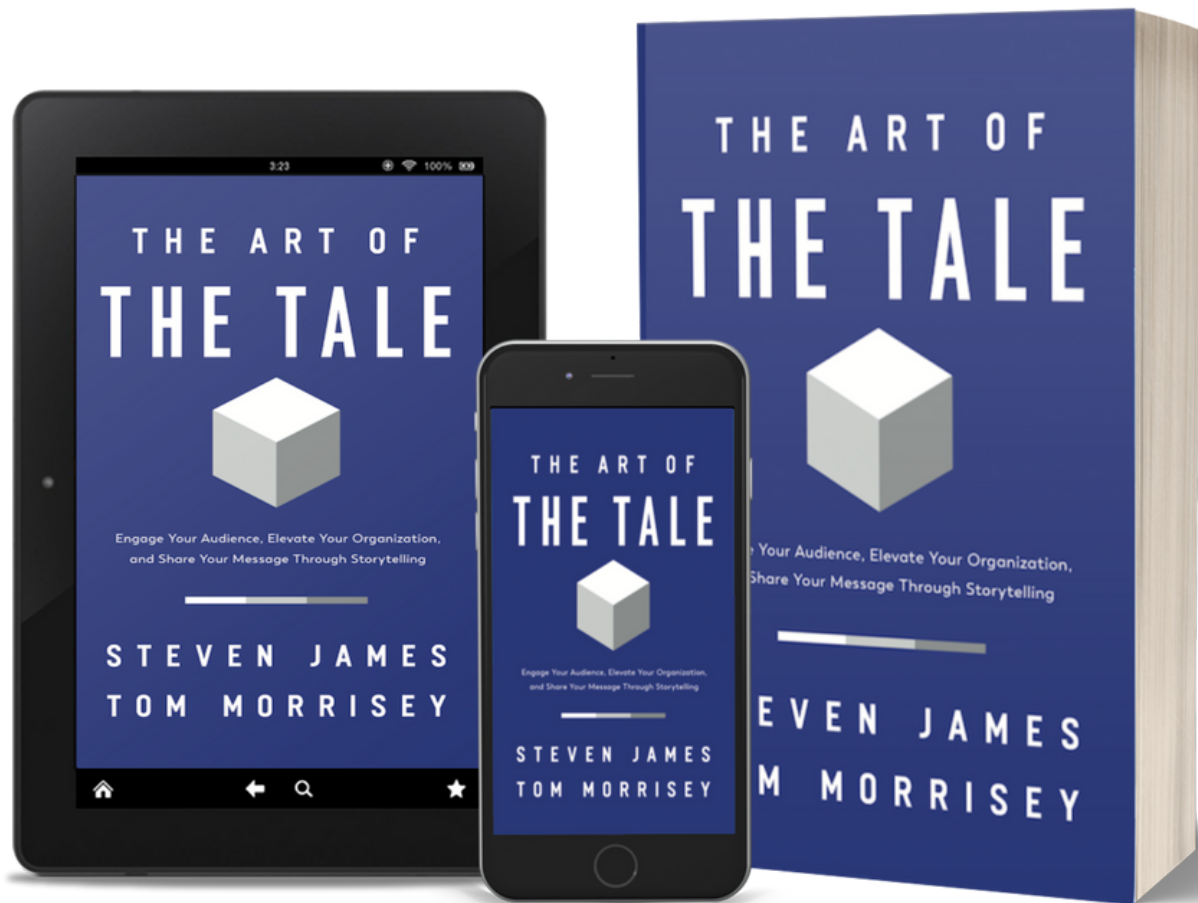
When transitioning to telling a story from another culture, you might connect the tale with your personal story. For instance: "I was on a business trip to Russia and when we were having dinner, the director of our branch there told me this really powerful story that he heard when he was growing up. I'd like to share it with you today." Then the story comes from your personal experience and not simply from another culture. Or you might say, "We can all learn a lot from other cultures, and often the lessons in their stories stretch across cultural boundaries and teach universal truths. That's true of this story from Jamaica ..."

If you're not sure where the story comes from, or if it has multiple variants from around the world (which is actually quite common), you may wish to say something like, "This is a story that's found in many different parts of the world and told in many different ways. This is my favorite version."

Through it all, be respectful of others, give credit where credit is due, and celebrate the stories that can span the divides between us.



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For tips and techniques for addressing stories from other cultures, see Chapter 8 in [The Art of the Tale](#).



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