

Using Storytelling to Strengthen Peer Leadership Skills in Grade 11 Boys

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Further Information
This poster and further information is available at <http://www.theibsc.org/>
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Introduction

Peer leaders help new boys learn Woodberry's culture and expectations. This project sought to embed storytelling in our Peer Leadership Council and advance goals set by the peer leaders, who said they wanted their weekly meetings to feature more stories and engagement.

The Research Question

How does personal storytelling strengthen the peer leadership skills of Grade 11 boys?

Research Context and Participants

I trained twenty-five peer leaders at Woodberry Forest. Peer leaders were in Grade 11 and selected through a competitive application process. Each group included five or six Grade 9 boys and was led by a Grade 11 boy.

Woodberry Forest School is a boys' boarding school located on a large, rural campus in Virginia. All 400 students in Grades 9-12 live on the campus. Most students are from the American South and mid-Atlantic; about 13 percent of the student body is from overseas.

The Research Action

The boys were introduced to Freytag's Pyramid, a storytelling structure used for hundreds of years. After watching a Super Bowl commercial as an example, peer leaders practiced telling stories to each other. I reviewed Freytag's pyramid and led them through another practice exercise with stories from Woodberry during a follow-up training session.

FREYTAG'S PYRAMID

This simple storytelling structure has worked for thousands of years.

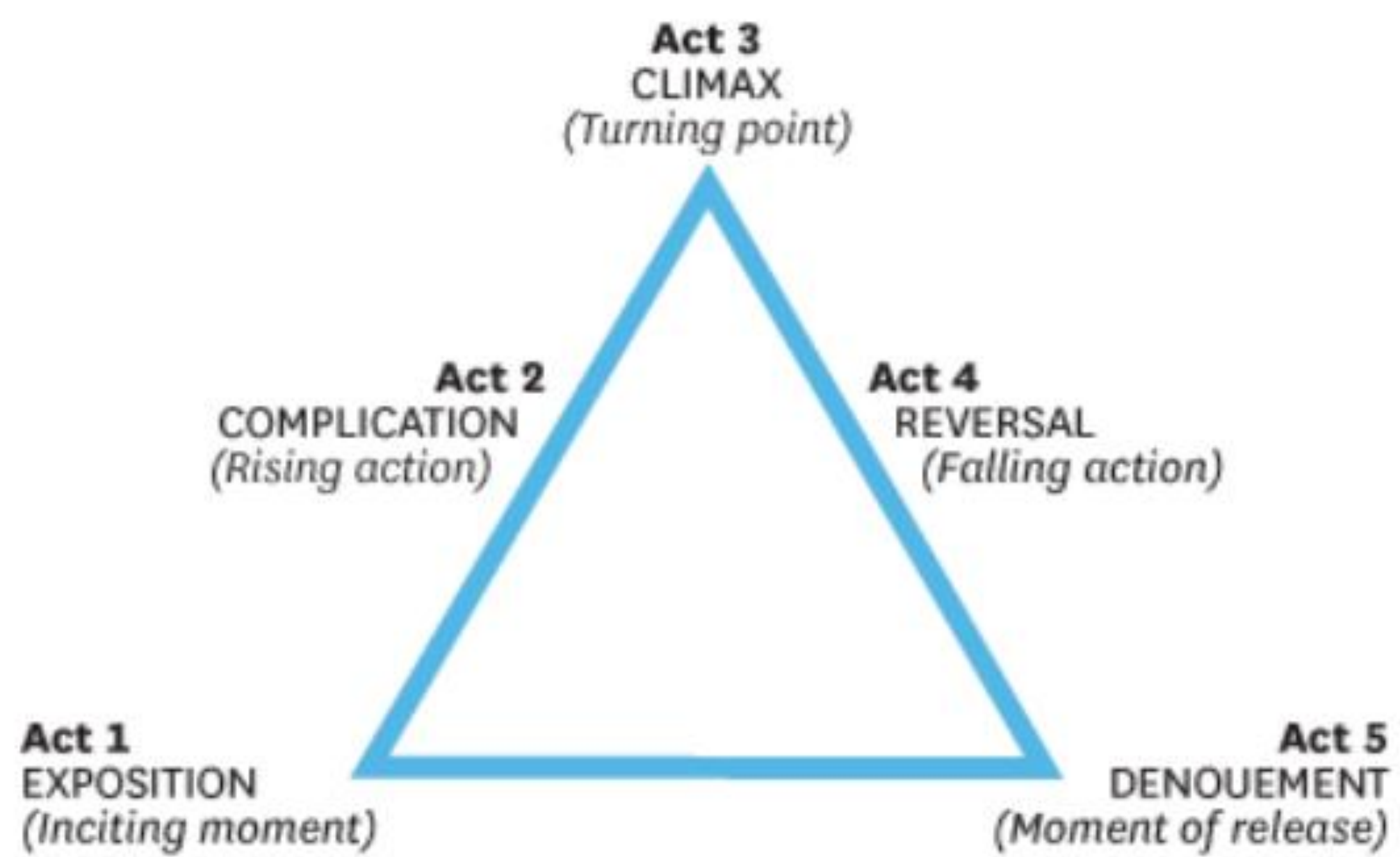
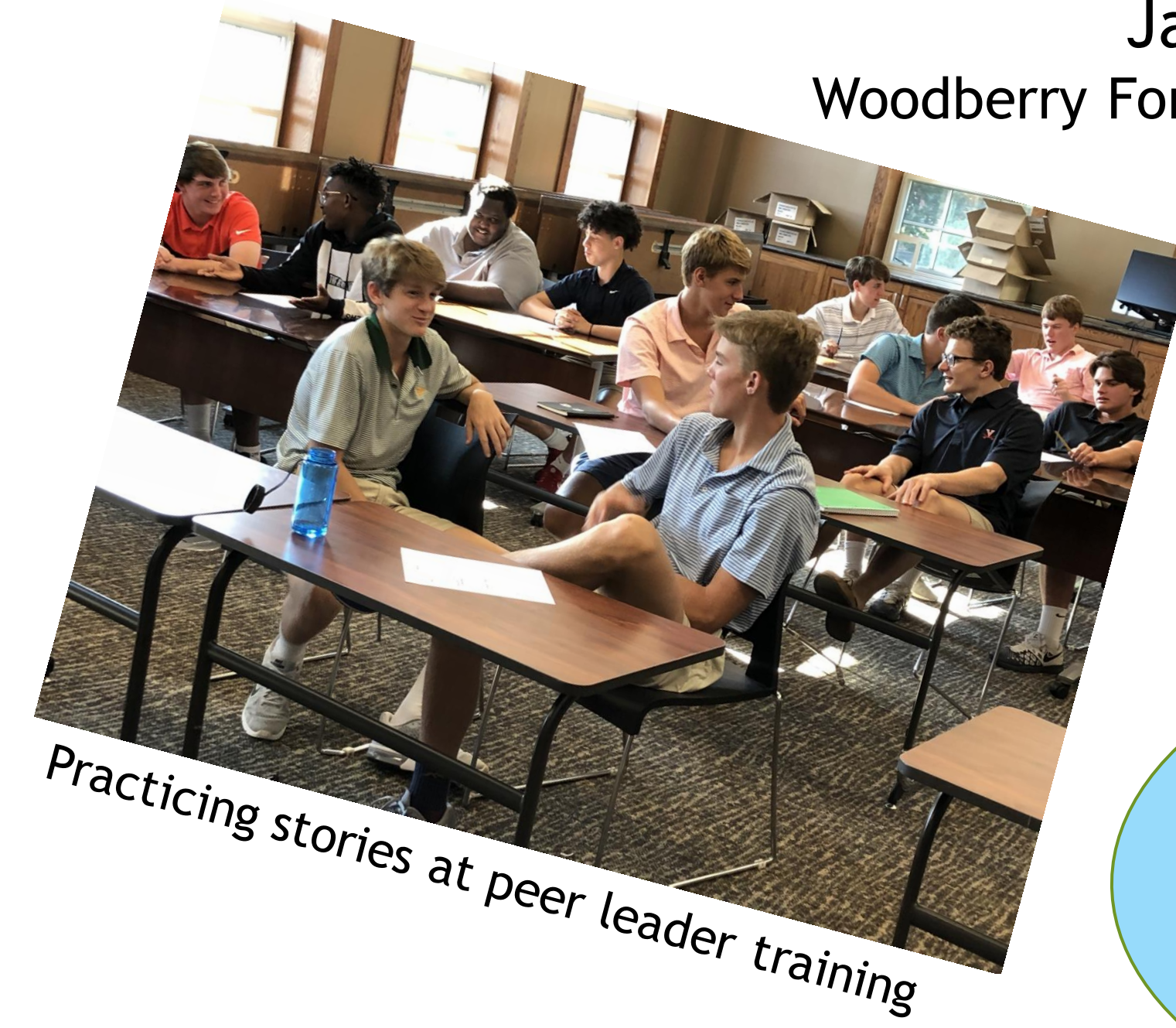


Image courtesy of Rapid7: www.blog.rapid7.com



Practicing stories at peer leader training

"I think telling a story helped them see me as someone with a past as a freshman."



Pizza and stories: Two keys to a successful meeting

"Storytelling has helped me get to know the new boys in my group better because it is engaging, and now I have two kids in my group that like to stay back after meetings to just talk and hang out for about fifteen minutes, which always includes storytelling."

Traits of a good PLC meeting

Laughter
Stories
Engagement
Social
Guidance
Laid-back

Data Collection and Analysis

- The primary method of data collection was three surveys completed by the peer leaders in early September, mid-October, and mid-December. The surveys asked boys to rate their comfort level with stories and to provide short answers about their experiences using stories.
- The survey data were complemented by weekly field observations of peer leader meetings.
- Along with determining the peer leaders' reported comfort level with stories, the survey data showed which topics were most often addressed in stories.
- Notes from the field observations were coded to determine how frequently a peer leader told a story and how frequently a new student told a story.

Key Findings and Discussion

- Teaching storytelling to peer leaders made them better at telling stories and more likely to use stories.
- When new students were told stories, they responded with stories of their own.
- An intentional use of stories kept school traditions alive and helped transmit community values.

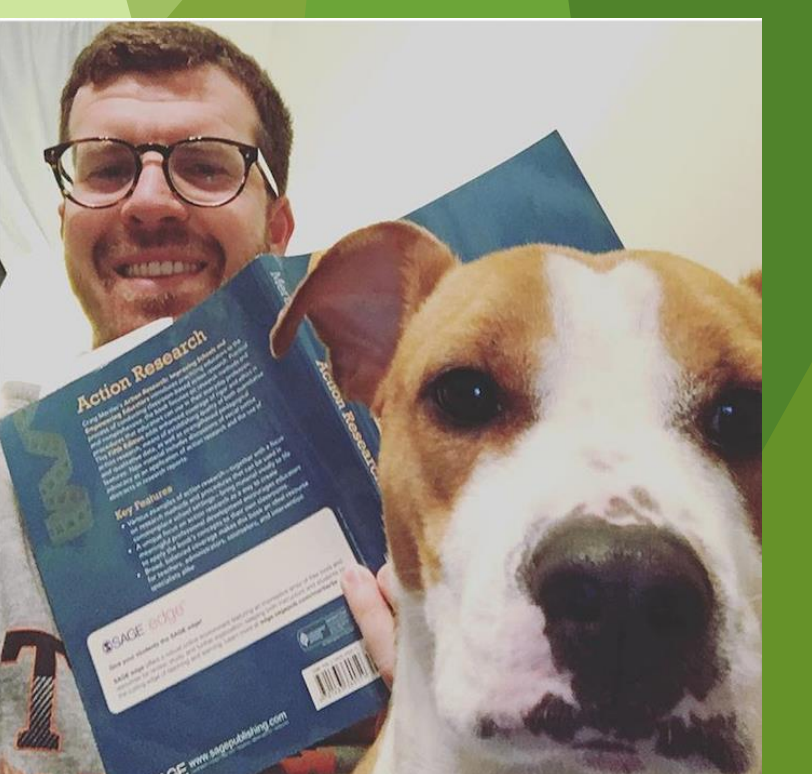
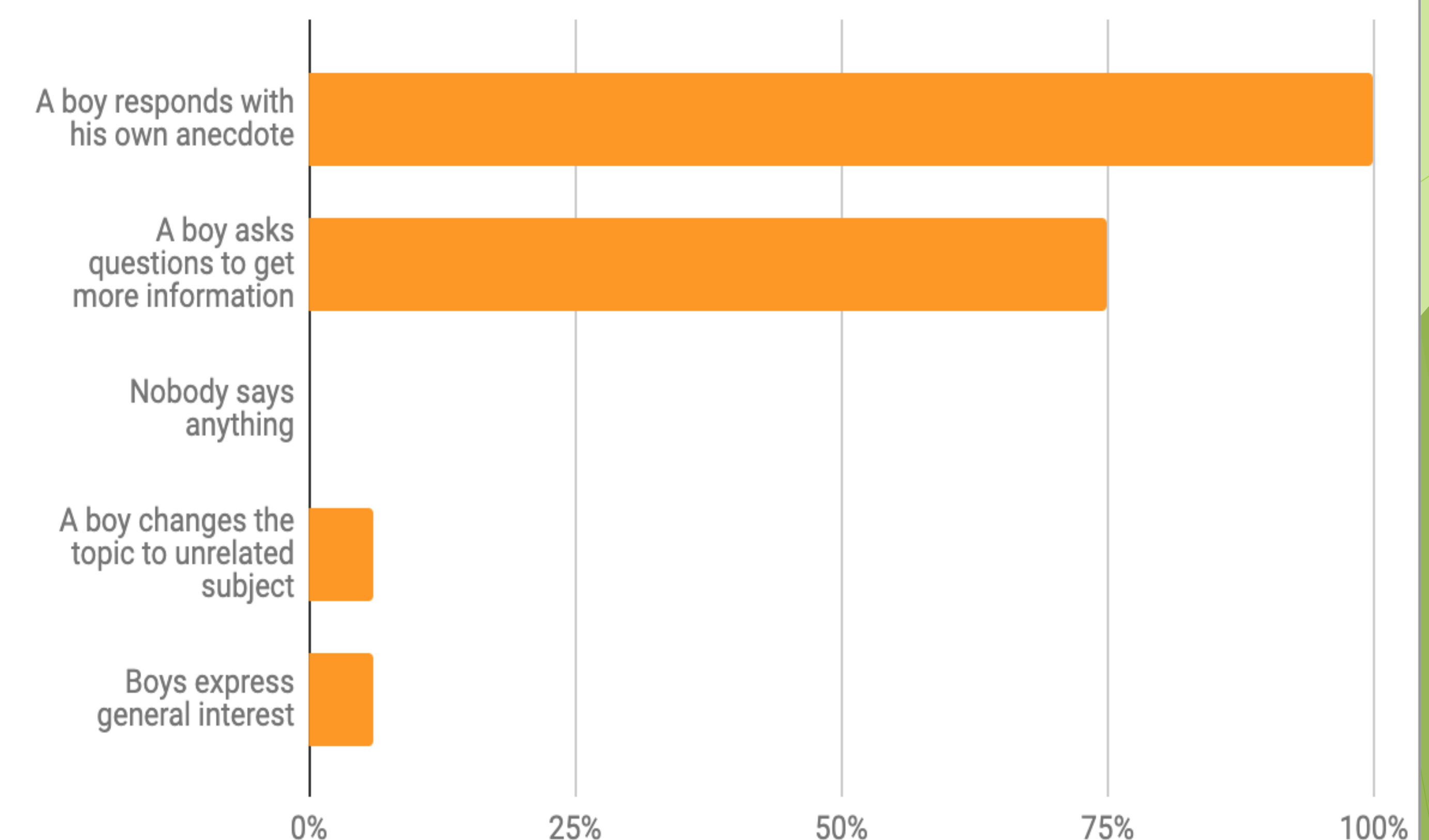
Conclusions

- Storytelling, like many other skills, is something the boys got better at with practice. They needed ongoing encouragement to practice stories and use them in meetings.
- Storytelling built trust between peer leaders and new students.
- A positive cycle developed: Being told stories built trust and high trust lead to more stories.
- There is a strong storytelling culture at Woodberry beyond the peer leadership program, and future storytelling efforts should be considered in that context.

Key Readings

- Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Quesenberry, K. A., & Coolson, M. K. (2014). What makes a Super Bowl ad super? Five-act dramatic form affects consumer Super Bowl advertising ratings [Abstract]. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 22(4), 437-454.
- Schray, K., Russo, M. J., Egolf, R., Lademan, W., & Gelormo, D. (2009). Are in-class peer leaders effective in the peer-led team-learning approach? *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 38(4), 62-67.

What happens after a Peer Leader tells a story?



The researcher and his assistant, Donut, review their methods.

