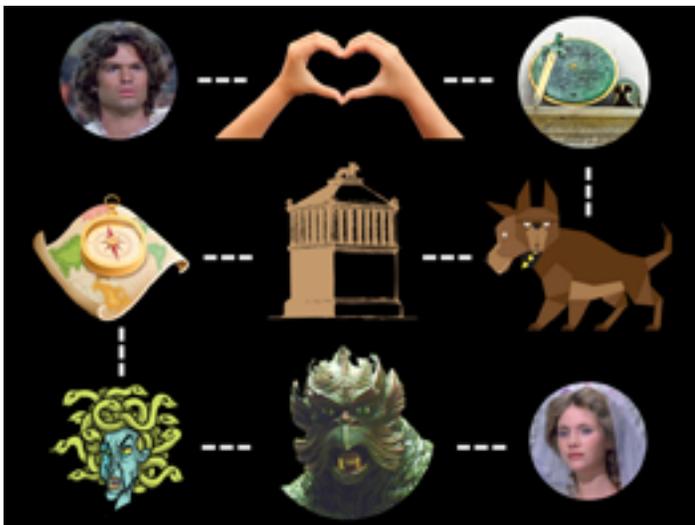


Medusa's Guide to Novel Writing

Presentation script for TEDx El Cajon

Are you creative?



TWO
Get A Lot of Help



SOURCES
The American Academy of Pediatrics
Kaiser Family Foundation
Common Sense Media

6 - 9 hours
everyday

6 hours a day =
42 hours a week =
168 hours a month =

2,016
hours a year.

SLIDE 1: ARE YOU CREATIVE?

Raise your hand if you'd answer "yes" to this question...

Keep your hands up and let's see what creative things you like to do. Do you like to write... draw... sing... dance... design clothes... build stuff... solve problems...

If you like doing lots of creative things, raise both hands. (RAISE YOUR HANDS)

Look around at all that creativity!

(LOWER HANDS)

When kids are asked this question, we *all* raise our hands.

When *adults* were asked this same question, guess how many raised their hands.

SLIDE 2: ADOBE "STATE OF CREATE" SURVEY STAT 52%

Does that mean half of the kids at this TEDx event today will stop being creative at some point in their lives?

SLIDE 3: BLACK SCREEN

I hope not. Because I think we're born creative. It's part of who we are.

And it's not just us. Did you know that animals are creative too?

SLIDES 4-5: BOWERBIRD

This bowerbird is an interior decorator.

He decorates his nest with flowers, rocks, twigs, and fruit.

SLIDES 6-7: CHIMPANZEE PAINTING

This is Congo, one of the first chimpanzee artists. He made over 400 paintings.

Here's one of my favorites.

SLIDE 8: VIDEO

This Bird of Paradise dances to impress his girlfriend. (video)

SLIDE 9: BLACK SCREEN

Animals are creative in lots of ways. But as far as we know, humans may be the only storytellers on planet Earth.

That's the part of creativity I want to talk about today. Storytelling.

I began my first novel when I was six.

SLIDE 10: CHESTNUTS

It was about a girl who loved chestnuts. But she could only have three chestnuts a day, or something terrible would happen. I wish I could tell you what... but I never finished the story.

About a year later, I started another novel.

SLIDE 11: CLOUD-PERSON

It was about a girl who woke one morning to find a cloud castle high above her house. Cloud people floated down and took over the city. I wish I could tell you what happened next... but I never finished the story.

SLIDE 12: BLACK SCREEN

This went on for three years. Three years may not sound like a long time, but I was nine. So three years was a third of my life. It was discouraging.

But it turns out, even great writers had the same problem.

SLIDE 13: POTTER BOOKS & QUOTE

(READ QUOTE WITHOUT LOOKING AT IT)

“Before I wrote the Potter books, I'd never finished a novel.” J. K. Rowling.

That was encouraging. So, when I was nine and a half, I started another novel.

SLIDE 14: BLACK SCREEN

It's about a girl named Lillian. One day, her sister disappears through a magical portal into an ancient world. A world filled with dragons and chimeras.

To save her sister, Lillian sneaks into this monster world where she learns a terrible secret.

I wish I could tell you what happens next, but... you'll have to read the book yourself. That's right — you can read the book. Because I finished it!

SLIDE 15: MONSTER REALM COVER

And when I was thirteen, I finished the sequel.

SLIDE 16: MONSTER REALM + THREE WORLDS COVERS

But wait a second. After spending a third of my life not finishing a novel, how did I finish these two?

I've met a lot of kids at book festivals and schools. Kids who, like me, had started all kinds of stories but never finished. They kept asking, "How did you do it?"

And I kept thinking, "Yeah, how *did* I do it?" I mean, what was different this time?

I'm fourteen now, so I've had a lot of time to think about that. I've talked it over with my family and with other writers.

So now when kids ask, "How did you do it?" I have a few ideas, which I call "Medusa's Guide to Novel Writing."

SLIDE 17: TITLE SCREEN

Medusa is a character in my novels, but she comes from Greek mythology.

Medusa had snakes instead of hair...

SLIDE 18: MEDUSA CARTOON

... and she was so scary, that if you looked into her eyes...

SLIDE 19: HAPPY CHARACTER WITH MEDUSA LOOKING AT HIM

... you'd turn to stone. Literally.

SLIDE 20: CHARACTER TURNED TO STONE

There are a lot of different versions of the Medusa story. The one I like best comes from the 1981 movie, *Clash of the Titans*.

SLIDE 21: CLASH OF THE TITANS POSTER

Here's the basic story. Perseus is in love with Andromeda.

SLIDES 22-29: CLASH OF THE TITANS STORY MAP

Unfortunately, in a few days, Andromeda will be sacrificed to a big green sea monster called the Kraken.

To stop the Kraken from eating Andromeda, Perseus needs to find Medusa.

But to find Medusa, Perseus needs a good plan...

Because Medusa lives in a dark temple...

...guarded by a ferocious two-headed dog.

So Perseus is going to need a lot of help too.

But what does all this have to do with novel writing? A lot, actually. Nearly everything I learned about finishing a novel can be found in this story.

SLIDE 30: ONE (DO IT FOR LOVE)

First of all: Do It For Love.

SLIDE 31: CLASH MAP WITH PERSEUS/ANDROMEDA

Perseus loves Andromeda. The adventure starts with love, and love keeps him going when things get tough.

SLIDE 32: BLACK SCREEN

The same is true for your novel. If you don't love the story and the characters, will you really spend a year or more writing and rewriting and editing? Probably not.

So look through all your story ideas. Choose the one you love the most. That's the one to write.

Ray Bradbury wrote over 600 stories. What was his secret?

SLIDE 33: BRADBURY BOOK/QUOTE

(READ QUOTE WITHOUT LOOKING AT IT)

“Write only what you love, and love what you write.” Ray Bradbury.

SLIDE 34: TWO (GET A LOT OF HELP)

Step Two: Get A Lot of Help.

SLIDE 35: CLASH MAP WITH KRAKEN

Perseus loves Andromeda, but is love going to stop the Kraken from eating her? No.

Perseus needs more than love. He needs *help*.

SLIDE 36: SWORD, SHIELD, HELMET

He gets a lot of good advice, an invisibility helmet, a special shield, and a sword that can cut through almost anything. Like Perseus, you'll need a lot of help too. First, find a mentor...

SLIDE 37: MENTOR DEFINITION

A mentor is “an experienced and trusted adviser,” someone who can help and encourage you along the way.

And if you can, find a mentor who knows a lot about writing, so they can be your editor too.

SLIDE 38: BLACK SCREEN

Your mentor might be a parent, family member, a teacher, or a friend.

We think of writing as a one-person job. But that's really not true.

SLIDE 39: JOHN GREEN BOOK/QUOTE

(READ QUOTE WITHOUT LOOKING AT IT)

“A great editor makes the books far better than they would otherwise be.” John Green.

SLIDE 40: BLACK SCREEN

Every novel I tried to write on my own, I didn't finish. When I started *The Monster Realm*, I asked my dad to be my mentor, and that made a big difference.

Put together a support group too. Tell your parents, brothers, sisters and friends. Tell them you're writing a novel. Ask them to cheer you up when you want to quit.

My mom encouraged me every day, and my sister did some of my chores to give me more time to write—which she never lets me forget. The point is: like Perseus, I had a *lot* of help.

SLIDE 41: THREE (PLAN A)

Step Three: Make Plan A.

SLIDE 42: CLASH MAP WITH SHIELD

So Perseus is doing it for love, and he's getting a lot of help. Now he needs a plan. I call this Plan A.

For Perseus, Plan A goes something like this: sneak up on Medusa and... chop off her head.

Then take Medusa's head and hold it up to the Kraken. The Kraken looks at Medusa and turns to stone.

SLIDE 43: BLACK SCREEN

So Perseus sails to Medusa's island. But as soon as he gets there, he's attacked by a two-headed dog who sounds the alarm.

Now Medusa knows he's here! So Plan A was a fail. But it got Perseus moving and that's what matters.

To get your story moving, make a rough outline. This can be a lot of fun because there are all kinds of ways to do it. For example, all you may need is a one page outline: how the story starts, more or less what happens in the middle, and how it ends.

SLIDE 44: J. K. ROWLING'S HANDWRITTEN OUTLINE

Or maybe a detailed chart would help, like this one, which J. K. Rowling used to organize *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*.

Remember, your Plan A outline is going to change, so don't spend too much time on it. It's just meant to get your story moving.

SLIDE 45: FOUR (FIRST DRAFT, WRITE FAST)

Step Four: First Draft, Write Fast.

SLIDE 46: CLASH MAP UP TO TWO-HEADED DOG

Thanks to Plan A, Perseus is on Medusa's island. He defeats the two-headed guard dog.

Now what? Medusa knows he's here. She's waiting for him in the dark temple.

SLIDE 47: BLACK SCREEN

If he thinks about it too long, he's going to get discouraged. He needs to commit *right now*. And the only way to do that is to step into Medusa's temple.

The same is true for your novel. Time to commit. Dive in and write your first draft as fast as you can — in 30 days or less.

Sounds impossible, but trust me. I got this idea from National Novel Writing Month, and it works.

SLIDE 48: NANOWRIMO

Make a commitment to write 1,000 words a day for 30 days straight.

No rewriting allowed.

Just follow your Plan A outline and write as fast as you can. If new ideas pop into your head, that's great, make them part of your thousand words.

SLIDE 49: BLACK SCREEN

In a month, you'll have a rough, messy, sloppy first draft.

But that's OK. In fact, you should celebrate! My first draft was a disaster, but my family went out to dinner the day I finished.

Why? Because a first draft is a turning point.

Like Perseus stepping into Medusa's temple, you're committed. For real.

SLIDE 50: FIVE (MAKE PLAN B)

On to Step Five! Make Plan B.

SLIDE 51: CLASH MAP UP TO TEMPLE

Perseus loses the invisibility helmet, which would have come in handy right about now. That was a big part of his Plan A. He planned on being *invisible* when he fought Medusa.

So...what's he going to do?

SLIDE 52: CLASH MAP UP TO TEMPLE

There in the dark temple, waiting for Medusa, Perseus considers all his options... and comes up with Plan B.

Instead of attacking Medusa, he uses the shiny inside of his shield like a mirror. That way he can see Medusa without actually looking at her—and without turning to stone.

It's a good plan because it's based on his actual situation.

It works the same way for your novel. This is where you rethink everything you've done and come up with Plan B, which has two parts.

Part 1, read your first draft and make a new detailed outline which you'll use to rewrite your novel.

SLIDE 53: NOVEL NAVIGATION GRAPHIC

Sit down with your mentor and travel through your story. Does it all make sense? What new scenes or chapters should you add? Does the ending work? Are the characters believable?

SLIDE 54: BLACK SCREEN

When you're satisfied with your new outline, move on to Part 2: Schedule.

Set aside a specific amount of time to write, even if it's only an hour a day. *But stick to it.* I know it's a big time commitment. But here are some numbers to think about.

SLIDE 55: MEDIA HOURS STATS

According to recent studies, many kids and teens spend 6 to 9 hours a day on media, things like TV shows, movies, video games, music, SnapChat, YouTube.

I like all of those things too. But if we spend hours a day *watching* stuff, we won't have time to *create* stuff of our own.

Take an honest look at how you're spending your time. Add it up. If you're like me, you'll find you have enough time to do a lot of creative things, including finishing a novel.

SLIDE 56: SIX (FIGHT MEDUSA)

Step Six: Fight Medusa.

SLIDE 57: CLASH MAP WITH MEDUSA

Perseus is ready to put Plan B into action.

SLIDE 58: PERSEUS WITH SHIELD

(ACT IT OUT)

Hiding behind a stone pillar... he uses the shiny inside of his shield like a mirror.

He sees Medusa sneaking up behind him, jumps out and —

Chop! — cuts off her head.

Then he puts her head in a sack. Yuck.

SLIDE 59: BLACK SCREEN

For your novel, putting Plan B into action means one thing: rewriting.

I compare rewriting to fighting Medusa because I think it's the hardest part. A lot of writers feel the same way.

SLIDE 60: MICHAEL CRICHTON BOOK/QUOTE

(READ QUOTE WITHOUT LOOKING AT IT)

“Books aren't written—they're rewritten.” Michael Crichton.

SLIDE 61: BLACK SCREEN

Rewriting is where you shape your novel. Not just each chapter, not just each scene, but each sentence. This is where you work on the characters, the dialog, the pacing.

This is also where your mentor or editor needs to be really honest with you. They should ask a lot of questions, and tell you if something isn't working.

And when you're done rewriting... and rewriting... and rewriting... you'll have your final draft.

Except... it won't really be final.

SLIDE 62: SEVEN (FINALLY, THE KRAKEN)

Seven: The Kraken!

You forgot about the sea monster, didn't you?

SLIDE 63: CLASH MAP COMPLETE WITH KRAKEN

But the thing is, after all Perseus has been through—after Medusa in the dark temple—defeating the Kraken is almost easy.

SLIDE 64: PERSEUS/MEDUSA'S HEAD CARTOON

Perseus pulls Medusa's head out of the sack and holds it up.

The Kraken takes one look... and turns to stone.

SLIDE 65: BLACK SCREEN

For your novel, the kraken is like all the errors hiding in your story. So the last step is to hire a professional proof reader.

When I finished my “final” draft, I asked my family to read it. They found a lot of mistakes. I fixed everything, sent that to a professional proof reader, and guess what?

She found over 200 more mistakes. That's why you need a professional.

I fixed all those errors, and then it was time to celebrate again, because I had my final draft.

Remember how I spent three years not finishing a novel? I think that was because writing a novel felt like this huge, impossible task, like defeating a sea monster. But when you break it down, the monster really isn't that big.

So that's how Perseus beat Medusa and the kraken, and that's how I finished two novels.

Whatever your creative dream is, whether it's writing a novel or singing like Adele or traveling to Mars — no matter how hard it is — do it for love, have a plan, get a lot of help, work on it every day, and don't give up.

Because only *you* can create the things *you* are going to create.

SLIDE 66: NEIL GAIMAN BOOK/QUOTE

(READ QUOTE WITHOUT LOOKING)

“The one thing that you have that nobody else has is you. Your voice, your mind, your story, your vision. So write and draw and build and play and dance and live as only you can.” Neil Gaiman.

SLIDE 67: FIRST SLIDE "ARE YOU CREATIVE?"

Remember this question?

Raise your hand if you're creative.

(RAISE YOUR OWN HAND)

Look around. At some point in our lives, will half of us lower our hands? I hope not.

Let's take a pledge. With your hands raised, repeat after me:

I promise... my future self... that I will never turn to stone... that I will stay creative... my whole life.

I can't wait to see what *you're* going to create.

Thank you.