Observations
from research about how to work with stories and storytelling in organizations

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These are slides from a talk I gave at a 2000 workshop on things I had learned from two years of research into stories in organizations and communities. (Note, the web link here is dead.)
The Knowledge Socialization (Story) group at IBM Research focuses on:

- specific tools
- larger understandings,
- technologies and techniques
- applications and collaborations for learning, testing and refinement
Some of the work we've been doing in the Story group:

- **tools** for "working with" stories
- **knowledge representations** for composing, organizing, and understanding stories
- **methodologies** for gathering, understanding, and telling stories for education, KM and design
- **support** for storytelling in IBM
Food for thought.

- Following are some observations (intuitions) about "working with" stories and storytelling in the context of people and organizations.
- These are from experience; they are unproven though some are reflected in the literature.
1. Stories are a compact means of transferring **complex** knowledge.*

* and values, beliefs, viewpoints ....

"Some things in life are so easy to do," the man thought, falling to his death.

G.S. Evans, at www.storybytes.com
2. A story is like a **ripple** in a pond: stories have stories have stories have stories.

Then he jumped.
Why did he jump?
Those people are unpredictable.
The disconnect is growing.
3. Stories have a natural **life cycle** one can work with at many points.
4. Our first impulse is to **tell**; but it is often better to **do** and to **listen**.
5. In storytelling, truth* is almost always more useful than fiction.

* at least an element of truth ....
6. People have varied conceptions of what a story is and isn't.

People often think of stories as...

- **for children**: Once upon a time. How's that?
- **lies**: But this isn't a story, it's true.
- **Hollywood**: My story isn't good enough.
- **opinions**: My story is that I like sardines.
- **jokes**: I've got a great story. There was this dog...
7. Storytelling is **innate** but not necessarily at the surface.

... but really, I'm not a storyteller.
8. There are **grails** and **graffitis** in working with stories.

**grails**
(far-off solutions)

**graffitis**
(here and now solutions)
Finally, these are some things we are working on for the future.

- story composition tools, templates and principles
- a pattern language of story
- analogical problem solving
- storytelling in communities of practice
- story navigation methods