

Shifting Voices: One Story, Four Ways

Storytelling Guide & Presentation Handout

Clinton B. Atwater

Founder, Storytelling Connections

Connecting Stories and People

Downloaded from www.StorytellingConnections.com

The Thing in the Fog

Setting: A fog-shrouded harbor in a quiet coastal town. Early morning. Silence blankets everything.

Core Moment: A character discovers a carved wooden figure on the shore, triggering the realization that an old family legend is real.

Narrative Perspectives & Versions

1. First Person – Present Tense

Story Snippet:

I walk the harbor path, and the fog wraps around me like cold cotton. I can barely see ten feet ahead—just gray swallowing gray. The sea slaps gently against the rocks, but even the waves sound muffled. Then I smell it—brine, yes, but also something older... I reach for the shape half-buried in the rocks. It's a carved figure. I know that face.

Tone: Immersive, tense, immediate

Effect on Audience: Pulls listeners into the moment; creates a vivid, real-time experience.

2. First Person – Past Tense

Story Snippet:

I remember the damp chill that morning, how the fog made everything look like a ghost of itself. The harbor smelled of fish and old rope. When I found the wooden figure in the kelp, its carvings scraped my hand. It looked just like the one from my grandfather's stories. That's when I knew they weren't just stories.

Tone: Reflective, intimate, slightly nostalgic

Effect on Audience: Creates emotional connection through memory and realization.

3. Third Person – Present Tense

Story Snippet:

The fog curls around the harbor. The only sound is the tide and the creak of ropes. A figure walks the path, footsteps echoing softly. They kneel by the rocks, reaching for a small shape. It is a carved figure, ridged and sea-stained. Recognition dawns in their eyes.

Tone: Observational, cinematic, atmospheric

Effect on Audience: Builds mystery visually; lets the audience "see" the story unfold.

4. Third Person – Past Tense

Story Snippet:

That morning, fog blanketed the harbor. The smell of tide pools and old nets filled the air. Their hands were numb when they found it: a wooden figure wrapped in kelp. It was cold and rough and familiar. A childhood story resurfaced. Something had returned.

Tone: Classic, moody, storytelling-rich

Effect on Audience: Feels like a folk tale or ghost story; adds timeless depth and suspense.

Usage Tips for Oral Storytelling:

- Use strong sensory language to deepen immersion.
- Adjust pacing to match the tone: slow and thoughtful for past tense; quick and tense for present.
- Eye contact and voice modulation enhance the reflective or eerie atmosphere.
- Choose the perspective that best suits your audience and performance style.

Optional Visuals or Props:

- A carved wooden figure
- Lantern or foggy ambiance lighting
- Harbor soundscape (seagulls, waves, rope creaks)

Audience Settings:

- Story circles and swaps
 - Community storytelling events
 - Classroom or workshop settings
 - Seasonal themes (e.g., spooky stories, sea legends)
-

Let the fog speak. Let the sea remember.