

Podcast 549: Ways to Use the Story Sequence Chart

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: , I've come to realize that of all the models, this really is the most flexible in terms of how you can use it, the type of stories you can use, and the length that it comes

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, "IEW." My name is Julie Walker, and I'm honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Julie Walker: So Andrew and I have this routine every time we do a podcast where we walk in together and we share a few words, and you guys are probably wondering, "What are they talking about?" Well, I'm going to tell you what we talked about today: whether or not we should continue to do video podcasts. Now, Andrew and I both were reluctant to go this direction.

I, of course, I'm fine. I'm happy to change. Andrew, you are not so much.

Andrew Pudewa: 'Cause I'm so much older than

Julie Walker: Yeah, that is not true. Anyway, I just... The reason I mention that is I would be curious to know what you think. Do you like this new format, or do you just listen to us on audio while you're walking anyway and don't even care about the video? Well, you could leave comments on the page, but there's no place to leave comments. You could just pop us an email at podcast@iew.com. Love to hear your comments. And we have a topic to talk about today that I'm kind of excited about. I love October, the fall air, and turning the calendar, and now we get to jump into Unit 3.

But I noticed you brought a letter, and I'd love to start with that. Can we start with that?

Andrew Pudewa: Can I just tell you what I don't like about October?

Julie Walker: Having to rake all the leaves?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I've accepted that as a worthy penance. I just don't like Halloween decorations and this year they started in August. I actually saw Halloween decorations in August. This should not be happening

Julie Walker: No, but I do love the little costumes that they have out. I wanted to get my three-year-old grandson a little firefighter costume. Not that he would necessarily wear it for Halloween, but it would be fun for him to dress up.

Andrew Pudewa: Anyway, I did get this, this cute letter in August. This is from a girl, Desi, in California, and I actually...she wrote to me. I wrote back, and I sent her a picture of me eating scorpion. Remember that? Scorpions on a stick?

Julie Walker: I do

Andrew Pudewa: Dear Mr. Pudewa, this year I did Structure and Style Level B, which improved both my vocabulary and writing. For the 250th birthday of our country, our city, Tustin, California, did an essay contest on what does America mean to you?

Julie Walker: I love that

Andrew Pudewa: When I saw the flyer, I thought, "I should do this contest." A couple of keyword outlines later, I had my rough draft

Julie Walker: Cute

Andrew Pudewa: After I corrected it, I had a three-paragraph final. Then we went to turn it in.

I didn't know at that time that my friend, Harrison, who is part of our church homeschool co-op and also does IEW, had entered the contest as well.

Julie Walker: Uh-oh, competition.

Andrew Pudewa: A couple of weeks later, during VBS at our church, Harrison's mom was looking at the rankings for the contest. Turns out I got first place and Harrison got second for our age bracket, grades six to eight.

Thank you for teaching IEW, Mr. Pudewa. I've attached my essay for you to read.

Julie Walker: Aw, very sweet. Oh, Desi, good job.

Andrew Pudewa: Sometimes I think people, they may wonder, do these models and checklists and all the rules we make people follow, do they work in the, quote, real world, whatever that is? Well, if some random essay contest from some random city in California...

Julie Walker: I know where Tustin is.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. and it doesn't know. It's just getting all these submissions from school kids. And yeah, I guess it turns out that IEW works, and the students notch up to first and second place amongst all.

Julie Walker: Amongst all. And now we can confidently say we should show up again to work tomorrow because it works.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, I guess so. Anyway, what do you want to talk about today?

Julie Walker: So if we're doing the one-a-month schedule that you talk about in the teacher training course, *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, you say one a month, and one a month puts Unit 3 in October. So I want to spend a little bit of time talking about that tool that we use in Unit 3, the Story Sequence Chart.

And you don't go into too much depth on the video, but you do cover ways to use the Story Sequence Chart. So I wanted to take a little bit more time today to talk about how did this tool even come about, and in what grade level, and yeah. And then you've got one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight different ways you can use a Story Sequence Chart.

So if you don't mind, let's kind of go.

Andrew Pudewa: So the story as it was told to me by Dr. Webster, how it came to be a part of the thing. So there, there's actually a story behind almost all the units, and this one, he was teaching grade five, I think, in Vancouver,

Julie Walker: OK

Andrew Pudewa: and he was over at his aunt's place, Mrs. Ingham. And people who know *Structure and Style* know that Mrs. Ingham created the Blended Sound-Sight Program of Learning, and that's where we went up to Canada way back when, 20-some years ago and

Julie Walker: You and your wife, right? All those years ago, yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: And then you went too,

Julie Walker: I did. Went to the very last conference they ever had

Andrew Pudewa: And so Webster was over at Mrs. Ingham's, and she had a little pile of her first and second grade students, and he was reading their stories, and he said, "Aunt Gertrude, these stories your grade two kids are writing are, are better than any that my grade five kids are writing.

How, how do you get them to do this?" And so she kind of wrote... He said on a, we'd call it a napkin, they called it a serviette, she just wrote it out,

Julie Walker: How many great ideas were born on the back of a napkin?

Andrew Pudewa: Who knows? I mean, obviously this isn't something she completely invented. This has been around since the beginning of people writing and telling and talking about and trying to understand stories.

But, what he did was he went back and he thought, "Okay, my grade five students do pretty well with their science experiment write-up because there are three parts, and each part has this job." So part one is you have your... and I haven't ever done this, so I'm just recalling. But he said you kind of have your hypothesis and your equipment, and then the next section

is the procedure and what you did, and then the third section is the outcome and any scientific conclusion you might be able to make from that.

Julie Walker: Okay. Right. Yep. I remember those

Andrew Pudewa: He said the kids were used to writing three-part science experiment write-ups, and this would've been, what? Back in the '40s probably. So he took... Yes.

Julie Walker: 1940s, we have to say that now

Andrew Pudewa: Who knows? 1940s, early '50. I'm not sure when he was there. So he took Mrs. Ingham's Story Sequence Chart, which she was using with grade two kids, kind of just all one thing, and he made it into a three-paragraph model, assigning very specifically then the first part to the first paragraph and the second part to the second, third to the third.

So, that's kind of the story of how it came to be, why it's three paragraphs. And then of course, we've been doing it since the beginning. And three paragraphs is, it's a nice length because it's enough to tell a decent story, but it's not so much that you feel overwhelmed by it.

And it's very flexible. In fact, just thinking about last year, the kids I was teaching, and I used a few Midas, I used Midas. And if you were to, to see, okay, I have all these kids, and they're, they're somewhere between 9 and 13 years old, 14 maybe. They were, they were all writing three paragraphs, but some of them wrote maybe a total of 200 words, right? So their paragraphs were maybe 60, 70 words And others wrote a total of maybe 2,000 words which would make their paragraphs like mini chapters.

But you know what? It was, it was okay. It worked out because the high aptitude kids who wanted to write more and got into it, they could kinda keep going, and, and these three paragraphs were more like mini chapters.

And then the kids who, just doing one paragraph was taking them hours, they could be done with it in a relatively short time, and both came out well. And so I always point out: long is not necessarily better than short. Short is not better than long. It's kind of who you are. It's your personality, your style, your aptitude. Are you a here's-what-you-need-to-know, let's-get-on-with-life kind of person? Or are you well, let's-just-tell-everything-we-can-think-of right now because it's all so interesting kind of person? And what's interesting to me is that if you charted the length of their final thing, it wouldn't correspond with their age, right?

Some of the younger ones wrote way more than some of the older ones. And so that just kind of shows us that we shouldn't necessarily have an expectation of length based on age or grade or whatever.

Julie Walker: Sure. Well, and, and conciseness is also a skill,

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. So that's kind of where it went. With the beginning, I was trying to use some of the stories that we had done at Grouard and that Webster had done, and I had this idea that everything should be a certain way and be a certain length, and I was kind of narrow in my way of thinking. But over the years, I guess I can technically say over the decades, which is a horrible thought, but true. I've come to realize that of all the models, this really is the most flexible of them in terms of how you can use it, the type of stories you can use, the length that it comes.

And, I have tended to be a lot more willing to follow Webster's edict, right? Hands-on structure and style. Follow the model, use the checklist, hands-off content. I'm not going to, I'm not going to get irritated if you write something that doesn't necessarily fit with my concept of the rules of reality and common sense.

Julie Walker: Which is ironic, Andrew, because I know that you, like me, grew up watching Star Trek, and I mean, transporters are not real. You know that, right?

Andrew Pudewa: No but communicators are pretty darn close.

Julie Walker: They're pretty darn close.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, children are not bound in the same way we are to, well, would that make sense? Would that even be possible? and I remember very clearly, and I'll share this, I was, I was out doing one of these, I used to go to a city for six days and teach kids for four days and do the student writing

Julie Walker: That's how we met. Yeah, yeah

Andrew Pudewa: And I remember reading something that one of these kids wrote just thinking, "This is so ridiculous." And then I don't know what flashed on it, but I realized VeggieTales exists, which is way more ridiculous. Like a cucumber singing a song about where's my hairbrush? Like...

Julie Walker: And now we're going to have that song in our head all day.

Andrew Pudewa: And it was adults who created VeggieTales, adults who had not outgrown the capacity to be creative outside these rules of logic and reality that I think we get more attached to as we're growing up. And that was really a shift at that moment. I thought, "Okay, if VeggieTales can exist, for better or worse, I have no particular opinion, but how much more should we appreciate the kind of willingness of children to write any crazy thing?" That's a beautiful thing.

Julie Walker: Yep. I love that. I love that. I love the flexibility of our system, but I also love the safety of the fences around it so that children know what to do. Yep.

So seven ways to use the Story Sequence Chart. Is that what I said?

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. So I kind of came up with this in the process of teaching the TWSS over years. And some of the time we get teachers who are teaching in the primary grades and they are not ever going to get their first graders writing three-paragraph stories, and they shouldn't or even kindergarten. But there they are in the seminar.

So, I was thinking, "Well, how could you use this?" And then I would do, I think a few occasions, they asked me to do some demonstration classes with kindergarten and first grade. Well, what do you do, right? They really should be working on letter formation, spelling, and copy work, but they want me to do something. So what do you do? Well, I realized that you could read a story, read a book, whatever, and then you could use the Story Sequence Chart just as a discussion tool. So who's in the story? Okay, tell me a little bit about what's that character like? What's their personality? What, what do they, what do they think or feel? What's the situation? What do you see? When you hear this story, what do you imagine in your mind? These are great questions to ask young children as you're reading them books. And then what's the problem? That for the story to exist at all and be worth reading more than once, it's got to have some kind of little problem or conflict or thing or misunderstanding or it's got to build to something.

So what is that? And getting kids to articulate, "Well, you know, he wanted that," or "He needed that," or, "He didn't understand this," or "Amelia Bedelia kept doing stupid things." Right? , you And so that, and then how is it resolved in the end and what can we, what can we learn

Julie Walker: Right. This sounds very Charlotte Mason, d- don't you

Andrew Pudewa: I think so. Montessori and pretty much any common sense way of engaging children in literature. It just, this is a very concrete kind of tool. It's laid out, it's there, you can memorize it easily, and then use it whenever you talk

Julie Walker: Yeah, I think about our friend Adam Andrews, his whole *Teaching the Classics*, which is a product we used to sell. We no longer sell it, but it's still available. Link in the show notes. But he does this very thing where he has conversations about literature. *Bargain for Frances*. He starts with a simple children's book to demonstrate you can just have a conversation. And how much better is this than an arduous book report to force our children to do?

So I love that. Okay, so the next one is straight summary.

Andrew Pudewa: So this is something, I got a little bit of trouble. I was working with a school district in California, and I was kind of showing them the way I would teach this, which is kind of to let the kids change things

They said, "Well, one of our standards is to write a summary of a story." And the kids would get kind of knocked down, marked down if they change anything.

So okay, so a straight summary, this is where you get the story and you retell it probably shorter than the original, but you don't change anything because that's the assignment. Now, I personally would never do that because I like to quickly get into the more creative side. And of course, while there's an application for that, we do plenty of stick to the facts in Unit 4 and 6.

So, we deal with the need to do that. I like to get to this idea of elaboration, and that's where you can change up things a little bit and maybe add in some, some dialogue that the characters might have said that wasn't in the original or tell what one of the characters was thinking that might not necessarily have been in the original or even change it up a little bit.

I remember one time a student was writing about "The Hare and the Tortoise" and the fox was supposed to be the judge, and he wanted to make the cheetah the judge that nobody would get caught cheating. Yeah,

Julie Walker: Oh, very

Andrew Pudewa: I think that's awfully clever. I would have immediately thought, "Well, I mean, the cheetah would probably eat the hare," but okay, it's a world of animals. They're talking. They're people too. So anyway, those little elaborations, I try to encourage them and, often will kind of use the Robin Hood style where you get one kid who will give an idea and then another kid might give an idea, and sometimes those things even can make their way into the key word outline as you're doing it with the class.

But modeling that communicates to them, you have some freedom here. You can change things up, and it's going to be fine. And that's one reason why when we work with fables, myths, fairy tales, parables, legends, those are safe because nobody owns them. You can't be accused of stealing the story because people have been retelling the story for hundreds or thousands of years in different ways, and that's fine.

Disney's version of whatever is a little different maybe than somebody else's version of whatever, and Disney even makes a new version of something they made an old version of and changes it up more. So that's a safe zone to be, and so a lot of our materials are, of course, making an appeal to those kinds of stories that nobody owns and have been told in different ways for a long time.

Julie Walker: Well, the next level of difficulty perhaps, variation, yet options for use is the variation. We change characters and setting.

Andrew Pudewa: I never saw Webster do this until I showed him what I had done with it, and then he was all over it, of course. But this is the idea where you have a basic story and you say, "Okay, we're going to outline the story," but when you write it, if you want to change the characters and setting but kind of keep the problem, you can do that.

And so you'll have a very similar kind of parallel story, but you can customize it a whole lot more. So rather than "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" you could have a girl, and she's, rather than being a shepherd, she could be a goat herder. And rather than somewhere in Europe, she could be in Africa, right?

Or you could even expand out and say, "Well, what would be another situation where someone could be tempted to be untruthful just to get attention or relieve boredom or whatever, and some danger, and then a price that you pay for that?" And you could actually move it into the world of people if you wanted to, and you could have the Yankee sentry who cried rebel attack, right? Or you could have the storm trooper who cried Jedi, right? And so this is wonderful because kids have their own little worlds they live in, and maybe it's an historical thing they know about or it's a science fiction or it's a fantasy. They can move into that world, and then they have a good story, but they can really customize it to their own, kind of top of their imagination.

So I think some of the best writing that we've, that I've got from kids is that, and you can do it at all ages.

Can, can I share, do we have time? Can I share?

Julie Walker: Sure, absolutely. We're going to go a little bit long today, but I think you're going to be okay with that, right? Okay, good

Andrew Pudewa: Can I share the absolute best one?

So I was using the story of the prodigal son, and of course, it's a timeless story, and you could move it to any time and space. It doesn't have to be ancient Israel. It could be really anywhere. So I had this very talented older high school student and he put it in the world of the mafia.

So you had this son of a mafia boss who didn't want to be in the mafia. So he asked his father, "Give me what you'll give me, and I'll just leave." Right? So kind of a different scenario. Well, he's at the airport, and he's in the airport bar, and he's talking to this woman, and next thing he knows, he wakes up. He's in the airport, no ticket, no passport, no wallet. He's bereft. He can't go anywhere. He can't do anything. And then he kinda..and then he's kind of forced to go home, right? So you see the parallel here. And then it's revealed that this woman he met in the airport was a plant, and she slipped something into his drink, which is what made him go unconscious. And then he gets home, and his father welcomes him with open arms, and the older brother character in the original, says, "I don't know that we can trust him."

And the father says, "Well, he may not be around all that long."

Julie Walker: Oh.

Andrew Pudewa: You're just like, "Whoa, this was, this was a real twisting," but it kept the parallel. And I talked to that boy. I had him for the week. It was one of the student intensive courses, and he told me that, yeah, one of his goals would be to be a screenwriter

Julie Walker: Oh, it'd be fascinating to know if he did.

Andrew Pudewa: I've just seen so many really perceptive and imaginative applications of that variation on the Story Sequence Chart

Julie Walker: Yeah. And sequel, cross-genre expansion original story

Andrew Pudewa: We'll through quickly. Sequel is kind of the opposite where rather than keep the plot, change the characters, what you can do is keep the characters, change the plot, right?

Julie Walker: What happens next?

Andrew Pudewa: So the continuing adventures of the hare and the tortoise. Now the tortoise is the one walking around on top of the world, bossing everybody around 'cause he thinks he's so good, and the hare figures out some way to bring him down a notch in a different type of situation. So, that one, that's harder, but it-- I've seen it done a few times.

Julie Walker: But following the Story Sequence Chart, the characters and setting are the same, the conflict or problem is different, and then, obviously the climax and resolution would also be different. Yeah. I like it. But you still follow the questions.

Andrew Pudewa: You could also, honestly, you could take the characters from one story and the problem from another and stick them together. So

Julie Walker: That's such a great idea.

Andrew Pudewa: I think that's mostly what they do in formulaic romance novels, right?

Julie Walker: Yeah. Probably, yes, exactly. Okay, and then we have expansion. No, no, no, cross-genre. That's a fun one

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. So I came up with this because I had an interesting experience of working with the school district. It was Rocklin in California, and they had some poetry in their curriculum and I thought, "Okay, I'm always looking for ways to do writing across the curriculum, integrated with the curriculum."

And I thought, "Well, this story kind of tells--this poem kind of tells a story. How could we teach the teachers to do that?" So we took the poem, we outlined it on the Story Sequence Chart, and then we wrote it in prose. And I had a super interesting experience doing that. It was a poem, "Lochinvar" by Sir Walter Scott

Julie Walker: And we did that for Structure and Style for Students: Year 1 Level C

Andrew Pudewa: Yes, we did. Yeah. And I've always known the poem, but it was in writing the poem into prose that I really started to understand the poem. I had to reimagine it in a way that I never did have to just reading it. And so I think when you're dealing with something you really want to understand, the two things you can do to exponentially increase that comprehension and deep level understanding is either memorize it, bring it, take it, learn it by heart, or retell it.

So then I thought, well, if you could take a poem and go to a prose, you could probably take prose and go to a poem. One of my favorite poems is "The Embarrassing Episode of Little Miss Muffet" right? Guy Wetmore Carroll. And that's basically taking kind of a simple little nursery rhyme and expanding it out.

He also wrote another one called "The Sycophantic Fox and the Gullible Raven," which, is a retelling of The Fox and the Crow.

Julie Walker: Crow. Oh,

Andrew Pudewa: in poetry form

Julie Walker: Oh,

Andrew Pudewa: So I got the idea, okay, let's give him a s- let's give him a story and rewrite it into poetry. And, and then of course, you're kind off checklist. You don't worry about the dress-ups and openers when you're writing poetry 'cause you're trying to get a rhyme scheme and

And then, I tried one more, and that was, "Here's the story. Could you write it into a script?" And that's a little harder because you have to communicate everything that needs to be communicated in the dialogue, right? And I remember doing that once with "The Gift of the Magi" and writing it into a script. And it was a little rough, but I thought this could be worked with. So that idea of you've got prose, you've got poetry, you've got script, interchanging stories, the Story Sequence Chart works beautifully for all three of those.

Julie Walker: That's amazing. Okay, expansion

Andrew Pudewa: All right. So we used to sell Lee Roddy's *How to Write a Story*, and he basically talked about obstacles.

So rather than one problem to be solved, you had kind of one big problem, but then you had little obstacles along the way to solving that big problem. And so this would be a case where you could, instead of having three paragraphs, you could add in a couple more paragraphs in various ways. One would be to have characters and setting, and then maybe three paragraphs of the problem with obstacles, and then a fifth paragraph with a resolution.

you could even have two paragraphs for characters and setting. Maybe... Most stories have more than one character, so you could have one paragraph with the backstory of one

character, the hare and how he got to be so obnoxious and cocky, and then another one about the tortoise and his whole life growing up getting teased about how slow he was.

And so you could give some backstory on the characters, and then you could have one or more paragraphs of the body, and you could even expand the climax and resolution into two paragraphs where you could have one whole paragraph just at that moment of the turning and then the epilogue or the how, how it all comes out and what everybody thinks or says or does after that.

So I think you could imagine getting a Story Sequence Chart maybe up to two plus three plus two, so you'd be at seven paragraphs. That'd be enough. If anybody wants to write something longer than that, they could-- they would probably benefit from having written shorter ones, and now they're just going to give more in all of those details. But that's about the furthest I ever tried to go.

Julie Walker: Yeah. Yeah. And then we have finally the original story, following the Story Sequence Chart, which I love that

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, and so if you've retold existing stories, you've internalized what makes a story work, what are these elements you have to have? And then if you go to enter a story contest or you're told to write an original story, you would ask the same questions.

Who's going to be in the story? Where is it going to happen? What are these characters like? What's a little bit of their personality or situation? What's the setup? Okay, what's the problem? Have to think of a problem. And, and so you could come up with a whole thing. And then in the TWSS, of course, I tell the joke, but I'm not going to tell it.

Julie Walker: Oh, no. Okay, we won't.

Andrew Pudewa: I don't want to steal.

Julie Walker: No, no, no, it's such a great story.

Andrew Pudewa: But it's, it's the frog that goes into the bank to get a loan.

Julie Walker: Well, I will just say that all of these things, most of what's on this list, Andrew, we do cover in various curriculum, including the discussion tool. We use that in our primary materials. But one thing that we don't actually do intentionally teach is this original story idea.

But I love that because it's kind of like, let's just let the kids go off and do that themselves. They don't need to have an assignment that necessarily goes with that. Kind of reminds me back to that piano analogy, that music analogy of my son writing his own music compositions. That was not a part of his lessons, but yet he now knew how to do it because of that practice and play.

So the Story Sequence Chart, many ways to use it. We'll put a link in the show notes of an actual Story Sequence Chart so that you can look at that and then be able to look at some of these different ways that you can use it in your Unit 3 for this month of October.

Andrew Pudewa: Sounds good.

Julie Walker: Thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: Thank you, Julie

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you will find our show notes and relevant links. One more thing: would you please rate and review our podcast? This helps other smart listeners like you find us. Thank you.