Everyone relates to stories. Stories have universal appeal. They connect people, present them with new ideas, motivate them, and challenge their thinking. As Adventist educators, we have an enormous resource of such life-changing and life-challenging stories: the Bible. Using these stories, expressed in song, poetry, drama, biography, and personal accounts, we can lead our students to discover that the Bible is not one single narrative or a novel, but a compilation of many narratives, unified in their shared concern with overarching issues of the cosmic battle between good and evil. This article deals with the why and the how of using Bible stories in the classroom.

Bible Stories

in the Classroom: The Why and the How

Part I: Why Tell Bible Stories?

Christians generally regard Genesis 1 as the biblical metanarrative.[1] Adventists, however, believe that the cosmic conflict metanarrative began in heaven before the creation of the world and will end with a perfectly re-created Earth.[2] This Adventist metanarrative is what our students need to hear, learn about, and engage with because it has the potential to transform their lives.

What Is a Metanarrative?

A metanarrative is a distinctive narrative form.[3] It relies on many of the various forms of narrative (poetry, allegory, parables, biography, etc.) to showcase and explain a grand story. It is an epic, overarching, explanatory story associated with a specific worldview. Traditionally, it has been portrayed as being absolute, normative, and objective. Cultures and belief systems have historically relied on master stories, or metanarratives, to provide the central values, ideals, and theories for their worldview. Metanarratives have generally been regarded as a framework that offers guidance to each generation while preparing them to pass on their values to the next generation.

The Adventist Metanarrative

All faith-based belief systems have a metanarrative on which their worldview is based. Adventists believe the Bible contains the true history of the world; therefore, we embrace the biblical story as our metanarrative. It provides objective reasoning and justification for our beliefs, morality, and identity. It is a progressive, linear narrative, not cyclic (cycle of life) as in Hinduism.[4]

The Bible's story of the cosmic conflict is told in narrative form, includes sub-narratives, and is outlined in Figure 1. Without the entire story as the backdrop, individual or sub-narratives may lead to incorrect assumptions or misinterpretations.

An Objective Metanarrative

Adventists believe that the biblical metanarrative is the

Figure 1. The Adventist Metanarrative Structure		
Narrative Structure	**Sub-narratives**	**Biblical Roots**
The Orientation: Setting, Characters	1. Triune Godhead 2. Creation	Old Testament stories point to the Cross and the promise of salvation.
Complication	3. The Fall	
The Resolution	4. The Rescue 5. Waiting and Living	New Testament stories look back to the Cross and claim salvation has come.
The Conclusion	6. Re-creation	

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source of absolute truth. It is regarded as an objective construct rather than a subjective record of personal feelings or attitudes.

Figure 2 outlines, in a condensed form, the Adventist objective and historic linear metanarrative known as the Great Controversy (Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief 8).[5]

An explanation of each number on the timeline is as follows:

1. God: The Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) existed in a perfect heavenly kingdom (Genesis 1:1, John 1:1, Ephesians 1:3). Lucifer, a created being, led a rebellion against God (Isaiah 14:12-14, Revelation 12:7-9). Lucifer was cast out of God's heaven and became the devil (Satan).

2. Creation: God created the Earth in seven days. He created man and woman in His image and gave them free will (Genesis 1 and 2).
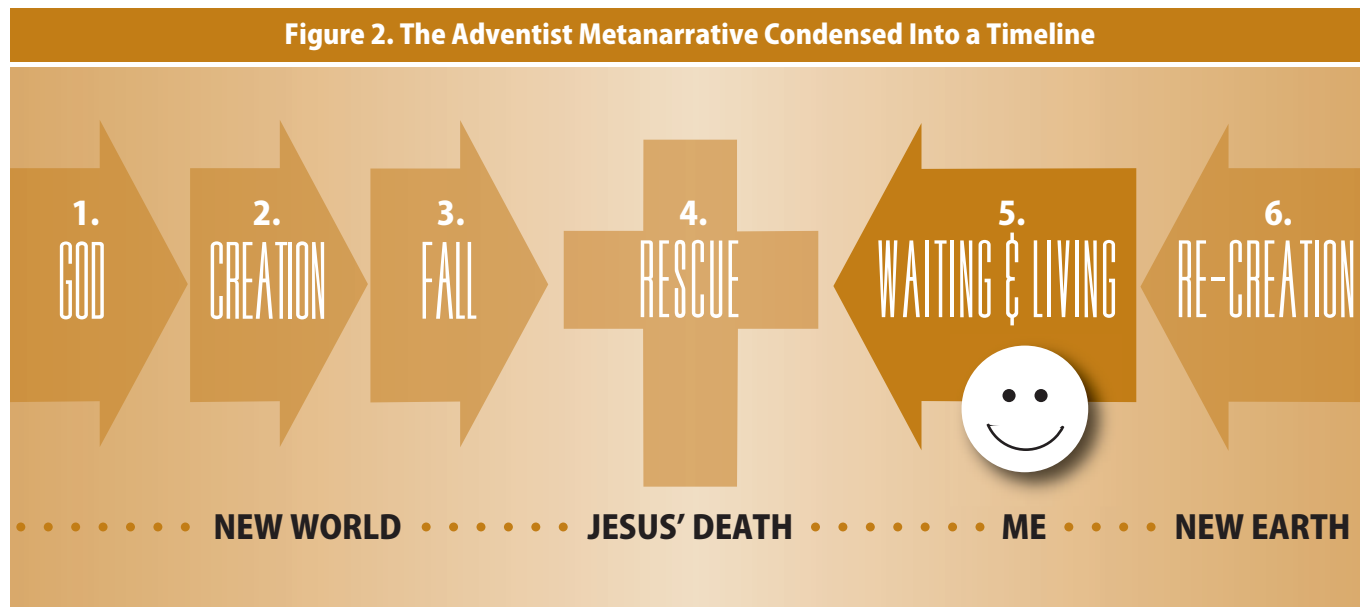
6. Re-creation: Christ returns as promised. Sin and Satan are finally destroyed, and those who have chosen God's offer of redemption and salvation are changed from mortality to immortality, returning the Earth to its condition before the Fall. God's character is vindicated, and He establishes a perfect re-created world (Revelation 21:1-7).

Sally Pierson Dillon's *The War of the Ages* series brilliantly portrays the Adventist metanarrative in contemporary language and art suitable for students aged 10 to 14.[7] These books are a young person's version of Ellen White's *The Conflict of the Ages* series.[8]

A Subjective Metanarrative

Many 21st-century storytellers portray truth (via television, movies, and print media) as being a personal and subjective

Figure 2. The Adventist Metanarrative Condensed Into a Timeline

1. GOD 2. CREATION 3. FALL 4. RESCUE 5. WAITING & LIVING 6. RE-CREATION

NEW WORLD • • • • • • • JESUS' DEATH • • • • • • • ME • • • • NEW EARTH

3. The Fall: Satan introduced the spirit of rebellion (Genesis 3) on Earth through Adam and Eve's rebellious choice. Satan now claimed to be the ruler of the Earth. He questioned "God's character, the fairness of His law, His right to rule and Jesus' right to save sinners from eternal death."[6] Satan engages in continuous conflict with God concerning who will control people's lives and to whose kingdom they will show allegiance (Ephesians 6:12).

4. Rescue: This confirms Christ's right to be the ruler of the earthly kingdom and guarantees the eventual destruction of evil and Satan (Romans 5:19).

5. Waiting and Living: God is now waiting to reclaim His earthly kingdom because He wants everyone to (a) see the results and consequences of giving allegiance to Satan, and (b) have the opportunity (John 3:16) to know Him as King and Lord. Every person is given a choice to either accept or reject His offer of liberation, by way of salvation, and life for eternity. God sends the Holy Spirit and the angels to comfort and protect His followers (Hebrews 1:14) during the waiting time.

construct. This view has increased interest in subjectively constructed personal metanarratives, and a noticeable movement away from the acceptance of and participation in objective and historically based metanarratives. Consequently, faith-based metanarratives are portrayed negatively as overriding, ready-made, and outdated stories.

The following two scenarios will help to highlight the significant differences between an objective and a subjective metanarrative.

Scenario 1

An objective metanarrative may be likened to two people who set out on a long and arduous journey after having decided on a specific destination. They choose to trust their car's Global Positioning System (GPS) or a road map throughout this journey because it will assist them in arriving at their destination without too many mishaps, wrong turns, or delays. The journey and the destination are both relevant and important.

Scenario 2

A subjective metanarrative may be likened to two people who set out on a long and arduous journey. They decide that

they will not take a GPS or a road map with them because they want to find their own route to their destination. Since life is a saga, an epic poem, the journey is more important than the destination. They are not committed to any particular route, since they regard the destination as unimportant.

Teaching the Adventist Metanarrative in the Classroom

The central theme of the Bible is the gospel, which is set within the context of the cosmic-conflict metanarrative. For Adventists, this metanarrative provides a plausible biblical belief structure that answers the basic worldview questions about human origins, identity, future, and purpose.

Bible stories, or metanarrative sub-narratives, are about real people who lived in Middle Eastern cultures and times. They are not historical novels. These stories assist Adventist educators in "unpacking" why we believe what we believe. Bible stories are often in "freeze-dried" form, as they record only the most significant aspects and events. The minute details can be reconstituted in the telling.[9]

Ellen White pointed out: "As an educator no part of the Bible is of greater value than are its biographies. These biographies differ from all others in that they are absolutely true to life."[10] Students need to have the opportunity to meet these Bible characters as real people in a real world (who slept, ate, cried, laughed, and had the same temptations and problems as they do). They need the chance to observe God's power to change people's lives, to witness a Bible character's active faith, and to see the consequences and results of personal choices.

What Is the Purpose and Value of Storytelling?

Figure 3 outlines what researchers have found to be the purpose, value, and effect of storytelling in a Christian context.

Part II: How to Tell Bible Stories

A personal encounter with

the Master Storyteller is crucial before Adventist educators can effectively tell the story of God's love. They especially need this re-storying of their personal lives if they are to exert a positive influence on their students. Stonehouse observed: "If the stories have become real to us, the children will sense our excitement and join us, through their imaginations, in the story. They will learn to love the God they meet there and will want to return again and again."[11]

Using the 3P Storytelling Technique

The author worked out a *3P Storytelling Technique* (Preparation, Practice, and Presentation) that has proved useful for pre-service Adventist teacher-education classes at Avondale College of Higher Education in Cooranbong, New South

Figure 3. Purpose, Value, and Effect of Storytelling in a Christian Context	
The Purpose and Value of Stories	**Researchers' Comments on the Purpose, Values, and Effect of Storytelling in a Christian Context**
Stories touch the heart and mind.	"A good story points to meaning beyond its particular characters and events, for the story tells not just what happened but what happens."[12] "Stories are at the heart of faith development for children; stories capture and communicate theology for them."[13]
People express their faith though stories.	"We tell Bible stories because the Scriptures instruct us to, because Jesus told stories and because they are worth telling" and because "through them children comprehend the deep truths about God and the world."[14] "Bible stories are the key to helping children know a God who is mysterious and who knows them for who they are."[15]
Stories create a sense of belonging to a faith community.	"As children come to know the stories of the Bible, they develop their identity as part of the Christian community" and understand "what it means to be a follower of Jesus."[16] "Through a story, we can imaginatively enter into a very different world, shift to a different viewpoint, and begin to experience what someone else has experienced."[17]
Stories increase biblical literacy.	It is essential "to share the rich tapestry of Bible stories with each generation of children" so they know why they believe what they believe.[18] It provides a road map.
Stories provide the necessary knowledge for an understanding of Western civilization.	Great Western art, literature, and music often refer to biblical stories.[19]
Stories are a basic educational tool for Christian educators.	Children "understand realities that they would not grasp through abstract explanations, propositional statements, or theological concepts."[20] Remembering information in a story is easier than trying to remember a list of facts. Stories can assist in explaining "abstract concepts and specific skills, presenting them within contexts . . . [where] people can view the parts in relation to the whole."[21]

Wales, Australia. It outlines sequential strategies for developing and encouraging dynamic and effective Bible storytellers. Each of the three storytelling ingredients is discussed below.

1. Preparation

A. Preparation of the individual Bible storyteller

• Pray and ask for guidance in teaching this Bible story.

• Decide why this Bible story is being taught.

• Decide what the children should remember from this story.

• Decide on adaptations that will ensure the story is appropriate for the targeted age group.

• Read and reread the entire story as recorded in the Bible until it becomes a personal story. It is impossible to be a convincing storyteller if you cannot visualize yourself as involved in, and part of, the Master's story. Read from a child's Bible storybook to add a different perspective to the understanding of the story.

• Decide where the story fits into the big picture (meta-narrative) and what it teaches about God's love.

B. Preparing the Bible Storyteller's Knowledge Base

• Remember that the length of the story is determined by children's ages and interests.

• Select either an objective or a subjective viewpoint. An objective viewpoint has the storyteller as an observer telling someone else's story, or assumes the viewpoint of a supporting character. A subjective viewpoint means telling the story from the main character's perspective.

• Consult a Bible atlas to find the story's location. A Bible commentary, Bible dictionary, and Bible handbook are also useful resources.

• Summarize the story's structure into about five to six main events, using the narrative format for assistance and setting it in the larger context of a meta-narrative: Orientation—the characters, the setting; Complication; Resolution; Conclusion.

• Analyze and research the cultural aspects of the story and engage the senses to make the story come alive. The following questions can help: What could the characters hear? What could they smell? What did it feel like? What did it taste like? What could they see? Imagine the characters and what they would be wearing and eating. How would they be feeling? This should help bring them to life.[22]

• Learn the entire story using the five to six main points as memory triggers to assist in memorizing the sequence of events, rather than the whole story.

• Select appropriate props to maintain visual interest in the story. Always include a Bible as part of the story props so children learn that Bible stories come from the Scriptures.

2. Practice

A. Practice aloud using your prepared narrative sequence involving the five to six main events of the story.

B. Maintain the same perspective for the entire storytelling. Do not switch perspectives, as it confuses listeners. Remember that stories told in the third person often sound like observer stories, making it more difficult for children to identify with the main characters. Stories told in the first person add authenticity and intimacy to storytelling. Become a participant in the story, not an observer, and intimately engage the listener in the emotions and feelings of the hero. This helps the students identify with the hero.

C. Stories need a logical progression. Resist backtracking if a point is missed, as this causes confusion and interrupts the flow of the story.

• Leave out all unnecessary events that slow down the story. It is important to keep the story moving.

> *R*ead and reread the entire story as recorded in the Bible until it becomes a personal story. It is impossible to be a convincing storyteller if you cannot visualize yourself as involved in, and part of, the Master's story.

• The characters in Bible stories really existed. They lived in real places, had the same needs, feelings, and emotions as all people do, but some of the cultural aspects of housing, transport, food, and clothing were different from today. Children need to see Bible characters as real people, and not confuse them with fictitious characters such as Santa Claus or Disney characters.

• Prepare and practice an engaging introduction that will entice the children to want to listen. "Memorize the first sentence. Say it out aloud."[23]

• Engage your imagination and all your senses as you live the story sequence. "Make a video of the story in your mind."[24] Stay true to the story so that listeners know where information from the Bible stops and the storyteller's imagination begins.[25]

• Practice using the props so they enhance rather than detract from the narration.

3. Presentation

Before telling any Bible story, Adventist storytellers need to ask themselves this question: Why am I teaching this story? Is it to entertain or to create an engaging, enlightening, and life-changing experience?

A. Focus: Have the goal of the story clearly in mind before commencing the storytelling session. Show where in the Bible the story appears, and leave the Bible open during the telling of the story.

B. Introduction: Commence the story using something that will gain the curiosity and attention of the children. Avoid introductory statements such as: "Today our story is about David and Goliath." Entice the children so they will have a reason to listen.

C. Setting: Set the scene so children can visualize the story. Keeley suggests that imagination should be used overtly for the benefit of listeners: "As you are telling the story, if you imagine that the Sea of Galilee is on your left, motion to it when you talk about it as if you were standing on the shore. By seeing the scene in your own mind, you can build a real place for your listeners."[26]

Remember to exercise caution when describing places and things because the overuse of description can become tedious and interrupt the interest and flow of the story.

D. Eye contact: Maintain eye contact. Focus on the listeners and engage them. Learn the story well. Forget about using notes, as these can interrupt the flow of the story.

E. Voice production: The storyteller's voice can put children to sleep or invite them into the story. Volume, pitch, and pace need to be varied and expressive according to the mood of the story. Clear diction is a must.

F. Vocabulary: Use age-appropriate vocabulary. A good variety of action words keeps the story moving.

G. Pacing: Watch the children's responses. This will alert you to the correct pacing to maintain the listeners' interest and focus. Refrain from asking questions in the middle of the story

as this will interrupt the flow. Lowe notes the importance of self-awareness: "Observe yourself in the process—imagine yourself watching from the corner of the room. What needs to change? What is working?"[27]

H. Props: Use props at the appropriate time to add visual interest to the story and aid in the retention of the story. Audience involvement can also be used as props, for example, making sound effects or specific hand motions.

I. Gesture: Use gestures and nonverbal communication to help clarify the meaning of the story. Avoid being condescending or patronizing. Eliminate meaningless gestures that distract, for example, pacing backwards and forwards or excessively gesticulating.

J. Conclusion: Habenicht and Burton recommend that stories "have an exciting climax and then a quick conclusion."[28]

Using Storytelling Props

Visual resources help children connect with the story. While

Category	Resource Ideas	Comments
Figure 4. Storytelling Approaches and Ideas		
Art	Sketch-n-tell	Sketch-n-tell stories assist children to remember the main events of the story.
Books	Storybooks Picture books Children's Bibles Audio storybooks	Interactive storybooks can add a new dimension to a Bible story. Choose picture books that appeal to a range of age groups. There are a variety of appropriate children's Bibles written for different age groups.
Drama	Role plays Skits Plays Readers Theatre Participation stories	The Bible is full of drama: For example, Abraham and his son Isaac, or the sanctuary and its services in the wilderness. A child who role-plays a Bible character will recall what that person said or did.[30] Suggestion: Involvement in drama is best employed when children have a basic knowledge of the story. Make sure the acting doesn't detract from the story.
Music	Bible songs Action songs Scripture songs Instrumental music Original songs and music	Bible stories mention singing as a way of remembering (e.g., Miriam in Exodus 15:21). Music can create an atmosphere of quietness and worship.[31] Bible stories set to music can provide a succinct introduction to the main events of a new Bible story. Inspired by a Bible story, children can write the words and set them to the melody of a well-known nursery rhyme.
Poetry	Finger plays Rhymes Hebrew poetry	The rhythm and rhyme of poetry are very engaging. Suggestion: These are best used as a review of the story.
Puppetry	Finger puppets Glove puppets Puppet Theatre	The children can be involved in using the puppets to assist the storyteller. Suggestion: The children using the puppets will require some instruction prior to the storytelling if the puppets are going to enhance the story rather than distract the listeners.
Symbolic Stories	Analogy Allegory Object lessons Parables	These resources are very helpful for explaining abstract concepts. All age groups relate to object lessons. Suggestion: Reserve Allegory for the older students.
Visual Media	Animated and cartoon Bible stories Dramatized Bible stories Biblical movies PowerPoint Bible stories Flannel graph pictures	These resources are best used to revisit the story, rather than as the initial introduction. **Caution**: Be very selective. Decide if the resource is true to the Bible story by comparing it to the original. Teach children to be discerning viewers. Animations and cartoons can trivialize God and give young children the impression that Bible stories are for amusement and entertainment.[32] Children may conclude that Bible stories are the same as Disney make-believe stories and, therefore, Bible characters are fictitious.

storytelling props can gain attention and actively engage the listeners, they should not detract from the story.[29]

Bible Storytelling Approaches and Ideas

The list on page 30 (Figure 4) provides a sample of the plethora of approaches and ideas available to teachers.

Storytelling is one of the most effective ways of teaching students about a transcendent God. The Adventist metanarrative of the cosmic conflict provides big-picture ideas and information that outlines the best way for each generation to live in this world while preparing for the next. Conveying the Adventist metanarrative to our students offers them an understanding of the greatest story of all time, awareness of their role in it, and a hope for the future. A life-changing personal encounter with the Master Storyteller is, after all, the goal of Adventist education. ✑

This article has been peer reviewed.

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7. Sally Pierson Dillon's five-chapter books are available from Adventist Book Centers. The titles are: *Survivors of the Dark Rebellion: God's Heroes From Adam to David; Exile of the Chosen: God's Heroes From Solomon to Malachi; Victory of the Warrior King: The Story of the Life of Jesus; Champions of the King: The Story of the Apostles;* and *War of the Invisibles.*

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