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Once Upon a Summit: Telling the Story for Deeper Learning

Fall Summit 2025: Day 2

October 15, 2025



Agenda

Day 2

- Welcome, Feedback, and Connector
- Functions and Purposes of Stories
- Design Elements of a Story
- Storytelling Mediums
- Stories in the Classroom
- Team Time
- Closing



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Pulse Check Results



What feedback can you give us to help us improve tomorrow's sessions?

N/a

A better variety of snacks would be nice. :)

Love everything about today's session

Thank you so much for a purposeful time. I really enjoyed hearing another's story..

I think today was really good

Nothing at this time

Na

Continuous flow

Different snacks or veggies

Allow more share time.

Everything was wonderful! Loved the storytelling scaffolds and the sharing with the teachers and students from Texas A&M

I loved all the activities and I love that we can easily apply them in the classroom



Pulse Check Results



What feedback can you give us to help us improve tomorrow's sessions?

Different snacks or veggies with dip

Thank you

Details on the assignment

None.

Thank you

Explain the final day activity, voices that moved us

Everything is great! I am enjoying it all so far.

Some spoke way too long and could not always be heard.

I loved the collaboration and connection with other educators. Thank you!

None. First day is grace!

This is my first time attending a BranchEd Summit so it is very appealing and new for me. I don't think I have anything to compare yet.



Connector



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Learning Objectives



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Design opportunities for learners to craft and share their own stories as a means of meaning-making and identity development.



Understand the cognitive and emotional benefits of storytelling in educational settings, including its impact on memory, empathy, and student engagement.



Apply storytelling design to learning experiences that make complex ideas accessible and relevant across disciplines and grade levels.



Integrate narrative techniques into instruction, coaching, or leadership to enhance communication, build relationships, and promote culturally responsive practices.



Reflect on how storytelling can support inclusive and equity-centered approaches in their educational context.



Communication Suffocation



“Much of what is transmitted we receive blurrily or at low volume because we are not interested.”

(Garmston, R. J., & Dolcemascolo, M. n.d.)



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Function and Purposes of Stories

From Insight to Action Through Story

- Shift perceptions
- Invite learning
- Inspire action
- Seek a desired state



(Garmston, 2015).



Shift in Perspective

These stories invite listeners to move beyond current frames of references and to entertain new ways of observing or interpreting their worlds.

Example:

I realized the student wasn't being defiant, he was overwhelmed!

(Garmston, 2015).



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Inviting Learning



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These stories offer learning opportunities about skills, courage, and internal processes.

Example:

After attending that workshop, I completely rethought how I use read-alouds to build vocabulary.

(Garmston, 2015).



Inspiring Action

This set of stories inspires, encourages, and motivated you or other to take purposeful action.

Example:

After that meeting, I started advocating for literacy coaching time.

(Garmston, 2015).



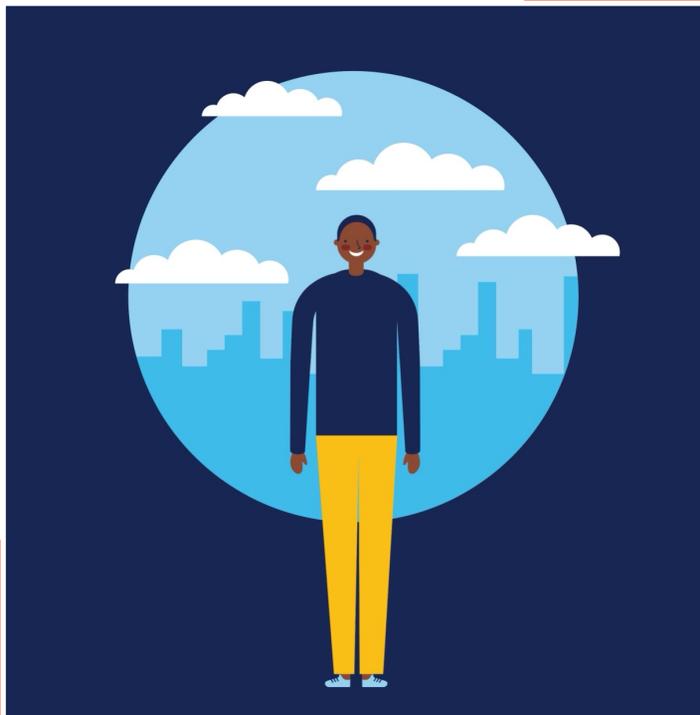
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Desired State



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These stories illustrate ways to lead other to more productive states, attitudes, and behaviors than what currently exists. These stories reveal who you are at your core.

Example:

I strive to teach in a way that gives students ownership of their learning rather than compliance.

(Garmston, 2015).



Purpose Remix

- Recall a story you know well
- Identify its original purpose
- Retell the same story with a different purpose





Share Out

What changed in the telling?

What stayed the same?



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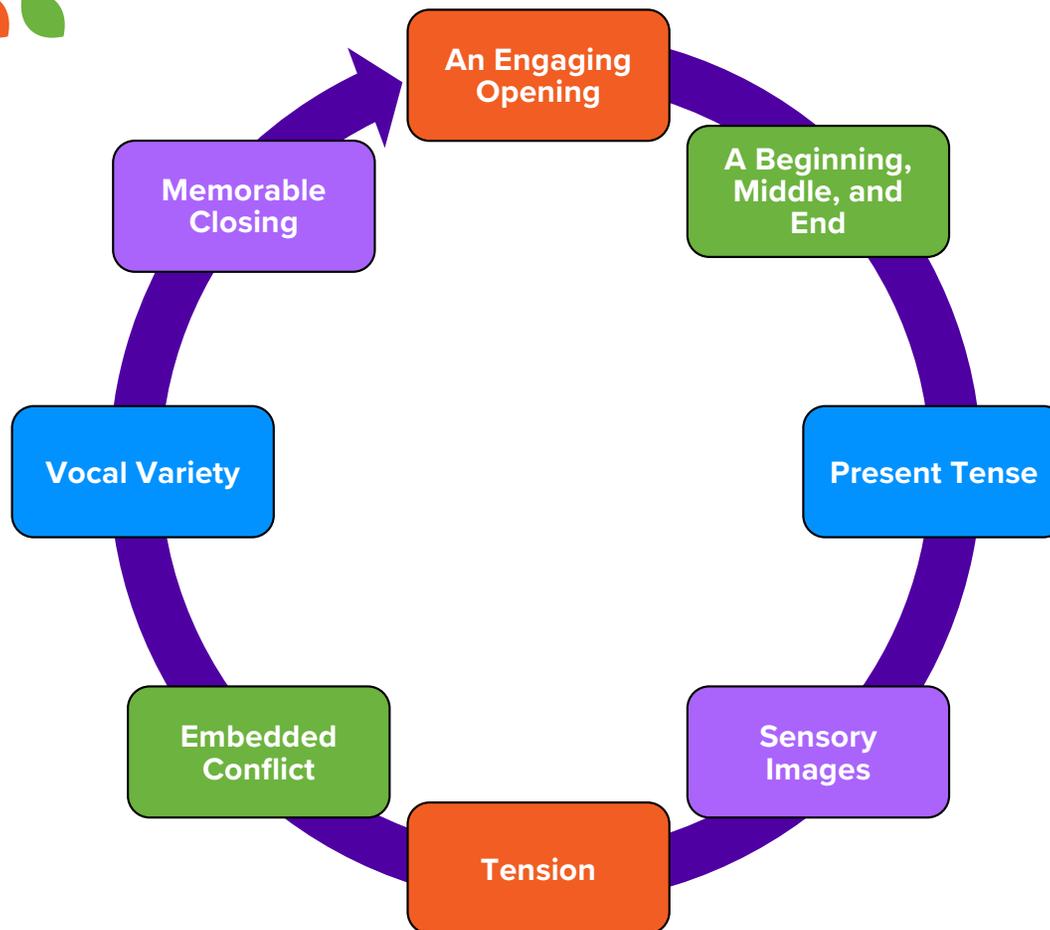


Break Time!





What are the characteristics or design elements of a good story?



Characteristics or Design Elements

Good Stories Have...

(Garmston, 2015).



Guiding Questions

When developing your story

1. What moment or phrase could ‘hook’ your listener right away?
2. Does your story flow naturally from setup to challenge to insight?”
3. How can you bring your audience into the scene using present tense verbs?
4. What could your listener see, hear, or feel if they were there?
5. What uncertainty or pressure builds interest before resolution?
6. What challenge or opposing force creates movement in your story?
7. Where might your voice rise or fall to mirror the story’s emotion?
8. What phrase or image will stick with your listener after it ends?



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That's Odd

- Pair up and explore the surrounding area.
- Identify three of the strangest things you can find.
- Email photos of your discoveries to drmchatton@educatordiversity.org



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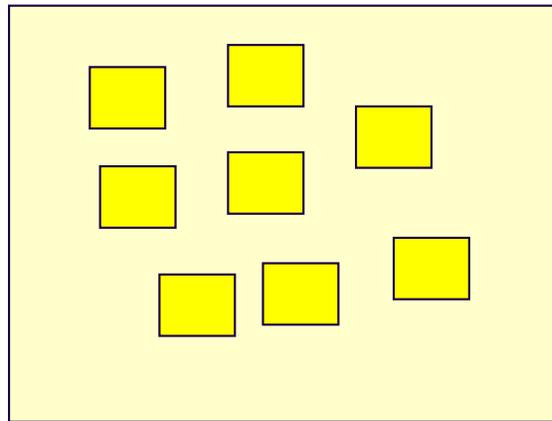


That's Odd



- Write 1-2 descriptive words for each strange thing you photographed on separate Post-It Notes (see below) and place on the chart papers

Sticky Part
YOUR 1-2 WORD DESCRIPTION





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Lunch Time!



Random Word



Odd Encounters, New Stories

- Select two random sticky notes
- Use the revealed words to create a solutions for a challenge you are experiencing in education
- Be sure to determine the purpose of your story and apply the design elements of a story



Share Out and Debrief



SAW IT?



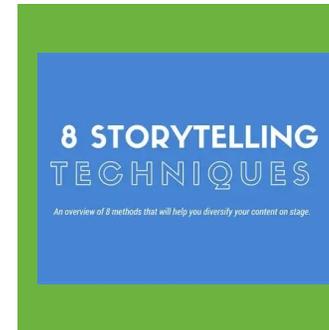
FELT IT?



Storytelling Mediums



Storytelling is not one-size-fits-all



The medium we choose can shape how a story touches others

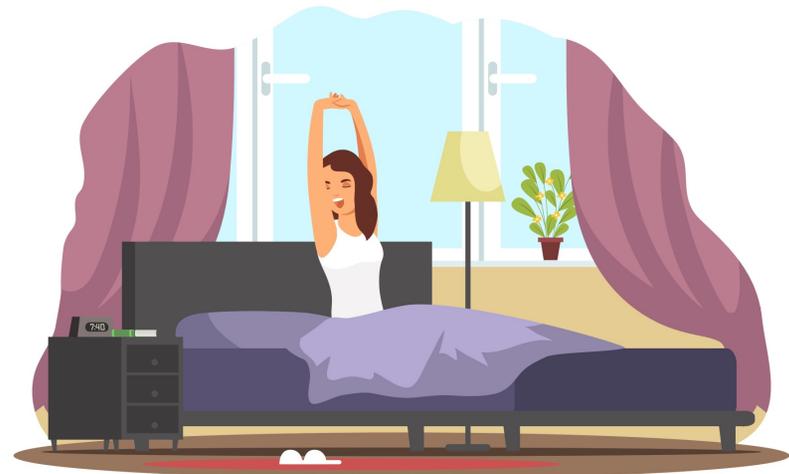
(Hernandez, 2024).



The Setting...



A hero wakes up with an unexpected power, but it's kind of useless!





Possible Storytelling Medium



- In your table groups, brainstorm as many possible storytelling mediums as you can think of.
- Push beyond the obvious! Think about playful or unconventional forms.
- We are looking for wild, silly, and ambitious ideas!



Crafting Your Story, Your Medium



Choose one invented medium from your brainstorm and create a mini version of the story in that form.



Same Story, Different Medium



- Share your story using your selected medium
 - How did this medium change the story's feel or focus?
 - What limitations or opportunities did this medium create?
 - Could this medium connect to real-world communication or teaching practices?



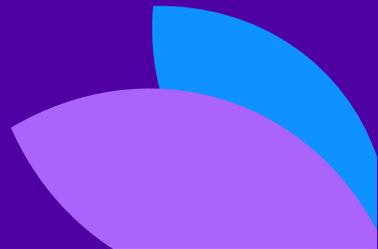
Debrief

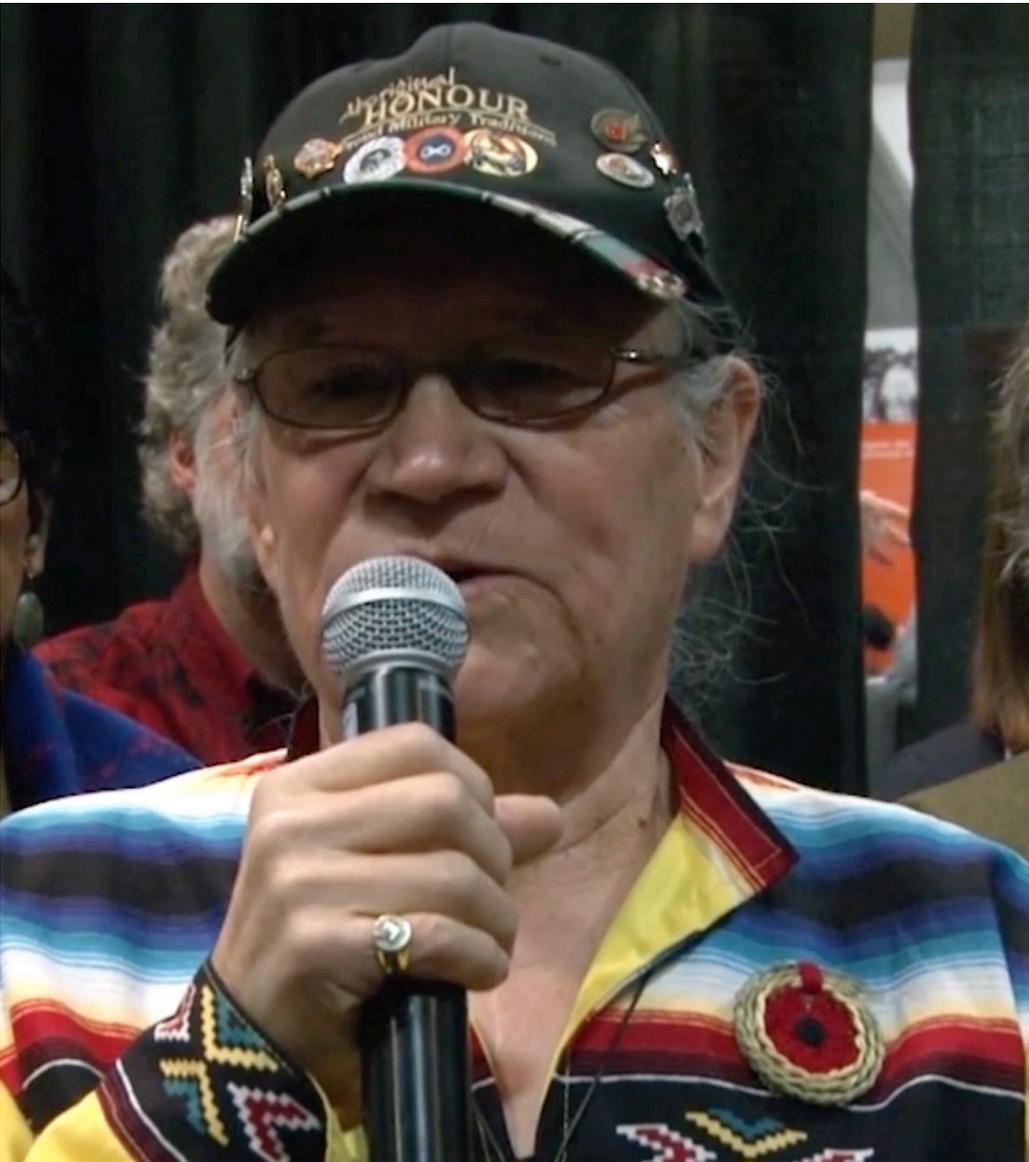


- What did we learn about how medium shapes meaning?
- How might this apply in your classrooms/professional work?
- Which invented mediums surprised you the most?



Break Time!





“

*There is always a
teaching in every
story.*

*Jerry Wood Cree First Nation Elder, Grant
MacEwan University*



Stories in the Classroom

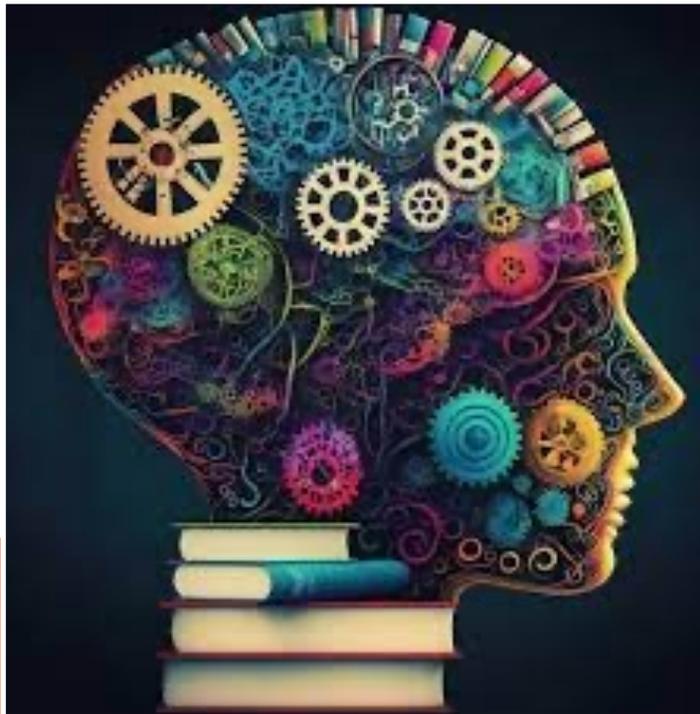


Why Stories Belong in Every Classroom

- The science shows how we remember; pedagogy applies it to how we teach.
- Facts alone rarely stick; stories anchor learning in emotion and relevance.
- When students see themselves *inside* a story, they engage both cognitively and emotionally.



Stories Across the Curriculum



Application by Content Area

- Every content area has its own stories - discoveries, struggles, and breakthroughs.
- Every subject, from math to science to art, is *already full of stories waiting to be told.*



Storytelling in the Content Areas

Small Group Activity

Content Through Character

Story-Spine for Lesson Planning

Data-to-Drama

History as First-Person Narrative

STEM Myth-Making





Content Through Characters



Setup: Various content topics on slips of paper (e.g., “fractions,” “water cycle,” “civil rights movement”).

Activity: Each participant draws one and invents a **character** to embody that concept (e.g., “Freddy the Fraction,” “Droppy the Water Droplet,” “Justice Jane”).

Swap: In your group, each person tells their story using their character.

Goal: Experience how personification makes abstract concepts relatable and memorable.



Story Spine for Lesson Planning



Set Up: Use the “**story spine**” framework (a narrative structure from improvisation theater):

- Once upon a time...
- Every day...
- But one day...
- Because of that...
- Until finally...

Activity: Select a content area. Use the story spine to build a content-based story.
Example: Fractions → “Once upon a time, four friends always shared a pizza...”

Goal: Apply the story spine to make content engaging and meaningful.



Data-to-Drama



Setup: Give participants a **data set or fact sheet** (e.g., population growth, chemical reactions, math word problems).

Activity: Groups must dramatize the data in story form, turning numbers/facts into a narrative.

Example: Population growth becomes “A town that keeps running out of chairs for everyone at dinner.”

Goal: See how storytelling translates abstract numbers into concrete, lived experiences.



History as First-Person Narrative



Setup: Select historical or scientific figures/events.

Activity: In your group write a lesson as **a first-person diary entry or oral story** (e.g., “I am Harriet Tubman guiding families to freedom,” or “I am a carbon atom traveling through the atmosphere”).

Goal: Practice empathetic perspective-taking and humanizing content.



STEM Myth-Making



Activity: Ask groups to invent a **myth** that explains a natural phenomenon **before science explained it** (like how ancient cultures created myths for eclipses, thunder, or seasons).

Example: “Why does the moon change shape?” → A rabbit keeps nibbling at it each night.

Goal: Create a myth that explains a natural phenomenon and shows how stories shape understanding.



Team Share

- Explain your activity
- Share what your team developed
- Debrief the experience
- Share how you would utilize this in your practice





Content Storytelling Relay



Setup: “Once upon a time, there was a number line...”

Relay: Each subsequent participant adds one line to extend the story, weaving in more details about the content.

Goal: Build collaboration while modeling how students can construct understanding piece by piece.

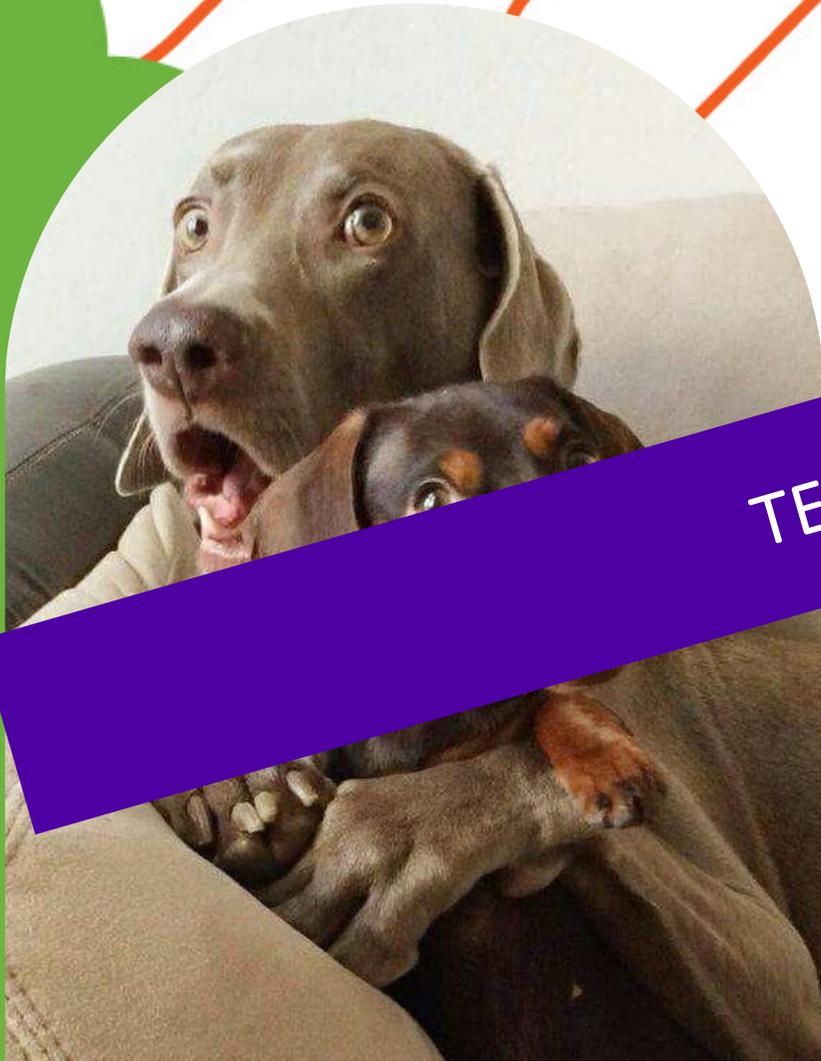


Surprise!

BranchED Tradition

- Book Reviews
- Superheroes
- Children's Books
- It's All About the Data
- EBP Cheers
- Songs of the Summit: AI Edition
- Summit Stories: Voices that Moved Us

TEAM TIME





Closing

Your Feedback is Important to Us!



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