



The Story Effect: Catalyzing Connection & Impact



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Instructions for Living a Life

by Mary Oliver

Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.



Storytelling and Neuroscience

Cortisol & Attention: Engaging narratives often spark cortisol spikes, improving focus and retention.

Oxytocin & Empathy: Emotional storytelling can trigger oxytocin release, heightening trust and social bonding.

Neural Coupling: When a story is told, both speaker and listener can show synchronized brain activity—sometimes called “brain-to-brain coupling.”

Immersion & Memory: Psychologically, narratives help listeners become immersed in character experiences, boosting emotional impact and long-term memory.

References for previous slide

Storytelling and Neuroscience

Cortisol & Attention: Engaging narratives often spark cortisol spikes, improving focus and retention. (Zak, P. J. (2015). *Why inspiring stories make us react: The neuroscience of narrative*. **Cerebrum**.)

Oxytocin & Empathy: Emotional storytelling can trigger oxytocin release, heightening trust and social bonding. (Zak, P. J. (2014). *Why your brain loves good storytelling*. **Harvard Business Review**.)

Neural Coupling: When a story is told, both speaker and listener can show synchronized brain activity—sometimes called “brain-to-brain coupling.” (Hasson, U. et al. (2012). *Brain-to-brain coupling: A mechanism for creating and sharing a social world*. **Trends in Cognitive Sciences**, 16(2), 114–121.)

Immersion & Memory: Psychologically, narratives help listeners become immersed in character experiences, boosting emotional impact and long-term memory. (Mar, R. A. (2011). *The neural bases of social cognition and story comprehension*. **Annual Review of Psychology**, 62, 103–134.)



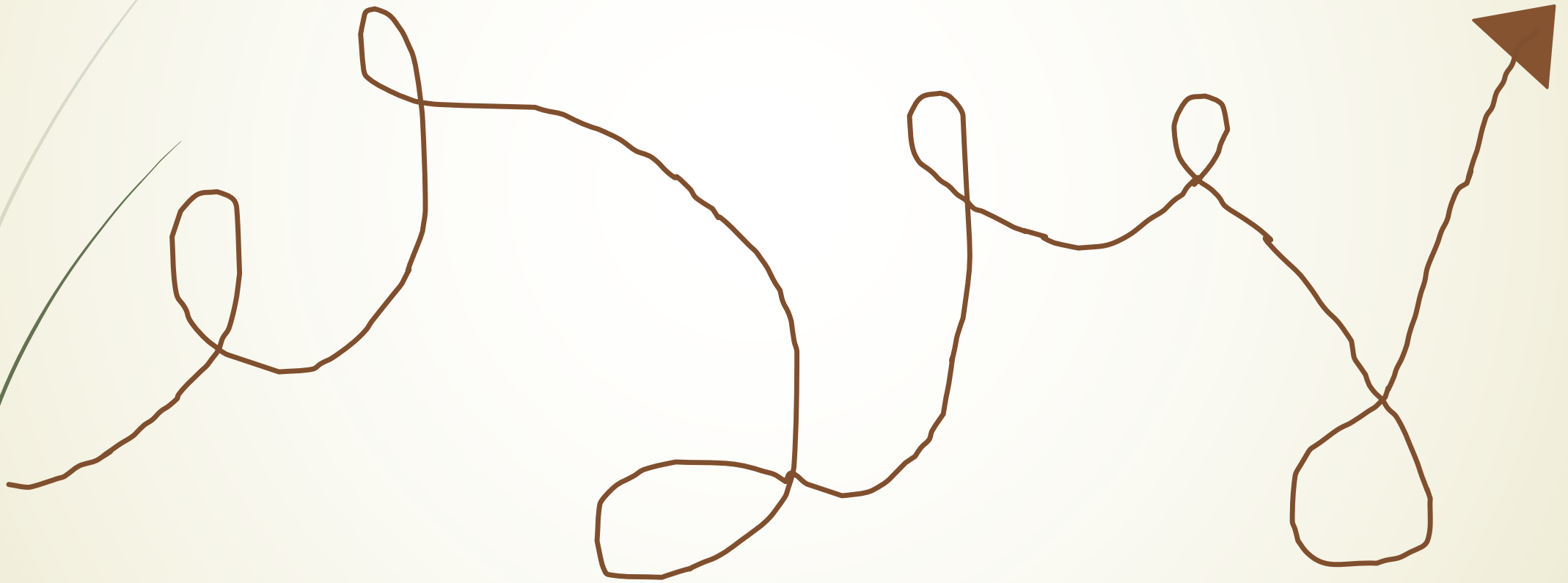
Story Structure



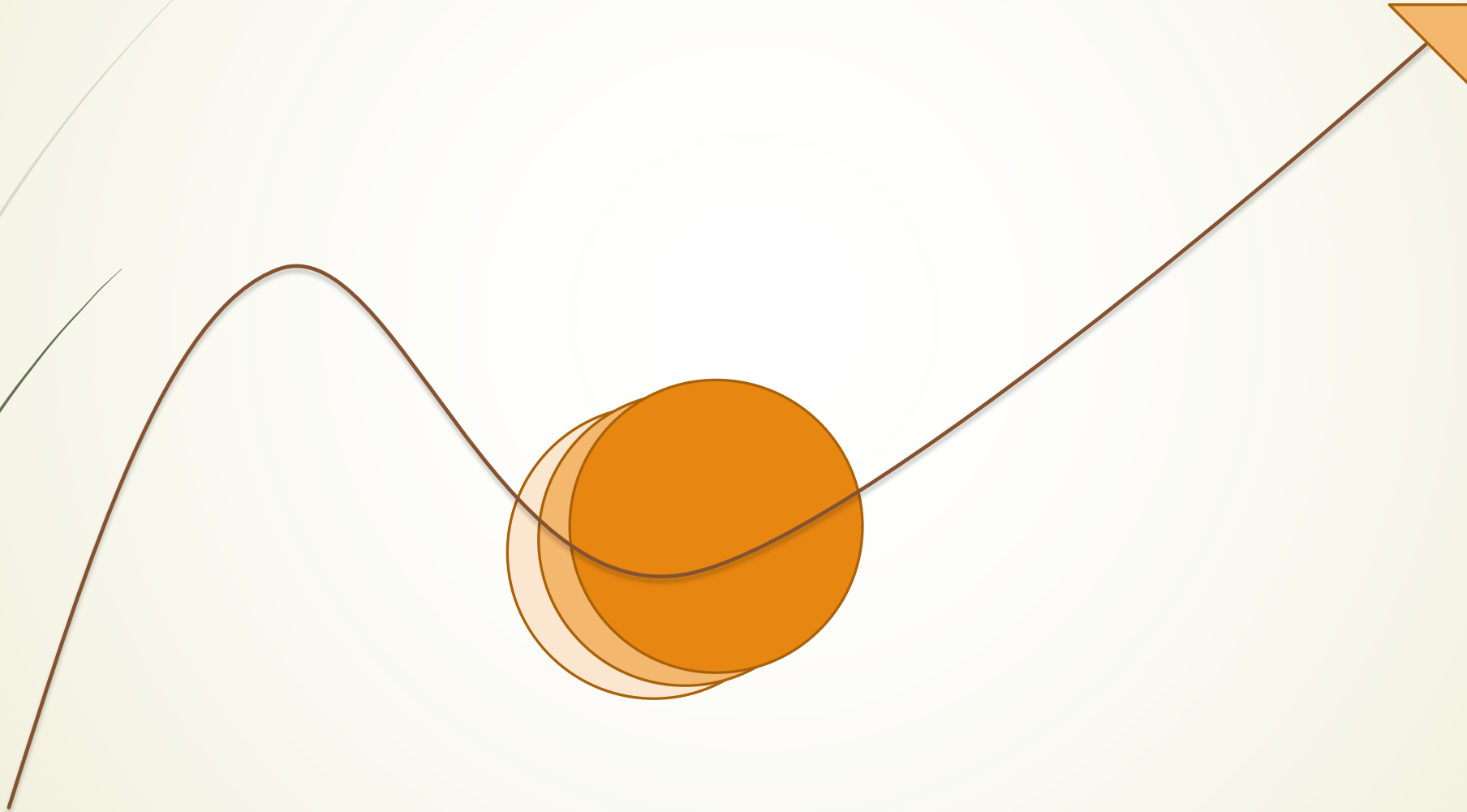
“Coming of Age” Story



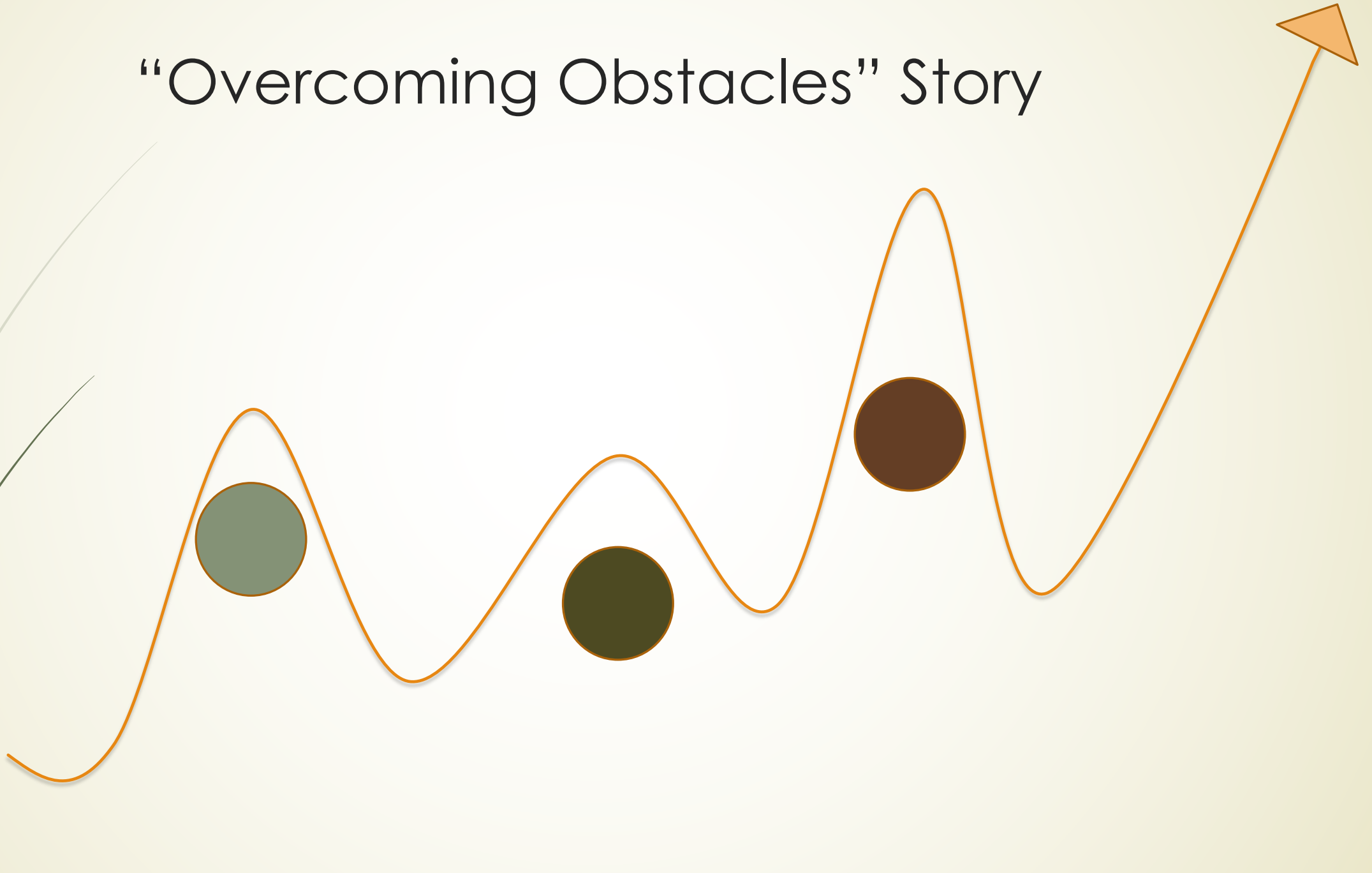
“Quest” Story



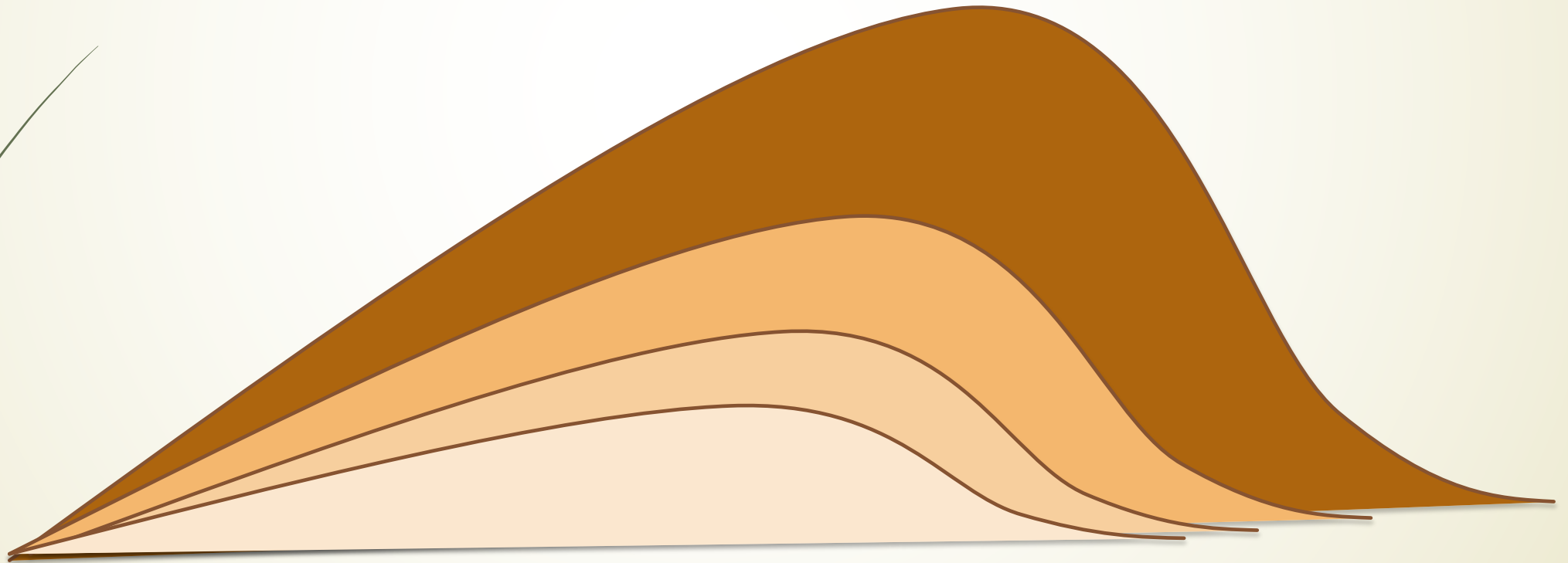
“Rebirth” Story



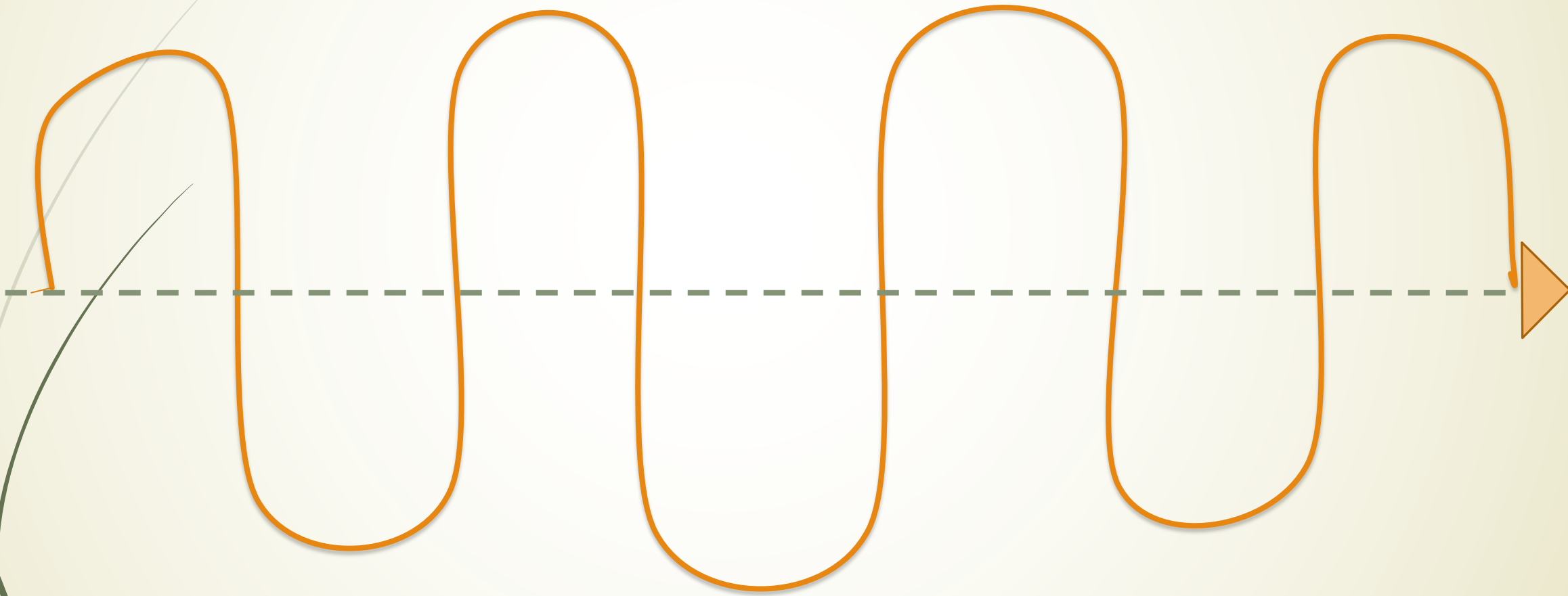
“Overcoming Obstacles” Story



“Constant Evolution” Story



“True as it Ever Was” Story



A photograph of a dirt path winding through a dense forest. The path is covered in fallen leaves and leads into the distance. The trees are tall and thin, with green foliage. The text "Guidelines for Storytelling" is overlaid on the left side of the image in a white, serif font.

Guidelines for Storytelling

Tell your own story.





Beginning...



Middle...



Ending...

A woman with dark hair, wearing a grey cable-knit sweater, stands in profile looking out a window. Her arms are crossed. A strong shadow of her is cast onto the wall behind her. The scene is lit with warm, golden light from the window.

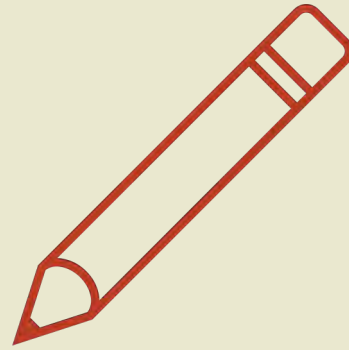
Share from scars rather than wounds



The End.

“And that’s my story.”

Discovering and Creating Stories



4 sentence stories

1) **Start** (what was happening?)



2) The **MESSY** middle



4) **Now...** what changed?



3) **CLARITY** is coming

Techniques of storytelling



Pace & Timing



Tone &
Intensity



Pause &
Silence



Emotion &
Mood

Ideas for Integrating Story...

- Website
- Writing (blogs, articles, books)
- Podcasts
- “In the moment” stories
- Additional ideas...





Thank you!

- Stay in touch!
- 5-day Storytelling Retreat in Tuscany – 22-26 April 2025 (www.thestoryacademy.org)
- *Make Life Less Difficult* podcast (www.makelifelessdifficult.com)
- lisatilstra@gmail.com