



TaleTrail

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 3 chapter books from the TaleTrail cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

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Introduction

The TaleTrail cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 3 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Once

*BEGINNING-OF-STORY — *who lives here? where?*



Once is a plump cream-and-lavender field-mouse-kid in a tiny *Once upon a time* pennant-vest, always carrying a little rolled scroll in one paw. She lives at the very beginning of the story-trail — a small grassy hill at the start of every storybook-path.

Once *loves* beginnings. To her, the beginning is the most important part of a story, because without a beginning, there's no story at all! And a beginning tells you just two things: *who* the story is about, and *where* they live. Once stands on her little hill, unrolls her scroll a peek, looks at the kid, and says her gentle words: "Who lives here? Where?"



Once found out how magic a beginning is on a rainy, nothing-to-do afternoon.

She was little, and bored, and there was nothing to play with. So she picked up a stick and said, just to herself, "Once upon a time, there was a... *dragon*." And then: "...who lived in a... *teapot*." And *poof*— suddenly there was a whole world in her head! A dragon, curled up snug in a big blue teapot. She could see it!

"It was like a door opening," Once says, eyes shining. "I picked one *who* and one *where*, and a whole story came pouring out behind them, ready to happen." From that afternoon on, Once knew the secret: every story is just waiting behind a *who* and a *where*. Pick those two, and the door swings open. She's helped kids open that door ever since.



Today, Page — the story-trail's brave little guide — brings the kid up the grassy hill to visit Once.

"Watch Once unroll her scroll," Page says. "Then YOU pick a WHO and a WHERE. Who lives here? Where? Pick anyone. Pick anywhere. That's the beginning of your story!"



Once helps the kid pick. The *who* can be anyone — a kid, a bunny, a dragon, a robot, a frog, an astronaut. The *where* can be anywhere — a house, a forest, a planet, a teacup, the moon. A grown-up can help pick too, suggesting a *who* or a *where* for the kid to take or change, and a grown-up can *scribe* — write down what the kid says — if the kid wants help with the writing. And Once *never* says "that's a boring beginning" or "pick something else." She just says "Who lives here? Where?" and writes down whatever the kid chooses. A dragon in a teapot. A girl in a normal house. A frog who is *also* an astronaut. *Any* beginning is a good beginning. And if a kid isn't sure what to pick, Once offers gentle choices — "How about a kid? A bunny? A little dinosaur? You can pick one, or make your very own" — and unrolls her scroll a little longer to record each new *who* and *where*.



"Who lives here? Where?" That's Once.

And when the kid picks their *who* and their *where* — all by themselves, or together with Page and a grown-up — a warm little *ready* feeling glows right in the middle of their chest: happy, brave, *let's-go!* Picking your *who* and your *where* feels *so good* — like your story just took its very first happy breath, and the whole adventure is waiting, right there, just for you.

Bump

*MIDDLE-TROUBLE — *uh-oh! now what?*



Bump is a round warm-russet turtle-kid in a soft-yellow safety helmet — and on every single path, Bump literally *bumps* into something. A door. A tree-trunk. A friend. A flower. A sign. Always with a soft little "oof!" But Bump is *never* sad about it — Bump is always *curious* about whatever they bumped into. Bump lives at the middle of the story-trail, a bumpy little path where things keep happening.

Bump's special skill is *middle-trouble* — the surprise in the middle of every story. Because every good story has a spot where something *unexpected* happens: a problem, an obstacle, a surprise. And Bump knows a wonderful secret: unexpected isn't *bad* — it's the thing that makes a story *interesting*! When Bump bumps into something, little ! sparkles float around the helmet, Bump tilts their head, and says the gentle words: "Uh-oh! Now what?"



Bump learned to love bumps on the day of the very best "oof!"

When Bump was small, they used to feel a little jumpy about surprises — a bump meant something had *gone wrong*. Then one afternoon, hurrying along, Bump bumped smack into a big flower they'd never seen before — *oof!* — and instead of being upset, Bump got *curious*. What kind of flower? Why here? Where did it come from? And that one little bump turned an ordinary walk into a whole afternoon of discovery.

"That's when it clicked," Bump says, sparkles fizzing. "A bump isn't the end of the fun — it's the *start* of it! Every 'uh-oh' is really an 'ooh, *now what?*'" From then on, Bump stopped worrying about bumps and started *welcoming* them. They're the most interesting part of any trail — or any story.



Today, Page — the story-trail's brave little guide — brings the kid down the bumpy middle-path to visit Bump.

"Watch Bump bump," Page says. "Then YOU put a bump in your story! Something unexpected. A problem. A surprise. Uh-oh — now what? What does your character do?"



Bump helps the kid pick a bump. It can be silly or serious — the character ate the wrong-colored berry, the dragon lost its socks, the girl got tickled by a giant feather, the robot ran out of beeps. *Any* bump the kid likes is a good bump. A grown-up can help brainstorm too — "What if your character...?" — and can scribe the middle. And Bump *never* says "that's a scary bump" or "make it smaller." Bump just says "Uh-oh! Now what?" and waits, warmly, for the kid to think about what their character will *do* next — because that's the next exciting part of the story. And if a kid worries a bump feels *too* scary, Bump helps make it *just-right* scary instead — because on the story-trail there are no scary-scary bumps, only *interesting* ones, and the kid and the grown-up and Bump decide together what's just right.



"Uh-oh! Now what?" That's Bump.

And when the kid puts a bump in their story and starts to figure out *what happens next*, a brave, tingly, *ooh-let's-find-out* feeling bubbles up inside them — not the jumpy kind of scared, but the curious kind of excited, warm right in the middle of their chest. That brave, curious, *now-what?* feeling — a surprise turned into an adventure — is the very best part of the middle of the trail.

Tada

*END-RESOLUTION — *tada! we did it.**



Tada is a tiny warm-amber hummingbird-kid in a soft sparkle-cape, both wings spread wide in a big *Ta-da!* reveal pose. Tada lives at the very end of the story-trail — a little celebration-clearing where finished stories get cheered.

Tada *loves* endings. To Tada, the end of a story is a *celebration!* The character had a beginning (thanks, Once!). They had a bump (thanks, Bump!). They figured out what to do. And now — right here at the end — *they did it!* Tada spreads both wings wide, sparkles fly, and Tada says the gentle words: "Tada! We did it."



Tada learned that endings are for celebrating on the day a first story finally got *finished*.

When Tada was small, they used to feel a little *sad* when a story ended — like something fun was over and gone. So Tada would leave stories unfinished, just to not say goodbye.

Then Tada watched a friend finish a whole story — beginning, bump, and all — and instead of feeling sad, the friend *cheered*, wings up, sparkles everywhere. "You *did* it!" everyone said. And Tada saw it clearly: an ending isn't a sad *stop*. It's a proud *ta-da!* — the moment you get to look at the whole thing you made and celebrate. "That's when I understood," Tada says, sparkles fizzing. "Ending doesn't mean the fun's over. It means you *made* something, all the way to the end — and that's worth cheering!" Tada has celebrated every ending since.



Today, Page — the story-trail's brave little guide — brings the kid into the celebration-clearing to visit Tada.

"Watch Tada celebrate," Page says. "Then YOU end your story! Tada — we did it! How did your character solve the bump? What happened at the end?"



Tada helps the kid wrap up. There are *lots* of ways to end: maybe the character solved the problem, maybe a friend helped, maybe they decided the bump wasn't so bad after all. A grown-up can help too — "How did it work out?" — and can scribe the ending. And Tada *never* says "that's a sad ending" or "make it happier." Some stories end happy, some end with the character figuring something out, some end with a hug, some end with a brand-new beginning — and *any* ending that wraps up the bump is a good ending. Even a *quiet* ending gets the full wing-spread, because endings aren't stops, they're celebrations. And if a kid wants their story to *never* end — to just keep going forever — that's okay too! Tada simply says, "Tada! We did it... *for now*," and the kid can come back to the very same story another day. For-now-endings are perfectly good endings. When the story is done, Tada *celebrates* — sparkles fly, both wings spread — and Page records it in the storybook, ready to share with anyone the kid chooses.



"Tada! We did it." That's Tada.

And when the kid finishes their very own story — beginning, bump, and ending, all the way through — they feel it too: a warm, bubbly, *proud* feeling that rises all the way from their toes to their smile, like Tada's own sparkles fizzing inside them. Finishing your very own story feels *wonderful* — a happy, glowy, look-what-I-made feeling you get to carry with you, and share, forever after.

About Spark & Anvil

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- **ProofQuest** — formal proof techniques through Direct-Proof Dora and the Lemma Library
- **CuriosityQuest** — Texas geography exploration through Linger, Notice, and the Lantern in the Dark
- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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