To Tell a Story

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BIOGRAPHY
I hold a B.S. in Astronomy and a M.A. in Science Education. I spent eight years in industry before beginning my career as a teacher in 1998. I have been at the Howard B. Owens Science Center planetarium for 25 years, 18 as full-time staff.

ABSTRACT
Can just anyone tell a story (in the planetarium)? Why and when should you use stories in your programs? How do we stay focused on what is really important? For this portion of the presentation, Patty Seaton will share the traditional Greek story of Perseus, Medusa, Cassiopeia, and Andromeda, modeling storytelling techniques presented by Toshi Komatsu earlier in the session.

INTRODUCTION
Sometimes the story you want to share in the planetarium is simply that – a story. A myth, a legend. While you want to be true to the culture that originally told the story, you can also incorporate the “rule of three” elements that Toshi Komatsu just described. I would like to re-tell the Greek story of Perseus, Medusa, Cassiopeia, and Andromeda, outlining what I call the “soap opera in the sky”. Note that I prompt the audience for input; their expected response is in parenthesis in the text below. Needed visuals on the dome are indicated in brackets.

I. PERSEUS AND MEDUSA

[NOTE: Sky should be set for the fall, with Cassiopeia, Andromeda, Perseus and Pegasus all in the sky. Display outlines of the figures as indicated, where available.]

Perseus can be found here in the sky [draw using laser pointer, then show the outline as available. Leave on during this part of the story.] Perseus was the son of Danae, daughter of King Acrisius, who had locked Danae away because of the Oracle that Danae’s son would one day kill him and become the next king. But trying to interfere with prophecy never works, and Zeus himself visited Danae which therefore led to the birth of Perseus. Perseus grew to be a strong fighter who was willing to take on any challenge. King Polydectes challenged him to bring him the head of the gorgon, Medusa!

Medusa had her own problems. She had once been a beautiful woman, but made the mistake of going on a romantic date with Poseidon in the temple of Athena. Athena turned her into a hideous creature who had what in place of hair? (snakes) and if you looked into her eyes? (you’d turn into stone). Killing her would be a problem! Fortunately, Perseus had the blessing of Zeus and Athena… he was given the gift of a sack for Medusa’s head, winged sandals and an invisibility hat. However, even while invisible, Perseus couldn’t look directly at Medusa, so Athena gave him advice, to polish his shield. What good would that do? (It can be used as a mirror). So Perseus used the reflection of Medusa in his polished shield to cut off her head. Her blood pooled on the ground, and swirled in a strange form… a full-sized stallion with eagle-like wings! This was the birth of Pegasus, the first winged horse, which can be found here in the sky, by identifying this square. [Point out, and then show outline as available.] Perseus took Medusa’s head and placed it carefully in the sack, then fled the cave where he had found her in fear of being discovered by her two gorgon sisters.

We pause this story here, to introduce another cast of characters… [Fade the constellations of Perseus and Pegasus]

II. CASSIOPEIA AND ANDROMEDA

In Africa there was a kingdom known as Aethiopia. It was ruled by King Cepheus [point out and show outline as available] and Queen Cassiopeia [point out and show outline as available]. The queen was very beautiful, but that turned out to be her fatal flaw. Her beauty led to her vanity. She would boast of being more beautiful than any other woman. And one day, she
went too far. She boasted that she was more beautiful than the Nereids, immortal sea goddesses. It is NEVER good for a mortal to insult the immortal, so the Nereids complained to Poseidon who therefore decided to punish Aethipoia. He vowed to send a horrible sea monster to destroy everything and everyone. Queen Cassiopeia pleaded for mercy, but it was too late. When she accepted responsibility for her actions and pleaded to save her city, Poseidon relented a little (what does *relevant* mean?) and gave her the awful solution to offer her daughter, Andromeda, as a sacrifice to the sea monster in order to save her city. What choice did she have? The dreaded day came, and Andromeda was chained to the cliff. [Point out Andromeda and add outline as available.]

**III. THE STORIES COME TOGETHER**

Here’s where our stories collide. Let’s bring back Perseus and Pegasus. [Add outlines as available.] The earliest versions of the stories have Perseus flying using his winged sandals. More modern versions of the stories (the original; 1970s movie of “Clash of the Titans”) have Perseus flying on Pegasus. In either case, he happened to fly over the kingdom of Aethiopia on the day that Andromeda was chained to the cliff. He knew nothing about the story of Queen Cassiopeia, but one look was all he needed to see that Andromeda was in trouble. And that she was beautiful. And he thought, hey, maybe if I rescue this girl, I can go on a date with her! He saw the monster coming, and tried to distract it. The monster looked up, Perseus whipped out the head of Medusa And… (the monster turned to stone!). [NOTE: here is where I put on my Medusa hat and shine a light on my face. The students are usually pleasantly startled by the unexpected use of this prop!] Therefore, the monster was destroyed, Andromeda was saved, and not only did Perseus get to date Andromeda, he got to marry her! And they lived happily ever after… OR you can add the story of how Andromeda’s original fiancé, Phineas, decided to challenge Perseus and then gets killed by him… OR you can make up this ending, how Andromeda gets on Perseus’s nerves, so he dumps her off on a deserted island and flies off on Pegasus. [Note: the kids seem to like this version!]

The idea is to make the story dramatic. I probably never tell it precisely as I had to write it down in words. I tell students that in appreciation of Dionysus, the god of wine, storytelling often took place along with much drinking of wine, so should we expect the stories to be told the same way every time? (NO!) Therefore (hey look, another of Toshi’s rule of three for the Sentence!), the stories vary and SHOULD vary, and in my opinion, be told with a bit of dramatic flair!

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**REFERENCES**