

Bonni [00:00:00] Stories can capture our imagination and make a class come alive today Aaron. Daniel Annas joins me to talk storytelling.

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Bonni [00:00:20] Welcome to this episode of Teaching In Higher Ed. This is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to increase our personal productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students.

Bonni [00:00:46] I am absolutely thrilled to be welcoming a friend to the show today and also I think I can officially call you my neighbor. I think so. My office across the hall at work is our Com department and in our com department is Aaron Daniel Annas he is an Assistant Professor of Cinema Arts and also the Faculty Director of the Vanguard Sundance program.

Bonni [00:01:10] And before we start in talking about storytelling I wonder if you could just share the story of how the Vanguard Sundance program came to life and you pretty recently just got back from the most recent Sundance. Tell us what that was about.

Aaron [00:01:24] I did so Sundance takes place at the end of January every year. And I pitched that we would have a program to take students to the Sundance Film Festival which is in the top three largest film festivals in the world and the top film festival in the country.

Aaron [00:01:40] And it kind of acts as a lab for us to engage the culture of the industry from a student perspective and to be able to come together each morning discuss what we're engaging and then go out and engage it. And so we take a select group every year and we all go watch films together meet the filmmakers and have critical analysis with them.

Bonni [00:02:00] It reminds me a little bit of a class that I teach called Sales and Sales Management and the whole class kind of geared toward something that happens at the end of the semester it's called sales challenge 3. And so the challenge is we go out and visit a business.

Bonni [00:02:14] And even for some of them as strange as this is to say maybe they've never been to a quote unquote real business like the kind of business that we visit they might have a family business that maybe some of them it's a construction business or really small bookkeeping firm or something like that.

Bonni [00:02:31] But they haven't gone to the big building the building we typically have gone to for the last four years is right by that John Wayne Airport and it's actually a whole bunch of different towers that connect and then down at the bottom there's a really fancy I think it's a four star restaurant.

Bonni [00:02:46] The bill showed up and it was like a five star general. OK we can do this. And anyway so they're kind of nervous from the very beginning. And then they go up the elevator and then from the conference room where they have to sit for the sales challenge 3.

Bonni [00:03:01] They're overlooking the atrium with all the buildings where they come together usually it's dark by this time so this little twinkly lights that screen. And so they have to roleplay with a business professional that they've never met before and they have to actually try to sell them.

Bonni [00:03:17] It's all fictitious but to them it feels very real at the time and there's usually a lot of nerves but it kind of reminds me that because I could tell them what that was like. I might even show them some pictures on a PowerPoint slide but nothing like a scene in real life I don't think you could give them the Sundance experience unless they were there.

Aaron [00:03:34] I think it makes it more obtainable for the students as careers. Having having a film career they think I want to be a filmmaker I want to be a director but all their lives they hear Well that's in Hollywood.

Aaron [00:03:45] And you see this but you're never a part of it. And they come to school thinking what I want to be this. But I could never do it because it's the famous people that do it.

Aaron [00:03:53] Then they go and meet these people and they're regular people just like they are and they're like oh this is this is something that I could do. So I really do it. I'll actually do this I'll make a good story and I'll be a filmmaker. And so it makes it more reachable for them.

Bonni [00:04:07] So anyone who is listening to this podcast it's fun because the listeners have been growing every week and I'm starting to have a lot more conversations over email and social media with our listeners. I would really be disappointed if someone shut off this episode thinking well this guy is he's a by the way I should also mention that in addition to your role as the director of the Sundance program.

Bonni [00:04:29] And then you're also an Associate Professor you also have a nice side gig where you sing with the musical group and I actually when my husband Dave and I first started get to know you we got to see you in a musical theater gig down here in one of our local community theater. So you're kind of you come from a background if theater.

Aaron [00:04:47] I do.

Bonni [00:04:47] And the cinema art. So it might be tempting to shut off the podcast and say well I am a math teacher. I am a science teacher right. I don't tell stories.

Aaron [00:05:00] See I come from a perspective that everything is based on story. So if you're a math teacher and you're looking at story structure first you have the introduction of the characters right. One plus one is two your characters are one and one there major conflict is that one and one must add together.

Aaron [00:05:17] And your final solution or your outcome is it ends up being too. So there is a beginning there's a conflict and there's an end. And so not only do I feel that formulas or stories I also feel that the way that we deliver our our methods and our lessons are usually based in story form her story structure.

Bonni [00:05:40] One of the things I think is so sad is how many students have been turned off by Statistics. Has the context for the statistics didn't come alive for them. And I actually had to go back and retake an undergraduate statistics class when I was getting my master's degree because it was a prerequisite for the program and I didn't have it as a part of my undergrad.

Bonni [00:06:00] So I think at the time I was 30 something and going back and taking what a lot of our 18 to 22 year olds take. But I did it in a working professionals program so most of the people there were already working.

Bonni [00:06:11] And this guy that taught the statistics class he was eighth grade math teacher by day and then he taught this statistics class by night. And one of the things I left. First of all he would allow us to tell our own stories through statistics.

Bonni [00:06:29] At the time as a Vice President of Human Resources and he would have me do my projects related to well what kinds of things could you analyze as a vice president human resources around using these statistical methods. And for me that really made it come alive you know here the sky is introducing some new tools for me new lenses that I could use to analyze things.

Bonni [00:06:50] It was all completely new. But that context when I put it on the lens of the context it just made it so valuable to me so meaningful and I think I probably understood faster than I might have if it was a context I was unfamiliar with.

Aaron [00:07:04] And did you remember it easier because you had that story context to remember what it is that you're learning.

Bonni [00:07:10] I think I did although instead of him necessarily telling the story he let us tell our own stories with our student work. That's great. Yeah. And then the other thing I remember him doing was he would bring in all these different games from Vegas that you might play.

Bonni [00:07:24] Like Russian roulette. No. Hahahahaha, That's a game. What is the one where you spin the wheel.

Aaron [00:07:36] Well it is a roulette, It is a roulette.

Bonni [00:07:39] Russian one. Right. Leave the Russians out so you can tell I don't do a lot of gambling or a big visit Vegas too often. And then there was blackjack. And actually it was more challenging for me to grasp it there because I had to learn the game because I didn't know.

Bonni [00:07:54] Actually I think I knew how to play blackjack but some of my didn't know we had to calculate the probability of winning. And then you could

see actually that the the gambling facilities always had the upper hand but we actually had to calculate that out.

Bonni [00:08:06] And it really made it memorable for me but I think I was probably slower on that one because I wasn't familiar with those games but most students were. And I think it at least was entertaining for me to do it. So tell me how do you craft a good story.

Aaron [00:08:22] I think to craft a good story. There's this basic story structure that from from my background we all come from learning the story structure and that is that it begins with the introduction of your characters and getting to know them and then you get towards the middle of your story and you see whatever your conflict is it's kind of coming toward you.

Aaron [00:08:40] And then after coming towards you it gets to the climax where there is some type of major conflict or the major meet write the major meet. That's that's the second act the major meet and then towards the end of the second act it looks like things could possibly work out even though they may not.

Aaron [00:08:55] And then finally you get to the third act where there's some type of solution it may not be fulfilling or it may be fulfilling. But there's some type of conclusion or some type of resolution. And if you think of crafting a story you could even consider the class experience as a lecturer a story right.

Aaron [00:09:15] Because when you start you introduce your topic. When you first come in today and you introduce your topic and so you're introducing the character of what it is that you're teaching as you get into that story.

Aaron [00:09:26] The students are focusing on what you're saying but it's something new and usually something challenging because it's something that they probably don't know or they wouldn't be in the classroom.

Aaron [00:09:35] So the conflict is the challenge of learning this a whole new meet that you're introducing and the climax rises as you get to probably the most difficult part which is usually two thirds through the class that you get to probably the hardest part because you've taught the beginning of the formula or whatever it is you're towards the middle of it.

Aaron [00:09:53] There's already been a whole lot to retain and then you're there at the middle of it. So that would be the climax and then in the third act as we start to see maybe I can get this every once in a while. And the best stories.

Aaron [00:10:05] There's a twist to 80 percent. This is the part I don't like in the classroom. It's when one student has a question that has nothing to do with what you're talking about but they think it has something to do with what you're talking about.

Aaron [00:10:15] So it takes you completely off topic and everybody who is with you goes away because a student asks a question that has nothing to do with with the actual formula they just thought it did. So everything goes it has major twists and then you have to bring the whole class back.

Aaron [00:10:28] So for you as you experiencing the story you're bringing everybody back on topic and somehow making that student not feel that they just twisted the whole class around so keeping them involved in the story and then hopefully the resolution where the class leaves understanding what's going on.

Aaron [00:10:43] So even the experience of teaching a class is a great story in my opinion. And then everything that you say is shaping that story so for me when I'm teaching. I try to think how can I make this not only educational but I don't I hesitate to use the word entertainment because.

Aaron [00:11:03] When other professionals hear entertainment they may think that we're not giving the goods but we're just pandering to the student and I don't believe that it's about entertaining.

Aaron [00:11:14] But I do believe that to be this is my belief that to be a good educator you have to be able to take a student on a journey and that's what story is as a journey. So learning how to have a journey. And when I plan my my lesson plans I try to think of the journey experience how am I going to keep the student with me through the class.

Bonni [00:11:34] I wanted to ask you a question about what do people do if they're not good at telling stories. But even before I get there how do I know how do I assess myself as a storyteller what are some methods that I might be able to use to know if this was something I was good at or not.

Aaron [00:11:48] I think there are several methods I'm going to ask you the same question because I want you to try to analyze this from your perspective for me. I know I have this trick that I do and I try to think the most boring thing that I've ever experienced.

Aaron [00:12:03] What have I sat through and just absolutely hated whether it be a specific faculty meeting or whether it be something that was that happened a long time ago. And then I try to think of why I hated it and as I think about why I hated it.

Aaron [00:12:16] Usually there's some way that it lost me on the journey some way they lost my attention and I just didn't care anymore. So when I'm preparing a class and in my mind I'm thinking and this may be the first time I prepare it if I'm going to teach it every year but as I'm thinking of the lecture or whatever I'm going to talk about I try to think would I be bored if I were sitting in front of me listening to this.

Aaron [00:12:40] And so I really judge it by if I don't know the information and if I don't care greatly about the information would I still be interested in the journey of this story. And so that's kind of how I look at it you. I feel like when we were talking at some point and you gave a different method I'd love to ask you the same. How do you know if you're if you're boring or if you're telling a good story.

Bonni [00:13:04] Well one thing that comes to mind as you were talking about I both do this and I don't do this at the same time so I when I used my background was in corporate training the franchise world. So I used to train people how to run these businesses all around the world.

Bonni [00:13:20] And back then I could tell if they were with me on the journey and I was being effective in my engagement and storytelling by the body language and the eye contact and that gave me a lot of really good because I taught computer classes actually very very early on these were eight hour classes on Microsoft Excel.

Bonni [00:13:41] Six different classes, six different eight hour classes I taught on Microsoft Excel and you could tell me you've taught software before and you can tell some of the bells and whistles that are in software.

Bonni [00:13:53] It's funny because now I mean maybe people would scoff at this but in Microsoft Excel there's that little autofill handle. And if you type in

Monday and then you drag that autofill handle down it type in automatically for you Tuesday Wednesday Thursday.

Bonni [00:14:07] And this was back in the day really big deal. And then I would have it where you could actually do trend. So if you typed in you know the 15th and then the 17th it would go every other day and whatever if you dragged it if you highlighted both of them first and then drag that autofill handle.

Bonni [00:14:23] It could recognize trends and people would just get more and more excited to have them you know what other things you could do oh quarter one quarter to quarter three and they start to experiment earlier in the day when I had been teaching them about in Microsoft Excel the difference between copying and pasting or referencing a cell.

Bonni [00:14:41] So if I say equals a3 and what's in a 3 is tacos I had him type in what they were going to have for lunch that day then that's a different thing than if I copied the word tacos to that other cell does that make sense?

Bonni [00:14:53] It Does.

Bonni [00:14:54] So I told them about the autofill handle you know you typed in that you're having tacos for lunch today. If you just drive the autofill handle down it'll actually list different types of Mexican food.

Bonni [00:15:06] And the woman believed me and it was one of those that was actually one of those sad things where I thought that was the kind of humor that we don't want to use in a classroom cause I don't want anyone to ever feel like they were laughed up by. It does make for a good story doesn't it.

Bonni [00:15:23] But with college students so the listeners would remember probably only teach mostly 18 to 22 year olds not entirely but that's about 90 percent of my teaching.

Bonni [00:15:32] I can't do that same thing. They're there. They have more of a flat affect than my typical business leaders might have if I were to go in and do a workshop for them so I have to I have to not give up on them though. It just forces me to ask better questions and to challenge them more.

Aaron [00:15:52] Well I hear you saying that you often involve your students in this story. Right you have them participate. What am I having for lunch. What

happens if you do this. And if you even if you think of going to the movies when you go to the movies you like a movie that you feel you're almost in.

Aaron [00:16:12] When I teach filmmakers how to use a camera I tell them that the camera should be the head of the viewer. And when I tell them how to cut that film together I say listen. After somebody says something if it's shocking I want you to think if you were standing in this room watching this where would you snap your head after this person said that.

Aaron [00:16:32] And it would be to look at the reaction of the person. Right. Right across. Who is being told whatever the shocking news is. So you whip straight to that person therefore you would cut straight to that person and show that face.

Aaron [00:16:43] And so you are having to be the head of the viewer. Well in the classroom what you're doing is the same thing you're letting the viewer or the student be a part of the story and letting them be inside the story by letting them participate.

Aaron [00:16:58] And encouraging them to use things from daily life like what am I having for lunch today. So even though you can't use all of that information in your students. Now that's a huge thing that you can carry over into the classroom now is bringing them on the journey with you and letting them have a horse on the ride.

Bonni [00:17:12] And I don't know if you found this before because I actually now that you're mentioning that I do that a ton in my classes and they don't always like it but it works because some of them want to sit there and disengage and they become angry at me that I won't quote unquote allow that right.

Aaron [00:17:30] It's I always think of the glass ketchup bottles the Heinz ketchup bottles. I love ketchup and whenever I open a ketchup bottle and I can't get that ketchup while it drives me crazy and I have to shake it a little bit and once I get that air flow right then they ketchup just pours out.

Aaron [00:17:45] And I have exactly what I want. I think it's the same thing with my students. They are all too either scared or embarrassed to participate. But as soon as I shake them up a little bit and get them involved once they start participating sometimes it's hard to get them to stop. So I mean I think you're right.

Bonni [00:18:03] I am going to be thinking of the Heinz ketchup bottle every time that I teach, That is a wonderful analogy. And so tell me. We're kind of getting toward the latter end of the podcast. I would do. Tell me the story as we're looking toward the finish line because I think people might enjoy hearing from you.

Aaron [00:18:23] You know every everything's a story as as what I would what I would come what I would say to my students who are preparing stories.

Aaron [00:18:32] Usually I use a lot of little things that happen in real life stories right. So oftentimes I'm trying to teach students not to trust. The first thing that they hear from someone in the business that we work in because people will say anything to you.

Aaron [00:18:46] A lot of times in the industry of entertainment to try to get you to do what they want. Sure I'll pay you. But you don't have a signed contract that they're going to pay them.

Aaron [00:18:54] So I'm teaching them about about trust. And I remember when I was a kid my brother I have two brothers my older brother he had a BB gun you know like in a Christmas story that Red Rider BB gun.

Bonni [00:19:07] That's the first thing I thought of.

Aaron [00:19:07] . So he had a BB gun. And he was out in the backyard and he was shooting his BB gun into the woods and he thought he was done and he put his finger over the barrel. I don't know why. Just because he was going to set the back of the gun on the ground like a walking stick and when he set it down on the ground the gun went off and shot him in the finger.

Aaron [00:19:28] It was just a little BB gun. So you know it wasn't going to kill him but it hurt. And he was bleeding a little bit and he ran inside to my mom and he said mom mom mom I shot my finger I shot my finger and it's bleeding.

Aaron [00:19:39] My mom said well did the bullet go in and he said I don't know. I have a bullet in my finger.

Aaron [00:19:46] And so he is crying. We're both little and my mom looked at me and she said she said Aaron Daniel run upstairs and get that metal detector you have and I thought that's a great idea I'll get my metal detector and find out if there's a BB in my brother's finger.

Aaron [00:20:02] So I went upstairs and I practiced making it go off because whether he had one or not I was going to ensure that he had a baby in his finger because I thought that would be the coolest thing in the world.

Aaron [00:20:12] So I practice how to make it go off and seem like it was detecting metal whenever I stuck it up to his hand. And as soon as I felt like I had a perfected ride my finger just where you couldn't see it was on the knob but I can make it go off.

Aaron [00:20:24] I went downstairs with my metal detector. So you can make a metal detector go off if you just change the sensitivity of it to where because it's kind of like the squelch on a radio.

Aaron [00:20:33] You change the sensitivity and once it gets completely sensitive it's always on. No matter what. So I went downstairs and my brother was on the couch and my mom was waiting by him and I got the metal detector and I got already. And I stuck it up to his hand and it went off without me doing anything.

Aaron [00:20:51] He had a baby in his finger. But. Had he not had a BB in his finger he would have still had a BB in his finger. And so you could not trust me. And I feel like I have a pretty innocent looking face so be careful of who you trust.

Bonni [00:21:06] I've seen on Facebook a picture of you as a little boy. So I don't even have to like imagine what you look like. I know.

Aaron [00:21:12] That's right.

Bonni [00:21:14] I've seen it. Sometimes that's your profile picture. That's right.

Aaron [00:21:16] Well you know.

Bonni [00:21:17] The other day I was talking with some students and they were sharing about a professor who tells a lot of stories but it's not a good thing. So this particular wasn't a perfect adjunct faculty. This is a situation where the individuals not engaging them they're bored in class a lot.

Bonni [00:21:38] But it's also sharing a lot about their personal life and some of their real difficulties that they were talking about the end of the semester is coming and they know that they're going to be asked to evaluate this person.

Bonni [00:21:48] They feel sorry for them. So they were kind of grappling with I don't know what to do because they have these problems and it just this weight of responsibility but it would be a bad situation.

Bonni [00:22:00] They felt like if this person wasn't necessarily continued on in there because it's not a 10 year thing you know they don't want to see them continue on from a teaching standpoint sure but from a personal life standpoint there was just this tension of feeling guilty.

Bonni [00:22:12] So I wonder if we could maybe spend a little bit of time talking about when not to tell the story. I think that's probably a perfectly obvious one to someone listening that Wayne are students down to match with what's happening in our personal lives is not the greatest thing to do but what are maybe some less obvious times when a story is not a good idea.

Aaron [00:22:30] Well it should never feel like you're going to the nursing home when you're going to class so you never feel like you're going to visit a dear friend who's just going to talk sometimes incoherently about their lives that has nothing to do with anything and current events her current situations right.

Aaron [00:22:45] I feel like sometimes we talk to hear ourselves talk and that's a really bad habit to get into. You need to remember who your audience is which is one of the number one things about story is know your audience when you tell a story.

Aaron [00:22:57] Right. So your story needs to have a connection to what it is that you're doing to what it is that you're trying to teach. And I think that sometimes you even have a connection of what you're trying to teach but maybe your story gets you a little bit a little bit crazy.

Aaron [00:23:15] Because you get kind of wrapped up in that story that you're talking about. So I think that you need to remember that you have a specific a specific hopefully a specific logic that you're trying to get across through your story.

Aaron [00:23:28] And once you lose that logic and you start just telling a story for the story's sake well who are you edifying your student or yourself and if you're just edifying yourself and your students not on a journey but you're taking a journey and they're getting to watch you run.

Aaron [00:23:43] Then you're probably doing the wrong type of stories for the class.

Bonni [00:23:46] Having to watch thousands slides of someone's two week vacation or something.

Aaron [00:23:51] That's right. You know you have all of you have some Facebook friends who are telling their story and you care nothing about their story and you wish you could hide it you know. You know the person I'm talking about that one person don't be that person in the classroom.

Bonni [00:24:04] The I when I was getting my doctorate degree I took a law class and I got to write a research paper on the last 10 years of case law for academic freedom and it was I kind of enjoyed it because it was a little bit like a soap opera I mean just just all these cases that are really really outside my realm of something that I saw on a day to day basis.

Bonni [00:24:24] So it was a fascinating set of cases to look at. And you know some of the people in higher ed I mean I feel like at our institution we don't see this as much as a big institution but they really have some very controversial ideas and that's what higher education is all about the marketplace of ideas.

Bonni [00:24:41] And so we I guess what's culturally allowed or legally allowed is much more outside the bounds than perhaps most of us are comfortable with but where that case law shows time and time again that the faculty loses the case is when whatever it was they were espousing a story they were telling or something they were doing didn't relate to the content of the class.

Bonni [00:25:05] So that would be a key thing is we want to make sure that it relates. But I think that that a lot of creative examples I mean your story of you and your brother with the BB again that relates to that class in a unique and distinct way to make it that much more memorable.

Bonni [00:25:20] Than if you had told the fiftieth story about when back when I worked for National Geographic ran to I mean so it's a con you've placed it in a context that they've all been little kids and they all know what it's like to have maybe not told the truth about something.

Aaron [00:25:35] Sure. I find that that stories need to relate to theme maybe not specific content but they need to relate to theme if there's a very important

point you're trying to get across to the student and having a little bit of personal so.

Aaron [00:25:47] So being a child saying that that I have a brother. Sometimes I feel that helps students think of you as a human and not as a robot that's teaching them. And when they feel they can relate to you and they think oh I have a brother or.

Aaron [00:26:01] Oh I remember when I was a kid and I did so then all of a sudden there's a connection that wasn't there before that often we lose especially in big lecture hall settings. Often we we're just we're not participating as a student we're just sitting there and we can't relate at all. So it makes a little more relatable.

Bonni [00:26:16] Yeah absolutely. I told you that when we got to the part of the show when we talk about recommendations that I wasn't going to have one I lied. You can't trust me either.

Aaron [00:26:26] That's OK.

Bonni [00:26:27] But I also have never shot it again. So that's another. So my recommendation actually has to do with storytelling. I'm not sure if you saw this or not.

Bonni [00:26:34] There was an April Fool's Day a professor at Biola a math professor there puts on a big April Fools joke and I'm going to post a link to this in the show notes which will be at [Teachinginhighered.com/43](https://teachinginhighered.com/43).

Bonni [00:26:51] And so this Biola professor he.

Aaron [00:26:57] That's a great video.

Bonni [00:26:57] Well then you explain what.

Aaron [00:26:59] No no no Go ahead.

Bonni [00:27:00] So he comes. Well I guess people should probably watch the show notes teachinginhighered.com/43 and you will see a guy who has combined multiple media. So he's standing up there and then he walks over to a screen.

Aaron [00:27:14] Don't tell the end of the story.

Bonni [00:27:15] OK. He starts engaging with a video and surprises them because first it kind of seems a mere expecting boredom. So it's just a video. And then he then he actually starts interacting with himself on the video screen.

Aaron [00:27:28] That's right.

Bonni [00:27:29] And I'll leave it at that. So I don't want to give the ending away but that was so fun to think about. And by the way I put an invitation if anyone listening knows him I did send him an email to see if he would be on the show because I wanted to do an episode on humor in the classroom for a long time.

Bonni [00:27:43] And I thought he would be just the perfect guest to talk about humor because his humor was so related to that class. But in such a unique way. So if anyone knows him say give him a nudge tell him to e-mail me back. I'd love to have him on the show but I thought that was just a great way of telling a story.

Bonni [00:27:59] Oh and the one thing we didn't I didn't remember to ask you about our mention we don't have to have all the storytelling resting on our shoulders so before we actually get to your recommendation can we just spend a minute or two ways that we can bring story in.

Bonni [00:28:13] I know for myself I love finding really short clips. Two to three minutes. If it's a movie clip or a clip from a TV and sometimes the textbook publishers will do that for us. I used some books from the Cengage series the four letter press and they'll actually send us clips that are from movies or TV that we can access to bring into our show.

Bonni [00:28:31] And I think that makes a big difference. And today I was talking about my marketing class the difference between profit oriented pricing and sales oriented pricing. And I gave the example from the Godfather the horsehead deal it's great that that was something that even if they hadn't seen the movie.

Bonni [00:28:47] They could picture this because I could tell them the story but probably would've been better if I had a clip. But I'm not sure. Actually I've never seen The Godfather I shouldn't tell you this.

Aaron [00:28:55] Oh this is terrible news. I will show it to you soon.

Bonni [00:29:00] We have to have a discussion afterward and.

Aaron [00:29:03] We will. My students are required to watch it.

Bonni [00:29:05] So any other ideas for bringing in the story into the classroom that doesn't necessarily it's us being the storytellers.

Aaron [00:29:12] Sure will show a lot of clips being being in cinema but in addition to that I feel that great guest speakers that are professionals in the topic that you're discussing really help move the story along because they also have a new set of stories from their experience. And you tell your stories in class.

Aaron [00:29:31] And you have industry experience. But then students have heard a lot of your stories and they have a different perspective I think of a person Rachel who I just brought into our class who is a documentary filmmaker and she just worked on that Ebert documentary Life Itself for CNN.

Aaron [00:29:46] And when she when she came in with her stories of of how this came about and before Ebert died how they were trying to finish the documentary and it was exciting and the class was about truth in documentary so they were learning about truth and how do you have the truth as your subjects dying while you're making a film.

Aaron [00:30:03] And her stories were so exciting for the students to hear that I still hear them talk about her. And so I think great guest lecturers that can also share stories of the craft of whatever you're teaching.

Bonni [00:30:14] Are they always coming into the classroom because there is something so unique or do you ever do skype or anotherway.

Aaron [00:30:18] She was actually Skype. I say coming in because I consider almost all of my guests because I'm connected and more more nationally than I am locally. A lot of times my guests Skype and for for those presentations.

Bonni [00:30:31] Now when you do that when a student has a question Is there a particular way that you arrange the computer so that they can see the person asking them the question.

Aaron [00:30:38] I require that every student sit within the video within the angle of the lens so that the guest speaker as able to see every student and I require

that every student wave before they speak so that she can direct her attention to where the question is coming from.

Bonni [00:30:55] And that works that because when you were telling this story it sounds like she is in the room.

Aaron [00:30:59] It does and it feels like she's in the room because she's looking at the person talking because they wave first and she gets to know the people because she sees each one and I require that each person every person is required to ask a question.

Aaron [00:31:11] Whenever I have a guest speaker and also every person is required to introduce themselves to the guest speaker before they ask a question. So often my guests remember their names and talked to them specifically if they have a side comment. So it feels like they're there.

Bonni [00:31:24] So you have your computer there your laptop and you're turning it around and you best have had to have an elevated in some way.

Aaron [00:31:29] Right I put it on a podium and I put it as far back as I can to get the angle as wide as I can. And I tried to light the back of the room if possible and turn the front lights off with the projector because I put her on a projector and we do it that way.

Bonni [00:31:43] And for anyone listening that maybe size is an issue for you or the shape of the classroom. I'm going to try it the way that Aaron Daniel just described it. But I have had it where I turn the computer around it's sitting on the desk up at the front so its at a Seated level.

Aaron [00:31:56] Right.

Bonni [00:31:56] And I have three chairs that I will set out in front of it and I will call three students over randomly and have them sit there and then a couple three more over. In that case it's a little bit more of an intimate thing and maybe not everybody gets called to the hot seat if you will to do that.

Bonni [00:32:12] But in those cases it's a larger class or it's just too rectangular for me to make everyone in the frame.

Aaron [00:32:18] Sure.

Bonni [00:32:18] And I like that that sometimes they kind of get that one on one. One other thing I do with guest speakers too by the way is I teach our students how to think someone properly and instead of just saying thank you that was great actually to have something specific that they're going to be able to take away of value.

Bonni [00:32:34] And I found that that really actually helps them celebrate and affirm other people better.

Aaron [00:32:37] It's a great idea.

Bonni [00:32:38] So we have one last piece which I've been very excited about since I just saw in your office earlier. Tell me about your recommendation.

Aaron [00:32:46] I brought my recommendation here to show you after the show because I'm so excited about it.

Bonni [00:32:50] Dave is super excited too.

Aaron [00:32:53] I'm a bit of a geek when it comes to gadgets and the Amazon Echo is only available still by invitation only. It's too late now to get an invite. But the Amazon Echo in my opinion is the future in home automation.

Aaron [00:33:07] It's basically Siri that you plug in and it's got better voice recognition. It has seven microphones in the top so it can hear you across the room in a regular speaking voice through somebody else's conversation and you just call her by name Ecos name is Alexa.

Aaron [00:33:22] She wakes up and you can ask her what the traffic situation is to go to work she'll tell you the best route before you leave as you're grabbing your keys. You can ask her to play music she's got a wonderful bluetooth connection as well as straight connection into a lot of music apps.

Aaron [00:33:38] And great great audio and I think that what's going to happen is and they just announced today that they've released a connection to the new Wi-Fi electrical outlets and Wi-Fi light switches from Echo will use something like that in our house to be able to talk to our house and say raise these lights dimm these lights run a bath upstairs and you'll just talk to it.

Aaron [00:33:57] That's what I feel and I feel this is the first step. So it's exciting and it's only a hundred dollars if you're a prime member it will be 200 soon when it's released I believe is totally worth it because I think it's the future.

Bonni [00:34:08] And I think you can request an invite but not for ninety nine dollars so if you're a prime member you still can but you're going to be requested to invite for a 200 dollar device not a 100 dollar device.

Aaron [00:34:17] That makes sense as probably right.

Bonni [00:34:19] But Aaron Daniel posted on on Facebook that he had comments I went back and re watched the demo video which I'll post a link to in this show notes great and that was so fun to watch.

Aaron [00:34:29] It's pretty neat. I think it's exciting.

Bonni [00:34:31] So check it out. Well thank you so much. Aaron Daniel for being here and joining me on Teaching In Higher Ed and I'm going to leave it to you to give one more word of encouragement about starting more storytelling into our classroom.

Aaron [00:34:44] Thank you so much for having me. I want to I want to remind you what I tell my students and that is I believe that story is his passion. And if you're passionate about what you're talking about people are going to want to listen.

Bonni [00:34:58] Thanks for listening to today's Teaching In Higher Ed podcast. If you are interested in giving us feedback for future guests or future topics you can do that at teachinginhighered.com/feedback.

Bonni [00:35:09] Aaron Daniel and I would love to hear from you what you thought of the episode. What other ideas you have of how we could bring storytelling into our classroom. You can do that at teachinginhighered.com/34. Erin Daniel what if they want to touch base with you on Twitter.

Aaron [00:35:24] My Twitter is SuperMAnnas, that's my last name Annas and superman.

Bonni [00:35:34] I will post a link to that in the show notes for anyone who would like to connect and we will look forward to talking to you next time on the podcast.

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