



7 Creative Ways to Use Stories to Advance Your Issue

Share it up.

Sometimes the best move is the easiest move. A great way to get your feet wet using pop culture opportunities is to share what's already out there. Go ahead – dive in! Our story database is organized by issue and includes share lines for Twitter, so you can start finding and sharing good stories immediately. In the database, you'll find TV and film stories with descriptions, images, and relevant issues – everything you need to use pop culture to advance your work. Whether it is a retweet about a relevant TV show or sharing a Facebook post from the makers of a film about your issue, sharing social content is a quick and painless way to connect your work with pop culture moments people are already talking about. Find more ideas in our DIY Social Media Guide.

Connect the dots.

Found a story in our database that's a match for your work? Let the world know how the story connects to your issue and why. A quick Facebook or blog post lets you add your two cents to the conversation. You can encourage your supporters to tune in, or you can engage the film or show's fandom and ask them to weigh on your issue, with the storyline as a jumping-off point. Make sure your social media outreach is on point with our DIY Social Media Guide. Also check out #PopJustice, a series of insightful reports from Liz Manne, in collaboration with Unbound Philanthropy and Nathan Cummings Foundation, on using pop culture for social change.

Put a meme on it.

Adding a visual to the conversation can really drive home the connection between a storyline and your issue. Visuals also increase the likelihood that people will view your posts. Whether you pull a quote from the film or TV show or compare a real-life situation to something in the script, you can create custom memes to direct your audiences to meaningful stories and get them talking about your cause. Not sure how to make one? Read our guide here! (Citizen Engagement Lab's new project, Cultural Pulse, also provides another nice how-to guide on meme making.) Want to be sure your memes won't come back to haunt you? Check out our guide on the Rules of the Road.

Get talking.

Ready to really step it up? Find a TV episode or film broadcast that connects to your issue and cover it live. Live tweeting or Facebook chatting the stories as people are watching creates a shared experience lets people connect meaningfully with your issue. Give yourself some lead time to find your best writers and promote the event. Identify the hashtags fans use so you can plug into their conversation. Then, bring the story to life with clever commentary and action opportunities as you engage with viewers in real time. Active Voice Labs has many valuable free tools on its site to help identify the right opportunities. Horticulture, for example, provides a guide about what type of film works for what type of message.



Write away.

Once you're in the swing of things, you're ready to start churning out original content. Keep an eye out for a TV episode or a film that shines a light on your issue and think about how you could use a blog post, listicle, short video or newsletter article to incorporate it into your communications work. Does the story raise an interesting perspective? Are the characters particularly relatable? Did they really get the reality of the issue wrong? Check out our guide on how to use even an imperfect storyline. There can be many entry points, so experiment and see what works best for your organization and your audience.

Break the ice.

Sometimes striking up a conversation about your issue can be awkward. Ever tried bringing up marriage equality over dinner at your (not-so-progressive) grandparents' house? Stories can give people an easier opening line. If a popular show or film has broken some ground by talking about your issues, give your members a tool that helps them use the story to start conversations. These "conversation starters" can be simple one-pagers highlighting good entry points from the film or show. Like, "When grandma talks about how much she loves *Modern Family*, say 'I know! Isn't it so great that Cam and Mitch were able to get married?'" Even (or especially) shows like "*South Park*" offer many entry points for discussion. It's as simple as getting your discussion points together ahead of time, and on paper. A great tool to get conversations going.

Party on.

If you've found a spot-on film or TV episode, it might be time to ask your members to break out the chips and dip. You can make it easy for your dedicated activists to host a screening party, drive some good conversation, sign up new members and generate action. All you need is a quick screening guide that describes what to look for in the story, key topics and questions to discuss, online resources and an action step, such as signing a petition. Tying this into your ongoing campaign work is a great way to provide some variety to your long-term supporters and engage new ones. Does your organization want to host a large-scale screening? Craving more detail on how it's done? Check out our how-to guide on how to host a screening.