

How Ken Robinson's TED Talk Attracted 65 Million Views With No PowerPoint

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Sir Ken Robinson, one of the world's leaders thinkers on reforming the educational system, died on Friday. His ideas found a global audience after he delivered the most popular TED Talk of all time, a 2006 talk that has been viewed more than 65 millions.

I featured Robinson's now famous TED Talk in my book, *Talk Like TED*. In the talk, "[Why Schools Kill Creativity](#)," Robinson addressed a big topic in just 18 minutes: reimagining the educational system so that it nurtures creativity instead of stifling it.

Robinson was a talented speaker who kept his audience engaged without using slick animations or presentation slides. His public-speaking tools were humor and storytelling.

Humor

"If they're laughing, they're listening," Robinson once told an interviewer.

As an educator, Robinson knew that nobody will stick around for his ideas if they are mentally checked out.

In his TED talk, the laughs start early. Here are several portions of Robinson's presentation that elicits the biggest laughs in the first five minutes.

If you're at a dinner party and you say you work in education—actually, you're not often at dinner parties, frankly, if you work in education...

But if you are, and they say, "What do you do?" and you say you work in education, you can see the blood run from their face. They're like, "Oh my God. Why me? My one night out all week."

I heard a great story recently of a little girl who was in a drawing lesson. She was six, and she was at the back, drawing...the teacher was fascinated. She went over to her, and she said, "What are you drawing?" And the girl said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." And the teacher said, "But nobody knows what God looks like." And the girl said, "They will, in a minute."

In the first five minutes Robinson elicited about 10 laughs from the audience. At two laughs per minute, that made Robinson's talk more entertaining than many comedy films.

Robinson's humor was largely self-deprecating. Although you have to be careful about poking too much fun at yourself and risk losing credibility, social psychologists have

found that humor scores points with an audience.

Robinson taught us to lighten up.

Storytelling

In his TED Talk, Robinson told the story of a woman he had met. Gillian Lynne was Broadway royalty. She choreographed “Cats” and “Phantom of the Opera.”

Robinson asked Lynne how she became a dancer. She said that when she was going to school in the 1930s, her school administrators believed she had a learning disorder because she couldn’t concentrate and was always fidgeting.

Lynne’s mother took her to a specialist. After listening to Lynne and her mother for about twenty minutes, the doctor told Lynne that he would like to speak to her mother privately.

But as they went out the room, he turned on the radio that was sitting on his desk. And when they got out of the room, he said to her mother, ‘Just stand and watch her.’ And the minute they left the room she was on her feet, moving to the music. And they watched for a few minutes, and he turned to her mother and said, “Mrs. Lynne, Gillian isn't sick; she's a dancer. Take her to a dance school.”

Robinson told the story to reinforce his theme that the educational system must nurture the unique creative capacity of each child. “Our task is to educate their whole being, so they can face this future,” Robinson concluded.

Robinson taught us that stories capture our imagination and inspire us to see things differently.

Sir Ken Robinson was a notable voice in creativity, education and human potential long before his TED Talk, but the video introduced his remarkable public-speaking skills to a wider audience.