

# Brainstorming



## Banana Peels

*Tap Into Your Creativity*

Marci Seither

So, what's up with **banana peels**?

I was asked to teach an online workshop on the topic of brainstorming, I tried to think of the CRAZIEST topic I could brainstorm and my eyes rested on my fruit bowl complete with, you guessed it, bananas. I thought, *if I can teach people how to brainstorm a banana peel, I can teach them to brainstorm anything!*

Some people call this method “Mind Mapping” or “Clustering”. I call it thinking outside the box.

I hope this helps you as much as it has helped me over the years.

Peace and Courage,

Marci Seither

~ Creative Storyteller ~



***“Start your brainstorming by separating CREATIVE THINKING and CRITICAL THINKING. Both must be done, but they must be done separately if anything of lasting value will be accomplished.”***

C. McNair Wilson- Disney Imagineer, speaker, and author of *HATCH*.

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### **Creative thinker**

I knew from a very young age my brain was wired different.

The thought of multiplication tables made me break out in hives. When it came to building clay boats to see how many paperclips it could hold before sinking, I was all in.

When I saw my closest friends making things in the MGM class- mentally gifted minors- I begged my mom to have me retested.

I knew I was a creative thinker, even if I couldn't put a label on it.

Finally, my mom convinced the school district to have me retested. I was in the third grade.

I remember going into a small windowless room with an older man in a suit that smelled like mothballs. He pulled flashcards out of his binder and began asking questions about measurements and containers.

Then he asked the question that ended our test,

“A farmer has a goose, a fox, and a bag of grain,” he stated. “The farmer can only take two at a time across the river on his raft. How does he do it without the goose eating the grain or the fox eating the goose?”

It didn’t take long to answer. It was so obvious that I didn’t understand why it was a question at all.

“He takes the fox and grain in the raft,” was my response. “The goose can swim!”

He checked the box –WRONG.



Needless to say I did not get in to the hands-on class. After all, I had the wrong answer. For years I struggled with the fact that if my answer was wrong, maybe I was as well.

I felt like a “square peg person” in a “round-hole world”.

It wasn't until I was older that I realized. I did NOT have the wrong answer. The man in the suit had asked the WRONG question.

So hang up the suit, roll up your pant legs and let's jump into this puddle to see how big of a splash we can make!



### **What is Brainstorming?**

Brainstorming helps to untangle the tight cerebral knots created from overthinking a task or situation.

It allows you to see things from a very different angle because you are not thinking linear or in a straight line.

While I was looking up insights on brainstorming what I noticed was the theme of problem solving the project at hand. Many focused on the manuscript.

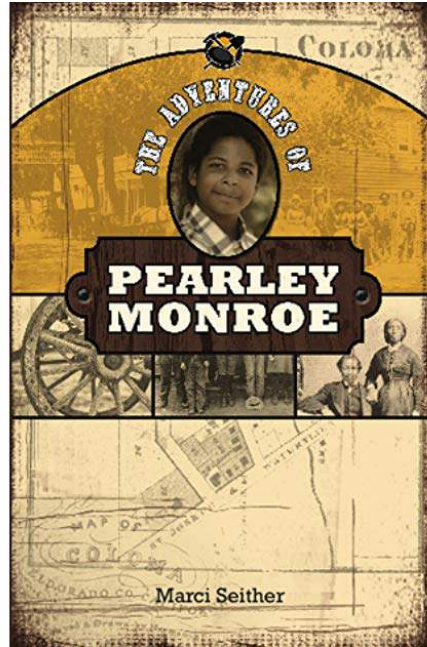
But for me, brainstorming is as valuable for audience reach, marketing, and research, as it is for the actual writing.

And it needs to be done first.

The buyer is not always the reader. So keep in mind that you might need to think about your audience before you start writing your book.

Keep in mind that if you have more than one buyer, you need to have more than one marketing plan.

### Audience



Let me share about my book project, *The Adventures of Pearley Monroe* and the value of knowing my audience's needs.

I heard the story of Miss Nancy and Peter Gooch being brought to CA in 1849, during the gold rush, as slaves after their 3 year old son had been sold.

The following year, CA was admitted into the Union as a free state, but Peter and Nancy's son was still a slave, so she began earning money to purchase her son's freedom, and eventually the family was reunited.



I was moved to tears.



More importantly, after a conversation with the docent of the museum, I was moved to action. He challenged me to help preserve their story due to the fact there were no living survivors.

As much as I admired Miss Nancy, I knew that ever 4<sup>th</sup> grader in California learned about California history, so I decided to tell it from her grandson, Pearley Monroe's point of view.

With six kids, four of them boys, I knew having a boy as the main character would be a huge plus. "Patty Reed's Doll" was standard reading in most CA 4<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms. There is no way my guys are reading about a doll sewn in the hem of a little girl's dress. Ever.



So it needed lots of adventure including explosions, bear chases, close calls, and even a jewel thief to keep my readers engaged.

According to my readers, I hit the mark.

**“The Adventures of Pearley Monroe is one of the best books I’ve ever read. I think this book is extremely fun and exciting, but since it is based on a true story its very educational too. I would give this book 999,999,999 stars!**

Clara, 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

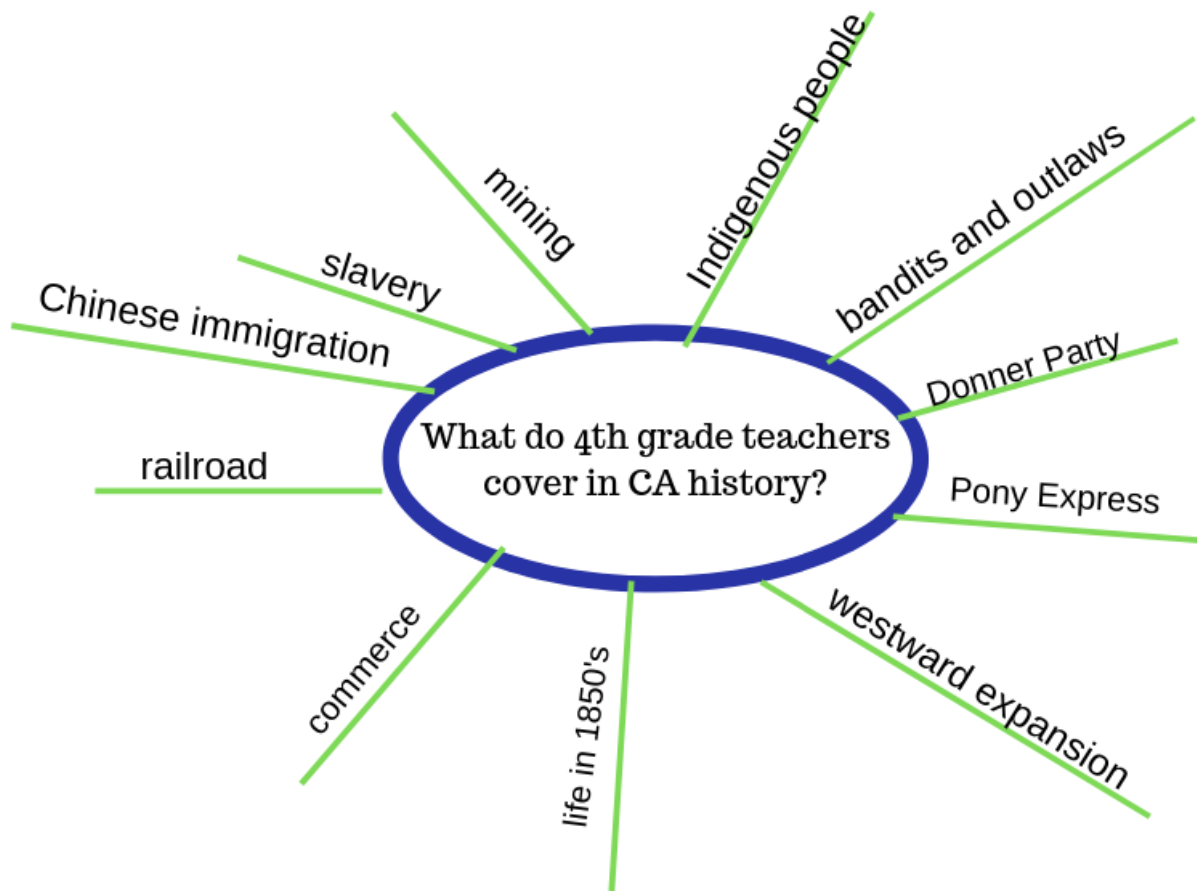
Parents want books that emphasize kindness, compassion, honesty, perseverance, courage, and forgiveness.

What do teachers cover in California History?

My thought was if I sell to the kids, and parents, I am selling a few books at a time. If I can sell to teachers to use in the classrooms I could sell boxes of books at a time.

And that is exactly what has happened.

## Brainstorming Banana Peels



I was able to take one of the spokes per chapter and weave Pearley's story around it.

I had a teacher's resource that reinforced accurate California history facts for each chapter.

## Brainstorming Banana Peels

When I have spoken at schools, teachers often comment on how much they enjoy using *The Adventures of Pearley Monroe* in their classroom because I made the facts relate to each other, making it more memorable.



It was not an accident that just happened to work.

I did the simple task of brainstorming BEFORE I started writing and it paid off.

The kids loved the book and teachers often commented on how it integrated so many of the topics relevant to what they were teaching in that grade.

The teacher read a chapter every day and the students blogged about it. Every evening I responded and commented on any questions they had. I also used some of their quotes in my updates on my Kickstarter and linked it to my Facebook page.

Showing the buyers how excited the readers were about this project also helped me to fully crowd fund getting this book into print.

“Logic gets you from A to B. Imagination takes you everywhere.”

Albert Einstein



### **Themes ~ Topics ~ Ideas**

When I looked out over those taking a class on creative brainstorming I was co-teaching with my friend, Lisa Bogart, I gasped.

A New York Times best-selling author was seated in the third row. What could we possibly teach her?

As we talked about this process and how we applied it to writing and marketing, her face lit up.

As usual, we decided to brainstorm someone's project in the hands-on workshop. The first person's dilemma was a plot issue, which we had fun with.



## Brainstorming Banana Peels

Then, the New York Times author, asked us about blog topics. We brainstormed what mattered to her audience.

The ideas went from a sparse trickle to a wipe-off board flooded with potential blogs.

Did Lisa and I give her ideas she couldn't have thought of herself?

NO. We just helped to loosen the creative knots.

Your turn.

Let's put a TOPIC as the center of the oval.

SUMMER

Think of as many topics related to summer as you can and write them in the same spoke pattern we used for brainstorming the Pearley Monroe project.



IDEAS: gardening, vacations, sunscreen, camping, RV, grandparents, fishing, daycare, swimming, picnics, reunions, college bound, graduations, weddings.

The ideas are basically endless. But what if you chose –Gardening.

Now think of things related to gardening such as small space gardening, container gardening, rotated crop gardening, herb gardens, salsa gardens, soil, worms, composting.

Lets pick **composting**.

What if you created a list of all the things that you might have thrown into the trash can that you can now recycle such as apple cores, broccoli stems, and banana peels.

Basically, you could take SUMMER and spin off hundreds of articles, blog themes, or chapter ideas for a book. Depending on your audience, you could tailor make something that editors would love to offer to their readers.

If you are writing for children, you could talk about the value of ecology and why a banana peel has value for sustainable living.

If you are writing for a nostalgic piece you can address the fact that during WWII people grew victory gardens and we can learn a lot from that generation.

## Brainstorming Banana Peels

You could create a simple bullet point list of how and what to compost.

NOW, let's try banana peels.

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Like I said, if I can brainstorm banana peels I think I can pretty much brainstorm anything else.

Quick - think of whatever comes to mind. Remember, there are no wrong answers.

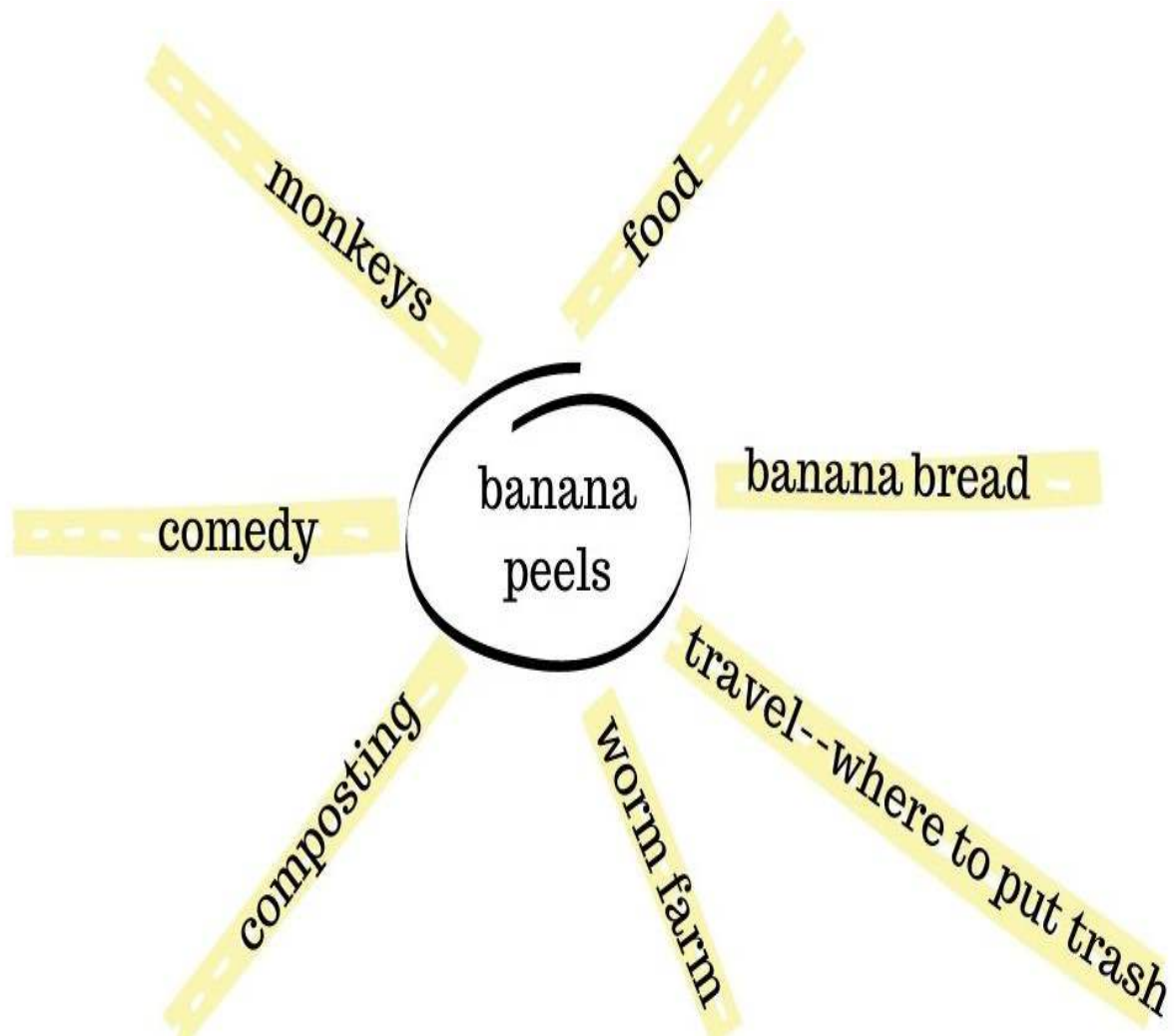
Did you come up with other word associations? Most likely you did. That is because we all have different life experiences.

I mean, why would I have travel?



## Brainstorming Banana Peels

It is because I hate the thought of people littering by tossing things out their car windows, including banana peels! So what kind of article would I possible write that included travel and banana peels? What can I say? I hate to see people throw things out their car windows, even banana peels.



Because I want to really make myself have to stretch on this, I decided to go with worm farm.

## Brainstorming Banana Peels

So now we brainstorm on “Worm Farm” and think of several things we can connect.

- Worm casings
- Care and feeding of worms
- Build your own worm farm from scratch
- Start your own worm farm business

Think of who would be interested in each of the above sub-categories. What are publications looking for? Can one of those be used as a sidebar?

What is a sidebar? So glad you asked.

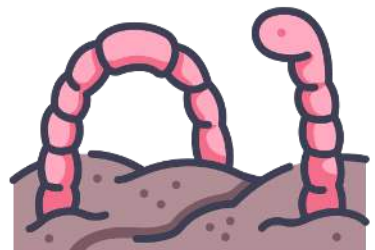
A sidebar is a short additional piece in a newspaper or magazine. Typically they are boxed, placed along the side of a main article and can include bullet points, a list, public announcement of an upcoming event, or additional information not included in the article.

Just hang on and I will show you how you can make it work.

Now, we are going to go a bit deeper and think about who would be interested and why for each of these subcategories.

Worm casings

~ small-space gardening ~



## Brainstorming Banana Peels

Care and feeding of worms

~ banana peels as part of diet ~

~ environmental awareness ~



Start you own worm farm business

~ teach entrepreneurial skills ~

Build your own worm farm from scratch



~ science fair project ~

~ educational ~

Let's run with the last idea.



Build your own worm farm from scratch. Who would be interested in science fair or educational projects? Kids, teachers, youth workers, homeschool parents and the list can get even longer.

Ask someone who works with kids for input. You might be surprised!

## Brainstorming Banana Peels

So what if we pitched a story for earth day to a kids magazine about a kid's experience in starting a worm farm and the sidebar was a bullet list of things that you can feed your worms, including banana peels.

There we go.

And just think, for every word that we wrote down on the spoke from “banana peel” we could have had just as many subcategories. That is a lot of great content!



### Marketing

When my friend's first WWII novel was about to launch I wanted to do something special to help celebrate.

I went to the local quilt store and bought a few yards of 1940 replica material, created a “Sassy Flounce Apron”, and had her book cover printed on fabric to use as the pocket.

I made one for Sarah, one for me, and one for the quilt store.



## Brainstorming Banana Peels

I knew who went to the quilt store. Women who loved history and were nostalgic. I also knew that a local book club met at Whistle Stop Quilt Shop and the owner was a Christian.

The quilt store put the apron in the window with the pocket full of Sarah's bookmarks and before long, the quilt store ordered a box of books.



Note the Self: You have to go where readers are, not just where books are sold.

For marketing, put **audience** in the center.

Think about all the things that matter to them. For me, it was the fact that Sarah's readers love nostalgia.

Who has contact with them?

Write it out and see where your ideas will take you.

Trust me, a card table at a craft sale as a means of selling your books might not be the best way to connect with your readers and buyers.



When you have exhausted all ideas,  
remember this; You haven't."

— *Thomas Edison*

### Tailor Made

My grandmother was a seamstress.



She took our measurements at least twice a year and jotted them down on an index card she kept with her sewing machine.

I am not going to say I was fond of the mint green double-knit-polyester leisure suit I received for my 9<sup>th</sup> birthday, but I will tell you it fit. Perfectly.

I can't imagine a seamstress creating an elaborate gown, hoping to find someone it fits. What a waste of time and effort. She would make sure she knew the exact measurements before she ever purchased material.

Why would we think we are any different as writers?

Brainstorming your project is like taking good measurements.

“Creativity is intelligence having fun.” Albert Einstein

There Are 4 Basic Rules of **Brainstorming**

- **No judgements.** There are no dumb ideas. This is the first rule of creativity.
- **Don't criticize other people's ideas and don't limit your own.** No wimps!
- **Build on ideas.** When an idea comes up reply with “Yes..and\_\_\_\_\_.” Keep the idea thread going to see how far it will take you.
- **Go for quantity over quality.** The more ideas you have to work with, the better!

"Forget having the right answers; learn to ask the right questions."

What do you need to brainstorm?

Get started by putting your idea, topic, or theme in the oval and get started.

Every journey starts with a single step.

The YES..AND...



Now that you have an idea of who your audience is and what they consider important, try to see how far you can go with an idea for marketing, platform building, or outreach.

What idea do you have?

Maybe it is like my friend Lisa Bogart who was releasing her book *Knit Love*, and decided to do a few talks and book signings at knit stores.



And then she took it to the next level.

She decided to travel across the country to spots where close friends and relatives lived and even made the small town newspaper news.

Her trip ended in New York, where she was the key note speaker at a fund raiser.

That might have seemed like a huge event, but remember, every big journey starts with first step.

What about you? How far can you take your idea? Think big. Be bold. Sure, it might seem too far out of reach, but you never know what can happen when you start to say YES not allow yourself to limit your creative thoughts based on what you think is reasonable.

One of the other big benefits of brainstorming is that it helps you in developing your mission statement for each project BEFORE you start writing.

I totally understand that some people have mission statements for their business, brands, and who they are as writers. I think that is a great idea, but I also think having a mission statement for your project helps establish your main point and focus. Similar to what a plumb line does for starting a construction project.

Face it, there are a lot of different ideas and directions you can take once you start on a project and being able to go back and see if it measures up to your original plan and purpose can be such a huge benefit not only financially, but emotionally and physically as well.

My objective for the Pearley Monroe project was very clear.

“To help kids fall in love with history and understand everyone has a story worth sharing by using the Monroe-Gooch family as an example.”

When I was asked to speak to groups of kids, I would ask that they had read or where in the process of reading the book, but I was happy to do it free of charge because it lined up with my mission statement.

WRITE YOUR MISSION STATEMENT

## Brainstorming Banana Peels

- Who are you?
- Who is your audience?
- What do they need?
- What value are you bringing?



EXAMPLE ~

*Brainstorming Brilliance helps writers tap into their creativity with originality and ingenuity so that they can launch their next project with confidence.*

Your Turn.

Who are you? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is your audience? \_\_\_\_\_

What do they need? \_\_\_\_\_

How will you help, inform, or educate?

\_\_\_\_\_



**Brainstorm Brilliance**  
Launch Your Creativity

## Brainstorming Banana Peels

Feeling stuck?

Take time to write out several words that apply to each of the blanks above and start sifting through them to see which ones capture what you are trying to convey.

Use a synonym finder or thesaurus and write out as many as you can.

This is hard work so don't quit..keep going.

Marci Seither's writing career began after her family humor article was published in the small-town newspaper.

Since then she has authored two books and hundreds of articles for local papers as well as contributing to national publications such as Guideposts and Focus On The Family.

Her book *Lakeside Retreat*, published by Tyndale House will be released July 2022

You find out more about Marci on her website.

[www.marciseither.com](http://www.marciseither.com)





**Brainstorming is the act of creatively unleashing thoughts you didn't know you had and connecting them to points you hadn't noticed.**

Creative storyteller, Marci Seither, has taught hundreds of people how to use this simple, yet powerful process. If you are stuck or not sure where to start, dive into this treasure and see where your own creative thinking can take you.



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