

Podcast: What If World

[Episode: 157: What if dinosaurs were alive today?](#)

File Length: 00:16:18

Transcription by Keffy

[Rising harp scales followed by the What If World theme song.]

Lyrics: What if kittens played the glockenspiel? And what if unicorns were real? What if you could fly or travel back in time, we welcome you to What If World. What If World. This is What If World.

[Gentle bell music.]

- Mr. Eric: Hey there, folks, and welcome back to What If World, the show where your questions and ideas inspire off-the-cuff stories. I'm Mr. Eric, your host, and today I'd normally be airing a rerun but I know a lot of families around What Is World are a little cooped up right now so I wanted to give you an activity. Now, don't worry, I will also answer a what if question and there will also be a bit of a story at the end but I want to make sure that I'm equipping you to go off and try to tell your own stories.
- Dracomax: But before he bores you with his lesson, I must give a shout out to Tessa.
- Mr. Eric: Hey, Dracomax.
- Dracomax: Tessa is four and a half years old and likes to draw characters. She has even drawn a picture of me.
- Mr. Eric: She sure has. Thanks, Tessa, for a lovely drawing.
- Abacus: Now, J.F. Kat and I shall shout out Charlie, Malcolm, and Murphy, from St. George, Utah.
- Mr. Eric: Oh, hey, Abacus.
- Abacus: Charlie loves reading.
- JF Kitty: Malcolm loves math and Murphy loves listening to What If World 24/7.
- Mr. Eric: Nice work, J.F. Kat and Abacus.
- JF Kitty: And I've got a final meow out for Lily, who's eight years old, loves Legos, space, playing with her family, and drawing.

Mr. Eric: Wow. Those are all great interests—especially in times like these. Well, thank you, Lily, Murphy, Malcolm, Charlie, and Tessa.

Now, normally, we'd jump right into our patron question but we're gonna hold off a minute right now. See, I don't want to give you any leading ideas about your story. I just want to teach you one of the ways I like to tell stories. Now, this is a fun, creative exercise you can do with yourself or your friends and family collaboratively. Sometimes I just do it for fun when I'm not even trying to tell a story.

But anyway, there are three main elements to this story and I'll walk you through them one by one.

Fred the Dog: Oh, really, Mr. Eric. You're just gonna talk for like 15 minutes straight?

Mr. Eric: Hey, Fred. Well, I mean, yeah. I'm like teaching a lesson. You know I used to be a teacher.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, but they don't want to just listen to you the whole time when they could be listening to the dog with a tongue that's too long for his mouth.

Mr. Eric: Fred, it's true. I do love listening to you. Maybe you can tell them about the very first thing we need for a fun story.

Fred the Dog: Oh, oh, I know this because I'm always hanging around Mr. Eric when he's trying to come up with his What If Stories and then he's like, oh, Fred the dog, I don't know what's the story I'm gonna tell, can you help me? And I'm like, I got this, Mr. Eric, and then I tell the story.

Mr. Eric: That is not true.

Fred the Dog: Well, that's how I remember it.

Mr. Eric: Okay Fred, well, I'll start by telling them.

Fred the Dog: Oh, oh, oh, before they start, Mr. Eric. Do they need anything, like, pens or papers?

Mr. Eric: Sure, if they want. You can always draw your ideas or write your ideas, or, and this is especially important if you're driving, you can just remember your ideas. I'm looking at you, parents.

The first thing you want is just your fun detail.

Fred the Dog: Now, Mr. Eric likes to use your what if questions for his fun detail, but when you're telling your own story, you can use anything in the world

that makes you happy or interested, or even things that make you feel a little spooky.

Mr. Eric: Yeah, that's right, Fred. And this fun thing just has to be fun for you. Don't worry about making it fun for everyone in the whole wide world, okay? Because no matter how good your story is, there's gonna be someone out there who loves it and someone out there who does not care for it. So don't worry about that, just worry about—

Fred the Dog: Worry about picking a fun thing that you really want to talk about.

Mr. Eric: Okay, you've got your fun idea. Could be a what if question or just something you really like. So hold onto that idea or write it down or draw a picture of it and save it for later.

Fair Elise: Now, the second thing you'll need is a safe place.

Mr. Eric: Oh, hi Fair Elise. I didn't know I was gonna get so much help teaching my lesson that I came up with.

Fair Elise: Oh, Alabaster Zero told me you were bombing out there so I came to help.

Mr. Eric: Oh, uh, thanks, I guess. Tell us about the safe place.

Fair Elise: This is where your story will start. Some place normal or some place comfortable. Maybe even some place you feel bored. It doesn't have to be an actual safe or a bank vault, and it shouldn't be anything too unusual because this helps ground our story.

Mr. Eric: Yeah, thank you, Fair Elise. So a park or your bedroom, or your classroom or closet. Some place you've been a few times and you're really familiar with.

Abacus: And finally you need your strange place.

Mr. Eric: That's right, Abacus. But I kind of like talking about the strange place—

Abacus: The strange place is where your story will take us. It's some place unusual. Maybe it makes you a bit nervous. Maybe it makes you intrigued or excited.

Mr. Eric: Maybe it's some place you've never been or some place that's—

Abacus: Or some place that doesn't even exist!

Mr. Eric: Yeah, that.

Abacus: You could go to the moon or deep underground.

Mr. Eric: You could go to the other side of the world or a deep, dark, jungle.

Abacus: But the better you can imagine this strange place—

Mr. Eric: The stronger your story will be.

Fred the Dog: So do you have your fun thing?

Fair Elise: And your safe place?

Abacus: And your strange place?

Mr. Eric: I hope so because now what I want you to do is tell a story where you go from the safe place to the strange place and back. And I want you to throw in your fun thing at some point to really shake the story up.

Now, for older kids, if you want your story to have a lesson, try to figure out how you can tie your lesson to this fun thing. Now, I know all of this together sounds very confusing.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, it started with three things but then you just went through a lot really fast.

Mr. Eric: Okay, okay. So I'll show you how I sometimes come up with a story by taking a fun thing, a safe place, and a strange place. So let's get our fun thing by using a our patron Bruno's question.

Bruno: Hi, my name is Bruno and I like dogs and my question is what if dinosaurs were alive today?

Fred the Dog: Yes, I knew I was gonna get in a story!

Mr. Eric: So let's find out what if dinosaurs were alive today?

[Rising harp scale.]

So we already have our fun thing. Dinosaurs are going to be alive and Bruno told us he likes dogs so I'm gonna use Fred the Dog as a character, but I still recommend using yourself in your story, or a friend, family member or fictitious character that you know really, really well.

What do I need next?

Fair Elise: Your safe place.

Mr. Eric: No, they were supposed to guess it! Yeah, our safe place. So you can close your eyes if this helps, unless of course you're a grown up who's driving a car in which case please keep your eyes open. But now you think of that safe place. I'll tell you mine, but it doesn't have to be yours. One of the many places I feel very safe and comfortable is the beach. My parents got our first house by the beach when I was eight years old and I could always walk down to the ocean whenever I needed a little break.

And so, once upon a time, Fred the Dog went to the beach.

Fred the Dog: [Sniffing] Oh, I know it's here somewhere.

Mr. Eric: Said Fred, sniffing from sand dune to sand dune, from high tide to low. He was on the search for something that Fred is notorious for loving.

Fred the Dog: I know I can smell that driftwood here, somewhere.

Mr. Eric: Just then, Fred saw a whole pile of driftwood sticks right by the edge of the rising tide. A big wave came, pushing all the smaller sticks farther and farther up towards Fred. They were so close he could just stretch out his tongue and snag one.

But the big driftwood, the biggest stick, in fact, that Fred had ever seen outside of a tall tree still stuck in the ground, well, that driftwood stick was too buoyant so the wave just took it back out to sea.

Fred the Dog: No, no, no! I need that stick! Gimme, gimme!

Mr. Eric: Fred reached out with his tongue while jogging as fast as his little paws could carry him, and... he wrapped his tongue around the stick just as water crashed around him.

Fred the Dog: Totally worth it! [Gurgles]

Mr. Eric: Fred said as he was dragged out to sea! Now, folks at home, you know better than to hang onto something that's drifting out to sea but stories are a great way for us to play with mistakes and learn from them without having to make them in real life. So as Fred is getting pulled deeper, and farther out to sea, can you think of a strange place for him to end up?

Well, off shore from this little beach town where I grew up, there were several tiny islands where nobody lived, and I always dreamed of kayaking out to one all by myself and finding buried treasure, but I knew

in real life that would be a very unsafe decision. You think Fred knows that?

Abacus: Oh, oh! I think he doesn't know that!

Mr. Eric: I know, I was asking the listeners, though, Abacus.

Abacus: Is deserted island, is that your strange place?

Mr. Eric: Yes, Abacus, and we're just about to go there.

Wave after wave had crashed over Fred. He went from holding onto the stick in order to chew it to clinging to the stick for dear life. But finally, a wave tossed him ashore.

Fred the Dog: Ah, man. I'm gonna have to walk the whole length of the beach to find my way hoo-boy.

Mr. Eric: But Fred soon realized that this wasn't the same beach at all. Beyond the dunes, giant palm trees stretched up into the sky, and he heard a loud, distant, stomping. Louder footsteps than he'd ever heard back home. It was a brachiosaurus and its long neck reached up to the tallest palm tree and [chomp]

Breanna: Mm, trees. Who are you?

Mr. Eric: Asked the brachiosaurus, finally noticing Fred.

Fred the Dog: I'm a dog. I mean, I'm Fred the Dog. Who are you?

Breanna: Breanna Saurus. What of it?

Mr. Eric: Fred the Dog got to know Breanna Saurus and found out that she, too, had been swept away to this distant island along with all the other vegetarian dinosaurs in search of bigger sticks.

Breanna: So you see, now we live in paradise with all the biggest sticks we could ever need.

Fred the Dog: I don't know... this island's pretty small.

Breanna: Oh, I know, but the sticks are so big!

Mr. Eric: Fred had a decision to make. Would he stay on this dinosaur island and enjoy the best sticks of his life for the rest of his life, or would he give up the driftwood paradise so he could finally see his friends and family again.

Fred the Dog: Oh, okay, can I just eat one of these really big sticks and then go home.

Breanna: No! If you want to eat our sticks, you must be one of us forever.

Fred the Dog: Oh, no fair! Can you make me a big airplane out of the big sticks?

Breanna: I think you know the answer to that.

Fred the Dog: Oh, you...

Breanna: However, I can fling you with my tail. You should land pretty close to the shore.

Fred the Dog: Fine. Just fling me back.

Breanna: Oh, absolutely. Could you just please remove the six sticks that you hid very poorly underneath your tongue.

Fred the Dog: What are you talking about. Fine. You'd think a brachiosaurus would be too tall to see a little doggy with a stick.

Breanna: Well, you should be thankful for my good eyes because they let me see all the way back to your home. Are you ready?

Fred the Dog: Yeah, maybe just one more nibble, and then I'll be ready—hey! Bye, Breanna Saurus...!

Mr. Eric: Breanna Saurus flung him all the way back to the shore of his home. Fred doggy paddled the last few feet back up to the beach and saw another cluster of sticks about to get whisked away by a wave.

Fred the Dog: Oh, delicious. Oh and that one stick is so big. I'll never forget how to get the big sticks. But for today, I think the little ones will be enough.

Mr. Eric: And so Fred grabbed his little stick and then another one and then another stick and, okay, and then more sticks... how many are you gonna grab, Fred?

Fred the Dog: Oh, I think like 347, maybe?

Mr. Eric: And so Fred grabbed 347 sticks, the end.

Fred the Dog: Oh, I was just about to start chewing them!

[Falling harp scale.]

Mr. Eric:

Okay, I know that story wasn't as long as my typical stories, but I just wanted to demonstrate. And if I wanted to make it longer, then maybe Fred would have tried to stay for a while and chew some of these big sticks, and then that might have made it even harder to leave. Or maybe Fred could have convinced some of the dinosaurs to leave the island, too, and go experience the big, wide world for themselves. Or maybe he would have met the dinosaurs on a pirate ship rather than an island. There's any number of ways a story can go just by swapping out your safe place, your strange place, and your fun thing.

So take your own ideas and have fun with them. You can take turns writing or drawing stories and telling them to one another. You might even tell a story together. But that's a lesson for another day.

I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, my co-creator. Craig Martinson for our theme song, and all you kids at home who know that your imagination is like a muscle. Flex it! Use it! Exercise it! And your imagination will grow just as fast as you do.

Until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme plays.]