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Explorer Classroom Storytelling Series 2025

The Explorer Classroom Storytelling Series is a series of 5 virtual events with National Geographic Explorers and 5 "missions" for students to complete in class or at home.

Drawing on inspiration and information from National Geographic Explorers and in alignment with the attitudes and skills of National Geographic Education's Explorer Mindset Learning Framework, students will...

1. Identify and reflect upon the purpose and impact of a story [Empathetic, Communicate]
2. Identify key individuals who contribute to their community [Curious, Empathetic, Collaborate]
3. Develop and practice skills for asking people challenging questions and listening closely to gather information and storytelling [Empathetic, Empowered]
4. Create a story with emotional resonance based on an interview [Empathetic, Seek Interconnections, Communicate]

Each mission builds throughout the programming helping students grow from curiosity and empathy through to taking initiative on an important story in their own community.

Grades: 3-8

Subjects: Language Arts, Social Studies, Art, History

Standards-Based Skills: This program is designed to support US-based education standards such as the Common Core for English Language Arts and the College, Career, and Civic Life Framework in Social Studies Grades 3-5. Examples of specific standards alignment are below:

- LA-Reading: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text
- LA-Writing: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well structured event sequences
- LA-Speaking and Listening: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively



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- SS-Civics: Describe the ways in which people benefit from, and are challenged by, working together, including through government, workplaces, voluntary organizations, and families
- SS-Using Evidence: Use evidence to develop claims in response to compelling questions

Essential Questions:

How do we find stories that need to be told?

How do stories inspire change?

What is my purpose in telling this story?

Key Concepts to Be Explored Throughout the Missions:

- Listening
- Impact
- Community
- Identity
- Audience
- Nonfiction

Use the [Key Concepts Worksheet](#), when needed, to pre-teach vocabulary before the missions and throughout the series.



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| Navigate this Educator Guide

[Introduction](#)

[Pre-Mission: Identify Purpose of a Story](#)

[Mission One: Sharing Your Own Stories](#)

[Mission Two: Spotlight Stars in Your Community](#)

[Mission Three: Connect with a Community Member](#)

[Final Mission: Tell a Community Story](#)

[Post Mission: Reflection](#)

| Introduction

Welcome to the Explorer Classroom Storytelling Series! You and your students will be heading on a journey to explore how community stories can be discovered and shared. Along the way, National Geographic Explorers will share how they look and listen for compelling true stories and share those stories with wider audiences. Your students will join these talented Explorers in five live virtual events.


As students learn about the National Geographic Explorers, and the stories they tell, they will also practice finding and telling powerful stories from their own lives and community.

View a [short introduction](#) from series host Explorer Andrea Villarreal Rodríguez

The series of virtual events is accompanied by several short activities, called "missions" for your students to complete in class or at home.

Through the missions, your students will develop an [Explorer Mindset](#): the attitudes, skills, and knowledge that embody what it means to be a National Geographic Explorer. Everyone has the potential to build an Explorer Mindset, driving us to ask questions, seek knowledge, and think critically to help solve challenges both local and global. This series will emphasize three key attitudes Explorers bring to their work: Curiosity, Empathy, and Empowerment.

| Series Resource: Explorer Classroom Storytelling Series: Event Notes and Reflection

 **Event Notes and Reflection: 2025 Explorer Classroom Storytelling Series**



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Use this worksheet during each Explorer Classroom event to help students record what they learned about storytelling from each Explorer, while also reinforcing the attitudes, skills, and knowledge of the Explorer Mindset.

To help you prepare for the Storytelling Series, [view our Educator Webinar here.](#)



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| Pre-Mission: Identify Purpose of a Story |

Empathetic, Communicate: Identify and reflect upon the purpose and impact of a story


Before students meet the National Geographic Explorers, they should consider why stories are important. Why do we tell stories? What impact do they have on others? Encourage students to explore the details of a story and determine its purpose.

| Mission At A Glance:

- Students will listen to a story about a dedicated individual making a difference in their own community
- Students will identify the three main parts of the story to determine its purpose: Background, Choosing a community role, and Impact on community

| Pre-Mission Resource: Identify Purpose of a Story

 Pre-Mission - Identify Purpose of a Story 2025

 Community Story (Slideshow)_ About Susana Scott Ayala by Andrea Villarreal R...

| Student Briefing: Identify Purpose of a Story

Tell students to think about the different kinds of stories they hear each day. Engage students in a discussion to brainstorm different types of storytelling and why we tell stories. Record responses.

Ask:

- What kinds of stories have your parents or grandparents shared with you?
- What types of stories do you hear on the news?
- What kinds of stories do you hear in songs?
- Why do we tell stories?

Reflect on students' responses and note that some of the stories mentioned are true (nonfiction) stories and some are fictional stories. But, both types of stories can be very interesting and meaningful. Tell students that during these missions they will focus on



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true stories about people in their community. They will start by viewing and reading a story by Explorer Andrea Villarreal Rodríguez about environmentalist Susana Scott Ayala. The story highlights how Susana contributes to her community in Monterrey, Mexico.

Pass out and review the Pre-Mission handout: Identify Purpose of a Story. Tell students that they will review the story again and this time they will take notes on the three main parts of the story: Background, Choosing a community role, and Impact on community. After the second reading, they should also reflect on the story by responding to the three Reflection questions on the back of the handout.

| Mission Debrief: Check for understanding of the story by reviewing students' responses to the three main parts of the story. Make sure students have considered why the community member chose their particular role and how it has impacted the community. Then, dig a little deeper into their reflections on Andrea's storytelling:

- Discuss how the story made students feel and why it made them feel that way. Note how Andrea uses examples and details to show, rather than just tell, about Susana.
- Ask why they think Andrea wanted to tell this story to others. Let students know that they will be telling their own stories, including stories of members of their own community, in future missions.



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| Mission One: Sharing Your Own Stories |


Empathetic, Communicate: Identify and reflect upon the purpose and impact of a story

Given the opportunity, students might be surprised by the rich and meaningful stories they can share from events in their own lives. Reflecting on classmates' stories will allow students to gain insight into their own storytelling and the power of sharing stories.

| Mission At A Glance:

- In pairs or small groups, students share a nonfiction story from their own lives
- Students identify why a story from their life has power and meaning
- Students will discuss and complete the reflection worksheet together to understand why each story has meaning, power, and relevance

| Mission Resource: Mission One - Sharing Your Own Stories

 Mission One - Sharing Your Own Stories 2025

| Student Briefing: Sharing Your Own Stories

Tell students that tomorrow (or when convenient given class time constraints) they will take part in story circles, where they will share a true story from their own life with classmates. They should share a memorable personal, family or community story. The story can be about a more recent event that happened in their life or a nonfiction story that has been passed on from previous generations. Encourage students to discuss their story with community members before they share it and to think about why it is important.



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Model telling a brief personal/family story of your own with students. Afterwards, encourage students to ask you questions about your story to demonstrate good listening and gain more understanding. Provide sample questions or sentence starters if needed.

Brainstorming: To help students choose a story to tell, ask them to take a few minutes to close their eyes and imagine a particular moment or situation when someone told them a story or to envision a person, place, or object that reminds them of a specific event/story. Have students consider who told them the story and when they first heard it, perhaps it is a generational story that has been passed down to them or a funny moment that occurred in the distant past or more recently.

Students should plan their stories at home, on Section One of the worksheet, and be prepared to share them in school. In pairs or small groups, allow students to share their stories. Remind listeners to ask questions about each story afterwards. Encourage students to observe any connections between their stories. They should be starting to develop confidence that each of them is a budding storyteller with meaningful ideas to share.

| Mission Debrief: Next, review and instruct students to complete Section Two of the Sharing Your Stories worksheet to reflect on a classmate's story. Afterwards, engage students in a whole group discussion that gets them thinking about the purpose and impact of telling stories. They can draw on their responses to the reflection questions:

- Why is your story meaningful to you and/or your family? What made you want to share it?
- Why do we keep telling each other these stories? How can hearing a story change the way you think, feel, and act?
- Reflect on how these stories helped you learn more about your classmates. Have students identify any connections made between the stories and the storytellers (e.g., two group members shared stories about younger siblings, a travel memory, an embarrassing moment, etc.)



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| Mission Two: Spotlight Stars in Your Community |

Curious, Empathetic and Collaborate: Students will be able to locate and identify key individuals who contribute to their community

In every community there are many wonderful stories to tell; stories of people who are working hard to improve their communities in a variety of ways. Students will now consider the various communities they belong to and identify changemakers within those communities.

| Mission at a Glance:

- Students will identify the various communities they belong to
- Students will begin to identify individuals who shape their community and who have potential stories to tell
- Students will select three dedicated community members for Community Star awards

| Mission Resource: Mission Two - Spotlight Stars in Your Community

☰ Mission Two - Spotlight Stars in Your Community 2025

☰ Mission Two - Spotlight Stars in Your Community (Exemplars) 2025

| Student Briefing: Spotlight Stars in Your Community

Ask students to come up with words they think of when they hear the word "community." Discuss student responses, noting which words are most common (using an online word cloud generator could add digital interaction to this activity). Then, pair students and guide them to brainstorm a list of communities that they each belong to.

Tell students that these can be communities based on location (their neighborhood, town/city, etc), social interests, sports, religious or civic groups, hobbies, etc. Refer to the word cloud for any possible additional ideas or categories. After pairs brainstorm, lead a whole class discussion where you record responses and note similarities and the likely wide variety of communities shared by students.



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Next, review the Mission Two handout: Spotlight Stars in Your Community and tell students that they will be selecting three community members from their various communities to receive a Community Star award. Share the Community Award exemplars with the class and point out the variety of roles these three award winners have in their communities.

Ask student pairs to consider the different communities they recorded earlier and quickly brainstorm 5-10 people who show great dedication to their community. Make sure students widen the net to include a variety of vital community members; parents, teachers and rescue workers are wonderful choices, but encourage them to also consider restaurant owners, delivery workers, coaches, volunteers, etc. It takes all kinds of individuals to create a community! **Note: Since students will later interview one of these individuals, be sure to make students aware of this and guide them to choose people who they can easily access for an interview.**

For Part Two of the handout students should select three especially dedicated individuals who deserve Community Star Awards, describing their role in the community and explaining why they chose them.

| Mission Debrief: In small groups, instruct students to share their Community Star awards with their classmates. Encourage students to ask questions and share comments about the Community Stars their classmates have selected.



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| Mission Three: Connect with a Community Member |

Empathetic and Empowered: Develop and practice skills for asking people challenging questions and listening closely to gather information and tell a story.

How do we find stories that need to be told? Personal and local stories are a good place to start, as we are writing about what we know and often what is most impactful and immediate in our world. We can shine a light on a person whose story and contributions might otherwise go unnoticed. In this mission, students will choose a community member to interview and use the skills they have been developing throughout this series to seek details to create a story.

| Mission at a Glance:

- Students choose an important community member to interview so that they can share a story that needs to be told, using the worksheets as a guide

| Mission Resource: Mission Three - Create a Community Story

- ☰ Mission Three - Connect with a Community Member (Interview) 2025
- ☰ Oral Storytelling: Interviews(OER)

| Student Briefing: Connect with a Community Member

Guide students to interview an important community member. Ideally they should choose from their Community Stars from the previous mission, but they can select another changemaker in their community, if desired. It could be someone they already know well or someone they want to discover more about, but they should be easily accessible for an interview. Students will conduct the interview *outside* of class. Be sure to remind students to have these conversations in a safe and public location and with trusted community members. A parent or caretaker should accompany younger students for the interview; adjust worksheet directions as needed. If possible, students may want to record this interview so they can collect exact quotations for their story.

Pass out the Mission Three handout Connect with a Community Member. Point out that they will ask questions to help answer the Three Parts of a Story (like Andrea

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Villarreal Rodríguez's story in the Pre-Mission); these are already included in the handout. Review these questions with students to clarify any confusion.

Review the Oral Storytelling: Interviews handout with students to help them prepare for their interview. Students should prepare two warm up-questions and any additional questions that they feel will add interest to their story and help convey the impact of this individual on the community.

| Mission Debrief:

After students have conducted their interviews, direct them to listen to the recording of the interview so they can add additional details and quotes to their handout. Back in class, encourage students to review the handout and highlight key details and quotes that will help them to create a three part story about this community member in the final mission. They can work in pairs to help accomplish this task.



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| Final Mission: Tell a Community Story |

Empathetic, Seek Interconnections and Communicate: Choose from a variety of formats to tell human stories that inspire change, empathy, and connection

In this mission, students will use key details and quotations from their interview to tell a star community member's story.

| Mission at a Glance:

- Students use the Tell a Community Story organizer to add interview questions and record details from their community member interview
- Students present the community member's story using a chosen media
- Class shares the stories they have collected and discusses how sharing stories can change the way people think, feel, and act.

| Mission Resources: Final Mission - Tell a Community Story

Final Mission - Tell a Community Story 2025

Final Mission - Tell a Community Story-Exemplar 2025

Community Story_ About Susana Scott Ayala by Andrea Villarreal Rodríguez.pdf

Final Mission - Tell a Community Story - Slideshow Template

| Student Briefing: Tell a Community Story

Students will create a three-part story, similar to the one Andrea Villarreal Rodríguez shared in the Pre-Mission. Share Andrea's example again, this time in the template students will use to develop their story, and the other exemplar handout. Review the exemplars with students to demonstrate how they can use pictures (their own drawings, photographs or clipart/found images), direct quotes, and a detailed paragraph to respond to the questions for each part of the story.

Provide the blank Tell a Community Story template. Instruct students to use their Connect with a Community Member notes and interview recording to complete the Tell



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a Community Story organizer. Guide students through this process and provide feedback on their organizers to prepare them for the final step of the mission.

As students prepare, emphasize the importance of using examples, stories and quotes to "show, not tell" about the person. Consider using this example from the exemplar:

Telling: "The students in Jackie's class can express themselves."

Showing: "She does a "soul train" where she dances one on one with each student and allows them to freestyle."

Once they have completed their organizer, students can tell the story of their community member in a variety of formats.

Format Options: Consider the following options for student stories, depending on the available time and technology. Encourage creativity from students.

- Written story
- Photo story/slideshow with captions or narration (see the "slideshow template")
- Other visual story format (mobile, poster, graphic novel format, etc.)

*Note: If you or your students plan to share these community profiles publicly, be sure to discuss with your students the ethics of storytelling and legal permission to share such stories. Here are two documents that you can use as guidance:

Ethics: [Ethics of Non-Fiction Storytelling](#)

Law: [Legal Issues to Consider in Storytelling](#)

| Mission Debrief: After students have shared their community stories, reflect on the following questions in a whole class discussion or in writing:

- How do the stories we heard and shared today relate to our essential questions?:
 - How do we find stories that need to be told?
 - How do stories inspire change?
 - What are the responsibilities of a storyteller?
 - What is my purpose in telling this story?
- How do you think these stories could inspire empathy or change? Choose one specific example.
- What is a story that particularly impacted you? Why?
- After hearing other community stories, what is something you might change if you were to tell the story of another community member?



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| Post Mission: Reflection |

As you finish this Explorer Classroom Storytelling Series, take a moment with your students to reflect on what they have learned about Storytelling and how their Explorer Mindset has developed. Use the Post-Mission Reflection worksheet below to give students a chance to look back on their experience. If time permits, discuss their responses to find commonalities and patterns.

| Post Mission Resource: Post Mission Reflection

Post Mission Reflection - Storytelling Series 2025

| Optional Extension Activities:

Are your students motivated to do more? Here are some ways students can explore further:

- Have students refine their stories for publication. Then, hold a community showcase - such as a gallery night or community night - to share the stories that your students gathered and told. Ask community visitors to respond to the showcase anonymously using the same Essential Questions that students and Explorers asked and discuss your survey responses.
- Use [StoryMaps](#) or similar software to create a digital community map using students' stories.
- Explore more global stories from Paul Salopek's Out of Eden Walk. Explore stories about [human migration](#), [culture](#), [water](#), and [food](#), that have been leveled for readers of varying ages and participate in engaging classroom activities.

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