

“Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.”

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, author

In this unit, we will explore the power and importance of storytelling, learn to craft our own story through performance art, and build our skills to perform our stories from a place of power.

A Note on Safety and Self-Care

Sharing our stories can be deeply personal and some people may feel at risk sharing components of their identity in a public space (this can be especially true for those from historically marginalized communities such as those who are differently abled or identify as LGBTQ+). Developed safe space norms can be helpful in providing the opportunity to courageously share our personal experiences. The following norms (four from the outstanding book, Courageous Conversations About Race¹ and two additional from our team) can be a strong place to start, but having a brief conversation to establish the norms for your community can be a good way to begin this unit.

1. **Stay engaged** - Remain morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.
2. **Experience discomfort** - Discomfort is inevitable, especially in dialogue about aspects of identity.
3. **Speak your truth** - Be open about thoughts and feelings and work against saying just what you think others want to hear.
4. **Expect and accept non-closure** - We are going to focus on small moments in our lives, meaning that there will be much more we wish to share or hear from others.
5. **What we share stays here, what we learn goes with us** - We will be hearing each others' stories, ones we may select to share publicly and others we may not. This space is confidential, and we will not share each others' stories outside of this space.
6. **Don't yuck my yum or yum my yuck** - Our experience and stories are just that - ours. What may make me happy may make you sad, based on your experience, and what you experienced as tragic may seem trivial to me, based on my experiences. We commit to not diminishing another person's experience based on our own.

¹ <http://iel.org/sites/default/files/G10-courageous-conversation-protocol-overview.pdf>

Using this Guide

This guide has been designed to be useful in a host of settings - from the traditional classroom to GSA meetings or other club uses. As designed, the lesson plans are built for 30 minute sessions, with approximately 20-45 minutes of homework to be completed prior to the next session. Lessons could easily be expanded beyond 30 minutes by providing additional practice or individual time to work on performance pieces, or by integrating the homework into the lesson time. Lessons can also be shortened to fit club times that might be occurring during lunch - club facilitators should skip the “Do Now” during the club meeting and integrate that work into homework. As such, folks shortening these lessons will need to ensure that students are completing their homework and practicing on their own time in order to be adequately prepared for their final presentation.

Below, you will find an overview of all sessions to help you to effectively plan your time.

Lesson #	Do Now	Lesson Materials	Homework
1	Story Summary (6 min)	Story Exploration (20 min)	If you really knew me. . . Worksheet (20 min)
Objective: Students will be able to define storytelling, identify well-known stories that impact the American experience, and explain three reasons that storytelling is important to social action.			
2	Read <u>Medium</u> Article (6 min)	Crafting Your Story Worksheet (20 min)	Explore narrative pieces and finish worksheet (20 min)
Objective: Students will be able to identify the key components of a successful story (protagonist, lightbulb moment/climax, obstacles and goals, transformation/realization) and formulate their first draft of their story.			
3	Partner Share (4 min)	Draft Your Piece (20 min)	Complete Draft (30 min)
Objective: Students will transform their story into a draft performance art piece that is 2-5 minutes in length and is appropriate for a public audience.			
4	Read Article (8 min)	Revise Piece (20 min)	Practice Piece (30 min)
Objective: Students will edit their performance piece using recommendations from articles.			
5	Emotional Response (5 min)	Partner Share (20 min)	Revise and Practice (30 min)
Objective: Students will perform their pieces in front of partners to continue to revise and improve their performances.			
6	None	Partner Share or Present in front of Group (20 min)	Practice for final performance, if applicable and upload materials (30 min)
Objective: Students will be prepared for a final performance of their piece.			

“I’m writing my story so that others might see fragments of themselves.” - Lena Waithe, screenwriter for *Master of None*

Lesson Plan 1: The Importance of Storytelling

Objective

Students will be able to define storytelling, identify well-known stories that impact the American experience, and explain three reasons that storytelling is important to social action.

Introduction (2 minutes)

Storytelling is innate to our humanity. It forges connection to others, providing a window into our world and a mirror to their own lived experience. Through stories, our emotions, motivations, psychology, personality and personal experience gives way to sparking others to feel something - whether joy or sadness or fear or anger.

Because stories are such a critical component of being human, stories can also inspire action - either through moral imperative (think of the stories of honest Abe Lincoln or Jesus washing the feet of the disciples) or through eliciting emotions that drive us to fight for change (think of the story of Malala or Nelson Mandela).

Stories, like the examples above, become part of the American experience - shared tales that define the moral compass of our community. But, we must ask the questions: What stories are not being told and why? If storytelling is truly part of the human experience, why are some stories exalted and others lost to the wind?

Today, we will explore the power of stories before participating in an independent activity to identify key stories from our own lived experiences.

Do Now (6 minutes)

Select one of the following stories and spend 2 minutes writing a 2-4 sentence summary of the story.

George Washington and the Cherry Tree

Rosa Parks and the Bus

The First Thanksgiving

Malala’s Fight for Education

Ben Franklin and the Kite

Barack Obama’s Run for the Presidency

Discuss: Why do you think we are familiar with these stories? What lessons do these stories teach us? The popular versions of these stories are often incomplete (Rosa Parks was much more than just a tired woman - she was actively engaged in the civil rights movement and this was a planned event) or outright false (George Washington and the cherry tree, for example) - why do you think we continue to tell them?

Lesson Materials (20 minutes)

Today, we are going to work in groups to examine stories. Some of us may receive stories with which we are highly familiar, others may receive stories that we've never heard before or even known existed. Our goal today is to answer some key questions:

1. What makes this story powerful? What emotions does this story elicit?
2. What voices are elevated in this story? What identities are represented?
3. Why do you think this story is or isn't mainstream?

Below, we've collected poems, videos, articles, and songs related to the stories of the people mentioned - in some cases, such as in the song, "Lola" included with materials regarding Sylvia Rivera, the song was not written about Sylvia, but rather, relates to her story as a transwoman. We encourage you to search for additional media or performance art related to the stories of the people below - notice how many you can find for some and not for others - there is power in story but also power in repressing the voices of certain people, as well.

After examining the artifacts below, meet with the other group to share stories and answer the questions above.

Hate Crimes

Matthew Shephard

[Poem](#)²

[Video](#)³

[Article](#)⁴

[Song](#)⁵

James Byrd

[Poem](#)⁶

[Video](#)⁷

[Article](#)⁸

[Song](#)⁹

Civil Rights Movement

Claudette Colvin

[Poem](#)¹⁰

[Video](#)¹¹

[Article](#)¹²

[Song](#)¹³

Rosa Parks

² <https://allpoetry.com/poem/3833145-Matthew-Shepard-by-FadedSparks>

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOsgy7CYnMI>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/26/the-truth-behind-americas-most-famous-gay-hate-murder-matthew-shepard>

⁵ https://youtu.be/EkbgdfQt_kA

⁶ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49491/jasper-texas-1998>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aauJNYE-5pg>

⁸ <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/24/716647585/texas-to-execute-man-convicted-in-dragging-death-of-james-byrd-jr>

⁹ shorturl.at/eKRS9

¹⁰ <https://dissidentpoetry.wordpress.com/2017/05/12/claurette-colvin-goes-to-work/>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qldCmA4ORoA>

¹² <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-43171799>

¹³ <https://youtu.be/7DwowKJvXis>

Poem¹⁴

Video¹⁵

Article¹⁶

Song¹⁷

The Latinx Community

Cesar Chavez

Poem¹⁸

Video¹⁹

Article²⁰

Song²¹

Sylvia Rivera

Poem²²

Video²³

Article²⁴

Song²⁵

Black Lives Matter

Trayvon Martin

Poem²⁶

Video²⁷

Article²⁸

Song²⁹

Denali Berries Stuckey

Poem³⁰

Video³¹

Article³²

Song³³

Closing (2 minutes)

Today, you had the opportunity to discover the stories of others and the ways in which their experiences, identities and activism influenced artists and communities. As homework before the next session, you will explore your own life and experience to help brainstorm a story. In the next lesson, we will work to craft that moment into a story to share with others.

Homework (20 minutes)

Before the next session, please complete the worksheet linked below.

¹⁴ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/90180/rosa-parks>

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjbYg6fAu50>

¹⁶ <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/rosa-parks>

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKCsZc37esU>

¹⁸ https://docs.google.com/document/d/10Za3Vwlj-cW8hLmfyhDVw_kXH0B4YjVTDVLw4yANds/edit

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wznw9TA2jXk>

²⁰ <https://ufw.org/research/history/story-cesar-chavez/>

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIOCq8OhYsw>

²² <https://medium.com/transequalitynow/poetry-blossoms-from-those-who-are-oppressed-702e9abb83b8>

²³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb-JIOWUw1o>

²⁴ <https://www.biography.com/activist/sylvia-rivera>

²⁵ https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/nea5g/trans-women-black-lives-matter

²⁶ <http://blogs.bu.edu/crwr/2015/05/11/tara-skurtus-poem-on-the-red-line/>

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mtn0-5CNQGE>

²⁸ <https://www.biography.com/crime-figure/trayvon-martin>

²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J70xd4g79Ls>

³⁰ https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FmeSq_C6WrdiWLVH66zDO7j4jxE2MupP8rqXtkTwQU/edit

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGQIdJRnr6U>

³² https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/nea5g/trans-women-black-lives-matter

³³ <https://youtu.be/JbX230NUWQc>

If you really knew me, you would know... Worksheet:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zp9e9YZPfc2ZlpPjSMPvj1ArvY2jbmZb/view?usp=sharing>

“Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here.” - Sue Monk Kidd, author

Lesson Plan 2 - The Craft of Storytelling

Objective

Students will be able to identify the key components of a successful story (protagonist, lightbulb moment/climax, obstacles and goals, transformation/realization) and formulate their first draft of their story.

Introduction (2 minutes)

We tell stories all day, every day. We tell our friends about what happened at work or school, we gossip about the latest celebrity news with co-workers, we reminisce with our loved ones about meaningful memories. But what makes a great story? A story that has lasting impact and ignites action?

Effective storytelling puts pieces of an event together in a way that is memorable, simple, and short. We're not writing the great American novel - we're seeking to elicit a response in a 2-5 minute piece where we are focused on where we want to take the audience.

Beyond the simple idea of a story having a cohesive beginning, middle and end, today, we are going to explore the six aspects of the stories we are creating for our performance piece. We will work together today to craft our story, and for homework, you will determine what type of performance art would be the best medium to tell your story to an audience.

Do Now (6 minutes)

Read Brian G. Peter's Medium³⁴ article, “6 Rules of Great Storytelling (as Told by Pixar).”

Discuss: What makes Pixar shorts and movies so compelling? How do you see these rules play out in other stories, songs, or works of performance art that you love?

Lesson Materials (20 minutes)

Today, you are going to take your work from the “If you really knew me” worksheet and apply it to developing a more fleshed out story. The worksheet we are using defines the six parts to developing a good story. Read the definitions and prompts and complete the worksheet. If you prefer to work with a partner or small group to

³⁴ https://medium.com/@Brian_G_Peters/6-rules-of-great-storytelling-as-told-by-pixar-fcc6ae225f50

bounce ideas off of, do it! Your goal is that by the end of this session, you have a story outline that will serve as the guide for your performance piece.

Crafting Your Story Worksheet:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/12tPDtmBl0SUwJi-91z4rBo1qsSjBxTgjIYc55uvuBDk/edit>

Closing (4 minutes)

Today, you had the opportunity to engage in your own story to identify a key moment or experience and build it out into a story. As homework before the next session, you will explore the ways in which performers have developed narrative pieces from their personal stories. You should also complete your narrative draft if you did not have the opportunity to finish during this session.

Homework (20 minutes)

Explore performance art pieces online - we've given you a list of some here to start with, but there are 1000s more. If you have not finished your narrative draft, complete your story for the next session or record yourself telling your story before the next session.

Monologues - A speech, poem, or other dramatic or comedic performance in which an actor speaks alone.

The Vagina Monologues³⁵

The It Gets Better Project Stories³⁶

Men Can Dance³⁷

Special³⁸

Spoken Word/Slam Poetry - A form of poetry that combines elements of performance, written word, and audience participation.

Button Poetry³⁹

Performances from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe⁴⁰

AndYes⁴¹

Original Song/Rap - An original piece in which the singer or performer has composed his or her own work.

Original Songs by YouTube Users⁴²

A Tribe Called Red⁴³

Shea Diamond⁴⁴

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUg85s27uJU>

³⁶ <https://itgetsbetter.org/stories/>

³⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZKDV2Pi0Bo>

³⁸ <https://itgetsbetter.org/blog/initiatives/ryan-oconnells-special/>

³⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/ButtonPoetry>

⁴⁰ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=nuyorican+poets+cafe

⁴¹ <https://www.andyespoetry.com/listen>

⁴² https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=original+song

⁴³ <http://atribecalledred.com/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0VdfjIDGJyI>

Rewritten Lyrics to Original Music - Performing another artist's work by rearranging or rewriting sections of the music or lyrics.

Rewritten Song Covers⁴⁵

Elle Mears⁴⁶

“To be a person is to have a story to tell.” - Isak Dinesen, author

Lesson Plan 3: From Story to Expression

Objective

Students will transform their story into a draft performance art piece that is 2-5 minutes in length and is appropriate for a public audience.

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Introduction (2 minutes)

Every piece of artwork - from classical ballet to the Top 40s list on the radio - tells a story. The purpose of art is to transport the audience member to have a new experience or to connect their lives to the lives of another. In this lesson, and over the next few sessions, you will take your story and translate it to a piece of performance art.

Do Now (6 minutes)

In partner's share the 1-2 pieces of performance art from your homework that elicited an emotional response from you - these do not have to be the pieces you "liked" the most, rather, the pieces that most impacted you when reading or viewing. Why do you think these pieces elicited that response from you?

As a group, have a few people share.

Lesson Materials (20 minutes)

Each of you will create your own performance piece influenced by the story you developed last session. To start on that process, we first want to take a moment to reflect on two key questions to guide our process:

- 1. What is the message you want the audience members to draw from your piece?
- 2. What emotions do you want the audience to experience (this will influence your language, pacing, etc.)?
- 3. Complete the following chart.

What did you see?	
What did you hear?	
What did you feel?	

⁴⁵ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=rewritten+song+covers

⁴⁶ <https://www.whiskeyriff.com/2018/10/19/girl-beautifully-rewrites-lee-brices-boy-with-a-mother-daughter-twist-girl/>

After you have become clear on the answer to these questions, head back to your original draft! Using the guiding questions, build out a draft of your original piece. Use the videos from your homework, online thesauruses and dictionaries, and your colleagues to inspire language and ideas.

Closing (4 minutes)

Today, you had the opportunity to begin the process of turning your narrative into a performance piece. As homework before the next session, you will complete a full first draft of your piece. In the next lesson, we will use an article on different performance styles to edit and revise our performance pieces for clarity and emotional impact.

Homework (30 minutes)

For the next session, create a full first draft of your performance piece and be prepared to revise in the next session.

“Carve your name on hearts, not tombstones. A legacy is etched into the minds of others and the stories they share about you.” - Shannon Adler, author

Lesson 4: Clarity, Brevity, and Emotion in Your Story

Objective

Students will edit their performance piece using recommendations from articles.

Introduction (1 minute)

Now that you have developed a draft of your performance piece, it is time to take that work and ensure that it is appropriate for the performance at the end of our time together. Today’s session will focus on editing your work based on best practices for creating performance pieces.

Read one of the following articles for additional information to help edit your idea into a usable piece.

Do Now (7-10 minutes)

Based on what kind of performance piece you have drafted, please read one of the following articles.

For poems or spoken word:

<https://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/creative1/poetry-writing-tips-how-to-write-a-poem/>

For songs or raps:

<https://flypaper.soundfly.com/tips/3-tips-for-turning-a-story-into-a-song/>

<https://www.secretsofsongwriting.com/2014/06/16/turning-a-good-story-into-a-good-song/>

For monologues:

<https://writingcooperative.com/how-to-write-a-dramatic-monologue-8f2a8a4a1ab1>

Lesson Materials (20 minutes)

Using the guidance of the articles, revise your draft. As you edit your draft, please use [this rubric](#):

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1jL_WQVrGb9aM56N-eCUJY3s1aX4IGZoX.

Closing (2 minutes)

Today, you had the opportunity to use professional advice to revise and edit your draft according to the final performance rubric. As homework before the next session, you should practice your piece and be prepared to

present in front of a partner. In the next lesson, you will receive feedback from a partner to ensure that the emotion and main idea of your piece is clear to your audience.

Homework (30 min)

For the next session, please practice your piece (again, review the rubric for clarity on exemplar performance pieces). In your next two sessions, you will perform your piece in front of a partner.

“If you want to know someone's story, they have to tell it aloud. But every time, the telling is a little but different. It's new, even to me.” - Jodi Picoult, author

Lesson 5: Practice Makes Perfect

Objective

Students will perform their pieces in front of partners to continue to revise and improve their performances.

Introduction (1 minute)

Today, we are going to work with partners to finalize our performance pieces and ensure that we are clear in our messaging and emotion. We're excited to dive into our work together for constructive and thoughtful feedback.

Do Now (5 minutes)

Listen to the song “Brave”⁴⁷ by Sara Bareilles.

If you had to tell a 4-5 sentence story about this song, what would you say it is about and what emotions do you feel when listening to it?

After having 2-3 students share, you can share the following from Wikipedia:⁴⁸

"Brave" was written by Bareilles and Jack Antonoff from the band fun. in 2011 about the struggles a friend experienced while coming out as gay. Antonoff described the song "as a real civil rights anthem at a time when there are no civil rights anthems and there's a giant need for civil rights anthems." Bareilles also discussed the song in many interviews, revealing that she thinks "there's so much honor and integrity and beauty in being able to be who you are, [and] it's important to be brave because by doing that you also give others permission to do the same."

Lesson Materials (20 minutes)

Today, students will be partnering to receive feedback on their performance piece. Share the following protocol for the partnership:

1. Have students partner with someone (or assign partners)
2. Student 1 performs the piece that they have so far (2-5 minutes)
3. Student 2 listens actively to the piece and takes notes. He/She/They will then share back to Student 1 what message they took to the piece. (1 minute)

⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUQsqBqxoR4>

⁴⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brave_\(Sara_Bareilles_song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brave_(Sara_Bareilles_song))

4. Student 1 will then share how well their interpretation aligns to the story, theme, and meaning. (1 minute)
5. Student 1 will take a minute to write notes and consider, how can the lyrics/narrative be altered to provide more clarity.
6. Students will then switch and repeat the exercise for Student 2's piece.

Homework (30 minutes)

Revise your draft based on feedback and prepare to perform again in the next session.

"If you've heard this story before, don't stop me, because I'd like to hear it again." - Groucho Marx, comedian

Lesson 6: Final Touches

Objective

Students will be prepared for a final performance of their piece.

Introduction and Lesson Materials (30 minutes)

In this final lesson, facilitators should choose between repeating the process from the last session or having the classroom perform the pieces in front of the entire class.

At the end of the session, provide a piece of blank paper to each student. Have each student write their name on the front side of the paper. Then, students should pass the papers around, giving each student the opportunity to write a message to their classmates about their performance, expressing what they learned from or what they appreciate about each person.

Homework (30 minutes)

If you are performing this piece in front of another audience, continue to practice according to the elements of the rubric.

Once you have edited your performance piece, please share it here: (<https://forms.gle/kPC8wuHayX7HtufV6>)

Please name your performance piece as FirstName_LastName_TitleofPiece_Genre (i.e.

Robert_Taylor_LightHeight_Rap)