

A banner with a blue and green circular pattern background. The text "DIVERSITY MEMO" is in large white capital letters, and "for teachers" is in smaller white lowercase letters below it.

DIVERSITY MEMO

for teachers

DIVERSITY MEMO: TELL ME A STORY ...STORYTELLING TO OPEN EYES AND HEARTS

Dear Teacher and Leader,

The stories of our lives often hold some of our greatest wisdom. When we share our stories with each other, we express our identity, details about our heritage, the places where we are unique and the things we hold in common. Stories often speak of what we hold important or precious to us.

In addition, storytelling activities build verbal communication skills, improve critical literacy and develop the imagination.

Consider bringing storytelling into your classroom to create community among diverse student groups and to link lesson plans to personal histories.

In this *Diversity Memo for Teachers* you will find a storytelling activity that can be adapted for any group of students along with some starter ideas for larger lessons plans. You will also find links to other online resources that use storytelling in the classroom to open hearts and minds.

Enjoy!

Classroom Activities

This brief lesson-starter suggests activities without being overly prescriptive so that you can adapt the activity on Storytelling to your classroom. A whole-classroom action item is included at the end.

Storytelling in Pairs

Begin a discussion about storytelling by asking students if they have a storyteller in the family. Who is it? What are their stories about? How do they make the listener feel? How do the stories inform or change your relationship?



Then ask, what is a story? You could go in many directions from this question but be sure to discuss how a story is different from a memory because *something happens in a story*. There are people (characters) and action (plot).

Pick a theme for your storytelling session. Start with a broad, open idea that connects with your lesson plan or a recent issue at the school and frame it as a story prompt.

Tell me a story about a time you didn't fit in, or a time when you changed, or a time when you stood up for something you believe in.

Demonstrate the idea with a short two-minute story of your own to set the tone and stimulate ideas for your students.

Ask your students to think of a story from their lives that fits the theme. Remind them that they should select a story that is appropriate for school and will not make them feel too vulnerable.

Compile a list of Group Agreements about how you will listen to personal stories. What do you need to agree on for everyone to feel "safe" telling stories? Students might offer "no judgment", "keeping an open mind", etc. Collect these ideas and post a list where everyone can see it.

Divide the class into pairs and give the students two minutes each to tell a story to their partner.

After students have shared stories, bring the conversation back to the big group and ask students to comment on their experience.

What was it like to tell your story and be listened to?

What was it like listening to someone else's story?

How did your partner's story remind you of your own life?

What about the story was new for you?

How did hearing and telling these stories change your relationship to each other?

How did hearing and telling these stories change your relationship to our lesson?

LESSON PLAN IDEAS:

Some ideas to get started in the classroom.

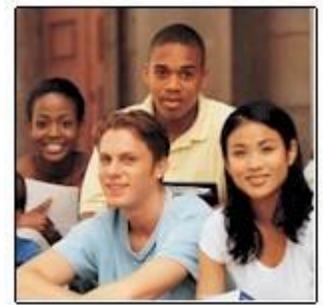
- Use storytelling in pairs to launch or end each unit or semester. As students practice, they'll get bolder and more comfortable.
- After students tell their stories to a partner, have them write it out as an essay. Often telling the story first will unearth many details and memories.
- Ask students to go home and “collect” a story from someone in their family or neighborhood. Have them bring in these stories and share them with the class by performing a monologue or reporting back as a journalist.
- Use true stories to create a performance. Ask students to work in small groups, select one story from the group, improvise dialogue and movement and perform it back for the class.



Check these out before diving into the topic.

Some preparations and ideas to create a conducive atmosphere for “storytelling swaps”:

- Tell your own story first to set an example.
- Model Positive Energy and Enthusiasm.
- Arrange the furniture as much as possible for more open space.
- Remind students that ALL stories are valuable.
- Hold students accountable to the Group Agreements.



Resources to help you plan lessons about the topic.

Links to RaceBridges for Schools Site

Here are some links to the RaceBridges sites and units that will give you further ideas and examples of using stories and storytelling:

- **Lessons and Units**

- 12 Theater Games for Building Bridges and Finding Common Ground
- Sticking Together ... Sharing Our Stories
- Storytelling: A Toolkit for Bridging Differences and Creating Community

- **RaceBridges Videos**

This is a companion site to this one. Review the variety of short video stories on the *Showcase* page told by professional storytellers. Use a few of these as prompts to student discussion and activities in the area of storytelling. They also provide fine models demonstrating the structure and art of image-making in storytelling.

- **Story Short Collection**

This is a series of brief lesson plans, audio downloads and short videos. They can be used alone or in a 'do it yourself' series around themes you choose. The short discussion guides and transcripts of the stories aids you to use these in the classroom.



Find the above lesson plans, resources and videos at RaceBridgesStudio.com

Further Recommended Resources

- **Story Arts: Storytelling in the classroom**
<http://www.storyarts.org/classroom/index.html>
- **By Word of Mouth: A Storytelling Guide for the Classroom**
http://www.prel.org/products/pr_/storytelling.htm
- **How to Use Digital Storytelling in Your Classroom**
<http://www.edutopia.org/use-digital-storytelling-classroom>

Use these quotations at the beginning of the lesson or unit to spark student interest; try having students respond to them in writing or discuss them in small groups.



Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me a truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.

- Native American Proverb

“Telling a true story about personal experience is not just a matter of being oneself, or even of finding oneself. It is also a matter of choosing oneself.”

- Harriet Goldhor Lerner

“God made man because he loves stories.”

- Elie Wiesel

“Great stories teach you something. That's one reason I haven't slipped into some sort of retirement: I always feel like I'm learning something new.”

- Clint Eastwood

Use these questions to inspire your own thinking and teaching about the topic.

What is your own experience of personal storytelling? Some of us get nervous revealing ourselves through stories, others are instantly at ease. Some of our stories are too personal to share in a classroom. Share your own feelings and expectations with your students as you engage them in this work.

Is there already a solid foundation of trust in your classroom? If not, consider what it will take to put your students at ease with storytelling and take the time to lay a foundation of working together.

It is impossible to predict what students will share in their stories. Be prepared to respond to a wide range of story topics with openness and respect.

Remember that storytelling is a universal human act that everyone has already done it and inherently understands. Trust your group to figure it out together.



**The stories of our lives are both the things that *happen to us* as well as the things that we *make happen around us*.
What life story are you creating for yourself?**