

Rivers Storytelling

#7 Story Circles



Two types of narrative shift

Telling stories that bring people in

Bringing people in to tell a new story

Bringing people in to tell stories

As a technique, the story circle process evolved, influenced in part by the commitment to radical democracy of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which played a central role in the early civil rights movement



Bringing people in to tell stories

"The rules of the story circle are the rules of civil participation in society. You agree to listen. You agree to respect."

-John O'Neal

Bringing people in to tell stories

- All participants sit in a circle free of barriers--there are no tables or other objects inside the circle. Sometimes the group leaders suggest a theme prior to the start of the story telling process and sometimes they decide to let the theme emerge as the circle proceeds.
- The immediate goal of the process is to create connections by establishing common ground, along with the chance to share experiences of love, injustice, hope, fear, and other powerful emotions and moments that all participants share.

Telling stories that bring people in

Social movements rely on stories

We can take our existing stories and communicate them with facts + emotions

We can publish these stories in papers and online to put forward a new narrative

We can assert new narratives

We can be a messenger that others identify with

We can give next steps for action

Bringing people in to tell a new story

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Social movements also rely on people

We can identify respected leaders in our community that people listen to and come together around rivers

We can tell stories together and find narratives that speak across difference + new messengers

We can assert new narratives

We can support local leaders to be messengers that others identify with

Story Circle

How it works

Process

- Everyone sits in circles of no more than ten.
- Each participant receives an equal amount of time to tell their story.
- The storytelling proceeds in order around the circle.
- If a participant does not have a story when it is his/her turn, the participant may pass.
- After the last person in the circle has told a story or passed, the participants who passed will have another opportunity to tell a story.

Principles and Notes

- *Listening is more important than talking.*
 - Everyone should listen to the storyteller of the moment – not talk, ask questions, or even think about their own story.
 - Don't worry about preparing the best story. Don't make notes. Usually a story will emerge through the process. Trust the circle to bring you a story.
 - It isn't about performance: the idea is to listen for the essence of what is being shared, however the storyteller wants to tell it.
- If you have several stories in mind when it is your turn to tell, choose the story that comes from the deepest place that you feel safe telling.
- After everyone who wishes to tell a story has had an opportunity to do so, participants may engage in cross talk, ask questions, or comment on the stories of others.
- Silence is all right. Take your time. Do not rush to tell.

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Principles and Notes

- Every story has a beginning, a middle, an end, and a teller. Imagine starting this way: “Let me tell you about the time....”
- This isn't a time to offer opinions or commentary, but to share something you experienced or observed.

Prompts

- **Share a story about a time** someone you care about was impacted by ecological devastation on the river
- **Share a story about a time** when you came together with people to stand up for a place, or for justice
- **Share a memory** of when you first realised something was wrong on the river
- **Share a story about a time** you were moved to feel hope about how we can care for place

3 minutes each

Reflection

Making connections between stories

Making Connections

- Were there common themes?
- Notable differences?
- What stood out for you, if anything?
- What touched you, if anything?
- What feelings and ideas were sparked?

Promotion

How do we set up story circles?

What is the purpose?

- **Collecting Stories + Creating Community Archives**
 - In the southern United States, story circles have been used as a first step to collect stories from the Civil Rights Movement for the benefit of young people, building a historical consciousness.
 - *Has there been an important movement in your area that brought in a wide group of people?*
- **Facilitate Community Collaborations**
 - Between groups that share common needs and experiences, or a common approach to building a movement for social change.
 - *Are there groups in your area that share goals or values?*

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Making a community event

- Turn it into a potluck
- Host it with a movie screening to prompt reflection
- Organise it to align with environmental water being sent to an important wetland
- Invite an artist

Capturing stories

- Pass a digital recorder or smartphone to each storyteller when that person's turn begins.
- After your Story Circle event, transcribe stories
 - <https://trint.com/>

After a story circle

- Keep it local – host a local storytelling event or open mic
- Share online – take a video of a talented storyteller at a nice location and post to social media
- Have another meeting focused on actions

Make a Commitment

- Will you tell a story that will bring people in? (e.g., write an opinion piece)
- Bring people in to tell a new story? (i.e., host a story circle)
- What support do you need?
- Where do you want to go from here?

Thanks for coming!