



StoryCorps® U

INTRODUCTION TO STORYCORPS: A LESSON PLAN

Our mission is to provide people of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share, and preserve the stories of our lives.

storycorps.org

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INTRODUCTION TO STORYCORPS

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Overview

- Title:** Introduction to StoryCorps
- Summary:** A customizable lesson plan for students in grades 8-12.
- Objectives:** To become familiar with the history and mission of StoryCorps
To learn basic skills in interviewing and storytelling
- Standards:** *Speaking and listening (English Language Arts)*
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
- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Time:** 60 minutes
- Materials:** Ball or crumpled up paper for warm-up activity; student worksheets; computer with Internet access and speakers; extra pens or pencils
- Preparation:** Photocopy student worksheets and StoryCorps Resources and Recommended Recordings document.
- Extensions:** You can replace or supplement our suggested listening clips in the lesson plan, see "StoryCorps Resources and Recommended Recordings" on page 11 which lists alternative edited recordings and is organized thematically.
- On page 13 you will find links to Question Generator and StoryCorps' Great Questions lists. Each tool may prove helpful when developing debrief questions for alternative clips or for conducting interview-based activities.

For inquiries about this lesson, please contact StoryCorpsU at education@storycorps.org.

Workshop Activities

WARM-UP: BALL TOSS (5 minutes)

1. Ask students to stand in a circle.
2. Explain that each student will say his/her name and one word, name or image that they think of when they hear the word “story.”
3. Model by tossing the ball/crumpled up paper to a student, saying your name and one word you think of when you hear the word “story.”

DEBRIEF (2-3 minutes)

- What did you notice about these words? Any patterns?

Affirm students’ responses to the Warm-Up and reiterate good examples of what the class thinks stories are. If not already mentioned, point out that we all have stories to tell about our own personal experiences. This can also be seen as our own personal history that reveals something about who we are today, or even who we want to become in the future.

ACTIVITY 1: LISTENING EXERCISE AND DISCUSSION (20 minutes)

1. Review the mission of StoryCorps:

StoryCorps is an independent nonprofit whose mission is to provide Americans of all backgrounds and beliefs with the opportunity to record, share and preserve the stories of our lives. Since 2003, StoryCorps has collected and archived more than 45,000 interviews from participants across the country, representing the largest collection of American voices ever gathered. At the heart of the StoryCorps mission is the idea that we matter and we won’t be forgotten.

2. Explain that today students will be listening to a selection of edited recordings from StoryCorps’ archives and learning the basics of conducting StoryCorps-style interviews. Pass out Student Worksheets (on pages 7-9).

3. Introduce the first listening clip, an animated interview between a mom and her 12-year-old son, Joshua Littman, who has Asperger’s syndrome. Poll the group to determine their knowledge of Asperger’s syndrome. If needed, explain that Asperger’s syndrome is a disorder that causes someone to have difficulties interacting socially with other people. People with Asperger’s often demonstrate intense interests or obsessions with certain things (like chess or bugs) as well as engage in repetitive behavior (like hand waving). Tell students to take note of the questions Joshua asks his mom (see Student Worksheet 1).

4. Play clip: <http://storycorps.org/animation/q-and-a/>

NOTE: If you are having technical difficulties playing the animation an audio clip is available at: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/sarah-and-joshua-littman/>

5. Facilitate a conversation by asking the following questions:

- What was something that surprised you in the interview?

- What was one of the most interesting questions that Joshua asked? Why?
- How do you think Joshua's mom felt during the interview?
- How do you think Joshua felt?
- Did Joshua ask good questions? Which ones?
- What makes these good questions?

NOTE: Students' responses may be mixed; although Joshua asked many questions that could be answered with just a yes or a no, his questions required a lot of thought and encouraged the speaker to reveal something important.

6. Introduce the second listening clip (this one has not been animated), an interview between a mom and her daughter, Blanca and Connie Alvarez. In this interview Blanca Alvarez tells her daughter, Connie, about crossing the border from Mexico to the United States and the family's initial experiences in this country. Tell students to take note of lessons Connie learned from her mother's story (see Student Worksheet 1).

7. Play clip: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/blanca-and-connie-alvarez/>

8. Facilitate a conversation by asking the following questions:

- What was something that surprised you in the interview?
- Do you think the interview had an effect on Blanca and Connie's relationship?
- What challenges did Blanca have to face in completing her education? How did she respond to these challenges?
- Are there other lessons you have learned from listening to this interview?

DEBRIEF (2-4 minutes)

- What are some reasons it might be important to share and preserve our stories?
 - Examples include:
 - to build connections between people
 - to remind one another of our shared experiences
 - to learn from the experiences of others
- Is there someone in your life you would like to interview?

ACTIVITY 2: PEER INTERVIEWS (20 minutes)

1. Explain that in the next exercise, students will be conducting interviews of one another in order to build connections with another classmate. Ask the class what they think they should focus on while conducting interviews.

Answers may include:

- Listen attentively.
- Ask for details in follow up questions.
- Ask for clarification when something does not make sense.

2. Ask volunteers to read each of the techniques aloud listed in Student Worksheet 2 (Effective Interview Techniques) and ask if there are any questions after each quote.

3. Tell students to turn to Student Worksheet 3 (Suggested Questions for Peer Interviews), review the questions listed and choose 3 they would like to ask their partner in the peer interview. Note that the questions are divided into three sections: Suggested Questions about the Past, Present, and Future.

4. Model the following procedure with a volunteer:

- For demonstration purposes you (the teacher) will ask the volunteer questions first, using questions selected from the Suggested Questions list.
- When modeling make sure to ask follow-up questions.
- Call “switch” and the volunteer will ask you their questions (you don’t have to use the full 4 minutes for the demonstration but want students to understand the activity).

NOTE: Emphasize that it is not important for students to go through each individual question, but rather to focus on a couple of questions from the list and create follow-up questions.

5. Pair students up by counting off. For example, if there are 20 students in the class count off 1-20 and pair up students who have the same number. If there are an uneven number of students you can participate. Have students decide who will go first and give the first group 4 minutes to conduct their interviews. After 4 minutes call “switch” and have the second group conduct their interviews.

6. Invite students to regroup for full-class discussion and report back on what they learned in their interviews. Questions for discussion:

- What was it like to interview one another?
- What was it like to share your story?
- What was it like to be listened to?
- What was difficult about this exercise?
- What did you learn?
- What questions worked well?

CLOSING (6-8 minutes)

“Popcorn” refers to a technique in which a set amount of time is allotted for students to respond to a prompt. The sharing is a “popcorn” because students are invited to voice their responses randomly rather than going around in a specified order and they don’t have to raise their hands. However, there should only be one student speaking at a time, so if two students speak at the same time, one should let the other go first.

Give students a few minutes to create a tweet of 140 characters or less that captures their answer to the question:

- Why do *your* stories matter?

Ask students to “popcorn” their responses.

Hand out copies of the document, StoryCorps Resources and Recommended Recordings.

Student Worksheet 1: Notes on StoryCorps Listening Clips

Instructions: Use this space to reflect on the listening clips your teacher will play for you. Take note of anything that seems interesting, surprising, memorable, or touching.

LISTENING CLIP #1

LISTENING CLIP #2

Student Worksheet 2: Effective Interview Techniques

“Follow-up questions can also elicit detail from a storyteller for a more vivid telling. The question ‘How did that make you feel?’ is often effective.”

- **StoryCorps: Listening for Production**

“Sometimes, you’ll encounter a participant who, because of shyness, nerves, or something else, is somewhat stuck. In this case, you should ask questions to move the interview forward.”

- **StoryCorps: Listening for Production**

“If your question is of a sensitive nature, give the participants the option to not answer ... for example, ‘Would you mind if I asked a question? You don’t need to answer if you don’t want to.’”

- **StoryCorps: Listening for Production**

“The most important is that it shouldn’t sound like questioning. ‘What time did you get up yesterday morning?’ ‘What time did you go to bed?’ ‘What did you do in between?’—none of that. ‘So tell me, how was yesterday?’ That’s the right way of doing it. Making it sound like you’re having a conversation.”

- **Studs Terkel, with Tony Parker, “Interviewing an Interviewer”**

“The first thing I’d say to any interviewer is ... ‘Listen.’ It’s the second thing I’d say too, and the third, and the fourth. ‘Listen ... listen ... listen.’ ... You don’t have to agree with them or disagree with them.... Don’t push them, don’t rush them, don’t chase them or harass them with getting on to the next question.... Let them take their time.”

- **Studs Terkel, with Tony Parker, “Interviewing an Interviewer”**

“The key to making it a great interchange is to be curious and have an open heart.”

- **StoryCorps: Listening for Production**

Student Worksheet 3: Suggested Questions for Peer Interviews

Instructions: Read over the following list of questions and choose a few to ask your interview partner.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PAST

- What is your earliest memory?
- What's the most exciting thing you've done?
- What are the most important lessons you've learned in life?
- Who has been the biggest influence on your life?
- What was the happiest moment of your life?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PRESENT

- Describe your perfect day.
- If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would it be? Why?
- If you could snap your fingers and make one thing better in the world, what would it be? Why?
- What's the best thing about being a teenager? The worst?
- Tell me a story about your name.
- What are you proudest of in your life?

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE

- What does your future hold?
- What do you think your life will be like when you get older?
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years? 20 years?
- What are your goals and ambitions for the future?
- How would you like to be remembered?

Use the space on the attached sheet to take notes.

StoryCorps Resources and Recommended Recordings

RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

Our website features edited interviews that have been produced for broadcast on NPR. For a list of recommended listening clips, see below, or explore the site on your own: <http://storycorps.org/listen/>.

The following list reflects the thematic diversity of StoryCorps' archives. When planning the One Lesson Workshop, we encourage you to research additional recordings that fit the needs and character of your institution.

Growing Up

- Ray Martinez: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/ray-martinez/>
- Mary and David Warm: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/mary-and-david-warm/>
- Kay Wang: <http://storycorps.org/animation/no-more-questions/>
- Alfred Zepeda and Albert Elias: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/alfred-zepeda-and-albert-elias/>
- Manny Diaz and Blanca Vazquez: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/manny-diaz-and-blanca-vazquez/>
- Noe Rueda and Alex Fernandez: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/noe-rueda-and-alex-fernandez/>

Family History

- Carl McNair: <http://storycorps.org/animation/eyes-on-the-stars/>
- William and Kimberly Weaver: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/william-and-kimberly-weaver/>
- Lucille and Victor Mascarenas: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/lucille-mascarenas-and-her-son-victor/>
- Stefan Lynch Strassfeld and Beth Teper: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/stefan-lynch-strassfeld-and-his-friend-beth-teper/>

Identity

- Lillie Love and Anthony Knight: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/lillie-love-and-anthony-knight/>
- Julio Diaz: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/julio-diaz/>
- Seniesa and Joe Estrada: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/seniesa-estrada-and-her-father-joe-estrada/>

Work

- Bill Schifrin and Herman Rotenberg: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/bill-schifrin-and-his-son-in-law-herman-rotenberg/>
- Angelo Bruno and Eddie Nieves: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/angelo-bruno-and-his-friend-eddie-nieves/>
- Kenny Hopper and Kerry Davis: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/kenny-hopper-and-kerry-davis/>

Love

- Pepper and Ron Miller: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/pepper-miller-and-her-husband-ronald/>
- Hilda Chacon and Pedro Moran Palma: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/hilda-chacon-and-her-husband-pedro-moran-palma/>
- Barbara and Jack Dundon: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/barbara-and-jack-dundon/>
- Hee Sook and Joyce Kim Lee: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/hee-sook-and-joyce-kim-lee/>
- Tomas Kubrican and Carol Mittlesteadt: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/tomas-kubrican-and-carol-mittlesteadt/>

- <http://storycorps.org/animation/danny-and-annie/>
- <http://storycorps.org/animation/to-r-p-salazar-with-love/>
- <http://storycorps.org/animation/she-was-the-one/>

Overcoming Obstacles

- Joe Buford and Michelle Miller: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/joe-buford-and-michelle-miller/>
- Taro Alexander: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/taro-alexander/>
- George Hill: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/george-hill/>
- Clayton Hall Jr. and Breana Hall: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/clayton-hall-jr-and-breana-hall/>

Friendship

- Jesus Melendez and Frank Perez: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/jesus-melendez-and-frank-perez/>
- Ky-Antre Compton and Stuart Chittenden: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/ky-antre-compton-and-stuart-chittenden/>

Gender and Women's Rights

- Tia and Christine Smallwood: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/tia-and-christine-smallwood/>
- Dorothy and Sonari Ginton: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/dorothy-ginton-and-sonari-ginton/>
- Betty Jenkins: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/betty-jenkins/>

Civil Rights

- Leon and Angela May: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/leon-and-angela-may/>
- Theresa Burroughs and Toni Love: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/theresa-burroughs-and-toni-love/>
- Mweupe Mfalme Nguni: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/mweupe-mfalme-nguni/>
- Jim McFarland: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/jim-mcfarland/>
- John Hope Franklin: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/john-hope-franklin-with-his-son-john-w-franklin/>
- Reverend James Seawood: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/reverend-james-seawood/>
- Elmore Nickelberry and Taylor Rogers: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/elmore-nickelberry-and-taylor-rogers/>
- Taylor and Bessie Rogers: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/taylor-and-bessie-rogers/>
- George Turks: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/george-turks/>
- Ella Owens: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/ella-annette-owens/>
- Herb Kneeland: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/herbert-j-kneeland/>
- Kathy Dean Evans: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/kathy-dean-evans/>

Immigration

- Ramon "Chunky" Sanchez: <http://storycorps.org/animation/facundo-the-great/>
- Blanca and Connie Alvarez: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/blanca-and-connie-alvarez/>
- Lourdes and Roger Villanueva: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/lourdes-and-roger-villanueva/>
- Jose Cruz: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/jose-cruz-and-his-daughter-grace/>
- Juliet Jegasothy and Sheena Jacob: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/juliet-jegasothy-and-sheena-jacob/>
- Claritza Abreu and Gerardo Villacres: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/claritza-abreu-and-gerardo-villacres/>
- Slava and Leon Leykin: <http://storycorps.org/listen/stories/slava-and-leon-leykin/>

STORYCORPS ANIMATIONS

Our original animated shorts series features some of our best-loved radio stories. The animated shorts are very popular with students and are a great way to spark discussion. (Some animated shorts are included in the previous section.)

- <http://storycorps.org/animation/the-icing-on-the-cake/>
- <http://storycorps.org/animation/no-more-questions/>
- <http://storycorps.org/animation/sundays-at-roccos/>
- <http://storycorps.org/animation/miss-devine/>
- <http://storycorps.org/animation/john-and-joe/>
- <http://storycorps.org/animation/a-family-man/>
- <http://storycorps.org/animation/the-human-voice/>
- <http://storycorps.org/animation/always-a-family/>
- <http://storycorps.org/animation/germans-in-the-woods/>

RESOURCES FOR CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Our Question Generator helps participants create a list of questions to bring to their StoryCorps interview: <http://storycorps.org/questions>

Our Great Questions lists feature suggestions for getting a good conversation going: <http://storycorps.org/record-your-story/question-generator/list/>

Additional questions were developed in support of the Griot and Historias initiatives. The Griot Initiative is a project to ensure that the voices, experiences and life stories of African Americans will be preserved and presented with dignity. The Historias Initiative is a project to record, preserve and share the stories of Latinos across the US.

Griot Great Questions: <http://storycorps.org/initiatives/griot/great-questions/>

Historias Great Questions: <http://storycorps.org/historias-en/great-questions/>