

Storytelling Activity:

Peace Building and The Narrative

Provided by Laura Simms

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Storyteller's Notes to Teacher:

The capacity for inner peace and nonviolence is within each one of us. The following narrative activities offer a way of garnering understanding of aspects of conflict transformation through creativity, dialogue and reflection. It activates the principles of nonviolence making them lived explorations. Engaged storytelling depends on body-mind synchronization (Presence). Hence, begin with open conversation about conditions, and a focusing activity that prepares the ground with listening and sharing. As facilitator you are building community by allowing students to listen to a story together and then to listen to one another. We are developing the art of open hearted and non-reactive listening and speaking.

When telling a story or reading a story imagine it, read it with your own personal feeling and give space for words to touch students. It is a group activity that is powerful because students are feeling into the events and imagining the story in their own minds. The indirect introduction of a story allows them to discuss difficult issues in a less invasive or personal way.

Activity: Storytelling and The Story-making Process (Principle 2: Nonviolence seeks to win friendship and understanding.)

Intention: Encourage collaborative and meaningful learning.

Total Time: 45 minutes (each day, for two days)

Age Group: Junior High and High School

For Elementary Children: Tell Mice and Elephant. Use the weather report. Engage children in a simple drama activity in small groups.

Second day: Let them write personal stories in which they may have felt small, and how could they be useful.

Intention: To encourage collaborative and meaningful learning

Note: Can be adjusted for curriculum focus (ex, history, ethics, language arts)

DAY ONE

1. Setting up Guidelines for Sharing:

Collaborative learning and peace building need the participation of students. To support their personal needs ask for and make a list of what conditions are needed for them to share their stories and work together in a new way. Write these on the board so they can be seen. Do not judge or intervene.

2. Focusing Activity:

Promote listening and expression.

Have the students sit in a circle, and ask each one to give the day's Weather Report. You can begin using imagery. For example, perhaps you are feeling like a hot summer day with mosquitoes buzzing. Or, you feel like a very cold winter afternoon where the streets are icy and dangerous. Or, a cloudy afternoon with dark clouds.

Note: The conditions that they state should include listening, with no interruption or mockery from other students. Ask if they would like these included.

3. Tell Story.

Teacher instruction: Read it at least twice before reading or telling it. Do not change the story. Do not explain or give your opinion. Speak it clearly and with your own heart open. Let them know this is a personal story that was told in Sierra Leone in West Africa after the civil war.

TEACHER AND THE BOY

told by Solomon Kargbo
to Laura Simms

A teacher in Sierra Leone in Solomon's town lost both legs to child soldiers during the civil war. Every day his two sons carried him to the edge of the road where he begged. At least in this way he felt he was useful. One day a boy seeing the legless man dropped coins in the bowl. The man pressed his thighs making the coins fall to the earth. The boy picked them up and replaced them. The man raged, "You do not recognize me, but I recognize you. You cut off my legs in the war." The boy began to sob. He did not recognize the man. He begged for forgiveness. The man refused until his sons arrived. His sons were the same age as the boy who had cut off his legs. The boy wept, "I cannot go home. NO one will receive me because of what I have done. Please forgive me."

Seeing his sons, the man felt pity for the boy and invited him home. From that day forward the boy became the man's legs. He carried him to the market and when schools opened carried him to school so he could teach again. The boy became his legs and became part of the man's family. Eventually the young man began to study to be a teacher as he so deeply admired the courage of the man who forgave him.

Sierra Leone , 1999

4. Ask the Students.

Have the students speak about what they felt or if they can relate to the events in the story. How did the story make them feel? (If class-time allows, this is a good opportunity to speak about child soldiers, gangs in communities, violence and reconciliation.) Take 10 minutes.

5. Give Out Paper.

This is a writing process that involves letting young people discover the story that is waiting to be told. Work in fragments. Make sure they know that it is their choice if they would like to share the story or keep it private. Give time for each response, 3-5 minutes or 30 minutes in total.

- a. Choose a strong emotion. Write it down. Describe it.
- b. Write about what causes that strong emotion.
- c. Describe the landscape where this emotion lives. Write it down.
- d. Describe the weather report in that landscape when the emotion is blazing.
- e. Then place two characters in the landscape where that emotion dwells.
- f. Provide a detail about each of the characters – age, talent, problem, background, gender.
- g. For each character, choose a conflict that feels unsolvable Describe it.
- h. Explain how the conflict began. Use what you know from your own life, community, friends, or family.
- i. Finally, write the end of the story with the conflict somehow resolved. Who does that effect? What changes? Let them take home their story.

DAY TWO

1. Pairs.

In pairs, let the students discuss with their partner, the place, the emotion, the conflict, and the end of their story. The purpose is deep listening. Give each student three minutes to speak. The role of the teller is to be clear. The role of the listener is to listen, not comment or react. Teacher keeps time with a bell or a clacker. Take 6 minutes.

2. Discuss.

What did that feel like to listen and to be heard? Take 4 minutes.

Let each person sit down and write the middle of the story. Make notes on other factors to be included: obstacles, meetings, things the students learned. Choose a name for your story. Take 15 minutes.

3. Review the Conditions for Sharing and Listening. See if anyone wants to change or add anything. Take 2 minutes.

4. Read the stories.

In pairs, take time to read the story.

Use a different partner than the one that was used before. Take 10 minutes.

5. Group Discussion.

What do they want to do? Do they want to work on the stories, make lyrics, make music, draw?

6. How do the stories relate to Principle #2.

Story for young children working with same nonviolence principle:

THE MICE AND THE ELEPHANT

A Tale from India

Adapted by Laura Simms ©2001 Laura Simms

Once upon a time there was a colony of mice who lived in a forest. They feared the elephants. Whenever the elephants walked through their land with their enormous feet, many of the little creatures were harmed. One day, the mouse king went to the King of the Elephants. He scrambled up the elephant's trunk and whispered into his ear, "If you spare our lives, we will help you in a time of need." The elephant king was sensitive and wise. He took pity on the small animals who he had never paid attention to, and agreed. That day he ordered the elephants to be careful and never step on a single mouse.

From that day forth the elephants were attentive as they walked. They lifted their huge legs carefully, never harming their tiny friends. When they entered the land of the mice, they lifted their trunks and trumpeted a warning to their small friends, "We are walking. We are walking." The mice answered, "we are walking. We are walking."

Both creatures lived more happily. As they became aware of one another, their eyes and ears grew sharper to what was around them, and their hearts grew more loving.

One day, elephant trappers came to the forest. They were capturing elephants for a human king's soldiers to ride into battle. Day by day more and more elephants were caught in great rope traps and bound to large trees so that they could be taken away.

The elephant king was very sad. Then, he remembered the promise of the mouse king. He called for his friend. The tiny king arrived and listened to the elephant's story.

Immediately, the mouse king called all the mice together. Thousands and thousands of mice gathered from every direction, to discuss how they might help the elephants. No one had forgotten how their huge friends spared their lives. No one had forgotten how the voices of the elephants called out to them in the forest. One clever mouse suggested a plan. All the mice rejoiced.

That evening they formed into little groups. Each group gnawed the ropes of a single trap with their tiny sharp teeth. They worked all night. They never rested, and by morning all the elephants were freed. The forest exploded with the joyful sound of elephants and mice in celebration.

Frustrated, the trappers left the forest.

The elephant king was grateful. He lifted the little mouse King on his back and decreed, "From today onwards elephants and mice will be the best of friends." And to this day, that is the truth. The elephants and the mice are still good friends. Regardless of their differences in size, they saved each other's lives.