

Moving Stories

Moving Stories: From Voice to Action

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

Zora Neale Huston from The Dust Inside of You

INTRODUCTION

The Moving Stories App provides an engaging classroom experience that allows students to explore our national foundational narrative of migration. Together, students can learn about shared experiences of migrations, through historical and current event lens. The App and these accompanying lessons provide an opportunity to build empathy and understanding across diverse student experiences. It also offers and empowering experiences for (often) invisible students in the classroom.

Socio-Emotional Goals

Using the Moving Stories app and the accompanying lesson set will help promote several essential college and career-ready dispositions including helping to develop:

- *Students who are **curious** and prepared to inquire about the ways that migration impacts individuals, communities, and nations;*
- *Students who are **empathetic** to individuals and communities who are navigating the changes that come with mass migration;*
- *Students who recognize their own **perspectives** and can understand the views of others about issues of migration;*

- *Students who can **articulate changes and continuities** of the experience of migrations across a range of histories and geographies;*
- *Students who recognize the importance of working to **build bridges** between newcomers and receiving communities.*

Academic Goals

*Using the Moving Stories app and the accompanying lesson set will help promote the following **speaking and listening skills** as defined in the Common Core State Standards.*

- *Students will practice **Initiating and participating** in a range of **collaborative discussions** (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively;*
- *Students will work with peers to set rules for **collegial decision-making** and (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on critical issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed;*
- *Students will practice **responding thoughtfully** to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented;*
- *Students will practice **adapting their speech** to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.*

*Moreover, collecting stories can be a vital component of an **action civics project**.*

Sharing and Contracting

*Educators have a variety of strategies they use to set the norms and expectations for participation in their classroom or learning space. Some of those norms are rule-based and are made explicit in school handbooks, but most expectations are unspoken. As educators, we often assume that our students already know the culture, either from previous experience or that they will pick it up from their peers and your presentations. A lot of the time that is true. However, we find it helpful to **be explicit in articulating norms and expectations** in order to make them clear for all learners, regardless of their previous experiences or learning styles. Classroom contracts can be particularly helpful in those moments in which you find that someone has broken an unspoken rule - either sharing a private comment from a peer or responding improperly to a fellow student's comment.*

*Educational researchers have found that **establishing classroom contracts** is an effective way to promote a positive learning environment. We think they are particularly important when lessons touch on sensitive personal, political or historical themes.*

What is a classroom contract? Why might they be useful? And, how do you create one? Think of a classroom contract a formal expression of expectations, norms, and even rules that are agreed to by all members of the classroom community. Many educators like to have their students co-construct the contract with them, and then have each member of the community affirmatively agree to abide by the document. Some educators have each student sign the contract and post it.

*A few notes that are worth thinking about: It is helpful to frame expectations in **positive language**; however, you might want to help students have an idea of **what kinds of behaviors would violate contract**. Finally, once you have created the contract, **return to the contract occasionally**, both for positive reinforcement, as well as a reminder when the contract is violated. While we prefer positive, over negative, reinforcement, it is useful to consider the consequences if students don't adhere to the contract.*

Below are two resources that outline lessons for creating classroom contracts:

- [*Facing History and Ourselves: Contracting*](#)
- [*Peace First: Creating Shared Classroom Rules through a Classroom Contract*](#)

Why do Stories Matter?

At the core of the Moving Stories App project is a belief that stories matter. As humans, stories are at the fundamental to who we are—sharing them with an audience that listen validates our experiences. By creating a space in which our students' stories can share their histories, we are telling them that they matter.

Storytelling is part of an exchange between a speaker and an audience. It is important to remember that while speaking is an important part of the transaction, listening matters just as well. When we hear about someone else's experience or read about other people's perspectives, we are learning. We may learn something new, or it may reinforce what we already know. Literature teachers often talk about the importance of books as windows and mirrors - windows to new worlds, and mirrors to our own experience. Stories can work that way as well.

In a review of the book *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction*, Steve Denning notes that at the height of the scientific revolution, "Narrative was seen as either infantile or trivial." Yet, "storytelling...lived on in the cracks and crevices of society—in the cafeterias, the corridors, around water-coolers, in bars and restaurants, living rooms and bedrooms." Indeed, "storytelling is a universal feature of every country and every culture."¹ It turned out to be central character Noted historian Yuval Noah Harari, the author of *Sapiens: A History of Human Kind* concurs that that we are humans are unique, precisely because of our capacity to relate to one another through storytelling. He writes:

Sapiens rule the world, because we are the only animal that can cooperate flexibly in large numbers. We can create mass cooperation networks, in which thou-

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2012/03/09/the-science-of-storytelling/#3b8c489f2d8a> (Accessed on Dec. 1, 2017)

sands and millions of complete strangers work together towards common goals. . . . The real difference between us and chimpanzees is the mysterious glue that enables millions of humans to cooperate effectively...This mysterious glue is made of stories, not genes.²

In the classroom, we find that students will telling stories engaging. It is sometimes helpful to provide a framework for sharing stories with others. Elena Maker, a teacher at the Blackstone Academy in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, created the following lesson for that very purpose.

Lesson Plan:
Why Tell Stories?
Author: Elena Maker, Blackstone Academy

It can be hard to imagine how we might tell "our stories." Where do they start? Where do they end? What do we deem necessary for other people to know about us?

In this lesson, we begin to imagine how we might speak about those moments and experiences that make us. We do so by looking at other people's stories.

Lesson Objectives:

1. To begin a discussion of why we might tell our stories
2. To sample different storytelling strategies used by youth
3. To connect individuals' stories to the world, our communities, and ourselves, so that we can better understand the power of storytelling

Lesson Part One: (30-40 minutes)

Procedures:

1. Carousel: We began by posting five prompts around the room. The prompts asked big questions that helped us generate initial thinking about the importance of story-

²From <http://www.ynharari.com/topic/power-and-imagination/> (accessed on Dec. 1, 2017)

telling.

- Why is it important to tell people our stories?
- What is something about yourself that you want people to know?
- What is something about yourself you don't normally tell people?
- Why should teachers know about students?
- What should students know about other students?

After spending 10 minutes circulating the room and responding to the prompts, we posted all of the posters on the front wall and read over what we had written.

Discussion prompts for whole group debrief:

- What trends/themes do you notice in the answers?
- What surprises you about what we have written?
- What lesson do we take away from this activity?

2. Story exploration and graphic organizer

Using the ilearnamerica.com human library, students can explore the stories of different young people. Each student was instructed to browse the library and select one story that they could reflect upon.

In the graphic organizer, students were asked to write a summary of the story, and use "the 3 Y's" to consider the importance of the story.

- Why might this story matter to me?
- Why might it matter to people around me?
- Why might it matter to the world?

Students spent about 20 minutes reading and finding meaningful connections to strangers through storytelling.*

Lesson Part Two: (30 minutes)

3. Share out:

Students were asked to share out about the stories they selected. Each student was given about 1 minute to summarize and explain the connections.

As students shared, the rest of the group created a list of why each story was significant (i.e., “because the reader felt less alone after reading the story”).

4. Creating criteria for storytelling

In small groups, students reviewed their lists and together, created one list of the critical elements of storytelling.

After small group discussions, we came together as a whole class and created one synthesized list of the criteria for a good story. We will use this list as we move forward in thinking about which of our own stories we want to tell, and how we will tell them.

Assessment:

The ilearnamerica.com graphic organizer

* “The 3 Y’s” is a strategy adopted from a Project Zero Thinking Routine.

Something to consider: How much should we share?

Most educators recognize the importance of developing their students' voice. One underappreciated aspect of helping young people find their voice is helping them become aware of the consequences of sharing particular details of their stories. For many, *being heard, and listened to with respect, can be a transformational experience.* This is especially true when you have been made to feel invisible. At Re-Imagining Migration, we have seen how being listened to leads to student engagement.

At the same time, we must recognize that some of our students may have complicated histories that are part of their story or their families' story. They should be conscious of their decision to share or not to share those details. Some students may have traumatic histories that they are not quite ready to discuss or relive. Other students may not have proper authorization to be in the country or have family members without legal paperwork. Students should be very careful in thinking about whether or not to share those details out loud, among their peers; essential is the issue of how trustworthy is the con-

text of sharing. They should be honored and provided full respect to reveal only as much as they feel they wish (and are ready) to disclose. They must not be pushed to speak out loud further than they are ready. Students should be allowed to write or draw or express themselves as they are most comfortable and not penalized by reticence (either by shaming or grading).

To recap:

- Make sure the sharing environment is safe and respectful;
- Make sure that everyone knows that they only need to share as much as they want to share;
- Make sure everyone knows that they can opt out at any point;
- Make sure that everyone knows that they can choose alternative forms of sharing such as drawing, poetry, journaling, etc.;
- Make sure that everyone knows that they do not have to make their stories public;
- Make sure there is a list of people to talk to in case issues arise including the school guidance counselor, social worker, clergy, or other trusted adults.

Harvard University Scholar Danielle Allen has been studying social change in the digital age for over eight years. Prof. Allen in her team have encountered powerful examples of storytelling. Their research led to the creation of the ***Ten Questions for Changemakers project.*** In that work, she and her team developed ten questions that they believe can help Changemakers design effective solutions to challenging social problems. One question they ask change makers to reflect upon is, "how much should I share?" The question is deceptively simple and incredibly relevant in the digital age. Online information can leave a footprint that others can follow if they seek to know more about you.

As students prepare to be interviewed by a classmate, encourage them to think, ahead of time, about the question, how much should I share?

Have students consider the advantages and disadvantages of sharing different parts of their stories publicly. We believe sharing our stories can be empowering, but we want students to be thoughtful about their own actions. Sharing some stories can put us at

risk, or stir up trauma. If students haven't thought about this question ahead of time, they can sometimes feel unprepared or put on the spot.

You can have students write their responses in a journal. Some may wish to share their thinking about this question in pairs or small groups, whereas, in other classrooms, teachers may want to keep this as a solo activity.

*Note: We have anticipated this dilemma in the design of The Moving Stories app. The settings allow users to upload or not upload the interview, and includes a variety of sharing settings. There is also a feature that allows educators to create password protected story-sharing areas on the Moving Stories website.

Definition of Terms

While some educators may use Moving Stories to kick-off a unit on immigration, or human migration, others may want to incorporate lessons on the app after introducing historical, literary, or scientific context about migration.

People often use the words immigrant, immigration, migrant, migration and refugee without knowing the distinctions between them. Below are definitions with a little commentary.

Migration: To move from one country, place, or locality to another. Currently, for example, there are over 250 million people living in countries outside of where they were born. Further, millions migrate within their own borders every year.

Migrant: Simply put, a migrant is someone who has moved from their birthplace. According to the United Nations a migrant is "any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties" to this new place. Some migrants move by choice (see immigrants below). Others have been forced to move by events that were beyond their control (see refugees below); another example is of forced migration is the involuntary migration of African slaves to the New world. Some migrants move across national borders and some move within national borders (like the Dust Bowl Migrants from Arkansas to California

or the Great African American Migration from the South to North). Still others are take annual cyclical patterns (like for seasonal farm work).

Immigrant: An immigrant is someone who moves to a new country with the *intent* live permanently. It is often implied that immigrants had some degree of choice in their (or their families) decision to move. Some immigrants are granted official Federal recognition (a variety of temporary visas; permanent residency; or citizenship) while many are in limbo or may not be granted official recognition leading to undocumented status. Within the same family, some members may be citizens and others may not.

Refugee: A refugee is someone who is forced to move to a new place (either within their own borders or to a new country) to escape danger or persecution. An increasing number of refugees are being forced to flee because of environmental disasters. In 1951, the United Nations created a convention that legally defined the word refugee and subsequent U.N. conventions elaborated on the responsibility of the international community toward refugees. Refugees may seek asylum; as they await official Federal or national recognition they are considered temporary asylum seekers.

If you are teaching in the U.S. context, we have linked to a [timeline of immigration](#) to the United States from the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation.

The Interview: Moving Stories

To prepare for the Moving Stories interview, pair the students into partners. You might consider having students with different backgrounds and stories pair with each other. This is a chance to hear someone's story that they don't know very well. It could be eye-opening for two students, who do not feel that they have very much in common, to listen, respectfully, to each other.

Ahead of time, have students download the app on the phone they will use for the interview. In pairs, have students go to the My Interviews tab and fill in the details that students wish to share. They will have to complete the short bio information and the release form. (This should not take more than 5 minutes).

Together have students review the interview questions and review the questions they will discuss. Knowing their students, some teachers may choose a standard set of questions for all students to answer or they may allow students to select a set of questions for themselves.

Not every student will be familiar with their family's history. To prepare for the interview ask them to prepare ahead of time (perhaps as a homework assignment) and consider:

- What do you know about your family's migration history?
- What would you like to know?
- Who can you ask?
- Where else can they turn from information?

How much time should you leave for the interviews themselves?

Depending on your schedule, you can have a productive interview allowing as little as 25 minutes. In that scenario, you would have each student be interviewed for 10 minutes. During that time they will be able to answer 1-3 questions.

However, we would recommend allowing at least 40 minutes. That way each student would be able to tell a more complete story.

Tips for conducting interviews:

- Find a quiet, well-lit room for the interview;
- For better quality, use a tripod and a lapel microphone. If you don't have a mic and tripod, find a place where you can steady your camera about an arm's length from the camera, at the proper level;
- Ask the interviewee to begin their answer with a full sentence;
- Do not cut off or redirect the interview in the middle of an answer and try not to make noise or respond to their comments while you are recording.

Sharing What We Heard

Before returning to a whole class discussion, in writing, ask the interviews to reflect on on comment or detail from their partner's story that they found particularly interesting or powerful that their partner will be comfortable with them sharing in a group.

In a large group consider allowing each student to share some of their response. Encourage students to share a quotation from their partner's words directly. A particularly moving teaching strategy you might adapt for this debrief is a [town hall circle](#).

Another way to encourage students to learn about each other's stories is to have them listen to a set number of answers, or interviews, from the Moving Stories website and to have them record their responses in a journal or in a class discussion. One strategy that might be particularly apt for this kind of debrief would be a fishbowl discussion. Here is a link to a description of the [fishbowl teaching strategy](#). As a prompt for the discussion, ask students:

- What similarities did they notice between the stories?
- What differences did they notice?
- What themes, dilemmas, or challenges did they notice from across the different stories?

Going Deeper

Storytelling is an essential part of making social change. [Ashoka](#), an organization dedicated to empowering change makers, believes there is a strong connection between our humanity, storytelling, and social change. In "A Changemakers Guide to Storytelling" they explain, "Humans are hard-wired for storytelling. We make sense of the world around us through narratives - they form a core part of our culture, belief systems, organizations and personal identities. They allow us to envision and showcase the change we want to see in the world."³

³ <https://www.changemakers.com/storytelling> (Accessed on Dec. 1, 2017)

Below is a lesson that you might use if you'd like to help your students move from sharing stories in an interview to taking action on an issue that is raised by their family story.

- Begin by asking students to reflect on the relationship between stories and civic action. Ask THEM to share all the ways that stories can be used as tools of social change. Can they think of examples of how people have used personal stories to inspire social change?;
- To help students focus their action civics project and develop a plan. Ask students to review the [Ten Questions for Change Makers](#). You can either introduce the questions ([they offer a free downloadable poster here](#)) or have students watch this [7-minute video](#) with Danielle Allen introducing the questions to teachers. Regardless of how you introduce the questions, review the questions with your students to make sure they are clear on their meaning;
- In groups, or on their own, ask your students to think about an aspect of a story they heard, either their own, their partner's, or from a classmate, they would like to see changed. It could be a policy, or it could be about an interaction between individuals and groups or another issue or experience related to migration;
- Individually, or in groups have students fill in this graphic organizer from page 15 of [the Ten Questions for Changemakers guide](#) to assist them in the development of an action civics plan;
- Have students return to their own story that they shared during their interview. Ask them, how might they use their story to help inspire the change they seek? Is there something in their story already that they can further develop, or do they want to add to their story? Give students time to prepare a three-minute presentation of their story that could help drive their action civics project forward;
- As an educator, you need to decide if you want to give students class time or credit to work on their project. Regardless of your choice, give students a chance to share

their refined presentations with their peers, either just those in your class or at an assembly or another school event with parents and members of the community.

For additional guidance in helping student's use their stories as part of a commentary on social issues, see the blog and video [Educating for Democracy from the Teaching Channel website.](#)