

ISLAND METHOD

GROUP STORY-MAKING
FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

“What does history
have to do with me?”

STORIES  FOR
SOCIETY

Transformative Storytelling

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STORIES FOR SOCIETY

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STORIES FOR SOCIETY:

- is a Swedish-based non-profit organization renewing the art of story-telling for learning and social transformation.
- seeks continually to develop and share its method for facilitating group story-making around complex social issues, particularly those that relate to inclusion and collaboration.
- was founded in 2010 after an extended period of consultation with experts concerning social need, concepts and tools.

THE ISLAND METHOD

Stories for Society's principal tool, was developed by experts over a decade and emerged from the desire to support **social and emotional health** among children and youth. With time, it became clear that the method was also useful to adult groups in different types of organizations. The method, which is documented in a detailed manual, provides a basic framework for creating common stories to address issues that may otherwise be difficult to discuss using a theoretical approach. The method integrates story-making in words, images and dramatization.

IT FACILITATES:

- a holistic examination of an issue/theme in order to reveal different perspectives, expand vocabulary and deepen understanding;
- the development of 21st Century skills, including creativity, critical thinking, empathy/compassion, leadership and teamwork.

Fantasy and play are integrated into the method in order to provide:

- a forum for coming up with new ideas;
- a safe space in which own experiences can be projected without harm to oneself or others.

The method is supportive of:

- school curricula: Teachers can use the method as a fun tool for deepening comprehension in various subject-matter areas and create cross-curricular projects. It provides the opportunity to work in a formative way with students' skills and meet each student at his/her level of development. The method is easily adapted to existing schedules and resources.
- organizational needs: internal and external communication issues can be addressed by creative and non-confrontational means.
- special needs: our projects have repeatedly demonstrated that the inclusive nature of our method allows for special needs students not only to participate, but also to shine.

FEEDBACK

Each of Stories for Society's projects integrates feedback mechanisms from stakeholders, which form the basis for evaluation. The results are wide-ranging, but overall point to increased willingness and capacity to collaborate, and internalization of the topic/theme. The absence of a culturally limited attitude in our approach can be attributed to our rules of engagement which emphasize possibility, openness and caring.

“A visitor comes to your island where you live. Your task, together with those in your community, is to take care of the visitor for one day so that he/she wishes to come back again.”

THE ISLAND METHOD

Below you will find a summary of the steps we followed in the story-making process in the video, and the facilitator's preparation notes for discussing the visitor. If you would like to deepen your understanding of story-making using "The Island Method," as this method is called, please contact Stories for Society for the full manual.

- 1. Introduction**
 - 2. Theme Immersion**
 - 3. Meet the Visitor**
 - 4. Rules of Engagement**
 - 5. Create the Episodes**
 - 6. Create the Story**
 - 7. Present the Story**
 - 8. Edit the Story**
 - 9. Reflect upon the Story**
- * Facilitator's preparation for discussion concerning the visitor**

1. INTRODUCTION

Provide a short overview of the exercise and theme for the session.

2. THEME IMMERSION

1. Choose the theme.
2. Cut out images from magazines, newspapers, etc. and create a collage. See our manual for other methods for theme immersion.
3. Share and explain collages in the group.
4. Facilitator: Note down key words and phrases.

This is a warm-up exercise for opening up to different perspectives of the theme, and at the same time building up a common vocabulary for discussing it in the story-making.

Note: Remember not to think too much and to choose images intuitively, i.e. images that you are drawn to when you think of the theme.

3. MEET THE VISITOR

Facilitator: Think of questions about the visitor, relevant to the chosen theme, that will help to form the character. For example:

- Abdul loses confidence in certain situations. What are they and why does he lose confidence?
- Abdul has a secret dream. What is it?
- Abdul is good at...
- What is his relationship with his parents like?

Facilitator: Draw a “make-over model” and note down all suggestions so that all can see.

The exercise establishes challenges related to the theme which the participants themselves find important.

Note: Allow the discussion to be open. Contradictory suggestions often create a complex character, making the story more credible.

* Please see the sample facilitator’s notes for discussing the visitor, in this case, Abdul, last page.

4. RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

- Everything is possible.
- We take care of one another.
- There are no “right” or “wrong” ideas.

The rules facilitate creativity and steer us away from limiting thoughts, providing a framework for the story-making and the story itself.

Note: It is important that all participants dare to dive into fantasy. By drawing upon the idea that everything is possible, new ideas applicable in reality emerge as metaphors. No ideas are ridiculous. By agreeing to take care of one another we avoid destructive suggestions.

5. CREATE THE EPISODES

- The story starts with the visitor coming to our island. Our goal is to have a good day together so that he/she would like to return to see us in future.
- Each of us comes up with independent episodes that could happen (possible or impossible). Draw, write and cut out images and texts from magazines.

This exercise trains creativity and openness.

Note: At this stage it is important not to think too much, in particular about how the episodes relate to one another. Don't let performance anxiety limit your effectiveness. Trust the process and express your ideas as they come.

6. CREATE THE STORY

- As a group, put the episodes together.
- Consider how the tension in the story builds up and relate it to the visitors' challenges.
- Listen to one another's suggestions and be open to adjusting ideas. See the individually created episodes as raw material.
- Facilitator or volunteer: write down the story as expressed by the group.

This exercise trains creativity, openness and collaboration.

Note: This step works best when several parallel paths are allowed/considered before the story falls into place. Be ready to “kill your darlings” and to turn your original ideas upside down. Synergy happens when we are prepared to cut away, add and form new ideas together, rather than just reach unhappy compromises.

7. PRESENT THE STORY

Reflect upon the following:

- Does the story have a clear beginning and end?
- Does the story have a clear plot?
- How would you like to present the story? Read for this group/another group? Dramatize or create a short story-book with text and images?

This exercise trains collaboration, rhetorical and author skills. Dramatization can help to integrate and deepen thoughts and feelings relating to the theme.

Note: What is your ambition level for the presentation? If the goal is solely to work on a complex question rather than to create something to share with others, then a rough sketch of the story with images and episodes might suffice.

8. EDIT THE STORY

- Review the story once more and fine-tune the details.
- Ensure that it is relevant to the theme, and adjust episodes accordingly.

This exercise trains an important dimension of story-making: to return to the story, consider it from different perspectives and improve it.

9. REFLECT UPON THE STORY

Discuss:

- What strategies did we use to address the theme and take care of the character in the story?
- What can we learn from the story?
- What metaphors and episodes relate to reality?

This exercise trains analysis and provides new ways for understanding our theme.

Note: Take a break from the story before reflecting on what it has to say. A little distance from it will help you to gain new perspectives. Don't expect to come up with answers only. The process can and should lead to new questions which, in turn, lead into new story-making processes.

* FACILITATOR'S PREPARATION FOR DISCUSSION CONCERNING THE VISITOR:

Below are notes that we created in order to facilitate the discussion about Abdul, the visitor in our demonstration video. Prior to the discussion of the visitor, the facilitator should give some thought to the visitor's basic narrative and some questions that can help the group to discuss this character.

THEME:

What does the past/history have to do with me?

THE VISITOR:

Abdul comes from Iraq. His father's parents came here from the war. His grandfather was blinded, he thinks in the war, but doesn't know how. He isn't allowed to ask either his parents or grandparents about it. In school all have been given an assignment to talk about where their families come from. Abdul feels angry and doesn't know what to do about this assignment. He feels embarrassed and doesn't want to think about the past and his family. He only wants to think about the future and not think about anything to do with Iraq.

General suggested questions about the visitor:

- What is Abdul's family situation? Who are the members of his family?
- Where does Abdul live?
- What are Abdul's hobbies?
- Abdul sometimes has a hard time communicating. Why? What upsets Abdul? What makes him especially angry?
- What is Abdul worried about and most afraid of?

- Are there any particular situations that Abdul avoids? Why?
- What triggers make him 'overreact'?
- What makes him uncertain about himself and his abilities?
- What kind of obstacles does Abdul feel are hindering him?
- What makes Abdul feel good about himself? What makes him happy and when does he feel at his best?
- Abdul has a secret dream. What is it?
- Abdul is particularly good at...
- Abdul has a secret talent. What is it?
- If Abdul had a magical wand, he would...
- If Abdul could...he would...

For special subjects such as, for example, "tolerance," develop specific questions:

- What types of people does Abdul like to be with? Why?
- What types of people does Abdul prefer to avoid? Why?
- Sometimes Abdul feels he doesn't really fit in. Why? How does he cope? How does Abdul feel about things and people that are different from him?