

Storytelling Curriculum

[A Note From Dr. Monteleone](#)

[Storytelling Workshop Lesson Plan](#)

[Week One – Introducing Storytelling](#)

[Week Two – Parts of a Story](#)

[Week Three – Describing](#)

[One-on-One Sessions \(Between weeks 3 and 4\)](#)

[Week Four - Storytelling as a Performance](#)

[Week Five - Final Dress Rehearsal](#)

[Closing Activity Example](#)

[Supplemental Material](#)

[More Resource](#)

About: Dr. Becca Monteleone is a director at [Detour Company Theatre](#) and Assistant Professor of Disability Studies at the University of Toledo. She has been engaged with inclusive performance art with and by artists with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) for over a decade. She created this curriculum for a five-week storytelling workshop and adapted it for virtual performances. We invite you to pick and choose elements that interest you, or simply use it as a resource to learn more about storytelling.

Each of the five sessions includes objectives, activities and homework. It was originally created for adults with I/DD, but can be adapted for a variety of artists. There is also supplemental material included that can help you exercise your storytelling skills. Special thanks to Allison Weeks (Allison also provided the template for the What, So What, Now What activity), Natalie Zanin, ArtStream, Inc and Historic Strolls and Cary Johnston, Shopworks Theatre Company for reviewing this curriculum.

A Note From Dr. Monteleone: True stories, no matter what they are about, are deeply personal. Sharing your story can make you feel vulnerable, so cultivating a workshop environment that honors all artists is vital. Even though all artists in our workshop had both performance experience and experience working with one another, it was important to focus time and energy in the first several sessions on creating a community built on mutual respect and care. If the artists in your workshop do not know each other, you may want to spend more time on introductory games, collaborative activities (like the rules of engagement) and talking through what it means to have a safe space to create and perform.

Some artists may choose to tell stories about difficult situations. Some artists may choose to tell stories about funny moments. Some artists may choose to tell stories about the morning before they came to the workshop. All of these stories have value and should be cultivated with equal care. Likewise, some artists will tell longer stories, while others may tell a story that only lasts a few sentences. Artists may verbally speak, use sign language or an AAC, or choose some other mode of communication. Artists may read their stories, memorize them, have a support person prompt each line, or choose to express themselves in some other way. What is most important here is cultivating a space that allows for authentic expression, rather than attempting to fit many different perspectives into a single mode of storytelling.

In Summer 2020, the workshop was completely virtual, and the performance was done via pre-recorded stories edited and presented on Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. You can adjust this template as needed to reflect live performance.

The lesson plan below outlines a five-session workshop with 15 artists. Activities from this workshop could be selected to create a one-day storytelling bootcamp or augmented for a year-long project. The suggested times for each activity may be too long for your workshop, or you may need to double them to accommodate different numbers of artists or modes of learning. For groups with less performance experience, you may think about doing a “Public

Speaking 101” session or building in activities about projection, stage directions, and expression on stage.

Making Modifications: As with any workshop, you may need to modify and adapt activities for the artists creating stories. Some adaptations may include:

- Presenting information in more than one way. For example, provide written instructions, verbally reiterate them, and provide pictures and diagrams to further explain.
- Modifying physical and sensory activities. For example, when doing stretches, offer variations for all bodies. When doing activities that traditionally rely on sight or hearing, offer alternative examples. Shift away from talking about "seeing" and "hearing" and toward "noticing."
- Including additional facilitators to provide 1-on-1 or floating support for artists.
- Sending out the week's agenda in advance or sharing it at the beginning of each session. Consider also using a visual schedule or timer.

STORYTELLING WORKSHOP LESSON PLAN

Timeline: 5 week, 1.5 hr per week sessions (+ performance = 6 week start to finish)

- NOTE: Between weeks 3 and 4, there were also additional 30 minute one-on-one sessions with each artist. Overview of these sessions is included in the lesson plan below.

WEEK ONE – INTRODUCING STORY-TELLING

Objective: Introduce story-telling as performance and establish goals of workshop

Materials: Writing materials to record suggested rules (Facilitator only).

Activities:

- **Warm Ups (15 min)**
 - Have everyone introduce themselves, explain while they're interested in storytelling, and answer the following question:
 - What **FOOD** describes you?
 - You may want to introduce this game with an example, "I feel like French Toast today, all warm and sugary! What food do you feel like?"
- **Creating our Rules of Engagement (15 min)**
 - Collaboratively create your workshop rules together. Use prompts "how do you think we should treat each other?" "What rules do you think are important" Prompt for respectful listening, constructive feedback, etc. as needed.
 - Create a poster or handout with workshop rules for future sessions (see attached for example). Ask artists to review/remember as many rules as possible at the beginning of each session. If artists create new rules throughout the session, add them to the poster.
- **Introduction to Storytelling (20 min)**
 - For each question, facilitate a short discussion among artists. Don't feel like you need to feed answers or that there is any one correct answer. Contribute to the conversation rather than lecture.
 - **Guiding Questions:**
 - What is story-telling?
 - How is story-telling different from acting?
 - Why do we tell stories about ourselves?
 - Start thinking about what you might want an audience to know about you?
 - What might people not know about you?
 - Have you ever been underestimated? Did someone think you couldn't do something?

- Was there a time you were lonely? Was there a time you found friends or a special community?
 - Was there a time you were brave? Scared? Powerful?
- **One Sentence Memoirs (30 min)**
 - What is a memoir (take answers)? Memoirs are stories about ourselves. They are true events. A memoir can be about one moment, it *does not have to be your whole life story*.
 - To practice telling stories about ourselves, we're going to practice by creating very short one sentence memoirs. Pick a single time or event.
 - For each person sharing, take 2-3 responses from rest of session (prompt "What did you notice?")
 - A Note on Adaptation: You can adapt this game to be one word, a phrase, a drawn picture, etc.
- **Review and Prep for Next Week (10 min)**
 - Take questions, talk about what we learned, sneak peek of next week.
 - For a template for reviewing the session, see the Closing Activity Example at the end of this document.

Homework: Come with one or two ideas for your final performance piece.

WEEK TWO – PARTS OF A STORY

Objective: Identify the major parts of a story. Choose story to write your monologue around.

Materials: Parts of My Story (and writing utensils if beginning worksheet during session).

Activities:

- **Warm up (5 min)**
 - Physical stretch warm up (take suggestions for each stretch) - be sure to provide verbal descriptions and to reiterate that everyone should do whatever is best for their bodies.
- **Review Workshop Rules (5 min)**
- **Parts of a Story (30 min)**
 - Start by asking artists if they can name any of the parts of a story.
 - Review the following parts, asking artists to describe each before you provide explanation:
 - Setting: Where and when story takes place
 - Characters: Who is in the story
 - Problem/Conflict: What is the *problem* characters have to solve
 - Solution: How do characters solve the problem
 - Use a story all artists are familiar with as an example (i.e. Goldilocks) - have artists identify all the above elements in example story

- You can also add a **button** or **call to action** at the end of your story - this is a line that tells the audience why you told your story, why it is important, or what they should do with what they've learned. Think about **why you want the audience to know your story**.
- **Individual Sharing (40 min)**
 - Each person will give a brief overview of their chosen story. Work together with a full group to identify the four story elements. After every 3-4 people, take a stretch break.
- **Review and Prep for next week (10 min)**
 - Review, take questions, and distribute homework

Homework: Complete worksheet on story elements (see attached)

WEEK THREE – DESCRIBING

Objective: Learn the basics of descriptive story-telling, including dialogue. Incorporate description into story

Materials: Recording device (phone, tablet, etc.) if recording stories to transcribe.

Activities:

- **Warm up and review (15 min)**
 - Warm up game: Each person introduces themselves with a body movement. Everyone else repeats that body movement while saying “Hi, [Name]!” Be sure to provide verbal descriptions and allow for/facilitate adaptations
 - Review workshop rules and earlier sessions
- **Introducing dialogue and descriptions (15 min)**
 - Explain dialogue
 - Have artists model dialogue from familiar story (Goldilocks works well here. For example, have one person act as Goldilocks and another act as one of the bears. Set the scene where Goldilocks wakes up. After two artists do a few lines back and forth, have a third artist restate their conversation as “Goldilocks said...Papa Bear said...”)
 - Explain how to provide descriptions. Be sure to not just focus on visual descriptors. Encourage artists to think about taste, smell, feeling, and hearing as well as visual descriptions
- **Description Game (10 min)**
 - Have each artist describe an object in the room without naming it. Encourage describers to think about texture, smell, and sound as well as appearance. Have everyone else guess what the object is. If guessers don't get it right away, encourage your describer to provide more details.
- **Describing and Dialogue in Your Story (40 min)**

- Go around and have each artist tell their chosen story, including at least ONE description and ONE line of dialogue. After each story, ask other artists what they noticed.
- **Review and Prep for Next Week (10 min)**
 - Review and discuss scheduling one-on-ones

ONE-ON-ONE SESSIONS (BETWEEN WEEKS 3 AND 4)

- These sessions should focus on drafting written versions of each story. Some participants may write and have their own written drafts. Encourage them to send them to you in advance.
- Start by reviewing the story elements as they relate to each story
- Have the participant tell the story fully as if they were performing it for an audience. Either record the session or write down as much as possible in their own words
- Ask clarifying and probing questions as needed (e.g. “Why did you want to go to that place?” “Can you say a few sentences about why acting is important to you.”)
- Discuss any major problems with the story or story structure.
- After the session, write up the story draft and send it to participant. Stories between 150-500 words are ideal. Encourage them to read it out loud and make changes as needed.

WEEK FOUR - STORYTELLING AS PERFORMANCE

Objective: Learn about different performance tips and practice final monologues.

Materials: Copies of draft stories for all artists.

Space Setup: Chairs in rows facing "stage" area.

Activities:

- **Warm up and review (15 min)**
 - Physical and Vocal warmups (have artists lead)
 - Review workshop rules and earlier sessions.
- **Performing Our Pieces (15 min)**
 - Review how story-telling is different from acting (Week 1)
 - Talk about the various ways artists can perform their story, including reading the monologue, memorizing it, using notes/bullet points, improvising, having someone help with prompting, etc. There is no right or wrong way to perform these stories, it is all about scaffolding.
 - Elements of Performance (For each element, come up with an example from one of the artists stories that everyone can try out):

- Acting out your story - using your body or voice. Examples include miming actions, turning to look at other people in the story, using different voices for different characters
 - Pacing - how fast or slow you tell your story. Creating pauses after dramatic or funny moments
 - Projection - changing pitch and volume for different parts of the story
 - Facial expressions
- Ask artists for other examples. Have artists give examples of good and bad presentation styles (facing away from audience, projecting v. whispering, etc.)
- **Practice Run (50 min)**
 - Practice each monologue fully.
 - After each piece, take 2-4 pieces of thoughtful feedback from other artists (prompt: “What did you notice?”)
- **Review and Prep for Next Week (10 min)**
 - Talk about filming options (film by self, record on Zoom during session next week, etc.)
 - Talk also about setting up your “recording space” to be somewhere where you don’t need to hold your phone or camera, and your full face and shoulders can be visible
 - Set order for next week

WEEK FIVE - FINAL DRESS REHEARSAL

Objective: Review monologues and provide final feedback.

Materials: Copies of finalized stories for all artists.

Activities:

- **Warm up (15 min)**
 - Let artists pick or provide new game
 - Review rules of engagement
- **Practice Run (60 min)**
 - Remind everyone of run order. Start recording if needed.
 - Run through each story and take 2-4 pieces of thoughtful feedback from other artists (prompt: “What did you notice?”)
- **Review and Prep for Next Week (15 min)**
 - Review session
 - Gather feedback of overall experience
 - Discuss details for next week’s performance

CLOSING ACTIVITY EXAMPLE

Closing Discussion/Activity Evaluation: “What, So What, Now What” Processing Model

“What?”

- How did you feel during this activity?
- Did you like this activity?
- What did you learn from this activity?

“So What?”

- Why is it important to know what we learned today when we are storytelling?

“Now What?”

- How will you include what you learned today into your storytelling?
- How can you work on storytelling outside of these activities?

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

Example of Collaborative Classroom Rule

Parts of My Story

Name: _____

Story Idea: _____

Setting and Characters

Conflict or Problem

Resolution

What do you want the audience to take away?

More resources:

For storytelling inspiration

- [Stonebelt Arc's "I Am You"](#) performance showcase
- Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities [storytelling project](#) and [podcast](#)
- [Cow Tipping Press](#), a Minneapolis-based press that publishes a yearly zine by writers with DD.
- [Sprout Film Festival](#)

Inclusive Theatre and Performance

- [Phamaly Theatre Company](#) (Denver, CO)
- [Artstream, Inc.](#) (DC Metro Area)
- [The DisAbility Project from Uppity Theatre Company](#) (St. Louis, MO)
- [AdaptiveWorks](#) (Peoria, AZ)
- [Detour Company Theatre](#) (Scottsdale, AZ)

Note: There are many inclusive theatre and performance companies across the country. This is just a small sampling for readers wishing to learn more.

Other reading

- *The "We Have Human Rights" [handbook](#) for people with developmental disabilities from the Harvard Project on Disability*
- *"[Tools for Building Power Through Personal Stories](#)" from The Arc*
- *[10 Principles of Disability Justice](#) from Sins Invalid, a performance arts collective centering the experiences of disabled artists of color and LGBTQ/variant artists*

[Disability Visibility: First-Person Stories from the 21st Century](#) edited by Alice Wong.
[Plain language summary](#) also available, by Sara Luterman

[About Us: Essays from the Disability Series of the New York Times](#) edited by Peter Catapano and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson

Resources for those curious about journalism and disability

[National Center on Disability and Journalism](#) housed at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University in Phoenix

[NCDJ Disability Language Style Guide](#)

[“I’m Not Broken: What this Washington Reporter with Autism Wants You to Know”](#) by Eric Garcia, The Atlantic