

The Power of Storytelling

Grades 4–12

Objective

Using an everyday, meaningful object as a primary source, students will learn how to tell a story as a creative way to express emotions, create cohesion, and build community and connection.

Materials — [Worksheets available on Google Slides](#)

- [“Welcome to the Skirball”](#) lesson from the Visions and Values Curriculum
- A meaningful everyday item in a student’s life
- “The Power of Storytelling” worksheet
- “Self-Reflection” worksheet (optional)

Class Activity

1. If you haven’t already, review the [“Welcome to the Skirball”](#) introduction, which features primary sources related to this lesson, and information about the Skirball and its permanent exhibition, *Visions and Values: Jewish Life from Antiquity to America*.
2. Watch the seven-minute video [“Classroom Skeleton: Whose Bones are These?”](#) from *All Things Considered* with your students. Discuss with your students what made this story compelling. Focus on the storytelling elements emotion, memory, connection, characters, drama, tension, etc. Ask students one or more of these questions and lead a class discussion:

What are some of your favorite stories?

What makes a story powerful?

Why do we remember some stories better than others?

What are the different ways we can tell a story? (Visually, verbally, written, etc.)

3. Drawing on the storytelling elements previously discussed, each student will tell a story about the everyday object they selected. Break into small groups for this activity.
4. Each student will present their story about their object to the class.
5. Together, take five minutes to identify common themes from the stories. Use the following questions to get the conversation started:

Are there any shared themes?

Is there a story students heard that they connected with and have more questions about?

6. Take five to ten minutes for reflection using the following prompt: **Why are primary sources useful storytelling devices?** Come back together as a group to share your thoughts.

Optional: Use the Skirball’s “[Seek Learning](#)” lesson plan, which focuses on storytelling through interviews and art-making to jump-start the student activity.

Student Instructions

Use the worksheet to write an original story about a meaningful object of your choice or interview someone at home about an object that is meaningful to them, taking into account what you learned about storytelling with the entire class. See the “[Seek Learning](#)” lesson plan for interview tools and resources.

Share Out

Students will present these stories using various methods, including, but not limited to:

- Written word (comic strip, story, poem, song, etc.)
- Podcast
- Video
- Presentation

These various methods address the emotional, cognitive, and communication needs of students.

Curriculum Connections

Common Core English Language Arts and Literacy Standards

SL.4.4, SL.6.6, SL.8.5, SL.6.2, SL.8.1, SL.9-10.4, SL.9-10.5, SL.9-10.6, SL.11-12.3, SL.11-12.6

Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards

DI.3-5.6, DI.3-5.8, DI.6-8.6

[VAPA Media Arts Standards](#)

4.MA:Cr1, 6.MA:Cr2, 5.MA:Cr3, 7.MA:Cr3, 8.MA:Pr5, Prof.MA:Pr6, 6.MA:Re7, 5.MA:Re9, 5.MA:Cr3, 7.MA:Cr3, 8.MA:Pr5, Prof.MA:Pr6, Prof.MA:Cn10

Resources

“[Teaching Podcasting: A Curriculum Guide for Educators](#)” from NPR
Step-by-step lessons that make the podcasting process easier

“[Hunting for Sound](#)” from NPR
Helpful tips for best practice when recording audio

“[How to Sound Great](#)” from NPR
A short video guide to making your podcast sound great

Learn about making a podcast in “[The Students’ Podcast](#)” from NPR

Connect with Us

Our educators are here to help! If you have questions about this curriculum or would like to share your students’ writing or artwork with us, please email teacherprograms@skirball.org.

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About the Teaching Artist

Elissa Nadworny is a correspondent at National Public Radio (NPR) covering higher education. In 2022, she spent several months in Ukraine covering the war with Russia, with a special focus on the effect of war on children and families. She also guest hosts NPR shows such as *All Things Considered* and *Weekend Edition*. Her work has won several awards, including a 2018 James Beard Award for a story about the Chinese American population in the Mississippi Delta, a 2017 Edward R. Murrow Award for excellence in innovation, and a 2020 Gracie Award for a story about student parents in college.

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Name:

Object:

Where is it from?

Who is it from (if applicable)?

What values does this object represent?

What makes it important to you and why?

Name:

Self-Reflection

Reflect on your experience with the activity you completed and share what you learned about yourself, your values, your traditions, or your community.

Three things I learned about myself:

Two things I learned from hearing someone else's story:

One thing I am curious to learn more about:

My greatest challenge with this activity was:

After completing the activity, I am most proud of:

A lasting impact I hope to have on my community is: