

## Tool Nine: Story Circles

DIFFICULTY: ●●○○○

FOR: ORGANIZATIONS

A Story Circle is a structured gathering where a group of 5–15 people sit in a circle to share personal stories under the guidance of a facilitator. Each Story Circle is tailored to a specific purpose and theme, fostering deep listening and meaningful connections. It promotes the art of storytelling and encourages participants to reflect, empathize, and engage with the meditative quality of dialogue. Story Circles are valuable for community building, cultural exploration, and self-expression.

### BASICS:

**When:** Story Circles typically occur after a group of 5–15 people has met and socialized, such as during a potluck dinner or similar gathering.

**Time Needed:** A minimum of 60 minutes is recommended for a Story Circle session.

**Materials:** Participants may use paper and pencils for taking notes during the session.

**Objective:** Story Circles aim to create a space for individuals to share personal stories drawn from their own experiences.

**The objectives may vary based on the specific purpose of each circle, which could include reinforcing cultural identity, examining issues of race and class, identifying community concerns, or introducing a community storytelling project. The primary objective is to promote storytelling, active listening, and connection among participants.**

### STEPS:

#### 1. Pre-Circle Socializing:

Before the Story Circle, the participants meet and socialize at an informal event or gathering.

#### 2. Defining a Story:

A story in this context is a narrative of events derived from the teller's personal experience. It can include memories, dreams, reflections, or moments in time, typically featuring a beginning, middle, and end, along with characters and atmosphere.

#### 3. What a Story Is Not:

Storytelling in this context is not a lecture, argument, debate, or intellectualization, although these elements may be part of a story.

#### 4. The Facilitator's Role:

Each Story Circle is led by a trained facilitator. The facilitator's role is to clarify the circle's purpose and theme, explain the rules, emphasize the importance of deep listening, encourage participants not to overthink their stories, ensure time management, and guide the circle's flow.

#### 5. Storytelling Process:

The circle begins with the facilitator sharing a story that sets the tone. Participants take turns sharing their stories or passing, with the order either clockwise or counterclockwise. After all have spoken or passed, the rotation continues for those who passed. Participants may choose to share stories inspired by other participant's tales.

#### 6. Reflection and Closure:

After sharing stories, participants reflect on the experience, sharing observations and comments. Some circles may conclude with a group song or poem to bring closure to the session.

#### THINGS TO CONSIDER:

##### \* **Story Circle Rules:**

There are no observers (only participants), the facilitator is also a participant and also shares a story, participants speak only when it's one's turn and maintain deep listening throughout.

##### \* **Sensitive Topics:**

Facilitators should exercise judgment when painful stories arise, ensuring the well-being of participants. If necessary, they can pause, offer support, or refer distressed individuals to appropriate professionals.

##### \* **Recording and Permission:**

Story Circles are not typically recorded without participants' consent. If stories may inform the development of a play or similar project, participants' permission must be obtained.

[Source: Roadside Theater](#)

