

We Choose All of Us Story Exchange





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We choose a world where everyone is valued, where everyone is safe, and where everyone can thrive. It all starts by telling your story.

Everyone has a story. When was the last time you told your story? When was the last time someone told you their story? How can storytelling lead to empathy and understanding?

Telling other people's stories using the first-person point-of-view is a way to truly put yourself in another person's shoes and practice empathy. A story is the shortest distance between two people!

We Choose All of Us Story Exchange is inspired by the ideas from Colum McCann and Narrative 4's Story Exchange. To find out more, please visit Narrative 4's website at <https://narrative4.com>.

3 easy steps!

1. Choose a prompt for your story.
2. Find a partner and share your story. Then your partner tells your story as you, and you tell their story as them. No notes, not reading, just telling.
3. Reflect on your experience.

Step 1 – Choose a prompt for your story

Choose from and respond to one of the following prompts to get started:

- **Choosing Love** – We need to love ourselves and each other, especially our differences, and focus on that connection more than on the anger and fear that can feel so prevalent in our world. Tell a story from your life of a time when you chose love over anger or fear. Where were you when this happened? What did it make you understand?

We Choose All of Us

We are a people who choose
A world where everyone is valued,
where everyone is safe,
where everyone can thrive.
A world where love is love, and
kindness is everything.
Nothing less than this.
Every day we choose love,
and in this love, everyone belongs
to beloved community.
Everyone.

- **Belonging to Community** - We all have a deep need to be safe, belong, and be part of a community. Knowing and expanding the group of people you feel connected to is powerful. Who are your people? Share a time when you felt unconditional belonging and fully accepted for who you are.
- **Stronger Together** - We are more similar than we are different, yet the ways we are different make us special and give us a unique perspective on the world. Our differences make us stronger together. Exploring and celebrating our unique differences, across identities of gender, race, etc., can help us shift our relationship to difference and see it as a strength instead of something to fear. Share a story about a time when you experienced how our differences and unique experiences made us stronger together.

Step 2 – Find a partner, tell your story; then exchange!

- Everyone needs to find or be assigned a partner for the story exchange. It works best with someone you don't know very well. Each partner should have 10 to 15 minutes to tell their story. Practice deep listening. When your partner is telling their story, listen without distraction — don't worry about what you're going to say next, or what's going on around the room — be fully present while your partner is telling their story. Paying close attention is how we honor each other's stories.
- Once you and your partner have had a chance to listen to each other's story, join two to four other partner groups (the ideal number for the story share is 10 people in a group along with a teacher/trusted adult to help hold the space) and have each member of the larger group tell their partner's story using the first-person point-of-view. Each person should have 3 to 4 minutes to share their partner's story.
- Simply put, I tell you my story. You tell me your story. When we gather in a group, I tell your story as you. You tell my story as me. When you tell your partner's story, start by introducing **yourself as your partner**.
- Be sure to have a teacher or trusted adult as a facilitator throughout the group exchange.

Step 3 – Reflect upon your story exchange as a group

Immediately upon finishing the story exchange, debrief as a group how it went by starting with the prompt: "Choose one word to describe how you feel right now." Go around the circle and give everyone who wants a chance to share time to do so. If you have additional time, continue the debrief by having your group members respond to the following questions:

- a. How did it feel to tell your partner's story?
- b. What was it like to hear your story told by someone else?
- c. How could this be something you use in your own life, or in your classroom?
- d. To end, turn to your partner and say — my wish for you is ... and what your wish for your partner is.



Facilitator's Guide for the Story Exchange

Storytelling is a powerful way for people to connect with each other. It also asks students to be honest and vulnerable in the face of their story and their partner's story. Establishing trust between the partners and having students feel like they are in a safe(r) space and a brave space to share is a way to build community in the classroom. Setting these parameters from the start is the best way for this story share to be a success. The following are ideas on how to set your students up for a successful partner story share.

1. Start by modeling a story exchange. Either model your own story exchange with another person, show the student video that models a partner story exchange (www.engagingvoices.org), or watch the Narrative 4 video on what the story exchange does (<https://narrative4.com/about/>). Ask the students what they noticed about the sample story exchange, and address any questions or concerns they have.
2. Remind them that the story they tell their partner will be shared by their partner, out loud, using the first-person point-of-view to a larger group of people.
3. Encourage them to share stories that are meaningful to their lives, and that they are comfortable having another person share out loud in the class.
4. Remind the students that stories shared need to stay in the classroom. The story exchange requires trust and openness.
5. Consider asking for community agreements that students affirmatively agree to about what happens to the stories once they are shared. Emphasize developing trust and honoring each other and their stories by holding the stories within in the context of the story share. Remind them that their partner's stories are not their stories to share outside of the classroom.

How to Get Started:

1. The partner story exchange is an exercise in which individuals are randomly paired off and each partner tells a story that illuminates one of the prompts:
 - **Choosing Love** – Describing a time you chose love over anger or fear.
 - **Belonging to Community** – Thinking about and responding to the question, "Who are your people?" Or sharing a time when you felt unconditional belonging.
 - **Stronger Together** – Celebrating our differences across identities of gender, race, etc.
2. Explain to your students that the partner story exchange is about practicing deep listening. When one partner is telling their story, encourage students to listen closely, and if it helps them to remember, take notes. Some people are comfortable listening without taking notes, and that's fine too.
3. The partner story exchange is told, not read. Talk about this ahead of time so there are no surprises. After hearing their partner's story, they will tell their partner's story from memory.

Timing:

Preparation - One or two days before Story Share (30 minutes)

1. Introduce the We Choose All of Us Story Exchange purpose to build connection and go over the process.
2. Copy and handout pages 2 and 3 of this guide to the students or write the prompts on the board. Ask students to reflect on the prompts, select a prompt, and begin to identify a story that they want to share.
3. Optional — model a story share or show the story share video.
4. Warm up activity — quick story share practice (10 minutes):
 - a. With the person sitting across from you, tell your partner what you had for dinner the night before and then have the partners share — practice deep listening — have the partners introduce themselves as each other and tell what they had for dinner as if it were their own story—use the first person.

Story Exchange (50-75 minutes; adjust size of group for the story exchange based on time available)

1. Reminders — All stories stay in this room. Your partner's story is not for you to share with others, this is a place free of judgement. It's a safe space and a brave space.
2. Telling Your Story — Pair off — each partner group gets 20-30 minutes to exchange stories — 10-15 minutes per person.
3. Sharing Your Partner's Story — After the partner groups have told each other their stories and are ready for the story exchange, join one to four other partner groups (the ideal number for the story exchange is 10 people in a group, along with a teacher/trusted adult to help hold the space). This is the group that will do the story share together. The telling piece of the partner story should last about 3 to 4 minutes. This means that each partner gets 3 to 4 minutes to tell the other partner's story (12 -30 minutes).
4. Have partners sit next to each other.
5. Take a minute to pass out an index card — on one side write down their hope for the story exchange, on the other side write down their fear of the story exchange—pass the paper two people to your left and share the fears first, then the hopes

6. Acknowledge that these fears could happen, that it's fine. And remind them these stories stay in this circle. They don't go out of the circle because they're not anyone else's story to share. Have them crumple the pieces of paper up, and throw them on the floor.
7. Then, choose a partner group to start—the first teller will introduce themselves as their partner and tell the story in first person.
8. After each person tells their partner's story, thank the teller and move on to the next person.
9. The story is told, not read. It's all done from memory.
10. Debrief as a large group immediately after the partner story share.

Debrief Questions:

1. Immediately upon finishing the story exchange, debrief as a group by starting with the prompt: "Choose one word to describe how you feel right now." Go around the circle and give everyone who wants a chance to share. If there's time, or on the next day, have students also respond to the following questions:
 - a. How did it feel to tell your partner's story?
 - b. What was it like to hear your story told by someone else?
 - c. How could this be something you use in your own life or in your classroom?
 - d. To end, ask your students to turn to your partner and say - "my wish for you is."

Things to think about:

1. When thinking about partner groups, encouraging students to partner with someone they don't know very well works best. Or, randomly partnering up students can work as well. Count off the number of students in your class, divide that number in half (for example, if you've got 28 students, on small pieces of paper make two sets of numbers from 1-14), and have the students come up and pick a piece of paper. They'll find their partner by seeing who has the same number.
2. When putting students into partner groups, be sure to create a safe(r) environment. If that means choosing partners for the students, do that. Otherwise, numbers work well.
3. Modeling is helpful. If you can find someone to be your partner and practice doing a partner story share in front of your students, it will give them an idea of the expectations.
4. Spend time brainstorming ideas for possible stories students could tell connected to the themes — it's hard to come up with a story right on the spot and this may help students feel more comfortable with the activity.
5. You know your students. If you've been together since the beginning of the year, encourage them to really stop and reflect on a story they can share that addresses one of the themes. If your students aren't very well acquainted, go with one of the themes that will be easier for them to connect with.
6. The story exchange is a way to build community and empathy. Students may be hesitant at the start. Remind them they won't be telling their stories in front of the whole group, but in a small group of four to ten.
7. It is recommended to have an adult or another teacher with the small groups during the story share. It's important that the students feel safe telling their stories.