

# Stories That Matter

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We all have a story. It's part of what makes us human, and part of how we connect. It's that story that helps us have empathy, not sympathy, but true empathy, for others. Stories tell of our success, and our challenges. They tell of what we've overcome, and what has overtaken us.

Educators might consider helping their students find people with stories that inspire, tell the reality of life, or just share an experience. The practice is the basis of projects like StoryCorps (<https://storycorps.org/>), This I Believe, (<https://thisibelieve.org/>), The Moth (<https://themoth.org/stories>) and more. And for teachers of English Language Arts, stories can become the basis of helping students meet multiple provisions of the Common Core State Standards.

Teachers might consider some of the following ideas in helping their students produce stories that matter:

- Provide models! Let students explore StoryCorps, Letters Live on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/c/LettersLive>), This I Believe, and more.
- Teach empathy. Help students talk about what it means, why it matters.
- Help students understand what a "story" consists of.
- Talk about what makes a story. Start a conversation around a topic, like:
  - What makes a story worth telling?
  - Are all stories worth telling?
  - How do we know what to include?
  - How do we best share a story?
  - What's the value of media: video, audio, photo story?
- Help students explore possibilities. Encourage them to talk with family members, neighbors, friends. Sometimes the best stories come from people around us.
- Depending on your location, you might work with civic organizations, veteran and senior groups.
- Young people have stories worth telling as well. Consider students who are new immigrants, young musicians, dramatists, others. Imagine a young actor's story of overcoming stage fright, someone discovering a passion, composing a first piece of music, finding the value of teammates, what it means to win a championship, or lose.
- Don't be lulled by the idea that stories need to come from people who society sees as "successful." People who aren't achieving their dreams have a compelling story to tell.
- Work with students on listening. Often when we talk about interviewing, we focus on what questions to ask. Sometimes though, the key is to let there be silence, and listen as the story emerges.
- Create a culture of collaboration, revision, and respect for the work. Stories evolve, and sometimes the telling of them may become overwhelming when the flow hasn't yet emerged. Help instill a sense of patience as the story comes through.
- At the start of the process, help students determine where these stories will go, who will see them, and how they will be presented. Share conversations about the presentation with the owners of these stories, the subjects, and include them in showings.