

# OUR COLLECTIVE FUTURE STORY CIRCLE GUIDE



## **We choose all of us.**

We are people who choose  
a world where everyone is valued  
where everyone is safe  
where everyone can thrive.

We commit to bringing forth a world rooted in  
interdependence, resilience, and regeneration.

We commit to weaving together our stories and our hearts,  
finding our way back seven generations to our ancestors,  
seven generations forward to our descendants,  
to repair the harm and heal the wounds that constrain our  
dreams.

We will create the world we want to live into now  
through community,  
and love.

## OUR COLLECTIVE FUTURE STORY CIRCLE

A story is the shortest distance between two people, but the practice of storytelling is something many of us have lost. We need to reclaim it.

The purpose of the *Our Collective Future Story Circle* is to strengthen community interconnectedness and shine light on the future we choose now. Hearing each other's stories and telling our own will help us rediscover and rebuild our relationships to each other and move us towards collective thriving.

Transformation can occur in moments when we gather; our collective humanity deepens when we gather with purpose. Through stories, we expand our capacity for empathy, build authentic connection to others, and cultivate hope for a world rooted in interdependence, resilience, and regeneration.

We are inviting you to gather groups of students – clubs, classrooms or school-wide - to share stories and learn from each other.

## PURPOSE TO PROMPTS

*Our Collective Future Story Circle* is a way to transform our collective community consciousness and live into the fullest expression of our humanity. Here are the themes and prompts for the *Our Collective Future Story Circle*. As a facilitator, we encourage you to role model and share your story first. Select the prompt that energizes you and your students the most!

### **Stories of Our Collective Future**

- Share the story of what is possible when we find real joy inside ourselves.
- Share the story of what is possible when we love ourselves and each other authentically.
- Share the story of what is possible when we are fully present with ourselves.
- Share the story of what is possible when we each find our sense of purpose.
- Share the story of what is possible when we are free to be our whole selves.
- Share the story of what is possible when we listen to each other's stories.
- Share the story of what is possible when we understand that there is enough for everyone.

- Share the story of what is possible when we are in a balanced relationship with all living things.
- Share the story of what is possible when we create true belonging for everyone.
- Share the story of what is possible when our community supports everyone.

If you have a smaller group, it can be powerful to connect two prompts together and do two rounds of story sharing. For example, tell the story of possible when we love ourselves and each other authentically, and then tell the story of what is possible when we create true belonging for everyone.

## INVITATION

Invite students to come together in groups of seven to share stories in response to one or more of the prompts. Tell students that we're not writing stories, we're telling stories, and that this is not a performance. The invitation is to be part of intuitive and spontaneous storytelling.

Be creative in how you introduce the idea of story circles to your students! Consider ways that the invitation will create energy around the purpose of the gathering.

### The Art of Gathering

Consider all the ways you can create a sense of belonging at your gathering—sitting in a circle, playing music that reflects the purpose and theme of your gathering. Some specific things to plan include:

- Select a warm, accessible space for your Story Circle. Most important is a space that makes everyone feel comfortable and welcome. This could be your classroom or anywhere that provides a quiet space.
- Introduce community agreements—this is a way for the group to see that this Story Circle is a different way of being in community with each other. Ideas for possible community agreements:
  - Speak from the heart
  - All of you is welcome here
  - Honor the story that arises
  - Practice deep listening

## THE STORYTELLING

### Spaciousness

Have enough time planned for everyone to have a chance to tell their story. Depending on how many students are in each group, plan 5 minutes for each story. Consider doing two or three story prompts over two classes. **A sample of a Story Circle flow is in the Appendix.**

### Open, Welcome, and Introductions

Welcome everyone. Share the purpose, theme, and ways of the Story Circle—why you are gathering. *The important things to remember are that:*

- **Story Circle is a time to share a true story about something you experienced or observed.** Imagine starting this way: “Let me tell you about the time...” Whatever story each student wants to tell is just fine. As each student in turn shares a story, a larger, richer, and more complex story emerges. By the end, students see both real differences and things their stories have in common. A Story Circle is a journey into its theme, with multiple dimensions, twists, and turns.
- **Listening is as important as speaking.** Each student receives full attention while telling their story. It isn't about performance: the idea is to listen for the essence of what is being shared; however the storyteller wants to tell it. Some people might be able to concentrate or listen more deeply if they are engaged in some kind of creative activity like drawing or doodling.
- **Remind people to stay present and focused on each storyteller.** If you're thinking about the story you're going to tell when it's your turn, it won't be easy to give your full attention to other storytellers. Don't worry about preparing the best story. Don't make notes. Just focus on listening and the rest will take care of itself. Feel for a story that wants to be told and let whatever story rises up, bloom. Stories will arise in your mind, and you will have one to tell when the time comes.
- **Telling stories about our past is hard and can be painful.** Remind students to share only what they want to share!
- **Folks can pass** and will be given another opportunity to tell a story at the end of the circle. If someone declines, that's fine. Don't insist.
- There are **no questions, criticisms, cross talk, or comments** on any story while sharing is going on. Every story anyone wants to share is welcome.

- After **each story, share gratitude.** If a few moments of silence feels natural, a moment of silence after a story can serve as the greatest acknowledgment. We strongly recommend that participants not ask questions, or share reflections or comments at this point.
- Decide how you will (gently) **keep time.**

### Dive In

If there is enough time, begin with a prompt that allows people to introduce themselves and ease into sharing from their heart with authenticity. Here are examples of introductory prompts:

- Why are you here?
- What are you hoping for from the Story Circle?

**Breathe Together (5 minutes):** Low and s-l-o-w breathing invites the body into full participation and prepares the mind to embrace new information. This can be as simple as just pausing and inviting participants to take five deep breaths together before you start or leading a breathing exercise.

**Inviting Our Creativity (5 minutes):** Before the storytelling, a way to ease into the practice, and ground in the space and story is to give 5 minutes to art. Art opens up creative energy. Offer simple supplies for people to engage in art for 5 minutes: drawing, doodling, painting, journaling. Have them choose the medium that works for them from the materials you have to offer.

Then choose a prompt from one of the themes that has the most energy for you or your students from *Stories of Our Collective Future*. The facilitator tells the first story, then goes around the circle.

## REFLECTION

After everyone has shared their story, reflect on the storytelling. You can use either words or drawings on sticky notes. Some prompts to get feedback from the group are:

- What was it like to hear each other's stories?
- What feelings, connections and ideas were sparked?
- How can we carry this connection and understanding forward?
- What are the next actions we can take together?

## CLOSING

A few carefully chosen closing words can create a satisfying sense of completion. It can be helpful to close with a final activity. Some favorites:

1. Ask partners to face one another and take turns completing the sentence "My hope for you is..." For example, "My hope for you is that you tell your story to the world"; "My hope for you is to find some peace in your story and your life."
2. Stand in a circle – shoulder to shoulder. Now say one word to capture how you feel. Perhaps even hold hands as you speak.
3. Thank everyone for sharing their stories.

## COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY IMPACT

### During

**Tell Us about It:** During the Story Circle, take some pictures of your group or even a short video and post them on social media with hashtags #WeChooseAllofus and include a link to the website: <https://wechooseallofus.org> or tag us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram with @wechooseallofus

### After

**Share Impact and Insights:** By hosting a Story Circle, you're part of something bigger than yourself. We want to learn from and gauge the impact of these story circles. After the Story Circle, we encourage you to visit [www.wechooseallofus.org](http://www.wechooseallofus.org) and share your feedback and reflections in a simple, online form.

These are the questions we'll include in the form:

1. What did you get out of this?
2. What have you taken away from the experience?
3. Do you want more? Of what?
4. What was your experience as moderator? (share a short, written reflection)
5. What did you notice about your group? Such as: What most energized and excited them? What might they want more of?

## APPENDIX STORY CIRCLE FLOW

The flow of your Story Circle will depend on the activities you include. Here's a sample flow:

- Welcome (5 minutes): Host calls everyone together to sit in a circle, welcomes people and explains briefly what is going to happen.
- Introductions (5 minutes): One round of brief introductions to ground the group.
- Breathe Together (5 minutes): Low and s-l-o-w breathing invites the body into full participation and prepares the mind to embrace new information. This can be as simple as just pausing and inviting participants to take five deep breaths together before you start or leading a breathing exercise.
- Inviting Our Creativity (5 minutes): Offer supplies for people to engage in art for 5 minutes. Drawing, doodling, painting, journaling – to get creative energy opened.
- Story Circle (35-40 minutes): Host briefly reminds the group of the Story Circle purpose, process, and prompts and then storytelling begins. (See storytelling section for more details).
- Reflection (10 minutes): Brief sharing of the experience, the larger story we heard, insights and discussion.
- Closing (5 minutes): Give thanks to all. Have everyone share a word or phrase about how they feel in the moment. Share your own word or phrase to start.

For more information about *Stories of Our Collective Future* or *We Choose All of Us*, please visit us at [www.wechooseallofus.org](http://www.wechooseallofus.org) or the Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence at [www.engagingvoices.org](http://www.engagingvoices.org)



