



Intergenerational Storytelling

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Fall 2024

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Executive Summary

Storytelling is a way for people to share parts of their lives with one another. Over time humans have used storytelling to pass down their legacy to the next generation. Humans also use stories to entertain, to gain empathy, and to gain understanding of others.

Storytelling benefits people in a number of ways. For teenagers, they are able to learn to speak up, to use their voice, and to open up to other people. Teens can gain insight into the lives of others, and develop important skills such as critical thinking, active listening, and clear speaking. Older adults use storytelling as a way to share wisdom and experience. Storytelling helps them to feel more connected to others, less lonely, and more visible.

The library at NHS created a program that pairs teenagers and older adults for storytelling. Pairs are put together based on mutual interest (such as cheerleading or sports) and they are given sample questions to help get them started.

Executive Summary (cont.)

The storytelling sessions will be recorded, along with photographs, and used by the teens to create a digital artifact at the end of the program.

The program will run for four weeks. Three weeks will be at Atria Merrimack Place, an assisted living facility near the high school. The older adults will visit the high school library for the fourth week.

The program outcomes will include the groups becoming more comfortable with one another. They will learn about each other's lives and will share their experiences. Teens will discover that the older adults are not that different from them, and the older adults will better understand the world that teens are living in and how they are living their lives.

Both groups will feel more confident speaking up and using their voice to share their values. They will see that they are valued members of society and that they have a stronger connection to their community.

Storytelling

Storytelling is the act of sharing stories with other people. It has existed for as long as we can remember and has served as a way for human beings to pass knowledge down to future generations.

Besides sharing wisdom over time, storytelling has the power to entertain us, to offer new perspectives to us, or to assist with develop understanding and empathy for different people, cultures, and life experiences.

Storytelling is an interactive experience, and at the minimum requires a storyteller and only one listener. Interruptions are okay and may be expected because storytelling is a narrative experience that fosters a connection between people. Storytelling uses language (verbal or non-verbal such as ASL) and may also include supporting gestures, sounds, or movements.

Storytelling is what makes us human, and is powerful, useful, and important. (Packer, 2020)

The Power Within Storytelling-Teens

The teen years are a time of incredible change and growth emotionally, mentally and physically. Teens are figuring out who they are, discovering more about the world around them, dealing with more responsibility in their day to day lives and adapting to the changing people and relationships around them.

Through storytelling, teenagers gain new insight into their own experiences and are opened up to the perspectives of others. They develop stronger critical thinking and active listening skills and learn to communicate more effectively. (Agosto, 2013)

Additionally, through storytelling, teenagers are able to “share their unique experiences, advocate for themselves, and drive societal change.” (Saad, 2024) Storytelling has the power to help teenagers become confident and well spoken young adults.

The Power Within Storytelling-Older Adults.

Through storytelling, older adults (age6+) are given the opportunity to share their life experiences, values, and knowledge to others.

The benefits that older adults experience from storytelling include the reduction of stress and loneliness. Murphy noted that “storytelling is the perfect vehicle for others to meet new people, get to know friends on a deeper level, create a legacy for future generations, and enjoy an activity that is ultimately beneficial to the self. “ (p. 125, 2021) Older adults also experience an increase in confidence and feeling of purpose in life.

Storytelling can also help older adults to gain wisdom from their own experiences. As they tell stories about their life they can see things through a different perspective.They may gain new insight into parts of their life, they may finally heal from old hurts, and they may feel free from what has held them back previously. (LifeCare Advocates, 2021)

NHS- Intergenerational Storytelling

The NHS library has designed a program for a group of students at the high school to visit with residents of Atria Merrimack Place, an assisted living facility nearby. This program will run after school weekly for four weeks. Students will meet with residents at the community room in the assisted living facility for the first three weeks and the residents will visit students in the library at NHS for the fourth week.

Students will be paired up with a resident with whom they have something in common (when possible). An example of this would be pairing a current cheerleader with a former cheerleader or a current football player with a former football player. Other pairings could include current/former connections to high school band, theater, or other extracurricular activities. Having a common interest or similar experiences will encourage both the student and the resident to open up more easily to one another.

NHS- Intergenerational Storytelling (cont.)

Each pair will be given a set of open ended questions to assist with the storytelling process. These questions are not required, but may help with breaking the ice upon meeting one another. Participants are given the freedom to ask questions to one another and to share the stories that they wish to share.

Each storytelling session will be recorded digitally (audio) by the student. This is similar to the recording done by StoryCorps (<https://storycorps.org/participate/>) podcasts, which is familiar to the teenagers. Teens will have the opportunity to use the audio recordings to create a digital artifact to be shared with the resident (and with permission, to the high school) after the four week program has completed.

Photos will be taken with permission of both student and resident to be used for personal mementos, school news, local news or for the digital artifact created by the student.

Examples of Similar Programs

<u><i>Austin Bat Cave</i></u>	Intergenerational storytelling through oral stories, journaling, and art.
<u><i>Voice of Witness</i></u>	Community based oral history organization-intergenerational storytelling and art
<u><i>My Life My Stories</i></u>	Vulnerable seniors paired with younger people to record their stories
<u><i>Bridging Ages</i></u>	Teens paired with isolated seniors for storytelling
<u><i>Varnum Public Library</i></u>	Cambridge Court- Seniors and Teens Sharing Stories

Conclusion

Storytelling is a bridge that helps to bring different generations together. Price-Mitchell explains “that intergenerational stories can bring meaning to life experiences and act as a conduit to learning.” (2016) This suggests that teens can learn from the experiences of older adults, especially when they hear that they have experienced similar things in the past, and that older adults can understand the world that teens live in better.

“Stories have a wonderful capacity for stirring up feelings, inspiring empathy, and fostering communal experiences.” (Darci, 2023)

Intergenerational storytelling programs help to form new relationships and to build stronger community connections. Teens and older adults will gain new insights into themselves and each other. Both groups will find they are more comfortable and confident sharing their truth. They will know they are important and that their voices should be heard.

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