



ART BRIDGES: Lesson Plans for Enrichment, Growth and Healing

Personal Stories and More

Including an Introduction Based on the Copyrighted Article

“Why Tell Your Life Story?”

Re-posted with permission from

Tom Gilbert

President/Owner “Your Life is Your Story”

www.your-life-your-story.com

“Story Starters”

Contributed by

Pippa White

Persona-Poem (With a Collage Component)

A Copyrighted Lesson Created and Re-Posted with Permission from

Dr. Leslie Opp-Beckman

<http://www.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html>

Ten Steps for Creating a Personal Mandala

A Link to the Copyrighted Activity Posted with Permission from

Vera Snow

www.ElephantJournal.com

Objectives:

The participants will:

1. Reflect on their lives and personal histories
2. Use written media to tell a personal story about themselves
3. Use the art elements of color, design, line, symmetry and negative and positive space to create art
4. Use a poetry format to write poetry
5. Set goals for themselves and write a personal mission statement

Audiences:

These activities can be used for any age groups and would be particularly beneficial when working with those who have experienced trauma or are overcoming addiction and other mental health issues. They would also be beneficial for the elderly.

“Why Tell Your Life Story” by Tom Gilbert

“Why tell your life story? I can think of two very important reasons:

- 1) First there is the need to find the real meaning life has for you.

This journey we are all on is a varied one, for sure, but there are some similar things we are all going through. Each of us, in our search for meaning in life, has a vast amount of experience to draw upon. Our struggles and hardships, along with our achievements and blessings, teach us life’s lessons. Your experience, your strength and the hope that endures are part of your unique story — and part of the reason why you should tell your life story.

- 2) The second primary reason to tell your life story is to leave your mark.

This is what we call your *legacy*. We all want to be remembered. Certainly we want to be remembered for the good we've done and for the significant accomplishments in our lives. There is satisfaction in a life well-lived. Living a life fully... richly experiencing what it means to be alive and involved in helping others is a great thing. To share with others who you are, what you are about and what you believe in is passing on some very valuable personal history. This story is of great value.

The **process** of telling your life story will help you identify the core values and beliefs you hold. **Sharing** it will pass on valuable lessons to others. The benefit of that should be apparent. Children, spouses, relatives, friends, coworkers, and even complete strangers all love to learn more about other people. We thirst for this knowledge. It helps us, because we find out that all people have a story to tell that can enrich our own lives. We revel in the triumphs. We grow in our struggles. Sharing our difficulties is part of why you tell your true life story.

What story will you tell? There are all types of stories about your life that you can tell. Your story can take the shape of inspirational tales, lessons learned, observations and opinions, historical records or just plain bragging.

The most common forms of life stories are biographies and autobiographies. Both are records of life events, memories, thoughts and lessons learned. It is the experiences and observations of them that make each story unique. This typically encompasses one's entire life and is full of memories from childhood through later stages. It usually flows chronologically.

You can also write a memoir. Your memoir is a collection of values, recollections and stories about your life and may cover just certain aspects or times of your life or your entire life to date. However, memoirs are not as focused on a historical recap or your life chronology.

Instead of concentrating on your entire life, you might want to consider focusing on a particular period or event. Many military personnel desire to record their experiences, especially those who've served overseas or in conflicts. People who've been through the hardship of disease and addiction have found that experience to be tremendously profound, especially when they've recovered against incredible odds. They have a powerful testimony to share. Same goes for times of achievement in athletics, work or adventure.

The personal journey to faith in God can be especially rewarding to write about and to share. Your spiritual or special life experience story is often a life changing event and can be the basis of a powerful personal history.

How you will tell your life story includes a choice of format and the decision of whether to involve others. Writing is a difficult challenge for many, although it is easier than feared. Most people don't do it enough to get past those fears. Having some tools that will assist in writing your life story can be very helpful. There is

the process of journaling and various types of journals that can keep you going. Memory-inducing books and methods can also be of great help. There are even games you can play that will help you mine your past.” (To view this article in its entirety, please visit <http://www.your-life-your-story.com/whatandwhy.html>).

“Story Starters”

Contributed by Actress and Professional Storyteller
Pippa White

The story you decide to tell may span your entire life or it may be a “snippet”, an adventure or some other important moment in your life you’d like to share and pass down. As **Tom Gilbert** shared above, getting started may seem daunting. But remember you have other options besides putting pencil to paper or pounding on the keyboard. Oral storytelling has a rich tradition (*please see Pippa’s Lesson “Storytelling” included in this project*) and is a wonderful way to share your story. Putting your thoughts into a journal may also make the writing process easier. Don’t forget that you can record your story digitally or even create a family newspaper or blog (all suggestions from **Tom Gilbert** found at <http://www.your-life-your-story.com/how.html>).

Professional Story Teller **Pippa White** provides some story starters that will help get ideas flowing as you begin the writing process of your personal story or as you help someone else tell their story.

- I remember the incident well. I was ____ years old.
- It was one of the most exciting days of our lives (or, my life).
- Oh, Boy! Was I ever in trouble!
- It was a turning point in my life; I will tell you how and why.
- What did I do in the War? (Suitable for our veterans and/or senior citizens)
- I had never felt so alone in my life.
- I had never felt so scared in my life.
- I had never felt so sure of myself.
- I love animals, so let me tell you about.....
- I always thought I'd grow up to be.....

Here are some additional story starters to help you create your own personal stories/essays.

I remember my favorite holiday when.....

My favorite adventure with my best friend was.....

It was the best joke ever!

The storm was one I'll always remember.

The first time I.....

I never laughed so hard as when.....

I never knew how brave I could be but I soon learned.

I had the surprise of my life when.....

If I had it to do over again, I would.....

Talk about embarrassing!

Life isn't always fair! There was a time when.....

I still laugh about.....

The thing I regret the most in my life is.....

I was never prouder than when.....

Persona-Poem (With a Collage Component)

A Lesson Created by Dr. Leslie Opp-Beckman

<http://www.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html>

Persona-Poems are structured 8-line poems of a biographical nature. This lesson was adapted with permission from the materials of June B. White. Originally developed for working ESOL students, this activity scales well to beginner through advanced level proficiency (in English) and can be used for all ages.

Warm Up Activity:

Persona-Poems make a good in-class writing assignment at the beginning of the term when students are just getting acquainted with each other. Students bring in photos or small mementos, collect pictures from magazines, and/or draw their own pictures of things which are self-representative. This becomes the basis for their poem and follow-up collage.

Instructions:

1. In small groups or together as a class, look at the example poem about “Kate Thompson” and discuss the structure of the eight lines. What parts of speech or grouping of words form each line?

Kate Thompson

(Title)

By Leslie Opp-Beckman

(name of the author of the poem)

(Line 1) Kate.....

(first name/nickname of the person in the poem)

(Line 2) tall, energetic, happy, intelligent

(four adjectives which describe the person)

(Line 3) mother of Danny

(X of Y formula, about an important relationship to the person)

(Line 4) who loves music, books, and fresh air

(3 things s/he loves)

(Line 5) who is afraid of wolves, spiders and heights

(3 things that scare her/him)

**(Line 6) who wants to see Latin America, the end of poverty and
summer**

(3 things s/he wants to see)

(Line 7) resident of this moment

(resident of...a place or time or concept)

(Line 8)Thompson

(last name of the person in the poem)

3) Using the template (below), students can work alone and write about themselves or work in pairs and write about their partners.

Template:

Justify right, center or left for different effects.

Title of Poem:

Author's Name:

_____.....

_____, _____, _____,

_____ of _____

who loves _____ and _____

who is afraid of _____ and _____

who wants to see _____ and _____

resident of _____

Follow-up Activity:

Students can now create their personal collages, including their poems. Persona-Poems make good wall posters and/or a class anthology.

<http://www.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html>

Ten Steps for Creating a Personal Mandala

By Vera Snow

Posted on www.ElephantJournal.com

This is a step-by-step process to help you create your own personal mandala, which can lead to a more authentic and meaningful life. Creating a personal mandala can be done alone or in a group; you will need some lined paper and a piece of blank paper, a round plate (for tracing), crayons or colored pencils—a radio or CD player is good if you want to have meditative music playing in the back ground.

Overall, the process will take approximately one hour, depending if you want to share your findings in a group. Wear some comfortable clothes, sit on the floor or at a table and let the process begin!

Please visit <http://www.elephantjournal.com/2012/09/ten-steps-for-creating-a-personal-mandala-vera-snow/> to access the complete, 10-step instructions for creating a personal Mandala.

Adaptations and Extensions:

In addition to writing personal short stories and poetry and creating mandalas, consider writing your own **Personal Mission Statement**. Writing your own personal mission statement can help you to identify your goals, values and beliefs. Creating this statement forces you to examine yourself as you decide what it is you want to achieve and a way to achieve it. Once written, this personal mission statement can serve as a clarification of your life goals and help guide you in your actions and attitudes.

Where to you start? Identify those qualities in others that you most admire that you already possess or would like to incorporate into your own life. Make a concerted effort to embrace and live by those qualities as you move forward. You will need to ask yourself what it is you want from life, what you believe and how you want to relate in this world. You are unique as is your Personal Mission Statement so put in some real time for honest reflection.

Next, set goals for yourself and don't be afraid to set deadlines and spell out details for reaching those aspirations. Once you have really analyzed your life and determined who you are and where you want to be as you move forward, write

your Personal Mission Statement. It may take a few drafts before you feel you have it just right so don't be afraid to add, delete and "let it simmer" until you feel your statement embraces you, your beliefs and your goals. It, just like you, will be a "work in progress".

Once you've written your statement, pull it out from time to time (maybe every morning!) to see if you have living up to the goals you have set. Let your statement serve as an inspiration for your attitude and actions every day. Don't forget to review your statement periodically. You and your goals may change over time so don't be afraid to update your statement as your circumstances change. You and your statement need to be on the same page!

Source: <http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Personal-Mission-Statement>

Tom Gilbert of Albuquerque, NM, is a writer, teacher, personal historian and the founder and developer of www.Your-Life-Your-Story.com with the purpose of preserving life stories. Tom explains, "Sharing our stories, those of our families and other people we meet, is a great way to learn the important lessons in life. It also helps remind us that we really are all here for the purpose of community. Life is pointless without participating in a loving way in the lives of others." Special thanks to Tom for graciously allowing Hildegard Center to re-post this copyrighted information from his website. Please visit Tom's website to sign up for his free newsletter and to learn more about: "How to Tell Your Story", Autobiographies, Biography Writers, Journal Writing, Oral History and resources that can help you "Tell Your Story"!

When not on the road entertaining audiences as an actress and professional storyteller with her "One's Company Productions" (a combination of theater, storytelling and history), **Pippa White** of Lincoln, NE, offers workshops and residencies and has been a teaching artist with the Nebraska Arts Council for nineteen years. She is actively involved in aesthetic education including coaching "Poetry Out Loud" for the NAC and Hildegard Center appreciates her contributions to this lesson and the entire Project. To learn more about Pippa, visit <http://www.pippawhiteonecompany.com> .

Thanks to **Dr. Leslie Opp-Beckmann** for allowing Hildegard Center permission to re-post her "Persona Poem" Lesson Plan <http://www.sites4teachers.com/links/redirect.php?url=http://pages.uoregon.edu/>

[leslieob/pizzaz.html](http://www.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html) . Dr. Beckmann, of the University of Oregon Linguistics Department, is a Distance Education Coordinator and ESOL Instructor as well as the founder of "PIZZAZ", her on-line resource for "Scribblers and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Visit <http://www.uoregon.edu/~leslieob/pizzaz.html> for more excellent resources.

Special Thanks to **ElephantJournal.Com** for granting Hildegard Center permission to link to Vera Snow's Lesson: "Ten Stops for Creating a Personal Mandala" (<http://www.elephantjournal.com/2012/09/ten-steps-for-creating-a-personal-mandala-vera-snow/>). Elephant journal is dedicated to "bringing together those working (and playing) to create enlightened society."

If you have used this lesson plan, we'd love to hear from you! Please send questions or comments through our website www.hildegardcenter.org .

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