

STORY CIRCLE FACILITATION: A QUICK GUIDE*



- 1) Arrange chairs in a circle in a pleasant, quiet space so everyone can see each other and there are no extra chairs.
- 2) Put everything away, take everything off your lap, silence cell phones.
- 3) Give a little BACKGROUND INFO:
 - In some form and fashion, people have been sitting around telling stories since we learned to talk 100,000 or more years ago. Socrates believed the living word has a soul of which the written word is properly no more than an image – and he refused to write down any of his thoughts!
 - This methodology was developed by **Roadside Theater**, the theater wing of Appalshop, in collaboration with **Junebug Productions**. Story circles form a central practice of Appalshop/Roadside Theater's community cultural development (CCD) methodology, also developed with Junebug Productions and their shared touring management, Holden and Arts Associates, and practiced in communities across the country.
 - **In a story circle you will mostly listen:** the point is to listen intensely and meditatively, creating a space where all voices can be heard and valued equally.
- 4) Story circles follow a formal PROCEDURE...
 - **These instructions will end with a prompt**, which we will agree to as a group, based on what we are working to understand together: *Tell a personal story about...*
 - After the facilitator gives the prompt, we'll spend some time together in **silence**, until someone is moved to begin with a **story** that responds to the prompt.
 - After that person is finished, the person *to that person's left* will tell a story that responds *both to the prompt and the story the first person told*. After that, the person to that person's left will tell a story that responds *both to the prompt and the first two stories*. And so on around the circle.
 - Try to **tell a story that lasts about x minutes** (where x = total time available / # of participants, leaving some time at the end for cross-talk). But we won't use a timer.
 - When it gets to be your turn, **you're welcome to pass**. We'll come back around in the circle at the end to offer everyone who passed another chance to tell a story.
 - After everyone's done, if there's time we'll go around again for more stories, then we'll open the space for **cross-talk** (open discussion) about what just happened. For example: did we create a new **story in the center of the circle**?

(see over)

5) ...a few other GUIDELINES...

- **Tell a story.** A story has characters, a setting, and a beginning, middle, and end. It's not an argument, an analysis, an opinion, a rant, a sermon, a lecture, or an explanation. Just tell the story, not how we should interpret it.
- *You are telling a personal story, about something you have experienced. At the same time, you are contributing to the story we are making together in the center of the circle, building on the stories we've heard so far toward expressing our collective experience, in all its complexity.*
- **Don't think of your story in advance.** Listen to the stories before you, observe where the story in the middle of the circle goes, and then tell a story that contributes. Remember, you can take a pause before you start your story, or pass if you'd like.
- Others may tell stories that bother you, upset you, or offend you. If this happens, remember that it's just their stories, from their experience. Listen generously, and then when your turn comes you can share a story from your perspective.

6) ...and a few final, important RULES:

- **No cross-talk.** Only talk when it's your turn to tell a story; otherwise, just listen.
- **Avoid commenting on others' stories** when telling your own.
- **Everyone in the room participates** in the story circle, including the facilitator. Story circles have no observers or audience.
- **No one enters or exits the room during a story circle**, except in case of emergency. Latecomers may not participate.

7) Ask if anyone has QUESTIONS, before you give the prompt and the story circle begins.

8) Remind folks that after you repeat the prompt there'll be silence until someone (not the facilitator) breaks the silence with a first story—and then repeat the mutually agreed-upon prompt: *Tell a personal story about...*

* *This guide is just a quick overview. To really understand story circles, check out:*

- *The many resources on story circles on Roadside Theater's website: <https://roadside.org/program/story-circles>*
- *A Roadside Theater article putting story circles in the context of grassroots-led, culture-driven art and community development: <https://roadside.org/asset/community-cultural-development-site-joy-struggle-and-transformation>*