

Lesson Nine – Understanding Your Narrative About Others



At the end of my life I want to be able to say I contributed more than I criticized.

– Brene Brown



CREATIVE ACTIVITY – Graphic Novel

Lesson Intention:

Thoughts about ourselves and our lives can often be inaccurate, and these thoughts can be painful. In the previous lesson, we learned to discern which thoughts are true and which thoughts may be exaggerated or inaccurate. We can apply this practice to the way we think about the other people in our lives as well. In this lesson, we teach the phrase “The story I’m telling myself” as a tool to support young people in pausing in the midst of a conflict or difficult experience to check the thoughts they are thinking about the other person and see if those thoughts are accurate. So often, negative interactions with others can occur because of incorrect assumptions we have made, or a miscommunication. **The practice of pausing to check your understanding of a situation – and clarifying or questioning an assumption – will support students in developing the skill to look at the situation from the other person’s perspective.** For this creative activity, students will look at a story they have been telling themselves about another person, and then write a new version of this story by taking on a different perspective. They will do this by creating a mini graphic novel. This practice is at the heart of learning to have empathy for others.

Learning Goals:

- Learn a technique for taking on a different perspective.
- Begin to cultivate an awareness of empathy for others by questioning our stories.

Materials for Lesson:

- [Featured Video \(1\) – Dr. Robin Berman](#)
- [Additional Videos \(3\)](#)
- Lesson Plan (this document)
- [Lesson PowerPoint](#)
- [Student Examples of Creative Projects](#)

In Preparation for Lesson:

Prior to teaching this lesson, **watch the expert video** and create your own mini graphic novel to illustrate what the students will be doing in the creative activity.

Ensure that every student has access to technology that will allow them to create their mini graphic novel.

The website storyboardthat.com will allow students to create their graphic novels online.

If you would like for this to be a tech-free creative project, provide students with paper, pens, pencils, and markers.

Featured Video:

Dr. Robin Berman offers several methods for resolving conflicts: standing in someone else's shoes, validating others' feelings, staying present in a conversation, and avoiding exaggerated language.

Additional Videos:

1. Lin-Manuel Miranda explains that developing empathy and considering where someone else is coming from is an important part of writing, art, and life.
2. Melanie explains the way she used the phrase 'the story I'm telling myself' to see her friend's struggles through a more compassionate lens.
3. Patrick describes the way he learned to have compassion for his roommate by using the phrase "The Story I'm Telling Myself."

Lesson Plan:

Display the 'welcome slide' from the Lesson 9 PowerPoint as you begin.

**Slide 1*

As discussed in the teacher training, remember to make the suggested language below authentic to yourself and meaningful for your students.

Launching the Lesson:

** Slide 2*

Connect the previous lesson with today's lesson by offering that the previous lesson explored the idea that thoughts about ourselves aren't always accurate, and today's lesson will extend this idea to the thoughts we think about other people. Describe the way that thought or the assumption you made turned out to be inaccurate.

Example of What You Could Say:

"In our previous lesson, we looked at the way thoughts that we have about ourselves aren't always accurate. Today, we are going to extend that idea to look at the thoughts we think about other people. Has anyone gotten into a fight with a friend because of something that turned out to be a misunderstanding? Have you ever thought someone was mad at you,

but when you checked in with that person it turned out they were just upset about something else or having a bad day? We all make up stories about others that can be judgmental and critical without even realizing that we are doing it. For example, we might assume that another person isn't trying very hard at school because they are lazy, but it's possible that person is going through a hard time at home. We told ourselves a story about them that was not true. We can begin to have empathy for others if we learn to pause in our thinking and try to look at the situation from their perspective. I have an example of a time this happened to me. (Share an example from your own life). Now, we're going to watch a mental health expert share a few techniques she uses to help resolve conflicts and check the story about another person in order to see if those thoughts are accurate."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Guest Artist Video:

An expert in mental health describes several approaches to conflict resolution, emphasizing the importance of empathy and active listening. She provides several strategies that will support students as they seek to understand the conflict from the other person's perspective.

Introducing the Creative Activity:

**Slide 3*

Invite students to consider a thought they have been thinking about another person that might not be true. Have they been telling themselves a story about that person? Invite students to consider a different perspective on that person by trying to see the situation in a kinder, more compassionate way. Explain that students will write a mini graphic novel/ comic strip in which they consider another way of looking at the story from the perspective of another person. The short graphic novel/comic strip will be a revised version of their story in which students try to see the person in a kinder, more compassionate way. The comic strip becomes the 'new story' of what students don't see at first glance.

Example of What You Could Say:

“As you were listening to this expert video, did you think of a conflict you have had where what you were thinking about that other person might not be completely true? What is the story you have been telling yourself about this person? Sometimes the stories we tell ourselves can become so strong that we begin to feel certain of our version. It can be really eye opening to have the ability to pause and see that there might be more than one version to the story. We are going to practice this by looking at a story we are telling ourselves about another person from a different perspective. It is like putting on a new pair of glasses that allows you to look at a situation in a new way. You might consider thinking about a person you are angry at to see if there is a different perspective that you weren’t considering. Maybe someone has hurt you, and you have come to a conclusion about why they have behaved that way. In moments of uncertainty, we are all essentially filling in the blanks of what we don’t know with a “story we are telling ourselves.” Becoming aware of this and trying to see these challenging situations from the other person’s perspective allows us to learn the skill of empathy. It may also have the added benefit of eventually reducing the number of difficult experiences and interactions we have.

Now, we are going to create a short graphic novel/comic strip to illustrate this idea. First, think of an example that fits with what we are talking about. Write down the story you have been telling yourself about a person or a situation. Begin by writing: The story I am telling myself about _____ is: _____. After you’ve written this, you will create a short comic strip/graphic novel that will illustrate a new way of looking at this situation. This is a practice of viewing a person or situation through a different lens.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Creative Activity:

Students choose a story they are telling themselves about another person or situation. They will describe this story in a sentence or two either on paper or on their laptops using the sentence: The story I am telling myself about _____ is: _____. Next, students will create a short graphic novel/comic strip to illustrate a new perspective – one that they hadn't thought of as a possibility before. If students are using an app or website, they can customize the setting, characters, and dialogue. If students prefer to draw their mini graphic novel by hand, the drawings can be as simple or detailed as students would like – anything from stick figures to more detailed designs.

Lesson Closure:

Facilitate a discussion in which students share their graphic novels with the class and reflect on the process of seeing their story in a new way.

Example of What You Could Say:

"I know this exercise can be uncomfortable because it might mean admitting that we are possibly wrong about a person or situation. But I wonder if it was also empowering to see something through a new lens or if you were able to have more empathy for the other person by doing this activity? Were you able to see your story in a new way? Would anyone like to share their short graphic novel/comic strip? Would anyone be willing to share how it felt to try on a new perspective during this activity?"

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Supplemental Information:

If you or your students would like to learn more about the ideas in this lesson, additional resources and third party links are included below.

1. Chris Argyras, a Harvard professor, developed *The Ladder of Inference*, another approach to understanding the assumptions we make in our day to day thinking and social interactions. In his [TED Talk](#), Trevor Maber describes this theory.
2. Brene Brown describes her approach to thinking about empathy in this short animated clip: [Empathy](#).