

# Public Narrative 101: Story of Self

## [Program]

**\*\*\* highly suggested for training teams to write stories before Sprog and then the day before sproggers get there during a training team session people will share their stories of self and give and get feedback so that trainers can get closer and practice their own stories but also so trainers for this specific workshop can practice and learn from others before doing it on their own\*\*\***

**Trainer Names:**

### **Learning Objectives:**

*Skills, Knowledge, and Attitude which learners should take away from this session.*

- Understand the crucial role that motivation plays in organizing
- Identify personal experiences that motivate us to do the work we do (*why are you here today?*)
- Begin to see how personal narrative can be used to build motivation and inspire action
- Begin to recognize the diversity of experience and identity that we all bring to our movements

### **Achievement Objectives:**

*Skills, Knowledge, and Attitude which learners should take away from this session.*

- Practice crafting and sharing our personal narrative
- Practice coaching others in crafting and telling their personal narratives

**Time:** 150 minutes (2 hrs 30 mins)

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Normal = say out loud

Underlined = flipchart this!

*Italics* = trainer notes/instructions

**Bold** = key point

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### **Note for Trainers:**

*This Public Narrative training is designed to go along with in-depth Anti-Oppression training in a multiple-day training program. Public Narrative teaches us about the importance of motivation in our movement work. In that spirit, a goal for this training is that it helps redirect some of the negative feelings that can come out of a heavy AO training. These feelings are common and expected, but are concerning if they become barriers to action. We do not want participants to leave our AO trainings feeling “privilege guilt” – we want them to feel that they have a place and a responsibility in fighting against oppression, and be motivated to take action. We do not want participants to feel overwhelmed and hopeless because of the challenges that systems of oppression stack against them – we want them to draw strength from their struggles, and from uniting with others against the injustices we all see in the world. Everyone has a story to tell and a voice in the movement for justice.*

## 1. Introduction: What is Public Narrative? [5 mins]

First, can anyone tell me what a narrative is?

--take answers--

Thank you for your ideas, a narrative is something that is narrated, like a story, or account.

Stories are an integral part of

Public Narrative combines three stories that together inspire action. It's a way of communicating to others about why we do the work we do, and inspiring them to join us. In other words, Public Narrative is a storytelling tool. Through the power of stories, we can share different perspectives, present our values and issues in a way that carries an emotional weight, and even motivate others to join our movement and take action. In this way, we could say that storytelling is a practice of leadership: each of us has a compelling story to tell, and we each have the power to move others and inspire action. But in addition to inspiring others, storytelling can also be an important practice for achieving our own liberation. When we exercise the power to reclaim our stories and tell them on our own terms, we are practicing an act of anti-oppression.

### 1. **Story of Self: Who am I and why am I called to do this work?**

A "Story of Self" tells why we have been called to action. We each have our own story to tell, and we have all had different life experiences that have shaped our core values and beliefs. In a Story of Self, we express the values that move us to work for change. The power in a Story of Self is to reveal something of yourself and your values – not your darkest secrets, but key moments in your life that have shaped you. As we will see when we talk more about Story of Self, thinking about these key moments and values – and connecting emotionally to the work we do – is important for us as organizers, too.

### 2. **Story of Us: Who are we as a community, and why do we have a responsibility to act?**

A "Story of Us" tells why your community in particular is called to act. Just like in the Story of Self, the key is to focus on telling a story about specific people and moments that have shaped your organizing community – and then invite others to join your community or to stand alongside you. A Story of Us might be a story that you tell your organizing community, to inspire your peers and establish some unity in your motivations and goals. It might also be a story that you use to help figure out just who your "Us" involves.

### 3. **Story of Now: What are we called to do now? What challenges do we face, and what is our strategy for overcoming them?**

A "Story of Now" communicates the urgent challenge we are called upon to face now, and calls us to action. The Story of Now describes the challenge in specific detail, but it also includes a description of the path we can take to achieve goals relevant to the mission – the unique strategy or set of ideas that will help us to overcome challenges and succeed. It invites listeners to make a specific commitment towards the collective mission.

When we link these three stories, we have a tool for explaining why we are called to this work, why we are calling others to act with us, why we are called to act now... and why we know we can succeed. For the next two hours, we'll start by focusing on Story of Self.

Review objectives (Flipchart Objectives).

**Anchor:** The ANCHOR step invites learners to reflect on past experiences which relate to the learning of the session. (e.g. "Think back to a time when \_\_\_\_\_. What did that feel like?")

## 1. Why are you here activity (name?) [15 min]

*Introduce activity:* The Story of Self is the most personal piece of a Public Narrative. It's about sharing what motivates us personally, and what draws us to do the work we do. It speaks to the question, "Why are you here?" The answer to that question might be very different for each of us. It depends on what we personally feel is at stake for us in this struggle/movement.

*Share variety of examples of reasons for being here, maybe from the team, maybe made up - give a variety of different reasons to avoid the sense that there's a "right" reason to be here. For example: Maybe some of us are here because the powers that we're fighting pose immediate threats to our safety or well-being. Maybe some of us are here because we're worried about what our futures will look like if things don't change. Maybe we're here because of personal challenges we've faced in our lives. Maybe we're here because we care deeply about suffering that we see others experiencing, and we want to change the injustices that we see.*

We're going to do an activity that will help get us thinking about what it is that brings us here today and what's at stake for us in resisting climate change and environmental crises. It will also help us to see some of the experiences that have motivated others in the room to be here today.

**Activity Instructions:** Hand out pieces of paper and markers/pens/etc to everyone. Ask everyone to answer the question "why are you here?" on their piece of paper - they can journal, write poetry, or doodle. Everyone should only put what they want to share, and shouldn't put their name on it. After everyone is finished (a few minutes), have them crumple of their piece of paper, throw it across the room, and pick up someone else's piece of paper. Everyone un-crumple someone else's reason for being there, and everyone shares out whatever is on the paper they picked up. After each reason is shared, the whole group says "I see you."

*Be very clear that participants shouldn't feel like they need to share things that they aren't comfortable sharing.*

*Run through activity. Have a minute after everyone has shared for quiet processing - what did you feel when you were writing/drawing your why are you here? What did you feel when people were sharing?*

*Thank everyone for sharing. Move into next section, motivation.*

## **1. Step In and Be Seen [15 mins]**

*Introduce activity:* The Story of Self is the most personal piece of a Public Narrative. It's about finding the words to share what motivates us personally, and what draws us to do the work we do. It speaks to the question, "Why are you here?" The answer to that question might be very different for each of us. It depends on what we personally feel is at stake for us in this struggle/movement.

Maybe some of us are here because the powers that we're fighting pose immediate threats to our safety or well-being. Maybe some of us are here because we're worried about what our futures will look like if things don't change. Maybe we're here because of personal challenges we've faced in our lives. Maybe we're here because we care deeply about suffering that we see others experiencing, and we want to change the injustices that we see.

We're going to do an activity that will help get us thinking about what it is that brings us here today and what's at stake for us in resisting climate change and environmental crises. It will also help us to see some of the experiences that have motivated others in the room to be here today.

### **Activity instructions:**

*Read off a series of statements about impact, one at a time. After each one, participants who identify with that statement should take a step towards the center of the circle. Everyone in the room will verbally acknowledge the people in the center by saying, together, "We see you." The people in the center then step back into the circle, and you move on to the next statement.*

- *Explain:* We will say "We see you" after **every** statement, even if no one in the room steps into the circle. This is because we recognize that even if an experience doesn't resonate with anyone in this room, there are probably people in our communities and movements for whom it does resonate, and we want to acknowledge those experiences too.
- *Be very clear that participants should not feel pressured to step into the circle at any time if they feel uncomfortable doing so. Acknowledge that Story of Self can be very personal, and that making ourselves vulnerable by sharing our personal stories takes courageous leadership.*
- *Trainers can use the following statements, or write your own list that is relevant to the region or issue focus of your training. The important thing is that the statements are all about **impact**.*

*Do a practice round with something trivial: e.g. Step in and be seen if you are wearing sneakers.*

1. Step in and be seen if there is a coal mine, gas well, power plant, refinery, or other fossil fuel infrastructure near where you live.
2. Step in and be seen if you or someone you know has asthma.
3. Step in and be seen if you live in a place that could be underwater in the near future due to rising sea levels.
4. Step in and be seen if you worry about your health because of pollution in the place where you live.
5. Step in and be seen if you're not sure whether you should be worried about pollution in the place where you live.
6. Step in and be seen if you live in a place that has experienced a drought in the past few years.
7. Step in and be seen if you live in a community where people have a lot of trouble finding jobs.
8. Step in and be seen if you or your family has ever had to move or travel to find work.

9. Step in and be seen if you or anyone in your family has been stationed in Iraq, or involved in another war over fossil fuel resources.
10. Step in and be seen if you are worried about your future.
11. Step in and be seen if you want to change the world for the better.

*Thank everyone for participating in the activity. Have participants return to their seats.*

**Add:** The ADD step introduces new information and tools for learners to consider.

## 1. Motivation [10 mins]

Now that we've all shared a little of our own motivation for why we're here, we're going to dig into how motivation is important in organizing, and how it's important that it comes through in our stories of self.

Motivation, why we're here, is important to organizing. We can learn strategy all day to decide how to act effectively, but that won't be enough. Sustained, successful actions usually need a deep connection to the values and emotions that remind us of why we should act. As organizers, it's important that we look within ourselves to uncover our motivations.

Now, what does this have to do with Story of Self? Remember, Story of Self a story about the WHY of organizing. If we want to transform our world for the better, we know it's important to learn strategy so we can decide HOW to act effectively—but that won't be enough. For most of us, the power to make the real commitments and sacrifices necessary to win big campaigns and stay committed over the long haul doesn't just come from good ideas or continuous action. It comes when we connect deeply to the values and emotions that remind us of WHY we should act. As organizers, it's important that we look within ourselves to uncover our motivations.

This is important for drawing other people into our movements, too. We need to help others engage emotionally with the struggle, because just knowing the facts isn't enough to inspire people to take action. We need to motivate them!

Flipchart:

What is motivation?

Where does it come from?

What is it made of?

*Group brainstorm on the role of motivation in organizing. Have people get in groups of 3-4 and discuss the flipcharted questions for 5 minutes. Have groups share out and leave space for people to respond to what was shared into the space.*

*Make sure you more or less hit these points:*

- *Motivation enables us to take responsibility to act*
- *Motivation enables us to keep going even in face of uncertainty*
- *Before we get others to join us in action, we must MOTIVATE them to do so!*

An important part of motivation is emotions. Emotions inspire action by connecting us to our values. On the most basic level, when we talk about motivation, we're talking about emotions. The two words come from the same root word, *motor*, which means "to move." Emotions tell us what we value – in ourselves, in others, and in the world – and when we experience values emotionally, they move us to take action.

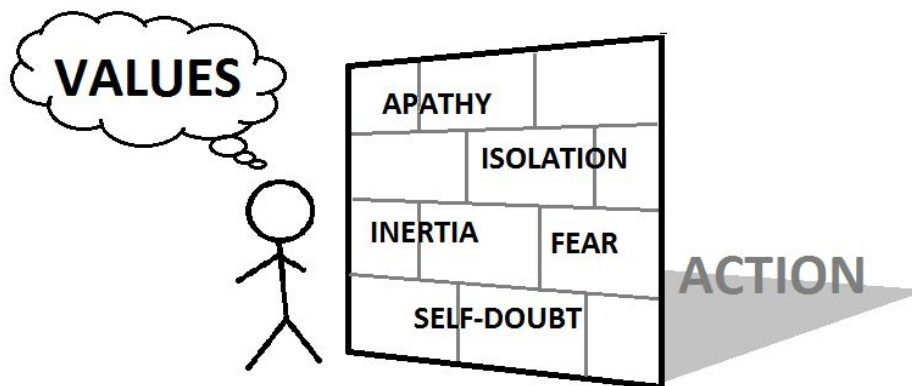
Flipchart this graphic:



## 2. Emotional Barriers to Action [10 mins]

Some emotions hold us back, while others move us to act. Let's brainstorm: Why do we often choose not to act, even when we know something is wrong? Think of people you know, or maybe even your own experience.

(Take 5-6 group shares, then explain the 5 major emotional barriers).



As our brainstorm reflects, there are many reasons why people often choose not to act. Here are five big ones we see consistently:

**Apathy:** We often think of apathy as "not caring," but in fact, its root words mean "not feeling". Apathy is **denial, numbness, and a refusal to feel.** ~~We refuse to feel when we experience despair:~~ caring about a problem and at the same time believing we can't do anything about it. ~~Really, we are hard-wired to care and empathize with one another.~~ But in a world filled with violence, oppression, and suffering, engaging head-on with our feelings is hard and painful, and sometimes it feels easier to shut down. But in the long term, as individuals and as a society, we can't solve our problems if we refuse to feel, feeling is one of the greatest parts of being human, its a miracle and we can use it to our advantage!

**Apathy → Anger:** We don't mean uncontrolled, "hot" rage – we're talking about the indignant anger or outrage at injustices we witness. The root word for "anger" means "grief" or "sorrow". We feel grief or sorrow when we experience *loss* – either our own or others'. At the heart of anger is *compassion*. The more we deepen our sense of compassion for our own and others' suffering, the more powerfully we can feel the grief, sorrow, and anger that **moves us to act**.

**Isolation:** When we feel isolated, we feel powerless. We also don't see the interests we share with others or our access to common resources, and we don't feel a sense of a shared identity. Has anyone ever felt like you're the only one who cares about the injustice you see around you? (*allow for people to respond*).

**Isolation → Solidarity:** The experience of community, love, belongingness, and support all help us break through our sense of isolation. This is one of the important roles of mass meetings, singing, and other shared rituals. It is why people join groups in the first place! It may be why some of you are here. When we think about relationships working to counteract the negative feelings spurred by the oppression and violence in the world, building community starts to look a lot like an anti-oppressive practice. This is also one of the reasons that developing strong relationships among those whom we hope to mobilize is so important.

**Inertia:** In physics, inertia refers to how moving objects tend to keep moving, and objects that are still tend to stay still. When we're talking about emotions, inertia is a metaphor for the power of habit. Sometimes we choose not to act just because of plain old resistance to change. We say, "I'd love to get involved, but ...I already have plans. ...I'll do it later, tomorrow, next month, next year." We should never underestimate the power of inertia.

**Inertia → Urgency:** There are many important things that could grab our attention – so why do we choose to do what we do? Oftentimes, the urgency grabs our attention. We can feel urgency in the form of opportunity or danger. When we feel that something is a pressing, urgent issue that must take priority and needs immediate action, we are more powerfully motivated to break the inertia of inaction.

**Self-Doubt:** Have you ever felt that the problems you see in the world are just too big to overcome, or that you weren't the right person to even try? Most of us have probably experienced self-doubt at some point or another. These feelings can be very hard to counter. It can be especially hard for those with marginalized identities – those of us who hear messages every day from our society telling us that we are powerless and we don't matter.

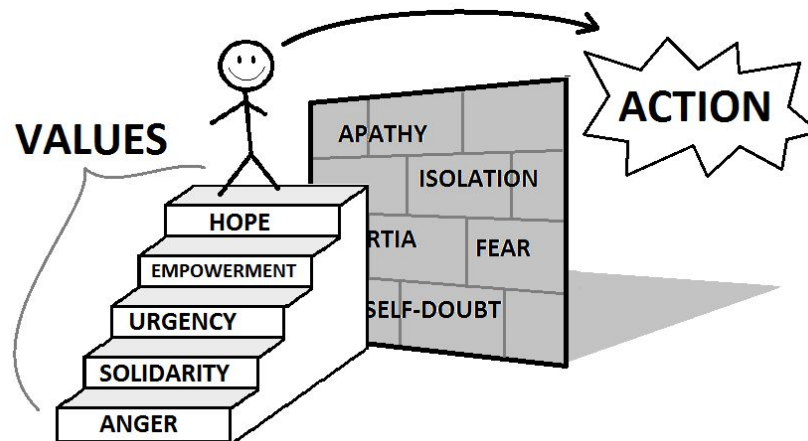
**Self-Doubt → Empowerment:** Organizers work to counter self-doubt by coming up with ways people can experience empowerment – that feeling of "I can make a difference!" These include recognition, action programs, accountability, trainings, and many other things. That's why the SSC puts so much emphasis on training – we believe that through trainings, people can gain a stronger sense of their own power and find the strength to overcome self-doubt.

**Fear:** All kinds of fear can hold us back from taking action: fear of standing out, failing, being laughed at, taking risks, or fear for our safety. Coupled with self-doubt, fear can make for a powerful and lasting paralysis.

**Fear → Hope:** We can't eliminate everything that makes us fearful in the world. Hope does not free us of our fears, but it motivates us by giving us the **courage** to act despite our fear. Where does hope come from? Where do you get your hope? (Take 2-3 group shares).

### 3. Emotional Calls to Action [10 mins]

How can we break through each of these “belief barriers”? **What emotions can facilitate action?** (Go through each belief barrier one at a time, soliciting ideas from the audience and then giving the corresponding emotional call to action.)



### 4. Structure of a Story [25 mins]

We've talked now about our personal stake in our work, how emotions can guide our choices, and how some emotions hold us back while others call us to act. Now we're going to bring all of those together in a story of self.

Now the question is, how do we inspire in ourselves and others the emotions that call us to action? We've already talked about how just telling people the facts isn't enough – so we tell stories. Can we simply tell people they ought to feel anger, solidarity, urgency, empowerment, and hope? Let's take the example of global warming: "If we keep emitting carbon pollution and changing the climate, the sea levels will rise and millions of people will become refugees. Doesn't that make you angry?" (allow for response)



~~Maybe a little bit, at best. But most of the time, we can't just present the facts and persuade someone to feel motivated to act. What we can do instead is tell a story. How about this:~~

*Introduce trainer to share story of self.*

*At this point, a trainer should share a personal Story of Self, which will act as a model of both the structure and the moving power of Personal Narrative. It's important that your story demonstrates the practices laid out in this training: clearly identify your frontlines, follow the "Structure of a Story" explained below, and **make yourself vulnerable** – just like you will be asking participants to do when they practice Story of Self later in the training. One way to do this could be to talk about personal experiences of impact. Think of this story as an opportunity to demonstrate AO in practice: you can show participants that AO is not just about theory, but is about real experiences that happen to real people.*

*Thank trainer, share a resonance (if sprogs like this practice), open up the space for others to resonate.*

Do you feel how this is different than trying to motivate someone by telling them a bunch of facts? (Allow for response.) Stories move us by conveying a convincingly real, lived experience in which we can "see ourselves," and through which we can feel emotions as if we were really there.

### **Structure of a Story**

All stories or narratives share the same general structure. We're going to use trainer's story of self to think through what the parts of the story are.

~~What is the structure of a story? The more you can draw out from the audience, the better. Ultimately, you want to arrive at the following:~~

*Have sprogers get into 5 groups. Each group will have a different part of the story to identify from the trainer's story: character (and other characters if relevant), challenge, choice, outcome, and motivation. Flip chart all the parts of the story so sprogers can reference it throughout the activity.*

*Sprogers will have 5 minutes to discuss their part of the story in the small group, and then all groups will share out to the whole group (can be creative with how they share their discussion with the large group - flipcharts, drawings, skits, theater, music, poems, etc).*

- **Character:** the people in the story.  
Who is the main character? How do you relate to them?  
Who are the other characters? How do you relate to them?

What makes a good protagonist? Have you ever seen a bad movie and thought about the main character, "who CARES about this person?!" A story only works if it has a character we can empathize with. When we can see ourselves in their shoes, we can "feel" what they feel – for example, we not only hear about someone's courage, but we can be inspired by it.

- ~~**Plot:** All stories have a plot! What makes a good plot? (...allow for response – what you want is to highlight 1) challenge, 2) choice, and 3) outcome.)~~

- **Challenge:** the thing that gets the plot moving.  
What was the challenge that trainer faced in their story of self? How do you relate to their challenge? What were you feeling when they talked about their challenge?

A story needs a challenge to get the plot moving. In your Story of Self, the challenge might be the frontline you're throwing down for, or it might be an inner, personal challenge. It doesn't need to describe all the hardship in your life. Keep in mind that a challenge could be a difficult situation you are struggling against or have overcome, or an issue you chose to address based on your values. Any number of things may have been a challenge to you and the source of a good and inspiring story.

- **Choice:** the thing the character does in response to the challenge.  
What was the choice that trainer made in response to their challenge? How do you relate to their choice? What were you feeling when they shared their choice?

What's the natural question we all ask when we see a character faced with a challenge? We want to know, "What are they going to do?" A good plot has a challenge that forces the character to make a choice.

- **Outcome:** the thing(s) that happen when the character makes a choice.  
What was the outcome in trainer's story? How do you relate to the outcome? What were you feeling when they shared the outcome?

Once the character makes the choice, what's the next question we naturally ask? We all ask: "So what happened?!"

- **Moral:** the point of the story, the lesson(s) that the character learned. The moral is how we use a story to express our values not just as abstract principles, but as lived experience.  
What was the moral of trainer's story? How do you relate to the moral?

Now the plot is over, and you know the challenge, the choice, and the outcome... but that's not enough. What's missing? We want to know the point of the story. The moral highlights the lesson learned by the character, and it tells us why the story matters to our own lives.

*Thank all the groups for sharing.*

This kind of structure makes for a compelling story, that plays on people's natural curiosity and keeps them interested. When we see or hear about someone else facing a challenge, most of us are naturally curious to see how they dealt with it, what resulted, and what they learned from it – about themselves, about life – so that we can apply those lessons, too.

*Announce the break, and tell Sprogers that when they return from the break, they should sit in groups of 4 (these can be previously-established groups, such as Night Teams, or new groups – trainers decide).*

*Time check: You should now be **60 minutes** into the training.*

-- **Break [5 mins]** --

**Apply:** The APPLY step invites learners to utilize the new information in a task, challenge, or focused conversation. (e.g. practice, application, case studies, compare, etc.)

## 1. Writing Story of Self [15 mins]

We're going to take time now to reflect silently, start to uncover our own story, and then share in small groups. You've already had a little time to think about your personal stake and connection to the work you do – now it's time to craft a story that will draw others into connecting with that work, too.

Remember, a good Public Narrative has a plot – the **challenges** you faced, **choices** you made, and **outcomes** you experienced.

*(Give time checks at 5 minutes, 2 minutes, and time to finish final thoughts. NOTE: All trainers not currently facilitating should participate in this.)*

## 2. Story of Self Practice [60 mins]

### Intro [5 mins]

Great! In a few minutes, we're going to break up into groups of 4, and actually get to practice both telling our own story and coaching others in telling theirs.

Each team will choose a timekeeper. Each person will get 2 minutes to share their story. The team will listen to the storyteller, take notes, and then give 3 minutes of coaching before rotating to the next storyteller. I'll give periodic reminders so we all stay on track with time, but make sure your timekeeper cuts you off. It's very important that we stick to our time limits – the point is not to tell a perfect story right now, but to give us some practice in focusing, since we'll often need to tell our stories quickly and concisely in real-world situations.

**As a listener and coach**, use the grid on your Story of Self worksheet to track your team's stories. Keeping track of the details of each person's story will help you to provide feedback and remember details. Remember, the coach plays a very special role here. By listening deeply, providing truthful feedback, and asking probing questions, you will create a space for the storyteller to uncover entirely new understandings of their own story, and of themselves.

The more practice you gain in coaching, the more effective you'll be as an organizer. Organizing starts with relationships, and relationships are built on shared stories; so, any time you're meeting for the first time with a volunteer, leader, or ally, it's crucial that you solicit their story – and coaching will help you do that.

Does anyone have any questions about what we're doing next?

*Answer any questions, and allow a few minutes for people to assemble into their teams, or assign teams. NOTE: All trainers not currently facilitating should participate in this.*

### **Small Group Share [30 mins]**

*The trainers facilitating this session should do a time-check for all the teams every 5 minutes, starting once everyone has settled with their team: "OK, the second storyteller should be starting now!" etc. The trainers participating in each team should be adequately prepared to model good storytelling, listening & coaching.*

*When the last feedback session is wrapping up, bring everyone back to the big group.*

### **Full Group Share [25 mins]**

Now we're all going to hear from storytellers who'd like to share with the full group. For each one, we'll stick to the 2-minute limit, because it's good practice and because it will give us time to give feedback and hear from others. Who would like to go first? *(Call on someone who has volunteered, or choose someone if no one raises their hand.)*

While [storyteller] is sharing, the rest of us will listen attentively and take notes on what we hear.

*Keep time and be sure to get them to wrap up when 2 minutes is up! After each person shares, start a round of applause – the positive reinforcement is necessary no matter what kind of a job they did – and then launch in a maximum 3 minutes of feedback.*

Great! So, what worked well in that story, and why?  
*Draw out 2-4 responses from the audience, then add your own feedback.*

And is there anything that could be improved, and why?  
*Draw out 2-4 responses from the audience, then add your own feedback.*

*Repeat for as many more storytellers as you have time for, and be sure to stick to time limits!*

**Away:** The AWAY step invites learners to connect their new understanding to the real world context of their lives. (e.g. a personal action plan, commitment, projection into future, etc.)

### **1. Debrief [5 mins]**

Let's have another round of applause for our storytellers, and everyone for stepping out onto the edge of our comfort zones! *(Initiate applause)*

I know we covered a lot in this training, and we'll be returning to Public Narrative throughout the week to go deeper and gain more practice. But for now, what would you say are some key takeaways from this first session? *Take 4-5 shares.*

Remember – this is just a beginning. We are always learning, growing, and changing, and so our understanding of our own story – and our ability to articulate that story – will continue to evolve as well. I hope you enjoy this process. Thanks to everyone again for diving right in today! *(Initiate applause again)*

## **Pluses and Deltas [5 mins]**

*Collect feedback on the training session by asking Sprogers for training **pluses** (things that went well) and **deltas** (things that could have gone better/could be improved/that are growth zones).*