



Advocating for a New Story of Our Shared Humanity

A guide to conversation circles for trust and
community building

Story sharing from the beginning of time has been used to inform and educate, to record and entertain, to remind and restore. Whether in prose, poetry or song, or through art of all mediums, it is our prime tool of communication. Our collective national and international experiences combine to form the great narratives that inform our relationships and identities.

A specific interest of Creators of Peace is to advocate for a new global story of our Shared Humanity. A shared humanity where every person matters, every language and culture, every ethnicity and world view matters. Throughout history, dominant cultures have distorted the meaning of a shared humanity to a restricted interpretation that only included those people necessary to the status quo and excluding those people considered lesser. Whole peoples and histories have been marginalized, rights denied, voices unheard and genocides sanctioned. Colonisations and conquests have been based on a hierarchy of human value to legitimise greed for wealth and power. We want to reclaim its true meaning. We all matter and we all are of value. We hope these conversations will help us all to be more aware of the damage done through 'negative othering' and where we ourselves get caught in that.

Every person will have their own part in the realisation of a truly shared humanity. There are huge obstacles to overcome, current stories of prejudice, fear, blame and greed for example along with historic hurts and discriminatory practices that go back over centuries. How we process our individual stories either adds or detracts. Addressing them, alongside the huge challenges of planetary devastation, food shortages and people displacement among other issues, requires a new-found appreciation of our togetherness and mutual value.

These conversations hope to highlight where we are stuck, whether in nations or communities or in our own hearts. It is our foundational belief that transformation in people is always possible. With that awareness, perhaps we can uncover some tools that can help us get unstuck and find a way forward into this new story.

- Jean Brown and the Creators of Peace New Story Team

This guide can be used either as an individual reflection or as a group exercise. It also works extremely well for online groups.

It is designed for the following purposes:

- 1) To raise awareness of the power of narratives to shape our world and identity.
- 2) To gain a deeper understanding of how stories can harm or heal.
- 3) To listen respectfully and appreciate others' lived experience.

4) To invite deep reflection to consider the stories that have shaped us personally.

5) To explore the change needed to become advocates for a new story of our shared humanity.

We also hope that this guide will serve as a vehicle for meaningful conversations in modern cultures that often have little time to connect deeply.

We urge that enough space is given for times of deep reflection. Times for listening to the inner voice, God, or whatever is each individual's spiritual source of wisdom. This often brings fresh insights and perspectives.

“Human beings fall easily into despair, and from the very beginning we invented stories that enabled us to place our lives in a larger setting, that revealed an underlying pattern, and gave us a sense that . . . life had meaning and value. . . . [Story] is not about opting out of this world, but about enabling us to live more intensely within it”

Karen Armstrong, Author

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How to use this guide for groups

- Set up a group of 6 – 8 diverse people who will commit to explore this theme over the 5 sessions.
- Agree to meet 5 times; allowing for approx. 2 hours each time. It helps if dates can be agreed on ahead of time. Both Part A and B of Conversation 1 should be covered together in the first session.
- Give everyone a copy of the guide and encourage them to read before each session.
- Meet online or in an informal home-like setting, sitting in a circle, with tea and coffee available.
- A host is needed to lead the process. Hosting can be shared but it is helpful to have as much consistency as possible. See following page for host's role.
- The group will make their way through the content together using the intentions, inputs, questions and activities offered.
- Suggested timeframes are given for some sections but the group can consult together and be flexible with these if an interesting conversation has arisen. The conversations are after all the most important part of this process, so please give them all the time they need!
- It is helpful if group members have read the material before each meeting. We recommend the input is also read aloud as the session proceeds.
- Be sure to read and reflect on the quotes scattered through the guide.
- There is further material in the resource section at the end of the guide for those who want to continue exploring the topics.
- Always use the latest guide from <https://www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace-advocatesnewstory>.

Host's Role

Whilst everybody is an equal participant in the group, it is important to choose a host who can organize the group, create

and hold a safe space, and welcome all contributions. It is helpful if the host has already experienced this program before.

The host is responsible for:

- Welcoming the group.
- Being aware of the time needed for each section beforehand. The activities will need some extra time management.
- Keeping the conversations progressing as needed.
- Checking in with the group periodically - see if they are happy to continue on a topic or move on. Consult with the group before making changes.
- It is not the host's responsibility for the group to arrive at some specific conclusion or understanding. The host can trust that the group's conversations will produce interesting insights and learning for all.
- Use the questions to encourage discussion.
- Making sure there is space for everyone's contributions.
- Encouraging sensitivity in the group where emotion or struggle arises and checking with participants who may need extra care.
- It is important the host and participants do not advise or counsel others unless specifically asked. This is not a therapy group though the effects may be therapeutic.
- Including breaks, identify if the group needs movement.
- Incorporating times for silent reflection when needed.
- Closing the group and being clear on the details of the next gathering.

Conversation 1 Part A

Getting started



Allow 40 minutes for this section



Start with a round of initial introductions



Who is in the room and why are we here?

Intention:

Get to know each other, understand principles of conversation, create group guidelines and clarify terms.

Conversation principles:

A real conversation implies an exchange of information, perspectives and experiences. This should be a comfortable space for each person to be heard and listened to, and also a challenging space where the group can be comfortable to question, contradict and affirm the contributions of one another. There is always a temptation for a speaker to be preoccupied with their contribution, inhibiting real listening and progression of the conversation.

Each Conversation piece in this guide begins with a set intention. Each member of the group shares responsibility for its realisation, which requires awareness of their own presence/style in the group. There are no right answers, everyone's contributions count. We must have a willingness to be open to and wrestle with new concepts. The guide is interspersed with questions, as prompts for conversations and clarifications, which the group can use or not.

Recognise that there will be stories with totally different perspectives to your own. There must be space for counter arguments, but with a keen recognition of the point at which you accept and respect the other person's position. It is important that the conversation does not get stuck in debate between two people. This is a great opportunity to invite others to share their thoughts on the topic. Feel free to have an internet search during conversations on historic incidents as a way of clarifying the root causes of a story, bearing in mind there is always more than one perspective. Be inspired to research into your nation's stories and your own personal family history.

Creative thoughts and insights are often produced after times of quiet reflection. The host should introduce space for this as much as possible, especially as a way to end a conversation.

Our histories and stories are powerful. During our conversations some group members may share quite personally. This can trigger strong emotions in us which may be traumatic for some and yet can be an opportunity for healing.

Creating group guidelines:

These are essential to ensure a safe space as well as being aware of your own needs and asking for time or space if needed from the group. For the guidelines recommend:

confidentiality, respect for different views, active listening.... Are there others the group would like to add before they are agreed on?

Clarifying terms

We appreciate there are many different uses of the terms 'narrative' and 'story'. Sometimes they are distinctly different and at other times they are easily interchangeable. The authors of this guide are not preoccupied with this. For the purpose of this guide and to give clarity, we view stories as specific events or experiences. These stories - and our perceptions of them - can feed into stereotyping and positive or negative overarching narratives. Narratives are not bound by time and are formed from a collection or sequence of events.

For the authors, a narrative is like a river and the stories are what happens along the bank, impacting the river and being impacted in return. Each one of us are responsible for the stories we are part of creating and passing on. In this way, we contribute to the life and health of the river - the narrative.

We also acknowledge terms such as mega and meta narrative that are used in the wider discourse to describe the dominant and underlying narratives of our lives and countries.

“As the amazing 13.8 billion-year story of the cosmos continues to unfold, in this little corner of the universe, we hope to tell a story of justice and joy, love and peace, for the benefit of future generations who will be born into the story that there is no [us and] them at all. This is a cosmic and inclusive story that demands healing more than punishment”

Brian McLaren and Gareth Higgins, Authors

Conversation 1 Part B

Stories of our time and stories we long for



Allow 30 minutes for this section, excluding activity



This section includes a discussion and a creative activity

Intention:

To identify the current narratives our world lives out of and dare to imagine a new story of our shared humanity for the world, inspiring creative possibilities.

We live out of our stories. Our world lives out of our stories. Stories are the basic medium for the sharing of information, understanding identity and finding meaning in life. Stories have significant power in our lives, as they form the great narratives passed on through generations, very often through oral traditions, which inform our perceptions and actions in the world today.

In spite of our progress in so many areas, the world remains trapped in conflicts and unmet basic needs. Alongside stories of technological breakthroughs and medical progress there is the shadow of climate change, corruption, and increased polarisation. These damaging attitudes of blame, greed and fear tend to dominate the global culture leading to the degradation of Earth and Sea and Sky.

What else causes you concern when you look at the world today?

Author, Charles Eisenstein, titles one of his books, "The more beautiful world our hearts know is possible." His appeal to a humanity at the crossroads of self- destruction or renewal, is to come together with a united intention to transform our way of being and doing. He says that humanity has lived out of the 'story of separation,' and needs to embrace a new 'story of interbeing'; a concept suggested by Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk and author. The authors of this guide agree and suggest an immediate next step will require us to shape a 'story of our shared humanity'.

A wonderful description of this is Ubuntu, a Nguni Bantu term from Southern Africa meaning 'humanity'. Ubuntu is often translated as 'I am because we are', or 'humanity towards others'. It is often used to mean the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity (Wikipedia).

In current times commentators have described the world sociologically as an age of anxiety, or an age of entitlement. Scientists are debating whether the current geological age of this period should be called the Anthropocene.

This describes "the most recent period in Earth's history when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet's climate and ecosystems." - National Geographic.

Where do you see negative or positive human impact on the life of the planet in your life time?

"The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination"

Albert Einstein, Scientist

Once upon a future - 40 mins

As individuals, take time in silence to:

1) Creatively reimagine a year at least 30 years in the future. The world has gone through many changes and is now a world of peace, harmony and a shared humanity. You're alive during this time, what does it feel like and look like?

2) Imagine what changes happened for our global community to reach this point.

3) If each change is like a new chapter, what would some of the chapters be called? What titles would you give them?

4) Imagine telling these stories to children, how would you tell this story of transformation? Could this be your legacy?

As a group share and discuss what emerged for each person.

Take time (now or later) to individually reflect on what might need to develop in you for this to be realised. How can you play a part in making these new stories a reality?

Our global story already has a beginning, even a middle, and some might say we are approaching an end due to the current climate crisis and increasing global tensions. When we say we want 'a new story of our shared humanity', we mean changing the course of our current one, by changing ourselves and our systems, so that a new creative ending is possible.

“Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society, rather you must tell a new powerful tale, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story, one so inclusive that it gathers all the bits of our past and our present into a coherent whole, one that even shines some light into the future so that we can take the next step... If you want to change a society, then you have to tell an alternative story”

Ivan Illich, Priest and Philosopher

Closing

What strikes you about this quote?

A couple of minutes of silence followed by an open space for anyone to share any last conclusions or insights.

Conversation 2

Stories we live out of



Allow 60 minutes for this section and activity



This section includes whole-group and smaller group discussion of case studies

Intention:

For a 'new story of our shared humanity' to be fully realised we need to become aware of the specific narratives that we are living out of, both nationally and personally. Examining those which build our human community and those which diminish it.

Briefly recap the first conversation, remembering your vision and the titles you imagined for the future.

We are going to look at two stories of dominant cultural and family narratives. Dominant narratives at a national level often arise from experiences of humiliation, persecution or conquest, leading to victimhood or bravado and triumphalism. Can we share any examples?

Many of the narratives and stories that we live out of are in fact inherited.

It's important to be clear about what has been passed on to us and to examine their relevance for ourselves. Awareness of inherited or self-chosen stories can be very painful. All are affected by dominant cultural and national narratives. Some have been the victims of these narratives for generations. The stories less heard or suppressed. While some celebrate others mourn. What can bring them together? Some discover they have been the perpetrators of these damaging narratives. This disturbance is often the first step of change.

“Bringing our visions into the everyday; how new stories can transform current community situations”

Diana Damsa, Activist

Activity

Read case study 1 together. Encourage comments, discussion and examples throughout.

Case Study 1

At a certain point Diana had become aware of the damaging narrative that she had inherited, which allows for large scale mistreatment of Roma people in her county, Romania. Through this awareness Diana began a process for herself of addressing this injustice.

1) Recognise your own prejudice and be willing to work towards addressing it.

“I started doing this during times of quiet reflection. I could see how I was the product of my own society where despising the gypsies is the norm. People speak badly about them. When something goes wrong, people will blame it on gypsies. I started to understand the concept of scapegoating and I could see how it is applied by our society against them. It was painful to realise that I belonged to the group that was discriminating.”

2) Tackle your ignorance.

“I realised how little I knew about this group who have been living alongside us for as long as we can remember! I started searching for more information and read anything I could about their history and culture. The greatest shock was when I learned about the 500 years of slavery they had to bear in the territories that now make up my country! How could this be possible? Why didn't I hear anything about it before? Why were we not told about it in our history classes?”

3) Make a conscious decision to show respect.

“I decided to stop speaking badly about them and I stopped calling them 'gypsies'. I started using the more preferred, dignifying term of Roma or Romany people, the meaning of the word being 'human being'.”

4) Reach out and make friends.
"I realized I had no direct connection to any Roma person. All I knew about them was based on assumptions and superficial observations from a distance. I looked for opportunities to meet people from this community and sure enough, when you start looking for opportunities, they come your way. A few friendships started taking shape. The closer we became the more embarrassed I felt about 'the old, prejudiced me'. I learned that there are many Roma people living very similar lives to mine, having a house, a job, a family and similar preoccupations and expectations from life."

5) Share all new discoveries with family and friends.
"This is probably the hardest thing one can do, as those closest to us have a tendency to be more resistant to such challenges. However, I started to speak about it with my family, sometimes with some success. Some of my friends were interested and willing to start on this journey of discovery themselves!"

6) Stand up and speak out.
"I became aware that my journey of discovery is worth the most when I use it to challenge the general negative view regarding the Romas and speak-up about the painful truths in our history and our society. I want to make the wider society aware of how our ignorance and indifference affects the others, how humiliating some of our assumptions are, how disempowering and unjust our sense of superiority is. This is an uncomfortable topic for many and one risks quite unpleasant reactions even from the closest friends. I want this generation to be proud for having found solutions to the social injustice we witness today in our country. And I renew my commitment once more to stand up and speak out and not fade away feeling powerless or too challenged."

"The societal prescription for this nation...is first a relational one – a transformation in how we see, perceive and value all people....This collective change of heart can generate new priorities."
- Gail Christopher, Social Change Agent

We suggest that the group divides into pairs or small clusters to study either or both of the following stories, depending on time.

Case Study 2

The following story is from Kenyan Ann Njeri Ndiangu-Kimanthi. In many cultures the dominant narrative comes from the dominant group in power at the time. Ann Njeri shares how she addressed her inherited story.

Ann Njeri's family is from the Kikuyu tribe in Kenya. For many years they had been at war with the Kalenjin tribe. The clashes always caused a lot of innocent deaths and suffering and several years ago Ann Njeri's own family was forced out of their home as a result of the clashes. The hate between the tribes continued to spread. More than a thousand people were brutally killed and hundreds of thousands were internally displaced.

Even before her family was forcibly evicted from their home, Ann Njeri already hated all Kalenjins. "I had been fed with a biased frame and prejudices against them. When my family was thrown out of our home, my hatred was enhanced. I wanted everyone to hate them. I kept passing on the seedlings of hate to all willing listeners".

Some years ago she attended a Creator of Peace Circles meeting in Panchgani, India. "We were reflecting on what builds or destroys peace in society. For the first time it dawned on me that even though I always prayed and hoped that Kenya could be a peaceful country, I was still a perpetrator of hate. I was among those destroying my country's peace by the hate in my heart and the bitter and resentful words from my mouth." That realisation was a new beginning in Ann Njeri's life.

The tribal problem is massive and deep rooted, but Ann Njeri has discovered her part in being part of the solution. First she apologized to Kalenjin friends for her hatred towards them. It was very difficult to begin with, but every time she did it she found that her hatred melted away and love found some space. By doing this, Ann Njeri developed the courage to forgive those who were involved in the clashes.

Ann Njeri also took some extra steps. She visited some Kalenjin friends' homes and later invited some to her home – something that had never happened before. She realized how generalisation hinders understanding. "I learnt that we fight because we don't understand each other; because we don't want to put down our preconceived assumptions."

"I feel that so much contamination has been done by my parents' generation to the younger generation. I am convinced that resentment and prejudice will not bring any peace. I am convinced that the young people have a role to play in rebuilding our country. They have to break the chain of hate and build a generation of mutual respect and interest based on moral and spiritual integrity."

Forgiveness, embracing our diversity, understanding the other and respecting our differences is Ann Njeri's message and part of her life. A campaign to fight the negative stereotypes around differing ethnicities is underway. "I have made a commitment and a decision to remain in the frontline to fight the tribal monster. I strongly feel that if the right steps are not taken, there could be more deaths, suffering and pain coming. In my own small ways, together with others who have the same vision, I want to advocate and create a better society."

"You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending"

C.S Lewis, Author

Case Study 3

The following story is drawn from the film "Beyond Forgiving" and explores the reconciliation experience between a black and a white South African: Letlapa Mphahlele, Director of Operations of APLA – a militant wing of the PAC (Pan African Congress), and Ginn Fourie, a woman whose only daughter, Lyndi, was killed in an attack on a restaurant, the Heidelberg Tavern, in 1993 on the orders of Letlapa. The attack was to avenge the killings of five African school children.

After some time of deep grief, Ginn decided to get to know and understand more about Letlapa. Their meeting led on to a remarkable healing and friendship and the beginning of working together to bring such healing and reconciliation to others in South Africa. They started a Foundation in the name of her daughter, The Lyndi Fourie Foundation.

Ginn:

"How does one move from victimhood to survivor to wounded healer? I had the perception of an evil person – and then when I met him, to see his integrity and humility – so then there was no way I could shut him out. As one starts to see the humanity of the person who perpetrated against you, you no longer only see the wound that is yours – you start to see the woundedness of the other. I made a conscious and principled decision to give up my justified right to revenge. People said he was unapologetic, but I soon discovered that for Letlapa saying 'sorry' is too easy. He wants to build bridges between our communities to bring conciliation."

"That October he invited me to his homecoming ceremony and asked me to make a speech. It was here that I was able to apologize to his people for the shame and humiliation which my ancestors had brought on them through slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Vulnerable feelings, when expressed to other people, have the potential to establish lasting bonds."

Letlapa:

"When Ginn said, 'in spite of the pain you have caused me – I forgive you' it was like being struck by lightning out of the blue. It was something I was never prepared for. I had demonised the people I was fighting against. Her forgiveness was like the opening of a world that was, until then, closed to me. The story of forgiveness has many layers of meaning and each time we tell the story I uncover a deeper level, a deeper meaning."

Ginn:

"Just imagine if, in our woundedness, separation, alienation and loneliness, we acknowledge our complicity in the injustices of the past and reach across the divides of individuals and communities and then hold ourselves and our leaders accountable."

Each group report back to each other. Consider together how Diana's 6 steps from Case Study 1 are used in the other stories.

Finally, as a whole group, take a few minutes in silence to reflect on the following:

There is a lot of talk these days about such things as white privilege, decolonisation, BLM, #metoo-movement. What is your personal experience of privilege or discrimination?

'Perpetrator or victim – can you relate to either or both of these?

Invite those who wish to share to do so.

“Compassion becomes real when we recognise our shared humanity”

Pema Chödrön, Buddhist Nun

Closing

A couple of minutes of silence followed by an open space for anyone to share any last conclusions or insights.

Conversation 3

Sharing our stories



Allow 40 minutes for this section



This section includes personal reflection and story sharing

Intention:

For us to consider creating a new story for the world, we must first engage with our own experiences. The purpose is also to begin to know each other more deeply and to be reminded of our shared humanity. This is less of a conversation and more of a listening space.

Story sharing from our life journeys gives the group a special insight into who we are, as individuals and as members of a community. As we hear each other, we are sometimes challenged by our own judgements and prejudices, hence it is important to listen without interruption and with open hearts and minds.

“Don’t be afraid to share your story. It could be the key that unlocks someone else’s prison”

Our own inherited narratives

We recommend taking at least 20 minutes in silence to consider the following questions. It is usually helpful to make notes.

- What are some negative attitudes about other people or groups you've inherited through the stories you've been told?
- Are you aware of conflicting versions of history within your country/community or family? Why are these kept alive and passed on?
- How have these affected your beliefs and behaviours?
- Do we have any experiences ourselves, or know of others who have worked to transform attitudes?

Give each person 10 -15 minutes to share as much as they are comfortable with of their insights from the questions. The host will give some warning signal at 12 minutes for wrapping up. We discourage comments and questions during the sharing. At the end of each sharing allow a moment's silence to appreciate the person. At the end the host thanks everybody for what they have shared.

“I learned the importance of challenging dominant narratives leading to stereotypes, hatred, and divisions in our society”

Didace Kamana, Priest and Scholar

We can tell A New Story by starting where we are. This will require countless new stories emerging in individuals' lives as they find a personal freedom beyond fear, greed and bitterness which limit compassion and reinforce separation from one another. New stories do not alter facts but unlock new perspectives, allow for justice to replace revenge, make space for a sympathetic interpretation to take place - all leading to a different ending to the one which may have been playing out for many years. A New Story can be created through a transformation of heart and mind.

In this age of individualism - busyness, fear and mistrust often prevent us from hearing and honouring each other as we have just done. Communities become fragmented. Story sharing helps to build trust among us. We know that we will discover more about each other as we go along and the varied experiences that have shaped our world views. The willingness to reveal parts of ourselves makes us vulnerable and perhaps more open to learn from one another. Together we discover that all our stories are of value and contribute to the collective journey of the society of which we are a part. However keep the following quote in mind:

“If you don't see that your story matters, chances are that no one else will either. So even though it isn't always easy, it's important for you to find the strength to share your truth. Because the world needs to hear it”

Michelle Obama, Author and Lawyer

“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story”

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Author and Poet

Closing

Take a couple of minutes of silence, followed by an open space for anyone to share how this experience was for them and especially to thank each other for their participation.

For online groups we recommend the nature activity in the next conversation is done by participants beforehand.

Conversation 4

Becoming our own authors



Allow 50 minutes for this section



This section includes a nature activity

Intention:

To reflect on our stories and identity. In the process we learn that change is possible, and we can be the authors of new stories for our lives.

Briefly recap any key points from the previous session.

Most of us live out of dominant narratives in our personal and inner lives as well. Narratives in our head such as 'you are worthless', 'you are ugly' 'you will show them' are among the damaging ones reinforced by experiences and stories we absorb. Some of us get stuck in a story we shaped for ourselves in childhood to make sense of what was happening to us.

Narratives such as 'get to the top', 'make a lot of money' 'don't let anyone get in your way' 'never trust those type of people,' give us a sense of purpose while others get that from 'you are here to serve' 'you have a voice' 'we are all responsible in caring for the earth'. Growth and maturity invite us to become aware of what narratives run our lives and then to make our own choices about whether to continue with them or change them. This often requires a painful honesty and letting go, even forgiving, for a new start.

“Look in the places where ink does not show. In the breaking voice between the lines of a song. Our history is written in that song, written on the voice, sometimes on the heart”

Dr. Carmen Tafolla, Author and Storyteller

Remember, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie said, “no one is a single story,” our multiple personal stories inform our identity. Personal experience – positive and negative, personal trauma, our spiritual, moral and material values - shape how we are in the world. At each stage in life we create new stories and meanings for ourselves. These are built from facts, fictions and feelings.

Can you identify personally with this?
What makes it so hard to see the stories we live out of?

We are very aware that each person is somewhere on their personal journey to healing and wholeness, so we do not want to make any assumptions around where that might be.

We are invited to participate in the following activity to the degree with which we are comfortable. However, be alert to discomfort, sometimes that is the key to growth.

On page 4 of this guide we have urged that enough space is given for silent reflection alongside the conversations. We referred to ‘times of listening to the inner voice’.

“We need to look hard at the stories we create, and wrestle with them. Retell and retell them, and work with them like clay. It is in the retelling and returning that they give us their wisdom”

Marni Gillard, Storyteller

During this nature activity we suggest that each one take seriously that voice of inner wisdom; connection, correction and direction, that speaks in every heart. Some refer to this as God, some the voice of Love. As it affirms us so also it can lead us to face our own behaviours and attitudes, and to care for others. This practice is central to transformation and finding the way forward.

Nature Activity

Vietnamese Buddhist monk and author, Thich Nhat Hanh, talked of a new story for the world being one of 'Interbeing', a profound sense of the inter-connectedness of all life forms. As we reflect on our own lives and stories, we suggest allowing ourselves to be taught by nature.

We suggest that you spend an unhurried time in the fields, parks or garden where you live. And if going outside is not possible, find a window through which some part of nature can be seen.

The following questions are just prompts for thought rather than having to be answered one by one. Be aware of your feelings as you go through.

Let your feelings speak to you, they have a way of getting underneath the more rational, protective devices we often live behind.

Find a time and space where you can reflect deeply on your life. How do you feel about yourself? What particular stories or experiences do you live out of? Which ones are most meaningful? Are they ones that make you feel good about yourself or worthless? Who or where did they come from?

Can you see the sky, the endless expanse? Is anything clouding your vision, both outside but also inside your heart? Do you feel the freedom to be yourself, to see the way ahead clearly? Rain can be a reminder of tears of pain or tears of joy. What part have tears played in your life?

Look at a plant or tree, fruit or vegetable. Enjoy its colour, shape and texture. Imagine its growth from a tiny seed, adapting and adjusting to its environment in order to be the best it can be. Think of the parent plant or tree it was part of, deeply rooted in pot or ground. Think of your growing journey and roots. What are the nutrients of family, faith, and purpose that feed you and help you to be the best you can be?

Think of your tiny life in the vastness of the universe. So insignificant and yet so amazingly precious. What do you feel?

Life is full of paradoxes and life is full of choices. The greatest choice of all is that each of us gets to choose what inner stories we live out of. What choices are you being invited to make? Are you stuck anywhere? What will help you to grow? – fertilizer? pruning? rain? And what nutrients will you give others? Listen to the inner voice for guidance and love.

Make space for everyone who would like to share what came up for them from the nature reflection.

If there is time at the end of this session please consider watching together the [Brené Brown – Vulnerability Ted Talk](#). Or, as a group revisiting the original purposes listed at the beginning of this guide in order to share if they are being met for each participant.

“The Lord spoke through the still, small voice” The Bible

Closing

A couple of minutes of silence followed by an open space for anyone to share any last conclusions or insights.

End by everyone sharing one thing they are grateful for from the Conversation.

“Give us the inner listening that is a way in itself,
and the oldest thirst there is”

Rumi, Sufi Poet

Conversation 5

Advocating for a New Story



Allow 40 minutes for each of the following 3 sections



These sections include personal reflections and group discussions

Intention:

To begin to understand what being an advocate for this new story of our shared humanity would be like in your life and the wider community.

Briefly recap any key points from the previous sessions.

Understanding Advocacy

Advocating for a new story is only possible when we keep alive our vision for the future, our belief in the new stories we imagined in Conversation 1.

Communities as well as individuals are often trapped in past experiences of unmet needs. Sometimes they are acting from a place of shame, humiliation, insecurity or fear. This relates to our own lives as well as the community and world around us.

Being an advocate for a new story means encouraging new perspectives, new understandings and often requires the dismantling of old structures and prejudices. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement advocates for systemic change as well as confronting personal discrimination.

"How can we make the transition from the old story of separation, competition and self-interest to a new Story of the People?" - Charles Eisenstein, Author

“We all come from a sacred place, the beginning, and we can all journey back as one people and be the authors of a new story for this country”

Archie Roach, Australian Aboriginal Musician

The following case study is about a woman in Northern Ireland daring to advocate for a new perspective on the inherited story that divides her country.

Sectarian violence had torn the country of Northern Ireland apart over many years. One day during the height of ‘the troubles’, as they called that period, a woman called Saidie Patterson, part of the Christian Protestant community, was riding in a bus through the Protestant area of Belfast. In front of her, two women were loudly criticising the Christian Catholic community.

Finally Saidie couldn’t stand it anymore and poked them with her umbrella. She said, “It’s no use blaming – we’re all part of what’s wrong, it’s we who need to start the change.” Soon she was in full flow.

The bus driver was so fascinated he would not stop the bus to let anyone off in case they missed what she was saying. He took them all to the bus terminus, then turned around and said, “Now I’ll take you all home for free”.

What is your understanding of advocacy? Have you had any experience of advocating for something yourself?

Take some time in silence to consider:

- What is your current messaging about ‘the other’ - whoever they are for you?
- Are we just victims of history or its authors?
- What might need to change in us for us to model what we want to pass on?

Preparing yourself to be an authentic Advocate

Changes can come through honest conversations, through stepping into the shoes of the 'other' when we listen without pretences and defences. They come from daring to dig deep into our own fears and hurts that underlie our painful experiences, and taking responsibility for our part in the 'stuckness', however small. Purity of motives, unselfishness in action, compassion at the core – these and many other values are our ingredients for a new story, starting with ourselves. And then inner listening – deeply, over and over, a regular practice of inner reflection and guidance seeking for the way ahead.

As a group make a list and discuss these and other ingredients that we have identified in Diana and Saidie's stories and the nature activity, that can lead to this kind of authentic advocacy for healing personal and community narratives.

As individuals take 10 minutes to reflect in silence and choose a few ingredients that could be useful to specific situations in your life right now.

Anyone who wishes is welcome to share their choices.

“What is my purpose in life, what is my responsibility? Whether I like it or not, I am on this planet, and it is far better to do something for humanity. So you see that compassion is the seed or basis. If we take care to foster compassion, we will see that it brings the other good human qualities. The topic of compassion is not at all religious business; it is very important to know that it is human business, that it is a question of human survival”

The Dalai Lama in 'A Policy of Kindness'

Being an Advocate

At the core of creating a new story of our shared humanity is what we ourselves are able to model. As Mahatma Gandhi said: "My life is my message." It's important to be committed to walk one's talk as well as talk one's walk. Along with our own personal modelling there are many other platforms and possibilities such as social media, the arts, face to face encounters, events, the dinner table, school associations, workplaces etc.

A media initiative

A prominent news outlet in New Zealand, 'Stuff', began a "truth telling" project in 2020, publicly apologising for the racist reporting of Māori people.

'Stuff' reported that "our monocultural lens means we haven't always fairly represented tangata whenua [people of the land]. We've been racist, contributing to stigma, marginalisation, and stereotypes against Māori." A review of all print showed that language used "often split New Zealand into two – Kiwis and Māori ... us and them" 'Stuff's' editorial director said.

The process for advocating will need to include:

- Learning all you can about the 'other' or situation.
- Being reflective rather than reactive – seeking guidance through inner listening.
- Finding others who can work with you.
- Identification of key players and points of stuckness around the issue.
- Taking opportunities to pass your message on through various platforms. Look for opportunities to speak out publicly.
- Willingness to share your own experiences of discovering a new story.
- Being alert to every encounter. All are opportunities to change a negative narrative, to tell a new story, to feed into the conversation new possibilities that challenge prejudice and enlarge hearts and minds.

Does anyone in the group have further ideas or experiences to share?

Going Forward

These Conversations have given us a glimpse of the power of story. We have explored the stories we live out of, the stories we long for and the possibility for transformation and a new narrative for our lives and the world. This has just been the beginning. If we are serious about bringing change, we cannot leave it here. It is up to all of us to become advocates for this new story of our shared humanity.

Many people have contributed far more detailed thinking on these subjects. The authors encourage everyone to enjoy the material in the resource section and to continue gathering and sharing if you wish to.

We encourage you to create new groups or share this guide for others to start their own. Anyone is welcome to use the material. It can also be used by special interest groups as a new approach for engaging with specific topics such as climate change, homelessness, migration, etc. Copies can be downloaded online at <https://www.iofc.org/creators-of-peace-advocatesnewstory>.

The authors of this guide are interested in any feedback from the conversations. Please feel free to write to creatorsofpeace@iofc.org.

In the years ahead we hope that these conversations will lead to the development of informal New Story communities.

Closing

Thank you all for participating in these conversations. Take a few minutes of silence followed by an open space for anyone to share any last conclusions, insights or next steps. End by everyone sharing gratitude for each other.

Resources

Books

- Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone
- Change the stories and you change the world. True short stories of changes in individuals, Creators of Peace, 2018
- Toward New Gravity: Charting a Course for The Narrative Initiative, Narrative Initiative
- Engaging Narratives for Peace Resource Guide, Partners Global & Alliance for Peacebuilding.
- Sapiens, Yuval Noah Harari, 2014
- From What Is to What If, Rob Hopkins, 2019
- Talking To My Country, Stan Grant, 2017
- The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible, Charles Eisenstein, 2013
- The Seventh Story: Us, Them, and the End of Violence by Brian D. McLaren and Gareth Higgins

- Trustbuilding: An Honest Conversation on Race, Reconciliation, and Responsibility by Rob Corcoran

Articles

- ['Why It's Time to Align Your Stories With Your Narrative', Keith Jennings](#)
- ['The threadbare stories we tell ourselves are wrong. Australia needs a new narrative', Julliane Schultz, in The Guardian, 2017](#)
- [Imagination Declaration, Garma Youth Forum, 2019](#)
- ['No matter what you have done' -Erhling's story. Initiatives of Change International](#)
- [Charles Eisenstein's Chapter 'A Gathering of the Tribe'](#)
- [OR the Video reading of the Chapter \(7min\).](#)
- [New Zealand Media's Truth Telling](#)
- [Finding Our Humanity - Rob Corcoran](#)

Videos

- [A New Story of the People: Charles Eisenstein at TEDx Whitechapel](#)
- [The Apology, Kevin Rudd, 2008](#)
- [The danger of a single story, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi, TED Talk](#)
- [Transition to a world without oil, Rob Hopkins, TEDx](#)
- [Kenyan Woman Campaigns for Peace, Ann Njeri Kimanthi](#)
- [4 Rules For Achieving Peace and Justice, Bryan Stevenson](#)
- [Beyond Forgiving, Imad Karam, Initiatives of Change, 2013](#)
- [Beyond Forgiving Trailer](#)
- [The Imam and the Pastor, FLTFilms, Initiatives of Change](#)
- [Irene Laure – For the love of tomorrow, Grosvenor Books, 1985](#)

Practices

- [Personal Guidelines, The Work That Reconnects, Joanna Macy](#)
- [The Storytellers Convention, The Work That Reconnects, Joanna Macy](#)
- [Practices from The Work the Reconnects, Joanna Macy](#)
- [Principles of dialogue, by Kay Lindahl](#)
- [Blind man and Elephant story](#)
- [All who we are activity, TV2](#)

This guide is produced by Creators of Peace, a peacebuilding community launched in 1991, reaching over 50 countries working towards personal and social transformation. Creators of Peace is part of Initiatives of Change, an international network building trust across the world's divides in more than 70 countries.

Creators of Peace transforms, empowers and engages women in peace creation. For many years, we have invited women in the Peace Circles we host to share something from their own lived experience. We have learned that sharing stories from our lives is a powerful tool for personal healing, community building and peacemaking. As we have considered what it means to “live peace” in our own lives, we have been challenged to advocate for peace in our communities. We now want to offer this opportunity more widely to anyone who wants to help shape the narratives that are told in our world today. At a time when our global community is more connected than ever, humanity is still fragile and unequal. Every person around the world has their own precious experience and unique story of life to tell. Human beings are gloriously diverse and yet when we join our voices together, we can yet perceive our shared humanity. We invite you to join this conversation, listen profoundly to others and be curious together as to how we can advocate for this new story.

This guide, version 1.1, has been written and developed voluntarily. We welcome donations and feedback via creatorsofpeace@iofc.org.

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"In every community, there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart there is the power to do it."

Marianne Williamson, Founder of the Peace Alliance

"When we deny our stories, they define us. When we own our stories, we get to write a brave new ending."

Dr. Brené Brown, Social Researcher

"Ours is not the task of fixing the entire world all at once, but of stretching out to mend the part of the world that is within our reach. Any small, calm thing that one soul can do to help another soul, to assist some portion of this poor suffering world, will help immensely. It is not given to us to know which acts, or by whom, will cause the critical mass to tip toward an enduring good."

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Writer and Psychoanalyst

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