



## 6. FACILITATING A STORY CIRCLE

Story circles use the age-old tradition of storytelling as a way to bring people together to build relationships and help one another. Story circles help participants develop, clarify, or structure the digital story they want to create in a supportive group environment. Usually people sit in a circle and present their story ideas, including their script and images. Having individuals share personal stories within a group process gives everyone the opportunity to explore a range of ideas, learn from each other, and polish their own pieces.

Story circles typically take 2-3 hours, giving up to 10 workshop participants approximately 10 minutes each to share their ideas and get feedback. When facilitating a story circle, establishing safety and comfort from the outset is important to creating a positive learning experience and producing effective, meaningful digital work. Here are some tips...

★ **Time frame:** Determine the time allowed for the entire process and for each individual story, as well as for breaks during the circle. Identify a person willing to be the timekeeper if you wish. If the story discussion has not reached resolution or the storyteller is still feeling unresolved, summarize key ideas and remind them that they can get further support one-on-one following the story circle. If participants ask “Can I just add one more comment?” you can respond with the question, “Can you share it with the storyteller following the story circle?”

★ **Ground Rules:** Before beginning any story discussion, establish ground rules with the group. A few of our favorites are:

- ☺ **Respect.** Everyone’s story is valid; it’s not about competition. Be non-judgmental—no negative facial expressions, body language, or sounds that indicate disinterest or disapproval.
- ☺ **Confidentiality.** What is said in the room stays in the room.
- ☺ **Consideration.** Let each person talk until they are finished presenting their script/story idea, before jumping in with comments or questions.
- ☺ **Offering Feedback:** Let the storytellers begin by telling the group what kind of feedback or assistance they would like. Ask others to start with something positive and supportive; then ask questions. It is best to avoid “shoulds”. Remind the group that they shouldn’t feel compelled to comment or to reiterate someone else’s comment.



- ☺ **The Workshop Space:** Cell phones OFF during the discussion.
- ☺ **Emotions:** Challenging ones may come up. Passion (anger, sadness, inspired dreams) are OK and don't need to be apologized for.
- ☺ **Silence:** Is OK. If someone is struggling with what to say, don't make him or her feel rushed.

★ **Facilitator Questions:** If you're facilitating a story circle and are struggling with what to say, after someone has shared their written piece of story ideas, the following questions may be useful:

- ? **Appreciative comment:** I really liked (fill in the blank) about your story. A phrase/something that jumped out to me was....That was very powerful and I appreciate you sharing that story.
- ? **Getting Personal:** Who do you see as the audience for this story? What first- hand experience could you include to convey your ideas to that audience?
- ? **Narrative Arc:** After hearing your story, I can think of many different ways you could structure it. I have these ideas (share ideas), but what would you choose?
- ? **Create a Scene:** I heard something about (fill in the blank) in your story, and I'm curious to hear more about that. Is there a specific incident that comes to mind? What would be a way to "create a scene" in your story?
- ? **Clarification:** It sounds like you're talking about (fill in the blank). Is this right, or did you mean something else?
- ? **Visuals:** What images do you have in mind for your story?
- ? **Support:** Are you open to feedback? Is there anything else you would like us to give you feedback on? Do you have enough feedback to move forward?
- ? **Summarizing:** (*To end with, before going on to the next person*) Do you have any more questions for us, or for the group? Do you feel like you have enough to work with, to take the next step with your script?

★ **Closure:** Be sure to end the story circle with supportive and positive comments that thank everyone for their honest and open participation. Let everyone know that they can check in with instructors on an individual basis to continue to develop their script ideas.

*Adapted with permission from the Center for Digital Storytelling*

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