



Field Practice Resource: Stories From Our People

Students come from different places and backgrounds. Residential Environmental Learning Centers (RELCs) provide the space for students and teachers to know each other in a different environment.

Why this matters

Oral traditions are a part of many cultures around the world, helping people to identify cultural and family values. Inviting participants to share stories from their culture or family allows their heritage to be acknowledged and valued by others. Students may share stories from their lifetime or from long before. Students often remark that they have known a classmate for a long time and have not yet heard that particular story.

CASEL Competency Supported: Social Awareness

Social awareness is the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

Getting started

Creation of a positive learning environment is essential for people to share their family and cultural histories. An atmosphere of respect must be established and supported by all. It helps to notify students in advance of their trip that they should bring a story to share. Students may wish to speak with parents or grandparents to collect stories from their heritage. Coach students to practice their story in advance; they will be more accurate in meeting the time goal and will get to practice their public speaking skills. Ensure time is shared equitably by issuing a time goal. Five minutes works well, if time allows..

How to do the activity

1. After students have begun to know each other better, provide time each day for sharing stories. Make sure to set a general time limit and allow each student equal time. Also, ensure that each student is heard through this activity.
2. Discuss the importance of oral histories with the group. What can oral histories tell us about ourselves and others?
3. Students should share their stories uninterrupted. If they have five minutes, give them a one-minute warning with a nod if necessary, so they can begin wrapping up.
4. After the student is finished, let the students ask questions for two minutes. Everyone should be coached to have a question prepared upon completion of the story.
5. For reflection, ask students what they learned about themselves through investigating their family history. What values are emphasized in their story? What values do they choose to live today? What did they learn about other group members? What values do they notice in their classmates? How does this impact their understanding and empathy for each other? How can they discover more stories from more people? What stories will they tell from this trip?

Extensions or further resources

Five Minutes of Fame is an alternative activity that requires less preparation time and may be appropriate for groups that are not as accustomed to sharing with each other. In this activity, each student gets five minutes to introduce themselves to the group, uninterrupted. The time may be adjusted to two minutes of sharing to adapt to time constraints. Sharing stories should always be followed by time for questions from the group. Question prompts might include: What do you do for fun? What is the best way you relax? What sports do you play? Do you have any pets? Where were you born? Have you always lived here or have you lived in other places? What decorates your room? If you were to choose one item to save forever, what would it be? Who are the most important people in your life?