Telling, listening to and analysing stories

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**What is a story?**

A tale, account or explanation of something that happened, is happened, or will happen. It can be about events or experiences or both. It can be spoken, written, visual, sound, spatial, or enacted. Often it is a personal account of something that happened to you or someone close to you, but a story can also be the story of a group of people, or a country, or an imaginary story, or the story of a dream.

**First activity:**

- In pairs, tell each other a story about something that’s happened to you recently – just for five minutes. Choose something that you can talk about to us all, later
- Your partner will listen, and then, if they want to, they can ask some questions – just for two or three minutes.

**As a storyteller:** Tell the story however, and about whatever, you want!
What may stories do?

Operate as an essential right: The right to narrate (Bhabha, 2000)

Gather people together (Mandela, Plummer, 2001)

Explain the world

Shape action and change (Polletta, 1996)

Build relationships between individuals

Help individuals make sense of their lives
Listening:
First, just listen to the story.
• How can you do this in a good way?
  What is ‘active listening’?

Asking questions:
This activity is more like an *interview* than just a conversation.
• An interview is a ‘conversation with a purpose’ (Burgess, 1984).
  What is the purpose here?
• There are *unstructured, semi-structured and structured* interviews. This is a *semi-structured* interview – it is about an event that happened recently.
• Ask questions related to the story that has been told to you
• Ask *open-ended* questions
• Listen carefully to the answers
• Don’t tell your own story or give your own answers while listening!
• Ask an open question at the end, and say. ‘Thank you!’
Analysing the stories

What was the story about? (its content)

What was its structure? (its grammar)

What was its context? Who was it told by? To whom? For what purpose?

What is left out?
Mohamed Yusif
I love my village, Sirba, in Sudan.
I lived there for many years, and I have many friends there.
I went to school at six years. Our school classroom was made from grass and some pieces of wood. It was like a cottage. We just had to sit on stones because we had no seats.
When I was promoted to Class Six, I made up my mind to leave school because I had to take over caring for my family, as my father’s salary was not enough to pay for us, and as we are five children; two of us are girls and the others are boys. So now, my childhood was getting worse. But then my uncle refused the idea of me leaving school, so I carried on my studies. Finally, our country broke into war, and everything was changed now. Our lovely village became full of soldiers.
Then some people came to our village and made camps. They were very strange to us, because they were white people. I asked our uncle questions like, ‘Where do these people come from, and what are they going to do here in our village?’ My uncle would answer, ‘These people are American and they are here because they are helping us, so don’t be afraid of them any more’. I nodded, ‘Yes’, but in fact I was still a bit afraid of them. But they were very kind to us; they gave us sweets, clothes and many things, and they were very keen to talk to us, though unfortunately we didn’t understand each other.
Then the Janjaweed came into our village and my family went to stay in the camp of the Americans; it was called UNICEF. I refused to join them. I tried to go to South Sudan because it was safe and on the other hand, I didn’t want to sit in a camp.
A difficult story?

My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty three years old. This is my testimony. I didn't learn it from a book and I didn't learn it alone. I'd like to stress that it's not only my life, it's also the testimony of my people.... The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people.

(Menchu and Burgos, 1984)
So I went to South Sudan. I stayed there for two years. Then there was another war, this time in South Sudan, and we left South Sudan and entered the bush, to avoid getting hurt. Some rebels followed us and killed many of us. So I tried to go to Libya. But at the same time I didn’t have money to travel there. I just had 2000 Sudanese pounds. So I gave all that money to the human trader and he said, ‘Pay the rest when you reach there, and when you have got some money by working’, and so we agreed. We set off into the great desert, the Sahara. It was a deadly journey. Crossing that distance isn’t easy. We struggled so much, and some of us died because we didn’t have enough water. We were mixing water with fuel to drink. It took us six days to reach Libya.

After arriving there, we met a Libyan guy. He was tall, with white and grey coloured hair. His face was red. He said, ‘Who didn’t pay 8000 Sudanese pounds?’ I put my hand up. I said, ‘I have paid 2000 Sudanese pounds, but I will pay the rest soon, after I get a job. We agreed on that already in Sudan’. He said, ‘No, you have to pay me my money now, otherwise I will put you in prison’. I said, ‘I don’t have any money left, so do as you like’. So I went to prison for one year. Finally, I was released.

After that, I crossed the sea to find freedom. Now I’m in another Jungle, but it is different from the one in South Sudan, as that one kills
A different kind of story?

Anur

My story starts when Allah gave me another life, when he saved me from the death I faced in the Mediterranean Sea: he let me know the importance of life and to see life in different ways. The big problem I found: I feel as shocking, the reality of Europe. The idea of it, I knew before I came to Europe. I recognise that this reality is not telling you the story.

One of the problems was faced by my mum; she struggled more and more to grow us up; she worked day and night to get food and water when we were young, because our father had been dead since I was young.

(Spoken: I am going to stop now).