



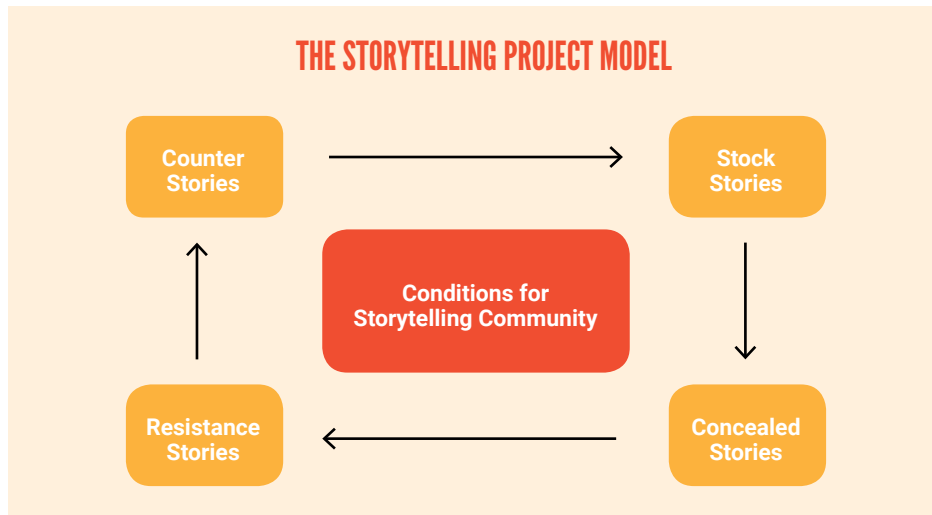
Part Two: Practice Equity Daily > 4. Tell stories centered on people and systems.

## STORYTELLING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE<sup>50</sup>

As a multicultural society, the United States is rich with stories from diverse groups that make up this country. As a deeply racialized society stained by structural racism, not all stories are equally acknowledged, affirmed, or valued, however. Many stories survive through tenacious resistance against a status quo that marginalizes—and often silences—their telling, thus diminishing their truths.

The Storytelling Project Curriculum asks students to consider what we lose when stories of and by diverse groups are concealed or lost, and what we gain as a society when we listen to and learn from them. The curriculum also invites students to tell their own stories and, in doing so, identify the challenges they face in a racialized society and articulate their visions for a future that offers inclusion, equity, and justice to all diverse people.

Below, we examine four story types about race and racism in the United States: stock stories, concealed stories, resistance stories, and counter stories. Consult the curriculum for a full range of activities. Consider building exercises for your staff to explore the different kinds of stories as they relate to your organization, your community, and society at large. Consider how you can use them to analyze the stories you tell in your fundraising, program descriptions, and other public communications. The materials that follow are an excerpt from the curriculum.



We begin with **stock stories**. They’re the most public and ubiquitous in dominant, mainstream institutions such as schools, government, workplaces, and the media. The other story types critique and challenge their presumption of universality, so they provide the ground from which we build our analysis. Stock stories are told by the dominant group, passed on through historical and literary documents, and celebrated through public rituals, monuments, and media representations. Because they tell us a lot about what a society considers important and meaningful, stock stories about race and racism provide a useful point of analysis to understand how racism operates.

**Concealed stories** coexist alongside stock stories but most often remain hidden from public view. Though invisible to those in dominant society, concealed stories are often circulated, told and retold by people in the margins to honor and express their experiences and aspirations, and provide a perspective that’s often very different from the mainstream. These stories recount experiences, critique or “talk back” to mainstream narratives, and share the struggles, self-affirmation, and survival of often stigmatized people in the face of oppressive circumstances. Aurora Levins Morales writes, “We must struggle to re- create the shattered knowledge of our humanity. It is in retelling of stories of victimization, recasting our roles from subhuman scapegoats to beings full of dignity and courage, that this becomes possible.”

Though concealed stories are often eclipsed by stock stories, they challenge the stock stories and offer a perspective that can expose and challenge their self-interested nature and purported universality. We can deconstruct stock stories by comparing them to concealed stories, identifying different perspectives and knowledge, and developing a fuller picture of our society and its institutions. These comparisons can also help us understand how stock stories maintain the institutional and social status quo in a racial system that harms everyone by preventing the full realization of our ideals as a democracy committed to equality.

**Resistance stories** are a third type of story we examine in this curriculum. These are historical and contemporary stories that tell how people have resisted racism, challenged the stock stories that support it, and fought for more equal and inclusive social arrangements. Resistance stories are the reserve of built-up stories about challenges to an unjust status quo. They include “sheroes” and “heroes” who have been excluded from history books (or included and vilified) but nevertheless struggled against racism. These

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## STORYTELLING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, CONT.<sup>50</sup>

stories can teach us about anti-racist perspectives and practices that have existed through history to the present, expanding our vision of what's possible in our anti-racism work.

Finally, we explore what we call **counter stories**, which are new stories deliberately constructed to challenge the stock stories, build on and amplify resistance stories, and offer ways to interrupt the status quo to work for change. These stories are a continual critique and opposition to stock stories and enable new possibilities for inclusive human community.

These four story types are intricately connected. Stock and concealed stories are essentially two sides of the same coin, reflecting on the same realities of social life from different perspectives. Resistance and counter stories are also linked through their capacity to challenge stock stories. Resistance stories are a base for the imagining of counter stories and serve to energize their creation. Counter stories then build anew in each generation as they culminate the struggles before them and learn from and build on resistance stories that preceded them.

### HOW ABOUT EXPLORING THE STORY TYPES

#### Stock stories

Students explore the societal genealogy of racism, the conditions that generated it, and the ways it has been transmitted to the present through the stock stories that keep it in place.

#### Guiding questions

- What are the stock stories about race and racism in U.S. society that justify and perpetuate an unequal status quo?
- How do we learn these stories?
- Who benefits from stock stories and who pays?
- How are costs and benefits obscured through stock stories?

#### Concealed stories

Students develop analytical tools for research and examine concealed stories that reveal the underside of racism. They also analyze concealed stories to understand how racism looks from the perspective of communities of color and identify the hidden advantages for Whites and explore the negative consequences of inequities for all people in our society.

Following the lead of critical race theory, we begin with activities that tell the social and experiential context of racial oppression through the experiences of people of color (Taylor, 1998). These stories tend to narrate the past and ongoing realities of racism that are either invisible or only glimpsed in the stock stories. Such stories lead the search for concealed structures of racial inequality and the hidden stories of white advantage.

#### Guiding questions

- What are the stories about race and racism that we don't hear?
- Why don't we hear them?
- How are these stories lost/left out?
- How do we recover these stories?
- What do these stories teach us about racism that the stock stories do not?

#### Resistance stories

Students research to find and explore resistance stories told by individuals and groups who have opposed racism throughout history and into the present. These stories serve as guides that can help students learn about ways to resist and work against racism as they begin to imagine more just alternatives to guide their own efforts.

#### Guiding questions

- What stories exist (historical or contemporary) that serve as examples of resistance?
- What role does resistance play in challenging the stock stories about racism?
- What can we learn about anti-racist action by looking at these stories?

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## STORYTELLING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, CONT.<sup>50</sup>

### Counter storytelling

Building on existing resistance stories, students generate new stories about their vision for a more just future and develop strategies to enact anti-racist action for more inclusive schools and communities.

#### Guiding questions

- What can we draw from resistance stories to create new stories about a human community where differences are valued?
- What kinds of justice-based communities can we imagine and work to embody?
- What kinds of stories can raise our consciousness and support our ability to speak and act against instances of racism?

We believe the Storytelling Project Model and the story types we identify offer a powerful framework to understand race and racism. The curriculum based on this model offers one way to address concerns about racism and race relations in this country felt by students from all racial/ethnic groups. Teachers interested in supporting students in developing anti-racist understanding and strategies have a critical role to play. We encourage them to try out this curriculum in their classrooms.

We also encourage teachers to find a community of support among colleagues in their schools and communities as they work with students on these issues. The process of learning about racism and ways to dismantle it will at times be painful and difficult, often joyful and empowering, and ultimately energizing and mobilizing. It's important for teachers and students to know that they are part of a much larger struggle and broader group of people who share in this collective effort.

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