



## CHAPTER 9

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# “Miss, I Think I Found my Story!”—What’s Your Story?

*Adrienne Karnofel*

### INTRODUCTION

Vulnerability—the willingness to occasionally let go of the labels—transforms these walls into thresholds. Differences don’t go away ... nor should they. But if we posit a shared factor of identity ... we can be open to the differences among us. Through conversation, through exchanging stories, through exploring our differences without defensiveness or shame, we can learn from each other, share each other’s words. As we do so, we’ll begin forging commonalities. (Keating, 2002, p. 529)

Senior year of high school is complicated. It is a time of immense pressure, difficult choices, and coming of age. Students are wrapping up one phase of their lives and preparing for another. At the same time, they are becoming adults and trying to figure out their own identities, values, and beliefs. Sometimes that looks like a sort of idealistic rebellion from their family’s values, while other times it looks like a tight adherence to the values they’ve always known. For me, that looked like moving away to

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college as quickly as I could to get out from under my parents' rules, straight to a conservative religious college that someone in my family had attended for the past four generations, where I consistently objected to and defied their rules, for which I had knowingly and willingly signed a contract to uphold. Needless to say, I didn't know who I was or where I was going, only that I wanted to do things *not* the way I was raised. I'd like to say I have a better idea now, but it has taken me much longer than I would have liked to get here. After a few decades of exposure to others' experiences outside of my religious and cultural bubble, the journey of raising my own children, and twenty years of teaching, I have a more solid grasp of my identity and how my story helped shape that identity. In my teaching practice, I strive to help my students figure out who they are and what they value before they step out of the safety net of their family homes.

For over a decade I have started the school year with an assignment called the Shadow Box. It is one that was passed along to me when I first started teaching seniors. The assignment consists of a shoe box set up diorama-style with items that symbolize a student's life. Then they write up the explanations for each item and present the Shadow Box to the class as the first speech of the year. Ideally it is a way for students to get to know each other better and to dig deeply into their figurative language skills as they use a small plastic owl to symbolize their ongoing search for knowledge, or a ladder to symbolize how they will continue to climb, building upon the steps their parents laid out for them. But what happened more and more over the years was something like this: "Um, this is my iPod, to symbolize that I ... I like music. And this is a medal from my last track meet to show that ... I like track. And uh, these are the keys to my car to symbolize that I have a car. Uh, Miss, can I take my keys out of the box after class so I can get home? Oh, and the iPod, too." But really, there was. What kind of music is on that iPod? Who introduced you to that music, and why do you appreciate the music you do? What is it about track that makes you enjoy it so much? What or who encourages you to run? Do other people in your family run track? How do you feel when they watch you run? And the car. Did you buy it by saving up money from your paychecks? Did it get passed down to you from an older sibling? Do you and Dad spend weekends working on it in the garage? These were some questions I asked to help them to dig deeper. I knew that there were so many stories behind these objects and I wanted my students to find the richness in their everyday lives.

I realized that the students were struggling to find meaning in the objects that comprised their lives as seventeen-year-olds. There was clearly a disconnect between my intention of facilitating students’ validation of their identity through the stories of their everyday object and what was actually happening. I didn’t know how to get them to invest in this assignment emotionally and deeply. I needed a way to model the storying journey for and with my students.

I teach at a public high school outside of Los Angeles, California. Over 90% of the students are Hispanic and 74% qualify for free or reduced lunch. As a white woman from a middle-class background, my story is very different than that of most of my students. I naturally teach through my experiential lens and I need to glimpse the lenses through which my students are viewing life. More importantly, students need to see the validity and significance of their own backgrounds on their unique stories.

During my doctorate program, I conducted a pedagogical self-study for a class assignment (Raj, 2019). During that process I learned a tremendous amount about myself and how my personal history has impacted my teaching practices. I traced my family, education, religious, and cultural experiences, and was struck by the degree to which they all were reflected in my teaching. My own childhood family norms, how they valued higher education, my fundamental protestant beliefs, and my Southern California upbringing as a middle-class white woman permeated my life into adulthood and then into my pedagogy. What a gift it would have been to have realized this at a much earlier age. Through that thinking, when planning my courses for the following fall, I saw a way to change the Shadow Box assignment so that my students could find the deeper meaning within their own life stories.

The title of the new assignment is “What’s Your Story?” It is adapted from the assignment I completed during my doctoral program. I made a few changes, but it stems from the same prompt (Raj, 2019). The project had a major impact on finding my identity through storying and I hoped it could have the same effect on my high school students. When I first introduced it, I was met with blank stares. At seventeen, most teens don’t feel they have a story; their story is just getting started. I wanted them to look at their interests and personality and family history and use that to frame what their story is or how those elements make them who they are today. But with some brainstorming activities and modeling, we slowly worked to find their stories. The brainstorming process looked like this:

- Give an historical overview of your life. You may use the following as a way to think about this:

What/Who has been a strong influence in your life? These can be positive or negative.

Think about and recollect incidents or events in your life that have contributed to your development.

How has your race, ethnicity, gender, identity, and so on influenced your journey into becoming the person that you are today? As you think about your autobiography be sure to connect it to influences of race, gender, identity, and so on, as you begin to explore issues of equity.

Why are these particular times/points/events that contributed to your becoming “aware” of who you are significant?

This part took a lot of work, encouraging students to travel back into their childhoods and see the significance and impact of events. Even more challenging was for them to see how parts of their identities fit into their story. At their age they haven’t seen the world through any other lens but the one in which they were raised. Also, our town is a small one, where families live for generations. There are many shared experiences here that students do not realize are unique for our area, such as a large Latinx population and a general acceptance of all sexual identities, cultures, and socioeconomic levels. But these challenges also created incredible teaching opportunities to address the topics of childhood and identity.

The second part of the assignment was the presentation. It was important that there be freedom in the presentation. Students could choose any format in which to present their story—a photo essay, a digital video, a musical piece, art, collage, or any other medium that fit their personality and story (Raj, 2019). I first modeled my own story for them. Being of a certain age, I had been working through a deconstruction of sorts. The Franciscan monk Richard Rohr (2002) talks about a universal concept of life transitions he refers to as order, disorder, and reorder. Philosophy and world religions have other terms for the same concept. I bought a small wooden crate from the craft store and divided it into three sections. Using washi tape, I decorated the outside of each section to represent the emotions entailed in each box of the process. Then I placed items that represented facets of my life—heart, mind, spirituality, family, work, creativity—into the different boxes. I talked about my journey thus far and

in what stage of order each part of my life was currently in. I took my time explaining the process through which I created my box, modeling that the visual aspect was part of finding and framing their story. Ultimately, though, most students chose a traditional speech with a slide show as a visual aid. I think that the pressure of “finding” their stories was so much that the visual tool became an afterthought. The attached instructions include the updated presentation guidelines. Next year I will spend more time modeling how integrating other modes of presentation can add to the design of their stories.

What happened next was deeper and more profound than I ever could have imagined. As each student got up to share their story, they began slowly, stumbling over their words, taking us through their childhood milestones. Then suddenly they would latch onto one event or realization and take off, newly understanding the lasting impact that detail had on their life’s journey so far. Note: all names are pseudonyms and these stories are retold from memory, so there may be some gaps. In future years I will take notes as students present for my own records and self-evaluation. However, I do not record the students in any way or collect their visual representation. The promise of safety is imperative.

### SAMI

Sami’s life had been marked by fear of deportation that would tear her family apart. Her father Ruben had been brought to the United States from Mexico as a child. When he was seventeen, Sami’s dad was in a car accident that resulted in the other driver being seriously injured. Because he was undocumented, Sami’s dad fled the scene. As a result, he spent four years in prison and was then deported. While in Mexico, Ruben met and married his wife. When they were expecting their first child, Ruben knew he wanted a better life for his family and that life was in the United States. So Ruben borrowed his twin brother’s passport and crossed the border. Soon after his pregnant wife crossed over into the United States under the pretense of a day shopping trip.

Now a family of five, Sami’s parents need to wait for her oldest brother to turn 21 so he can help his mother get her green card. Only after she becomes a citizen can she begin the process of helping her father get his green card. While this is a decades’ long process, it was further complicated by Sami’s father’s arrest when he was a teenager. Because he has a felony on his record, he is not able to come back to the United States for

twenty years. So for the more than twenty years they waited for the documentation process to even begin, Sami's family lived in fear of her parents being caught and deported back to Mexico.

Sami was a straight A student who was active on several school sports teams. Until she shared her story, I had no idea she was carrying this burden with her every day. And at that moment, when she invited us all into her story, Sami seemed to fully acknowledge the weight of what she had been carrying. She began to cry and tell us how scared she was for her father every time he had to cross the border into Tijuana for work, fearing that he may never come back. Every day was a day closer to when both her parents could become legal residents of the United States, but just one mishap could derail and tear apart her whole family. Not only did Sami's story invite empathy from her teacher and classmates, but it also drew out similar stories.

Stories of undocumented family members and deportation are not rare in this area, but they are rarely shared. Children are told to keep the information private to avoid someone calling Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or just to keep the family's issues private. Because of this, students do not have a place where they can safely share their fears of losing their families. When Sami shared her story she unknowingly made my classroom a safe space for those conversations and me, as a white teacher, a safe person with whom to trust with those stories.

### KAROL

The day after Sami shared, it was Karol's turn. I have known Karol since she was a freshman, and she always seemed like an old soul to me. When other students in the class would act up, Karol would give me a knowing look that said, "[T]hese kids." While she didn't rush through her schoolwork, it always seemed like she completed it to check it off her list in order to move on to something else. She often stayed in my classroom after class or during lunch to finish her homework. Now it was three years later and Karol was in my senior class. She still had that air of being mature beyond her years, and she seemed to treat school like a job, not a social experience to enjoy.

When Karol stood up to share her story, I expected it to be about her drive for good grades and her future college plans. But what came from her heart and out of her mouth shocked me.

Karol told us the story of her Monday through Friday reality. The reason she works so quickly and efficiently during the school day is because she goes home after school to care for her fifteen nieces and nephews. Fifteen. But her responsibilities go far beyond feeding them their afternoon snack, monitoring play time, and making sure they complete their homework. Her older siblings came to the United States as children and do not yet have their immigration papers. Karol is the only one of her parents’ children who was born in the United States, and as such, a citizen. Each day when Karol babysits her nieces and nephews, as the time draws near for their parents to come pick them up, she waits in fear that one of her siblings will not come to pick up their children. That their workplace will have been raided by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and that they will be deported.

Her family has a plan that Karol must be constantly prepared to carry out in the situation that ICE officials come to her house after school. She knows her rights and that she must protect the children in her care. As a seventeen-year-old in high school, Karol is a teenager, a potential college student, and from three to seven each weekday, the sole protector for fifteen of her most helpless family members.

As Karol neared the end of her story, her voice drifted off as though she was no longer talking to her classmates, but rather seeing and feeling the emotions behind her daily routine. After a pause, Karol quietly, almost as if to herself, said that she feels she has an obligation to protect her family. As the oldest person in her family with legal status in this country, she bears both a privilege and a burden. She told us she feels a sense of guilt because she does not have to carry the fear of deportation with her every day. So she does the only things she can do to alleviate that guilt and to keep her family together: she keeps her grades up so that she can be the first in her family to attend college and she protects the children in her family with a fierceness that drives her to continue day after day.

At this point I would like to mention that the directions for this assignment include a time guideline of ten minutes per presentation. But after the first few days, the speeches were averaging thirty to forty-five minutes each. Two different times an administrator walked into the room to make an announcement, and after waiting in the back for a few minutes quietly left, acknowledging the heaviness and significance of what was happening in my classroom. What started as an introductory assignment had turned into a methodology. It became a practice that set the tone for the rest of the year. The curriculum in this class includes topics that cover cultural

norms, the American justice system, and the exploration of future life plans. All of these require critical thinking skills and an ability for students to self-reflect on where they came from, who they are, and where they want to go. Telling their own stories with authenticity and vulnerability opened the doors for a powerful and productive school year.

### ANDREW

After hearing a few of his classmates' stories, Andrew came to talk to me after class one day. He had thought and thought, and the only idea he had to bring for the visual for his speech was a soccer ball. He was on the school soccer team and that was his passion. He felt more confident in himself when he was holding a soccer ball, so he thought that would help him not to be nervous. Andrew also told me he didn't have a powerful story or testimony of overcoming great obstacles to share. He decided he didn't really have a story; he just had a "regular" family. I probed Andrew for more information for a while, asking him what he planned on doing with the soccer ball to make it less of an object and more of a visual symbol of his presentation. He said maybe he could tape pictures of each family member on each white pentagon of the soccer ball. His family is very important to him and he would like to share a little about each of them. I then asked him more about soccer. I asked him if there was any connection between his story and soccer. Andrew's initial response was "not really," but after a pause, he continued talking.

Andrew has loved soccer since he was a little boy. He can't remember a time when he didn't know how to play soccer. When he was very young, his father taught him to play soccer. His father had been an avid soccer player growing up in Mexico and taught his children to play as a way of connecting them to his own childhood memories. Andrew has an abundance of fond memories of his family playing soccer at the park and of his father attending all his and his siblings' practices and games. That was significant because other than soccer, his father was distant and for the most part absent. Soccer was where and how they had a relationship with their father. I then asked Andrew if all of his siblings play soccer. He responded that yes, all of them play. Then he retracted and said that his older sister recently stopped playing. When I asked him why he paused for a few moments, then carefully, as though putting the pieces together, told me that his older sister and his father had a major falling out in their relationship. Soon after that, his sister quit playing soccer. I asked him if he



thought those two events were random or tied together somehow. Andrew immediately replied that he thinks his sister quit soccer as a way to push back against their father. Then Andrew looked up and me and said, “Soccer is how my family bonds, and it represents my family’s relationship. Miss, that’s my story. Soccer is my story.”

The stories continued to flow, and as I looked out on my class, on that sea of faces, I could see them thinking about their own stories and searching for the underlying current in each of their own histories. As each student got up to present, it brought our class closer together. At first students stepped up to the front of the classroom and began their rehearsed speech. Then one by one, their true stories unfolded as though lifting from the words of their note cards. It was like those art pieces that were popular in the 1990s, where if you looked at them in just the right way, a 3D picture would emerge. Students would suddenly see their past and their path from a new perspective, in a new way. And as more students shared, I sensed a wave of freedom in the room. Students began to start their speeches with less hesitation, almost in anticipation of what they would discover about themselves. But others used their presentations as a declaration, as a way to call out wounds in their family and draw them out of the shadows.

### LORRAINE

Lorraine was a “west lawn” girl. She hung out with the kids who boldly wear furry hats with cat ears or squirrel tails hanging from their belts. Sometimes she would come to school dressed in full cosplay. Her group of friends talked about anime shows and video games in animated, loud voices. It was common to see her group of friends reenacting anime scenes during lunch. That was Lorraine’s social public side. However, in the classroom, she was quiet. She would walk into class before the bell rang and continue her private conversation with a friend in full outside voice, but once class started, she would fold in on herself. There was clearly a social dynamic outside of her friend circle where Lorraine did not feel she fit in with the general population of the school. I fully expected Lorraine’s speech to be superficial and “safe,” where she would talk about her hobbies and pop culture interests. I think the rest of the class did, too. Instead, Lorraine stepped to the front of the class and shocked everyone.

She started off with a fairly typical introduction, apologizing for being nervous and for her voice shaking. Her hands shook as she clasped them in front of her. She relayed that she labored over what part of her story to

share, but ultimately decided that this was the time, as she was nearing adulthood, for her to share this part of her story for all to hear. Lorraine paused, and then with complete confidence (yet still visibly shaking) and authority announced, “I come from a family history of rape and incest, and that generational curse ends with me.” She then shared a very clear retelling of the rape she had endured at the hands of her grandfather and the generations of similar stories going back far in her family. The descriptions were appropriate for the classroom, but she was very detailed as to the frequency and routine of her grandfather’s attacks on her body and psyche. It was as though she was testifying in court, making sure that the jury was fully aware of the extent of the abuse and denigration. For forty-five minutes the class was silent. At the end of her presentation Lorraine declared that while this was extremely difficult for her to share, she knew that she needed an audience for accountability and to break the silence that was part of the abuse. She acknowledged her awareness that her classmates have not accepted her over the years and consider her an outcast, and that by her sharing this very personal information she now leaves herself even more vulnerable to ridicule and bullying. But for Lorraine, this was about taking a stand. All of the victims in her family have, until this point, kept the family secrets and therefore allowed the violence and evil to continue. But she refused to stay silent and would not pass this legacy of evil on to her own children. (As a teacher I am a mandated reporter. The crimes and violence had been perpetrated when Lorraine was younger and had been reported and dealt with within the judicial system. I also asked specific permission of this student to share this story due to its nature.)

When Lorraine finished speaking, the class went silent. Then suddenly there was a round of applause, and the students began to gather around her, waiting their turn to give her a hug and affirm her strength. Now I cannot speak to what, if any, changes occurred socially outside of the classroom, but the social dynamics definitely changed for the positive inside the classroom. Lorraine began to participate verbally much more in classroom discussions, offering her opinion on unit topics and sharing answers from her own work. Even more striking, though, was how the other students’ reactions to Lorraine changed. I noticed the other students connecting to her responses, beginning their comments with phrases such as, “Going off of what Lorraine said” or “I agree with Lorraine’s point and want to add.” When Lorraine shared her story, she allowed others to help

carry her burden and allowed them to see beyond her outer self and into her humanity.

I was stunned. I never expected to hear such a raw, traumatic experience shared by a teenager to forty of her peers. My first inclination was to stop her; this was clearly not an appropriate topic for the classroom. Then I realized Lorraine had done exactly what I’d asked of her. She was telling us her story. The traumatic events of her childhood set the stage for her story and the assignment allowed her the opportunity to see the victory she declared over the trauma by bringing it into the light that day. My initial reaction could have stopped that. As much as it pushed back against my teacher instincts to keep the discussion light, I remembered that by assigning this and asking students to be open and vulnerable, I had asked Lorraine to do exactly what she was doing. If I had shut it down, I would have told her that my room and this space were not safe for her to share her story. That response would have caused significant damage. I am so glad I paused before I reacted and that Lorraine was able to share her powerful words with us.

## MARK

The day after Lorraine presented her story, her friend Mark asked if he could be the first to present that day. His friend had given him the courage to get up and share his story with the class. Mark shared privately with me that he had intended to take a zero on the assignment because he was too terrified to get up and speak in front of the class. But after going to school with the same group of people for the past twelve years, Mark knew this would be the last time he would be able to share a part of him that his peers wondered about, but he had never openly discussed.

Mark was born without the sense of hearing. But unfortunately, his deafness was not identified until he was almost school-aged. His parents sent him to a school for the hearing impaired, but because he had not received any therapy or teaching during his early formative years, Mark made little and slow progress in school. In the four years I had known Mark, he had never volunteered to share in class and would only reluctantly respond when called on. Often he would point to his answer on the paper instead of speaking aloud. Yet that day in class, everything changed.

Mark stood up in front of his peers, and with very shaky hands, and a shakier voice, pulled out a piece of lined paper and read directly from it. Then, Mark shared his story. He talked about always being behind in

school, even though he was very talented and excelled in his own creative work at home. In elementary and middle school, Mark tried to stay under the radar. He stayed with the other kids who had special needs, even though he felt that his needs were very different from the other kids'. He just needed to be connected in a way that his body wouldn't allow. Also, in his younger years, there were not a lot of accommodations that he could use in the general education classroom. He felt trapped. In high school, Mark received a cochlear implant. While this tool eventually improved his hearing greatly, Mark now had visible outward evidence of his disability. He shared how when he came back after the surgery and activation of the implant, he felt very conspicuous, as though suddenly everyone knew he was deaf. Before, he could just pass as being anti-social or very shy. Now he could feel everyone looking at him, and even worse, now he could hear them whisper about him.

Mark then shared that while the cochlear implant allows him to hear, it doesn't always differentiate between the sounds he wants to focus on and all the other sounds around him. So many times, he just hears a cacophony of noise, and because he is accustomed to silence, the noise causes him extreme anxiety. As a result, sometimes Mark "forgets" the outer part of his cochlear implant at home to give himself a day off. But that choice doesn't come without its consequences. A day without the implant means a day with only about 10% of his educational experience. It also means a day of isolation.

This is when Mark's demeanor transformed for the first time in his speech. For a few minutes he wasn't talking to the class; we were merely humble observers to his inner monologue. He spoke slowly and thoughtfully about how lonely he feels when he is in his own world of silence. During lunch, he hangs out with his friends, who are his lifeline, but when he forgets his exterior implant device he is left out of the inside jokes and the latest news. So then he attends his classes without the social lift of interacting with his friends. He sits in class, only catching a few words or assignments, based on what the teacher presents visually or what he can pick up by reading lips. He knows he's falling further behind, which only increases his anxiety when he gets home and can't do the homework. That frustration causes Mark to go deeper inside himself, which only makes him want to disengage more. It becomes a vicious cycle. He then looked at the class and explained that while most people cannot choose to really shut out the world, he can. And that is both a blessing and a curse.

Mark quickly came back to the present and wrapped up his speech, remembering that he was nervous and now embarrassed. Yet as he tried to scramble for his seat, a student raised her hand and asked if she could ask him a question. With great hesitation and irritation, Mark conceded. She first told Mark that while she has known him since elementary school and always wanted to ask, she never asked him about his experience. She thanked him for sharing and apologized for not having the courage to ask him before now. She asked Mark to explain how the cochlear implant worked, which Mark gladly did. He removed the outer piece and explained exactly how it worked, and what type of sounds he heard. As soon as he finished another hand shot up. That student asked about Mark’s FM unit. The FM unit is something that Mark gives to each of his teachers to wear around their necks. It helps him hear the teacher more distinctly and quiets more of the background noise. But as he hands it to each teacher to wear, it is another clear marker that he is different. Yet that day Mark proudly explained how it worked, even asking me to stand up as his model. At the end, multiple hands went up with students thanking Mark for sharing his story and being so open. When it was finally done, the class applauded for Mark.

While the students knew Mark was hearing impaired, they didn’t know the story behind his hearing loss; but more importantly, they didn’t know Mark. Honestly, I thought Mark was not going to complete the assignment. Of all the assignments in school, one where he would need to verbally share elements of his physically evident personal struggles would seem to be the most daunting. Yet as Mark saw the importance of telling his story, of revealing his fears and difficulties to his peers, he gained a freedom from not hiding in the quiet. Mark became much more verbal in class after his presentation. Students in the class approached him more, and while Mark had already felt safe with me, I saw that he now interacted more as a student and as a peer with his classmates. It was as though sharing that piece of himself broke down a barrier, allowing him a broader path to academic and social progress.

Now these are five remarkable stories. I had almost ninety senior students that year. There were some who read their notes and sat back down. There were others who admittedly waited until the last minute because, as one of my sons always says, “If you wait until the last minute, it only takes a minute.” And that was perfectly alright. We all learn and grow at different rates and we need to respect others’ process. Also, listening to others’ stories helps us connect to our own. I choose to believe that many of my

students found their story through listening to the stories of their peers. The final story I would like to share is from a student who took a different approach.

### CHRISTOPHER

Chris had been patiently listening to his classmates' presentations over the course of many days. On one of the last days, he volunteered to present. He shared his story, his family, their legacy, his upbringing. While he had learned much about himself during the process of the assignment, there was nothing shocking or life-altering about his story. He realized he didn't have anything in his story that was nearly as traumatic as many he'd heard but was clearly impacted by the stories of his classmates. After Chris shared his story, he explained how he'd been affected by the stories of people he'd known almost his whole life. He talked about how we don't really know much about the people we sit in classrooms with every day. Then Chris declared he would always be available for those who did share traumatic stories that he will always be there to listen and walk alongside them, and even to pray for them.

Chris' story played an important role in the success of this assignment. When he said he didn't have a story to share, he was in fact sharing his story. He showed us through his words how he grew in empathy; how a stronger bond had been created between he and his classmates. His story showed his confidence in his faith and his generosity of character. The recognition of these traits and the cultural consciousness in knowing his classmates' stories made Chris an ally and advocate for his peers.

This activity changed the climate of my classroom in a way I never fathomed. I expected that at the very least it would be an extreme icebreaker, a way to create a sense of safety and vulnerability for students as we ventured into the emotional roller coaster of their senior year of high school. And it did accomplish that. But it did so much more. It felt like that scene from *Dead Poet's Society* where Robin Williams' character gets his student Todd to shake off his fear of academic compliance and release the poet within. An activity like this requires risk. It does not come with a rubric or a calculated outcome. It is messy and fluid. There can be tears or there can be silence. It can last one week or several weeks. But the results make the messiness and risk worth it. Starting the year with a foundation of trust and a deeper understanding of who we are and where we have been created a buy-in from the students that set the tone for a positive and productive academic year.

In terms of pedagogy, the story assignment functions under the constructivist approach. It was also an inquiry-based approach, as I presented students with specific questions to begin their brainstorm process. The students then found meaning within their own learning process. I, as the teacher, was merely an instigator and observer. Each student created their own masterpiece and underwent their own transformative process at different levels. The assignment also meets the California Common State Standards for writing, speaking, and listening. In my reflection of this assignment, I will add more structure in the initial phase with much more modeling of options and freedom for the presentation aspect. I will also adapt it for different grade and learning levels. Finally, I know that my students can be the best sources of feedback for altering assignments. I will use their feedback and suggestions to make the assignment stronger each year as they continue to allow me to learn from them.

Storying is a way for students to see the power of their history and the influence it has on their life paths. At a time when they are working through the process of coming of age, knowing where they came from is crucial to knowing where they are going. They can then choose to continue that path or forge a new one.

There was never any more inception than there is now,  
 Nor any more youth or age than there is now,  
 And will never be any more perfection than there is now,  
 Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now. (Whitman, 1892)

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