

Re-Writing my Narrative

Grades 8-12

Physical and Health Education, Language Arts and Arts Education

Purpose of the lesson

Narrative therapy focuses on your life story and reflects on the stories you tell. Likely this life story changes depending on who is asking us, our moods, and whether we feel we are at the beginning, middle or end of our most important story.

The goal of narrative therapy is to uncover opportunities for growth, development, finding meaning, and understanding ourselves better. We use stories to inform others, connect over shared experiences, say when we feel wronged, and even to sort out our thoughts and feelings. Stories organize our thoughts, help us find meaning and purpose, and establish our identity in a confusing and sometimes lonely world. Thus, it is important to realize what stories we are telling ourselves, and others, when we talk about our lives.

Narrative therapy was created by Michael White and David Epston in the 1980s. The purpose of this lesson is to highlight narrative therapy techniques by using a timeline to help students become more self-aware of their important life stories. Then asking students “what if we were to re-write this life story where you are the hero of your own life, rather than the victim?” <https://positivepsychology.com/narrative-therapy/>

Curriculum Competencies:

Physical and Health Education

- ◇ Identify and apply strategies to pursue personal healthy-living goals (Grade 8/9/10)
- ◇ Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being, for self and others (Grade 8/9)
- ◇ Explore and describe the impact of transition and change on identities (Grade 8)
- ◇ Explore and describe factors that shape personal identities, including social and cultural factors (Grade 9/10)

After Grade 9, Physical and Health Education becomes an elective and divides into more specific courses. However, this lesson plan can still be used in classrooms for Grades 10-12

Language Arts

- ◇ Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful literary and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audiences (Grade 8/9)

After Grade 9 Language Arts divide into a more specific curriculum. This lesson could be used in Creative Writing or Spoken Language 10/11/12

Arts Education

- ◇ Take creative risks to experience and express feelings, thoughts, ideas, and experiences (Grade 8/9)

This lesson can also be used in Art Studio 10/11/12

First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- ◇ Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story
 - *See last page for description of novel My Name is Seepeetza by Shirley Sterling*
- ◇ Learning requires the exploration of one's identity

Step-by-Step Lesson plan

Preparation: Print off the Timeline below.

- 1. Discuss the curricular objectives for this lesson with your class.** Point out that we all have a story to share and how this connects with the First Peoples Principles of Learning- (for example, often story is used across family generations). *Check if your library has the novel [My Name Is Seepetza](#) by Shirley Sterling*

Below are some **guiding questions** to promote student thinking for the assigned reading (chapter 1 or 1&2):

- What do you notice about story-telling in the first people's culture?
- How does Seepetza find strength (resilience)? *(she finds dancing as a coping strategy)*
- What do you think the impact of the residential schools has had on the first people's culture? (this has led to intergenerational trauma- *go as deep into this as the teacher sees fit*)

- 2. Watch the video: Childhood Trauma and the Brain.** You can find the video [HERE](#).

Below are some guiding questions to ask after the video:

- What is latent vulnerability?
- What are the social impacts of trauma?
- What are the 3 different brain systems (reward, memory, threat)
- What is hypervigilance?
- What are the impacts of trauma on memory? (they remember more negative experience, have a hard time recalling every day experiences)
- Can the brain change and adapt from trauma? (yes- they need positive connections with trusted adults, encouragement, and time)
- What do you think builds resilience?

- 3. Follow-up Activity:** See below for the timeline instructions. ***See attached document "My Timeline"*** (print in landscape view so students have more room to print their timelines).

- 4. Other Suggestions:** Have your students check out the **inspirational stories section** of the toolkit on their own personal time. Listening to others personal struggles with mental health can help to de-stigmatize mental health disorders and encourage students to seek help with overwhelming feelings. You can find the

inspirational stories section [HERE](#) Have student write **a reflective journal** using this question: “what if we were to re-write this life story where you are the hero of your own life, rather than the victim?” *Students may want to write this entry in a personal journal at home to keep private.

- 5. Lesson Closure:** Share some coping strategies that students can use to seek help with their personal stories- seeing the school counsellor to explore their life story further, seeing an outside agency counsellor or getting involved with a community program (support groups or art therapy online), writing about their experiences in a journal, creating a scrapbook of positive experiences to relate back to when they are feeling down, making a photo album with pictures & happy memories of a loved one that has passed away, creating a playlist they can listen to when reflecting on memories/emotions (self-esteem, grief, sadness, anger- for workouts) doing some art to express their story with painting & words etc. ***Caution-** Please refer any students to the school counsellor if they are triggered by this lesson or want to talk about their life story further*

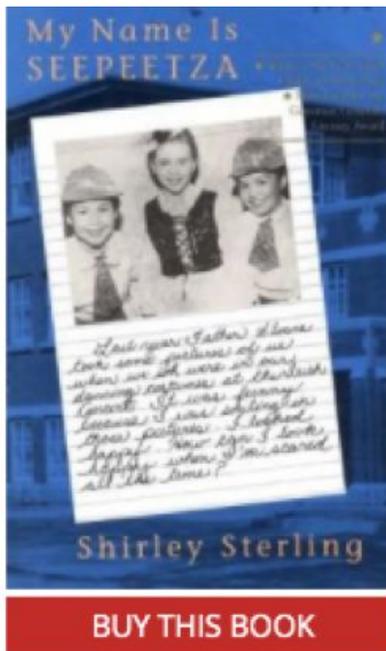
My Timeline Instructions

- Print my timeline in landscape view and photocopy for each of your students
- Mark the beginning of your timeline with your birthday and the end of your timeline with today's date
- Mark the important events in your life on the timeline consider these examples below:
 - For example, moving homes or schools, family members entering your home or passing away, pets passing away, sibling births in your family, vacations, new friendships, memories that stand out, any challenging life events/injuries that you are comfortable sharing with classmates etc. (see your school counsellor to reflect more on traumatic events for support with your feelings J)
- Encourage students to add details & doodles to their timeline using the below guiding questions:
 - What is a difficult moment that you reflected on from your timeline? How could you re-write that story to make yourself "the hero" or allow that experience to become a learning lesson?
 - What is a happy memory from your timeline- how did that moment make you feel?
 - What moments from your timeline made you feel sad?
 - What moments from your timeline made you feel mad?
 - What moments from your timeline made you feel worried?
 - Is there anything from your timeline that is similar to one of your classmates?
 - Are there any differences from your timeline from your classmates?
 - What did you learn in reflecting on your timeline? How could you be more optimistic/positive moving forward with your life experiences?

My Timeline



Description of novel My Name is Seepeetza by Shirley



My Name is Seepeetza

Shirley Sterling, Author Greenwood Books

\$14.95 (126p) ISBN 978-0-88899-290-1

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MORE BY AND ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

This rather desolate autobiographical novel chronicles a girl's harsh upbringing in an Indian residential school in 1950s British Columbia. Sixth-grader Seepeetza, whose name has been changed to Martha Stone, was only six when she was ripped away from her cozy family farm and plunged into a spartan existence. She and her classmates are beaten with a strap by Sister Superior and threatened not to get out of bed lest the devils grab them and "drag us into the fires of hell." Related as entries in Seepeetza's private journal, this book has a devastatingly simple style and conveys tiny details only a person who had been through such a school could know: "Girls hide bread or raw carrots in their bloomer legs under the elastic. They take it out and eat it late at night when the lights are out. That's when we get really hungry." The story breaks out of rigid notions of right and wrong—Seepeetza is fond of her father although he drinks; her parents may have sent her away, but they are loving; the nuns are cruel but sometimes inexplicably kind; Seepeetza finds moments of happiness in her dancing amid the general oppression. Though the naive tone of the journal slightly distances the reader, the smoldering intensity and unvarnished details still assume a mature sensibility on the reader's part. This title

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