



STORYCORPSU SUMMARY

StoryCorps is the acclaimed American oral history project which is helping the country recognize the power and value in the stories we find all around us, teaching the importance of listening and helping us realize that every story counts and every life matters equally. StoryCorps shares select interviews of everyday Americans with the nation over public radio, public television, books and new media. At some 38,000 interviews, StoryCorps now stands as the largest collection of American voices ever gathered.

Educators have creatively used StoryCorps content in the classroom since our founding in 2003. With StoryCorpsU, we introduce an interactive, standards-based college-readiness curriculum that uses StoryCorps content and interviewing techniques to enhance students' skills in the areas of speaking, listening, writing and critical thinking, while also fostering their self awareness and social awareness. Aligning closely with the Common Core Standards, StoryCorpsU incorporates web-based technology that is interactive, and content that is particularly relevant to and reflective of the lives, experiences and dreams of urban youth. StoryCorpsU engages the hearts and minds of young people to promote positive student outcomes.

StoryCorpsU enables students to experience their teachers as interested not only in their learning, but also in who they are as individuals. StoryCorpsU is therefore an especially powerful tool for enhancing school connectedness, a key factor in academic achievement. The relationships that develop as a result of listening to and valuing each other's stories are vital to enhancing the bonds that build a positive sense of community with peers. The curriculum also promotes positive interactions between the school community and students' families by providing an opportunity for students to conduct a StoryCorps interview with a family member. Sharing stories among teachers, students, and families creates the types of human connections that can play an important role in high school completion.

THE NEED

In a 2010 survey of 40,000 educators funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, nine of ten teachers pointed to the following as critical to school success:

- Academic instruction that promotes critical thinking, problem solving, reading and communication skills;
- Student motivation, a factor that teachers embrace as their responsibility and attempt to address at all teaching levels; and
- A social support system, including family and friends, that values and promotes learning (viewed as absolutely essential to student academic achievement by 75% of respondents).

StoryCorpsU addresses each of these issues, providing teachers and students with highly engaging material and methods to enrich their shared educational goals and experiences. StoryCorps' stories of everyday Americans present a diverse portrait of the nation, including significant historical events and human themes that resonate universally.

PROGRAM DESIGN

StoryCorpsU's college readiness curriculum has been piloted in New York City in the 2010-11 school year and will roll out nationally in 2011-12 as part of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's American Graduate program. Beginning in school year 2012-13, pending funding, StoryCorpsU will be staffed and structured for national expansion.

The Curriculum

The StoryCorpsU curriculum, developed in alignment with the Common Core Standards, introduces students to the power of their own voice, helps them articulate their aspirations, and develops public speaking and critical listening skills. Students practice college and career readiness skills such as learning to communicate information in a well-structured, audience-appropriate manner and writing for a range of tasks, purposes and audiences.

The program, delivered in a classroom by teachers trained and supported by StoryCorps staff, is comprised of 24 lessons divided into three units:

- Where We're From
- Who We Are
- Where We're Going

In each unit, students listen to StoryCorps stories and participate in class discussions to analyze, think critically about, and reflect on the interview segments, making connections between the stories and their own lives. Students learn how to conduct their own interviews, and make their own recordings, focusing on their family histories, how they see themselves, and who they hope to become. They also conduct interviews with teachers and peers.

The 24-lesson StoryCorpsU curriculum has been implemented as part of an Advisory program and would also fit well as part of an English or History class. Each lesson plan is based upon a 45-minute class but can be modified to meet varying class lengths. Similarly, the curriculum has been used in classes that have taken place once per week over the course of the school year, but can be adapted to meet varying course lengths.

StoryCorpsU's impact will be assessed through independent evaluation which will examine, among other factors, the program's impact on: students' academic performance, students' connectedness to school, and students' self awareness and social awareness.

The experience I had working with StoryCorps is something that words cannot convey. One of the most difficult things for teenagers to do is to find their voice. StoryCorps gave my students a platform not only to find their voice, but to let that voice be shaped by the words, history, and experiences of their loved ones. By sharing their interviews, these young men became more confident in themselves, more empathetic towards their peers, and more united as a group.

Joshua Lupher | Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice, Brooklyn, NY

Teacher Training

All participating teachers attend a two-day training event designed to introduce educators to StoryCorps, StoryCorpsU and oral history. Attendees receive copies of all StoryCorpsU teaching materials, including a course manual containing lesson plans and student workbooks. Teachers are also equipped to use the online and staff resources that will be available to them over the course of the school year.

PARTNERSHIP EXPECTATIONS

- Schools' mission and vision must align with the goals of StoryCorpsU, i.e., supporting a culture of academic excellence for all students
- Teachers using the StoryCorpsU curriculum are required to attend a two-day professional development training, for which they will receive a stipend
- Teachers must commit to implementing the full StoryCorpsU curriculum
- Schools must assure that students participating in the program have email addresses and access to the Internet
- StoryCorpsU staff will work to support partner teachers. Teachers are required to be available for regular communications with StoryCorpsU staff, submit evaluation forms and provide feedback to StoryCorpsU on a regular basis.
- StoryCorpsU staff will conduct site visits two times during the school year. Teachers will be expected to meet with StoryCorpsU staff at these times to provide feedback.

In addition to the two-day training, StoryCorpsU staff meets with teachers during two visits made to participating schools during the school year, and each school will also have a specific StoryCorps staff person assigned to maintain regular contact and provide support as needed.

Online Support

StoryCorpsU makes a rich array of tools and materials available to teachers through our Online Resource Network. The site is available in two tiers: a private, fully robust version is accessible to partner schools where the full curriculum is being implemented. A public version of the site was created so that all educators with interest in StoryCorpsU can access limited materials including ways to incorporate StoryCorps into the classroom such as suggested interview questions for teachers and students and a customizable one-lesson StoryCorps workshop.

CONCLUSION

StoryCorpsU is a dynamic, standards-based program that teaches students the power of their voices and enforces the message that every voice counts and every story matters equally.

CONTACT US

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