



OurStoryBridge Student Storytelling Projects Protocol

This document has been written to guide teachers, librarians, and school administrators and staff as they conduct storytelling projects in their schools, integrated into their students' classes. The protocols are based on our two-year pilot project in Keene Central School (NY), focused on 8th and 12th grade storytelling projects in 2021 and 2022 and in partnership with the *OurStoryBridge* project, *Adirondack Community: Capturing, Retaining, and Communicating the Stories of Who We Are*. Note that you can adapt the specific instructions that follow to your specific use and to any grade level, K – 12, and into postsecondary institutions.

Please don't hesitate to email us at createyourstoryproject@gmail.com to ask questions. And be sure to let us know about your experience!

Project Description

Each 8th and 12th grader begins by learning about storytelling, their local *OurStoryBridge* project, and those from across the United States, as well as listening to several posted stories. Next, they outline, practice, and record a one-to three-minute (8th grade) or three- to five-minute (12th grade) story. These stories are then posted to their local *OurStoryBridge* project website—as podcasts for 8th graders and as individual stories for 12th graders. A listening party follows completion of the project, along with a review of the elements that make a compelling story.

Note: Of course, schools can create *OurStoryBridge* projects, which may be especially helpful for development projects. For communities without *OurStoryBridge* projects, review this document and adapt your school story project accordingly. We'd love to hear what you did!

Learning Objectives

1. Recognize the importance of storytelling, its impact on both the storyteller and their listeners
2. Learn about the experiences of neighbors and your local history, as well as similar and new experiences across the country, by listening to select stories
3. Share elements of a compelling story and learn how to construct an outline to help *tell* one (rather than read one)
4. Develop public speaking ability and promote confidence in one's own voice in the context of sharing not only experiences, but also ideas
5. Demonstrate the skills needed to tell an audio story by having stories recorded

6. Gain communication skills that will be useful in college, career, and any communications, including presentation organization, sequential thinking, and presentation skills

Guidelines

- Each student is required to participate (unless the teacher determines that barriers exist).
- Permission to publish individual stories online is left up to each student's family. A *Parent/Guardian Letter and Release Form* (attached below) should be circulated and returned on a timely basis.
- No student names are revealed in their stories. Identification includes only the name of the school and the students' grade level.

Timeline

1. Teachers review this protocol (presented as an adaptive guide) and prepare a schedule.
2. Teachers distribute the *Parent/Guardian Letter and Release Form* and work diligently to receive it back within two weeks of distribution.
3. Local Story Aides deliver an introductory lesson on the project and outline the task, including the *Student Story Outline Form* (attached below) as a handout to prepare for storytelling.
4. If a professional storyteller is available, they present a lesson on the importance of storytelling and discuss elements of a compelling story. They may also tell a few brief stories (no more than five minutes each) to model their craft.
5. If available, student(s) from a previous storytelling project should share what their grade learned about preparing a good story and present a brief selection of their stories.
6. Teachers work with students to complete their story outlines.
7. Students practice telling their stories to each other in pairs or in threes, coaching each other as a "storytelling workshop" or "peer critique."
8. Story Aides take stories from the students.
9. Story Aides return for final session(s) sharing the stories with students and helping them to generate a list of what elements—from their own stories—made for a good story.
10. Story Aides prepare the podcasts or individual stories with pictures and post them to the local *OurStoryBridge* project website.

Responsibilities

Teacher Leading the Project

- Organize the project and schedule, inviting others with responsibilities (e.g., Story Aides from the local story project to take stories and process them, possible professional storyteller, and previous student storyteller[s]) and keeping them informed
- Revise/update as needed, distribute, and collect both the *Parent/Guardian Letter and Release Form* and the *Student Story Outline Form*.
- Assign students to listen to at least five stories or podcasts on their local story project or other projects listed on the [OurStoryBridge Stories](https://www.ourstorybridge.org) page of www.ourstorybridge.org to understand what an *OurStoryBridge* story is.

- After the initial introductory lessons by Story Aides, teachers work with students to prepare the *Student Story Outline Form*. Important: students should not write out their stories. Students should be guided to write only the first line, last line, and a few bullets of details they want to remember to mention as they talk. This is not a story *writing* project, but a *storytelling* one.
- Choose whether (and how) to grade the students' participation and/or their stories.

Students

- Listen to at least five stories or podcasts on their local story project or linked on the [OurStoryBridge Stories](http://www.ourstorybridge.org) page of www.ourstorybridge.org to understand what an *OurStoryBridge* story is.
- Return the *Parent/Guardian Letter and Release Form*, on time, as specified by the teacher.
- Complete the *Student Story Outline Form*, on time, as specified by the teacher.
- Create and practice individual stories a few times before recording, including workshopping with classmates.

Professional Storyteller

- If a professional storyteller is available, ask them to provide a single class lesson on their own storytelling approach and experience. This should include the importance of storytelling, elements of a compelling story, and examples. Teachers might also ask them to briefly discuss the benefits of storytelling, such as confidence building, public speaking, etc.

Story Aides

- Work with the teachers on technology needs, scheduling, and organizing the projects.
- Provide the introductory lesson for each grade.
- Work with the students to record the stories, using the *Student Story Outline Forms* they have filled out previously with first sentence, a few bullets to remind them what to talk about, and a last sentence. The first sentence should start by saying what they will talk about but should *not* include their names.
- Designate a class (or classes) to play the student's stories for them and discuss their experiences. Play each story, praise it leading the students in applause, ask them for ideas on what was done well, give some of your own, then move quickly onto the next story. After a few stories are played, hand out index cards or paper and give the students five minutes to list the elements that make a good story. Let them hold onto the cards for the duration of the class and add anything to the list as they finish listening to all their recorded stories. Then collect these cards and read off what they wrote at the end of the session.
- Publish the stories, individually or as podcasts, as appropriate.

Elements of a Good Story

These are some of the thoughts on elements of a good story, in no particular order, supplied by 8th graders:

- "Provide lots of details and descriptions, especially for explaining what you saw and felt."

- “Put emphasis on words that are important to the story or your feelings, so you don’t sound boring.”
- “Make sure you speak clearly and don’t rush your words; you can talk fast, slow, loud, and quietly in the same story to engage listeners.”
- “Include emotions, what you were feeling, talk from the heart.”
- “Use a good vocabulary and correct grammar.”
- “Include suspense to make your story especially interesting, if possible.”
- “Prepare a good conclusion that ties the story together, especially one that expresses emotion.”
- “Don’t make it too short, nor too long.”
- “Your story is special to you, so make sure your listeners understand why.”
- “Be funny, if relevant.”

Other Resources

- The [OurStoryBridge Teacher’s Guide](http://www.ourstorybridge.org) on www.ourstorybridge.org (in the Tool Kit) includes a resource for teachers at all levels to select stories to use in their lessons or to direct students to specific stories. Starting in 2023, this is expected to be converted to a *Story Index*, a searchable database of stories from across the country and including story categories as well as suggestions for courses these stories can be used in.
- Check out the *Sample School Assignment* in the [OurStoryBridge Teacher’s Guide](http://www.ourstorybridge.org) on www.ourstorybridge.org (in the Tool Kit) for another resource for preparing story project lessons.

Sample Parent/Guardian Letter and Release Form

Note: This two-page form (to be printed two-sided) is only a sample. Each school should adapt it to meet their needs and get approval from School Administration before distributing.

[SCHOOL LETTERHEAD]

Dear Parents/Guardians,

In this year's curriculum we are again partnering with our local *OurStoryBridge* project, **[INSERT NAME HERE]**. Each 8th and 12th grader will learn about storytelling, their local *OurStoryBridge* project and those from across the United States, as well as listen to several posted stories. Students will then outline, practice, and record a one-to three-minute (8th grade) or three- to five-minute (12th grade) story, have stories posted on their local *OurStoryBridge* project website **[ADD WEBSITE LINK]** as podcasts for 8th graders and individual stories for 12th graders, and review what makes a good story.

The Learning Objectives for this project are:

1. Recognize the importance of storytelling, its impact on both the storyteller and their listeners
2. Learn about the experiences of neighbors and your local history, as well as similar and new experiences across the country, by listening to select stories
3. Share elements of a compelling story and learn how to construct an outline to help *tell* one (rather than read one)
4. Develop public speaking ability and promote confidence in one's own voice in the context of sharing not only experiences, but also ideas
5. Demonstrate the skills needed to tell an audio story by having stories recorded
6. Gain communication skills that will be useful in college, career, and any communications, including presentation organization, sequential thinking, and presentation skills

Sports, family traditions, and adventures in nature are a few examples of experiences suitable for your child to share as topics in the brief stories we will be recording. If you do not wish to give permission for your child's story to be released publicly, they will still record their story, but it will not be made available to listen to on the website alongside those of their classmates.

If you have any questions regarding this request, please don't hesitate to contact **[ADD TEACHER]** (for 12th graders doing the project in the fall) or **[ADD TEACHER]** (for 8th graders doing the project in the spring).

Thank you for **returning the form before [ADD DATE]** and for your support of this important work!

Best regards,

[TEACHER'S NAMES, SCHOOL NAME]

[School Name] Release Form

Full Name of Student Interviewed (print): _____

I understand that any audio and/or photographs provided are for a project sponsored by **[NAME OF SCHOOL]** and **[NAME OF STORY PROJECT]**. I give permission for use of the student's audio recording and photographs for the project (if provided), including website posting and publicizing the stories and/or project.

Name of Student (print): _____

Signature of Student: _____

Date: _____

Name of Parent or Guardian (print): _____

Telephone: _____

Email Address: _____

Signature of Parent or Guardian: _____

Date: _____

Student Story Outline Form

Use this form to plan your story.

First Name: _____ **Last Name:** _____

Email: _____ @ _____

Telephone: _____ **Cell?** Y or N

Story Title:

What is your first sentence?

List three to five things you want to be sure to talk about.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

List any places, people, or dates you want to be sure to include.

What is your last sentence?