



Youth Training Toolkit

Storytelling for Civic Participation

Non-formal education materials

GERADOR



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About the Project

ARTvocacy for the (U)nion is an international project exploring how artistic expression can strengthen young people's engagement with questions related to democracy, human rights, diversity and participation.

Partners in Greece, Poland and Portugal worked through different artistic practices and local contexts, using art as a space for expression, dialogue and active participation.

At the centre of the project is the idea of activism: the connection between artistic practice and social engagement.

Activism does not necessarily mean giving an audience a particular message or telling people what to think. Art can also raise questions, bring different experiences into the conversation, create empathy and encourage people to reflect on the communities and societies of which they are part.

In Portugal, the project was implemented by Gerador through the activity *Parliament of Words*, a storytelling-based process developed with young people and local organisations.

Partners

The Portuguese activity was developed by Gerador, a non-profit media organization based in Lisbon, Portugal, founded in 2014. It operates at the intersection of journalism, culture, education and civic participation, with a strong commitment to strengthening democratic engagement through access to quality information and critical thinking tools.

In collaboration with the associations CoolBrave and Moinho da Juventude, in Amadora, the project challenged 50 young people to identify the concerns, inequalities, and stories they feel are under-heard, and to create original audiovisual works based on them.

The European project Artvocacy for the (U)nion (ART4U), is developed by an international consortium coordinated by MasterPeace (Netherlands) in partnership with Gerador (Portugal), Autres Directions (Netherlands), El Sistema Greece (Greece), Multigenerational Community Foundation (Poland) and Youth for Exchange and Understanding (Belgium).

Introduction

This toolkit was developed as part of ARTvocabulary for the (U)nion, based on the storytelling workshop implemented in Portugal by Gerador within the activity *Parliament of Words*.

It presents a simple and adaptable workshop that uses storytelling, audiovisual creation and non-formal education to explore activism, participation, freedom of expression, democracy and human rights with young people.

The workshop was built around a central question:

“What would you like to bring to Parliament?”

In this context, “Parliament” is not understood only as a formal political institution. It is used as a symbolic space of listening, where young people can bring forward the stories, concerns, questions and proposals they believe should be heard and discussed publicly.

The purpose of this toolkit is to help youth workers, trainers, educators, cultural organisations and civil society organisations reproduce or adapt the Portuguese storytelling workshop in different contexts.

The toolkit aims to support facilitators in creating a participatory space where young people can identify issues that matter to them, reflect on their own experiences and communities, transform concerns into stories, questions or audiovisual ideas, explore storytelling as a form of civic participation, discuss democracy, rights, inclusion, discrimination, freedom of expression and social justice through creative methods, and understand how art and storytelling can contribute to public dialogue and social awareness.

Young people often have strong perspectives on the issues affecting their lives, communities and futures, but they do not always have access to spaces where these perspectives are heard, taken seriously or transformed into public dialogue.

Storytelling can help bridge this gap. By turning concerns into narratives, young people can make visible experiences that are often ignored, simplified or excluded from public debate.

The Portuguese activity showed that themes such as racism, gender equality, violence, mental health, freedom of expression, access to information, justice and participation are deeply relevant to young people. These themes are not abstract: they appear in daily life, in communities, in schools, online, in families and in public spaces. For this reason, the workshop uses storytelling not only as a creative tool, but also as a way of encouraging listening, reflection, empathy and participation.

Methodology

The methodology combines non-formal education, guided discussion, storytelling exercises, group work and audiovisual thinking. Participants are invited to move from a broad theme or concern to a concrete story. This can take different forms, such as a fictional scene, a testimony, an interview, a voice-over text, a short video concept, a campaign idea, or a performative action.

The process encourages participants to ask:

- What do we want to talk about?
- Why does this matter to us?
- Who is affected by this issue?
- What story can help others understand it?
- What do we want people to feel, think or question?
- What responsibilities do we have when telling this story?

This toolkit is divided into two main parts:

Part I: Theory on the Topic

This section introduces the key concepts behind the workshop, including activism, storytelling, participation, freedom of expression and the role of art in social change.

It can be used by facilitators to prepare the session or to introduce participants to the broader ideas behind the workshop.

Part II: Practical Plan and Instructions

This section provides a practical workshop structure, including learning goals, expected outcomes, methods, materials, agenda and facilitation recommendations.

Youth trainers and facilitators may copy, adjust and adapt the non-formal education materials, including Canva presentations, handouts, worksheets and discussion questions, according to the needs, age, experience and interests of each group.

The workshop can be implemented as a standalone 90-minute session or expanded into a longer process leading to the creation of videos, campaigns, interviews or public presentations.

Part I: Theory on the Topic

This section provides the theoretical basis for the workshop. It is designed to help facilitators explain the main ideas behind the activities and support participants in moving from a broad social theme to a concrete story and, later, to an idea for a video.

What is Storytelling?

Storytelling is the art of telling stories in order to communicate a strong, touching or memorable message. A story can make an abstract topic easier to understand. Themes such as racism, mental health, freedom of expression, women's rights or violence can feel very broad until they are connected to a concrete situation, a character, a place, a memory, an image or a question.

In this workshop, storytelling can include fiction, personal memories, testimonies, imagined situations, real events, interviews, voice-over texts, documentary approaches or symbolic images. What matters is not the format itself, but the intention behind it: what the group wants to communicate and how that message can reach an audience.

The facilitator can invite participants to begin with simple questions: what do we want to say, why does this matter to us, who is affected by this issue, and what image or situation helps explain it?

The Common Structure of a Story

A useful starting point is the classic narrative structure, often associated with Aristotle. This structure usually includes a protagonist or hero, a conflict or obstacle, a beginning, development and ending, a climax or turning point, and often a message or moral.

This structure can help participants organise their ideas. It gives them a simple way to think about how a story moves: who is involved, what happens, what problem appears, what is the strongest moment and what feeling, question or message remains at the end.

For example, instead of staying only with a broad theme such as "racism", the group can begin to shape a story: where does racism appear, who experiences it, what happens, how do people react and what does the audience need to understand?

However, facilitators should present this structure as a tool, not as a rule that must always be followed.

When the Rules Do Not Serve the Story

Although narrative structures can be useful, they may not always serve the story. Some stories do not need a hero. Some do not have a clear villain. Some do not end with a solution. Some are built from fragments, voices, images, silences or questions.

This is especially important when working with sensitive or complex topics. Issues such as racism, domestic violence, police violence, discrimination or mental health cannot always be reduced to a simple conflict and resolution. Sometimes the most honest ending is not a solution, but a question. Sometimes the most powerful way to speak about violence is not to show it directly. Sometimes a place, a silence or a voice-over can say more than a scene with dialogue.

The facilitator can explain that structure is helpful, but participants should also listen to their intuition, their taste, their body and, above all, to what the story itself seems to need.

A useful guiding question is: *“What does this story need in order to be told with truth, care and impact?”*

From Theme to Story

One of the most important steps in the workshop is helping participants move from a general theme to a concrete story.

Participants may begin with broad issues such as racism, poverty, harassment, individual expression, women’s rights, mental health, housing, homophobia, transphobia, community or animal rights. These themes are important, but they are too broad to become a video immediately. The facilitator’s role is to help each group find a specific angle.

The question *“What is your story?”* can guide this transition. Participants can begin by asking where the theme appears in their lives, when they have seen it happen to someone else, where they see it in school, family, the neighbourhood or social media, and what image immediately comes to mind when they think about it.

After that, they can move from observation to intention: what do they want to say within this theme, what touches them, what do they imagine, and what idea, dream or desire is behind the story?

This movement helps the group transform a broad issue into something concrete. A theme such as racism may become a story about a scene in a park, a shop, a school or a street. A theme such as mental health may become a story about someone hiding what they feel. A theme such as freedom of expression may become a story about a protest or a moment when someone is afraid to speak.

From Individual Experience to a Collective Story

Many stories begin with one person's experience, memory, emotion or idea. However, in a group workshop, participants need to transform individual material into a collective story.

This requires communication, listening, negotiation and sometimes compromise. Facilitators can support this by encouraging each participant to share an idea, memory or image connected to the theme. The group can then identify what repeats, what feels strongest, what creates disagreement and what everyone agrees is important.

Before moving forward, the facilitator can ask whether everyone feels represented by the idea, whether anyone feels uncomfortable with the direction, and whether the group needs to adapt the story so that it feels more honest, respectful or possible to create.

Caring for People and Stories

When working with storytelling, especially around social issues, it is essential to discuss care and responsibility. The presentation used in the workshop highlights five important principles: truthfulness and authenticity, consent, dignity, transparency and protection.

Truthfulness and authenticity mean being clear about the nature of the story. Is it fictional, based on a real situation, a testimony or inspired by something the group witnessed? A fictional story can still communicate truth, but the group should understand what they are presenting and avoid misleading others, especially when working with sensitive topics.

Consent is essential whenever real people, voices, faces, testimonies or identifiable situations are involved. Participants should think about whether the person understands the project, where the video may be shown and whether they are comfortable being included. If minors are involved, consent from a parent or guardian may be necessary.

Dignity means not reducing people to their suffering or exposing them in a way that may be humiliating. Even when the topic is injustice, discrimination or violence, the people represented should be treated with respect and care.

Transparency means being clear about the purpose of the story: why it is being told, where it may be shared and what role each person has in the process.

Protection means thinking carefully about what should not be shown. Sometimes it is better to change names, avoid identifiable places, use voice-over instead of faces, or remove details that are not necessary. A useful question for the group is: *"What do we need to show, and what do we need to protect?"*

From Story to Video

After the group has developed a story, the next step is to transform it into a video idea. The journalistic lead can be a useful tool at this stage: what, who, when, where, how and why. These questions help participants clarify what happens in the video, who appears or is affected, where and when the story takes place, how it will be shown and why it matters.

The group should also think about audience and resources. Who do they want to reach? What is the best way to show what they want to say? What means, spaces and people do they have available? What does their intuition tell them?

A video can take many forms: a fictional scene, a short documentary, an interview, a voice-over with images, a symbolic sequence, a collective statement or a hybrid format. The important thing is that the format serves the story, not the other way around.

Storytelling, Activism and Public Voice

In the *Parliament of Words*, storytelling is connected to activism because it allows young people to bring their voices into public space. The workshop is about helping participants understand that their questions, concerns and stories can be part of public debate.

Storytelling can make social issues visible, create emotional connection, challenge stereotypes, open conversations and communicate experiences that are often ignored.

However, storytelling does not need to tell the audience exactly what to think. It can leave a question, create discomfort, show a contradiction or invite people to listen more carefully. For this reason, facilitators should encourage participants to think of their videos not only as final products, but as starting points for conversation.

A useful final question is: “*What do we want people to keep thinking about after they watch our video?*”

Key Message for Facilitators

The facilitator’s role is to help participants move from a theme to a story, and from a story to a possible video, while keeping the process open, respectful and safe.

Structures, questions and tools are useful, but they should not replace intuition, care or group dialogue. The goal is to support young people in creating meaningful stories that express something they believe should be heard.

Part II: Practical Plan and Instructions

Workshop Setup

Duration: Approximately 90 minutes

Target audience: Young people aged 10–25, including participants from diverse cultural, social and community backgrounds. The workshop can be delivered with an existing youth group, community organisation, school group or informal group of young people. It can also be adapted to different age groups and levels of experience with storytelling or audiovisual creation.

The workshop aims to:

- introduce participants to the concept of activism;
- explore storytelling as a tool for participation, expression and social awareness;
- encourage young people to identify concerns and questions that matter to them;
- support participants in transforming a social issue or concern into a story;
- develop critical thinking around narrative, representation, audience and impact;
- introduce basic tools for interviews, testimonies or audiovisual storytelling;
- encourage reflection on freedom of expression, democracy, and human rights;
- create a safe space where youngsters can listen to each other and develop ideas.

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the workshop, participants will have had the opportunity to:

- understand the basic concept of activism;
- reflect on storytelling as a form of civic participation and public expression;
- identify social themes or concerns they would like to bring into public discussion;
- transform an idea or concern into a story, testimony, interview or video concept;
- develop a central question or message for their story;
- reflect on the ethical responsibilities involved in telling stories about real people;
- work collaboratively with others to develop a creative idea;
- explore how stories can contribute to awareness, empathy, dialogue and social change.

Workshop Agenda

The following agenda is based on the storytelling workshop implemented in Portugal within the *Parliament of Words* activity. It can be adapted according to the number of participants, their age, the time available and the intended final output.

TIME	CONTENT	NOTES & RESOURCES
10 min	Welcome and Introduction Welcome participants, organise the session and introduce the goals of the workshop. Explain that the objective is to understand how to move from a general theme to a story, and from a story to an idea for a video.	Create an open space suitable for group discussion.
10 min	Introduction to storytelling: rules and the breaking of rules Introduce what storytelling is, the common rules of telling a story, and the importance of intuition when breaking those rules. This moment helps participants understand that stories can follow structures, but can also be adapted, challenged or reinvented according to what they want to communicate.	Presentation slides: link to the presentation . Feel free to copy and adjust the presentation to your needs.
20 min	Creating groups and assigning or creating the main themes Divide participants into groups and support them in choosing or being assigned a main theme. Groups can be formed using different methods, for example by gathering participants according to their interest in a particular theme.	Paper; pens; markers; post-its or cards.
5 min	What is your story? Invoking memories regarding the theme to build a story Guide participants through a series of questions that each group should discuss and answer in order to move from the chosen theme to a concrete story. Encourage them to connect the theme with memories, situations, places, or experiences.	Theoretical input and guided reflection.

5 min	How to work as a group? Tips and considerations Share advice and considerations for working collectively when creating one idea, one story and one video. Encourage listening, negotiation, respect for different opinions and shared decision-making.	Facilitation guidance.
5 min	Caring about the people and the stories Share advice for using personal material and dealing carefully with people's stories. Discuss respect, consent, privacy, representation and the importance of not exposing anyone in a way that may be uncomfortable or harmful.	Theoretical input and ethical guidance.
20 min	Brainstorming: group work and discussion First brainstorming session for groups to discuss and decide what their idea and story are, based on the previous inputs. The facilitator accompanies the process by going to each group, listening to the ideas and helping participants develop them further.	Paper; pens; markers; post-its; story development worksheet; guiding questions, etc.
5 min	How to transform a story into a video Guide participants through questions and reflections that help them move from the story to a concrete video idea. Encourage them to think about format, scenes, characters, interviews, voice-over, locations, images, sound and the intended audience.	Theoretical input and practical guidance.
20 min	Brainstorming: group work and discussion Second brainstorming session for each group to decide what the idea for their video will be. The facilitator accompanies the process by going to each group, discussing the ideas and supporting the development of the video concept.	Practical group work.
10 min	Presentation of each idea for the video This moment allows participants to receive feedback, listen to other ideas and reflect on how their own proposal could be developed further.	Practical presentation and peer exchange.

Recommendations

The workshop should feel like a space for exploration rather than a lesson with predetermined answers. A few simple principles can help create this environment:

- Encourage participation without forcing anyone to speak;
- Make room for different opinions and experiences;
- Listen to participants' responses before moving immediately to the next question;
- Avoid presenting one interpretation as the correct one;
- Adapt the language and questions according to the age of the group;
- Use the participants' own experiences and concerns as starting points when possible;
- Be attentive to sensitive topics;
- Don't pressure participants to share personal experiences;
- Encourage respect, care and consent when discussing other people's stories.
- Keep the process flexible; the facilitator's role is primarily to open the conversation;
- Ask questions and help participants make connections.

In this workshop, the facilitator supports young people in moving from abstract themes to concrete stories, while ensuring that the process remains participatory, respectful and safe.

Notes

Youth trainers may copy and adjust these non-formal education materials, including presentations, workshop flow and discussion questions, according to the needs of the group.

The workshop can be shortened, expanded or adapted depending on the time available, the number of participants, the age of the group and the intended final output.

If the workshop leads to the creation of videos, testimonies or public presentations, facilitators should ensure that participants understand basic principles of consent, privacy, representation and ethical storytelling.



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