

## Session 1 – Names & Storytelling

### Materials:

- Agenda charted on the board or chart paper, or provided as a handout
- Handout: "TING"
- AV equipment to play video: The Neuroscience of Storytelling

### Opening: Stories

Pick one of the following quotes to read aloud with the group:

"Stories have a transformative power to allow us to see the world in a different way than we do if we just encounter it on our own. Stories are an entry point to understanding a different experience of the world."

- Clare Patey, Director of the Empathy Museum

"Listen, stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So, it helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and stories between stories and finding your way through them is as easy and hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is the getting lost. And when you're lost, you really start to open up and listen."

- Fisher, et al., co-founders of A Traveling Jewish Theatre

Explain that we are all sharing stories all the time. Elicit, or explain, that stories promote laughter, build connections, resurrect memories, hold sentimental meaning, preserve history, and reveal identity and bonds that people hold dear. Let participants know that we will learn more about storytelling throughout this session.

Stories also are key to developing empathy. Introduce the definition of empathy:

- Empathy: Sensing others' feelings and perspective and taking an active interest in their concerns.
- People with this competence:
  - Are attentive to emotional cues and listen well
  - Open to diversity

- Show sensitivity, read non-verbal cues and understand others' perspectives
- Help out based on understanding other people's needs and feelings

Using the definition of empathy, invite participants to reflect on the quote in pairs and/or in the larger group. Invite participants to think about a time in their life when a story changed their perspective and/or sparked their empathy. Have a few volunteers share out for your time together, naming the specific and sequential activities all will engage in.

Though some people are fine to go with the flow, others benefit from, or require, a sense of the plan for the day. Giving people an overview of what's to come is considered a trauma-informed practice as it provides the predictability that can help manage some people's uncertainty and accompanying anxiety about what to expect and when. For this reason, we'll also be using a similar and thus predictable format for each session:

- an opening (ceremony)
- checking of the agenda
- a main activity or two, and
- a closing (ceremony)

Additionally, having a visible agenda supports the visual learners in your group.



### Talk Participants Through Today's Agenda

- Opening: Stories
- Introduce the Checking of the Agenda
- Check Agenda
- Storytelling and the Brain
- Video: The Neuroscience of Storytelling
- Listening: The Chinese Character "TING"
- "A" Story of Your Name
- Closing: A Takeaway

### Storytelling & The Brain, The Why of Storytelling

Frame today's learnings by introducing the following core ideas to your group:

- **Learning is a holistic process engaging a person's body, heart, and spirit, as well as their mind, in an integrated process.** Many societies and cultures have long-established storytelling traditions. The stories, and accompanying performances, function to entertain as much as educate.

- **As human beings we are programmed for stories. Our brains are wired to connect to and process stories differently than mere facts.** Before we had written language this is how information was shared, how we passed on lessons learned to keep us safe and help us thrive. Stories are an effective way to transmit important information and values from one individual or community to the next.
- **Stories that are personal and emotionally compelling engage more of the brain, and thus are better remembered, than simply stating a set of facts.** Neuroscience tells us that the brain is more engaged when we hear a good story. And we know that “neurons that fire together wire together” creating neural passages in the brain to facilitate learning.

### Video: The Neuroscience of Storytelling

Consider playing the following video: [The Neuroscience of Storytelling](#) through 1:26 min.

This first part of the video is about how our human brains are wired for storytelling. Connections can clearly be made to learning the classroom and school, as stories help us retain more information. Stories, moreover, trigger the release of oxytocin, which helps to promote empathy.

**Facilitator Note:** The second part of the video revolves around storytelling as a marketing tool, which is less relevant to our session today.

### Large Group Reflection

Ask participants to consider *if, when* and *how* they've used storytelling with their students in class before. For what purpose? What was the impact?

Then ask them, given what they've explored about the power of storytelling just now, can they think of (other) ways they might want to use storytelling with their students in class going forward? When would they want to use it and how?

### Listening: The Chinese Character, “TING”

Introduce listening as an essential skill for Social and Emotional Learning, Restorative Practices, Brave Conversations and all teaching and learning. Throughout the different activities in this guide, we encourage you to practice wholehearted listening, whether in pairs, small groups, microlabs or restorative circles.

Distribute the handout of the Chinese character “ting” and explain that before our first pair share today, we’ll prime our “listening pump” so to speak by reflecting on the following graphic: The Chinese Character “TING”



The Chinese character for listen: “**TING**” captures the full spirit of listening and invites us to show up fully in the following ways:

- The upper left part of the symbol stands for ear – our ears to hear the speaker’s words
- The upper right part represents the individual – you
- The eyes and undivided attention and focus are next and finally,
- There is the heart at the bottom right of the symbol.

The symbol captures listening with our ears, maintaining eye contact, giving the speaker our undivided attention and being empathetic to their story. We realize, of course, that eye contact while listening is not considered respectful in all cultures but the intent is to be fully present with the other person, bearing witness, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, as we meet in a shared exchange.

We realize that listening is a skill to be learned and practiced, which we’ll start with in this next activity.

## Storytelling Pair Share: "A" Story of Your Name

During this pair share, you'll invite participants to share a story of their name.

Invite participants to pair up. Have pairs decide who will speak first and who will listen.

Explain that each person will get 90 seconds to share, while their partner practices wholehearted listening, keeping the Chinese character, "ting" in mind. If people's stories don't fill the 90 seconds, they may share another story about their name or sit in silence as they let the rest of the time pass. This is *not* a back-and-forth conversation.

After 90 seconds, partners will switch roles: listeners become speakers and speakers become listeners.

Explain that they'll be sharing a story of their name(s). We understand that people may have different stories about different parts of their names, but in the interest of time, you'll invite people to share one story. Invite them to consider telling a story about their first, middle or last names, given or chosen names, married or single names, nicknames, etc.

They might talk about:

- why it was given to them; by whom
- whether they were named after anyone
- what the ethnic, cultural, or religious root(s) of their name is/are
- what the meaning of their name is
- whether a name is ever misspelled or mispronounced
- whether they (dis)like their name and possible reasons why
- whether their name is unique or common
- whether and how their name fits them, or not
- what feelings any and all of this brings up
- who they might ask to learn more about their name(s)
- what other ways they might learn more about their names

Model the activity by sharing a story of your name before you invite pairs to initiate their exchange. Let them know that when they come back to the large group, they'll be asked to introduce their partner with their name(s) and their story/ies.

When the three minutes of sharing and listening are up, invite people back to the large group. Then invite participants, one after the other, to introduce their partners with their name(s) and story/ies.

## Large Group Reflection

When all participants have been introduced by their partners, consider asking any, or all, of the following questions as you facilitate a group discussion on the stories of our names.

Make sure you end by asking the last question about the importance of names:

- What was this activity like for you?
- How was it to listen to your colleagues/be listened to by colleagues?
- What about the introductions to the group? What was that like?
- Did this activity allow you to connect with your colleagues? If so, how?
- How do you feel about an activity like this early in the year with students/staff?
- Why is it important to explore and discuss our names in this way?

**Note:** Some participants will know more about their names than others. The reasons for this range from the simple and mundane to the extremely complicated and painful. Always invite participants to share as much, or as little, as they feel comfortable sharing and emphasize that this activity is about sharing “a” story of your name, not “the” story of your name. This also opens the door for participants to share how they may have come to name themselves. For more information about names and naming, see the next session, Session 2: The Importance of Names.

## Closing: A Takeaway

Depending on the number of people in your group, invite all, or several, participants to share out a takeaway from today's session.

## Additional Resources: Session 1

### Additional Written Resources:

[“How Stories Connect And Persuade Us: Unleashing The Brain Power Of Narrative”](#) by Elena Renken

[“What Can the Chinese Character for “Listen” Teach Us?”](#) by [simonendr](#)

“Unpracticed” by N’Jameh Camara, *Teen Vogue*

[“Why Hearing Your Own Name Might Just Be the Sweetest Sound, Ever!”](#) by Anna K. Gallagher, [hustlefromtheheart.com](#)

[“My Teachers Mispronounced My Name. Decades Later It Still Stings, and Influences the Way I Coach Educators”](#) by Dionne Grayman, *Chalkbeat*

[“Pronouncing Students Names Should be a Big Deal”](#) by Punita Chhabra Rice

[“The Importance of Learning Students’ Names”](#) by Tamara Glenz

[“What is Deadnaming and Why Is It Harmful”](#) by Ariane Resnick

[“Deadnaming: What Is It and Why Is It Harmful?”](#) by KC Clements

### Additional Video Resources | TED Talks:

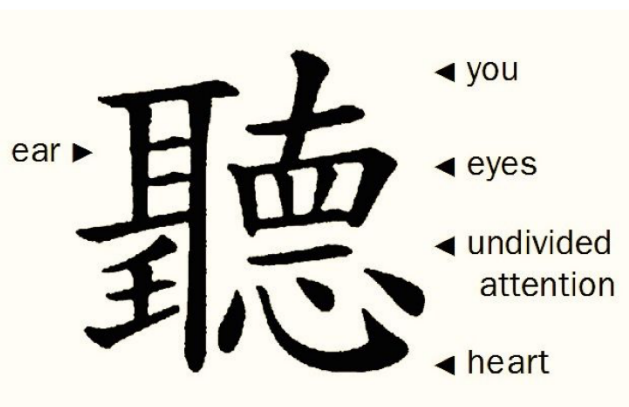
[Getting It Right: Why pronouncing names correctly matters | Gerardo Ochoa | TEDxMcMinnville](#)

[Your Name is the Key! | Huda Essa | TEDxUofM](#)

## Handout: The Chinese character for listen: "TING"



### CHINESE SYMBOL FOR LISTEN *TING*



The left side of the symbol represents an ear.  
The right side represents the individual- you.  
The eyes and undivided attention are next and finally  
there is the heart.

This symbol tells us that to listen we must use both  
ears, watch and maintain eye contact, give undivided  
attention, and finally be empathetic.  
In other words, we must engage in active listening!