



The Connecting Routes Project's core belief is that there's more that unites us than divides: that **"Stories Connect Us."** In this unique and challenging moment of both isolation and division, we have adopted a new online storytelling program, inspired through a collaboration with the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture last year. Utilizing the connective power of story circles and Zoom, we have started **Round Trip: Virtual Story Circles.**

We will be offering a story circle online every month, with communities all across the country. Round Trip is free, lasts 60-90 minutes, and is structured to provide each storyteller an equal amount of time to participate. Circles will be kept small and intimate to ensure a safe, welcoming space. Round Trip provides a chance for people to share their stories, but more importantly it's a chance to promote the value of listening to one another and finding the common ground.

So, what is a Story Circle? A Story Circle is a time honored tradition of sharing deep truths: a small group of individuals sitting in a circle (or in our case, a Zoom Room) sharing stories from their own experience inspired by a common theme.

Before we officially start the circle, we will take a moment to introduce ourselves, our pronouns, our location, and share our **Talking Piece.** Please bring a fun, special object and tell us a little about it! Later, during the group discussion we will use these to designate who is speaking.

Every speaker will be given an equal **3 minutes** to share their story. Imagine starting this way: **"Let me tell you about the time...."** Whatever story each person wants to tell is welcome. As everyone in turn shares a story, a larger, richer, and more complex story emerges. Taken together, these stories can help us to develop a shared analysis of the problems our communities face and spark our imagination about what's possible when we take action together. By the end, we hope to see both real differences and things our stories have in common.

After all stories are shared, we'll break for **a few minutes to reflect** on what was revealed by the stories. Were there common themes? Notable differences? What moments stuck with you? Any specific quotes? What spoke to you? What feelings and ideas were sparked?

We will then come back together to **share something of what we learned** with the whole group. During the group discussion, we will use our **Talking Pieces** to respectfully designate whose turn it is to speak.

Some Guidelines and Agreements:

- Although Round Trip is intended as an open forum -- welcoming of all voices and differing opinions -- **hate speech of any kind will not be permitted.**
- We will discuss and agree upon a possible theme for the circle beforehand, but **the theme is absolutely allowed to morph, expand, or completely change** as the stories are shared!
- A gentle reminder: stories have a **beginning**, a **middle**, and an **end**.
- **Listening is as important as speaking** - everyone receives full attention while telling their story.
- **This isn't about performance.** This event is intended as a safe, comfortable and welcoming space to share your experiences with fellow storytellers across the country. Listen to the stories being shared from others in the circle, reflect on them, let it inspire you -- and then share your story with honesty as it comes to you.
- If you're thinking about the story you're going to tell when it's your turn, it won't be easy to give your full attention to other storytellers. So please don't worry about preparing the "best" story! Don't make notes. I guarantee that **stories will arise in your mind**, and you will have one to tell when the time comes. Just focus on listening to each other and the rest will take care of itself!
- Each speaker is given 3 minutes to share a story, but **no need to use the full 3 minutes** if you don't want to, or if your story doesn't need it! No pressure to "fill" any remaining time.
- At the beginning of the circle, we will decide on a storytelling order, and write that plan in the Zoom Chat to keep some structure. When it is your turn, **you can pass**, and will be given another opportunity to tell a story at the end of the circle. If someone declines, that's also fine. Please don't pressure others in the circle.
- Please **no questions, criticisms, cross-talk, or comments** while someone is sharing their story. Every story anyone wants to share is welcome. Even if someone's story reminds you of our own experience—even if you were there when the story unfolded and remember it differently—it's not okay to contradict, correct, or embellish someone else's story.
- We **thank** each storyteller and **take a breath** between stories to let them sink in before the next story comes.

Thank you for your participation, we look forward to connecting with you and hearing your story!

#StoriesConnectUs