

# Speaking Our Stories: A Theater and Language Arts Exploration

**Grades 9–12**

Time: approx. 60–80 minutes

## Objective

Listen to the true story of one Jewish family’s journey from Eastern Europe to the United States more than one hundred years ago. Learn about this period in history, then make connections to your own life through peer interviews and writing monologues.

## Learning Outcomes

At the end of the workshop, participants will:

- Relate the past to the present by listening to a nineteenth century Jewish immigration story and identifying themes that are present today
- Have identified a personal experience that is in some way significant to them and practice critical thinking by translating it into monologue form
- Have practiced empathy and active listening by hearing a unique, personal story from their partner
- Engage in critical thinking practices in response to personal memories by evaluating and analyzing the feedback they receive from their partner’s notes

## Materials

- [Honor Memory lesson plan](#) (optional)
- Speaker or other method of listening to the audio of [Reva’s Story](#)
- Honoring Memory and the Power of Storytelling worksheet (page 4–5)

## Class Activity

**1. Optional warm up:** Lead students in sharing their answers to the statement, “I come from...” Give students about 1–2 minutes to create their response. They can provide a literal answer or an imaginative, creative answer.

**Note:** It is important to provide one or two examples of responses before giving students time to come up with their answers, so that they don’t feel pressured to share their geographical home if that is an uncomfortable subject for them. Sample responses could include:

**Play**—a form of literature that is written to be performed on stage by actors for a live audience

**Character**—a fictional or real-life person, animal, or being that moves the story forward

*Literal answers:*

“I come from California.”

“I come from Seattle.”

*Imaginative/creative answers:*

“I come from palm trees, salty air, and my grandma’s homemade tortillas.”

“I come from blackberry bushes, evergreen trees, and cloudy skies.”

**2.** Listen to the audio recording of [Reva’s Story](#).

Tell students they will be listening to a first-person narration of the story of a young Jewish girl who immigrated to the United States in the early 1900s.

**3.** Have a follow up discussion with students.

**a.** What themes or ideas from Reva’s story are still present today?

**b.** How can telling stories about resilience, despite all odds, be a tool for combating hate?

**4.** Give students 1–2 minutes to think of a strong personal memory or experience that they would feel comfortable sharing with a partner.

**Note:** it does not have to be an emotionally heavy story such as Reva’s story, but any memory that has left a lasting impression on them.

**5.** Students will then be split into pairs and begin listening to one another’s stories. Each student will receive 5 minutes of uninterrupted time to tell their story. The listener will take notes using a worksheet (page 4–5). Partners will switch and repeat the same process.

**Note:** Encourage students to write as legibly as possible, as they will eventually be sharing their notes with their partner. Also remind them that this is not a direct transcription; just listen actively and take notes on anything that stands out or is interesting to them.

**6.** After all students have shared their stories with their partners, instruct them to swap their note-taking sheets. All students will read and review the notes that their partner took, paying attention to anything that is interesting or surprising about what their partner noticed.

**7.** Students will then begin brainstorming and writing a monologue based on their own personal story. Depending on class level, it may be helpful to give a brief explanation on what a **monologue** is and how it differs from a **scene**, **dialogue**, etc.

**Monologue**—a speech given by a single character in a play

**Scene**—the action of a play that occurs in one setting

**Dialogue**—conversation between two or more characters

8. Have a follow-up discussion with students.
  - a. How did it feel to share a personal memory with a partner?
  - b. Why is it important to share stories, both our own and those of people that came before us?
  - c. What are the pros of working with a partner to tell your story? What are the cons?

## Curriculum Connections

This lesson aligns with Common Core Standards, Arts Standards, and the CASEL Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework by fostering competencies in self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

National Arts Standard TH:Re8.1.I.

National Arts Standard TH:Cn10.1.I. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA: SL.1, 2, 3; W.2, 3

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1, 10.2, 10.3 / SL.11-12.1, 12.2, 12.3

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2, 10.3 / W.11-12.2, 12.3

## Connect with Us

Our educators are here to help! If you have questions about this curriculum or would like to share your students' writing or artwork with us, please email [education@skirball.org](mailto:education@skirball.org).

## Honoring Memory and the Power of Storytelling

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Name of Story-Teller

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Name of Story-Listener

What does this story make you wonder?

What comes to mind as you hear this story? Include images, sounds, tastes, etc.

What emotions does this story make you feel?

## Honoring Memory and the Power of Storytelling

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Name of Story-Teller

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Name of Story-Listener

**Did anything surprise me about what my partner noticed? If so, what?**

To begin writing your monologue, think about the images, objects, sights, sounds, feelings, and other elements from your personal story. Imagine another character in your story saying something or asking a question that prompts a longer response from you. Be sure to include that imagined prompt below before you begin writing the monologue.

**For example, these are questions you might ask Reva after hearing her story:**

**“Can you tell me more about the belongings you packed?”**

**“What are you thinking about when you hear the sound of the soldiers?”**

**“How did you feel when you hugged your Papa again?”**