



Storyscope

A Story Circles Project

Highlights of Season 1: 2017-2018

“Home” (Fall 2017)

“People’s State of the Union” (Winter 2018)

“Change” (Spring 2018)



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Storyscope is supported by Black Mountain Communications and is associated with the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University and the US Dept. of Arts and Culture

About Storyscope and Story Circles

Storyscope is a joint venture by Citizen Artists who dare to dream of an inclusive community. We foster a spirit of equity and belonging through Story Circle Events, welcoming people of all stripes to come together in a friendly space, share personal stories, and find common ground.

Storyscope started as an idea. In January 2017, a group of performers in Tempe, Arizona, participated in “The Election Monologues,” a nationwide event coordinated by Tanya Taylor Rubenstein. 13 events were presented simultaneously from coast to coast. Inspired by that experience, John Genette circulated a white paper exploring ways to sustain momentum and give citizens more platforms: “The Refugee Monologues,” for example, and/or Story Circles – a format some of us had become enamored with through our participation in another nationwide event, the People’s State of the Union.

A dozen readers responded to the white paper with insightful comments and cautionary notes. In April 2017, John invited a small group to reflect on those observations and brainstorm about next steps. That discussion led to a decision to limit our focus to Story Circles as a way to foster inclusiveness without putting people or cultures “on display.” Storyscope was founded in June 2017 by John, Jennifer Linde, and Leah Marché.

The term “Citizen Artist” and the Story Circles format we’ve adopted/adapted come from the US Department of Arts and Culture (usdac.us), creators of the People’s State of the Union. USDAC is a grassroots action network based in Philadelphia, dedicated to “inciting creativity to shape a culture of empathy, equity, and belonging.” USDAC has recognized Storyscope as an Affiliate.

In a Story Circle, each participant takes a few minutes to share his or her unique lived experience as it relates to a chosen theme. The things that our stories have in common – as well as real differences – are brought to light, and a larger, richer, more complex story emerges. What’s reflected back to us is illuminating and ever-changing, with multiple dimensions, twists, and turns – like a kaleidoscope of human experience. In a Story Circle Event, a chosen theme is introduced through artistic interpretations by musicians, poets, or dancers. Then the group breaks into Story Circles of 6-10 people, facilitated by our trained volunteers. To conclude, the full group reconvenes as one to reflect on the stories that were shared and to highlight any connections or disconnections that may have emerged.

Our intention with Storyscope is not to build an organization but to build enthusiasm for the Story Circles format that was freely shared with us by USDAC. We try to stay loose-knit, without a hierarchy, because our mission is to encourage wide use of the format, not to treat it as proprietary. This approach has its administrative shortcomings, but we believe that’s a temporary obstacle. If we can keep Storyscope going with the right intention, we believe the project will one day find a home at an institution that can provide the proper administrative support. In these nascent days, we choose to focus on the Story Circle experience rather than duplicating a formal management structure that we are sure already exists.

Storyscope produced seven Story Circle Events in the fall of 2017 and five more events in the spring of 2018. We’re pleased to share these highlights of our inaugural season.

Fall 2017 – “Home”

October 2 – Tempe Community Christian Church

Storyscope was invited to Tempe CCC (“the storytelling church”) by pastor Doug Bland (now retired). Doug is a storyteller and faculty member at the Storytelling Institute at South Mountain Community College. About 25 people participated, and the program was well received. People found powerful connections between their various stories about home, such as the feeling that home is wherever your loved ones are. Artistic interludes were presented by Keely Bruner, Sharon Gilbert, and Leah Marché. Afterward, Doug offered his observations:



“I thought it was very well done. The flow of the evening—group theme setting, occasional artists interspersed through the evening, facilitated story circles, wrap up—really worked well. It’s a great model. I agree that storytelling that builds community around safe, shared metaphors is more fun than getting people together around topics where there is conflict—but both are needed in these times. Thanks for the work you do in both areas.”¹

October 13 – The Empty Space, Hugh Downs School of Human Communication, ASU

The Empty Space, a black box theatre at ASU, is home base for Jennifer and John. Jennifer Linde is on the faculty of the Hugh Downs School and curates the theatre for the department. John is an alumnus of the graduate program at the Hugh Downs School, has served as a Guest Lecturer, and is currently a Research Fellow. Jennifer and John have collaborated on a number of original shows as well as Civil Dialogue. The flexible black box setup offers an ideal laboratory for developing Storyscope. For the October 13 event, artistic interludes were offered by Linda Park Fuller, Micha Espinosa, Mike Tristano, and Sean Avery.

Mark Goldman, storyteller, storytelling instructor at Glendale Community College, and Storyscope volunteer, wrote this commentary in the Oct. 16 issue of his newsletter, “News from Storyteller Mark”:



¹ Topics of conflict is a reference to another small group format championed by Jennifer and John along with Clark Olson: Civil Dialogue®. The trio co-authored a textbook on the subject, “Hot Topics, Cool Heads: A Handbook for Civil Dialogue.” civil-dialogue.com]

“Storyscope - Open, Inviting, Comforting”

Last week I attended one of the Storyscope events ... a fascinating model for community sharing and belonging. It's more of a place to "share" your story vs. "telling" your story. The group of attendees breaks into smaller circles of 6-8 people. Each person in the smaller groups shares their story based on a particular theme. The theme for October thru December is "Home".

Here's the additional component: The event starts with an artistic presentation by a poet, dancer, or other artists who present their rendition of "Home". There are other interludes throughout the event where a different artist shares their art. ... There is also some sharing in the larger group after the small circles come back together in one group.

They named the project "Storyscope" because they believe that all the stories shared are like a kaleidoscope of memories and emotions.

The event is very open and inviting, and extremely comforting. I highly recommend attending!

Linda Park-Fuller, Professor of Communication (retired) and Storyscope volunteer, also shared her observations about the event in a Facebook post, October 16. (Abridged)

We (students, community members, teachers), came knowing that the theme was ‘what does home mean to you?’ We were divided into three story circles--about 6 people in each, and each had about 3 minutes to sit and tell our story. Some were about not finding your way home, about how ‘family homecomings’ (reunions) weren't possible anymore due to political strife, about how the idea of what home meant had changed, how there never was a home or how home is always inside. In addition, some art works--poems, performance art, a rap brought us to considering cultural homes, group homes, the longing for belonging. Really inspiring!

October 17 – Trans Spectrum of Arizona



Trans Spectrum of Arizona provides service, support and a social outlet for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals and their allies. The group meets at First Church in Phoenix, where

Storyscope was invited to facilitate a Story Circles Event. On October 17, an engaged group led by Sarah Jones and John shared powerful and touching stories about the meaning of home, with readings of poetry interspersed.

November 8 – AE England Building, downtown Phoenix

Storyscope moved to downtown Phoenix on November 8 to explore the theme of “Home.” Plus, Jennifer brought snacks! Artistic interludes were provided by Joley Hamilton and Fargo Tbakhi.

The AE England Building was an attractive venue for Storyscope’s first venture downtown. The property is owned by ASU and since Jennifer is faculty it was available at nominal cost. However, it turned out to be a cavernous space for what we intend to be an intimate event. We want to continue to have a presence downtown but we hope to explore other venues.



November 15 – Grace Lutheran Church, Phoenix

Grace offers a Wednesday night meal and Bible study to congregants who are experiencing homelessness. On November 15, the Bible study activity was replaced by Story Circles. Afterward, Pastor Sarah shared this reflection:



“I thought the event was great. The way it worked out was very non-confrontational. The ethos was just perfect for what was likely a sensitive topic for folks. The leader at my table was warm, open, and encouraging but not in an overbearing way. As was shared that night during our brief reflection afterward, there were a couple people who initially held back but then were drawn into our group. The open-ended nature of the invitation was great because it was clear a person couldn’t be ‘wrong’ in how they shared.”

John posted the following account of the event to Facebook on November 16:

“A door.” This was the response given by a woman in a story circle last night. The question was, “What does ‘home’ mean to you?” Her answer: “A door.”

She went on to explain that she’s been living on the street for 11 years. She knew how to stay dry ... how to get through hot summer days and chilly winter nights ... how to find food and clothing. The one thing she can’t find on the street is safety – that secure feeling you get when you enter the door of your residence, then lock it. She remembers that feeling well; nothing in her life has surprised her more than losing her home.

It’s the kind of story you never hear unless you ask.

Last night’s Storyscope event was held at Grace Lutheran Church in Phoenix, after a hot meal was served with love. Most in attendance were people who are currently experiencing

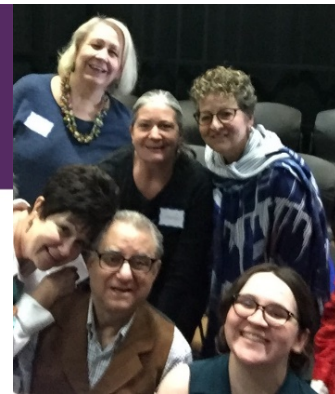
homelessness. It was the fifth of seven story circle events we are producing this fall on the theme of “home.” We’ve heard many amazing stories on this journey: “Home is wherever my partner is ...” “I’m finally comfortable in my own skin, that’s where home starts for me.” “My house is entering a third chapter – first, it was home to a wonderful marriage, then a period of caretaking for my husband, and now as a widow. It’s the same house but not the same home.”

So many poignant stories, and we’ve only scratched the surface. I was joined last night by Storyscope volunteers Leah Marché, Mark Goldman, Sandy Oglesby, Amelia Lo, and Kelsey Abele, who facilitated the other circles. They heard remarkable stories, too, like the man who is working as a laborer, building homes for others but still can’t afford shelter for himself.

November 17 – The Storytelling Institute, South Mountain Community College

Liz Warren, director of the Storytelling Institute at South Mountain Community College, welcomed Storyscope to the SMCC campus.

Students and teachers alike participated in the event. Artistic interludes included an interpretive dance by Anya Hernandez and Nicole Perlberg, and a poem by Leah Marché.



All agreed that a program like Storyscope is a natural fit for the Institute and we look forward to future collaborations.

December 19 – Stonegate retirement community, Scottsdale



Stonegate welcomed Storyscope as part of its lively year-round activities program for residents that includes lectures and guest artists.

The theme of “Home” conjured up many memories of houses and homes of the past as well as insights about the pleasures and challenges involved in making the transition to a retirement community as home.

Winter 2018 – “People’s State of the Union”

January 26 – The Empty Space | ASU

February 3 – Studio Theatre | SMCC

People’s State of the Union is a nationwide conversation coordinated by the US Dept. of Arts and Culture (USDAC), a grassroots group in Philadelphia (not a govt. agency). USDAC believes that art and culture are powerful and under-tapped resources for creating a more just, equitable, and vibrant world.



Here is how USDAC describes the People’s State of the Union experience:

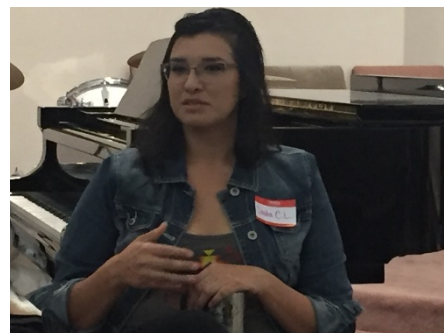
In January of most years, the President delivers a State of the Union Address highlighting the past year and suggesting priorities in the coming year. It’s a broadcast from one to many. But democracy is a conversation, not a monologue. Understanding the state of our union takes We the People reflecting in our own communities on our challenges and opportunities locally, nationally, and globally.

The People’s State of the Union is an invitation to host a national conversation in our own homes, schools, houses of worship, and community organizations. From January 25-February 4, 2018, individuals and organizations across the U.S. will host Story Circles.



Spring 2018 – “Change”

April 5 – “Sacred Earth, Common Ground” - Valley Unitarian Universalist, Chandler



Doug Bland, president of Arizona Interfaith Power & Light (AZIPL) suggested this event. His first thought was to co-produce a Story Circles Event on climate change. When he reached out to various faith communities he discovered that “climate change” is a hot button phrase in some congregations. Doug offered the theme “Sacred Earth, Common Ground” as a starting point:

In a time when every issue is polarized and our culture is divided along partisan lines, is it possible to find common ground in our love and gratitude for the gifts of sacred Earth? Participants will be invited to tell stories about times when, like Moses at the burning bush, we found ourselves standing on Holy Ground. Could these experiences build bridges to help us live more gently upon the Earth?

The event was well-received and an important beginning. Participants shared stories about transformational experiences in nature. One woman described being awestruck by a magnificent view of snow-capped mountains in Russia through an iced-over window, a long way from home in Missouri. Another spoke reverently about touching the bark of Sequoia trees in Northern California, while a parent described taking his kids for a walk to observe the wonders of nature that they normally pass by without noticing, right outside their door. The program was graced with artistic interludes of music by Kellie Walker, Native American poetry by Souta Calling Last, and an interpretive dance by Melanie Cloonan-Schulte. The event concluded with a period of reflection on what we learned about each other and ourselves through sharing our stories.

One of the participating pastors shared this feedback:

I thought it was a wonderful program. I left feeling very inspired to spend more time in nature. I think interspersing the artistic expressions with the storytelling circles was just lovely. I loved the dance element. Unexpected and ... really sweet.



April 20 – The Empty Space | ASU



The “Change” theme was explored by ASU students, faculty and guests through Story Circles as well as artistic interludes, including a pop music montage (“Turn and face the strange changes...”) and a personal narrative by Molly Bishop.

April 25 – Grace Lutheran Church, Phoenix

Pastor Sarah invited Storyscope back to explore the spring theme with people currently experiencing homelessness. Six Storyscope volunteers shared a hot meal with the group and led Story Circles for about 50 participants.



Looking Ahead to 2018-2019:

Jennifer and John will continue to develop the overall Storyscope project in The Empty Space at ASU and in the community at large. Amelia Lo and Kaden Sheffield have offered to take the lead on deepening Storyscope’s ties to the Storytelling Institute and South Mountain community. We hope that their work will serve as a model that can be replicated by other Storyscope teams in diverse communities throughout Arizona.

For more information about Storyscope, volunteering, or planning a Story Circles Event for 2018-2019, please contact John: 480-595-9292 | storyscopeproject@gmail.com.

Thanks for your interest in Storyscope and creating a spirit of inclusiveness through Story Circles Events.

Storyscope Volunteers – 2017-2018*Event Hosts / Story Circle Facilitators*

Kelsey Abele
Rob Azzante
John Genette
Mark Goldman
Joley Hamilton
Katrina Hanna
Sarah Jones
Jennifer Linde
Amelia Lo
Leah Marché
Sandy Olgesby
Linda Park-Fuller
Katherine Roxlo
Kaden Sheffield

Artists

Sean Avery
Molly Bishop
Keely Bruner
Souta Calling Last
Melanie Cloonan-Schulte.
Micha Espinosa
John Genette
Sharon Gilbert
Mark Goldman
Joley Hamilton
Anya Hernandez
Jennifer Linde
Leah Marché
Linda Park-Fuller
Nicole Perlberg
James Stein
Fargo Tbakhi
Mike Tristano
Kellie Walker

Please note: if your name isn't on this list but should be, please contact John at storyscopeproject@gmail.com.