

Connecting: River of Life

This lesson plan is part of the [Connecting through Time: Intergenerational & Family Storytelling](#) toolkit

Students will connect to their personal stories and legacy by mapping their river of life, grounding them in who they are as storytellers and considering the stories they may want to share with the world.

Facilitation Notes:

Remembering and exploring our personal stories can be a very beautiful and yet vulnerable activity, bringing up all types of feelings for all of us. This activity can be used as the beginning of an individual and collective photo journey to create trust and identification within the group. Encourage participants to take time to reflect on what feels comfortable to share and what doesn't. It's a great way to begin reviewing all the nuances of ethics around documentary work and respect for people's personal stories and privacy. Make sure to hold the space by modeling how to honor everyone's experiences. Everyone is welcome to share as little or as much as they want.

Guiding Principles/Framing Questions:

Connecting to our personal stories, our legacy and community is one way we can begin our journey in identifying and connecting to photo projects we might want to pursue. Who are we as storytellers? What are the stories I want to share with the world? How do I begin this journey by starting with myself and my own family's history?

1. Use a piece of paper large or medium, something to draw with and as many or as little colors you feel called to use.
2. Think of this piece of paper as a canvas to visualize your life journey as if it was a river. Use the following questions as a guide, feel free to add any that resonate with you or your group.
 - What are the key moments that have had an impact on who you are today?
 - Which experiences or relationships led to your interest in telling stories and photography?
 - Which are the most important relationships in your life?
 - Which places marked important transitions in your life?
 - What would your life look like if it were a river?

AUTHOR

Natalia Guerrero

GRADE LEVEL

all ages

TIME REQUIRED

1 session / 45 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED

paper, notebook, pens, colors, pencils

KEY IMAGES

[Image Bank](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

photoville.com/edu

The Photoville Education program is in partnership with:



Connecting: River of Life

This lesson plan is part of the [Connecting through Time: Intergenerational & Family Storytelling](#) toolkit

Note: Imagine all these life stories as a river, the river of life! What would that river look like? Does it come down a mountain? Or perhaps it has multiple streams and connecting bridges, maybe there is a dam that represents a moment in your life or it has lots of wild flowers, or maybe it ends or begins in a waterfall. The possibilities are as infinite as your imagination. How can you use images to symbolize important moments of your life on this river?

Students may want to brainstorm or sketch before they begin creating their river of life.

3. A lot of memories might have come up for you. Sit with them and take a deep breath. Remind yourself life is very complex, filled with lots of beauty and joy, but also anger and grief. You are the owner of your own stories. This means you get to choose how you tell them, when and to who.

- What feels important for you to share in this moment?

Note: Share what feels right and what you think will allow you to feel connected to others and yourself. Once you have an idea of what you want to share, start from the beginning! It can be before you were born or when you were born! Our stories come from a legacy of ancestors and we might choose to start from before you took your first breath out of your parent's womb/belly.

4. Once everyone is done with their river, the group will gather in a circle and welcome each participant's river of life into the space.

- What are the stories they want to share?
- What does each drawing or symbol represent?
- What is one story they would like to explore as a photo project?

5. Closing Circle: After everyone has shared you can use this opportunity to reflect back to the group what was heard as an affirmation of the work they did. Everyone in the circle has been both a listener and storyteller, similar to the process a photographer takes on. Use this opportunity to ask some debrief questions. This space will allow for further connection within the group and trust building.

- What did you hear that resonated with you?
- What story or stories would you love to see documented in a photo project (yours or other peoples)?
- Did you realize anything about the way in which you love telling stories? Are you more visual or are you more like the historian who likes to write things down? Is it linear, with multiple chapters or is it just one image that speaks for itself?
- How do you think this way of storytelling translates into how photography and memory work?

6. Your photo journey has begun even with just putting things down on paper. The River of Life will become a blueprint for future photo projects as it serves as a reminder of all the windows into potential ideas to explore and connect to.