

Christian Leadership in a Multifaith World Curriculum Designed by Interfaith America & CCCU

Module 2 – Religious Literacy

Activity 5 – Stories of Interfaith Engagement, Part 2

Overview

In this activity students will encounter different stories of how people from various faith traditions connect their faith and vocation

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this activity will:

- Explain the value of storytelling as a way to better understand self and other.
- Identify different ways that faith influences a choice of vocation.
- Practice *appreciative knowledge* and *narrative imagination* while engaging the stories of those who believe differently (See Module 1.2 for a full description of these terms).

External Materials

- Marshall Ganz, “Why Stories Matter” (*Sojourners*, March 2009), ["Why Stories Matter"](#)
- [Ethics and Theologies of Interfaith Cooperation](#) (Interfaith Youth Core; 13 minutes)
- [Abdiwahab Ali's Story](#) (audio, Muslim Experience in Minnesota, 2014; 19 minutes)
- [Razina Motala's Story](#) (audio, Muslim Experience in Minnesota, 2014; 16 minutes)
- [Balpreet Kaur's Story](#) (video, Interfaith Youth Core, 2013; 3 minutes)

Activity Content

We’ve all experienced the power of stories—to inspire, to make the abstract tangible, to touch our emotions. Each of us has a story to tell, and one of the best ways to help others get to know you, and to allow you to get to know them, is to tell and listen to each other’s stories.

As we’ve seen in previous modules (including 1.7 and 2.4), stories can help to cultivate what ethicist Martha Nussbaum calls a “*Narrative Imagination*.” This requires one to cultivate an imagination for what it might be like to live in another person’s shoes and what the world might look like from their perspective. Stories also help cultivate *appreciative knowledge*, which asks us to move beyond a simple understanding and tolerance of another religion to a sympathetic appreciation of that religion. When practicing appreciative knowledge, we humbly listen to the stories of another person in order to learn from them. Appreciative knowledge broadens our view of the world and the people who live in it.

Student Assignment Options

1. Unpacking the Ganz article:

- a. Read the Marshall Ganz article “Why Stories Matter”
- b. According to Ganz, why do stories matter?
- c. Describe what Ganz means by a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now

2. Engaging Other Stories

- a. Option 1: Watch “Ethics and Theologies of Interfaith Cooperation.” Choose 2-3 of the people featured in the video and explain what you learned about their religion by hearing their story. How are their religious beliefs similar and different from your own?
- b. Option 2: Listen to Abdiwahab Ali’s story. How did his Muslim faith influence his choice to become a police officer? What is his life in America like? How is his life similar to and different from your own?
- c. Option 3: Listen to Razina Motala’s story. How did her faith help her through her childhood in Apartheid South Africa? How did her childhood experiences shape who she has become? How does her faith influence her life choices? How is her life similar to or different from your own?
- d. Option 4: Listen to Balpreet Kaur’s story. How did telling her story change others’ perceptions in important ways? What does her story tell us about the importance of appreciative knowledge and narrative imagination?

Going Deeper: Additional Resources

Read: If you’re looking for more stories from people of different faith traditions, here are few that you might find interesting:

- Cowan, Paul. *An Orphan in History: Retrieving a Jewish Legacy* (NY: William Morrow, 1996). The story of the author’s journey from assimilated American secular Jew toward a deliberate, observant Jewish life. Of particular relevance for Christian readers are his stories of anti-Semitism, of Christian privilege, and of disagreements about what it might look like to be religiously faithful in a secular society.
- Idliby, Ranya Tabari. *Burqas, Baseball, and Apple Pie* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). The author’s many personal stories--particularly those in which she responds to questions from her children--provide an interesting, informative, and intimate picture of what it’s like to be a Muslim in America today.
- Johnson, Maria Poggi. *Strangers and Neighbors: What I Have Learned About Christianity by Living Among Orthodox Jews*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004). The author, professor of theology and a Catholic, describes the ways in which her own Christian faith has been changed through time she’s spent getting to know her Orthodox Jewish neighbors.
- Patel, Eboo. *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim in the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Beacon Press, 2007). The founder of Interfaith America tells the story of

ways in which his friendships with people of other faiths led both to his own spiritual reawakening and to his desire to promote interfaith cooperation and civic pluralism.

- Peace, Jennifer Howe, Or N. Rose, and Gregory Mobley, eds. *My Neighbor's Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2012) This collection contains more than 50 accounts of meaningful interfaith encounters told by people from many faith traditions. Each story is brief and accessible, focusing on an unexpected insight that the author gained through this encounter.
- Steadman, Chris. *Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious* (Beacon Press, 2013). Steadman recounts his own journey from Christianity to atheism, sharing how his experiences with intolerance and lack of love on both sides of this faith line eventually led him to become a bridge-builder.
- Wilson, G. Willow. *The Butterfly Mosque: A Young American Woman's Journey to Love and Islam* (NY: Grove Press, 2011). Wilson, a white American living in Egypt, tells the story of her conversion to Islam and her marriage to a Muslim man. Provides numerous insights about the complexities and joys of learning to navigate a new culture and religion.
- Winner, Lauren. *Girl Meets God: On the Path to a Spiritual Life* (NY: Shaw Books, 2004). Winner tells the story of her two religious conversions--first to Judaism, a community with which she found real belonging and a faith whose observances she found deeply meaningful, then to Christianity, a shift that she found initially difficult as she struggled to determine how much of her Jewish self she would have to leave behind.

Watch: [The Power of Storytelling](#) (5 minutes) and [What Inspires You?](#) (9 minutes) from Interfaith America's [Interfaith Leadership Video Series](#).