

Storytelling Prompts

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Storytelling prompts are designed to help storytellers to get over being stuck on 'What should I tell about?' A prompt is an idea to jiggle loose a memory, a spark to ignite a story idea, or a key to a locked door behind which a story may be waiting. Prompts are not used to get people to tell a fully-formed story – they are designed to help people get started, to do a 'rough draft' of a story.

There are thousands of prompts put together in lists by storytellers (and writers, too). There is no 'best list' of prompts. We have put together a few prompts here - some we have used and others we think might be fun. Find other lists (in books, from teachers, on the internet). Make up your own lists.

Once you have some prompts (you don't need many!), focus on developing some ideas that may eventually come together as a story.

- **Choose** a prompt that you want to work with. Take a few minutes to list out things, people, places, events, etc. that immediately come to mind when given the prompt. Don't get stuck on this stage – just list out what comes to mind. [Sometimes writing this list helps to capture ideas for future story ideas. You may find that several story ideas emerge from a single prompt.]
- **Choose** one of the entries on your list of responses to the prompt. Generally, one of the entries grabs your mind or imagination. If one doesn't grab you right away, just pick one. Prompts are a way to get you explore an idea, not a way to complete a story.
- **Tell** about what you have chosen from your list. Don't think about it too much, just tell. Ask listeners "In the story I just told, what are some elements that make this a good story? What do you want to hear more of?" Remind listeners (and yourself!) that you won't be telling a completed story, just a draft – we all need help with drafts before we get to a finished product!
 - OR, if you aren't working with other people, take the time to create a draft story (beginning, middle, and end) about what you have chosen from your prompt responses. Tell that draft to someone, as above.

¹ Modified from Storycorps.org and *Telling Your Own Stories* by Donald Davis

“Tell about . . .”

- *People:* the kindest person in your life, your favorite teacher; your mother or father, someone you have been in love with, the kid in high school who gave you the most trouble, someone memorable you worked with, someone we will never meet but you think we should, your favorite make-believe character, a famous person you met, a confidant, someone you want to meet, someone who was 'bigger than life', someone who taught you something
- *Places:* the neighborhood where you grew up, the first school you went to, a place you went to that doesn't exist anymore, your 'safe' place, somewhere you want to take me, somewhere you never want to visit again, a trip you wish I could have been on with you, a painting or picture you really like, a famous building you visited
- *Objects, real and virtual:* a toy you loved, something you once hid from someone else, a pet you had, something you invented, your favorite story growing up and why, your favorite food/meal, a word that makes you feel funny, a piece of clothing you loved or had trouble with, a book that impacted you, something you lost, a plant you remember, a phrase you learned that has shaped your life, something that was worth every penny, a happy surprise, a present you received, something you secretly love to do, something you pretend to care about but really don't
- *Times when:*
 - something startling happened
 - you did something you regret now
 - you were very proud
 - you learned a big lesson
 - someone got really angry
 - you got lost
 - you heard a story that changed you
 - you swore you would never do it again
 - you should have kept going but you didn't
 - you should have stopped but you didn't
 - you got overly excited
 - you were really disappointed
 - you cooked/prepared a dish or meal and how it worked out
 - you overcame an obstacle
 - a holiday turned weird or disastrous
 - you were really scared
 - you had your worse day ever
 - you or someone close to you was very sick
 - you improvised a tool with something else
 - you didn't have the right word/s
 - all you could focus on was a smell
 - you got priorities wrong/right
 - you let go
 - you forgot something really important
 - you were embarrassed
 - some food made all the difference
 - you made a dumb decision
 - trust was betrayed
 - you have been haunted by something
 - you could not have been happier
 - you didn't see it coming
 - you got a big break
 - you knew life would never be the same