

Guide 2: Reminiscences – A Migration Stories Workshop

Overview

This 90-minute workshop brings together elders, or elders and youth, to share stories about climate-friendly practices, values, and lifestyles and discuss how these are similar and different between the places people migrated from and to. Beyond story collecting, it can be used to identify practices that can be reinvented, expanded, and scaled up as community-based climate action grounded in local values, traditions, and history. This Connect version has been adapted from the Field Museum's Reminiscences workshop to focus on the theme of migration.

Purpose

Long before disposable toothbrushes or plastic shopping bags, people had a very different relationship to nature and its resources. From canning vegetables, to camping, to building wells, our ancestors have a long history of living in harmony with the environment. Much of this vital knowledge is still alive in our elders, among our parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. This workshop tries to capture some of this wisdom to put it to use for community and climate action today.

The workshop brings together elders to share stories from their past, to tell tales about their communities and practices and the historical ways that they have cooperated with nature. It uses a variety of household or other daily life objects to spur discussion. The goal of the activity is to encourage innovative thinking about how to learn from the past to create climate-friendly lifestyles and communities today. It is a powerful way to reclaim traditional climate-friendly practices that comprise a critical component of our communities' diverse heritages.

Needed

Group Size and Time

15-20 participants, about 90 minutes

Space

A room that is large enough to seat all participants in one circle, with a table to display objects in the middle of the circle.

Materials

- Facilitators provide all the objects used in this activity. Bring 6-10 objects used in daily life from past decades that represent climate-friendly practices, such as but not limited to: wooden clothes pin, bird house, washboard, iron that heats up by stove, books, wooden spoon, chicken/hambone for soup, fabric scrap (used to patch clothing), quilt, rag rug, old toys, umbrellas/rain gear, laundry basket, knitting needles. Include other objects that reflect the community's particular history, such as a hard hat or safety goggles in an industrial or post-industrial area. Consider bringing in photos or items that will generate discussion about key plant or animal species that are important to the community's culture, such as medicinal or edible plants. Also consider bringing in a few items directly related to Monarch or bird migration, such as cultural items with Monarchs on them or maps with round-trip migratory routes of Monarchs or of bird species that migrate along the flyway that immigrants will remember from their home countries. Maps are particularly

effective in generating stories, and immigrants from Mexico are often pleasantly surprised, or even at times reminded, that Monarchs follow the same routes back-and-forth as they do.

- Table tents for people to write their names on.
- Big post-it pad and markers.
- Microphone and digital recorder if you want to record the stories. It is especially important to capture stories from senior citizens about older life ways, and you may want to archive them in your local library or use them on a website or in presentations or exhibits.

Facilitation

The facilitator should have experience working with elders (and youth if you do an intergenerational activity that includes them—see this option below) and be comfortable encouraging participation from all members of the group, while graciously managing the sharing of the more vocal participants. S/he does not have to have particular expertise in climate change or migration, of people or animals.

Note Taker and Photographer

- Someone who can take good notes throughout the activity. This will be important for later on when you are ready to identify common themes or issues that came out of the stories that you heard.
- If you plan to do any kind of demonstration or exhibit of your work, whether online or in your local library, it is a good idea to arrange for a photographer to document this event. S/he should take photos of participants posing with the objects that they refer to in their stories.

Instructions

As participants arrive, have them write their names on a table tent. Then ask them to visit the objects on display and identify a few that prompt memories. Have the object viewing carry over into the first 5-10 minutes of the start of the activity. When everyone is seated, welcome them, explain the purpose of the activity, and ask them to introduce themselves, sharing their name, where they grew up, and where they live now. If you are not going to focus solely or specifically on geographic migration, revise what you ask them to share accordingly.

Review the objects again and ask them to close their eyes and think of a story or memory, about themselves or others, directly or indirectly related to one of the objects. Prompt them to think back to a particular time—when they were younger or when they had young families or were just starting out on their own or when they were children. Then instruct them to open their eyes and ask for a volunteer to share her/his story. Continue asking people to share their stories until everyone has had a turn or time is up.

In between stories:

- Keep up the momentum by turning the group's attention to some of the lesser discussed objects and asking who has stories related to those objects.

- Highlight themes that are emerging, such as repairing items that were damaged (e.g., darning socks), playing with neighbors in the streets, a strong sense of community, etc., and ask if anyone else has additional stories related to those themes. Write these themes down on the big post-it papers.
- Also listen for issues or practices directly related to climate change, such as gardening, conserving water or energy, etc. (see list above on climate change-related prompts for a more examples).
- Encourage participants to compare their past memories with their experiences today. What is similar and what has changed?

Conclude

Thank everyone for writing and sharing and tell them about next steps, if there are any. If you think you might use participants' stories in the future, let them know how you might do so—and confirm again that you have everyone's permission. (Moving forward, also make sure you honor your description of how they might be used, and contact people if you want to use the stories differently from how you originally planned.)

To conclude, facilitate a short reflection (five minutes). Ask people to think about what they have learned from sharing their own migration stories and hearing others'. Push them to think about the big “so whats,” such as Faith in Place's message that communities of color have been resilient and can draw on their deep knowledge and extend their hospitality to help the natural world, and themselves, survive.

One way to close an event is to gather the group into a “talking circle” and ask each person to individually share their thoughts and/or feelings about what they experienced. Thank each person in turn for sharing.

Moving from Stories to Action

For some ideas about how you can use stories as a springboard for action, see [Moving from Stories to Action](#) in Part 2.

Make It Intergenerational

“My grandma used it, my mom gave it away, and then I bought it.”

This activity would also lend itself nicely to an intergenerational group of participants, especially because so many past practices are now coming back in vogue (such as knitting). The activity can be facilitated as described above. The only changes you have to make are to

- bring objects that juxtapose each other to facilitate comparing between generations, such as a record and an iPod; glass jars and Ziploc bags; a clothesline, dryer sheets, and a dryer ball; vinegar, baking soda, and modern cleaning supplies; a mop and a Swiffer; and
- ask participants to think of stories or memories from their past, instead of specifying a particular age or time. Leave the last 10 to 15 minutes to sum up some of the key themes you recognized and ask what recommendations the participants have for taking better care of the environment and their communities today by reinventing some of their generation's past practices.

Helpful Link

- Reminiscences workshop: <http://climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org/sites/default/files/Reminiscences.pdf>