

Part 2: Do Your Own Migration Story Activities or Programs

In case you need a little help getting started developing your own migration stories activity or program, this final section includes storytelling prompts, summaries of two workshop guides (provided in their entirety in the Appendix), and some guidelines for moving from stories to action.

Storytelling Prompts

The key to collecting good migration stories is having good prompts. A prompt can be a spoken, visual, or written “cue” that gets people talking about their experiences. To collect migration stories, you want to use prompts that elicit stories about “there and here.” Here are some ideas for verbal, visual, and written prompts to get people talking about their experiences and perspectives.

Verbal Prompts

Here are examples of prompts to ask a person when interviewing them for their migration story.

To help people share their relationships to/fond memories of/love for place:

- What do you remember most about the place where you grew up?
- What are your strongest memories of smell, taste, and sight?
- How did people take care of themselves there? Of each other? Of the place around them?
- What’s a fond memory you have from here?
- How do people take care of themselves, each other, and this place, here?

To help people share their migration experiences:

- From the UIC Latino Cultural Center:
 - How does it feel when you’ve moved from the neighborhood that was familiar to you or the country where you grew up?
 - What were some of the challenges that you confronted in this new place?
 - What or who helped you adapt to this new place?
- From Faith in Place:
 - Who were we before and after we migrated?
 - How did we preserve our culture and values?

practices. They can be used to help people think about how they lived their own lives “there” in comparison to how they live them “here.” The Connect toolkit has a tool for creating your own visual collages tailored to your local community—to use as prompts— such as the one on food pictured here. The guiding questions on the collages can easily be tweaked to become “there and here” questions.

Objects representing climate-friendly practices can also be great prompts. See the Reminiscences workshop description for an example of an activity using objects to elicit stories.

Finally, having people write out their stories can also be powerful. This can be done as an exercise in itself or as a precursor to sharing stories. In a workshop, it is a good method for giving everyone time to assemble their stories, rather than privileging those who are comfortable sharing right away.



Story workshop leader using objects to prompt discussion.

Photo courtesy of The Field Museum.

Writing Prompts

- “Where I’m From,” a poem by George Ella Lyon, is a popular teaching tool that lends itself perfectly to migration storytelling. See the Where I’m From workshop description below for guidelines.

Audubon Vermont also uses writing as a way to capture migration stories of refugees and birds, in a partnership with Vermont Adult Learning, using the [Young Writers Project Blog](#). Read about the Audubon Vermont Migration Stories Conservation Education Program [here](#).

A Few Final Tips

- Start by telling a story or two of your own. This will get people comfortable and show them some examples of what you mean by “stories.” Or, prepare one or two people ahead of time to start with sharing their stories. Another option is to use a visual collage to start the conversation and then solicit the person’s story. Make sure to choose someone you know is who is comfortable talking about their experiences. While some people will be willing to speak to you without advance notice, it is usually better to ask the person you want to interview ahead of time that you would like to get their thoughts.
- Start general and then focus. It may be tempting to start the conversation on a particular climate-related issue, especially if your organization has a particular focus or project that you want to engage people in, such as removing invasive species, planting native gardens, or engaging residents in advocacy around water issues. However, the point of collecting stories is to understand what people really care about and where

they are at—so that they can meet them there rather than asking them to meet you where you are. See the section Moving from Stories to Action to get a sense of how general stories can lead to new ideas for action.

- Have participants interview family or community members. This is a great project for youth, modeled by the Sacred Keepers Sustainability Lab program. It allows youth who may not have their own migration story—or may not be very familiar with their family’s story—to learn more about their personal and cultural histories.
- Ask permission to share participants’ stories with others—if you think you may want to do so in the future.

Workshop Guides

If you are interested in using a set workshop format in addition to (or in place of) developing your own activities, see if the Reminiscences or Where I’m From workshops meet your needs. Here are brief descriptions of each; full workshop guides can be found [here (link)] in the appendix.

The theme of migration makes these workshops appropriate for all groups of people, because everyone has stories about where they’ve been and dreams about where they want to go. The workshops may resonate particularly well with people and populations who have experienced a significant migration, such as immigrants or refugees, or populations whose cultures include often-referenced migration stories, such as African Americans and Native Americans. With any group, the goal is to help people think about what they have done, are doing, or want to do that’s good for them, for others, and for the planet. The migration theme helps meet this goal because it adds an element of comparison, demonstrating that people live differently in different places and times. It helps to open people’s eyes to alternatives grounded in their own lives and cultures.

Where I’m From – Writing Migration Poems (1.5 hours)

This writing workshop has participants (middle school age and older) write their own migration poems, using the poem “Where I’m From,” by George Ella Lyon, as a model. Materials were originally developed by mother-daughter team Jennifer Hirsch and Penny Hirsch as one exercise for a writing class that they taught at Grace House, a transitional home for women released from prison. Similar to the UIC Latino Cultural Center’s program on Migration and Transformation, the class used the theme of migration to help participants think about where they came from, where they were at, and where they wanted to go.

Reminiscences (1 hour)

This workshop brings together elders, or elders and youth, and uses objects to prompt story sharing about climate-friendly practices, values, and lifestyles and how these are similar and different between the places people migrated from and to. This Connect version has been adapted from The Field Museum’s [Reminiscences](#) workshop to focus on the theme of migration.



Participant in the Field Museum Reminiscences workshop in south Chicago.

Photo courtesy of The Field Museum.

Additional Storytelling Resources

Want to learn more about storytelling for social change? Check out [these Storytelling Resources from the Climate Access Network](#).

Moving from Stories to Action

Once you have collected a number of stories, you will want to review them to identify common themes related to climate change and climate action. Look for particular stories, images, and symbols that demonstrate these themes. This will allow you to tell some collective stories about your community as well as incorporate community assets and concerns into your climate action work. Since the theme here is migration, you can specifically look for themes that have a comparative element; that relate to butterfly, bird, or even plant migration; and that include traditional practices that can be reinvented, expanded, and scaled up to take community-based climate action grounded in local values, practices, and history.

Telling Collective Stories

Broadcasting stories, and collecting more, is a great way to spread awareness of climate change and climate action as embedded in local culture. There are many ways to share stories. Examples from partners involved in the [Chicago Community Climate Action Toolkit](#) include creating a mural and a community-wide exhibit (South Chicago) and creating a graphic identity used on posters and in local ads (Forest Glen). You can read about the South Chicago exhibit on the Toolkit website [here](#) and about the Forest Glen creative outreach strategy, including the development of a graphic identity, [here](#).

Another option is to host a public storytelling program, where participants prepare to retell their stories more formally, to a larger audience. For example, the Grace House writers performed migration stories from their writing class at the Field Museum's exhibition of Jacob Lawrence's paintings depicting the Great Migration. To focus on climate action, you could enlist some people to tell stories about butterfly, bird, and plant migration as well, drawing out parallels with people's human migration stories, since you would now know those in advance.



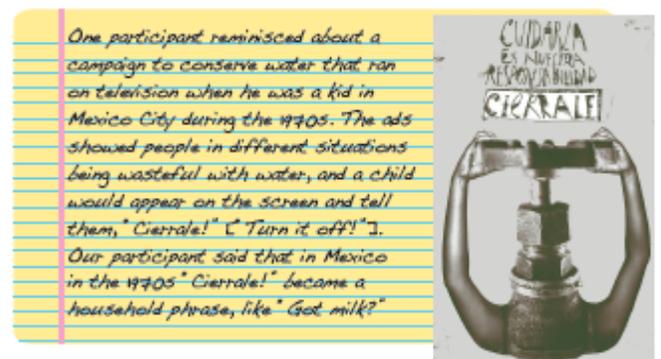
A Grace House resident tells her migration story at the Field Museum's exhibit of Jacob Lawrence's Great Migration paintings.

Photographer: Karen Bean.
Photo courtesy of The Field Museum.

Using Stories to Shape Your Climate Action Work

You can also use the themes, stories, images, and symbols you identify to shape your climate action work so that it both builds on and addresses things that people remember and care about. At the least, they can help you shape your messaging in terms of familiar experiences. For example, stories collected by Field Museum anthropologists in Pilsen and South Chicago included one about the Mexican water conservation campaign *Cierrale* (see image) and one about a popular phrase, "Gota a gota se agota el agua" ("Drop by drop the water runs out"). These types of ads and phrases, including people's stories about them, could be used in campaigns or signage—for example, on rain barrels or in gardens.

On a deeper level, the themes and stories can actually shape your action plans to be more community-oriented. An easy example is a heritage garden that grows people's comfort foods. Building on this idea, Chicago Community Climate Action Toolkit partners in Bronzeville constructed a



Story collected in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago.

Image courtesy of The Field Museum.

climate action program around vegan soul food, building on the community's efforts to reclaim its heritage as the Harlem of the Midwest by reclaiming soul food as healthy and reminding residents of African Americans' proud history as stewards of the land. If you are working with an immigrant community, you can also explore how to connect with immigrants' home country communities so that both communities are taking climate action together. For example, in Chicago, the Council of Islamic Organizations' Green Ramadan"campaign promotes green living and climate action among Chicago-area Muslims as part of a long-term solution to social disasters in Africa, including drought and famine in Somalia.

Stories might also reveal do-it-yourself practices that can be promoted as part of a broader program, such as canning, collecting clothes and household goods to share with people who experience disasters such as fires, and informal toy swaps. Stories will likely identify people with either informal or formal expertise in areas related to what you are working on, such as gardening, who could be brought into your work as local experts and leaders.

Bringing out your community's migration stories should help you engage communities more holistically and more deeply in your work, in ways that will create hospitable habitats for us all.

Helpful Links

- Make Your Own Visual Collages: <http://www.chicagobotanic.org/sites/default/files/pdf/education/Connect/Make-your-own-Visual-Collages.pptx>
- South Chicago exhibition: <http://climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org/sites/default/files/South%20Chicago%20Exhibit%20Map.pdf>
- Forest Glen creative outreach strategy: <http://climatechicago.fieldmuseum.org/photo-gallery/developing-creative-outreach-strategy>
- Storytelling resources: <http://www.climateaccess.org/storytelling-resources>
- Young Writers Project Blog: <http://www.youngwritersproject.org/blog>
- Audubon Vermont Migration Stories Conservation Education Program: <http://vt.audubon.org/migration-stories>