

Belonging and the Five Minute Life Story



Belonging

A combination of unique *identities* contributing to a generative *system of exchange* with shared *purpose*.

Belonging is the most fundamental human need and the structure within which every system in the universe functions. The idea of the five-minute life story is to share, with a friend or a small group, the main parts of your story for the purpose of cultivating belonging.

There are several reasons for ten prompts in five minutes. First, it makes it easier to initiate storytelling. Second, it reveals commonalities. This increases the experience of belonging and provides a jumping-off point for more story sharing. Last, it makes it easy to foster a curious, non-judgmental environment.

The Five Minute Life Story (no obligation to answer all questions)

1. Where and when were you born and what was going on in the world?
2. What is/was unique about your family, schooling, and friend group?
3. What were the geography and weather like? Urban/suburban/rural?
4. Describe your culture, race, and/or ethnicity. Are there particular foods or traditions?
5. How did you/do you spend your time (vocation, hobbies, causes, etc.)?
6. What's a favorite book/movie/story? Who is the character you like and why?
7. What were the main events/relationships that shaped you into who you are now?
8. What do you most want to be, do, or have?
9. What's your superpower? (or) What do you have to give to the world?
10. What do you need from your people to make your superpower more super?

Digging Deeper

Once everyone in your group has had an opportunity to answer the 10 questions, pick from prompts 6-10 and use them for additional five-minute rounds. These stories will build belonging by revealing the identity characteristics of storytellers.

Story definition

A recounting of *events* told from a unique *perspective* based on personal *experience* that caused *emotion*.

Cultivating Belonging

The end goal of a storytelling process is to discover and articulate the identities of each person in the group and how they fit and matter. What are the unique interdependent connections you share with the person or group and how might that interdependence empower you to accomplish positive change together? Listen and look during each shared story for clues to and examples of that person's unique *identity*, *system* interdependence, mutual *exchange* of outputs and inputs, and shared *purpose* (ISEP).

Facilitating Storytelling

Belonging is more likely to thrive if you gather frequently, the interaction is positive, and you expect the relationships to last. It is also helpful if there is geographic proximity.

The role of the facilitator is to reassure, lead by example, protect an environment of curiosity, and help the group find the ISEP for each storyteller.

Some things that will help generate healthy facilitation: Be personally engaged, equitable vs. superior, collaborative and solution-oriented, curious vs. judgemental, generous with strength, fiercely determined to discover and share value, and able to see through trauma-affected behavior.

Setting

Find or create a space where there are minimal distractions, eye contact is possible, *good* food and drink are shared, and no one has an unnoticed or un-dealt with flipped lid (triggered).

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Evidence for Belonging in Nature - Birds and Ants

Everything in the universe is part of a system. From sub-atomic particles to cells to birds to people, ecosystems, planets, and galaxies. Everything is a part of something else and everything is connected to everything else. We adapt, evolve, and find purpose through random behavior and, in people, conscious choice. For less conscious elements of a system, randomness is minimal. Most birds and most ants and most cells do the same things as all the other birds, ants, and cells. They follow three rules 98% of the time while they pay attention to the other birds, ants, and cells that are closest to them.

1. Don't bump into each other
2. Stay in alignment
3. Stay with the group

If you watch a murmuration or a food line close enough, you will notice a very small percentage (2-5%) that are not following the rules all the time. This is what causes the birds to shift and merge acrobatically in the sky, find places to roost, and take off all at once. The random ants are the ones who find a way around obstacles or another piece of ham sandwich. On the larger scale, this low-level randomness is the stuff of system adaptation and development.

Humans Can Murmurate with Stories

The patterns we see in nature matter because humans can murmurate too. While it's true that humans can choose not to follow the laws of nature and wreak havoc on our system and all the systems we touch, we can also be creative with those same laws. This is where Mozart's Symphony No. 41, the Buhart Gardens, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the defeat of Nazis came from. We can create art, cultivate life, build, and battle in a way that participates with and augments natural law more than any other species or element of any system.

The way humans murmurate is through relationships. We connect with each other in an endless, interconnected, tapestry of stories. Our stories are the building blocks of our system. They contain all the clues for how we belong and how our system can self-organize. One of the ways we can create, cultivate, build, and battle for belonging is by paying close attention to each of the characters of our stories. There are four distinct places we can investigate.

Four Parts of Story - Where We Look

1. Beginning character: what do they want to have, be, or do and what does this tell us about their identity?
2. Community: who are the other characters in the story and how do they relate to each other and the character?
3. Crucible: what are the obstacle and refining processes of the story? How does the character handle adversity?
4. Changed character: How does the character change through the story arc? What strength do they gain and how are they a greater asset to their community after growing through the crucible?

K.N.O.T.S. building durable belonging

As we seek to understand belonging in our stories, there are five different phases to consider.

- **Knowing:** We must first know our story - our core essence. Not how we express it but what is being expressed.
- **Noticing:** Then we must notice the larger story. How do we fit into the system of interconnected stories and what does it tell us about ourselves? Who are we already connected to and how do we connect with their stories?
- **Offering:** What does our true self have to offer to the system we are noticing?
- **Taking:** What do we need from the system we are in to be and become our best selves?
- **Sharing:** What is our purpose together and how can we extend it as far as it should go into our shared story?

Articulation

It is good to feel like we belong, but for belonging durability in the times when our feelings lie to us, we need to have good words to describe our belonging to each other. These are the words that anchor us when circumstances vary. ***This is why we share our stories.*** We listen to each other. And we say the words that we need to be written in our hearts and minds.

1. Who we are
2. How we do it here
3. What we want our world to be like