

What is a story slam?

- A slam is competitive storytelling.
- Slammers have 5 minutes to tell a story.
- They are judged and a winner is declared.
- Most stories have to be personal, true stories.
- Sometimes there's a theme, but not usually.
- No notes are allowed.
- No props are allowed.
- There are usually five judges. Often they are random members of the audience. Some slams appoint a panel of experts to be judges.
- Each judge gives a score on a scale of 1-10.
- There are penalties for going over the time limit.

Your class or school slam:

- students will have to tell a personal story between 2 and 4 minutes long without notes or props
- you'll grade using a rubric
- students may vote on their favourite

Unit Plan

Day 1

Watch a few videos of story slam performances:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Lug_lxFKo8&app=desktop

Noah, 15, talking about two moms and fear they'll divorce

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1V5_Jz04giA

Nimisha talking about her experiences as an awkward immigrant teen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bv7SV4NPmE0>

young man, talking about his mother in prison

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYSHNfI04hQ>

high school boy tells story of his birth in war torn Bosnia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMhq0Ffbvoo>

short snippets of the winners of the Boston teen slam

Get them Talking

Start them with a short assignment that requires them to speak in front of the class.

Could be as simple as describing (in full sentences) one of their favourite meals.

Review what a confident speaker looks and sounds like.

Do an enunciation exercise.

Prompts for Personal Stories

“If you have survived childhood, you have stories, a whole library of them”

“Because you have a life, you have a story”

Give each student one of the memory prompt cards. They should find a partner, ask the question, listen to the answer, answer the other person’s question, then find another partner and repeat (they do not answer their own question).

Day 2

Another Story Prompt

Have students draw a floor plan of the house they grew up in (If there were multiple houses, pick one). On the floor plan they should mark in the places where incidents happened, jotting a note on that spot or making a legend and writing a few words to remind themselves of the incident. If they get done the floor plan and have run out of ideas, they can expand - drawing the neighbourhood.

Developing the Story

Have students choose one of the memories to work with. When deciding between multiple options consider which has more action, which is plot driven, which one features a greater change in the main character.

Divide the group into As and Bs. Line up with As facing Bs.

A tells to B for 1 minute. (*actually 50 seconds*) Switch.

Bs shift down. A tells to new B for 1 minute. (*actually 60 seconds*) Switch.

Bs shift down. A tells to new B for 1 minute. (*actually 70 seconds*) Switch.

This should bring up more memories and help students to realize which parts need clarification.

Write a three sentence version of the story.

Write a one sentence version of the story.

Write an alternate three sentence version of your story.

Write a one word version of your story.

This should help to clarify focus and theme.

Day 3

Leads

see hand out

Have students try at least two options from the hand out (in writing or mentally).

Have them perform one of the openings without notes (groups would speed this up).

Setting the Scene

People like to be able to see the story to make sense of it. People want to know where and when, then who and finally what.

Have students plan the paragraph that will follow the lead so that they reveal where, when and who. Keep it point form or oral.

Conflict

Have students identify internal and external conflict.
Have them look for ways to give hints of the trouble coming.

Day 4

Sensory Details

To make it real for your listeners, to really bring them into the story, add some sensory detail.

Brainstorm - what were the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings of this experience?

Tell a partner about these sensory details.

Ending

see hand out

Have students try out a couple of potential endings (mentally or in writing).

Have them perform their closing lines without notes.

Memory

Encourage students to think of their stories in terms of scenes. Have them list those scenes in order:

Transitions are typically where memory fails. Have them look back at their scene lists and figure out how they're getting from one scene to the next.

Day 5

Rehearsal

Start with partner tellings. Time each other. TAG feedback (Tell them something you liked, Ask a question, Give a suggestion).

Join pairs, tell to the group of four. Time each other. TAG feedback.

Battling Nerves

Talk about nervous tells and how to battle them.

What to do if you forget

Remind them that no one has a script and unless they announce their mistakes people are likely to assume they meant to tell the story that way. They lived these events, they can add details. They shouldn't worry too much about the lovely words they planned, they should just tell it.

Day 6&7

Performing

Random draw? Put your hat in a beginning/middle/end hat? Volunteers? Alphabetical?
Welcome them to the stage with applause to give them a boost.

Sample Rubric

Name:

	Very Good 5	Good 4	Acceptable 3	Needs Improvement 2	Poor 1
Opening - attention grabbing					
Mechanics - volume, pacing, enunciation					
Presentation - expressive, confident stance, eye contact					
Knowledge of Story - sequence of events clear, memory good					
Closing - wraps things up, offers a deeper meaning or insight					

Comments:

Want to take in a story slam?

Edmonton:

Blue Chair, second Tuesday of the month

Mercury Room, third Wednesday of the month, @yegstoryslamm

TALES Storytelling Festival, Thursday May 21, The Pint

Calgary:

Rose and Crown, next slam March 12, @YYCStorySlam



<p>Tell me about a time when you got into trouble for something you'd already been told not to do.</p>	<p>Tell me the story of how you got one of the scars on your body.</p>
<p>Have you ever accidentally caused a fire?</p>	<p>Tell me about something you wrecked in an attempt to fix it.</p>
<p>What is your claim to fame?</p>	<p>Can you remember a time when you broke something that belonged to someone else?</p>
<p>Tell me about a memorable family vacation.</p>	<p>Can you remember a time when you got sick at a very inconvenient moment?</p>

<p>Tell me about a time when the weather had a major impact on your life or plans.</p>	<p>Tell me about a time when you got lost.</p>
<p>Tell me about a time when you got locked out of where you needed to be.</p>	<p>What have you heard about the story of your birth?</p>
<p>Can you remember a time when your first impression of someone turned out to be wrong?</p>	<p>Tell me about your most memorable holiday meal.</p>
<p>Tell me about someone who was your rival or enemy.</p>	<p>Tell me about the oldest person you know.</p>

<p>Tell me about a lie you remember telling when you were little.</p>	<p>Tell me about your favourite pet, past or present.</p>
<p>Can you remember a time when you tried to cook something and it didn't turn out?</p>	<p>What is the most unique place you've visited?</p>
<p>Tell me about a time when you left finishing a project until the last minute.</p>	<p>What's the biggest mistake you've ever made while cooking?</p>
<p>Tell me about a toy you really wanted when you were little.</p>	<p>What's the most meaningful award or recognition you've ever received?</p>

When you were little, what did you want to be when you grew up?	Tell me about a memory involving a bicycle.
Tell me about a close encounter with wildlife.	Tell me about a time when helping someone else made you feel really good.
Tell me about a close encounter with extreme weather.	Tell me about something you hate eating.
Tell me about the first trip you remember making to the hospital.	Tell me about your favourite childhood toy.

<p>Tell me about your least favourite chore.</p>	<p>Tell me about your closest brush with celebrity.</p>
<p>Tell me about a time when you were really afraid.</p>	<p>Tell me about one of your family's unusual traditions.</p>
<p>Tell me about your weirdest relative.</p>	

Story Slam

Crafting a Hook

Because of the time limits of a slam, you don't have a lot of time for introductions or set up. Consider starting your story one of the following ways:

Question - spark your listeners' curiosity by asking a question related to your story
Have you ever done something stupid to impress someone you were attracted to?

Announcement - spoil the ending and tell the listener right up front what this is about
Most people have stories they could tell you about getting locked out of places, but I have a story about getting locked in. My friends and I got locked in the Berlin Zoo.

Start in the Middle - jump right in to the middle of the action
I sat in the waiting room at the paediatric hospital panicking, soon my mom would know I'd been lying.

Start at the End - start by telling us how it ended and then work your way back
Natasha Elke, Uyen Ho and I are used to this day as a cautionary tale in high school science, but I swear it wasn't our fault.

Opinion - start with a strong statement of your personal opinion on a topic related to your story (without labeling it as such)
No matter how well you think you've covered up your mistake it can still come back to get you in trouble.

The Mislead - start with an opinion that you will prove to be contrary to your actual views on the topic
Nothing good ever comes of letting children watch TV.

Quotation - a famous quote, a proverb, something people say about you or your main character
When I was a kid, my aunt used to say "Naisy's lazy."

An Interesting Fact - give your listeners a statistic or fact related to your topic to pique their curiosity
In December of 1983, a Cabbage Patch doll graced the cover of Newsweek magazine. Three million dolls were sold that year, but the demand was not met.

The 'Imagine' Lead - start with something like "Imagine..." or "Picture this..." and put your listeners into your opening scene

Ending Strong

The ending should help listeners to see how this incident has a universal theme. It should help the listener to know why what they've just heard matters. It shouldn't explain everything or tell the listener what to think or feel.

You can end with:

- dialogue
- action
- reflection

End Where You Began: Look once more at your hook. Is there something you can circle back to?

Zoom Out: You've focused your story on a specific incident or experience, can you pull the camera back and show how the learning or message relates to your life, or relates to life in general?

be careful not to tell your listeners what to think or feel

Editorialize: take a stand with a bold opinion

Flash Forward: Jump from the end of the events to you in present day, what has stuck with you? What has changed as a result of the events? How does the learning still ring true? What's your relationship with the other characters now?

Hint at the Next Chapter: give your listeners a tiny taste of what follows: "but that's a story for another day" or "you don't want to know what happened the next time"
be sure to make sure that your story feels concluded though, listeners want a sense of closure

Insight: Show us how your experience or learning helped you when that crisis recurred

Question: end with a rhetorical question

Connect to the Audience: make a wish or suggestion for your audience