



WRITING SIX-WORD STORIES

Minimalist creative writing projects to construct counternarratives, provoke conversation, and explore diverse experiences within our community

What is a counternarrative?

We live storied lives. Stories are the means by which we fashion our identities and challenge the identities thrust upon us—they are a part of self-making. Stories are also a mechanism for societies to either maintain the status quo or activate change—a tool of world-making. When society holds stock stories that persistently misunderstand and misrepresent some identities and experiences, counternarratives deliberately challenge the stock stories, expand and amplify stories of resistance and persistence, interrupt the status quo and pave the way for change.¹ Counternarratives are “narratives that counter the dominant narrative and take into account the social and political context within which the dominant narrative is made.”² Six words is not enough space to explain anything, but it is just enough space to spark curiosity and a conversation about the realities we experience and the realities we want to co-create.

Michelle Norris created [The Race Card Project](#) to spark conversations about how people experience race. The project invites people to share their truth in only six words. In some cases, this is a list of words that describe someone’s thoughts, other times it is a pithy and provocative sentence that captures the essence of someone’s daily experience. Norris writes “The Race Card Project submissions are thoughtful, funny, heartbreaking, brave, teeming with anger and shimmering with hope. Some will make you smile. Others might make you squirm. And there are a few that might make you wonder why they deserve a place on our website’s Race Card Wall.”

Steps to a Six-Word Story Project

1. **Set up a story board or submission portal.** There are many platforms where people can post or submit their stories. [Google Forms](#) is one no-cost platform to create a submission portal with a six-word cap. A Google Form also allows submissions to be anonymous if that is important for your project. Alternatively, the Story function on social media platforms allows you to pose a question/topic that viewers reply to. Social media stories won’t cap responses at six words, but you can state the criteria in or before the prompt.
2. **Create a topic.** Collaborate with your group to find out what they want to learn from each other’s experiences or perspectives on the world. Depending on the purpose you want a narrative project to fulfil, topics might delve into personal identities or capture the moment we are in collectively. Here are several examples: What’s your 6-word-story about social distancing? School from home. Hope in moments of global fear. Who is your best friend in self quarantine?
3. **Share your stories!** Whether you’re using a submission portal like Google Forms or a social media platform, make sure everyone has the access they need to submit/post their story.
4. **What to do with the narratives.** Depending on the platform you used to gather stories, you may already have a story board that participants can see, or you may need to arrange and share out the responses you received through your submission portal. The story board you have compiled may be a thought-provoking mosaic of truths about people’s lives and experiences, perhaps a conversation starter about the experiences behind the six words someone wrote, or the beginnings of counternarratives that youth want for themselves and/or their community.

¹ Bell, L., Roberts, R., Irani, K., Murphy, B. (2008). [The Storytelling Project Curriculum: Learning About Race and Racism through Storytelling and the Arts](#). Barnard College.

² Burbach, J., Martin, S., Arnold-Fowlkes, J., Sakaith, J., Julius, C., Hibbs, A. (2017). This Is How I Learn: Co-Creating Space for Students’ Voices. In J. Keengwe (ed.) *Handbook of Research on Promoting Cross-Cultural Competence and Social Justice in Teacher Education*. Pages 178-192.