

TELL YOUR STORY!: Creative Self-Expression Through Zine-Making

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Introduction

“Tell Your Story: Creative Self-Expression Through Zine Making” is a workshop for older teens (aged 15-17), in which each participant will create a ‘perzine,’ or autobiographical zine. A zine is a physical, independently-printed publication that can be about any topic, and that incorporates different mediums and styles. Such styles can include: “personal writing, signs, and symbols, or graphic representations such as drawing, collage, photography, comics, and other related cultural practices” (Grushka & Goodlad, 2013, p. 69). In this workshop, each teen will be introduced to a genre - the zine, practice multiple literacies by independently and actively choosing a visual, or literary style to tell their autobiographical story. The participants will also have the opportunity to engage in community building by sharing aspects of their zine with the group.

Audience

The audience of this workshop is older teens (ages 15-17), who are participating in the Brooklyn Public Library’s Librarians of Tomorrow program – “an innovative, hands-on internship program for 10th-12th grade students from diverse backgrounds with an interest in library careers” (Brooklyn Public Library, n.d.). All participants in the Librarians of Tomorrow program are enrolled in a New York City high school. Workshop participants do not need to have any prior knowledge of zines, either in their content or construction. They will receive this instruction, and construct their own zine throughout the course of the workshop. Because the nature of the zine is that it is a physical construction, no specialized technological experience is

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necessary for the workshop. The maximum audience size for this workshop should be 15 participants, due to the potentially high level of assistance needed from the workshop facilitators.

Rationale

Teens are oftentimes relegated to the margins of our communities. They're in a constant state of flux and growth: pushing and creating boundaries, and looking for safe ways to explore their identities. Zines are a neutral medium for expression, many times created by such overlooked members of our society: "Because of their do-it-yourself ethos, zines are often embraced by those from marginalized backgrounds because of their freedom to experiment with different modes of writing, expression, and presentation" (Honma, 2016, p. 34). These characteristics make zines an excellent medium for teens, as they provide a flexible, creative outlet, while encouraging relationship building.

The act of individually copying and distributing one's zine gives teens agency over their experiences. Zine-making can also act as a therapeutic tool, enabling the creator to work through feelings, or as a political act, giving teens from potentially marginalized situations a platform to voice their feelings. But more importantly zines, and their distribution give validation that the creator's experience, story, and voice matter. They affirm that their creator can have an impact on their communities, that they can actively create these communities, and have a say in them. Honma (2016) elaborates on this concept: "The community aspects of zines include resource sharing, skills development, and the promotion of participatory culture, in which everyone is encouraged to contribute according to their own capacities towards a shared collective experience" (p. 34). This

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workshop will thus grant teens agency in enabling autobiographical storytelling, offer a safe environment for creative expression, and empower teens as active community participants.

From the perspective of literacy, zine-creation can also act as a unique educational experience. As zines are constructed in a myriad of ways, use multiple mediums, can be on any topic, and generally have very few limitations, their production can involve the engagement of multiple literacies - including information literacy, visual literacy, and basic literacy. This workshop, which provides only very broad guidelines in terms of the zine's creation (it must include autobiographical storytelling), and leaves much of the storytelling interpretation in the hands of the teens, will ask the participants to utilize such multiple literacies in order to effectively share their personal story. In the broadest sense, this workshop will provide a lesson in the concept of information creation, and in turn information literacy - the finished zines are objects of information “produced to convey a message and . . . shared via a selected delivery method” (ACRL, 2016) - in this environment the delivery method being a physical object (the zine) containing, and conveying the teen's personal story. Writing the autobiographical narrative will require basic literacy skills, and the sharing aspect of the workshop acts as basic literacy in itself, defined in part as a participatory skill in “reading, writing and calculation for . . . the community's development” (UNESCO as cited in Bhola, 2010, p. 3479).

Outcomes

There are three outcomes to the “Tell Your Story” workshop. Participants who complete the workshop successfully will: gain awareness of a new genre of self-expression – the zine; the experiencing of multiple literacies (including basic, visual, and information) that can be

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contained within, and gained through the creation of a zine; and learn the value of storytelling as a both a form of agency, and community building.

Objectives

As the three outcomes of this workshop are varied, we aim to provide clearly aligned objectives in order to ascertain that they are being fulfilled. These include:

- *Outcome 1: Gain awareness of a new genre of self-expression – the zine*
 - Objective: The workshop participant will study at least one pre-created zine, and answer several short evaluative questions about its content, construction, and purpose.
 - Objective: The workshop participant will independently create one autobiographical zine, or ‘perzine’. The zine will include an example of personal storytelling.
- *Outcome 2: Experience the multiple literacies that can be involved in the creation of a zine*
 - Objective: The completed zine will display that at least one literacy has been engaged in its creation. Examples may include:
 - The use of original or non-original artwork, signifying visual literacy skills¹ engaged in incorporating images that serve to enhance the personal story.
 - The incorporation of original narrative or poetry to tell a personal story, signifying basic literacy skills².
- *Outcome 3: Understand storytelling as a both a positive form of agency, and community building*
 - Objective: Workshop participants will display positive, and/or enthusiastic behavior during the creation, and construction of their zines (observable by the workshop facilitators).
 - Objective: Workshop participants will display a sense of personal value upon sharing aspects of their completed zines.

	Workshop Outcomes	Corresponding Objectives
1	Gain awareness to a new genre of self-expression – the zine	1. The workshop participant will study at least one pre-created zine 2. The workshop participant will independently create one autobiographical zine, or ‘perzine’.
2	Experience the multiple literacies that can be involved in the creation of a zine	1. The completed zine will display that at least one literacy has been engaged in its creation

¹ “A set of abilities that enables an individual to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, use, and create images and visual media” (Media Literacy Clearinghouse, n.d.)

² “A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on [their] everyday life” (UNESCO as cited in Bhola, 2010 p. 3479).

3	Understand storytelling as both a positive form of agency, and community building	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Workshop participants will display enthusiastic, or positive behavior during the creation their zines 2. Workshop participants will display a sense of personal value upon sharing aspects of their completed zines
Fig 1. Outcomes & Corresponding Objectives of the “Tell Your Story” Zine Workshop For Teens		

The Program

This workshop has three components, the first being the “Zine Library” exercise. This is followed by the zine creation, and zine sharing component. Finally, after the workshop is completed the facilitators will help distribute completed, and photocopied zines to their creators. The three components are separated accordingly below. There is accompanying slideshow to the workshop (see Appendix A).

Preparation

Two tables should be set up for this workshop. One larger table that will be the workstation and a secondary table that will hold the display Zine Library.

A. “Zine Library” Exercise –15 minutes

1. Attendees will enter and be instructed to take a worksheet (see Appendix B), and select a zine from the library to look over. This can happen while attendees are coming in, and as they are deemed present. The worksheet will have three questions they should answer about the zine they have chosen to read. They will be asked to determine a visual element, written element, construction element, and how they felt reading it or another observation.
 - o *For example:*
 1. Zine Title and Author: Becca Makes a Zine! By Emma Karin
 2. Visual: the images and text are drawn
 3. Written: the story is about when Emma went to Kinkos to help print Becca’s first zine
 4. Constructed: the zine is folded out of a single piece of paper
 5. Observation/Feeling: This zine was funny, it made me laugh. The zine is short.

B. Zine Creation & Sharing –90 minutes (with a break in-between creation and sharing)

1. Instructors will introduce themselves and give a short presentation about zines. Emphasized points will include:
 - o Zines use multiple mediums and are distributed by the creator
 - o Zines can be about anything, but the most common are called “Perzines” in which the author writes about their own life and experiences
 - o Sharing lived experiences is viewed as both a therapeutic technique and political act.

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- Sharing narratives is both cathartic for the writer and can also create empathy within the reader.
- 2. Attendees will be instructed to think of an experience that they have had that was meaningful or memorable to them. The experiences can be joyful and full of excitement, like the first time they went on a roller coaster, or can be more pensive and somber, like when they lost someone that was close to them. They can also choose to write about an everyday experience. The attendees will take five minutes to decide on the story and visual elements they will be using. The provided “Zine Library” worksheet will also include space for brainstorming
- 3. Instructors will give quick and basic instructions in zine-making (15 minutes). The rest of the workshop time will be dedicated to the students making their zines.
 - While the students are working, the instructors will walk around the table to offer advice, ask and answer questions.
- 4. For the last 15 minutes, attendees will re-group for a discussion, and to share aspects of their zines.
- 5. Five minutes should be left for workshop participants to fill out a written, evaluative form.

C. Post-Workshop Zine Distribution & Collaboration Efforts

After the workshop, the zines will be photocopied by the instructors, and given back to the attendees. This can be done through the mail, or through Brooklyn Public Library staff, as the participants will presumably still be involved in the LOT program. If the teens choose to share their zines with their communities, there is a possibility of the library starting a zine collection (if one does not exist already), or increasing the circulation of an already established zine collection.

Barriers

Zines, while still widely-circulated, might be unknown to younger generations.

Especially as one of the zine’s main features is its non-digitized format. Not having an understanding of the medium could cause some hesitance in the workshop. This can be easily mitigated by introducing zines ahead of the workshop. If the library already has a zine collection, it could feature a selection of titles on social media, make a display with them, or otherwise draw attention to them with teens as the specific user audience. A robust promotional campaign ahead of the workshop that highlights the zines, as much as the storytelling and DIY aspects of the workshop, will possibly draw more interest and participants. However, if the library does not have a zine collection, or cannot provide access to zines before the workshop, more time should

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be provided during the workshop to let teens read and ask questions, before starting the creation portion of the program.

Resources

If the library does not already have a zine collection, buying zines or borrowing them for the workshop is necessary. Zines are usually priced under \$10, therefore gathering a minimum of 20 zines could cost less than \$40. Having access to computers, and printers is also important, as this will enable participants to type and print out their narratives if they wish to do so. Depending on how far along the teens get in their zine-making, they may prefer to photocopy them at the end of the workshop so they can take everything home with them. However, if this is not possible the facilitators will photocopy, and distribute the zines after the workshop. If a speaker system is available, music should be played during the making portion of the workshop. A playlist can be made ahead of time that incorporates music from the punk and riot grrrl era when zines became a popular format. Materials needed to make the zines include:

- Blank 11 x 17 paper (one ream)
- Scissors (one pair per student if possible)
- Glue sticks and tape (one per student)
- Pencils (one per student)
- Erasers (one per student)
- Rulers
- Black felt tipped pens (one per student)
- Copy clip-art books, old books, old magazines, old newspapers

Collaboration

Collaborating with local zinesters, zine-related groups, zine shops/bookstores that sell zines, or any zine fests would be a tremendous benefit to the program. Ideally, zinesters could even help give the presentation, or act as helpers during the workshop. Incorporating local zine makers would further highlight the community-building aspects of zine making, and showcase

the diverse offerings of what a zine can look like. Brooklyn-based librarian Maggie Carson (2018) writes of her zine workshops:

Different local guest artists visit our school to lead the [zine] workshops. Each artist brings something new to the students: a story of who they are; a set of skills and experiences; or different techniques, topics, and themes. We try to feature a diverse roster of guests—across race, gender, age, occupation/area of expertise—and encourage them to choose unique and interesting themes that they're passionate about and want to share with our students.

In the weeks leading up to the workshop, profiles of zinesters or zine-related environments could be featured on social media, or zine makers could be asked to come in and do a reading, or present a panel discussion. Having the zinesters/zine shops reposting the library program would also be a great way to promote the workshop (and the library) to a different audience. After the workshop, if participants are interested in sharing their zines, or continuing in the community-building experience, a zine swap with other institutions that have held teen zine workshops could be organized.

Evaluation

We intend to evaluate the workshop through both observation, as well as physical evidence – the completed zine. During the zine library and zine-creation component, facilitators will take notes on the sorts of questions asked by the teens, as well as the type of assistance being asked for. Examples of questions asked by participants may include:

- Assistance in understanding the content of a zine being looked at
- Assistance in constructing the physical zine

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- Assistance in determining what type of image to use

During this part of the workshop, facilitators will also visually observe behavior of the participants, noting levels of enthusiasm/frustration/enjoyment while creating the zines.

Looking at the completed zine will determine whether Outcome #1 (an understanding of a new genre for self-expression – the zine), and Outcome #2 (an understanding of the multiple literacies involved in making a zine) were achieved. For example, if the participant successfully creates a ‘perzine’ that includes an autobiographical narrative, and that shows visual/basic literacy skills, then these outcomes were successful.

During the sharing portion, workshop facilitators will both prompt the teens with questions, and also observe the teens’ willingness to share their zines. This will determine whether Outcome #3 (an understanding of zine-making and personal storytelling as a form of agency), was successfully accomplished. Discussion questions may include: “Do you think you would make another zine?” “Will you share your zine with someone outside this workshop?” “Do you think your story/zine would be helpful to somebody else? How?” An evaluation form (see Appendix C) (including both a likert scale assessing the workshop, and an open-ended comment section) will provide participants with the chance to share any other feelings about the workshop, and the zine-making process as a whole.

Conclusion

The act of zine-making provides a unique creative outlet, and a solid community building platform. For teens, whose voices are often ignored or marginalized, providing a safe, and encouraging space to create a self-reflective zine will act as both an educational, and empowering experience. The product of the “Tell Your Story” workshop – a ‘perzine,’ will raise

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awareness a new genre, and engage multiple literacy skills. The nature of zines as physical objects - meant to be shared - will also allow the teens to be involved in an experience that will not only bring together the workshop participants, but also provide opportunities for community-building in a larger sense. Most importantly, the workshop's aim to create specifically autobiographical zines, will grant agency to the participants – affirming that their stories and voices are indeed being heard, and deserve to be listened to.

References

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Appendix A

Workshop Slides

This slideshow is designed to be presented by the workshop facilitators in conjunction with the “Tell Your Story” workshop.

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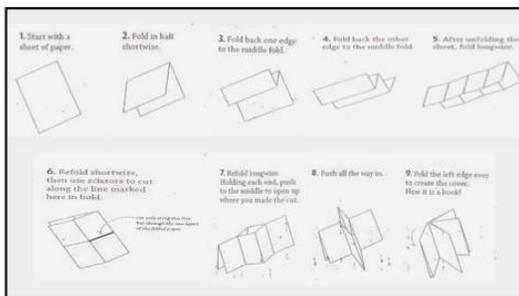
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Appendix B

Student Worksheet: “Zine Library” exercise

This worksheet is designed to be printed and completed by each workshop participant during the “Zine Library” exercise.

Title of zine & author's name

Short answer text

What is this zine about?

Long answer text

Describe a visual element of this zine

Long answer text

How is this zine constructed?

Long answer text

How did you feel when reading this zine?

Long answer text

Anything else?

Long answer text

Your zine

Description (optional)

⋮

Moment

Long answer text

Appendix C

Instructor Evaluation Form

This form allows for statistics to be recorded such as number, and age of participants, as well as places to record student answers relayed during the sharing portion of the workshop. These questions are indicators of Outcome #3 (do the students display a sense of agency in completing, and sharing their completed product?)

Tell Your Story- Instructor Evaluation

Form description

How many students participated in the workshop

Short answer text

⋮

Estimated ages

Short answer text

Number of teens who actively shared in the beginning

Short answer text

Number of teens who actively shared at the end

Short answer text

Questions asked to teens:

place tally marks next to option for each hand raised

Do you think you will make another zine?

- Yes
- No
- Other...

Will you share your zine with people outside of the workshop?

- Yes
- No
- Other...

...

Do you think your story/zine would be helpful to someone else?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

What else would you want to write a zine about?

Long answer text
