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**OWN  
YOUR  
STORY**  
**EDUCATOR  
RESOURCE  
PACK**



# A NOTE FROM LIVE DIFFERENT

Thank you for having a Live Different presentation at your school! The message of this year's presentation is "Own Your Story", and it is all about resilience and hope, inspiring students with the incredible ability that they have to not just bounce back from difficulties, but to become stronger and use their story to make a difference.

Research on resilience shows that one's construal, their "story", is a critical factor in their ability to overcome and thrive despite setbacks<sup>1</sup>.

Even more interesting, however, is how dramatically a student's core narratives and mindset can be "edited" with extremely brief and simple "nudges"/interventions<sup>2</sup>, resulting in long lasting positive changes. This is why we build our school presentations around personal storytelling. Even very brief exposure to short stories of other people overcoming obstacles can have an incredible, long-term impact<sup>3,4</sup>.

There is a bit of a catch to this however. Research also suggests that the effect of these positive stories or messages is greatly enhanced when it is internalized through reflection and meaning-making<sup>5,6</sup>.

This is where you come in. The stories or messages your students heard in the presentation might have sparked something in them. By taking the time to use these materials to facilitate further reflection, you will be helping to fan that spark into flame, and to turn inspiration into lasting change.

We appreciate that the demands on classroom time can make such "extra-curricular" activities difficult to fit in, so we thank you deeply for your willingness to make an important difference in your students' social-emotional growth by utilizing these resources.

— The Team at Live Different

1 Konnikova, Maria. "How People Learn to Become Resilient." *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, 21 Feb. 2019. [www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/the-secret-formula-for-resilience](http://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/the-secret-formula-for-resilience). "Perception is key to resilience: Do you conceptualize an event as traumatic, or as a chance to learn and grow?" This article is an excellent primer on the subject of resilience.

2 Miu, Adriana Sum, and David Scott Yeager. "Preventing Symptoms of Depression by Teaching Adolescents That People Can Change." *Clinical Psychological Science*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2014, pp. 726-743. [doi:10.1177/2167702614548317](https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702614548317) Using just a 25 minute exercise on a large group (n = 599) of students, depression rates were 40% lower compared to the control group NINE MONTHS later.

3 Walton, G. M., and G. L. Cohen. "A Brief Social-Belonging Intervention Improves Academic and Health Outcomes of Minority Students." *Science*, vol. 331, no. 6023, 2011, pp. 1447-1451. [doi:10.1126/science.1198364](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1198364). This brief one-hour intervention (using personal stories plus reflection exercises) achieved impressive results: compared with a control group, the experiment tripled the percentage of black students who earned G.P.A.s in the top quarter of their class, and it cut in half the black-white achievement gap in G.P.A. It even had an impact on the students' health — the black students who received the belonging message had significantly fewer doctor visits three years after the intervention.

4 Wilson, Timothy D., and Patricia W. Linville. "Improving the Academic Performance of College Freshmen: Attribution Therapy Revisited." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 42, no. 2, 1982, pp. 367-376. [doi:10.1037/0022-3514.42.2.367](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.42.2.367) In this study college drop-out rates were reduced 80% with a 30 minute intervention that shared simple stories of students "who did poorly at first, but do better later"

5 Mallett, Robyn K., and Timothy D. Wilson. "Increasing Positive Intergroup Contact." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2010, pp. 382-387. [doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2009.11.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.11.006). The group that heard positive stories of inter-racial friendships, AND did a writing exercise to relate it to their own experience, had formed 3 times more new inter-racial friendships. The group that did not do the writing reflection portion did not see as much change.

6 "The Health Benefits of Expressive Writing." *U.S. News & World Report*, *U.S. News & World Report*. [health.usnews.com/wellness/articles/2016-08-31/the-health-benefits-of-expressive-writing](https://www.health.usnews.com/wellness/articles/2016-08-31/the-health-benefits-of-expressive-writing). There is even a fascinating connection between writing about difficult experiences and physical health, even resulting in biopsy puncture wounds healing much faster.

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# PRE-PRESENTATION ACTIVITY

Note: This activity could alternately be used after the presentation.

## GOAL

Live Different will be doing a motivational presentation called “Own Your Story”.

Their presentation will have story-tellers, videos, and live music. This activity can be used in class before the presentation to prepare students to make connections to the message they will be hearing.

## MATERIALS

- Masking tape (or 1 meter string/rope)
- Post-It notes or tape (1” per participant)
- Paper (letter size)

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Tape two 1 meter long pieces of masking tape (or string) on the wall or floor. Write “yes” at one end of the 2 tape lines, and “no” at the other end.
- 2 Print, or re-write, the statements found at the end of this activity, and post above each line (Feel free to re-word the statements as needed to make appropriate for your class)
- 3 Give 2 post-its (or 1” pieces of tape) to each participant. Everyone vote by sticking their post-it or tape anywhere along the line between, “yes” or “no” to indicate how strongly they feel.
- 4 Ask students to explain their answers and give examples. Although the focus of the upcoming presentation is about developing resilient personal narratives, for the purpose of this activity, there isn’t a “right” or “wrong” answer. It is to just spark some initial reflection.

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**WHAT DOESN'T  
KILL YOU MAKES  
YOU STRONGER.**

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**A PERSON IS IN  
CONTROL OF THEIR  
OWN DESTINY  
OR FUTURE.**

# POST-PRESENTATION ACTIVITY: OWN YOUR STORY CHALLENGE!

## GOAL

This activity will reinforce the over-arching concept of human “anti-fragility”: that we can become stronger through adversity or challenge. Using an example or situation from their own lives, students will learn how to reframe challenging experiences to be able to learn, grow, and become more resilient.

## SETUP

- Video link: <http://livedifferent.com/ownyourstory>
- If using the video instructions, you will need a projector or screen with sound and a device to play the video. If you don't have the ability to play the video, use the “non-video” facilitation instructions on the next page.
- Print and handout 1 copy of the “Own Your Story Challenge” worksheet per student. Or give lined paper for extra writing space.
- If using the non-video facilitation instructions, you might wish to use some props (styrofoam and plastic cups) for the illustration. Additionally, *we recommend that the facilitator think through the reflection questions in advance and share about their personal example throughout the lesson.*

## VIDEO FACILITATION INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 The video will have 3 points where you will pause it and allow time (eg. 5 minutes) for students to freely write their answers to their questions. They don't need to worry about spelling or grammar, the only rule is to not stop writing.
- 2 Although the video lesson doesn't require much input from the facilitator, *we strongly encourage you to open or close the lesson with an example from your own life about a challenging experience and how you have learned and grown because of it.*

# LIVE (NON-VIDEO) FACILITATION INSTRUCTIONS

## **Opening statement:**

“There is a quote from Brene Brown that says: ‘When we deny our stories, they define us. When we own our stories, we get to write a brave new ending’. Today we are going to be doing the Own Your Story Challenge, taking a few minutes to think about our own stories and how we can write hope and meaning into them.”

## **Introduce the concept of anti-fragility:**

“Some things are fragile, for example a styro-foam cup. You squeeze it, and it breaks”

“Some things are robust, for example a plastic cup. You drop it, and it bounces back, unchanged”

“There is another category as well. Things that actually take advantage of stress or difficulty to become stronger. Such things are called ‘anti-fragile’”. Ask students if they have any examples of things that are anti-fragile, that get stronger due to adversity. Eg:

- Muscles: when you workout, they rip, and this is what causes them to grow/strengthen.
- Immunizations: being exposed to small quantities of a virus makes our immune system strong enough to handle the real thing.
- Forest-fires: efforts to protect forests by putting out small fires can allow dead wood to build up, eventually leading to catastrophic fires far worse than the sum of the smaller fires that were prevented.

“People are also very ‘anti-fragile’. We often become better, kinder, or stronger people because of adversities or stresses we face.”

## **Question #1: Think of a challenging experience or obstacle that you have faced in life. What happened, and how did you feel about it?**

- Share the example from your own life (just share about the event and feelings, you will reflect on the lessons from it in the next question)
- Let students know that their writing is for them only, and that it is perfectly fine to choose to write about a memory that is simple, or not overly intense.

“The first step to owning our story is to allow ourselves to acknowledge and feel the emotions attached to our experience. It is when we recognize our feelings that we can begin to sort through and make sense of our difficulties.”

- Give students 5 minutes to freely write about this experience. They don’t need to worry about spelling or grammar, the only rule is to not stop writing.

“Research shows that going through difficult things in life doesn’t affect us as much as whether we have made sense of how those experiences have affected us. There is a saying that there is a treasure in every tragedy. Basically, everything in life (both good and bad) can teach us something, but it’s up to us to find the meaning. We have the ability to do that, which brings us to the next step.”

## **Question #2: How did you (or could you) learn, grow, or become stronger from this experience?**

- Continue sharing about the personal experience you mentioned earlier, and what you learned from it.
- Give students 5 minutes to write freely about this question.

“When you stop and work through life’s challenging moments, you can begin to help others with your story. Great purpose in life is found when we are able to use the things we have been through as tools to help others. This leads us to the final part of the Own Your Story Challenge. I want you to imagine for yourself what it would look like for your story to make a difference.”

## **Question #3: How could your experience make a difference or help others?**

- Continue sharing about your personal experience, and any ways that it has made a difference or helped others.
- Give students 5 minutes to write freely about this question. Encourage them to use their imagination to dream of the most incredible outcome possible.

## **Closing statement:**

“There is another quote that says ‘Your past is just a story, and once you realize this, it has no power over you’. You have the power to rewrite your story, to find truth and healing, hope and meaning. Not just for you, but for those around you as well.”

## **Closing discussion (time-permitting):**

- Allow time for any students that are interested in sharing what their answers/story were. This can be a meaningful empathy building experience in the classroom.
- Use open-ended prompts (eg. “Why do you think that is?”, “tell me more...”, etc.) and reflective listening (eg. “it sounds like you really...”) to reinforce their insights and learning.







**THANK YOU FOR  
CREATING SPACE  
FOR OTHERS TO  
OWN THEIR STORY.**



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