

# TIPS FOR USING TEACHING MEMOIR WRITING THE HERSTORY WAY

## *A video presentation in six tracks*

Roundtable discussion led by

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assisted by Herstory Facilitators

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“Page One Moment” Panel Participants in order of appearance: Bahtara Keita, Tenzeeila Ali, Serena Alfieri and Suzy Sonenberg. Voiceover by Tuzyline Jita Allen.

This video provides teachers, healers and activists with an introduction to some of the key tools of an empathy-based method of giving voice to people who have been profoundly silenced. It has proven effective in school, jail and community settings, where other approaches to writing have failed to ignite a spark or bring mastery. This roundtable discussion features techniques of story shaping designed to be accessible to writers of all levels of literacy.

**Produced by Clarence Sheppard and Natalie Byfield of Black Media Foundation**

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We invite you to download these pages for tips for coordinating the use of this video with the study of Herstory’s two manuals, *Paper Stranger*, for teachers, and *Passing Along the Dare to Care*, for students.

While these training materials can be used separately, they are best used in combination with one another. To order the training materials, either separately or together in a discounted package, [click here](#).

Do please feel free to contact our office at [contactus@herstorywriters.org](mailto:contactus@herstorywriters.org) (or call 631-676-7395) if you are interested in organizing professional development workshops around these materials or in order them in quantity for classroom use.

The video is set up to enable the viewer the viewer to switch back and forth between the role of the memoir writer experiencing the process for the first time as she daydreams her own opening moments and scenes, in a hands-on immersion designed to shed light on the process, and that of a teacher who is intentionally learning the techniques that will allow her to bring the approach to other people.

Thus, you might want to stop the tape entirely in the middle of sentence if you suddenly feel inspired to write your own “Page One Moment” or further expand a scene. Or you might want to replay certain sections several times. You might want to skip ahead to a particular section relevant to your teaching interests, before playing what intervenes.

Below are suggested readings that go back and forth between Herstory’s two manuals, to give you a deeper immersion in how to use the books and video together. Do pay particular attention to the text boxes labeled “Tools for Facilitators” that appear periodically throughout *Paper Stranger*. And do encourage your students to use the sidebars for their notes.

# CHAPTER ONE (TRACK ONE)

## INTRODUCING THE “STRANGER/READER” AND THE “PAGE ONE MOMENT”

The discussions in this segment are designed to prepare facilitators to play-act strong opening moments, while introducing key features of the Herstory technique. You can use the arrow keys on your computer or remote to toggle between the text boxes that introduce new themes. Do not forget to allow yourself to daydream your own “Page One Moments” as the tape moves along.

For background on the Herstory project and how the techniques evolved, we invite you to read the introduction to *Paper Stranger*, pages 1-22.

### HOW DO YOU INTRODUCE THE “STRANGER/READER”?

The opening half of the first chapter of *Paper Stranger*, “**Becoming the Stranger/Reader,**” pages 23-37 will take you into new ways of listening to people’s stories, with the goal of echoing them back to help each storyteller find a shape. We suggest that you use the tools illuminated in **Exercise One: “Strategic Listening for Shape” page 25** and **Exercise Two: “Tracking your Empathy as you Listen,” page 29** throughout your work with this video and as you begin to implement the approach. In order to incorporate these exercises into your tool kit, we suggest that you set up your **Listening Log (as outlined on page 29)**. As you grow more familiar with the listening techniques, you will probably be able to implement them automatically without having to write them down. Ideally these listening exercises should not be done a few times and dropped. Rather they should become a part of your way of life, so that your understanding of the connection between narrative structure and what creates empathy will keep deepening and broadening.

### ALL “PAGE ONE MOMENTS” ARE NOT EQUALLY STRONG

When these words flash on the screen, stop the track for a moment to read: “**Structure and the Herstory ‘Bill of Rights,’**” page 78 in *Passing Along the Dare to Care*.

From this point on, it will be up to you to decide how best to intermingle your reading with watching the video. As you move through the opening chapter of *Paper Stranger*, pay particular attention to the side bars that will help you to apply the techniques being discussed in the video, exploring the techniques that allow each facilitator to replay her students’ stories with the goal of giving them a clear shape. Notice how each of the six facilitators represented in the tape has her own way of applying the same set of tools.

Before you move ahead to TRACK TWO, complete **Exercise Three: “If You Were the Puppeteer,” page 39** and **Exercise Four: “Shuffling Containers and Contents,” page 44**. There is no right way to do these exercises. The results are for your eyes alone.

Special references that come up in this track refer to the invented terms and concepts that Herstory writers and facilitators pass down from one person to another, becoming a common language that is equally accessible to college professors and those whose narratives come primarily from overheard tales:

- **Backstitches:** page 124, *Paper Stranger/* pages 6 & 70, *Passing Along the Dare to Care*.
- **Fast Forwarding:** pages 2, 18 & 62, *Passing Along the Dare to Care*. (See index of *Paper Stranger* for a more complete list of references.)

- **Chinese Menu for Modeling “Page One Moments”:** page 75, *Passing Along the Dare to Care*
- **Book Time/Book Time Moments:** page 123 *Paper Stranger*/ page 69, *Passing Along the Dare to Care*.
- **Invisible Backstitches:** page 124, *Paper Stranger*.
- **Juggling Pieces and Scenes:** page 38, *Paper Stranger*.
- **On Multiple Possibilities: Working with the Group:** page 76 *Passing Along the Dare to Care*.
- **Temporary Scaffolding and Permanent Shape:** page 125 *Paper Stranger*.

## CHAPTER TWO (TRACK TWO)

### YOUNGER WRITERS TAKE THE “STRANGER/READER” AND THE “PAGE ONE MOMENT” ON THE ROAD

The student excerpts in this segment are designed to prepare facilitators working with younger writers to make sure that their oral imaging of their opening scenes will lead to writing powerful enough to compel an audience of reading strangers. While Chapter One (Track One) focuses on the facilitator’s role in presenting the Stranger Reader and modeling the Page One Moment, Chapter Two (Track Two) focuses on the sort of play-back you are hoping to elicit. Although the focus is on younger writers, the principles that make effective playback are the same for writers of any age.

By way of preparation, review the first three entries outlined in the appendix of *Passing Along the Dare to Care*: “Teaching the Page One Moment (the essentials in summary),” page 75. Pay particular attention to entries 4-7 on play-acting strong opening scenes and developing a plan of action for beginning to write.

Read the **Introduction** and **Chapter One** of *Passing Along the Dare to Care*” pages 1-19. This is the manual that was used by the students whose voices you will hear in the video. As you read, make notes in the sidebars as to how you might use the excerpts to inspire powerful writing journeys. Make notes about what techniques you might illuminate to elicit the story-filled moments we explored in Track One.

Once you have finished reading the first four stories, listen to Chapter Two (Track Two), with the goal of understanding the way that each of the two students has absorbed the idea of writing for a stranger. Pay particular attention to the way in which each is developing a structure for her story, without losing her individuality or voice.

Let their voices guide you as you take a few moments to do **Exercise One, Page 20** of *Passing Along the Dare to Care*, remembering remember that this writing is only for you, to help you better understand what you are asking your students to do. You may find yourself writing only a few paragraphs, or you might get carried away and write pages and pages and pages.

When you come to a stopping point, turn back to *Passing Along the Dare to Care* and read **Chapter Two “First Awareness,”** pages 20-53, and do the first two **warm-up exercises on Page 54**. See if doing these exercises helps you to add more to the Page One Moment that you have begun.

*Note: The syllabus for the remaining four tracks will be appearing on this website by November 15, 2011. We welcome your comments and emails about your experiences with as you begin to use these tools, including notes about how and where you are using them. Please address these to our artistic director, Erika Duncan at [eduncan@herstorywriters.org](mailto:eduncan@herstorywriters.org)*