

Urban Agriculture Youth-Led Garden Tours Workshop Curriculum

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Summary and Core Principles

The following curriculum provides instruction and guidelines for training youth to design and lead tours of their own community gardens and urban agriculture projects.¹ This curriculum is designed for a one-day workshop to teach tour directing skills to youth ranging in age between 13 to 21. By the end of the training, youth will have learned and practiced some key aspects of the arts of public speaking, storytelling, and guiding groups. This workshop may be extended as instructors see fit and can be easily adapted to a variety of youth gardening and urban agriculture programs.

The entire training process is intentionally participatory and student-driven; the trainer is primarily present as a coach, facilitator, and model tour guide. Students are strongly encouraged creatively build from their unique strengths and passions. Pedagogical research and youth empowerment programming both demonstrate how horizontal relationships within the classroom are “not only a way of teaching but also a way of practicing democracy.”² Core principles of this approach include:

1. Youth tour guides are experts and the best interpreters of their places
2. Storytelling is empowering, translating meaning across culture, race, and age
3. Effective youth education is collaborative and dialogical

Beginning the Workshop: Breaking Ice and Building Trust (approximately 75 minutes)

Begin by introducing yourself genuinely and warmly to each student, modeling how tour guides connect with and relate to their audiences. Friendly, informal conversation prior to more formal workshop activities may ease nervousness as students are entering the room and “scoping” you and one another out. The primary aim is fostering a welcoming, safe, and comfortable space. Explicitly addressing and modeling signs of respect, such as turning off and putting away cell phones and ear buds, not speaking out of turn, and maintaining eye contact while others are talking, for example, is encouraged.

¹ This curriculum was funded by the state of California’s department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR), as part of a project by the University of California’s Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (UC SAREP): “Integrating Urban Agriculture with Youth Development through Community Tours.”

² Kathleen Yep. “‘For What You See as Just’: Paulo Freire and Asian American Studies in Community-Based Learning.” *The Journal for Civic Commitment* XVI, no. 1 (January 2010): 3.

See also: Anderson, Kimberly S., and Lorilee Sandmann. “Toward a Model of Empowering Practices in Youth-Adult Partnerships.” *Journal of Extension* 47, no. 2 (April 2009).

<http://www.joe.org/joe/2009april/a5.php>.

Morton, M. and Montgomery, P; “Youth Empowerment Programs for Improving Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem of Adolescents.” The Campbell Collaboration, August 24, 2011.

<http://campbellcollaboration.org/lib/project/114/>.

Once you have gathered everyone's attention and the workshop has officially begun, initiate introductions. Perhaps have each student share their name, garden site and how they prefer to be identified and addressed (including preferred nickname, gender pronoun, etc.). Add fun, memorable facts to the introduction as applicable, such as a favorite vegetable, why they like gardening, or a favorite book or musician.

After introductions, define "tour directing," professionally and otherwise. Discuss, for instance, a bit of the long history of guiding and briefly explain why it has been important over time in certain places. Guiding is often considered one of the world's most culturally ubiquitous and enduring professions, and it is one that has been particularly important for diplomacy.³ When people see something new or foreign, they may sometimes have a tendency to pass judgment. Guides can help translate and share authentic, meaningful stories about places, people, and histories to enhance cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect.

Next, transition into discussion of the urban agriculture youth tours: explain the goal of the program, including especially how this student-centered program differs from conventional approaches. Emphasize the importance of youth expert storytellers sharing their own stories — about place, urban gardening/farming, and their communities— focusing attention on what these experiences mean to them. Before transitioning into a conversation about elements of a good story and practicing storytelling, lead the students in two to three public-speaking exercises. Two suggestions are described in detail below. These activities help to break the ice, build trust among group members, and impart valuable "stage presence" and confidence-boosting skills to the youth.

Suggested Engaged Public Speaking Exercises

1) Name Game: Bring a ball or hacky sack and join the youth in a wide circle. This exercise can be done either standing or from a seated position; accommodate students with disabilities by adjusting this exercise accordingly. Introduce the name game: whoever has the ball gently throws it to another person whose name the thrower remembers, loudly pronouncing their name as they toss the ball to the named person. The catcher then repeats this exercise, calling the name of another person as s/he throws the ball to that next recipient. Encourage the youth to try to become faster and faster, throwing the ball quickly as they learn each other's names.

2) Communicating Emotion Through Voice and Inflection: Once youth are fairly adept at the basic name game described above, transition into a similar exercise, this time modeling how to call each person's name whilst communicating a particular emotion. Spend an adequate amount of time modeling each sound/expression of various emotions,

³ See, for example: Weiler, Betty. *Tour Guiding Research: Insights, Issues and Implications*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2014. For additional history and newer research on tour guiding, see: Pond, Kathleen Lingle. *The Professional Guide: Dynamics of Tour Guiding*. Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1993; and Weiler, Betty, and Kaye Walker. "Enhancing the Visitor Experience: Reconceptualising the Tour Guide's Communicative Role." *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 21 (December 2014): 90–99. doi:10.1016/j.jhtm.2014.08.001.

such as anger, sadness, surprise, joy, amusement, or fear. You may ask the youth to think of, and possibly share, personal experiences that evoke each of these emotions in order to help them create the aural effect. Be mindful that anger and sadness in particular may trigger troubling memories. Carefully reassure the youth that their emotions are completely valid and all sharing of experiences is welcome and fully embraced. The more you can genuinely express admiration and respect for each student, the better. Know when to stop pushing an especially shy or awkward individual, for instance. Helping to challenge the youth slightly beyond their comfort zone will foster supportive, collaborative relationship building rather than competition.

Follow this warm-up with a brief break, then transition into the second half of the morning: storytelling.

Storytelling: Key Ingredients and Practice, Practice, Practice (approximately 75 minutes)

Define and discuss the concept of “story” generally—why stories are powerful, how they change things, why they matter. Emphasize how important it is that everyone share their *own* story. Narratives can catalyze everything from individual-level change to entire social movements.⁴ Stories are key to identity formation, whether as people or whole communities, and give meaning to our lives, work and cultures.

Emphasize, and perhaps ask youth to reflect upon, how and why voicing one’s own experience matters, for yourself and your community. Elicit examples of storytelling as empowerment. Prompt students by asking them to think of a story, song, or other artwork that left a deep impression, perhaps even changed their lives somehow. The following section provides a framework and guidelines for this discussion.

***Trainer Tip:** One engaging way to commence this discussion is to tell the same example story twice, the first time ineffectually and the second time much more compellingly. (Feel free to tell a story from your personal childhood experiences or about your own gardening space.) Ask the students to listen and watch carefully, then share what worked and did not work with each telling. What specific elements/techniques, in their view, make for a great story?*

Ingredients of a great story (narrative structure and organization)

Begin by soliciting the group’s opinions on key elements of a great story – what do they look for in a story, and what have they liked about their own storytelling experiences? If possible, write down the adjectives students offer on a chalk/dry erase board or easel. Keeping in mind what this particular group enjoys about stories, and announce that you will tell the same story twice: once in a bored manner and then again in a highly engaged fashion. Ask the youth to listen, watch, and compare elements of both the story’s content and form, or *how* it was told. What parts made the story work or not work? What was boring? What was interesting, and why?

⁴ See, for example: Davis, Joseph E. *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=3407876>.

After demonstrating incoherent and then captivating storytelling techniques, discuss the fundamental elements of organization, namely: each story should have a clear beginning, middle, and end, there should be “connection points” within the story, linking the narrative together.⁵ Explain how emotions, vivid description, and humor all help guide the listener. Share the importance of being truthful and authentic, avoiding sensationalizing and exaggeration, in good storytelling.

Telling a great story (public communication/speaking techniques)

Having spent some time on story subject matter and organization, transition into delivery methods and techniques. Demonstrate how to hold and use a microphone, and give each student an opportunity to practice with the microphone. Discuss effective body language, such as eye contact, smiling, body posture, and movement. Explain the importance of avoiding turning one’s back on the audience when guiding tour participants along a garden path. Recall the ice-breaker exercises described above and re-visit or introduce voice exercises, emphasizing: inflection, tone, projection, emotion, vocal confidence, pauses, volume, emotion, and enthusiasm.

Audience engagement remains another core element of good storytelling; model and verbalize the importance of paying attention to one’s audience and showing respect for everyone. For instance, use inclusive and gender neutral language, such as “everyone” instead of “guys,” and avoid assumptions about others’ preferred gender pronouns.

Trainer Tip: *Having discussed the elements of good story and pointers for how to share stories effectively, transition to focusing on specific youths’ gardens. Bring colored markers and large pieces of paper upon which students can sketch out their garden/farming areas. Ask youth to begin envisioning how to guide a tour group through their particular spaces. Elicit certain places or objects within each garden that students feel strongly about and might proudly display to an audience.*

From storytelling to tour guiding

Next, transition to a time in which participants imagine and develop the content of their own stories in the context of their physical garden spaces. Perhaps ask them to envision their garden for the first time, practicing seeing through the eyes of others. Encourage students to use the landscape or props in their tours, integrating their stories into scenes, such as a particular fruit tree or garden tool. On a more practical level, remind guides to clearly state shared agreements for their audiences, as you have modeled in your teaching space, such as “kindly refrain from cell phone use during tour, listen quietly while others are speaking.”

⁵ For additional resources on storytelling, see: Greene, Ellin, and Janice Del Negro. *Storytelling: Art and Technique*. 4th ed. Santa Barbara, Calif: Libraries Unlimited, 2010; Heathfield, David. *Storytelling with Our Students: Techniques for Telling Tales from Around the World*. Delta Teacher Development Series. Peaslake: Delta Publishing, 2014. <http://www.deltapublishing.co.uk/titles/methodology/storytelling-with-our-students> ; Smith, Chris. *The Storytelling School Handbook for Teachers*. Gloucestershire: Hawthorn Press, 2014. <http://www.hawthornpress.com/books/storytelling/storytelling-schools/the-storytelling-school/>.

Trainer Tip: Break for lunch before delving too deeply into youth specific spaces/stories, ideally at a nearby garden/farm. Give students space to relax and continue to get to know one another during lunch. Then, before returning indoors, have youth practice guiding their group through a garden, with a microphone if possible. Emphasize body language, as well as vocal and other presentation skills practiced in the morning session.

During the second half of the workshop, post-lunch and outdoor practice, bring the youth back together to hone their stories. Form small groups of students, organizing by garden if possible, and have them write and then practice sharing their stories to each other, using their hand-drawn garden/farm maps as guides. They may also want to re-draw new garden/farm maps several times after thinking more in-depth about their stories.

Developing your own story

If necessary, to help prompt enhanced youth creativity, suggest that they begin by identifying elements they value about gardening or farming—why does this work matter? What do you want to share about your garden and experience? Then instruct students to write and draw their stories, combining visual descriptions and written narrative. Some may wish to begin with an outline. Once they have drafts written or mapped out, encourage the youth to share their garden stories in small groups of 2-3 students to provide feedback to one another. Then shift to the larger group to share stories and feedback.

Trainer Tip: People often learn best from their peers. Having the youth break into smaller groups not only encourages individuals less comfortable with large groups to speak up, and this also generates constructive, peer-to-peer critique. Once each youth has had an opportunity to practice in smaller groups, have each workshop participant share their story in front of the larger group.

Sharing and practicing stories

Provide youth with ample positive feedback and encouragement as they bravely speak in public. While they may read from their written notes at first, encourage students to memorize their narratives, practicing several times in front of the mirror, friends, and family. Stress the importance of practicing, polishing transitions, key moments, and the arc of the story.

This may be a good time to revisit the power of the story, reminding youth why and how stories can change lives and build bridges. Identify the powerful elements in each student's story, offering plenty of genuine affirmation.

Trainer Tip: Positive feedback is key. Model to the youth how to respond to a peer's practice performance by first highlighting what the performer did best. Critique should be constructive and diplomatically offered. For example: "You maintained eye contact with us really well, especially when starting out. Remember to continue to do so through to the end of your story."

Bringing it all together—guiding with story

Ideally the youth will have the opportunity to practice their storytelling in their garden/farm spaces, using the microphone, walking while speaking, pointing out garden features, and integrating specific elements of their place into their narratives. Again, emphasize how much practicing helps, both to polish their performances and strengthen their stories' effectiveness, and to ease any nerves or anxiety. Conclude with a group conversation, soliciting feedback on both the training process and the guiding practice.

***Trainer Tip:** You likely cannot stress enough how important it is for youth to practice their stories, ideally in front of a mirror, friends, and/or family. It is easy and tempting for youth to think they can simply ad-lib, but tour directing typically involves a tremendous amount of practice to sound fluid and may involve memorization. Youth should memorize key aspects of their stories, including when and how to perform these moments during their tours.*

Close the workshop with a final performance or dress rehearsal of each youth's story/tour, presented to the group for practice and constructive feedback. Give ample space for the youth to comment on one another's presentation, keeping your own comments to a minimum. Interject if someone seems too harsh or offended, or if there is insufficient positive feedback for each student. Genuinely and enthusiastically encourage each student, providing meaningful, specific feedback. Spend a short amount of time revisiting the power of storytelling, asking students to share their own impressions and thoughts. Be sure youth are clear on any logistical details of the tour day as well. Knowing what to expect in terms of timing, transportation, and tour participant numbers will help ease any anxieties. Lastly, gently yet firmly remind youth to practice as much as possible and to have fun! Thank them and remind them: their stories matter.