LEAH HARRIS: Personal Narrative Reflection Guide

“It’s our stories that result in the most lasting change in people’s hearts and minds.”

**PART 1:**

“We tell ourselves stories all the time.”
What are some of the stories you tell yourself about who you are and what you are capable of in this world?

“We are constantly making meaning out of things.”
Where did these stories come from? Who influenced you?

**PART 2:**

**BENEFITS OF STORYTELLING**

“Even if you never share your story publicly, just this process of beginning to question and interrogate the stories that we have taken as undeniable truth will change how you show up in the world.”
What are larger and more destructive stories that we hear in our culture/society that we can unlearn?

“In telling our stories we can build community, we can find community”
What are the benefits you see in storytelling?

“Stories are our most powerful tool of persuasion”
How can your story influence others?

**PART 3:**

**FEAR ABOUT SHARING**

“It’s powerful to acknowledge those fears, not to judge ourselves for having them.”
What are your fears around sharing your story?

What is the worst thing that can happen? What is your deepest core fear?

Do you feel ready to take the risks? Why or why not?

What are some supports that you could enlist to help you begin to move forward in spite of your fear?

“Fearlessness is not the absence of fear but our ability to move in a direction even while we are feeling that fear.”
How to Tell the Story

“You do not need to tell your story publicly to be a change agent”

Write your story: use poetry, song or speak it. Don’t feel pressured to go straight into a narrative format.

Give yourself time and space to reflect.

Talk one-on-one with a trusted person. Be clear about what you want from them as a listener. Don’t let anybody push you into opportunities before you are ready.

1. Know your audience and think about how to frame your story to be most effective to that audience. Use teaching moments to build bridges.

2. Try to see the space where you will be speaking. Make adjustments for your comfort.

3. Work with your nerves. Get to know yourself and your process. Find ways to calm down the nervous response: Take a deep breath, ground yourself and connect to the physical.

4. Know how much time you have and plan accordingly.

5. Structure your story:
   a. Again, know your audience. Focus on what they need to know and leave time to get to your message.
   b. Leave them with something they can do or see differently.
   c. Not every traumatic detail needs to be included. Use what’s necessary to make your point.

6. Do what feels right to you
   Best Practices from a Public Health Perspective:
   • Don’t go into detail about methods of suicide/attempts of suicide.
   • Don’t overgeneralize about reasons for suicide.

7. Include a call to action- what do you want them to think or do differently.

8. Watch out for the “vulnerability hangover.” After the talk, you may have a feeling of “Did I really say that in public?!” Know that it is okay to feel this way. Use your support system to prepare as well as debrief to help through the aftershock.

We wish you the best on your personal narrative journey and would love to hear about your opportunities to use this information in speaking engagements or even the work of developing your personal narrative, whether it is being shared or kept for personal growth.