

# Norah Dooley: *StoriesLive Residency* Educational Guide, Grades K-12



## About the Residency

**StoriesLive** teaches high school students to craft personal narratives through the art of oral storytelling. Over 9,000 students have participated in this customizable curriculum-based program. By engaging deeply with narrative structure, voice, and presentation, students strengthen essential English Language Arts skills, gain practical tools for college essays, interviews, and job readiness, and discover the power of their own voices.

Students begin by hearing a professional storyteller model the process, then engage in a series of guided exercises to develop first-person stories based on themes aligned with Common Application essay prompts. Throughout the residency, students build confidence and competence as writers, speakers, and storytellers. As they share true stories from their lives, students discover common ground, deepen empathy, and gain a better understanding of their peers' experiences. This strengthens their community by creating a space where students feel seen, heard, and connected through personal storytelling. The program culminates in a "story slam" performance, meeting ELA standards for oral presentation and narrative writing. This residency also includes teacher training, lesson plans, and support for teachers to run future story slams independently.



## About Norah Dooley



**Norah Dooley**, storyteller, is a critically-acclaimed children's author and educator who performs in schools, libraries, conferences, and festivals throughout the U.S. and abroad. Norah's popular picture books, *Everybody Cooks Rice* and *Everybody Bakes Bread*, are two of four titles in a series about her neighbors and former neighborhood in Cambridge, MA. Norah specializes in Irish and Italian folklore, as well as teaching people of all ages how important their stories are and how to tell them. She has been a full-time classroom teacher and instructor in visual and performing arts in elementary and middle schools, has taught storytelling at Lesley University's Graduate School of Education, Lesley, Tufts, Boston and Suffolk Universities, and has lectured teachers of English and graduate students in Japan, India and Tanzania. Norah has been a featured performer at the Exchange Place of the National Storytelling Festival (TN), the Clearwater Festival (NY), the Newport Folk Festival (RI) and Cambridge Revels (MA). For four years, she appeared as a historical storyteller for Boston's Save the Harbor initiative, and for over 25 summers she told stories to thousands of children through the Storymobile of Read Boston. Norah has an M.Ed. in Creative Arts and Learning and is a Nationally Accredited Artist through Young Audiences Arts for Learning.

### Residency Learning Goals

- To develop personal voice and confidence through oral expression.
- To recall and reflect on meaningful life experiences using storytelling prompts.
- To understand and use story structure, including setting, characters, conflict, and resolution.
- To identify emotional truth and use sensory details to bring moments to life.
- To strengthen listening and empathy skills through shared story circles.
- To practice oral presentation skills, including pacing, tone, and body language.
- To recognize the power of personal narrative to connect with others and explore identity.



### Essential Questions



- What moments in your life felt like turning points or taught you something unforgettable?
- How do our everyday experiences hold the seeds of powerful stories?
- Which memories still make your heart race, or make you laugh, years later?
- How does where you are from shape who you are?
- What has challenged or changed your sense of belonging?
- What have you learned from being an outsider—or an insider?



## Residency Overview

**Teacher Workshop:** to prepare for the residency, what to expect, and how the residency supports and enhances curriculum.

**Assembly:** an introduction to the art of storytelling followed by an interactive workshop.

### Four In-Class Lessons:

- **Lesson 1**
  - Recap assembly and provide overview for residency
  - Introduce story prompts aligned with Common App Essay Prompts
  - Introduce basic elements of effective narrative
  - Provide examples of stories
  - **Assignment:** tell story 3 times and record “take away”
- **Lesson 2**
  - Introduce story structure and presentation skills
  - Find the meaning and “main take away” of story
  - Employ the “pause” and varied inflection to imbue meaning
  - Explore visual representation of stories to create and craft a narrative without a text
  - Review of feedback format by Q&A: Questions and Appreciations
  - Tell part of a story in a small group
  - **Assignment:** tell story 3 times and notice what changes
- **Lesson 3**
  - Introduce nonverbal “tools” of the storyteller: voice, facial expression and movement
  - Explore exercises in performance skills
  - Tell stories using new skills
  - **Assignment:** Tell story 3 times, work on and note nonverbal elements, and fill out Performer’s Checklist prepare for in-class slam
- **Lesson 4**
  - Review previous lessons and Performer’s Checklist
  - Introduce rubric and scoring sheets for audience
  - **In-class Story Slam:** students tell, evaluate, and listen respectfully to each other’s stories. Students may vote on which stories will be sent to the school wide slam and/or teacher may decide based on evaluation forms etc.

**School-wide Story Slam:** participating students tell a 2-4 minute personal story by the end of the unit in a school-wide assembly.

### Further Resources

- [Norah Dooley Website](#)
- [StoriesLive Video Highlights](#)
- [WGBH Stories from the Stage](#)
- Dicks, Matthew: *Storyworthy: Engage, Teach, Persuade, and Change Your Life through the Power of Storytelling*, New World Library (2018)
- Leitman, Margot: *Long Story Short: The Only Storytelling Guide You'll Ever Need*, Sasquatch Books (2015)
- Lipman, Doug: *Improving Your Storytelling: Beyond the Basics for All Who Tell Stories in Work and Play*, August House (1999)
- Pearmain, Elisa Davy: *Once Upon A Time: Storytelling to Teach Character and Prevent Bullying: Lessons from 99 Multicultural Folk Tales for Grade K-8*, Character Development Group (2006)

### Press for *StoriesLive*

“Listen to the stories of kids in this struggling school and you realize how very little numbers like test scores and turnaround statistics capture. These students carry around stuff so heavy it’s a wonder they make it to school at all, let alone talk about it. And yet... “

— Yvonne Abraham, *Boston Globe*

“...the organization’s credo is simple but powerful: ‘We believe everyone has a story to tell, and that the greater community will be more honest and compassionate through the listening to and sharing of stories.’”

— Susan Miron, *Arts Fuse*

“Many of the stories people bring to the slams prove the algorithm, ‘Time plus tragedy equals comedy,’” Dooley said. “The stories are dramatic, hilarious, serious, and even cathartic but unlike their ‘cousins’ - stand-up comedy or a poetry slam, a story slam is a competition to see who can bring the best story related to the published theme.”

— *Watertown Patch*



## Curricular Connections

### Arts Standards: Theatre

#### Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.02)

#### Performing

- Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work. (T.P.06)

#### Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (T.R.09)

#### Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (T.Co.11)

### English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

#### Reading

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (R.PK-12.2)
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. (R.PK-12.4)

#### Writing

- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. (W.PK-12.3)



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### Curricular Connections, continued

#### English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards, continued

##### Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

##### Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)

