



Directing Change Lesson Plan: Suicide Prevention

Lesson #1- Superheroes and our Purpose

- Objectives:**
- (1) Students will understand the concepts of purpose and strength
 - (2) Students will explore the warning signs for suicide and ways that a young person could help those who are thinking about suicide
 - (3) Students will reflect on what makes a superhero a “hero” and how an ordinary person can become a hero in suicide prevention

Time: *Total time is 90-120 minutes, split into three segments of about 40 minutes each. Completing at least two of the three segments is recommended. Each Activity may need to take place in its own separate class meeting, depending on each school or organization’s schedule. In addition, a fourth activity is focused on helping students translate their superhero story into a Directing Change film.*

Materials: Access to computer and large screen/projector to project films and examples of superheroes
Ikigai worksheet (optional)
Paper for personality and storyboard development activities
Access to internet for educational films (can also be downloaded ahead of time from their Vimeo.com links)

Note: Before proceeding with introducing the youth you work with to this material, be sure that you are familiar with the referral process on campus or resources in your community in case you need support for a youth at risk or for yourself.

Additional Resources:

- Directing Change Tent Card with Youth Warning Signs
- Directing Change films:
 - “All You Need is Words”: <https://vimeo.com/124872750>
 - “Hey Taylor”: <https://vimeo.com/92755737>
 - “A New Tomorrow”: <https://vimeo.com/92755069>
 - “The Signs”: <https://vimeo.com/124831022>
 - “Busy Bee” <https://vimeo.com/258012053>

Adapted from Karla Duarte’s Superheroes’ Suicide Prevention lesson plan for middle school youth.

ENGAGE

- **Discussion Question:** Who are some of our favorite superheroes? What makes them a hero? What are some ways that an everyday person could be a hero?

DO/EXPERIENCE

Implement Activity 2 and at least one of the other Activities:

Activity 1: Superhero Strengths and Purpose

Activity 2: Superhero Suicide Prevention **(required)**

Activity 3: Writing Your Superhero Story

Activity 4: Adapting Your Superhero Story to a Directing Change Storyboard

ACTIVITY #1: SUPERHERO STRENGTHS & PURPOSE

1) Tell students that we are going to each create a superhero and that our first step in this workshop is to think about what makes someone a hero. On the board, have the class brainstorm at least 5 superheroes in one column and in another column, write down what kinds of strength that they are known for.

For example, if we have Superman on the board, someone may suggest that he has super strength or that he can fly; Wonder Woman is known for physical strength as well, or her golden lasso of truth.

2) Have each student brainstorm possible strengths they want their superhero to have. After several strengths have been identified, instruct students to choose one core strength that their superhero should possess.

3) Introduce the concept of PURPOSE: the reason that something is created, the reason that something exists. You might have heard people talk about "what is my purpose in life?" which means that people wonder why they exist, or what things they are supposed to accomplish in their life. What might be someone's purpose in life?

For example, a really funny person may believe that their PURPOSE is to make people laugh, or to make people's lives better through laughter. A girl who has always wanted to be a doctor could think that her purpose is to help heal people and make others feel healthier. A boy who wants to stand up for others may believe that his purpose is to protect or defend others who cannot defend themselves.

4) The Instructor introduces the Ikigai Philosophy. Ikigai is a Japanese concept that means "a reason for being." The word "Ikigai" is usually used to indicate the source of value in one's life or the things that make one's life worthwhile. The word translated to English roughly means "thing that you live for" or "the reason for which you wake up in the morning." <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ikigai>



- The instructor provides an Ikigai Worksheet (optional). Students fill in four regions of the worksheet: what they love to do, what skills they possess, what the world needs, and what they could have a career doing. Two example templates are included at the end of this lesson plan.

5) Based on the Ikigai definition we open a dialogue for students to discuss as a group the things that they value in their life (e.g., sports, family, friends, video games, etc.)

- At this point anything they value is important, and it can help identify the values of each student, etc.
- **Discussion Questions:** What do you love? What are you good at? What does the world need? When you grow up what profession would you like to do?
- This exercise gives the students an opportunity to share in-group the things that are important to them, their interests, etc.

6) What do you think your superhero believes their purpose is? How is that tied to their strength? Share with a partner.

Note to teacher: push your students to answer deeper than “save people” – why do they want to save people? Save what kinds of people? How are they saving them?

Note to teacher: a person’s strength is not necessarily the same as their purpose. A strength is something that a person can contribute to the world, but a purpose should also incorporate a person’s values and a need for something in their community.

ACTIVITY #2: SUPERHERO SUICIDE PREVENTION

Preparation:

During this session kids are encouraged to ask questions about the issue and/or discuss why meaning is important when people are suffering or struggling from life's events. If you have access to a school counselor, we encourage you to invite them to talk to the students about suicide. Other options can include inviting another guest speaker (another mental health professional or suicide prevention specialist, for example), or the instructor can lead this portion. The instructor can also use the Directing Change Suicide Prevention educational film to introduce the basics of suicide prevention.

- a. Directing Change Suicide Prevention 101: <https://vimeo.com/464407220>
- b. Directing Change Suicide Prevention 101 PowerPoint: <http://www.directingchange.org/schools/> (go to Lesson Plans)

Note to teacher: We present a Positive Psychology Approach towards Suicide Prevention or Suicide Awareness by tapping into the importance of meaning-making or leading a life with purpose. Meaningfulness is the topic that we emphasize to help students understand the benefits of creating meaning of life's events, challenges and suffering.

*Note to teacher: **Be sure to not oversimplify the causes of suicide or how to get better.** Suicide should not be framed as an explanation or understandable response to an individual's stressful situation (e.g., a result of not getting into college, parent's divorce, break-up or bullying) or to an individual's membership in a group encountering discrimination. Oversimplification of suicide in any of these ways can mislead people to believe that it is a normal response to fairly common life circumstances. It is okay to talk about life problems that may increase a person's risk of suicide such as family issues (divorce, abuse) or social issues (bullying, break ups), and to talk about these life problems as a possible contributing factor to why a young person might be feeling hopeless, drinking more, or isolating themselves (which are warning signs for suicide), but we should not point to just one of these events as the cause of suicide. The truth is that not one of these events causes suicide, usually a person is dealing with multiple tough situations and is showing warning signs.*



Lesson Plan:

- 1) Remind students of the idea of PURPOSE. Can anyone in the class give us a good definition? How about an example of a person's purpose?
- 2) Have students take out their notes/drawings of their superheroes from Activity #1. Once they have determined which strength they want their superhero to have (which may be a common strength that they themselves possess), ask them to reflect on a story they could write where their superhero loses that key strength. How would the superhero feel? What might someone think or do when they lose their life's purpose?
- 3) Show the following Directing Change film:
 - a. "Busy Bee" <https://vimeo.com/258012053>
- 4) The instructor briefly introduces the social issue of Suicide. The students are asked if they have ever discussed the issue in another class or they have heard the term before.
- 5) Tell students that sometimes people feel very hopeless after losing something that mattered a lot to them, and that some people may become so distressed that they begin to think that suicide is the only way to end their pain – but this is not true. Tell students that many teens interviewed after making a suicide attempt say that they didn't want to die as much as they just wanted to escape from what was happening in their lives (a really difficult situation, really sad/scary thoughts or feelings) – and at that moment, dying seemed like the only solution. Young people may be thinking about suicide when they are in a lot of emotional pain. Emphasize that this is not a solution, but rather it is important to find help and talk to a trusted adult, a teacher, a friend or family member about the pain to help make it go away. Point out that they can come talk to you and point out others at school that they can go to as well.
- 6) What can we do to help people who are struggling with these thoughts? One way is to learn and recognize the warning signs. Show Directing Change film "The Signs": <https://vimeo.com/124831022>
 - **Discussion Question:** What warning signs were listed in this film?
- 7) Review the warning signs of suicide (Hand-out the Directing Change Tent Card or access these two resources: https://directingchange.org/wp-content/uploads/DirectingChange_SuicidePreventionFactSheet.pdf and www.suicideispreventable.org).
 - **Discussion Question:** What would you do if you recognized warning signs in a friend?

- **Discussion Question:** Who would you tell if a friend told you they were thinking about suicide and asked you to promise not to tell anyone? What would you say to the trusted adult? Would you tell your friend who confided in you that you had told a trusted adult, even if they asked you to keep it a secret?

8) Show the following two Directing Change films about connecting a friend to help:

- a. "All You Need is Words": <https://vimeo.com/124872750>
- b. "A New Tomorrow": <https://vimeo.com/92755069>

- **Discussion Question:** How did the friend connect the person to help?

(Note to Teacher: Students are apt to answer with responses they think that you may want to hear. Challenge them to consider what they really would or would not do if they were told not to break a friend's trust and tell a secret. Help them to explore why doing the "right" thing might not always be so easy).

9) As a class, brainstorm other people/things that give us strength and hope when we are feeling down. (Protective factors are personal or environmental characteristics that help protect people from suicide. Major protective factors include: Available health care; connectedness to individuals, family and community; life skills including problem-solving and ability to adapt to change; self-esteem; a sense of purpose or meaning in life; and faith.

- **Discussion Question:** When we are feeling down, what are some things or people that help us feel better?
- **Discussion Question (revisited):** What makes someone a hero? What are some ways that an everyday person could be a hero to someone that is feeling down?



ACTIVITY #3: WRITING YOUR SUPERHERO STORY

- 1) During this session the students are invited to develop their character and his/her story. Begin by revisiting the last lesson and these discussion questions:
 - a. **Discussion Question** (revisited): When we are feeling down, what are some things or people that help us feel better?
 - b. **Discussion Question** (revisited): What makes someone a hero? What are some ways that an everyday person could be a hero to someone that is feeling down?
- 2) Questions that should be kept in mind (and written in plain sight for students, if possible):
 - a. What is the superhero like?
 - b. What is this character's magic?
 - c. What is his/her conflict? This can be a conflict the superhero experiences OR a conflict he/she observes in someone else.
 - d. Who is losing or having their purpose in life challenged? Why?
 - e. How did your superhero resolve or find a solution to the problem in your story?
- 3) Instructor hands out 2 sheets of white paper per student, which will be used for a personality compass and a four-part storyboard. Students should fold both papers into four equal rectangles.
- 4) The Personality Compass is an exercise introduced by the instructor to brainstorm ideas for the character and/or story. The students engage in the story by presenting the character's personality. The compass is divided in 4 directions North, South, East and West. Draw out example on the board.
 - a. Compass Cardinals:
 - i. North: What puts you on top of your game (e.g., feeling good activities)?
 - ii. South: What makes you feel you are losing your game (e.g., feelings of frustration, fear, etc.)?
 - iii. East: What can you do to overcome those negative feelings (e.g., challenges)?
 - iv. West: What can you do to stay positive (e.g., strengths)?
- 5) While the class is finishing up their personality compasses, encourage students to name their superhero; they may start designing their character's backstory, alias, and even costume if they have extra time.
- 6) Students share their personality compass with the class and are encouraged to give a 30 second elevator's speech about her/his character. They need to be confident in responding to the four directions about his/her character.

- 7) Once everyone has shared their personality compasses, students use the second piece of paper to brainstorm their story. In the center of the paper students should draw a big circle labeled “you are here” (referring to the character). The instructor invites the students to think about their character and a possible story (conflict and resolution) that their superhero may be a part of that involves some loss of purpose, either by the superhero or a person the superhero is trying to help.
- 8) Students fill in each rectangle by writing or drawing their story. Each rectangle is labeled with the following:
 - a. Top-left hand side rectangle: What kind of person is your character?
 - b. Top-right hand side rectangle: What is their magic?
 - c. Bottom-left hand side rectangle: What is their conflict?
 - d. Bottom-right hand side rectangle: How do they resolve the problem?
- 9) Students are invited to partner share the hero’s story. Once the hero’s story is shared, we invite the students to re-think the hero’s story by analyzing the following questions:
 - a. Does someone lose their purpose in the story?
 - b. How does this person respond when they lose their purpose?
 - c. Does your superhero help someone in the story (can be themselves)? How?

REFLECT

- 1) Ask students: Reflect on your own thoughts and ideas about mental illness and suicide prevention. What is a way that someone could be a superhero when it comes to mental health or suicide prevention?

Some answers may include: helping erase the stigma (prejudice, discrimination, whatever words that students have been exposed to thus far in their education) around mental illness; creating a club on campus that helps students talk about mental health; being courageous enough to get help if you are struggling; asking for help; learning more about mental health and correcting others when they say mean things about those with mental illness; recognizing the signs of suicide and connecting them to help – this could literally be saving a life!

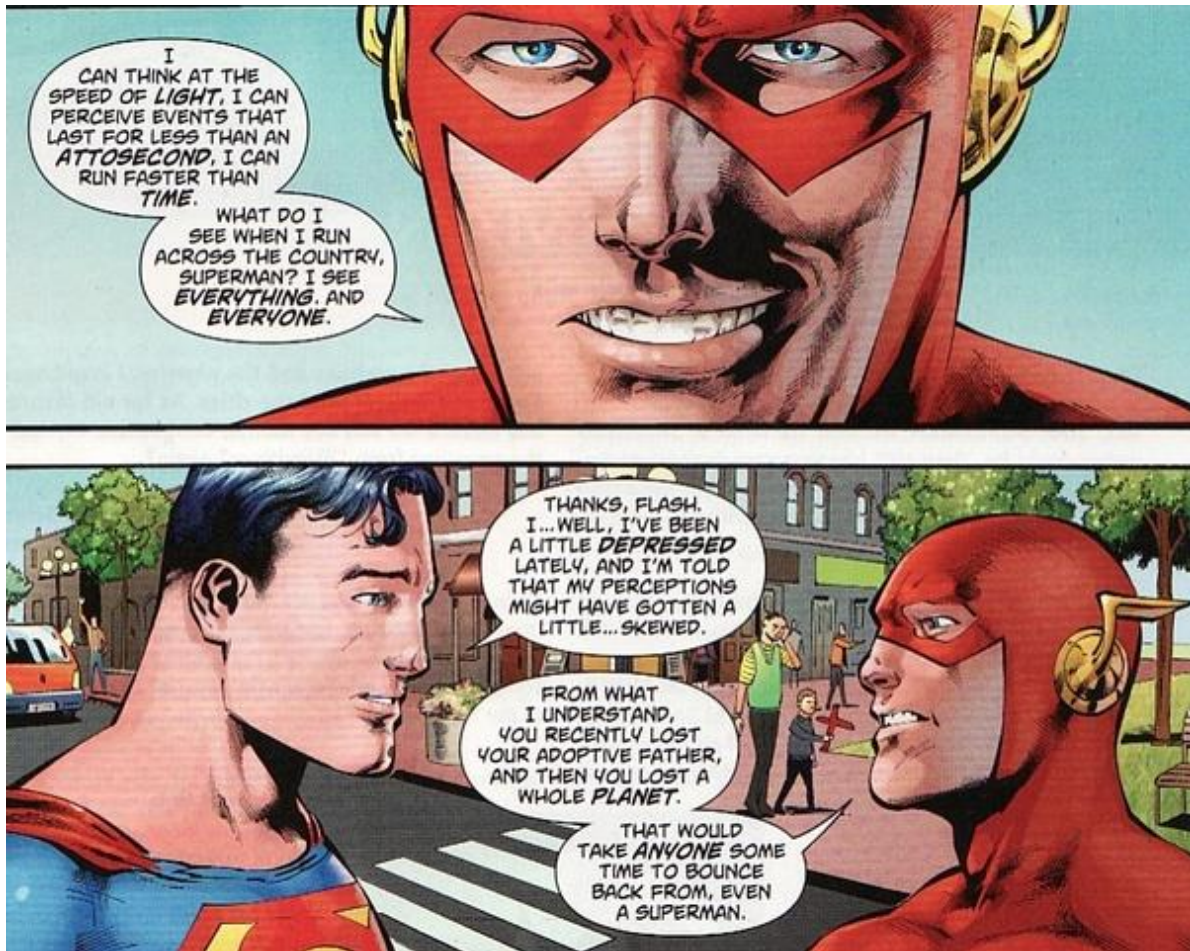
APPLY

Assignment Ideas:

- Have students write a short story about their favorite classic Superhero losing their most famous strength. Push students to have their superhero discuss their feelings about losing this strength and incorporate a clear mental health message in the piece.

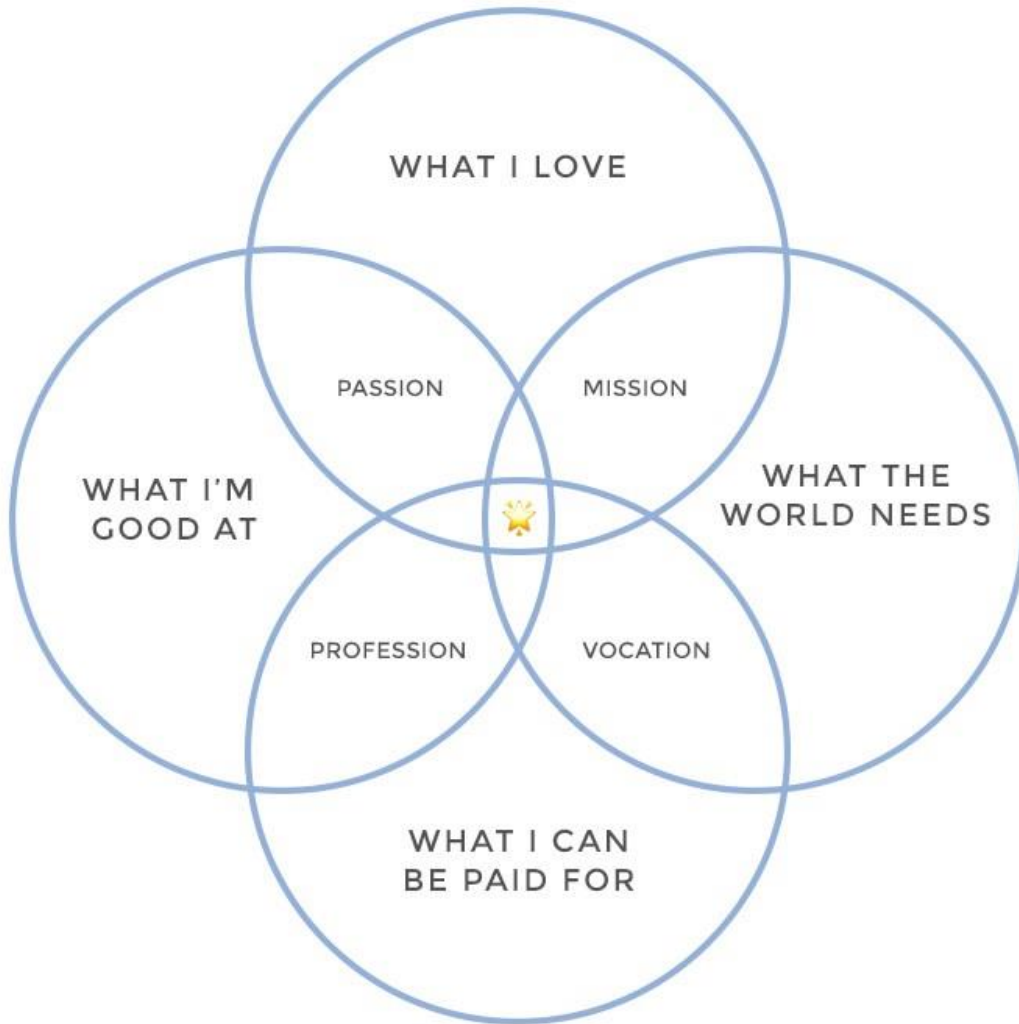


- Find a cartoon of a famous superhero that talks about mental health and share it with the class. Here is an example that you can discuss as a class as well, if you don't have research capabilities:



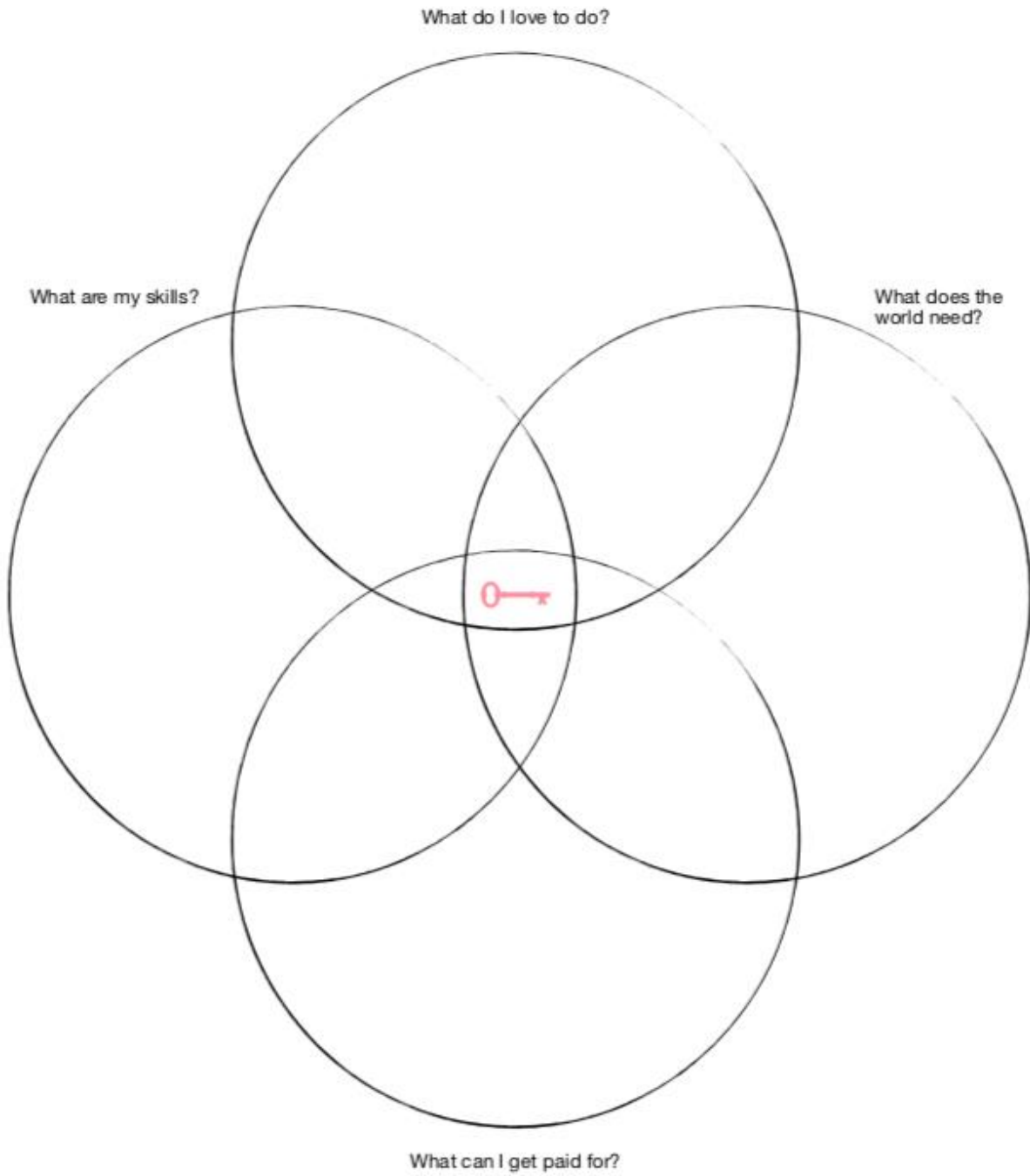
Optional Ikigai worksheets.

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ACTIVITY #4: ADAPTING YOUR SUPERHERO STORY TO A DIRECTING CHANGE STORYBOARD

This activity helps students take what they have created in earlier lessons and develop them into a Directing Change film. If you are not a video teacher, explore bringing in a guest speaker, video production teacher, or parent who might be able to help students with their projects.

- *Things to consider:* Think about what **technology** students will have access to for their films. Does your school have a camera and editing equipment? Will students create the film on a phone at home? Can you organize a field trip to a local library or community center that might have resources that can help students? Can you work with a local high school video production class or community college to help your students with your project?

If you need help with brainstorming ideas, contact the Directing Change team by sending a message through the Contact Us page on the website: www.directingchange.org/contact-us. The “For Youth” page on the Directing Change website also offers valuable links and resources: <http://www.directingchange.org/links/>

- 1) Provide every student with a storyboard template. We have one on our website for download here: <http://www.directingchange.org/wp-content/uploads/A4-landscape-6-storyboard-template.pdf>
- 2) Have students bring out and review their Superhero Stories and encourage them to now think about adapting their written story into a movie.
 - d. Does someone lose their purpose in the story? Who are they? What do they look like? Will you need to find an actor to play this character or will you use drawings to represent the person?
 - e. What are some of the warning signs that this person is showing that give us an idea that they have lost their purpose? (Use at least 3 or 4 from this list: <http://www.directingchange.org/suicide-warning-signs/>). Think about how you can show these warning signs. For example, you can list them on screen, you can have someone act them out or you can use drawings. Be creative!
 - f. How does your superhero help someone in the story (it can be themselves)? How? For example, if your superhero has lost their own purpose how does he or she get better? Or if your superhero observes someone else in trouble, how does your superhero help the person?
 - g. What resources can you list at the end of your film?
- 3) Have students write out their story using the storyboard. Remind them that their film is 60 seconds long.



- a. In each box draw a very simple idea of what people will see and hear.
 - i. Begin with the **title slide** and end with the required **logo end slate**
 - Title Slide: <http://www.directingchange.org/wp-content/uploads/Intro-Slide.mp4>
 - Logo End Slates (you can use either of these):
 - Black End Slate: <https://directingchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-Directing-Change-End-Slate-Black.png>
 - White End Slate: <https://directingchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2022-Directing-Change-End-Slate-White.png>
 - ii. What will they see?
 - iii. Write out the script that goes along with the film. For example, you can have people act in your film and write a dialogue for them OR you can narrate the story.
 - iv. If you want to include music in your film, be sure it is not a popular song and make sure that it is royalty free. You cannot include copyrighted materials in your film. To learn more visit <http://www.directingchange.org/links/> and review music options under the “Songs and Sound Effects Resources” section.
 - v. Make sure that your narration (script) goes along with what people are seeing.
 - vi. Time yourself and make sure you can fit all of your ideas within 60 seconds.
- 4) Ask students to get into small groups and share their storyboards. Have the group that is LISTENING to the idea provide feedback by asking the following questions:
 - What is the story about?
 - What warning signs did you observe?
 - What is the film asking you to do?
 - Was there a resource in the film?
- 5) For Teachers: Review the storyboards and provide input by assessing how simple or complicated the storyboards are. Remind students they don't have a blockbuster production budget. Do they have the resources to accomplish ambitious ideas? If their story is too complicated, help them brainstorm simple ways they can tell their story.

- a. Before you approve the storyboard for production, review the Directing Change Submission Category Checklist and Guidelines to ensure all submission criteria are met. Walk In Our Shoes' submission criteria can be reviewed here: <http://www.directingchange.org/walk-in-our-shoes/>
- b. Sign and submit release forms for every person involved in the creation of the film: <https://directingchange.org/release-of-image-and-voice/>