

Objective

Students will process a difficult experience by creating a personal narrative about it.

Materials

- Personal Narrative Planning Guide handout, one per student
- Feelings Wheel, one per student

Why This Matters Now

Students can make meaning out of a difficult situation by turning it into a coherent narrative. The process of creating a structured retelling of an event helps students make sense of what happened. It can help them process any negative emotions and integrate the experience into a broader perspective so they can move on.



Bold—Teacher's script

Italics—Anticipated student responses

Activity Instructions (10+ min.)

1. Discuss the healing power of stories. **Have you ever told your tale of woe to someone or written it in a journal and found yourself feeling like a weight had been lifted?** Watch for nods of agreement. **There's a reason for this. Putting a difficult experience into words does something for humans. Our main mode of communication is words, and when we use them to tell the story of a difficult, painful experience, the words have a healing power. Why do you think that is?** Give students think-time. Invite them to share their ideas. Help guide students to the following ideas: *Helps you make sense of things. Creates an organized summary of the event. Helps you separate yourself from it. Makes it less overwhelming. Forces you to slow down your thinking, which allows for closer inspection of your thoughts and feelings during the event. Helps you get a sense of closure so you can move on.*
2. Introduce the activity. **You've all gone through a lot recently. Today you'll create a personal narrative to help you process a particularly painful or difficult event. It will be a story about you, for you. And it'll help you process and integrate what's been happening in your life.**
3. Introduce the Personal Narrative Planning Guide handout and Feelings Wheel. **Use this handout and Feelings Wheel to help you plan your personal narrative, but don't limit yourself to the questions on the handout. Take the story wherever you need to to help you understand what's happened so you can move on. You can choose to create your personal narrative in any form you like, for example, a graphic novel, blog post, letter, video, one-act play, or song. Use the Feelings Wheel to help you describe what you were feeling during your story.** Distribute the handout and Feelings Wheel and go over them together. Ask students if they have any questions, then let them get started.
4. Circulate and help students as needed. Students can work on their stories over many days.
5. Reinforce. **You can create personal narratives to help you process difficult experiences anytime.** You can invite students to share their stories, but they may be too personal to share, so be sure to make this optional and not required.

Remote Adaptation

- Email students a PDF of the handout and Feelings Wheel or post them on your online learning platform.
- Students can submit their stories to your online learning platform.

Please Give Us Feedback

After you've tried out this activity, help us make a better product for educators by taking a quick survey. Access the survey by visiting the link, or scan the QR code with your phone's camera. <https://tinyurl.com/yyxz92fr>





Name: _____

Date: _____

Personal Narrative Planning Guide

Instructions: Use the prompts below to help you plan a narrative about a difficult event you experienced recently. Include as much detail as possible.

Start with the basic facts:

1. What difficult event are you writing about?

2. When did it happen?

3. Where did it happen?

4. Who was there?

5. What happened? Write down as many details as you can, in the order they occurred.



Now go deeper:

1. What was your emotional experience? How did your feelings change throughout the event? What do you feel now as you look back on it? Use the Feelings Wheel if you need help finding the perfect emotion.

2. What was going on in your body? What kind of sensations did you experience?

3. What was going on in your mind? What thoughts were you having?

4. What else stands out in your memory of the event? Sights? Smells? Sounds?



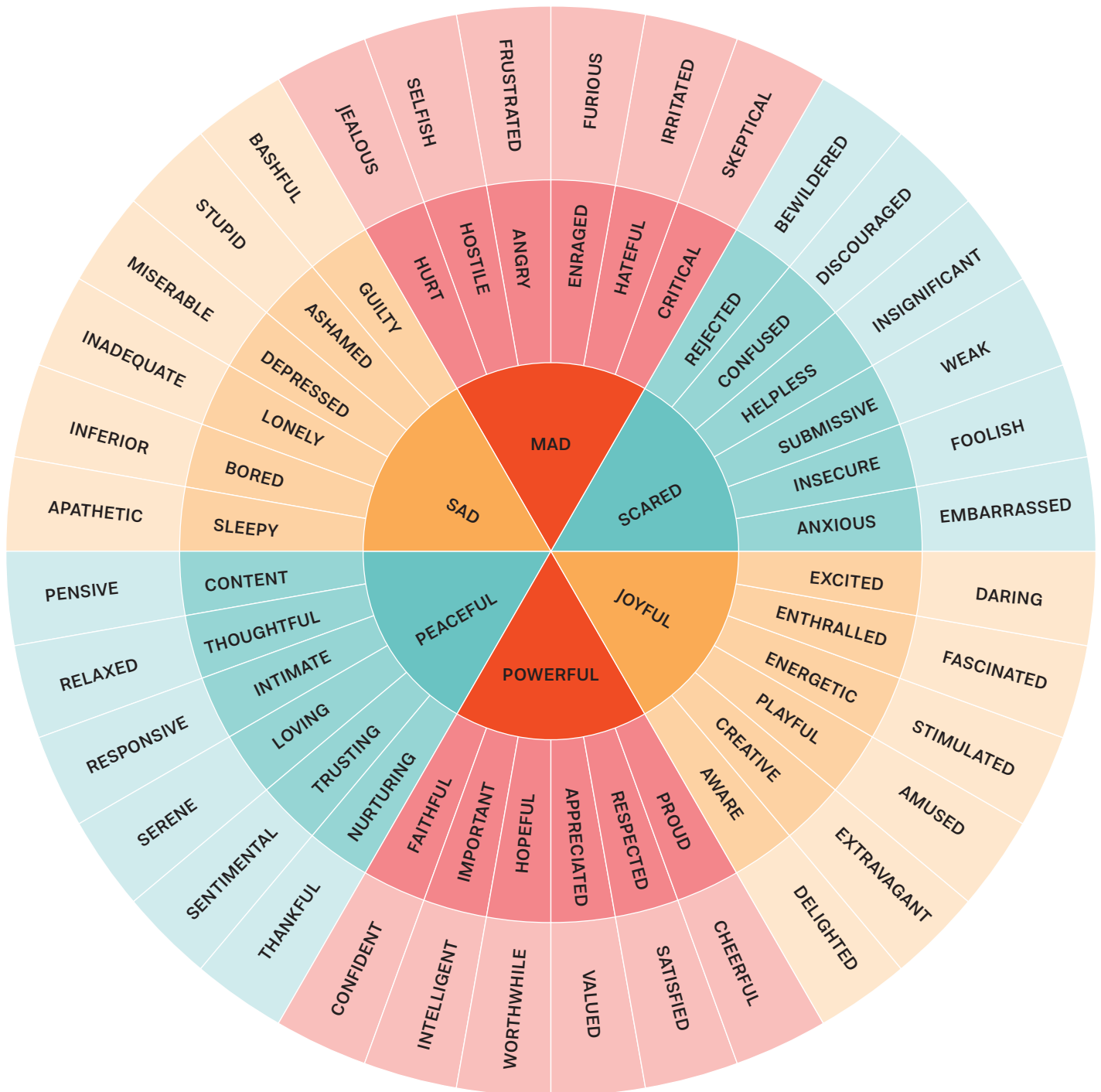
Find the meaning:

1. What's the most important point you want to make about your experience?

2. What do you want people to understand about your experience? Why?

3. What have you learned about yourself as a person as a result of this experience? What will you carry into your life going forward?

Put it all together into an organized summary of the event. Include details that express the full experience and its meaning for you. This can take the form of a traditional story or other forms such as a graphic novel, poem, song, letter, blog post, video, or one-act play.



Personal Narrative

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