

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU LISTEN TO A STRANGER?

CITY NEIGHBORS HIGH SCHOOL

TEACHER: Sean Martin

English Project



A group of 11th grade English students partnered with a group of students from The Park School of Baltimore to conduct a series of interviews with each other. We were interested in exploring what happens when we get to know one stranger deeply, personally, and intimately. We were also joined by Dr. Sheri Parks (University of Maryland) and Aaron Henkin (WYPR) who shared their expertise.

The project took inspiration from Dave Isay and his national initiative, StoryCorps, which seeks to collect and preserve the stories of “everyday people.” Isay explains:

StoryCorps is built on a few basic ideas:

- That our stories—the stories of everyday people—are as interesting and important as the celebrity stories we’re bombarded with by the media every minute of the day.
- That if we take the time to listen, we’ll find wisdom, wonder, and poetry in the lives and stories of the people all around us.
- That we all want to know our lives have mattered and we won’t ever be forgotten.
- That listening is an act of love.



Reflections

In our project, we listened closely to the stories of others, and we explored the ways stories are shaped from an initial act of questioning and listening. We investigated interviews and interviewing, and we experimented with the raw materials of questions and answers to craft coherent, meaningful stories. As our skills developed, we broke interviews down to examine their parts and their implications, considering, for example: the interview as an act of inquiry, listening, and empathy, as well as of composition and publication. A thorough understanding of both conducting and composing interviews became critical to our work.

In the opening to his collection of other people's life stories, Michael Kimball reflects,

“I never expected strangers to tell me so much about themselves, so many things they have never told anybody else, but I found an unexpected intimacy...[I] tapped into something human and humane. I was continually amazed by what people told me.”

Over the course of our project, we found out for ourselves the ways in which listening deeply, indeed, can be an act of empathy and even an expression of love.