

Introductory Lessons for Americans Who tell the Truth (AWTT)

(Lessons 1-6 may be done virtually or in person)

Lesson #1:

Get to know AWTT portrait subjects

Read the artist's statement:

“Art can transform the way a message is articulated and received. The medium of art is aesthetic, visual, and visceral. Non-verbal. It doesn't attack the viewer but invites inquiry and participation. It gives the viewer space to think, feel, react and respond...or not. The viewer becomes the active participant.

These portraits are dedicated to all those who have fought with such persistence and courage to close the gap between what the United States says about equality, justice, and democracy and what it does. Justice is not guaranteed in our Constitution; it is guaranteed by the love we have for it in our hearts, the truths we are willing to tell, and the degree to which we are willing to struggle for it.

The art of the portraits tries to call us back to essential issues and values, at the same time providing us with models of vision, courage, compassion and citizenship. This art does not insist that you agree with everything it says; it wants you, though, to look it in the eye, to know that what you see is an honest encounter with a real person with real courage working to close the gap between what we say about the common good and what we do. The portraits aspire to be a community of trust. You may disagree with some, but you can trust their intentions. And, in a sense, you could say that all of them are really one portrait, an historical portrait of a country struggling to live up to itself, to discover itself, to become its own dream.” -- Robert Shetterly

Explore the AWTT Website (www.americanswhotellthetruth.org)

- Go to the AWTT website (www.americanswhotellthetruth.org)
- Click on Portraits Gallery tab
- Select five portrait subjects
- Based on the portraits, what are some qualities you think the people might possess?
- Read their biographies
- From these five portrait subjects, select 3 people whose stories you want to explore – one person with whom you are familiar, two whom you don't know.
- Complete the information below about each portrait subject you choose

Portrait #1:

What issue did/does this person address?

What qualities make this person worthy of studying?

Why do you think Robert Shetterly chose to paint this person?

Portrait #2:

What issue did/does this person address?

What qualities make this person worthy of studying?

Why do you think Robert Shetterly chose to paint this person?

Portrait #3:

What issue did/does this person address

What qualities make this person worthy of studying?

Why do you think Robert Shetterly chose to paint this person?

Discussion:

In a small group (3-4) (This can be done in breakout rooms virtually.)

- Each person shares information about two of their chosen portraits.

- Explain why they think Shetterly chose them and what issues the portrait subjects address.
- As a group, pick two truth tellers to share with the whole class.

Lesson #2

Truth Teller Characteristics and Expansion of Portrait Subject List

Brainstorming:

1. Each student creates a list of qualities s/he thinks are important for a truth teller, e.g. moral courage, honesty, integrity. (Remember, brainstorming is just that, no comments, just list the qualities.)
2. Share the list with the class -- list duplicate characteristics only once.
3. Allow each student to vote for six (6) qualities using either a marker or colored dot stickers or virtual checkmarks.
4. Tally votes.
5. Students will use these qualities as a guide in selecting their own community truth tellers.

Brainstorming Community/Local Truth Tellers

1. One person at a time suggest people who are American Truth Tellers in their state or community.
2. Record list on chart paper.
3. After the brainstorming is finished, ask each student to explain or write a brief essay about why s/he nominated the truth teller – use qualities and actions and beliefs as evidence.

4. Lesson expansion possibilities:

- Ask students to research their chosen truth tellers, e.g. local newspaper articles, online posts, or interviews with the truth teller.
- Use the creative arts to present this person to the class, school, or community, e.g. portrait, piece of music, spoken word, collage, dramatic piece.

In Depth Exploration of Americans Who Tell the Truth

Lesson #3:

Getting to Know a Truth Teller from Americans Who Tell the Truth

Your Truth Teller: _____

1. In a sentence, describe your Truth Teller's issue.
(Ex.: Diane Wilson fought to improve environmental conditions and the health of people's lives in her coastal Texas county.)
2. Describe one thing that happened that made your Truth Teller care about this issue.
(Ex.: Diane Wilson learned that she lived in the most polluted county in the United States because she looked into why many of the shrimp she was catching were dead.)
3. Describe one thing that your Truth Teller did to address this issue.
(Ex.: Diane Wilson chained herself to the tower of Dow Chemical to create awareness of their chemical discharge into the environment.)
4. Describe the moment that caused your Truth Teller to take action about this issue.
(Ex.: Diane Wilson was fishing off her boat in the Gulf of Mexico and she pulled up a net full of half dead shrimp. It was this moment that moved her to go explore what was going on with her waters and what was causing many of her nets to pull up dead shrimp.)
5. Describe two hardships your person had to overcome in the struggle for this cause.
(Ex.: During Diane Wilson's struggle for justice in her small town in Texas, people tried to intimidate her in numerous ways -- someone shot and killed her dog, someone tried to sink her boat, and she was arrested and jailed all for speaking out against large companies who were destroying her town's people and environment.)
6. What or who is different because of your Truth Teller's actions?
(Ex.: In Diane Wilson's town people are no longer contracting cancer at an unusually high rate, shrimpers are able to make a living by hauling and selling healthy, living shrimp, and Formosa Plastics, Dow Chemical and Alcoa have changed their environmental processes.)

Lesson #4

Research and Writing

1. Select the Shetterly Truth Teller you would like to research.
2. Read the selection about your Truth Teller on www.americanswhotellthetruth.org
3. Find two other resources about your Truth Teller and read them. This may include books written, plays or songs performed, or articles published.

Resource #1:

Resource #2:

4. Write about your Truth Teller thinking about the following guidelines.*
 - Tell a story.
 - √ Ground it in the events of your Truth Teller's life.
 - √ Make it real.
 - √ Talk about moments when your Truth Teller was tested or challenged.
 - √ Tell things you know about this person that are not common knowledge.
 - Be personal and brief.
 - √ Be specific.
 - √ Name the belief or cause that is central to your Truth Teller's life.
 - √ Write in words or phrases that are comfortable for you to speak.
 - Some examples:
 - √ Don't say "bus." Say "run down city bus with doors that don't close".
 - √ Don't tell, but show. Don't tell **about** anger or truth or justice; show what made your Truth Teller angry or what act was unjust. Skip the "This is a story about truth" line and move right into the "truth."

5. Some possible formats for your writing

- A story – pick one incident or critical moment. Tell it as a first person story.
- A letter – written by your Truth Teller or to your Truth Teller from you or someone in your Truth Teller's life.
- A rap – add movement or beatboxing.
- Slam poetry – think spoken word, powerful emotion, smiles, tears.

6. Important concepts to consider

- What do you admire about this person?
- What does this person make you feel?
- What would you like to say to this person if you could have a conversation with him/her?
- What one story might tell the essence of this person?

*Based on *This I Believe* in association with National Public Radio and *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott.

Create Writing, Art, and Host an Event

Lesson #5

Preparation:

The Writing

1. Choose a Truth Teller from Shetterly's *Americans Who Tell the Truth*.
2. Identify the issue this person addresses.
3. Identify the "turning point(s)" -- when this person knew s/he had to act on the issue and not just be a bystander.
4. Write a description of this moment. Your description should be creative. It can be any one of the following or some other format that allows you to capture the energy of this moment:
 - letter to someone **from** your Truth Teller
 - letter from someone **to** your Truth Teller
 - brief story
 - poem, rap, spoken word
 - song
5. Edit your piece so that it is no longer than two paragraphs --
 - make it real
 - be specific
 - make people laugh, cry, be angry

The Art

1. Create a piece of art that represents your Truth Teller and the issued s/he addressed.
2. It can be any of the following or something else that represents what you want to convey:
 - a collage
 - a drawing
 - an abstract representation
 - a mosaic

3. Make your artwork small enough that it can be displayed with your writing on a 15" x 20" posterboard (or smaller if necessary)

Make this work “An Event”!

The Event (in person, virtually on Zoom or Google Meets, or filmed and offered as a video)

Introduction

1. As a group, students will verbally introduce the project – the purpose of the project, definition of a truth teller, an example of a “truth telling moment.”
2. The introduction will be
 - energetic
 - brief (5-10 minutes)
 - engaging – make people want to look at the exhibit

The Viewing

1. Students will stand professionally beside the art and writing about their Truth Teller.
2. Students will give a brief description of their Truth Teller for the people looking at their writing and art work.

The Closing (only if live or on a virtual live gathering)

1. Students and the audience gather together for a closing discussion.
2. Audience has an opportunity to ask questions of students.
3. Students ask the audience to identify characteristics common to all of the truth tellers.
4. Final comments from both groups.

Making it Personal

Lesson #6 (Interviews may be done in person, on Zoom, Google Meets or some other virtual connection)

Who is your Truth Teller?

Identifying your Truth Teller:

1. List three people in your life, community, school who are worthy of the “Truth Teller” designation. Be certain that each person has the qualities agreed upon for a Truth Teller. (See Lesson # 2)
2. Describe the accomplishment(s) or reason for nominating each Truth Teller.

Name: _____
Accomplishment(s)/Reason for Nominating:

Name: _____
Accomplishment(s)/Reason for Nominating:

Name: _____
Accomplishment(s)/Reason for Nominating):

3. Choose one of your nominated Truth Tellers to interview.

Interviewing Your Truth Teller:

1. Contact your truth teller, explain the project and set a time to meet for the interview.

Date of Interview:

Time:

Place:

2. Write 2 – 3 questions of your own to ask your truth teller:

Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:

Truth Teller Interview Form

1. What values have guided you in your life?
2. What are two or three events that have had a strong influence on your life?
 - 1.)
 - 2.)
 - 3.)

3. What have you done that you are most proud of?
4. Do you have a guiding belief in your life? If so, what is it?
5. How do people make a difference in the world?
6. Who are your truth tellers?

Your questions:

7,

8.

9.

Description of Project:

Please use this when you contact your Truth Teller to schedule an interview.

I am participating in the Community Truth Tellers Project at my school (insert school name here). We have studied Americans Who Tell the Truth, people whose portraits have been painted by Robert Shetterly. Now we are identifying Truth Tellers in our own lives and communities in order to gain a new understanding and appreciation for those people who make a difference right here. For me, you are a Truth Teller and I would like to schedule a time to talk with you and ask you a few questions.

The following times are good for me:

Do any of those times work for you? Thank you!

10. Create a display or presentation of your "personal truth tellers" -- photos, descriptions, their responses to your interview. This might be any of the following:

- Exhibit
- Virtual slide show
- Video

Featured articles in a local newspaper or online news source.

Lesson # 7 (In person)

Taking to the Streets (post COVID-19) or to the Halls of Your School

1. Review Americans Who tell the Truth -- portrait subjects, qualities, issues
2. Collectively choose 5 important qualities Truth Tellers possess
3. Each group prepare introduction about Truth Tellers (see Lesson # 6)
4. Role play introduction and interviews.

Interview Process (Each group should interview 3 people)

Excuse me, may I ask you a couple of questions?

Hello, my name is _____. We are students at _____ (your school's name) We are studying the role truth plays in our democracy. As part of this class, we have been talking about Truth Tellers in our country, people like _____ (list 2-3 Truth Teller portrait subjects). We have found that most Truth Tellers possess the following qualities:

List the qualities you have identified

We are asking if you would take a couple of minutes and think about who a Truth Teller might be/have been in your life and also who you think our community truth tellers are.

Ask if the person you are interviewing gives you permission to share the content of the interview.

Response # 1:

Personal Truth Teller:
Why?

Local Truth Teller:
Why?

Response # 2:

Personal Truth Teller:
Why?

Local Truth Teller:
Why?

4. Share findings with fellow classmates and discuss common characteristics and qualities.

5. Create a display or presentation of the interview findings
Community or School Exhibit
Featured articles in a local newspaper or online news source.