



“Witness”

Narrative Medicine Workshop Guide

Description:

This guide is timed for a **1-hour, 30-minute** virtual workshop with **8-10 participants** and includes a short break. It assumes you have already held an introductory “Attention” group and set group guidelines. Adjust your time estimates for groups that are larger, smaller, or of different lengths. If your workshop is in person, adjust timing and exercises as necessary.

Find facilitator tips, production notes, and sample language throughout to help make your workshop successful. Feel free to copy and paste third objects, prompts, and other exercises from the [Accessible Digital Library](#) into this guide.

Workshop sections:

WELCOME	<i>3-5 minutes total</i>
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Welcome, reminder of group norms and if anyone has any to add. Speak to illness narratives and witness, how slowing down is an offering and a way to deepen skills of presence. Recognize that witnessing is not just for others but also deepens the relationship with self.

Production note:

Witness happens when we slow down and take note. To the degree that you can slow the pace of this workshop, that will help with bringing witness into the room as a felt experience as well as a discussed experience.

WRITE & SHARE	<i>25-30 minutes total</i>
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Write #1 (7-8 minutes)

Think about yourself as witness to your experience and that of others, write on one of the following prompts. Engage with your memory and be sure to keep your pen/pencil/typing moving:

- An idea I carry close...
- The distance between...

Share (18-22 minutes)

Let everyone share their writing. Reminder of confidentiality, to read without apology or preamble. For listeners: pay attention to the writing, actively engage with what is being shared. Write down or type in the chat any word or phrase that stands out to you.

Facilitator tip:



Note any words/lines highlighted in chat, especially if they resonated with multiple people.

THIRD OBJECT – ENGAGE, DISCUSS, AND WRITE
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<i>25-30 minutes total</i>

For this workshop, we recommend using a poem for this first exercise. You can use other poems or a visual object for the other exercises. Third objects and prompts or exercises that pair best with this workshop, [visit the Accessible Digital Library here](#).

Engage with third object (4-5 minutes)

Before sharing your screen or passing out copies of the poem, encourage participants to take a deep breath and center themselves before they engage with it. Share your screen with the third object. Encourage absorbing first, note-taking second.

Ask one participant to read the poem aloud, and for the others to absorb the piece and/or the reading with all senses available to them. Then ask another participant to read it aloud a second time. Leave at least 1-2 minutes more minutes for folks to jot notes of what they notice about the piece, first impressions, words or phrases that stood out, their own experience in their body, and/or any emotional reaction.

Discuss (10-12 minutes)

Facilitate discussion on what people notice or respond to, what stands out. How does the poem use and/or teach **witness**. What is on offer here? Use skills from the “Attention” workshop.

Ask: Was there something you brought to your observation, any aesthetic preference or bias? Did it bring up memories for you? Was there something familiar that helped you identify with the material? Was anything difficult or challenging in the piece? Name it.

Write #2 (7-8 minutes)

Fresh off this discussion, do a second write. Have them think of a time they shared good presence with another person (or themselves) and what it felt like inside of their body at that time. Offer prompts that connect to the poem. Write for 7 minutes with no sharing.

Brief discussion (3-4 minutes)

Ask people to briefly put how that felt for them in the chat, but only if they want to. Read off a few of the things people share as they’re coming in.

BREAK

<i>5 minutes</i>

While it is nice to stay inside the dream of a workshop, it’s also important to normalize taking breaks. “Powering through” may leave some people behind who have access needs you are not aware of. Encourage people to stretch their body, use the restroom, grab a snack, and/or do what they need to rest and recharge.



THIRD OBJECT – ENGAGE, DISCUSS, AND WRITE

25 minutes total

For this workshop, we recommend using a piece that contrasts with the poem earlier, such as a piece of visual art, video, or much different type of writing. For third objects and prompts or exercises that pair best with this workshop, [visit the Accessible Digital Library here](#).

Preface (1 minute)

Before sharing your screen, invite participants to take a deep breath, quiet their bodies, and prepare to spend a few minutes just experiencing the third object. Share the piece.

Production note:

Make sure to share the third object so that everyone can engage with it in a meaningful way. You may also want to paste a link in the chat so participants can link to it directly on their own, so long as that link is to a fully accessible website. This way, if you stop sharing your screen, they can still access it.

Respond (5 minutes)

Give participants several minutes to take the piece in, give it a chance to stimulate, offer ideas and context. Ask everyone to jot down notes about what they're noticing and feeling. Have them consider how the piece is an example of **witness**. What is being **witnessed** through it? What scenes from their experiences come up because of their careful attention?

Discuss (10 minutes)

Facilitate discussion on what people notice or respond to, what stands out. Use skills from the "Attention" workshop. Does everybody gravitate to the same things or different? Was there something you brought to your observation, any aesthetic preference or bias? Was there something familiar that helped you identify with the material, or was there no point of reference? Was anything about the piece difficult or challenging for you? Name it.

Write #3 (6 minutes)

Reflecting on the piece just shared or anything else from this group, do a short write. Use prompts taken from or inspired by one of the third objects.

Quick share (3 minutes)

Pick a single phrase from your recent piece or anything else that was shared today that calls in the theme of **witness**. Come off mute and go around quickly sharing your lines.

CLOSING ACTIVITY

1 minute

Write one word in the chat that describes how you think of **witness**. Don't hit "enter" yet, just write it. Once everyone is done, everyone hit "enter." Read the words aloud.