A Human Library with a Side of Critical Thinking:
Considering Oral Narratives and Scholarly Articles

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

This project involves both a human library event and an accompanying assignment. A human library is an event in which "human books," individuals with personal life experiences relating to prejudice or discrimination, share their stories with "readers" who want to learn more about those experiences. Planners should refer to humanlibrary.org for planning assistance and guidelines.

The assignment challenges students to consider information from two very different sources: a personal narrative and scholarly journal articles.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to
- reflect on the experience of reading a human book and engaging with journal articles in order to understand the roles of both oral narrative and scholarly information in research;
- evaluate the authority of human books and scholarly articles in order to use appropriate information sources for a given context; and
- think critically about and reflect on differences in order to develop empathy.

COOKING TIME
- Four to six weeks of preparation for the first batch. After you've made it a few times, the recipe tends to come together more efficiently.
- Each human library "read" takes up to one hour. Multiple reads may start at the same time.

NUMBER SERVED

Small groups to large classes

DIETARY GUIDELINES

This assignment serves to develop students' critical-thinking skills, consideration of authority, and empathy.

Relevant frames from the ACRL *Framework*:
- Authority is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information Has Value

INGREDIENTS AND EQUIPMENT
- Human books who speak to relevant topics
- Teaching faculty collaborator(s)
- Space to host the event
- Promotional materials and signage
- Staff or volunteers to help (depending on the size of the event)

PREPARATION
1. First course: Event planning
   a. Recruitment of human books. For this project, we recruit individuals who have experienced gender- or sexuality-related prejudice or discrimination (e.g., being transgender, living with HIV/AIDS, sexism in the workplace), as well as individuals who have unique life experiences related to gender or sexuality (e.g., sexual abuse, breast cancer, testicular cancer). We use three recruitment methods:
      i. Contacting individuals who we know have relevant personal experiences
      ii. Contacting individuals who have been in the media
      iii. Responding to individuals who have submitted the recruitment form on our website
   b. Selection of date(s) for the event
   c. Scheduling specific times for human book "reads." Our event typically takes place in the evening.

d. Promotion of the event, if it will be open to more than class participants

2. Second course: Assignment preparation
   a. Design the assignment in collaboration with the teaching faculty member. For our assignment, we have worked with a women's studies professor to develop an assignment in which students
      i. attend the human library
      ii. search for scholarly articles
      iii. cite the human book and scholarly article
      iv. reflect on their learning process
   b. Librarians provide a citation guide for citing a human book.

3. Third course: Assignment evaluation
   a. The teaching faculty member uses a rubric which evaluates the extent to which students meet the following criteria:
      i. Depth of thought and reflection, quality and clarity of writing
      ii. Synthesis of information learned from the human book and the scholarly articles
      iii. Consideration of authority as it relates to different information sources
      iv. Citation of human book and scholarly articles

COOKING METHOD

1. Event
   a. The delivery of the event can vary widely, depending on scale and scheduling. For example, at our human library event, each read is scheduled for one hour, with multiple reads starting at the same time. Other models are more spontaneous, with no schedule available in advance. For more event planning details, visit humanlibrary.org.

2. Assignment
   a. Provide students with the list and schedule of human books related to the course assignment. Students then attend the human library event and read a human book who speaks to their life experiences of gender and/or sexuality. After attending the event, students write a brief reflection about learning via an individual's lived experience.
   b. Next, the librarian provides a brief (e.g., 30-minute) instruction session on searching for articles in a relevant database. Students then search for three scholarly articles on the same topic as their human book and write an annotated bibliography, which contains descriptive and evaluative annotations.

Figure 1. A conversation with a human book at the augustana human library.
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c. Finally, students write a reflection in which they compare the process of learning from the oral narrative of a human book with the process of learning from scholarly articles. This challenges the students to consider the authority of these two types of information sources in different contexts.

ALLERGY WARNINGS

- Make sure to consult humanlibrary.org to align with the practices outlined there.
- Consider privacy concerns of human books. We choose not to publicize human books' personal names.
- Ensure that human books are aware that students will be reflecting on their story as part of a course assignment. To date, this has not been a concern for our human books.

CHEF'S NOTES

- For librarians who want to make connections with a curriculum, this is an engaging and impactful way to do that. Anecdotally, students have mentioned that this is a favorite assignment.
- This event and assignment were awarded the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Women and Gender Studies Section (WGSS) Award for Significant Achievement in Women and Gender Studies Librarianship.
- We have found courses in the humani-

ties and social sciences to be a good fit with this approach to information literacy.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A guide for citing a human book can be found at aug.ualberta.ca/citehumanbook.

For more information about the augustana human library, email augustana.humanlibrary@ualberta.ca or visit aug.ualberta.ca/humanlibrary.