

Storycatching with a circle of friends

This entire book is a study guide on the delights of exploring story. It is imbedded with questions designed to foster conversation and writing. Every chapter ends with a full page of questions relating to the content. These questions are not repeated here, so please work with the book.

Potential Settings: book groups, writing groups, neighborhood groups, church groups, work teams, conversation cafes, libraries, neighborhoods, potluck suppers and living-room circles with friends and families.

Commitment: ten weeks, or sessions, are suggested to build trust and comfort and follow the book, chapter by chapter. Plan for about two hours each session, allowing time for greeting and leave-taking. If you are doing a series of meetings, several things need to happen in session one and session ten that may require more time so it may be helpful to schedule these meetings to be 30 minutes longer than the others.

Suggestions for hosting:

Size: you can follow this study guide by yourself, journal writing the responses; or do it with one other person to know a partner or friend more deeply; or call a group up to 12-15. (Any larger and it's hard for people to have enough time to speak, and for listeners to hold the amount of story.)

What you need: Copies of Christina Baldwin's book, *Storycatcher, Making Sense of our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story*, and a comfortable setting with privacy and quiet; someone to serve as host (may rotate time by time). If your group chooses to write the weekly reflections, everyone will need tablets or journals.

Quality conversation is served by creating a simple interpersonal container for receiving each other's stories and insights. Each member of a conversation contributes to this quality by listening attentively, speaking intentionally, and tending to the well-being of the group as well as their own well-being. The host should prepare seating so everyone can see each other. A circle is highly recommended. Please put a simple focusing object in the center of this space: a candle, flower, or object from nature.

There are simple suggestions in Chapter 2, page 45 of *Storycatcher*.

To begin, the host may light the candle and remind people of the agreements for this conversation. Agreements may be adapted to meet the needs of the group, but suggested agreements are:

1. To practice the qualities of a Storycatcher. (Chapter 2, page 27)
2. To hold personal material in confidentiality.
3. To listen to each other with curiosity and compassion.

To shift from greeting space to intentional conversation, the host calls for a moment of reflection, which may be silence, a brief reading, or time to write.

Suggested formatting of time: adapt to meet your own needs and interests.

- ❑ Check-in so every voice is gathered, and no one is interrupted (about 10 minutes). In check-in, a person offers a brief statement of how they are and what they bring to the conversation this evening. (For example: *“I’m glad to be here when we’re talking about chapter five. Just today I realized where I am in the Spiral of Experience two years after my divorce, and I’m excited to have time to think, write, talk and listen about this idea.”*)
- ❑ If you are using writing as part of the meeting, after check-in take one of the Storycatcher questions and write for 15 minutes.
- ❑ After writing, you may want to use a round of talking piece council to invite members of the group to share stories and insights (this round may take 30 minutes). A “talking piece” is any small object passed hand-to-hand to designate who is talking while the rest of the group listens. Anyone not ready to speak may pass it on and have another chance to contribute at the end of the round.
- ❑ After this round, a period of open dialogue will elicit less structured conversation (about 30-45 minutes).
- ❑ Check-out serves as a closure of the circle and return to informal socializing and leave-taking. Check-out occurs with a talking piece round so every voice is honored in leave-taking (10-15 minutes). During this time, make whatever arrangements are needed for the next session.

(Use of the circle format, may be unfamiliar. For more complete information on calling people into receptive listening/speaking space see Chapter two in Storycatcher, and also The Circle Way Guidelines <https://www.thecircleway.net/circle-way-guidelines>.

The important thing is to design a receptive speaking/listening space that supports those present and respects the stories that will be shared.

For each session, the Storycatching questions from the book are listed at the close of individual chapters. They can be addressed in writing and/or speaking. The group may want to choose one or two on which to focus. The host’s role is to help participants feel comfortable, to watch the time and facilitate the combination of structured and open conversation. Pauses are acceptable; silence is acceptable. Listening and not contributing is acceptable. The goal is shared storytelling and listening in which no one dominates or over manages the experience.