

American Family

“Sharing Our Stories”

A Workshop for *Ready To Learn* Coordinators

Messages

- Every family has a story to share.
- Children learn from their first teachers—their parents.
- Children and parents have dreams and aspirations.
- Read books to your children every chance you have.
- Using television programs, particularly high quality educational shows on PBS, can provide a useful basis for sharing dreams and aspirations as well as encouraging reading.
- You don’t need a book to tell a story.
- Sharing stories with children is an important teaching role for parents.

Background

The “Sewing Machine” episode of AMERICAN FAMILY is a poignant look into a family’s memories. During this episode, a number of issues are explored, including the continued feelings of loss, the impact of cultural and generational divides, and goal setting.

Most families feel the tugs and conflicts of generational divides. As children grow, they feel the need to challenge old views, to strike out on their own, to do things “their own way.” For many Latino families—in fact, for most immigrant families—this is compounded by parents’ realization that their children are becoming a part of another culture, with differing goals and ideals, and new ways of thinking and behaving.

Children go to school and learn not only how to read and write, but also the culture of the country—the songs, games, jokes, ways of behaving, and slang. They also learn that women can get jobs and have careers, that men sometimes take care of the household, and that everyone can have a chance to attend college, regardless of their gender.

This can be a shock to parents who are used to traditional roles in which men work and women stay home to take care of the house and the children. The goals set for children can be very traditional. Those who step outside of their assigned roles can create great controversy; but they can also open the door for those who follow.

In 1996, at the National Summit on Latino Children, 50 youth met to discuss the barriers to Latino youth success and what the community, including parents, could do to change the trends. In one of the most moving moments of the conference, the young people asked the adults to stand and raise their right hand and make promises to young Latinos everywhere. Two of the promises are relevant to this workshop:

I promise to teach my children their background, history, language, and moral values.

I promise to inspire my children and tell them my goals and dreams so they can have dreams and goals, too.

These promises clearly illustrate young people’s need not only to know about themselves, but also to have role models that will help them make wise choices for their futures.

All families want their children to succeed, and success can mean different things for people of different generations and viewpoints. In “The Sewing Machine,” Berta—who is Nina’s mother—says it clearly: “I don’t have what Nina needs. When I was growing up I knew what I wanted to do: get married, have children, and take care of my family.” Nina is the valedictorian of her class and has been offered a scholarship to Stanford University. Her choices are very different from those presented to her mother as a young woman. This conflict is played out beautifully in Jess’s memories about Berta, which begin when Pablito steals a dollar from Jess’s tip jar at his barbershop. He remembers how he refused to give Berta money to buy Nina a dress for her high school graduation speech. Money was tight, and Jess felt that the family could afford to send only one child to college—Conrado. As the oldest boy, Conrado would someday have to support a family. In the end, Berta took a dollar to buy the trim for the dress she made for Nina.

The intergenerational-cultural conflict is revealed when Berta shows Nina the dress she has made: it is the quintessential “quinceañera” dress, full of frills and lace. Nina, who earlier had told her mother she would not grow up to take care of a husband and cook and sew, makes excuses for why her parents should not attend the event so that she won’t have to wear the dress.

Storytelling has been a vehicle for transferring values, memories and culture to each subsequent generation. Wherever Latino families gather, a story will probably be told—how the first generation came to the United States, ancient stories that teach a lesson, or the first time that the parents met. Every gathering is an opportunity to share the family history. Latinos believe that “you won’t know where you’re going unless you know where you came from.”

Materials

Television and VCR	Scissors	Buttons
Tape of “The Sewing Machine” (#102) with segment queued	Glue	Fabric scraps
(Second copy may be needed if you choose to show another segment, as indicated in this agenda.)	Ribbon	Old magazines
Chart tablet	Markers	The Magic of Reading tip sheet
Chart markers	Crayons	<i>Magda’s Tortillas</i> book
Tag board or construction paper	Watercolors	Playing and Learning in the Kitchen activity sheet
	Glitter	

There are many sources for free materials: local arts and crafts stores, grocery stores, office supply stores, print shops, and florists. These businesses are often willing to donate items when a nonprofit organization is involved.

Setup

The room should be set up to allow the maximum amount of interaction among the participants during every phase of the session. If possible, set the tables in a circular shape. If you are using rectangular tables, arrange them in a large U.

Place materials in a convenient spot that allows everyone to obtain what they need quickly. If more than 20 participants are expected, create two stations with materials. Another option is to create three or four tables, each supplied with materials, where participants can work together. This helps to encourage bonding among the participants.

Set up a display with family photographs and reading materials, so that participants have a place to mingle. If food is available, place it away from the door to encourage people to move around the room.

Greeting

As participants arrive, personally welcome each one. Introduce yourself and provide each person with a nametag. Invite them to have a snack or to look over the books and photos at the back of the room.

Getting Started (5 minutes)

If all of the participants are not already seated, ask them to find seats. After participants are settled, ask them to think of something they learned from an older person—a grandparent, parent, aunt or uncle, family friend—when they were young. Then ask them to pair up and to take three minutes to introduce themselves and share their memories with one another.

Note:

Two activities are included in this workshop: Memory Book and Family *Milagros*. Depending on time constraints, the activities can be planned for two separate workshops or completed in one workshop. Another option is to create a take-home sheet with one of the two activities and encourage the participants to enjoy the activity with their children at home.

After three minutes, ask each person to stand and state his/her full name, nickname, and where s/he was born. If time allows, provide participants with one minute to share their stories. You can also create a chart with each person's information.

This activity will create a sense of intimacy and trust and will allow everyone to feel comfortable sharing their stories.

Read Aloud—Sharing Stories with Young Children (15 minutes)

Read aloud *Magda's Tortillas* by Becky Chavarria-Chairez. Model for the participants some of the elements of active reading—introduce the book, point out the author's and illustrator's names, ask questions, point out elements in the illustrations, and ask participants to imagine what might happen next in the story. This will help participants understand how to enhance their children's reading time.

Ask participants to list some of the active reading techniques you used while telling the story. Write them down on the chart tablet so that everyone can see them. Invite participants to list other strategies they use to engage their children while reading. This may include sitting close to them or inviting their children to select the book.

Ask participants what stories they think Magda will have when she grows up and has children. What memories or traditions will she pass on to her children and grandchildren?

Remembering Our Stories (20 minutes)

In connection with the book or possibly the short clip (suggested at the right), remind participants that it is often the small things that trigger a memory—a smell, a song, the way light reflects off the clouds. Our minds are full of the memories of our childhoods, our teen years, and our first love. These memories are the foundation of our personal histories; each one is unique.

Additionally, each person in a family may remember an event differently, viewed from the distance of time and from each person’s viewpoint.

Show the segment of “The Sewing Machine” where Jess’s memory is triggered by Pablito’s theft of a dollar from his tip jar. Jess remembers how, years before, Berta had taken a dollar for Nina’s dress from his hard-saved cache.

Ask participants to think about their own memories, their own stories, as they watch the scene.

Optional Activity:

(add 10 minutes if you do this)

To enhance the Read Aloud segment, watch the scene from “The Sewing Machine” where Pablito is watering his grandmother’s plants and Nina surprises him with tortillas. Before showing the clip, ask participants if someone in their family makes tortillas (or another special family recipe). Where did they learn to do it? How is this a family tradition? Remind participants that making and sharing food is a way families show their love for one another. In this clip, we see Nina’s mother making tortillas; then it dissolves into Nina trying to make tortillas. This segment shows an effort by a new generation family member to make tortillas like her mother did. Pablito is gracious but Nina’s efforts remind him how no one can make them like his grandmother did.

After viewing the clip, ask participants: “How successful are Nina’s efforts at making tortillas?”

Ask participants, whether they remember trying to make tortillas or some other family recipe for the first time. What do they remember? How successful were they?

Discussion

Invite participants to share their feelings about the scene. Some questions that you might ask to start the discussion are:

- What do you think were some of the differences between Nina’s view of herself and her parents’ view of her?
- When you were growing up, what kinds of issues were there between you and your parents?
- Did you and your parents have the same goals for you?
- What memories do you have about your dreams growing up?
- What stories do you remember hearing as you were growing up?

Activity 1: Memory Book (30 minutes)

Ask participants to think about the memories they’ve shared -- in the opening activity, or in connection with the book or segment from AMERICAN FAMILY. Why did they pick those particular memories? How were they important to the story of their family?

Explain that participants are going to create a “memory book” for their children as a way of sharing and preserving their family’s stories. Explain that they don’t have to create the whole book in one sitting; they can add to the book as they have time and as they think of memories they would like to include. Remind them that every family has a story and that sharing their stories is an important teaching tool.

Making Memory Books

Some questions that will help the participants get started include:

- What stories from your youth do you want to pass on to your children?
- What did you learn from an elder—a grandparent, parent, aunt or uncle—that made you feel grown up?
- Did you and your family always live in this city? If not, when did they move here? Why?
- What happened the first time you tried to cook something? How old were you?

Note:

Some participants may need assistance with writing. Be on the lookout for those who are having a difficult time and gently ask if they need assistance. They may feel more comfortable if someone else writes down the memories.

Invite participants to think about what they would like to include in their books and to use the materials provided to create stories out of pictures. Invite them to gather the materials they will need to make their memory books or to go to a table with the necessary materials. Allow participants time to work on a few pages of their books.

If time allows, discuss with participants various ways in which they can add to their memory books with their children. Encourage them to think of other stories or incidents that could be included in the book. If they want, they can make a book for each of their children, so that each child will have something to pass on to future generations.

Activity 2: Family *Milagros* (30 minutes)

Children are an integral part of any community, and the Family *Milagros* activity is a wonderful way for parents and children to illustrate their dreams and wishes for the future. The *milagros* can be used to highlight parents' important role in their children's lives. Parents and other adults can use this activity to celebrate the children in their lives and to voice their hopes for the future.

Milagros have been used for centuries as spiritual offerings to ask for wishes, special intervention, and good fortune. They are made from paper, bone, tin, wood, silver, gold, and other materials and pinned to altar skirts in churches. Visible throughout Latin America and in some U.S. churches, *milagros* frequently include photographs, commercially made metal images, short stories, prayers, and other supplications. The Spanish word *milagro* means “miracle.”

Frequently *milagros* take the form of eyes, hearts, feet, buses, cars, houses, books, and even animals. The symbol chosen is generally associated with the petition—for example, a miniature car is attached to a request for safekeeping of a family member driving on a long trip, or a heart is used to pray for quick recovery from a heart attack. If you visit any church in the Latino community you will find interdictions—requests—from parents and grandparents to the Saints or the Virgen de Guadalupe to keep children safe, to help them to be successful, or to make sure they grow up morally strong. The following activity will provide participants with the opportunity to create a symbol of their wishes for their children.

Making *Milagros*

Explain the history of *milagros* and their significance, and ask participants to think about their dreams and wishes for their children. Next, invite each participant to create a *milagro*. The steps for making *milagros* are:

1. Use scissors to cut a shape from tag board or construction paper.
2. Write a wish for the future on the back of the *milagro*. Parents should write what they wish for their children and for themselves. Keep in mind that some adults may need assistance writing down their hopes and wishes.
3. Draw a picture on the front of the *milagro* or create a design using the available materials.
4. Make a hole at the top of the *milagro* and tie a piece of string or yarn for hanging. Decorate the *milagro* with materials such as glitter, confetti, ribbon, and buttons.

Once everyone is finished, invite participants to share their *milagros*. Encourage them to display their *milagro* in their homes as a visual reminder of what they wish for their children. Invite them to think of ways that they can assist their children in reaching their goals.

Adding a Children’s Program Clip

Option One: Following the Memory Book Activity

If you do the Memory Book activity, it may be useful to explain how useful memory is in helping us stay connected as a family: Jess’s memories of his wife’s caring for the family; Pablito watering his grandmother’s garden; Nina making tortillas like her mother. The word ‘remember’ means literally to *re-member* -- to put back together. In Spanish, the word ‘*recordar*’ also means to re-cord or re-string -- in other words, to reconnect. The act of remembering is a way we heal.

You can help participants and children (who might be able to join their parents for this part of the workshop) appreciate the use of memory to heal and connect us with those we love. Here are some episodes from the PBS program schedule that convey this idea. We recommend showing a short excerpt from the program (2 to 5 minutes) and then asking some discussion questions.

Before viewing, remind participants of the importance of memories within our lives. Discuss the meanings of remember and *recordar* as noted above. Let them know that this is a valuable lesson for children to learn, and that some PBS programs can help them to do this.

After the viewing, ask a question about how memory helps the characters. Then ask how it might help participants. You might also have some questions for children, such as: what kinds of things do you like to remember? Why? Explain how their memories and those of their parents (and other family members) create the family’s shared story.

Some possible programs to use include:

CLIFFORD #133a: *Clifford Cleans His Doghouse* Clifford’s good friends come over to help him clean out his doghouse, determined to get rid of all the old “junk” he no longer uses. But, before long, Clifford realizes that each item holds a special memory and must be kept. Mac thinks this is nonsense, until he is reminded of a memory in which he was included. He then understands, along with Clifford, that one dog’s “junk” can be another dog’s treasure.

BARNEY #308: *On The Move* Since Derek and Tina are moving to a new school, Barney and the children have decided to make a memory book for them. The special going-away present shows pictures of all the good times spent at the school. Meanwhile BJ befriends a new boy, Kenneth, who recently has moved to the school. Barney and the children welcome Kenneth to

his new school by presenting him with a memory book, which includes photographs of all his new friends.

BARNEY #515: *Aunt Rachel Is Here* A visit from Ashley and Alissa's Aunt Rachel inspires the children to have a party in her honor. As the preparations are made, with the help of Barney, Scooter McNutty, and Miss Etta Kette, the children share their favorite memories surrounding their own aunts, uncles, and cousins.

CAILLOU #121: *My Family* Today Caillou learns that being a part of a family is something very special. Dad lends Caillou his old camera and helps him take pictures of every member of their family including Gilbert. Looking at the photo album, the family remembers when Gilbert was a kitten and first came to live with them.

DRAGON TALES #102b: *Goodbye Little Caterpoozle* Everyone loves to play with Cassie's fuzzy pet caterpoozle, especially Cassie. When Cassie discovers a transparent cocoon in the cage, they all believe that Poozie has died. To help Cassie feel better, the friends share favorite memories of Poozie and offer to help find another pet. None will do, until a caterpoozle a lot like Poozie crawls up Cassie's arm, nuzzles her neck, and smiles up at her.

MISTER ROGERS NEIGHBORHOOD #1533 Mister Rogers remembers his own childhood and his grandparents. In the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, Collette visits the school and shows pictures of jungle animals. Daniel asks to keep a picture of a tiger that is a "great-grandfather."

Option Two: Following the Milagro Activity

The *Milagro* activity focuses on hopes parents have for their children. When parents express these hopes, children have the opportunity to think about their futures.

Here are some episodes from the PBS program schedule that show characters thinking, imagining, and wishing about life when they grow up. We recommend showing a short excerpt from the program (2 to 5 minutes) and then asking some discussion questions.

Before viewing, ask parents whether their children have ever said what they would like to be when they grow up. Show parents how PBS programs can help them discuss growing up with their children. When the children on Barney thought about what they'd like to be, they played a hopscotch game (BARNEY #614). Or, you might want to just teach them the song, "When I Grow Up" featured on BARNEY #617. Or, you can show Caillou's thoughts about growing up after visiting his attic (CAILLOU #101). During the viewing, you may want to point out examples that show wishes for the future.

MISTER ROGERS NEIGHBORHOOD #1565 Mister Rogers introduces his new children's opera, "A Star for Kitty." In the musical story, Kitty (played by Betty Aberlin) wishes for a star of her own and learns some surprising and profound lessons as the opera's story unfolds with the help of both human and puppet characters. Baritone John Reardon and tenor Paul Spencer Adkins are featured in the delightful opera, which was written by Fred Rogers.

BARNEY #614: *Good Job* In this episode, the kids try to figure out what they want to do when they grow up. Barney explains to them what a job is and then each of the kids takes a turn

playing the "Hopscotch Game" and imagining what they most want to be. Hannah wants to be a dancer, Danny a chef, Emily a bus driver and Jeff a sailor. BJ has a hard time figuring out whether he wants to be an astronaut, a baseball player, or a cowboy. Some of the songs in this episode are "People Helping Other People," "Sailing, Sailing," and "When I Grow Up."

BARNEY #617: *You Can Do It* This episode teaches kids that learning something new takes practice. Barney gets some help from Keesha, Stephen, and Jeff when Baby Bop needs help learning how to jump rope. Everyone sings, "When I Grow Up."

CAILLOU #101: *When I Grow Up* Caillou and Mom clean out the attic and find an old chest full of wonderful belongings. Caillou realizes these treasures of the past were once someone's dreams for the future and he longs for his own. But when he finds a dead bird in the garden, getting older suddenly seems pretty scary. After Mom and Dad assure him that he has lots and lots of time, Caillou contemplates possible future jobs, like being a mailman or policeman.

Saying Good-bye (5 minutes)

Thank everyone for their participation in the discussion and invite them to share any final thoughts. Encourage participants to think about the topics covered during the workshop and how their memory books and *milagros* will highlight the wonderful memories and dreams of their families.

Provide each parent with The Magic of Reading tip sheet, the Playing and Learning in the Kitchen take-home activity, and book.

Beginnings and endings are very important to the Latino community. Try to make personal contact with every person as s/he leaves. You will be "making a memory" for them!

Acknowledgments

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