



## MY STORY OF MEANING

*“Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos.”*

– Abraham Maslow

### OVERVIEW

Create a timeline of the turning points of your life. Next, reflect on who you want to become moving forward and set a personally meaningful goal that contributes to the world. Close by pondering your awe-inspiring life journey so far.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the beginning of the school year, to inspire and set goals for personal growth
- To motivate and uplift yourself or staff members, particularly during a stressful time of the year
- To promote a positive school culture among staff members

#### TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 1 hour (note that this practice can also be done in multiple sessions to allow for deeper reflection)

#### LEVEL

- College
- Adult

#### MATERIALS

- Pen/paper or electronic device for writing

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students or School Staff will:

- Expand their self-awareness by creating and reflecting on a coherent narrative of their life, focusing on important turning points that helped to shape who they are today
- Expand their social awareness by thinking of how their goals contribute to the world
- Construct a story of who they want to become moving forward
- Make a plan towards achieving personally meaningful goals that also contribute to the world

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Purpose
- Meaning
- Awe

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Responsible decision-making

## MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused attention
- Open awareness

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- If facilitating this practice with a group:
  - Take 10-15 minutes of quiet time to think of the turning points in your journey and how they made who you are.
  - Create a timeline of these main turning points.
  - Ponder what this timeline tells you about who you are.
  - Reflect upon the goals that you find personally meaningful that contribute to the world, and think of ways to move forward with these goals.
  - How do you think this practice might be relevant or helpful to your team or staff?
- If doing this practice individually:
  - Set aside 30-60 minutes of uninterrupted time in a quiet space to complete the practice.
  - Take a few deep breaths to center yourself.

- Be kind and gentle to yourself as you note your responses.
- This practice is meant to provide insight on what your journey tells about who you are, and inspire thoughts on personally meaningful goals that contribute to the world.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### OVERVIEW

This practice can be done individually or in a group setting with a facilitator. If possible, conduct this practice outdoors for a more engaging and reflective atmosphere.

### PONDERING YOUR JOURNEY:

- Close your eyes or gently look at a spot on the floor, and take some quiet time to **reflect on your life's journey**. What are some of the main **turning points in your life that shaped who you are?**
- Now, take some time to **create a brief timeline** of these turning points.
- Next, choose two or three of these turning points and reflect on each one.
  - What are the feelings associated with these events?
  - How have they shaped who you are today?
  - What did you learn?
  - What obstacles or supports did you encounter?
  - What did they reveal about your values or motives?
  - Did they tell you anything about your relationships or community? If so, how?
- **What story does your timeline tell about who you are?** Does your story reveal a personally meaningful long-term goal? If so, how does this goal contribute to your community or the world?
- If conducting the practice in a group setting, encourage participants to take 10 minutes to share with a partner (5 minutes each) their reflections about their timelines, their goals, and who they are.

### THE STORY OF NOW:

- **Now, write briefly about the person you want to become moving forward.** What values do you want to hold on to and to cultivate? What values do you want to let go of?
- **What is a personally meaningful goal that you would like to pursue or are currently pursuing?** How does this goal contribute to your community or to the world? How aligned is this goal with who you are or who you want to be?
- **Now, write about your plans pursuing this goal.** What are some steps you need to take in the coming months or year? What is one thing you can do to start next week? What might you do individually and what will you do with others?
- If conducting the practice in a group setting, encourage participants to take 10 minutes to share with a partner (5 minutes each) their plans moving forward with their goal and how it will contribute to the community or the world.

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## APPRECIATE YOUR LIFE'S JOURNEY SO FAR:

- **Now, pause and take a moment to ponder the timeline of your journey.** Think of how extraordinary your journey has been. Reflect upon where your journey has taken you so far, and will take you next. Appreciate the value it will continue to contribute to your community or the world. Tap into the [awe](#), wonder, or transcendence that comes from reflecting on your life in this way. Or perhaps a sense of [gratitude, compassion, or love](#) arises. Take a moment to write down any feelings you might have.

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## CLOSURE

- If doing this practice individually or in a group setting, consider the following questions:
  - What surprised you about this practice?
  - What did you discover about yourself and about your journey?
  - Was the practice helpful in considering ways of moving forward with personally meaningful goals?

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- If you did this practice on your own, what worked well for you?
- If you conducted this practice in a group setting:
  - What worked well in facilitating this practice? Were the participants engaged in each step of the practice? What would you keep the same next time?
  - What did not work well? Were there certain parts of the practice that the participants felt uncomfortable with? What would you change the next time you conduct the practice?
  - Did you notice any change in the engagement of students or staff at your school after the practice? If so, what changes did you notice? Have participants been able to bring to work what they find most meaningful?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Three studies](#) involving more than 350 participants in the United States (college students and community adults) found that writing or telling narratives about significant life events shed light on the importance of participants' personal agency and relationships in the narratives they told. In other words, it can help people see how their actions and connection to other people shaped who they are and helped them to grow in wisdom.

[Research](#) has also discovered that telling personal narratives can *mobilize* educators' sense of agency, suggesting that reflecting on one's life journey may *empower* us to pursue personally meaningful goals, serving a purpose beyond ourselves.

In addition, pondering our life goals, purpose, and the meaning of our life journeys can be a means through which we experience [awe](#) and well-being. Indeed, a [study](#) of 563 Chinese adults found that dispositional awe (a strong tendency to feel awe), together with a sense of meaning in life, is connected to higher levels of well-being and happiness.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The work of teachers and other education professionals is fast-paced and demanding, which can impact their well-being and leave little time to remember why they chose to work in education in the first place. Thus, offering educators an opportunity to intentionally connect to their calling by reflecting on their life journeys—and appreciate the “awe” of their lives—can provide a means to increased [well-being](#) by grounding their work in [meaning](#) and purpose.

## SOURCE

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