



**LITERATURE
AS A BRIDGE**

HANDBOOK
STORIES
AGAINST SILENCE

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WELCOME

TO THE WORLD OF STORIES

Dear activists,

Before you is a manual *Stories Against Silence* designed to provide guidance for workshops utilizing literature from all over the world.

The manual is a result of the project *Literature as a Bridge: Empowering Youth Workers for Reconciliation, Conflict Prevention, and Promotion of EU Values*. This initiative uses literature and storytelling as instruments for peacebuilding, empathy, and intercultural dialogue. Grupa “Hajde da...” implements this project alongside its regional partners: Association “Prijateljice”, “Centar za mir Osijek”, and the Public Institute “Mladi zmaji”. This project is part of the program *The Book Makes It Visible (Delo na videlo)*, which Grupa “Hajde da...” has been implementing over the past several years through various initiatives.

Whenever young people engage with literature, a natural need often arises for them to reflect on and share their own life experiences connected to the themes of the story. This programme grew out of that need—from the desire to create a space where the exploration of literature goes hand in hand with psychosocial support and the strengthening of young people’s voices and capacities. The core idea of the program is to explore diverse topics, social issues, and phenomena through the analysis of literary works. It is intended for young people, youth workers, and trainers—especially those working with or belonging to marginalized groups, as they often encounter these themes most directly.

By implementing this project, we aim to create a transformative impact in the field of youth work by equipping practitioners with innovative tools and methodologies they can apply in their daily practice. Our approach is grounded in the belief that literature and storytelling do not merely reflect societal dynamics, but also serve as powerful instruments for fostering dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding among young people. In practical terms, our primary goal is to strengthen the competencies of youth workers in addressing complex themes such as peace, conflict, and cultural identity in a youth-friendly way that empowers young people to think critically and discuss these topics.

The Digital Interactive Manual is one of the project’s key outputs. It is designed to serve as a lasting resource for current and future youth work initiatives, offering guidance and inspiration for integrating literature-based methods into work with young people.

INTRODUCTION

TO THE MANUAL

For generations, literature in any form has served as a medium for expressing the full spectrum of human emotion to the world. Love, hate, fear, the things that often remain unsaid can be written for the world to witness. Peace activism has consistently sought new ways to connect people across borders of language, culture, and identity. Literature as a Bridge grows out of that same intention—to transform literature into a space where understanding, empathy, and transformation can take root. This handbook is written for those who already know the realities of peace work: the challenges of dialogue, the complexity of justice, and the sustained effort required to ensure an equal space for all.

While peace activism often relies on dialogue, education, and community action, literature offers a different but deeply complementary path. Stories and poems allow us to experience the world through another person's eyes—not through ideology or analysis, but through emotion, imagination, and shared humanity. This handbook is therefore not a guide to literature in the traditional sense, but a set of tools for peace practitioners. It explores how written words can foster trust, how literary workshops can open space for healing and reflection, and how artistic expression can contribute to reconciliation.

This manual is conceived as a set of guidelines rather than a fixed recipe. Its purpose is to support facilitators and peace practitioners in adapting workshops to the specific group they are working with—taking into account participants' age, prior knowledge, experience with literature, group dynamics, and the broader social and cultural context. We intentionally did not aim to limit facilitators with rigid instructions. Instead, the manual is designed to offer structure, inspiration, and methodological orientation, while leaving enough space for professional judgment, creativity, and adaptation in practice. In this manual, you will find workshop proposals that have already been implemented by trainers. However, each facilitator has full freedom to adapt the workshops to their group and their own working style, as long as the principles on which youth work is based are respected.

Why We Use Literary Works in Working with Young People

Literary works bring together a wide range of experiences and present certain phenomena, characters, and concepts from multiple perspectives—spatial, temporal, and contextual. As such, they provide an excellent starting point for addressing various topics, especially sensitive ones, because they offer a certain level of "protective distance." This distance makes it possible to approach complex issues more objectively. Since literature depicts vivid, realistic situations, stories and characters allow us to explore different sides of conflict, prejudice, and injustice, enabling a deeper understanding of the themes at hand.

Literary works can be a valuable tool for exploring topics such as interculturality, human rights, identity, cultural patterns, religious diversity and tolerance, attitudes toward minorities, gender roles, war and its consequences, fascism, extremism, reconciliation, and more. Those who engage with these subjects through literature are given the opportunity to examine them in greater depth and to express their views in a safe environment created by facilitators, while also considering the perspectives of others and observing social phenomena from multiple angles. Books offer a symbolic space in which we can discuss complex questions, and characters and stories act as intermediaries—through them, it becomes easier to address real social issues.

How We Approach a Literary Work When Working with Young People

How we use a literary work in activities with young people depends on various factors, and here we offer one possible model, as well as a suggested sequence for guiding a discussion after reading a literary text.

When we work with literary works in youth settings, we begin with the personal experience of the reader. We start the conversation with questions such as: How did you feel while reading this work? What left the strongest impression on you, and why?

This initial step creates an emotional connection with the text and opens space for personal interpretations and reflections.

We then move on to analyzing the social phenomena and contexts addressed in the work: the historical circumstances, social norms, or problems it portrays. Special attention is given to the characters: their position, actions, motivations, and the emotions they represent. We consider their relationships to certain social issues, as well as the causes and consequences of their actions or inaction.

We also ask questions such as: Could anything have been different? What might have changed if the characters had made different choices?

At this stage of the discussion, we also examine the author's standpoint—specifically the way the work addresses a particular issue and the writer's attitude toward it.

The next step is connecting the themes of the work with the present moment and the society we live in. Together with the participants, we reflect on questions like: How is this theme reflected today? How would we recognize it in our own environment?

This allows young people to draw parallels between the literary world and reality, using concrete examples from their own communities.

Finally, the conversation returns to the personal level. We ask: Have you ever experienced something similar to what the work describes? How did you feel at the time? What did you do? In this way, a literary work becomes an invitation to personal reflection, as well as a tool for fostering empathy, responsibility, and social awareness.

Check out how two youth workers put literature-based methods into practice after completing the project training.

At its heart, Literature as a Bridge is about connection: between experiences and perspectives, individuals and communities, and past wounds and future possibilities. In the pages ahead, you will find methods, examples, and reflections that show how words can become acts of peace.

How We Connect the Discussion of a Literary Work With an Activity

The discussion about a literary work usually serves as the foundation for the main activity that follows, providing space for an even deeper exploration of the topic and a more personal approach. In practice, drama techniques and performance have proven to be useful tools for deepening the theme and helping participants connect with it on a more meaningful level. These methods offer an opportunity for participants to express their opinions and emotions, use their creative potential, reflect on how certain experiences might be reshaped, try them out in practice, and ultimately offer others material for reflection.

Of course, other types of activities can also be used. They may vary in format (for example, whether the discussion is held in a plenary session or through a fishbowl conversation) or in the methods applied (such as guided fantasy, creative writing, storytelling...).



What are we relying on?

In this manual, we will not discuss the key knowledge and skills needed by someone working in non-formal education with young people, as we assume that you (as a user of this manual) already know and practice. We understand that there is no ideal youth worker, and that each individual has the capacities that we will list, developed to varying degrees, but it is certainly important to keep them all in mind. Here, we will list them as a guide and remind all of us that those aspects that "lag behind others" should be further developed.



BACKSTAGE NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

The final section of this manual highlights several key considerations to keep in mind when preparing and planning your workshop:

Choose appropriate and accessible excerpts

Keep excerpts short and focused, especially when working with teenagers. Avoid overly complex, graphic, or triggering passages unless the group is prepared and contextually supported. Select texts that reflect the diversity of young people's experiences.

Ensure the text is accessible

Always check whether the text is easily available (copyright, language, online access). If needed, provide a scan, PDF, or printed excerpt so that all participants can follow the activity equally. Ensure the format is accessible for participants with reading, visual, or learning challenges.

Create a safe and respectful environment

Establish clear group agreements (confidentiality, respect, active listening, and the right to pass). Encourage communication without judgment. Offer opt-out options for sensitive content.

Consider different media as entry points

For groups with low reading motivation, use films, YouTube creators, music videos, or online narratives as bridges into literary themes. Multimedia should support comprehension, not replace reflection.

Be attentive to group dynamics

Encourage balanced participation and avoid putting anyone on the spot. Provide structure for quieter participants and manage dominant voices gently. Validate multiple interpretations and avoid implying a single "correct" reading.

Allow emotional space

Literature can trigger strong emotions or memories. Normalize this and offer grounding pauses when needed. Always end emotionally intense sessions with a reflection or debrief.

BACKSTAGE NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

Support critical thinking rather than imposing meaning

Use open-ended questions, such as: “What do you notice?” “What strikes you most?” “How do you interpret this?” Encourage participants to explore perspectives rather than seek "correct" answers.

Connect the text to participants’ real lives

Bridge from the text to lived experience using tools such as the identity iceberg, role-play, or creative rewriting. Encourage personal meaning-making without forcing disclosure.

Adapt to the group’s developmental stage

Younger teens: shorter tasks, clear instructions, concrete examples.

Older youth: more abstract questions, complex dilemmas, and longer texts.

Be culturally sensitive

Provide cultural background when needed. Avoid assumptions about shared knowledge. Invite comparisons with participants’ personal environments.

Close every session with reflection

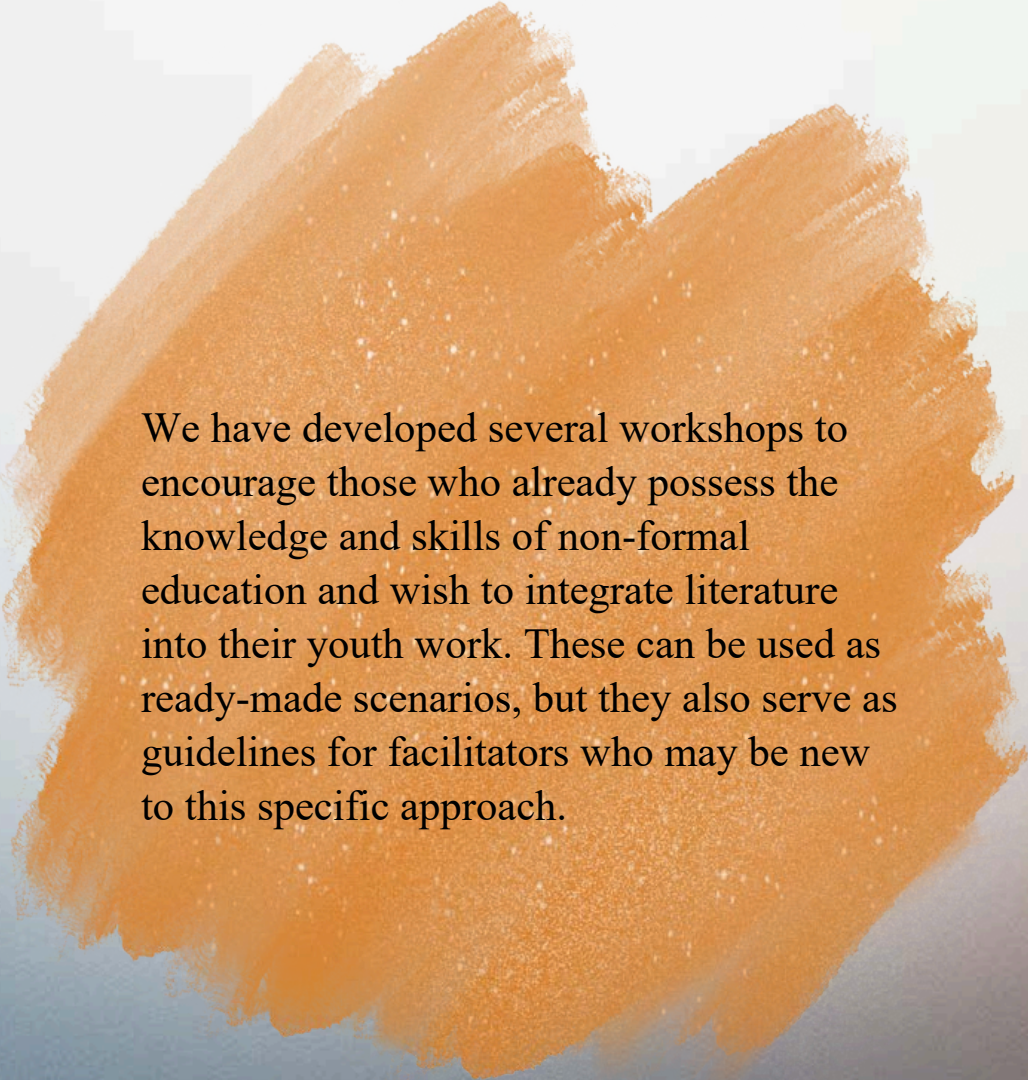
Ask what they learned, how they felt, and what they are taking with them.

“GOOD-TO-KNOW IDEAS” (OPTIONAL ENHANCEMENTS)

- For groups with little experience in reading or literary analysis, start with a poem or even the lyrics of a popular song – something familiar and emotionally accessible.
- If participants open up deeply during a specific activity, feel free to adapt the workshop on the spot and give more time and attention to that part.
- If possible, ask participants in advance which texts they would be interested in exploring. Co-creation increases ownership and engagement.
- If you work with a stable or long-term group, you can agree that a short text or book excerpt is read beforehand to allow for deeper analysis during the session.



EXAMPLES OF WORKSHOPS



We have developed several workshops to encourage those who already possess the knowledge and skills of non-formal education and wish to integrate literature into their youth work. These can be used as ready-made scenarios, but they also serve as guidelines for facilitators who may be new to this specific approach.

IDENTITY & GROWING UP



About the workshop:

The following workshop is flexible and can be adapted based on the experience level of both the facilitator and the participants. Depending on the group dynamics, it can be implemented in a more reflective and in-depth way or as a lighter, more playful activity focused on getting to know literary characters through informal conversation. By using metaphors, dialogue, and role-based interviews, participants explore identity and the process of growing up in a safe, accessible way. The literary characters provide the necessary "distance" to encourage openness, empathy, and the ability to see things from different perspectives.

OBJECTIVES

- Explore how internal and external factors shape identity, including its visible and invisible layers.[1]
- Understand how growing up is influenced by social circumstances, relationships, and cultural environments by comparing personal experiences with those of literary characters.
- Develop empathy and perspective-taking through character-based activities and reflect on how these approaches can be applied in youth work.

Age: 15+

Realization space: A room large enough for participants to divide into smaller groups and move around comfortably.

Time: 90–120 min

Material:

- Printed excerpts from selected books. For example:
 - Normal People by Sally Rooney
 - Siberian Education by Nicolai Lilin
 - Catch the Rabbit by Lana Bastašić
- Large sheets of paper (for the "iceberg model")
- Markers, sticky notes
- Chairs arranged for "speed dating"
- Open space for role-play and interviewing characters

IDENTITY & GROWING UP



1. Introduction (10 min)

Facilitators introduce the themes of identity and growing up, briefly presenting the chosen literary texts and the reasons they were selected. Participants are invited to share what the concepts of identity, growing up, and belonging mean to them personally.

2. “Speed Dating” – Metaphors of Growing Up (10–15 min)

Participants form pairs. Each pair has about 10 minutes (roughly 5 minutes per person) to discuss the following:

- Which book, film, poem, or character serves as the best metaphor for their own growing up?
- Why did they choose this specific metaphor?
- What emotions or memories does this metaphor evoke?



3. Literary analysis: Identity in the Texts (25 min)

Participants are divided into groups, based on the number of selected texts (with each group receiving one literary excerpt). If working with only one literary work, you can assign different excerpts from the same book. If the group is very small, everyone can work on a single excerpt together.

Each group will:

- Read the excerpt aloud.
- Highlight key events that shape the character’s identity.
- Identify external influences (social, cultural, relational) and internal influences (emotional, psychological, moral).

Groups then share their insights with the entire circle.

IDENTITY & GROWING UP

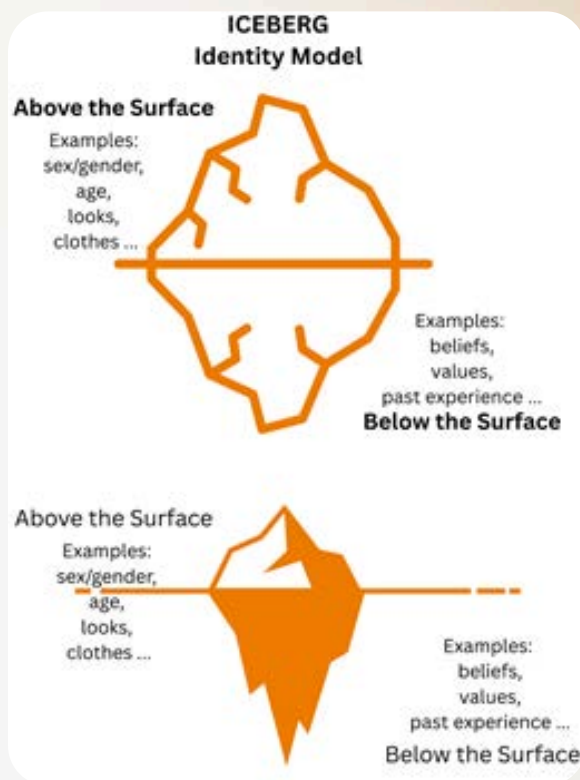
4. Identity Iceberg (10–15 min)

Each group creates an “identity iceberg” for their protagonist.

Above the surface: Visible traits (appearance, roles, public identity).

Below the surface: Beliefs, fears, memories, traumas, cultural layers, and hopes.

Participants reflect on how much “hidden” identity content shapes the character’s behaviour and choices. (Drawing right - Example from one of the workshops)



IDENTITY & GROWING UP

5. Interview with Characters (25–30 min)

Volunteers step into the role of the character from the excerpt, while others take on the role of interviewers.

Questions to explore:

- Random or funny things (e.g., “Which ice-cream flavour is your favourite?”, “Would you rather run towards a lion or a bear?”)
- The character’s background.
- Their social environment.
- The pressures and expectations they face.
- How they see themselves.
- Their thoughts on specific topics (e.g., “How do you see the roles of women and men in your society?”)
- How they would act in new situations (e.g., “How would this character behave in a youth centre?”)



As additional support for this workshop, we have provided a [link](#) to a recording of this exercise from a session conducted in Slovenia by Živa Mahkota and Katja Hajdinjak (Mladi zmaji). This specific workshop was delivered for other youth workers.

The first part of the recording shows the Interview with the Characters activity in action, while the second part focuses on the youth workers reflecting on their experience and discussing how this method can be useful in their own practice.



6. Closing Reflection Circle (10–15 min)

Participants share:

- What surprised them about the characters or about themselves.
- What aspects of identity they had not considered before.
- How this method could be used in their work with young people.

INNER WORLD AND INNER CONFLICTS



About the workshop

This workshop is designed for younger participants and introduces the topics of diversity and stereotypes through simple, interactive methods. Literary excerpts, games, and movement-based activities help participants recognize how stereotypes are formed and how they influence relationships. Depending on the facilitator's experience and the group's readiness, the workshop can remain playful and exploratory or open space for deeper discussion, while maintaining a safe and respectful environment for dialogue and reflection.

OBJECTIVES

- Encourage participants to reflect on how they perceive themselves.
- Create an opportunity for participants to recognize the internal strengths that enable them to overcome challenging situations.

Age: from 15 years onwards

Realization space: A room large enough for participants to divide into smaller groups and move comfortably.

Time: 110 min

Material: Paper and pencils (at least one for each participant)

1. My mirror (10 min)

Participants take a piece of paper. The facilitator asks them to draw a mirror frame and write inside it what they see when they look into their "inner mirror." As they think about who they are—their personality, what is important to them, their qualities, and even their flaws—they should write these reflections down. Crucially, they must write in the third person (e.g., instead of "I am Marko and I value..." they should write "Marko is a person who..."). Remind them to write legibly for the next step.

INNER WORLD AND INNER CONFLICTS



2. Exchange (25 min)

Participants pass their "mirror" to the person on their left. One by one, participants read the mirror in their hand aloud. The owner of that mirror is invited to close their eyes and simply listen—reflecting on how it feels to hear their own self-definition read back to them by another voice. Once every mirror has been read, the group discusses the feelings and thoughts that surfaced while listening to these self-introductions.

3. Pianist, creative analysis (15 min)

Assuming the group has read an excerpt from *The Pianist* by Alessandro Baricco, the facilitator asks questions to bridge the gap between the character's identity and the participants' own lives:

- If Novecento were to describe himself in a mirror, what do you think he would write? What is your own impression of him?
- How did Novecento's unique life circumstances (living entirely at sea) shape his character? What specific traits did he develop because of life on board?
- How far can a person go, and what can they achieve, by "traveling through themselves"?
- What is the power of a person's inner world and their ability to create their own reality? How is this ability significant in your own life? When do you use it?



INNER WORLD AND INNER CONFLICTS

4. Dramatic Scenes: Inside Oneself and Outwardly (20 min)

Divide the participants into smaller groups. Each group looks at their mirrors from the first step of the workshop and creates an imaginary person who has some of the characteristics found on the mirrors. They need to imagine that person a little: what does s/he do, how does s/he spend her free time, what kind of music does s/he listen to, what kind of family does s/he live in, what are her/his worries, the most common dilemmas...

They should highlight the situation in which that person found her/himself, because of which s/he has some internal conflict or dilemma.

In order to make it easier for you to understand what it is all about, we give an example of a not so complex situation:

E.g. it can be a conflict between the person „X“ being social and wanting to go out on the club with friends, and their responsibility, as they have a paper/exam tomorrow. It is also complicated by the fact that her best friend „Y“ called her and said that it is important that person X comes to the club tonight, so X also has a dilemma regarding loyalty...

Each of the group members takes on the task of "playing" one of those characteristics of a person (e.g. one sociability, another responsibility, the third loyalty, the fourth part of a person that tries to find a solution...). They should show us a scene in which we can easily see that internal conflict, but also how we can imagine a potential solution in which the person will take into account reality demands, but they will not give up on themselves.

Of course, situations can be more complex than the one we mentioned as an example. How does a person overcome these internal situations and how can it affect the external reality? Scenes should not last longer than 3-4 minutes.

5. Acting out the scenes (15 min)

Each group acts out a scene. You can reward each performance with applause.

6. Exchange (20 min)

We also talk about what it is inside the person that helped him to overcome the internal conflict/dilemma? Which of our qualities/properties help us to search for solutions, and which ones to realize things in reality?

7. Finally - (5 min)

Ask the participants to say in one or two words what impression they leave this workshop with.



DIVERSITY, ACCEPTANCE & STEREOTYPES



About the workshop

This workshop may seem demanding at first, as it benefits from a facilitator who already has some experience with drama techniques. However, it is a powerful tool for making the abstract visible. Internal conflicts are explored by having participants act out different aspects of a character—such as their competing needs or personality traits—which the group has developed through a participatory process. By physicalizing these internal dynamics, the conflict becomes easier to see and analyze. This session can serve as an ideal starting point for a series of workshops focused on understanding and addressing conflicts within the broader social sphere.

OBJECTIVES

- Explore how stereotypes are formed and how they influence relationships and social dynamics.
- Develop intercultural understanding and acceptance by identifying stereotypes in literary texts and comparing them with real-life examples.
- Reflect on how stories and societies change when stereotypes are challenged or removed, while strengthening communication skills through dialogue, debate, and shared reflection.

Age: 10–15 (younger participants)

Realization space: A room large enough for group work and a plenary circle.

Time: approx. 60 minutes

Material:

- Printed excerpts
- Papers, markers, sticky notes
- Circle space for discussion
- Optional: printed role cards

DIVERSITY, ACCEPTANCE & STEREOTYPES

1. Introduction (5 min)

The facilitator briefly introduces the theme of diversity and invites participants to share what comes to mind when they hear the word diversity.

2. Animal Identity (10 min)

Participants choose an animal and describe its traits. This warm-up opens a discussion on identity, difference, and perspective-taking.

3. What Are Stereotypes? (10 min)

In small groups, participants:

- define stereotypes,
- write examples on sticky notes,
- reflect on how stereotypes influence relationships.

Groups place their notes on a shared board and discuss patterns (gender, ethnicity, school performance, appearance, etc.).

Participants are gently invited to reflect on moments when they may have viewed certain social groups in a stereotypical way.

4. Identifying Stereotypes in Stories (15 min)

Participants work with printed excerpts (e.g., Harry Potter, Matilda).

In groups, they identify:

- Which stereotypes appear in the text?
- Who creates them? Who is affected?
- What would change if these stereotypes did not exist in the story?

Facilitators link literary stereotypes to those mentioned in the earlier activity.

5. Agreement / Disagreement Circle (10 min)

Participants respond physically (stepping into the circle or stepping out) to statements such as:

- “Some stereotypes are harmless.”
- “We all have stereotypes.”
- “Stereotypes always hurt someone.”
- “Stories without stereotypes would be boring.”

This exercise opens a lively debate and encourages respectful dialogue.

6. Reflection Circle & Closing (10 min)

Participants share:

- One insight they gained.
- One stereotype they now see differently.
- One thing they will pay more attention to in future interactions.

*This example workshop is based on a workshop conducted in Slovenia by Živa Mahkota and Katja Hajdinjak (Mladi zmaji).

PEACE, WAR AND POWER OF STORIES



About the workshop

This workshop is a little bit different from the rest of them. This one will use a different method that goes with using literature in peace work. Moreover, it will use photographs as a means to open up new stories and new ways of thinking about the war. Each method used in peace work usually can be more interesting for youth when you combine it with other methods. The **photograph** used in this workshop is authentic.

OBJECTIVES

- Encourage participants to talk about the past through story and photography.
- Create space to develop empathy towards different characters.
- Develop young people's awareness of different stories during the same event.

Age: 15+

Realization space: A room large enough that the participants can be divided into smaller groups that will work smoothly.

Time: 110 minutes

Material:

- Paper
- Pencils
- laptop and projector, or a printed **picture** in color.

IMPORTANT

Note for facilitators and introduction (10 min)

Before the workshop itself, introduce the participants to the fact that the discussion will be about the war of the 1990s in Bosnia and Herzegovina, specifically focusing on only one part and one photograph.

The war of the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia is a much broader topic, which can be addressed in many ways; this workshop is specifically about the life of one photograph and is intended to encourage thinking about the war itself and all its many levels. At the end of the workshop, the facilitator will provide additional links for further research.

PEACE, WAR AND POWER OF STORIES

1. Cinderella doesn't have to be right? (35 min)

Divide the participants into 3 groups.

Each group is given a different task: to tell the story of Cinderella from the perspective of other characters in the story.

- Group 1: Tell the story from the point of view of the stepmother.
- Group 2: Tell the story from the point of view of one of the sisters.
- Group 3: Tell the story from the point of view of the father.

Addendum for presenters: An example of Cinderella from different roles should be provided if it is necessary to encourage presenters or if inspiration is needed:



STEPMOTHER SAID:

"This story cast an unfair shadow on me. In reality, I tried to be a good and caring wife. When I came to this house, I accepted Cinderella as my own child. However, I must admit that she had many bad habits. She refused to bathe regularly and almost never wanted to wear clean clothes. Any attempt to persuade her to bathe would end with her screaming and a scene that would attract confused neighbors.

Whenever she put on a clean dress, she would soon turn to ashes again. She had a vivid imagination and was inclined to make up stories, so she told everyone around that I was abusing her. It hurt me deeply, but I didn't know how to reach her.

As for the famous ball, the truth is simple: there are no good fairies. My husband wanted to make all three girls happy and bought them beautiful white ball gowns. Cinderella immediately threw hers away, saying, offended, that she would not wear it. We tried to encourage her, talk to her, but she remained stubborn, so in the end we left without her.

Later, apparently changing her mind, she did appear at the ball — unexpectedly clean and stunningly beautiful. I was sincerely happy that, finally, something encouraged her to civilize herself. The prince, obviously charmed, immediately approached her. They danced, and as they passed me, I heard him ask her why she was the last to arrive. Cinderella, instead of answering, looked at him sternly, slammed her shoe on the floor and ran away, losing her shoe on the stairs.

When I heard a few days later that the prince was looking for her all over the kingdom in vain, I sent my elder daughter to tell him that the girl he was looking for was actually in our house. At their wedding, I honestly cried with happiness. I believed her late mother would have been proud then."

PEACE, WAR AND POWER OF STORIES

STEPMOTHER'S ELDER DAUGHTER SAID:

"I won't be long, but looking at myself and my younger sister, I often wonder if it's even worth being good, obedient, and humble. We grew up believing that hard work, decency, and loyalty to the family would one day pay off. At best, however, such a life leads to marriage to some quiet, unimportant clerk in the royal court—a man suave enough to wish you good morning, but not influential enough to change your destiny.

Cinderella, on the other hand, always did things her way. She was stubborn, unruly, sometimes even insolent; and although her behavior often pushed us to the edge of patience, everything always turned in her favor in the end. While we tried to be what was expected of us, she dared not to be. And the world rewarded her for that.

I cried countless nights over that injustice. Those quiet moments hurt when I realize that all the effort I put into being a 'proper' daughter, a 'good' girlfriend, and an 'exemplary' future wife went unnoticed — it was almost worthless. Sometimes it seems to me that fate favors those who dare to defy, and is hard on those who try to obey.

I don't begrudge Cinderella her luck. Indeed not. But sometimes, in the late hours when the candles burn to the end, I wonder what would have happened if, at least once in my life, I had slammed my foot on the floor, refused a dress I didn't like, or simply said 'no.' Maybe then some miraculous door would have opened for me, just as it opened for her.

But fate has already assigned us our roles. She became a princess. And I remained the one who observes, remembers, and tries to understand how justice disappeared somewhere between our steps."

CINDERELLA'S FATHER SAID:

"When my first wife died, I was left alone with my daughter. I didn't know how to do anything around the house or how to take care of a child. That's why I decided to get married as soon as possible, so that someone would take care of the house, the child, and me. So, I did.

I don't really understand all those 'women's things.' My job was to earn money and provide for all three daughters. When I come home after a hard day, I just want to get ready for bed as soon as possible, so I don't really know what went on there. Of course, I can't hide how happy I was when the prince asked for my daughter's hand in marriage and I gave her my fatherly blessing."



Questions for discussion

- Have you ever considered other roles in Cinderella?
- Have you thought about how they felt during all the events we learned about as children?
- Can you draw a parallel with anything in your life? When did you believe one thing to be true, and then it turned out to be something completely different?
- Is it possible for one event to have several different versions of the event?
- Is there an ultimate truth?

PEACE, WAR AND POWER OF STORIES

2. Storytelling (45 min)

The leader divides the participants into 3 or 4 groups, depending on the number of members. Each group receives the photo, or the leader displays it using a projector or laptop.

Each group is tasked with telling a story from the perspective of a different person in the photo, making that person the main character.

- Group 1: Creates a story in which the main character is the photographer.
- Group 2: Creates a story in which the main character is one of the victims.
- Group 3: Creates a story of the soldier who is shooting.
- Group 4: Creates a story in which the main character is the soldier holding a rifle, who can be seen in full but is looking the other way.

After each group creates their individual story, the entire group comes together to create one common story.

After creating together one story, you tell participants the real story of this photo, before you continue to discussion.



PEACE, WAR AND POWER OF STORIES

The Truth Behind the Photograph

At the end of the workshop, the facilitator presents the truth about the events behind this photograph:

The photographer who took this photo is Ron Haviv, and the full set of photos accompanying this image can be found on his website. It was taken in April 1992. Ron Haviv, seeing what was happening in Yugoslavia and initially not believing that the rumors of war would come true, traveled to the region. Through various paths, he eventually reached Arkan, who suggested that Haviv accompany him to photograph his conquests.

When he arrived in Bijeljina with the paramilitary formation known as Arkan's Tigers, he received a strict order that he could not take photos and was ushered away. However, once he realized the gravity of what was happening, he managed to take several photos from the cover where Arkan had told him to remain.

At that moment, one of the soldiers became suspicious and approached him. Ron, anticipating this, managed to remove and hide the film. The film the soldiers eventually took out of his camera turned out to be blank. Ron hoped that by sending these photos to be published globally, they would help stop the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Sadly, that did not happen, and another three years of hell followed.

His photos were later used as evidence in court, proving that his work was successful in seeking justice and remains vital for educational purposes. However, it remains a devastating fact that many people were not arrested for their actions during the war in the nineties—including the person seen kicking the bodies in the photo, who is currently a DJ in Belgrade.

PEACE, WAR AND POWER OF STORIES

3. Conclusion and discussion (20 min)

The core aim of this workshop was not to provide definitive answers, but to cultivate a critical awareness of how stories—especially those surrounding conflict—are constructed and perceived. By examining the Cinderella narrative from multiple, contradictory perspectives, and then applying this lens to a devastating moment captured in a war photograph, participants have engaged with the complex, multi-layered nature of reality. This is the **Link** for further research about the topic.

Questions for Discussion

- How did creating the backstory for the soldier who looked away change your initial perception of the photograph?
- Now that you know the photographer's intended impact (stopping the war) failed immediately, does that diminish the importance of his work? Why or why not?
- After exploring both fictional (Cinderella) and historical (war photo) multi-perspectives, what new understanding do you have about the nature of truth?
- Do you feel a greater responsibility now to seek out alternative narratives when consuming news or engaging with historical events?
- Have you ever considered other roles and thought about what was in the heads of the people committing crimes?
- Is it possible for one event to have several different versions?
- Is there an ultimate truth? If yes, when? If not, why?

MORE STORIES AND THEMES TO EXPLORE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Now that you have seen these examples, here are several additional themes you may explore within the context of peacebuilding, empathy, and intercultural dialogue, along with suggested literary works that can serve as strong entry points for discussion:

Prejudice

If you are addressing the topic of prejudice, *The World According to Garp* by John Irving offers rich material. It depicts both the subtle and overt forms of prejudice individuals face from their surroundings and society, as well as the ways characters project prejudices onto each other. The novel opens space for conversations about how stereotypes are formed, perpetuated, and challenged.

Discrimination

For the theme of discrimination, Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* remains a powerful resource. Through the perspective of a child observer, the novel invites reflection on racial inequality, injustice, and the moral courage needed to confront systemic wrongdoing.

Violence and Nonviolence

Lana Bastašić's *Catch the Rabbit* can be especially stimulating when exploring questions of violence, trauma, and the possibilities of nonviolent communication. The story's psychological depth and depiction of friendship strained by conflict encourage discussions about the long-term effects of violence and the search for understanding.

Patriarchy and Women's Position in Society

If your focus is on patriarchy or gender roles, Dubravka Ugrešić's *Štefica Cvek in the Jaws of Life* offers a sharp, humorous, and insightful portrayal of a woman navigating societal expectations. It opens the door to conversations on gender norms, identity, and resistance.

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War and Women's Experiences

In the context of war and the role of women, Svetlana Alexievich's *The Unwomanly Face of War* provides a powerful oral history of Soviet women soldiers in World War II. Their testimonies illuminate the emotional, moral, and social complexities of women's wartime experiences—perspectives that are often overlooked in traditional historical narratives.

EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT

In this section, you will find a case-study approach detailing what training participants thought about using literature in youth work—both before and after their training—as well as reflections from the young people who participated in the workshops themselves.

This section also explores where such a program fits into the life of an activist, a youth worker, or a young person. It outlines the specific benefits you can expect when implementing this program. Of course, these are just a few recorded experiences; we look forward to seeing what yours will be like.

Vlasta Marković, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Vlasta Marković was born on September 18, 1993, in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina. She completed her primary education at Elementary School "Slavinovići" in 2008, followed by Medical High School in 2012. In 2020, she graduated from the University of Tuzla, Faculty of Philosophy, specializing in Pedagogy and Psychology.

Having navigated life as a "child at risk" following her parents' divorce, Vlasta became involved with various civil society organizations (CSOs) at a young age. This early involvement shaped her life and career, providing her with a wealth of diverse experiences. Today, she continues to work within the CSO sector. Vlasta has chosen to remain in Tuzla, where she leads various projects dedicated to the continuous improvement of her community.



Introduction: A Personal Perspective

"My name is Vlasta Marković. I was born in 1993, while war was raging across Bosnia and Herzegovina. I was born into a 'mixed marriage'—my mother is Muslim and my father was Orthodox. Tuzla is a multinational city, and we lived well together; growing up, it never occurred to me that I was 'different' from anyone else. We visited both churches and mosques, and we celebrated both Eid and Christmas in our home.

My path into peace work began in 2008, when I was 15 years old. I joined a project called Vacation from War (known today as Youth United in Peace). I felt such a connection to the work that I remained a part of it ever since—moving from participant to group leader, then project assistant, and now coordinator.

Over the years, I have led many workshops regarding the victims of war, yet I never truly considered my own family to be among them. To be honest, I only realized this reality quite recently. My mother's family is from Brčko; they were exiled and their house was bombed. While my mother was pregnant with me here in Tuzla, she spent much of her time shielding herself from falling bombs, in conditions that were hardly fit for raising a child.

I think this is the first time I have seen us as victims of war. My uncle was wounded in the conflict, but it was not something my family spoke about often, and that silence is part of why I do what I do. Over the last three years, I have started asking questions. I received some answers, but I can see the topic is still too painful for them to revisit, so I do not press them. Even though my family suffered, they have always encouraged my peace work and they have always had my back."

EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT

Before the Training: My Approach to Peace Work

"The project my peace work is connected to brings together young people from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia. We address the difficult history of war while simultaneously building peace by fostering friendships among youth.

For years, my work relied heavily on photographs and various other visual methods. War photography was the cornerstone of my workshops, especially the work of Ron Haviv. While he has a book on the subject, I never read it in its entirety; at the time, I wasn't much of a reader. Instead, I gathered my information through direct conversations with him and other people who possessed deeper knowledge of the events.

I also utilized films and movies as a primary method of work, following them with discussions on the impact they had on the participants. We used thematic films covering a range of topics, such as:

- Can fascism happen again? (Die Welle)
- Children born as a consequence of war (Grbavica)
- Friendships before and after the war (Once Brothers)
- Empathy and psychology (Various YouTube resources and TED Talks)

While I had used specific texts in the past—such as *Good People in an Evil Time*, which provides accounts of individuals who saved others during the conflict—I had never used literature as a structured pedagogical method in the way I learned during this training."

After the Training: A New Perspective on the Written Word

"For me, this training was a revelation. For the first time in a long while, I discovered a completely new way to work with stories, books, and texts.

To be honest, I never used to like reading. That dislike stayed with me from elementary school, where the way we worked with literature felt like a burden. Memorizing poetry word-for-word was a punishment, and we weren't allowed to have our own emotions or interpretations—we only gave the answers the teachers wanted to hear. That experience left a mark on me.

Now, my perspective has completely shifted. I find myself buying books on peace, war, and history to better understand the world. I am eager to share these resources with my colleagues and those around me. The next step for me is sharing my own personal story—the one I've shared in this manual—with others. I have realized that my own life is, in itself, a small peace project.

At the recent youth exchange, I saw firsthand the impact books can have. I won't stop using photographs, but I will approach them from a new angle. In the future, I plan to integrate my story and the literature I discovered through this project into my workshops. My hope is that my journey will inspire others to see that every step toward peace—no matter how small—makes this world a better place."

EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT

The "AHA" Moment: When the Personal Becomes Professional

"During one session where we worked on the topic of women in war, I started thinking about victims and how women often stay forgotten in all of that. I was thinking a lot about my mom and how she managed being pregnant at the time of war. As I said earlier, I didn't think that we were war victims as a family, but during this session, I saw that we actually are. That was related to my personal experience and also a real 'AHA' moment. For me, it is important to understand that, because the war in the Balkans plays a big role in everyday life, whether we like it or not. To really understand the war in the 90s in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we have to go back to other wars that happened before.

For my personal life, this training helped me a lot to understand myself and my whole family, and that will help my professional work because now I know how to tell my own story. I see now how my whole life is one big peace project, and this training gave me the power and strength to be better at that.

I like to say that sometimes what we do with our life is something that really makes a change and makes a peace project. I talk with a lot of people who were victims of war and who are now fighting for other victims and doing great stuff, but when it comes to real change, they change the most when they are friends or family with the people from the 'other side.' Members of my family were on different war sides and we just lost as a family during the war, but today, we are rich because we help each other and we continue to be together.

When we met with all the participants at this training, we really changed each other. Even though I knew a lot about the bombardment of Serbia, I got a new perspective at the training from the people of '*Hajde da...*' and Serbia. On the other hand, I learned a lot about how people in Slovenia see us from Bosnia and Herzegovina. All I knew was that they were not part of this war like other ex-Yugoslavia countries and that a lot of people from B&H live there now. Hearing those stories and reading about similar stories in the literature changed me for the better. Now I can do my job even better and with one more great method."

EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT

Alma Gvozden, Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Alma Gvozden was born on March 16, 2004, in Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje. She graduated from Elementary School "Gornji Vakuf" in 2019 and completed her secondary education in electrical engineering at MSS "Gornji Vakuf" in 2023. Currently, she is a third-year student at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering in Tuzla.

Growing up in a post-conflict environment shaped her interest in social engagement and youth work from an early age. Through active volunteering, she developed a passion for promoting dialogue, social responsibility, and positive change. Today, she is dedicated to contributing to the development of local communities across Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Introduction: Personal Background

"My name is Alma Gvozden. I grew up in Gornji Vakuf-Uskoplje, and I currently live in Tuzla. Although I was not born during the war, I encountered the subject of war very early in my childhood because I grew up in a divided environment. Growing up in such a place, themes of peace, war, and conflict were inevitable; they had a significant impact on how I view society and interpersonal relationships.

Even as a child, I became involved with the Youth Center, where I participated in numerous workshops centered on war and peace. Through these activities, I began to develop an understanding of peace work. For the last four years, I have been part of the Youth United in Peace network, where we work with other young people to encourage dialogue, understanding, and active participation in peacebuilding."

Before the Training

"I believe that literature is a representation of the world as an author sees or imagines it. Because it depends so much on the author's vision, I wouldn't completely identify literature with the real world, but I do believe it can open up space for new ways of thinking and different perspectives.

When it comes to using literature to promote peace, I think workshops like the ones we experienced during this training are an excellent tool. It would be very useful if teachers in schools approached literature analysis in similar ways. This would make literature—and the theme of peace—much more relatable to young people. Additionally, literary contests focused on peace could motivate youth to think more deeply and express their own views."

EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT

After the Training

"Sharing my personal story during this project had a positive impact on the other participants. Personal stories create a space for dialogue and the exchange of different perspectives, which encourages empathy and critical thinking.

The topics we covered were directly related to my life because I grew up in a post-war, divided society. Although I did not experience the war personally, its consequences were present in my everyday life. This allowed me to easily connect the themes of peace, conflict, and reconciliation with my own reality. The training helped me to see these experiences more deeply and from a broader perspective.

Before this training, I hadn't read much literature closely related to war and peace, so I'm not sure books played a big role in my understanding of peace at that time. However, reading *The Unwomanly Face of War* was a major 'AHA' moment for me. In war stories, women are often pushed to the background, even though their roles are extremely important. After a war, a man is often remembered as a hero, while a woman remains 'just a woman,' despite the weight of the experiences she carries.

After this training, I have decided to expand the types of books I read. I have gained new knowledge and skills that I plan to apply in my future work with young people and in my activities aimed at building peace."

SOME MORE RESOURCES

Finally, we offer a selection of additional resources that can support your work with young people. These materials align with the themes of peacebuilding, empathy, and critical thinking explored throughout this manual.

These links are intended as a toolkit for you to explore. We encourage you to review them and decide which to show or send to your participants based on the group's age, level of experience, cultural context, and specific needs.

VIDEOS

- **The Benefits of Reading** | Ella Lee | TEDxYouth@MBJH (for participants - a point of view of a young person)
- **What is Literature for?** (for facilitators/older participants)
- **Why reading matters** | Rita Carter | TEDxCluj (for facilitators/older participants)
- **Character Traits Explained** (King and the Dragonflies): Crash Course Kids Literature #2 (for younger participants) - some parts
- **Can stereotypes ever be good?** - Sheila Marie Orfano and Densho (why are “good stereotypes” also problematic)
- **Brené Brown on Empathy**. (empathy explained graphically in two minutes)

MOVIES

- **Freedom Writers (2007)** - A young teacher in a racially divided Los Angeles school inspires her class of at-risk students, deemed incapable of learning, to learn tolerance.
- **Billy Elliot (2000)** - A talented young boy becomes torn between his unexpected love of dance and the disintegration of his family.
- **The Class / Entre les murs (2008)** - Teacher and novelist François Bégaudeau plays a version of himself as he negotiates a year with his racially mixed students from a tough Parisian neighborhood.
- **Die Welle (2008)** - A high school teacher's experiment to demonstrate to his students what life is like under a dictatorship spins horribly out of control when he forms a social unit with a life of its own.
- **Hate (1995)** - 24 hours in the lives of three young men in the French suburbs the day after a violent riot.
- **Fahrenheit 9/11 (2004)** - This documentary presents Michael Moore's view on what happened to the United States after 9/11 and how the Bush Administration allegedly used the tragic event to push forward its agenda for unjust wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- **Crash (2004)** - This drama examines racial and social tensions in Los Angeles, where characters from various backgrounds collide in a series of interconnected stories.

SOME MORE RESOURCES

MOVIES

- **Dangerous Minds (1995)** - LouAnne, a retired US marine, becomes a teacher in a Californian high school. But her mostly Latino and black students from an impoverished and racially segregated locality do not easily embrace her. She tries unconventional methods of teaching (using karate, Bob Dylan lyrics etc) to gain the trust of the students.
- **Dead Poet Society (1989)** - Maverick teacher John Keating returns in 1959 to the prestigious New England boys' boarding school where he was once a star student, using poetry to embolden his pupils to new heights of self-expression.
- **Monsieur Lazhar (2011)** - An Algerian immigrant substitute teacher is brought into a middle school classroom whose students are shaken by their instructor's suicide.

MANUALS

- **COMPASS** - the manual for human rights education with young people
- **Književna analiza i dramski postupci u povećanju osetljivosti mladih za pitanja diskriminacije, nasilja i ljudskih prava**
- **Let peace begin with me: activity book** - designed so that the teacher has a structured series of activities through which to introduce the concepts, values and attributes of Peace Education.
- Priručnik za interkulturalno učenje kroz drama, **BAZAART**

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LITERATURE
AS A BRIDGE