

Teresa :

My name is Teresa Chin, and I'm a producer and designer at youth radio in Oakland, California. Youth radio is a media production company that is driven by young people. So we produce news, arts content and education content, all working with young people, high school age, and college age. Today, we're going to be covering one particular form of media, which is the first-person commentary.

The lesson is about a product that we make, we [inaudible 00:00:41] . It's an important product for youth radio, which is the commentary.

I think it's a great tool for social engagement for civic engagement, because we often have a perspective we want to share, and we want other people to empathize with us. So my goal today is to really get them to think about how they might go about coming up with an idea for a commentary. That's a big challenge.

I'm going to hop right into some brainstorming about what stories we all carry with us that are worth telling. And even if you've done 10 commentaries or zero, there's always a story that you have that is of interest and significance to other people. And you'll see on the board over here, we're going to be talking about three phrases that you are all going to answer based on your personal experience. The first one is I know the next ones I care about and the last one is I wish people understood that.

People often say to me, "but I don't have a story," that's not true. Everybody has a story.

There's some really interesting things written up here. So let's kind of get to know a little bit about the story behind some of this stuff that y'all wrote. Let me read them out loud. I care about loyalty. I care about love. I care about making good art. I care about reforming the foster care system. Yeah, Heaven.

Heaven:

I liked that one because I was in the foster care system. And I want to know like, how would they reform? Like what, what would you want them to reform about the foster care system?

Teresa :

That's really important on day one, to think that you'd be excited about producing a commentary.

Let's go ask them well. So Noel you wrote that one. Tell us about why did you write that?

Noel:

I wrote it because I was like, I was actually born and raised in foster care and school would be one that I want to change. Just kind of the navigations through that, the biases that come with it. Group homes, shelters, even like juvenile hall. Like I decided to come to youth radio because I wanted to get involved with media because growing up, I got a lot of comfort actually through technology, surprisingly, and I thought what's a greater place than a radio station to be able to finally get my voice heard because I always saw a bigger vision radios involved with media, media really gets content out there and I thought, perfect.

Teresa :

Commentaries exist as Op-Eds and newspapers, as animations, as videos, as radio pieces, all those things. But these elements are pretty universal. So when you are stuck writing a commentary, you're like I'm having a hard time ask yourself, like, do I have an argument? Or what's a scene that I can put in there to make it better.

Once we get that brainstorm out, I'll spend time pulling out examples of stories. And my goal is to get young people, to interact with each other, showing them that commentaries can be a tool to start a discussion.

So in a space of one minute, in 60 seconds, this is a commentary by young person named Charlie. Let's see how she did it.

Charlie :

People have gotten my age wrong since I was 10. I remember my fifth grade teacher telling me to dress like a child. I did dress like a child. I just didn't look like one. The creepy part is the attention I get from older men.

Teresa :

Let's open it up initial impressions of Charlie's commentary. What do you all think?

Heaven:

She made a joke out of it, but she was also serious.

Teresa :

Yeah. So I think that's interesting, like the tone is something that you picked up on, right? Like when you hear the title of her commentary, which is the downside of looking older, what tone could that have, could be super sad, right. Could be like super scary. Yeah. So that's just a reminder that, you know, you have control over that and an ending. What I want us to do is take a moment and think of what are some ideas for commentaries that we might write. So I'm going to have a split into pairs because that's always fun and come up with at least one idea that you would want to share with a group that might be a pitch. Break, take five minutes.

Heaven:

Most people, if you walk into a store, they'll follow you around their store because of the way you walk. And it's actually really hard to be that way, because it's just, you can't help the way you walk. It's just that you can't trust the cops because of just what they've done to people..[Crosstalk 00:04:55]

Teresa :

So thank you for sharing in your pairs. So let's go around and kind of just talk about ideas that we came up with for what we could write a commentary about.

Heaven:

People can't walk into stores or walk like around the streets, without people thinking that person is sketchy, that person is going to do something or something like that.

Teresa :

I think with that one, one question I have that would be like the grounded in your personal experience. And also the adding to the story. I think that the phenomenon of like a person at a store falling round, like a young person of color, because, and because they have biases about what the person might do, what you can bring is like, how does it feel as a young person when someone treats you like that? Because, not everyone knows what the impact is. You're almost saying like, I wish people understood

that and then you're giving the point, the argument you want. So I think there's a lot of power and it is timely, which we talked about. Commentaries are really powerful tool for civic engagement. Your story is how you can get people to build empathy and understanding, and that can translate into Op-Eds for a newspaper. It can translate into the way you talk to somebody who disagrees with you or comes from a different perspective. So keep in mind these things, this will make your perspective, hit a little closer to home for people. So thank you very much everybody.

After the lesson, we had time to break off and work on commentaries. And one of the students I had a chance to work with was named Heaven.

Do you want to read it out loud now? I just want to get the sense for the flow. And then I have some thoughts on it.

Heaven:

Yeah of course, the whole thing?

Teresa :

Yes.

Heaven:

I was never proud of being black because I was adopted into a white family.

Teresa :

Heaven had been working on a commentary about being in a family where she was the only black young person. She was in a trans racial adoption. And I had seen this commentary and thought what a powerful story. Let's take a look at where it is and how we can make it have an even greater impact.

Heaven:

Whenever I would go places, I felt like people treated me differently. I never told my mom about this because I didn't want her to feel bad because it wasn't her fault.

Teresa :

I noticed we have a kind of three different arguments that I see, which is not a problem, but we might want to lean into the one that's most important to you. When you say, "whenever I go places, I felt people treated me differently." Give me some examples of how people treat you differently.

Heaven:

People would stare at my mom and I when we went to stores.

Teresa :

I think it's the power that this particular lesson can bring out. It can bring up stuff. That's so great. And it's also something you have to be prepared for as an educator, because you are being entrusted with young. People's really personal narratives. And they're looking to you to say, is this okay? And what you want to message them is not only is it okay, it's power and it's a tool and take it to the place where you want to make the impact and, and run with it.

Heaven:

People have just got to know my experience of how I felt and everything. And I felt like it's really a good learning experience for me, for myself and for other people too.

Teresa :

So I think one of the key takeaways that young people can have when working in digital civics is that creating a commentary is different than creating other types of media. You only have very small space for a commentary or an Op-Ed or an essay. You can't represent all of who you are. And you have to almost decide what aspect of who you are and your identity would be the most powerful to create the change of the conversation you want to have whatever the medium, just make sure that young people know before they start writing their commentaries, because you don't want someone saying, Oh, the whole school is going to hear this. I do not want my peers to know about it. Knowing control of where the story will go, will help them to make appropriate commentaries and then to feel good when those are shared back into the world, think beyond just social media to go back to traditional journalism, because these are products that people really do want and can spread and make change.