

Narrative Geometry: Warli Art and TimeSlips Stories – “Lions, Tigers, and Bears ... Oh My!”



Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

Participants will create stories together using the *TimeSlips* storytelling technique (www.timeslips.org). *TimeSlips* is a storytelling protocol that uses interesting images to create a story through a series of questions posed to the participants. The process takes the frustration out of trying to remember, for people who might have some memory issues, and places the emphasis on imagination.

For this *TimeSlips* activity, the inspiration will be *Warli* paintings by Vaishali Mohite that contain lively images of village life and animals of central India. The animal theme and people's interactions with them will be the focus throughout the activity. An introductory segment, "If I were an animal, what would I be?" will relax the group and help them get acquainted. This is followed by a brief description of *Warli* folk art, a discussion of the animals depicted in the painting, and finally the *TimeSlips* story activity.

This plan is perfect for six to ten participants but will work with a single individual or an intergenerational group. An ideal session includes the group plus a facilitator and a second person to take notes, to record all the participants' responses. Assistants, volunteers, or family members should be utilized to repeat questions for individuals who may be hearing impaired or to interpret answers for individuals who may have speech problems. The activity should be treated as a special event and ideally should occur in a location where the storytelling process can proceed with minimal interruption.

It is strongly encouraged that an animal assisted activity be held that precedes the *TimeSlips* session to further stimulate imaginations and various senses (sight, taste, smell, hearing, and touch) to enliven the elders so they may be able to more actively participate in the storytelling process. This activity includes showing and interacting with live animals. Working with a zoo, wildlife sanctuary, farm or ranch, fish and wildlife education and rehabilitation programs, or some other organization that works with live animals is recommended. While including an animal assisted activity with live animals is recommended, it is **NOT** required to complete this activity. The storytelling protocol can be done without the use of live animals, if preferred.

(Some people may be afraid of animals, have allergies, or be at risk for zoonotic diseases especially for those that are immunosuppressed. People susceptible to these issues should be considered appropriately. Seek the advice of medical staff at the elder care facility. Care must be taken for the proper control and safety of the animals as well.)

The people involved in this plan may involve wildlife outreach and wildlife education personnel, activity directors at elder care facilities, volunteers, teachers, or artists. Volunteers also are needed to assist.

TIME:

Two sessions ranging between a half hour to a little more than one and a half hours total (The first session is an optional presentation, discussion, and interaction with live animals for forty minutes. Followed shortly thereafter by the TimeSlips storytelling component for thirty to sixty-minutes. Multiple TimeSlips sessions over time using different *Warli* paintings or images, however, is recommended. Each of these TimeSlips sessions may or may not be preceded by live animal presentations or interactions.)

MATERIALS:

- Large, self-stick, easel pad paper (25" x 30" is standard) for the note taker to record the developing story
- Marker pen for the note taker
- Magnifying glass for participants who may be visually impaired
- Computer and printer to reproduce and enlarge additional copies of activity images so each participant can hold one up close (If it's possible to project the image large on a screen that would work also. Do this with a computer and digital projector using the links found in this plan).
- Some paper scraps and pencils for each participant
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains* (optional)
- Live animals for presentation, discussion, and interaction (optional)

Optional: It is optional but encouraged to utilize *Narrative Geometry: The Art of Warli* by Vaishali Mohite. This exhibit consists of twenty-five pieces of art depicting snapshots of village life, animals, and traditions in India. Multiple activity plans with an eye towards elders in care facilities and interaction with children are available based on the folk art featured in this exhibit. Instead of using digital images for the TimeSlips storytelling protocol, the actual paintings themselves can be shown and exhibited. For booking information, contact the North Dakota Council on the Arts at #701-328-7590.

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"THREE PLAGUES" (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):

The TimeSlips creative storytelling technique addresses the "Three Plagues" when participants gather in a group setting and everyone contributes to the final story, when facilitators ask open-ended questions that invite the unique, individual expression of every participant, when facilitators echo every response that is given to them, affirming the unique and individual expression of every participant, when facilitators share the stories generated in ways that reflect the dignity of the storytellers (newsletters, bulletin boards, readings, exhibits, collaborations), and when personal relationships are fostered through collaboratively creating and sharing stories.

Loneliness is addressed by bringing people together through animals or animal assisted activities that fosters and encourages interaction with one another. Helplessness is addressed by focusing on imagination rather than memory and by using adaptive materials such as enlarged images and magnifying glasses. Boredom is address by focusing on a visually interesting art form that is familiar yet foreign. Loneliness and helplessness is further addressed by using volunteers and mentors to assist the elders in more fully participating and sharing.

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDIES:

There have been several studies on the TimeSlips method and the underlying mechanisms of Creative Engagement with people suffering from Alzheimer's disease or dementia. One study concluded that "During TimeSlips, persons with dementia [PWD] have the opportunity to exercise creative potentials and remaining strengths and to experience moments of recognition, facilitation, creation, celebration, and play. By design, TimeSlips encourages PWD to become active participants, as opposed to passive recipients, of the program. Increasing opportunities for meaningful activities and person-enhancing interactions, as is accomplished by TimeSlips, promotes the positive psychosocial environment foundational to person-centered care."

--*Phillips, Lorraine J, Stephanie A. Reid-Arndt, Youngju Pak. "Effects of a Creative Expression Intervention on Emotions, Communication, and Quality of Life in Persons with Dementia." Nursing Research 59, no.6 (November/December 2010): 417-425.*

"Animal-assisted activity programs are commonly used in long-term care facilities to enhance the well-being of older residents. Although research suggests that older adults benefit from these programs, little is known about the experience from the perspective of older adults themselves. In this qualitative study, we used direct observation and in-depth interviews to gain an understanding of the experience of participating in a unique rabbit-assisted activity program delivered in a Midwestern residential facility. Several benefits were identified, with no negative experiences articulated by the participants. In addition to finding the rabbits soothing, the rabbits served as a source of social support for some participants and encouraged social interaction. Participants generally felt that rabbits are good animals to use for this type of activity, but expressed a desire for more frequent, longer, and more interactive visits. Facilities considering animal-assisted activities (AAA) programs should consider these factors when designing their programs." [Abstract]

--*Pitheckoff, Natalie, Sara J. McLaughlin, and Kate de Medeiros. "Calm ... Satisfied ... Comforting: The Experience and Meaning of Rabbit Assisted Activities for Older Adults."*

Journal of Applied Gerontology (November 2016). doi: 10.1177/0733464816680322 Epub 2016 November 30.

Activity Plan

SESSION 1 (OPTIONAL; 40 MINUTES):

- 1.** The person or persons directing this activity plan should contact an organization that works with animals. Arrange for a skilled, knowledgeable animal-handler to present and talk about the animals to elders at the care facility. Inquire as to animals that are safe to transport and for human interaction. Consider working with a local zoo, farm or ranch, fish and wildlife education and rehabilitation program, wildlife sanctuary, animal shelter, or some other organization that works with animals. Discuss the presentation regarding space and safety requirements. Arrange for volunteers, if needed, to set up the meeting place.
- 2.** Arrange for a variety of animals to be shown including some animals that may be touched safely. The person directing the plan, with prior conversation and approval with the animal-handler, should encourage the elders to touch the animals and describe how they feel, smell, and look. Include animals that are quite vocal. Such provisions will help prepare the elders to more fully describe the animals they will see and imagine in the *Warli* art during the TimeSlips storytelling section to follow.
- 3.** The person directing the activity plan should introduce the animal-handler and the organization he or she represents. Ask the animal-handler to talk about the animals; where they are from, what they eat, their habitat, their nature - skittish, calm, curious, aloof, and so

on. Again, this will prepare the elders to more richly access their imagination to develop their storytelling skills. Both the person directing the activity and the animal-handler should encourage questions by those in attendance.

- 4.** At the end of the presentation, inform those in attendance that an activity will be held later that same day or the next day, that will involve looking at ancient stylizations of people and animals. Elaborate further by saying a discussion of the artwork will be held whereby participants describe what they see and create a group story based on the images. Inform the elders in attendance as to the date, time, and location of the storytelling session. Actively promote, invite, and encourage participation as a follow-up to the animal assisted activity that was just experienced.
- 5.** Again, while including an animal assisted activity with live animals is recommended, it is NOT required to complete this activity. The storytelling protocol can be done without the use of live animals, if preferred. However, the use of animal assisted activities will enliven the elders greatly and will provide a layer of experiential context and interest for the storytelling session.

SESSION 2 (30 TO 40 MINUTES):

1. Locate a quiet space large enough to accommodate five to ten people. It's preferable to have the group sit around a large table (or circle) so everyone can see one another. The table seating setup helps accommodate materials necessary for the activity and creates a comfortable social setting.
 2. To prepare for the storytelling session make a **large** photocopy of the *Warli* painting by artist Vaishali Mohite shown on page 7. This image will be your "display" copy. (Many care facilities have access to computers with digital projectors. If so, you can project this image and make it very large which is ideal). In addition, make enough paper copies for each participant to hold and closely examine. Have magnifying glasses available for close inspection and to assist those visually impaired.
 3. Let the people in attendance know that a special storytelling activity is going to occur and invite participation. Generate enthusiasm by making it feel like an event. (Prior participation in a related animal assisted activity also will make the session feel unique and interesting.)
 4. The person directing the activity plan should welcome the storytellers and introduce themselves.
 5. As an ice-breaker, and to get the creative juices flowing, start with the following introductory activity. Hand out a scrap of paper to all participants and ask the question, "**If you were an animal, what would you be?**" Have participants write their answer on the paper.
- Go around the table and ask people to say what animal they are and why. Oftentimes there are people who identify with the same animal, and this simple exchange can break down inhibitions as people find common ground they might not have expected. Sometimes the chosen animals represent the personality of the participant. Sometimes it can just be a favorite animal. As facilitator, make sure you tell the group what animal you are. This allows the group to learn something about the facilitator which makes them more comfortable. The person directing the plan could go further by asking people what they imagine to be the character traits of the animals mentioned; smart, shy, nervous, busy, courageous, and so on. This opens people up to one another and helps break down personal walls of isolation.
6. Hand out photocopies or display images of the *Warli* painting on page 7. Give a brief description of the artform by discussing and reading the following:
 - While there are no records of the exact origins of *Warli* art, its roots may be traced to cave paintings over 10,000 years old. Perhaps participants are familiar with Swedish *Bonadsmålningar* painting or the Ojibway tradition of birchbark pictographic storytelling scrolls. (Read the text and show the images on pages 216-217 and page 38 of the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.) Similarly, *Warli* art depicts the culture and life of a people; from planting and harvesting to dances and weddings. Traditionally, it is used to adorn the home. The *Warli* people color the mud walls of their homes with a natural red paint and then use a white paint to create images. Thus, the artist uses red paper and white paint to simulate the mud wall paintings.



Warli painting of village life with fields, a river, and a prominent sun image.

(To create larger examples, select the following link and download the file to your computer: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/9gVtwKDvPucJFi4o1>. This file can be used to print large images at various online service or photography processing stores. Note: After selecting link and closing out of the image, you will be returned to the beginning of the activity plan. Not where you last left off. We apologize for the inconvenience.)

Explain that the artist who created this painting, Vaishali Mohite, is from India and this style of painting is called *Warli* and that it is a folk art from the Maharashtra region of India. Show the group the map below so they know the geographical origin of the art.



Google Maps. (2017). Maharashtra, India. <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Maharashtra,+India/@24.9726725,79.6961976,5.25z/?data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x3bcfc41e9c9cd6f9:0x1b2f22924be04fb6!8m2!3d19.7514798!4d75.7138884>

7. Ask the participants to spend a few minutes looking closely at the painting. Tell them to pay particular attention to the animals. Do they recognize any? Do they see their animal or one that resembles it; the one they identified in the “If you were an animal...” ice-breaker activity? Where might they see their animal in the painting? Ask the participants what animals they see in the painting or what the

animals remind them of? Perhaps one animal looks like a cow or another looks like a Northern Pike fish. Perhaps participants have visited a local zoo, wildlife facility, pet shop, or animal shelter, or animal-handlers have brought similar looking animals to them at the care facility. Ask if the paintings contain any of these animals and what they liked or disliked about their experiences with the animals.

8. Ask participants if they remember any animal stories from growing up; perhaps the *Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling, *Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter, *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell, *White Fang* by Jack London, *Winnie The Pooh* by A.A. Milne, or maybe *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White. Pursue a short discussion, if appropriate. Ask them what they liked about the stories or what they imagine the stories to be about based on their titles. If they don't recall any stories, suggest that they might enjoy reading them or listening to audio versions with family or friends. (Digital audio versions of these stories are available on the internet often with terrific narration).

9. Ask participants to closely look again at the *Warli* painting. Tell them that together they are going to do an activity that will result in an animal story based on this painting; one that can be shared with their grandchildren or great-grandchildren. Tell them to use their imaginations and to consider what makes a good story - colorful characters, unusual settings, lots of adjectives for colorful descriptions, and, of course, drama! Tell them you (the facilitator) are going to ask them a variety of questions, and the note taker is going to write down everything they contribute. In this way, the story will develop.

10. The facilitator asks participants open-ended questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" response. **The person facilitating the activity may want to compose in advance of the storytelling session a series of questions pertaining to the images chosen.** It is important for the person directing the storytelling session to be prepared so time and enthusiasm doesn't wane. Apply these types of

questions to **both** the people **and** the animals depicted in the *Warli* paintings. Think of the facilitator as the "conductor" of the story much like the conductor of a symphony.

- Ask the 4-Ws. (Who? What? Where? When?)
- Ask sensory questions. ("What do you hear" "What do you smell?" "How does she, he, or it feel?" "What does it taste like?" "What color is the animal's hair, skin, or scales?") Point out an animal and ask what the participants imagine the animal to be; a cow, a buffalo, a deer? Then ask the participants to close their eyes and imagine or visual that animal or person in their mind. With their eyes closed, ask them about color, sound, and smell, for instance. Then ask them to open their eyes and share what they imagined for the animal image discussed in the *Warli* painting.
- Ask questions that address things that aren't visible in the image. ("What's happening here?" "What time of year is it?" "What do you think might be happening next?") Also ask about personality traits for the people and animals depicted. ("What would you imagine the horse's character to be like, calm and confident or skittish and scared?" "Is the bunny angry and threatening or loving and warm?")
- Ask questions that emphasize interactions between the people and the animals depicted in the paintings. For example, "What is the man doing with the net?" "Why is he casting the net?" "Is the net easily pulled into the boat or is it difficult? Is it a constant, steady resistance or a shaky, jerky resistance?" "What do you imagine?"
- Ask questions that instill a sense of drama or comedy, mystery,

and intrigue. If you ask, “Who do you think that person’s or animal’s name is?” Follow it up with, for instance, “Snowball the Bunny has a secret. What do you imagine the secret to be?” Then, if a person in the picture was given a name, like Eddie, ask, “Why does Eddie want to know the secret?” And, “How is Eddie going to discover Snowball the Bunny’s secret?”

- Phrasing is important. Create ownership by asking, “What do YOU want to call him?” “What do YOU want to call this story?”

II. Each time a question is asked, repeat all the responses to the teller and group, for example, “Betty said...”

12. The note taker records all the responses.

13. The facilitator should periodically retell the story to keep it fresh in the participants’ minds by reading the responses recorded by the note taker. The facilitator can be dramatic in the retelling which will help shape the tenor of the story.

14. Keep doing this until it feels as if the story is coming to an end and the group is no longer contributing.

15. Do one final retelling and ask participants to give their group story a title.

16. Thank everyone for attending and contributing and, if possible, enjoy a snack and beverage together.

17. Make plans to share the completed stories in bulletins, exhibits, readings, with grandchildren or great-grandchildren, and so on.

Some considerations:

- Encourage everyone to participate and prompt storytellers by name to get their participation.
- Sometimes there is the tendency for people to try and just describe what they see in the painting. Remind them that they are creating a story about what might be or could be occurring. Encourage the group to use their imaginations.

OPTIONAL TIMESLIPS SESSIONS (30 TO 60 MINUTES):

If presentation of and interaction with live animals is utilized prior to the storytelling session, add another forty minutes.

1. To conduct additional animal-themed TimeSlips sessions, utilize the actual artwork from the exhibit *Narrative Geometry: The Art of Warli* by Vaishali Mohite or access the images from that exhibit provided on the following pages.

2. Consider including children in the process for an intergenerational interaction.



Warli painting of elephants and snake by Vaishali Mohite.

(To create larger examples, select the following link and download the file to your computer: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/zhhiNQOoQTFaRxES2> This file can be used to print large images at various online service or photography processing stores.)



Warli painting by Vaishali Mohite showing various animals, birds, reptiles, and people.

(To create larger examples, select the following link and download the file to your computer: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/HdPhkhBayK5wJ0b02> This file can be used to print large images at various online service or photography processing stores.)



Warli painting by Vaishali Mohite of people beneath and climbing a tree while various birds fly about. A musician plays an instrument as a swirl of people dance around him.

(To create larger examples, select the following link and download the file to your computer: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/Msf5Ar42TrfIGnLl> This file can be used to print large images at various online service or photography processing stores.)

AUTHOR • VAISHALI N. MOHITE:

Vaishali holds a Master's degree in Social Work with a Medical and Psychiatric Specialization from Shivaji University in Kolhapur, India. She worked with health sciences at Symbiosis International University in Pune, Maharashtra, India, and as a medical social worker for the Lions Club Eye Hospital in India. Vaishali is also a folk and contemporary visual artist. She creates intricate, colorful, and beautiful traditional sand paintings, *rangoli*, that are used in everyday life, ceremony, and festivals to bless the home, people, and Hindu deities. As a child and young adult, Vaishali learned various folk painting styles from her mother – *Warli*, *Gond*, and *Madhubani*. *Warli* is a traditional art wherein stylized pictographic images are painted on a red background on walls of homes. She has participated in numerous exhibits in India and the United States as well as demonstrated at festivals in the Fargo, ND, and Moorhead, MN, area. Vaishali conducted art workshops for people of all ages with the Indian American Association of the Great Plains (IAAGP) and worked as a trainer conducting art classes for the children's television channel POGO.

AUTHOR • SALLY JEPSSON:

Sally is the gallery manager at the Jamestown Fine Arts Association (JFAA). In addition to her curatorial activities, she coordinates JFAA's Art for Life Program. Jamestown was one of the pilot sites in the North Dakota Council on the Arts (NDCA) *Art for Life Program*, which places artists in eldercare facilities. Sally worked with the NDCA to create a touring exhibition based on the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*. The exhibit, which she coordinates, travels to libraries, cultural centers, and art galleries. Sally also developed *Art for Life Program* activity plans. One plan utilizes illustrations from the *Sundogs and Sunflowers* book and exhibit in the creative storytelling method called *TimeSlips*. Another guides staff and seniors in developing exhibits showcasing the creative results generated from *Art for Life Program* activities.

Sally holds a BA in Art History and Anthropology and a MA in Art History from the University of California at Davis. She worked for the Plains Art Museum, in Fargo, North Dakota, for eleven years, ultimately becoming curator. In 2000, she relocated to Gackle, North Dakota, and began her current work in Jamestown. Sally has served on various boards, numerous grant panels, and has juried a variety of regional art exhibitions and projects. She and her husband, artist Deane Fay, operate an exhibition design and art consulting business, Starview Enterprises, Inc. Together, they create exhibits for museums, cultural centers, city and state institutions, and private businesses. Sally is a Certified *TimeSlips* Facilitator.

AUTHOR • TROYD GEIST:

Troyd is the state folklorist with the North Dakota Council on the Arts who is charged with encouraging the preservation and continuation of folk and traditional arts, heritage, and culture. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Sociology/Anthropology from North Dakota State University, and has participated in and conducted projects involving the impact of folk art and folk traditions on personal health and well-being. Those efforts include traditional storytellers working with fetal alcohol research and prevention programs, Bell's palsy as viewed and treated in traditional cultures, familial Alzheimer's disease tracking using anthropological methods, and the use of culturally infused narrative and traditional music for guided imagery. He directed the original *Art for Life* pilot project in 2001-2003, which measured the effects of long-term folk arts and artist interaction on combating the negative impact of the "Three Plagues" (loneliness, boredom, and helplessness) that many residents in elder care facilities experience. Subsequently, he developed the *Art for Life Program*. With Dr. Timothy J. Kloberdanz, Troyd co-edited, co-compiled, and co-authored the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*.