

BNPower:

BUILDING NARRATIVE POWER

A set of multimedia tools that explore why some ideas take root while others disappear.

Narrative Power: The Epic Adventure

Animation Discussion Guide

This Discussion Guide offers questions for reflection or conversation starters to help explore the ideas raised in the film. The questions are organized to support individual inquiry or group conversation among colleagues, in coalition meetings, the classroom, workshops and community events. It's best to watch the entire film together leaving plenty of time for discussion afterwards. Try to be as generous with discussion as you see fit. There are also prompts to "go deeper" at your own pace—either as part of the discussion or on your own.

The fundamental tenet is that narratives do not take hold simply by repeating messages. Creating community-driven stories is important, hard work—crucial, in fact, if we are to realize a just world. But even the best stories won't have the effect we want unless we also build narrative power.

To transform dominant narratives, it is necessary to build infrastructure across different organizations and institutions for the long term so our stories become rooted and reproduced by systems and structures across society.

However you found your way to this guide, we hope it will help you amplify your narrative power and build on what you have done before.

Reflections:

What does the film tell us about where we are and how to get where we want to go?

Narrative Power is More Than Powerful Narratives | Questions 1 – 7

1. At the start of the film, Fanny is frustrated that her actions aren't getting the results she wants. She meets Sage the fox who nudges her to think deeply. Reflecting on the film opening, what did the images bring for you? How might they illustrate how narratives shape what we think and who we are?
2. Sages says: "This work is about so much more than messaging. It's about shifting the way structures reproduce meaning on a mass scale." What does that mean to you and your work of narrative change?

The power to define what's true, to determine the story of the past and institutionalize ideas so they replicate, this is narrative power.

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3. Fannie and Sage explore some of the systems and structures that shape our thinking, knowledge, and beliefs. How do you see the relationship between structures, systems, and narratives?



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5. What do you think is the difference between powerful narratives and narrative power? Why is that difference important? What does it make you think about organizing in relation to narrative power?
6. Reflecting on your own work to change narratives and build narrative power, what seeds or narratives are you planting?
 - a. How would you describe the soil and conditions that shape how your narratives are taking root and/or growing right now?
 - b. How would you describe the narrative “forest” where you are working?
 - c. What narratives, if any, are you planting, tending or growing, for lasting change?
7. Reflecting on social justice movements as a whole, in what ways have we “thrown” our stories out there without enough analysis of the conditions? What did Fannie mean by needing to have a plan?

Our Beautiful Legacy | Questions 8 – 12

8. Our crew looked at two examples of building narrative power that helped transform life as we know it, the movements of the 1960s and the tobacco control movement. What do you think Sage the fox meant when he said: “The good news is we don’t need to build new narrative power from the ground up. There’s already plenty of solid foundation we can work with.”
 - a. What lessons did you draw?
 - b. What, if any, applied to your own work?
9. Are there other moments from history on which you draw for inspiration and guidance in your work to build power and build narrative power? If so, please share at least one.

10. Below is a chart outlining some of the areas where structural power shapes narrative power and vice versa. Please reflect on any additional structures and how they shape narrative power and, if you'd like, add them to the list.

SITES FOR INFLUENCING STRUCTURAL POWER AND NARRATIVE POWER

<p>Schools, Arts, Media, and Culture: Authority to determine what's learned in school; the authority to determine what's "officially" valued as art; the power to control how people interpret and communicate</p>	<p>Shaping the story of the past; choosing what events, facts, memories are important enough to be saved and passed on as knowledge from generation to generation; determining what's beautiful, what's worth preserving, which also shapes the story of who is considered valuable and worthy of dignity. Training professionals on what is considered fact; what's important to know in order to be considered qualified to do their job.</p>
<p>Judicial, Legal, and Legislative: Authority to determine what's legal and illegal</p>	<p>Shaping the story of what's fair, what's safe, what "can be done," what's considered "legitimate" and practical approaches to solving community problems.</p>
<p>Work and Marketplace: Authority to determine wages and prices of goods</p>	<p>Shaping the story of what jobs are valuable, what things are valued, what should be produced, wealth accumulation.</p>
<p>Add your favorites here: <i>What other sites of structural power do you find as you do your work?</i></p>	<p><i>How do those sites interact with or reproduce narrative power?</i></p>

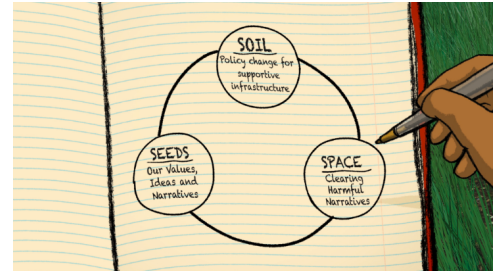
11. Have you, or groups or movements you've observed, ever tended to the wrong "forest?" What happened? What did you learn? Why do you think our work can sometimes strengthen (versus weaken) harmful dominant narratives?

12. During this segment, we see four legendary changemakers, who are now ancestors, in the sky above our s/heroes: [Bayard Rustin](#), [Grace Lee Boggs](#), [Marsha P. Johnson](#), and [Larry Itliong](#). Please take a moment to learn more about them.



We're On Our Way! | Questions 13 -17

13. After leaving the café, our crew boldly charged ahead only to have their path blocked by the river—an obstacle for which they hadn't planned but strategy helped them get to where they wanted to go. Reflecting on your own work, what tools and methods do you use to:
- Assess current conditions?
 - Develop the vision of what you want to see in the world?
 - Identify strategies to help you get to your vision?

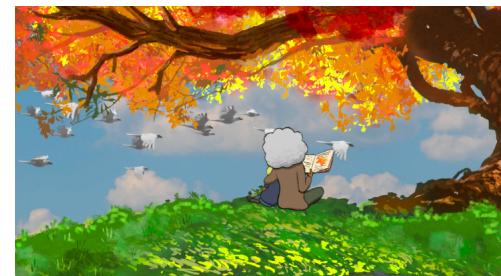


14. We hear about the “big mix” of systems, practice, history, conditions, belief, and power as fundamentally shaping the world and who we are in it. How does this “mix” shape our approach to building narrative power?
15. Reflecting on the examples of the [Equal Justice Initiative](#) and the [National Domestic Workers Alliance](#), what are takeaways for your own work?
- Are there ideas or strategies you are considering integrating into your own efforts?
 - Are there other current examples of narrative power building that inspire you?

16. What's your vision of the world you're trying to achieve? What's at the root of your “good” forest?



17. The film closes with our future Fannie in conversation with her granddaughter. What do you think would be a concrete indicator we achieved narrative power in our world that you would want to share with future generations?



End