



To create safe and brave spaces of belonging,  
we need to commit to doing *our work* before we do  
*the work* and to working within our scope and skill.

## ***Integration Idea***

# **Rising Strong and the Stories We Make Up**

### **Key concepts:**

- Introducing the idea of the Stormy First Draft.
  - When something happens that triggers strong emotions, we often immediately create a story to make sense of what happened. These stories are often one-sided worst-case scenarios, and they seldom contain the full truth. We call this story the Stormy First Draft (SFD).
- Explaining that a SFD is our brain's way of making sense of something when we don't have full information. We are a meaning-making species. In the absence of data, we make up stories because having complete information is a self-protective survival skill. But these stories often magnify our fears and anxieties. When we learn how to get curious and reality check the stories we make up, we can increase our resilience and reset faster after failures, setbacks, and disappointments.
- Reality checking using the phrase "The story I'm making up" is a powerful tool for personal curiosity and reflection. When we are hooked by emotion, the brain has a hard time focusing on anything else. Being curious and checking the accuracy of a story with others can prevent the story from festering or turning into a bigger problem.
  - We recently had a group of high school juniors tell us that this phrase brought their entire friend group closer, and they've taught their parents to use it. Now these students use the acronym SMU in texts for Story Making Up.

### **Be mindful:**

- The phrase is an "I statement" and shouldn't be turned into: "The story *you're* making up . . ."
  - If there's trust and safety in the relationship, we can always respectfully ask the other person, "What's the story you're telling yourself about what's happening?"

- Using the term “The story I’m telling myself” is never permission to be hurtful or disrespectful. When used appropriately, the tool drives curiosity and connection.

### Examples:

- You’re having a tough texting conversation with your friend or someone you really like, and the three bubbles come up. Then they go away. And you don’t hear from them. It’s been two hours. During those two hours, how easy is it to make up crazy stories about what’s happening?

### Classroom Discussion Ideas:

- Explain to students that our brains are wired to help us survive. When the brain senses danger or stress (even when it is just a text conversation), it craves a story that will help make sense of the situation. *Who is against us? Who is on our side? Who is dangerous? Who might hurt us?* Most of us make up stories that exaggerate our fears and anxieties. Our brains love those stories, and they chemically reward us with a sense of calm for having a complete story, **even when the story isn’t accurate.**
  - We tell ourselves our friend hates us and is talking about us with other friends because she never texted back. The truth is that her battery ran out and she couldn’t respond to our text.
  - We tell ourselves he didn’t text back because he likes someone else. The truth is that his mom took his phone because he was being mean to his little brother.
- When we catch ourselves making up these stories, we can take a breath and say aloud or write down, “The story I’m telling myself right now . . .” or “The story I’m making up . . .”—it helps us start a reality-checking process.
- Be sure to explain to students that sometimes their SFD will turn out to be true. When that happens it might require a rumble, a conversation, or even some boundary-setting.
- Try using this rumble process if problems arise in group projects in the classroom. When groups are getting upset, pull them aside and have them start the conversation with “The story I am telling myself...”.

**In addition to reading *Dare to Lead*, you can learn more here:**

**Books:**

*Rising Strong*

**Learning Lab Videos ([brenebrown.com/dc-learning-labs](https://brenebrown.com/dc-learning-labs)):**

*What happens when we get blindsided by the stories we make up?*

*How do you tell when you're hooked by emotion?*

*How do we deal with a "gotcha" culture?*

