

YOUTH GARDEN TOUR GUIDING



The following curriculum provides instruction and guidelines for training youth to design and lead tours of their own community gardens and urban agriculture projects. This curriculum is designed for a one-day workshop to teach tour directing skills to youth ranging in age between 13 to 21. By the end of the training, youth will have learned and practiced some key aspects of the arts of public speaking, storytelling, and guiding groups.

The entire training process is intentionally participatory and student-driven; the trainer is primarily present as a coach, facilitator, and model tour guide. Pedagogical research and youth empowerment programming both demonstrate how horizontal relationships within the classroom are “not only a way of teaching but also a way of practicing democracy.”¹

¹ Kathleen Yep. “‘For What You See as Just’: Paulo Freire and Asian American Studies in Community-Based Learning.” *The Journal for Civic Commitment* XVI, no. 1 (January 2010): 3.



Guiding is often considered one of the world's most culturally ubiquitous and enduring professions. Guides can help translate and share authentic, meaningful stories about places, people, and histories to enhance cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect.

Breaking Ice and Building Trust

Begin by introducing yourself genuinely and warmly to each student, modeling how tour guides connect with and relate to their audiences. The primary aim is fostering a welcoming, safe, and comfortable space. Explicitly addressing and modeling signs of respect, such as turning off and putting away cell phones and ear buds, not speaking out of turn, and maintaining eye contact while others are talking, for example, is encouraged.

Once you have gathered everyone's attention and the workshop has officially begun, initiate introductions. Perhaps have each student share their name, garden site and how they prefer to be identified and addressed (including preferred nickname, gender pronoun, etc.). Add fun, memorable facts to the introduction as applicable, such as a favorite vegetable, why they like gardening, or a favorite book or musician.

What makes a good story?

Stories should have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Being truthful and authentic is also important.

Key Ingredients and Practice

Stories are key to identity formation, whether as people or whole communities, and give meaning to our lives, work and cultures. Emphasize, and perhaps ask youth to reflect upon, how and why voicing one's own experience matters, for yourself and your community. Elicit examples of storytelling as empowerment. Prompt students by asking them to think of a story, song, or other artwork that left a deep impression, perhaps even changed their lives somehow.

Telling a great story

Having spent some time on story subject matter and organization, transition into delivery methods and techniques. Demonstrate how to hold and use a microphone, and give each student an opportunity to practice with the microphone. Discuss effective body language, such as eye contact, smiling, body posture, and movement. Explain the importance of avoiding turning one's back on the audience when guiding tour participants along a garden path. Audience engagement remains another core element of good storytelling; model and verbalize the importance of paying attention to one's audience and showing respect. For instance, use inclusive and gender neutral language, such as "everyone" instead of "guys," and avoid assumptions about gender pronouns.

From story telling to tour guiding

Next, transition to a time in which participants imagine and develop the content of their own stories in the context of their physical garden spaces. Perhaps ask them to envision their garden for the first time, practicing seeing through the eyes of others. Encourage students to use the landscape or props in their tours, integrating their stories into scenes, such as a particular fruit tree or garden tool. On a more practical level, remind guides to clearly state shared agreements for their audiences, as you have modeled in your teaching space, such as "kindly refrain from cell phone use during tour, listen quietly while others are speaking."

Developing your own story

If necessary, to help prompt enhanced youth creativity, suggest that they begin by identifying elements they value about gardening or farming—why does this work matter? What do you want to share about your garden and experience? Then instruct students to write and draw their stories, combining visual descriptions and written narrative. Some may wish to begin with an outline. Once they have drafts written or mapped out, encourage the youth to share their garden stories in small groups of 2-3 students to provide feedback to one another. Then shift to the larger group to share stories and feedback.

Sharing and practicing stories

Provide youth with ample positive feedback and encouragement as they bravely speak in public. Stress the importance of practicing, polishing transitions, key moments, and the arc of the story. Identify the powerful elements in each student's story, offering plenty of genuine affirmation.

Bringing it all together—guiding with story

Close the workshop with a final performance or dress rehearsal of each youth's story/tour, presented to the group for practice and constructive feedback. Give ample space for the youth to comment on one another's presentation, keeping your own comments to a minimum. Interject if someone seems too harsh or offended, or if there is insufficient positive feedback for each student. Spend a short amount of time revisiting the power of storytelling, asking students to share their own impressions and thoughts. Be sure youth are clear on any logistical details of the tour day as well. Knowing what to expect in terms of timing, transportation, and tour participant numbers will help ease any anxieties.

Gently yet firmly remind youth to practice as much as possible and to have fun! Thank them and remind them: their stories matter.