

The “YOU Are your Story” (YAYS) Syllabus for Secondary Schools
- Socio-emotional training for young people

Course Outline

Contents	Page
Course Summary	3
Context & Needs	4
Key Concepts	4 - 6
Learning Outcomes	7
Course Goals	8
YAYS Pedagogy (Notes for Teachers/Headteachers)	9 - 11
Assessment Plan	12
Key Research	12
Class Outline	13 - 15

Course Summary:

“*YOU Are Your Story*” is a course of 18 experiential workshops informed by evidence-based research into the benefits of story-guided mentoring. Sessions are designed to dovetail with existing PSHE provision or as a stand-alone programme.

The focus of this programme is socio-emotional training for all-comers, irrespective of the level of their formal education.

The programme illustrates that all our attempts at meaning and managing our sense of self are filtered through story structure. We now have compelling evidence to support the finding that a knowledge of narrative form (what we can call *classical story structure*) is the most effective personal tool to:

- Manage emotional challenges in our lives
- To sustain self-esteem
- To build and support intimacy and trust in relationships
- To provide the bedrock for a sense of purpose and meaning in life

Story structure synthesises many social disciplines and developmental tools including; philosophical and ethical consideration, the development of empathy and compassion, and the inspiration for dogged allegiance to a personal value system. So the YAYS programme embeds 18 key social skillsets that flow from story-guided mentoring. (These skillsets are listed below, and key research documents are referenced in Appendix 1).

Context, & Assessing Needs:

The largest item of cost for the health services in the UK and the USA is provision for mental health issues. This cost dwarfs the spend on heart disease and cancer. Prescribing anti-depressants (which are only “effective” for 50% of recipients) and attempting to provide one-to-one talking therapy for individuals who reach a point of dire need are both strategies to deal with symptoms and not causes. To date, we provide very little in the way of preventative support and socio-emotional training for young people. Yet the latest research confirms, once again, that this is the only realistic way to healthily address an endemic need. And we have the tools readily available to begin this process at secondary school level. As an analogy, educational institutions have tended to wait until students are seen drowning, and then dive in to attempt to life-save them one at a time. Would it not make more sense to teach them all to swim?

Key Concepts:

We will all experience emotional challenges and stress in our lives - some of us more than others - and some of us will handle those challenges better than others. The skills and ability to manage loss, grief, illness, physical trauma, abandonment, betrayal, disappointment, emotional abuse, fear, anxiety, and even some types of depression are *learned*, they are not given to us innately at birth. The ability to address and author the narrative in our own head about who we are and our basic value, which is a common factor in addressing these challenges, is also a learned skill. The grammar, the language, that lies behind these skills is story structure.

Stories are among the most powerful forces exerted on our lives. Stories start and end wars. They cause us to fall in and out of love. Stories gave birth to, and sustain, the great organised religions of the world.

But the biggest story in our lives is the one we tell ourselves about ourselves.

Why, for example, do other people's words and attitudes towards us upset us so much? To understand the *why* - to understand why stories are so powerful - is to begin to wrestle back authorship of our emotional life.

Stories are not constructed from words - you can tell a story through dance or a silent film - nor are they constructed from facts or events. Stories are an *angle* on events - a rhythmic process that adds up to more than the sum of its parts, like a good song. And, like music, the grammar of language is a learned one. The good news is we already know a lot of that grammar - but it is rarely consciously available to us.

We can all learn to be the hero of our story - in fact we already are. We just need to see and feel it. Understanding the hidden language of story can be the swiftest and most effective route to author our own lives.

The skill to understand the manipulation in the stories that others push on us, and to author new stories for ourselves is the key to what we might call *authentic* living.

To live well we need to tell and re-tell stories that carry a balanced and authentic perception of who we are and what we believe in. This ability is not just fundamental to maintaining or regaining a sense of well-being, but it is the key skill that enables us to function in a healthy way in any role of responsibility and intimacy.

A thorough understanding of story structure - the universal language of empathy and meaning - empowers our healthy function as friends, family members, parents, partners, employers, employees, as members of our wider community, and of course in our ability to look after ourselves when under emotional pressure. Story structure is a healthy, and universal, coping mechanism. But, more than this,

it is the shared language of intimacy - transcending gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, age, political and religious beliefs, it connects us all.

So, in the context of emotional health, stories are hugely powerful forces. We may have very limited control over the physical circumstances of our lives - we cannot prevent an economic recession or a hurricane - but the way in which we narrate the significance of all events in our lives is entirely in our control *if* ... we understand story grammar.

It is by making story structure *conscious* that we begin to wrestle control over the patterns of our thinking and the way that pervasive thoughts and ideas guide our emotional experience of life. It is in the ability to rapidly build new stories about our existence that we can sustain optimism and meaning in the face of extreme challenge.

Story structure exists in our lives like breathing. We have *automatic* breathing that occurs without thought, and *intentional* breathing where we can control, to a considerable extent, our mood, our heart rate, our emotional state.

Like automatic breathing, stories will impinge on every aspect of our thinking and emotional life whether we like it or not. But we can engage with story grammar in an intentional way, and begin to author our own lives.

As the great Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, wisely observed, "Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate."

He could have put this in a slightly different way, and said, "Until you make the unconscious narratives in your thinking conscious, you will live the script someone else wrote for you, and not the one you author for yourself."

Learning Outcomes set within 4 Primary Skillset themes:**Philosophy & Personal Values (foundations for meaning)**

1. Story grammar - the language of meaning (study, identify, detect, rewrite)
2. A Conscious Personal Value System (name, express, apply, evaluate, revise)
3. "Authenticity" skills e.g. dialectical thinking (memorise, research, practice)
4. 100% responsibility for own words and actions (record, review, dramatise, accept)

Communication with Self

5. 5 elements, Self-Communication (recognise, describe, develop, incorporate).
6. Compassion for Self and Others (identify, articulate, demonstrate, enhance)
7. Confronting 4 negative self-narratives (identify, classify, reframe, modify).
8. Reframing self-narrative through Vivid Imagination and "expressive writing" (compose, construct, depict, design, reconstruct, reorganise)

Communication in Relationships

9. Empathetic listening (understand, demonstrate, test, appraise, adapt)
10. Boundaries & Assertiveness (observe, distinguish, experiment, differentiate, protect, adapt)
11. Conflict resolution skills (describe, explain, apply, anticipate)
12. Subtext in communication (record, distinguish, interpret, debate)
13. Intimate relationship skills - e.g. positive affect systems (identify, explain, experiment, test)

Trauma & Post-traumatic Growth

14. Self-healing strategies (recall, apply, experiment, invent)
15. Accepting imperfection - Living with lack of control (define, observe, teach, editorialise, integrate)
16. Trauma & Recovery / best living (recognise, define, interpret, plan, reframe, manage).
17. The psychology of habit building (enumerate, identify, practice, collaborate)
18. Contributing to the community at large (identify, plan, execute, review)

Course Goals, Objectives and Intended Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this programme we expect students to have a secure grasp of socio-emotional strategies to improve their communication skills when under emotional pressure, and to have a better ability to manage their own mental health.

- We want students to have greater control and authorship over the emotional challenges in their lives.
- We want the standard of empathetic communication to improve in both work and familial contexts.
- We want to embed compassion towards others and ourselves as a learned skill that is accessible when most needed.
- We want to ignite a sense of personal responsibility in students, guided by an appetite for ongoing philosophical curiosity.
- We want to illustrate to students that social skills are learned skills and, through practice within an educational context, we want students to confirm to themselves the benefits of developing these new skillsets.

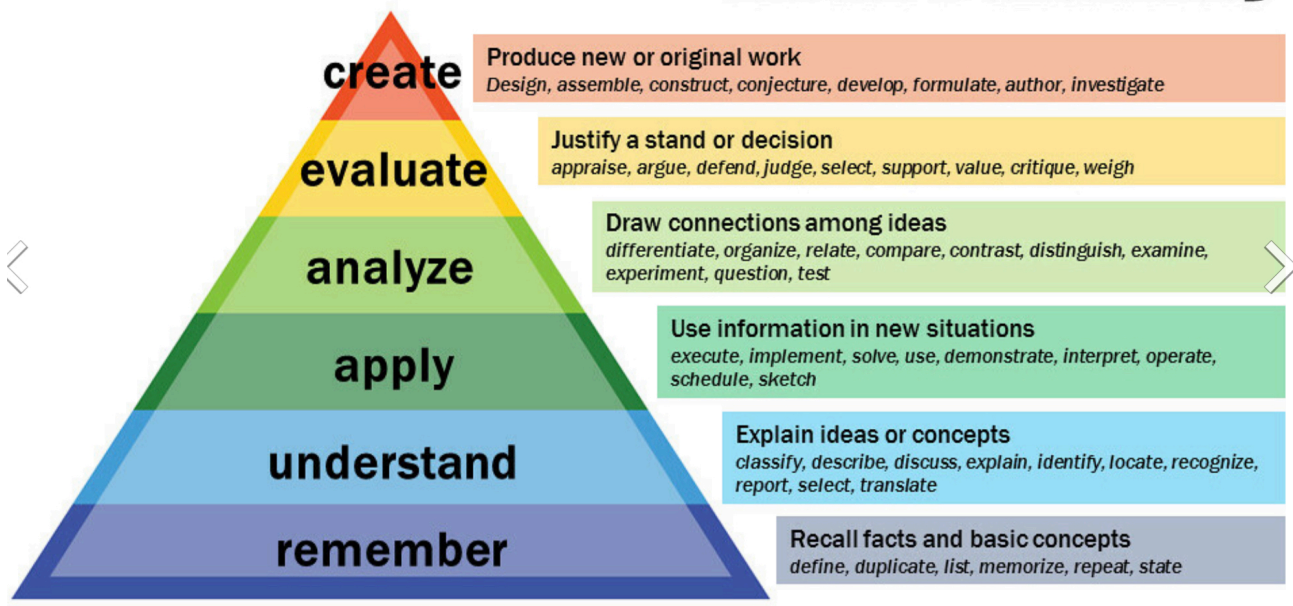
This programme is a formative process on a learning curve that will last a lifetime. What is endemically clear is that, without these types of interventions, the scale of mental health crises will grow.

The progression of ILO's (intended learning outcomes) are listed in the Class/Skillset grid.

YAYS Pedagogy - Notes for teachers and headteachers

The pedagogical approach is *learning through practice*. Bloom’s traditional taxonomy (graphic below) applies. This program is designed as a learning environment guided predominantly by what Bloom defines as *affective* and *psychomotor* strategies - as opposed to a primarily *cognitive* approach.

Bloom’s Taxonomy



As listed above, there are 18 core Skillsets / Learning Outcomes embedded within the structure of the program. They operate within 4 primary skillset themes - though there are many points in the syllabus where these themes crossover. For example, *self-healing strategies*, which is listed under “*Trauma & Post-Traumatic Growth*” is relevant, also, as a factor in “*Communication with Self*”.

The learning ladder is not hierarchical and students will often be practising “higher” levels of learning in early classes. Process and Outcome descriptors are in brackets. So, a description of the Intended Learning Outcomes linked to no. 1 in the list is, “By the end of the program, students will be able to recognise, describe, develop and incorporate effective self-communication skills.”

Notes on pedagogy & research background:

The skillsets that we seek to investigate in this programme are, self-evidently, those that require the dedication of a lifetime and will involve repeated backsliding. This is not an hierarchical academic process. With this in mind we must be inventive and flexible in attitudes to pedagogy and measurement of “success” and attainment.

In fact, if students identify the programme as “academic” and numerically assessed, then the programme is likely to be less effective.

The primary research and arbitration of both process and assessment lies less with Blooms Revised Taxonomy and more with the distillation of research in the field of psychology, neuroscience and the psycho-dynamics of classical story structure, thus “story-guided mentoring”.

Key formative research papers are listed in Appendix 1.

Class Setting:

One of the primary challenges of introducing these skillsets effectively is to distinguish their investigation, as much as possible, from the natural rhythm of a normal school day. Students should have every encouragement to feel that academic judgment is “parked” during these classes and that everything about these sessions is designed to help them nurture themselves in a totally non-judgmental environment.

Because of the nature of the skills being investigated, it is important that the facilitator/ teacher acknowledge their own fallibility - this is not a master/ student dynamic, but one of equally flawed humans trying to support each other.

The first session is crucial to establish these principles.

There are proven benefits to the introduction of these workshops irrespective of the limitations of provision within an educational context. At the same time, the mechanisms

of delivery are hugely significant in the efficacy of the sessions. With this in mind, there is a list, below, of what might be regarded as “Gold Standard” pedagogic elements.

Most secondary schools will find it difficult to implement many, or most, of these recommendations - but, if we are to take the responsibility of socio-emotional training for young people, then this is the yardstick to measure our commitment.

In an ideal world story-guided mentoring classes would take place in a “neutral” space that is not a normal classroom. In practice, of course, this is generally unrealistic. So a number of strategies can be employed to break-up the automated expectations of students. These can include: use of music, changing seating arrangements, extending the length of classes to include break-time, beginning a class in an outside setting etc. An aside: for a number of different reasons, boys can find it very difficult to suspend forceful skepticism as a defence mechanism (particularly in a co-ed environment), and boys-only classes is sometimes a good idea, particularly in years 12/13.

“Gold Standard” learning elements:

- Co-ed classes should have mixed gender in each break-out group.
- Attempt to split/ change normal friendship groups. Rotate groups regularly.
- Use of curated music on entry to class and during some workshop sessions (The Institute of SGM can provide playlists).
- “Neutral” teaching environment, ie one that is not associated with academic classes (theatre studio, “playroom”, small gym, external location)
- A trained and dedicated SGM facilitator/ teacher if possible (ie a teacher NOT associated with academic classes)
- YAYS classes at least once a fortnight.
- Class duration - 90 to 120 minutes.

Classes that are longer than a normal 60 minutes duration allow for more effective framing techniques and distinguish themselves from academic structures. One way to achieve this is to run the session across a break time or lunchtime, where participants are free to snack during class.

N.B. The list above is a reference for optimal settings, not a pre-requisite for delivery of the YAYS programme.

Potential Assessment Plan:

An online multiple-choice exam + a self-reflective “feedback” statement at the end of each year.

A pass rate of 75% gives the student a certificate of YAYS proficiency.

The test can be taken repeatedly.

Appendix 1:**Some Key Contextual Research Papers for YAYS:**

2006. Michael H. Kernis, Brian M. Goldman, “A Multicomponent Conceptualisation of Authenticity: Theory and Research”.

2008, Edward Deci and Richard Ryan “Hedonia, Eudaimonia, and Well-being: An Introduction”

1990, Grencavage, L. M., & Norcross, J. C. “Where are the commonalities among the therapeutic common factors?” *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 21(5), 372–37

2006 J. Douglas Bremner, a meta-analysis. “Traumatic Stress: Effects on the Brain” -Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience

2011 Martins C.M.S. Tofoli S.M.C. Baes C.V.W. Juruena M.F. A systematic review analysing the occurrence of early life stress in adult psychiatric patients.

2013 Ezequiel Morsella and T. Andrew Poehlman, “The inevitable contrast: Conscious vs. unconscious processes in action control.”

2008 John A. Bargh and Ezequiel Morsella, “The Unconscious Mind”.

2003 Tracey, Terence JG , "Concept mapping of therapeutic common factors", *Psychotherapy Research*, 13 (4): 401–13,).

1992 Anthony Greenwald, “New Look 3, Unconscious Cognition Regained”.

2013, Edited by Alfredo Pereira, Jr. & Dietrich Lehmann “The Unity of Mind, Brain and World: Current Perspectives on a Science of Consciousness”.

2017 “The Impact of Narrative Expressive Writing on Heart Rate, Heart Rate Variability, and Blood Pressure Following Marital Separation” in the journal *Psychosomatic Medicine*.

2016, Igor Grossmann, “A Heart and A Mind: Self-distancing Facilitates the Association Between Heart Rate Variability and Wise Reasoning”

Prospective Class Outline

2 classes per term from the beginning of Year 9 to end of Year 11.

The programme is guided by the 4 primary story motifs: ORPHAN, WANDERER, WARRIOR, MARTYR/PHOENIX, and these cross-refer to the 4 Learning Outcome themes; Philosophy & Personal Values, Communication with Self, Communication in Relationships, Trauma & Post-Traumatic Growth.

	CLASS TITLE	CONTENT	WORKSHOP ELEMENT	STORY ELEMENT	LEARNING OUTCOMES/ SKILLSETS
Class	Theme for 1st four classes Philosophy & Personal Values ORPHAN	Story as METAPHOR! First of the great story motifs. The theme carries through first four classes.			
1	What is ... Your HERO'S JOURNEY?	Story grammar - Intro to whole yays course: The language of meaning - the 4 story motifs - storyboarding - the shared conscious	Storyboarding - second half of a story - Spike Jonze's "How did they get Here?"	Metaphor	1, 2
2	Values & Meta-Values - your personal compass	The neuroscience of story. Psycho-education in to physiology of stress/trauma	"Who do you admire & why" exercise.	Internal Journey	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18
3	Authenticity - a learned skill	Grammar of flaws/pressure/growth	Spew - six months to live - Analyse opening of "As Good as it Gets"	Allies & Enemies Antagonistic Forces	1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 13, 15, 16, 17
4	100% Responsibility - for what you can control	Response NOT reaction.		Unconscious & Conscious goals	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16

	CLASS TITLE	CONTENT	WORKSHOP ELEMENT	STORY ELEMENT	LEARNING OUTCOMES/ SKILLSETS
	WANDERER - curiosity & observation - Communication with Self	Second of the great story motifs. Curiosity & Observation. Next 4 classes			
5	Talking to Yourself - the first sign of health	The 5 elements of self-communication	The “trigger recognition” exercise.	The Wanderer Motif	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
6	Compassion - for self and others. The beginning of wisdom	Learning to see the true meaning behind words and actions.	Observing and writing subtext in movie clip	Authorial POV	1, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14. 15. 16. 17, 18
7	The 4 big lies to oneself - negative narratives	Orphan, Wanderer, Warrior, Martyr/Phoenix	Curiosity & Observation	Flaws, obstacles, growth	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14,
8	Vivid Imagination - authoring your reality	The neuroscience of “expressive writing” - exposure therapy.	Identifying the inciting incident & link to opportunity & growth	Narrative Form	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 14, 16,

	CLASS TITLE	CONTENT	WORKSHOP ELEMENT	STORY ELEMENT	LEARNING OUTCOMES/ SKILLSETS
	WARRIOR - communication with others	The 3rd great story motif. Assertiveness, adherence to value system, dogged determination.		Act two	
9	Empathetic Listening - Heroic Communication	“Tell me more”	Assertiveness/ respect exercise	Brave choices under pressure	2, 3, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18
10	Boundaries & Assertiveness	Flexibility of healthy boundaries - and using assertive “scripts”	Spew - Trauma 1 (?) Spew - gratitude	Learning through adversity	2, 3, 4, 9, 10 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18
11	Conflict Resolution	Win/win thinking. Meta-values. Dialectical thinking.	Spew - Trauma 2 Identifying one area to improve.	Anti-story, anti-drama	1, 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18
12	Subtext - your Superpower	Seeing the true meaning BEHIND words & actions.	Film clip analyses	Inter-personal conflict.	1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 11, 16, 18
13	Intimacy - another learned skill	Positive aspect, trust, consistency, unconditional	Empathetic listening & “turning towards” technique	Comfort with lack of drama	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18

	CLASS TITLE	CONTENT	WORKSHOP ELEMENT	STORY ELEMENT	LEARNING OUTCOMES/ SKILLSETS
	MARTYR/PHOENIX - trauma & post-traumatic growth				
14	Self-Healing	Solomon's wisdom "this too shall pass" -	Sitting with discomfort - the MACE technique	Climactic Sequence (metaphor)	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17
15	Imperfectionism	Acceptance & forgiveness. The mythology of perfection & parenthood	Identifying meta-values & "neutral" statements	Internal Journey	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
16	Post-traumatic Growth	Single genre lies.	Flip the genre exercise.	Entire classical story structure.	All ILOs
17	New Habits	Cycle of trigger/ craving/routine/ & reward (Emotional escape) - link to 4 negative narratives	Identifying trigger/ reward in a "bad" habit.	3 Act Structure	ALL ILOs
18	Happiness is a by-product	Stoicism, Eudaimonic tradition. Counter-hedonism. Selfish to Selfless - growth through service to cause greater than oneself. (Erin Brockovich)	The 3 x "thank you" cards. Erin Brockovich ending - analysis.	Unconscious growth. Shift in POV. (Brockovich & "It's a Wonderful Life").	All ILOs

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