As we grow up, it is important to ask ourselves the question, “Who am I?” It seems like a simple question, but it is not. Identity—who we are—is complex, *multidimensional*, and *fluid*. For all human beings, a *key (important)* part of developing our identity is *storytelling*. As we grow up, we meet new people and we experience new things. Our brains organize all of this information into stories. The way that we tell ourselves these stories helps us to create our identity. Author and journalist Emily Esfahani Smith explains it like this:

We all tell ourselves stories. Most stories we have read or heard follow simple *patterns*. But our lives do not follow simple patterns. Our experiences and identities are *constantly shifting*, and so we have to create stories in our minds to *make sense of (understand)* all of it. We take all of the *disparate (different)* pieces of our lives and put them together into one big story. When we create this big story, we can see our lives as something *coherent*. Psychologists say that when we see our lives as a coherent story, it helps us make meaning of, or understand, who we are in the world.¹

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¹ Adapted from Emily Esfahani Smith, “The Two Kinds of Stories We Tell About Ourselves,” TED website (IDEAS.TED.com), January 12, 2017.
REFLECTION QUESTION: Why might a coherent life feel more meaningful than a life that is incoherent (not coherent)?

_A coherent life might feel more meaningful than a life that is incoherent because _________________________________.

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**Defining Narrative Identity**

The stories we tell ourselves about what we see, hear, and experience help us to create our own _unique_ (special and individual) identities. Through these stories, we communicate who we are to other people. _Psychologist_ Daniel McAdams believes that these stories form a _narrative identity_. A _narrative identity_ is another way of saying a person’s life story.

Our narrative identity has many parts: our memories from the past, our stories about the present, and our ideas about what might happen in the future.

McAdams describes _narrative identity_ as the story you create about yourself—your own personal _myth_. Like myths, our narrative identity has different kinds of characters (heroes and villains), major events, challenges to _overcome_, and _emotional struggle_. When we want people to understand us, we tell them our story (or just parts of it); When we want to know who another person is, we ask them to share part of their story. ¹

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1 Adapted from Emily Esfahani Smith, “The Two Kinds of Stories We Tell About Ourselves,” TED website (IDEAS.TED.com), January 12, 2017.

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REFLECTION QUESTION: Is Daniel McAdams suggesting that each person’s narrative identity is true, false, or something in between? What makes you think that?

_I think Daniel McAdams is suggesting that each person’s narrative identity is_____________________________.

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¹ = Thought
² = Question
³ = Epiphany
Authoring Identity – Part I

Just like the books we read, the stories we tell about our lives have characters, settings, plots, and themes.¹ And just like an author, we make narrative choices. This means that we decide what parts of our identities or stories we want to share with other people and what parts we want to keep private. This is an active process. Our narrative choices are influenced by our relationships with other people, especially our family and friends. Our narrative choices are also influenced by our experiences in the world. Psychologist and adolescent development expert Michael J. Nakkula explains it like this:

We do not create our life stories by ourselves. We are in a constant state of (always) creating who we are with the people closest to us and within those contexts that hold most meaning for our day-to-day lives.²

REFLECTION QUESTION: In the text you just read, it says, “This means that we decide what parts of our identities or stories we want to share with other people and what parts we want to keep private.” What kinds of stories do you tell others about yourself?

The kinds of stories I tell others about myself include ____________________________________________________________________________________

What kinds of stories do you keep private? The kinds of stories I keep private include ____________________________________________________________________________________

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Authoring Identity – Part II

During adolescence, young people explore their identities by engaging with other teenagers, forming friendships, trying out new activities and interests, testing boundaries, and taking risks. They make sense of (understand) all these new experiences through storytelling. Psychologists Mike Nakkula and Eric Toshalis believe that young people learn to understand themselves by telling themselves these stories in their head. Atlantic editor Julie Beck summarizes this idea:

These stories become a form of identity. People make choices about what to include in the story and how to tell the story. These choices can influence who the person is and who they may become. A life story doesn’t just say what happened to the person. The story explains how what happened in the past helped the person become who they are today and who they may become in the future.1

REFLECTION QUESTION: Think about two important people in your life (for example, a friend and a family member). How are the stories you tell them about yourself different?

The stories I tell these two people about myself are different because


1 Adapted from Julie Bleck, “Life’s Stories,” The Atlantic, August 10, 2015.

Directions for Reading a Second Time with a Partner

1. Read the text again with a partner. Take turns reading out loud to one another.
2. If you have new thoughts, questions, or epiphanies, add these annotations to the ones you made during the first read.
3. Answer the reflection questions in the gray boxes at the end of each section together.
4. Do not discuss your annotations; wait until you get to TQE Time! on the next page. Read the directions there for sharing your annotations with each other.
5. Answer the connection questions on page 6 together after TQE Time!
# TQE Time!'

**Directions:** Look back at your annotations. Choose two thoughts, two questions, and two epiphanies to record in the table below. Use the sentence frames to write out your thoughts, questions, and epiphanies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>= Thoughts</strong></th>
<th><strong>= Questions</strong></th>
<th><strong>= Epiphanies</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sample sentence frames:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sample sentence frames:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sample sentence frames:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The sentence ______ made me think . . .</td>
<td>• I don’t understand . . .</td>
<td>• I learned that . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I wonder about the line . . .</td>
<td>• I am confused by . . .</td>
<td>• I was surprised to find out that . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Directions:** Take turns sharing your annotations with your partner:

1. Start by sharing your thoughts with one another.
2. Then share your questions and try to help one another answer them.
3. Record answers to the questions in the space below.
4. Finally, share your epiphanies with one another.

**Answers to questions and other notes:**

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1 Adapted from Jennifer Gonzalez, "Deeper Class Discussions with the TQE Method," Cult of Pedagogy website, August 26, 2018.
Connection Questions

Directions:
1. Read the connection questions below and try to answer them together.
2. Be prepared to share your answers with the whole class.

1. What are the risks (dangers) and the rewards (advantages) of sharing your stories in person or on social media? What makes you say that?

   The risks of sharing my stories in person or on social media include . . .

   The rewards of sharing my stories in person or on social media include . . .

2. How can sharing personal stories help someone feel heard and recognized?

   Sharing personal stories can help someone feel heard and recognized . . .
3. To explain the concept of narrative identity, McAdams describes it as “a story you create about yourself—your own personal myth.”

   a. What words/ideas do you associate with “myths”?

   b. Why do you think McAdams chooses the word “myth” to describe narrative identity instead of just “story”?

   *McAdams chooses the word “myth” instead of “story” to describe narrative identity because . . .*
c. How can thinking about narrative identity as a “personal myth” help us understand the relationship between identity (who we are) and storytelling (the real and imagined stories we tell about ourselves, other people, and our experiences in the world)?

_Thinking about narrative identity as a “personal myth” can help us understand the relationship between identity and storytelling by . . ._

d. How can these stories influence who we are now and who we become in the future?

_These stories can influence who we are now/who we become in the future by . . ._