



# THE POWER

## *of Truthtelling*

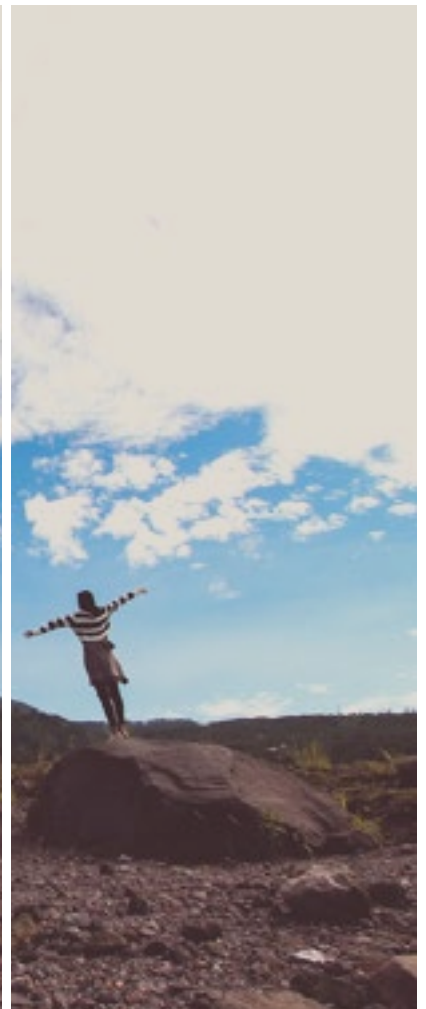
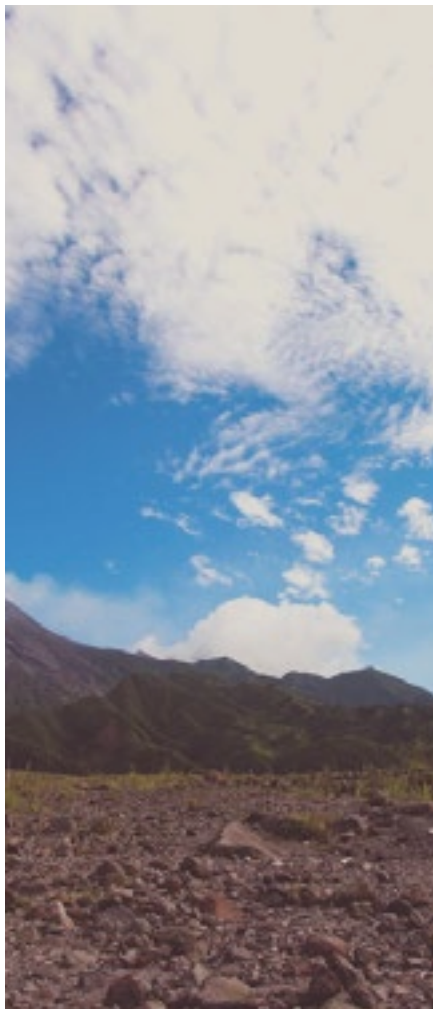
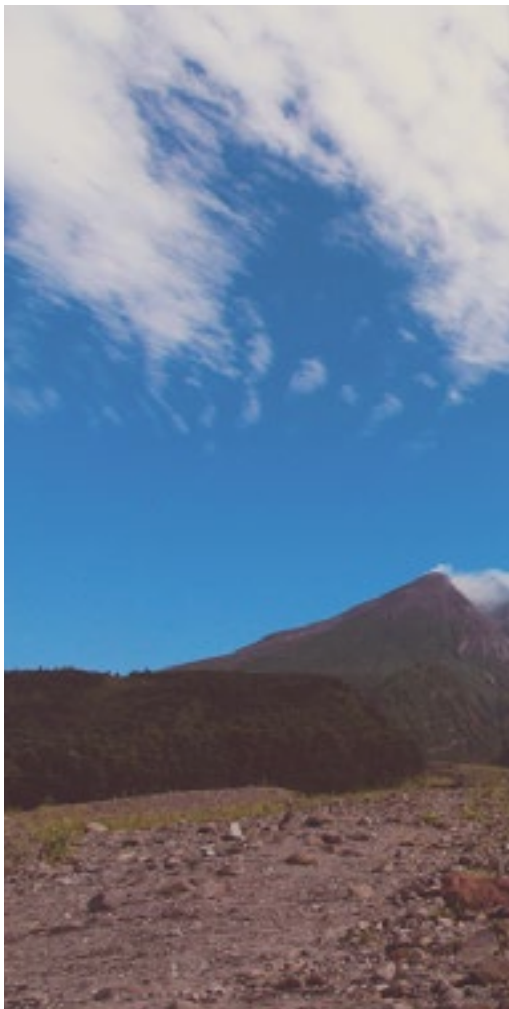
### MODULE 1

womenforONE  
share • inspire • grow



The world is shaped by stories, and the impact they leave on us.


**Stories are our most powerful tool for creating meaning in our lives.**



Whether we are looking at our ancestors and the myths they created in order to make sense of the world around them, or people today—entranced by the words, videos, or personal memes that pop up on their Facebook newsfeeds—human beings are bound by our mutual love of stories.

The word “story” comes from the Greek word meaning “knowledge and wisdom.” Stories have existed since before recorded human history—to entertain, to teach, to explore new ideas, to share experiences, to build community, and to express creativity and individuality.

As humans, we naturally think of our lives in terms of story. Reading and listening to our own and other people’s stories allows us to connect with ourselves and each other, and to process our experiences in ways that we otherwise wouldn’t. In fact, researchers have documented that we tend to learn much more quickly when information is delivered to us in the form of a story.



*We remember stories way more easily than we remember facts, statistics, or mere concepts.*

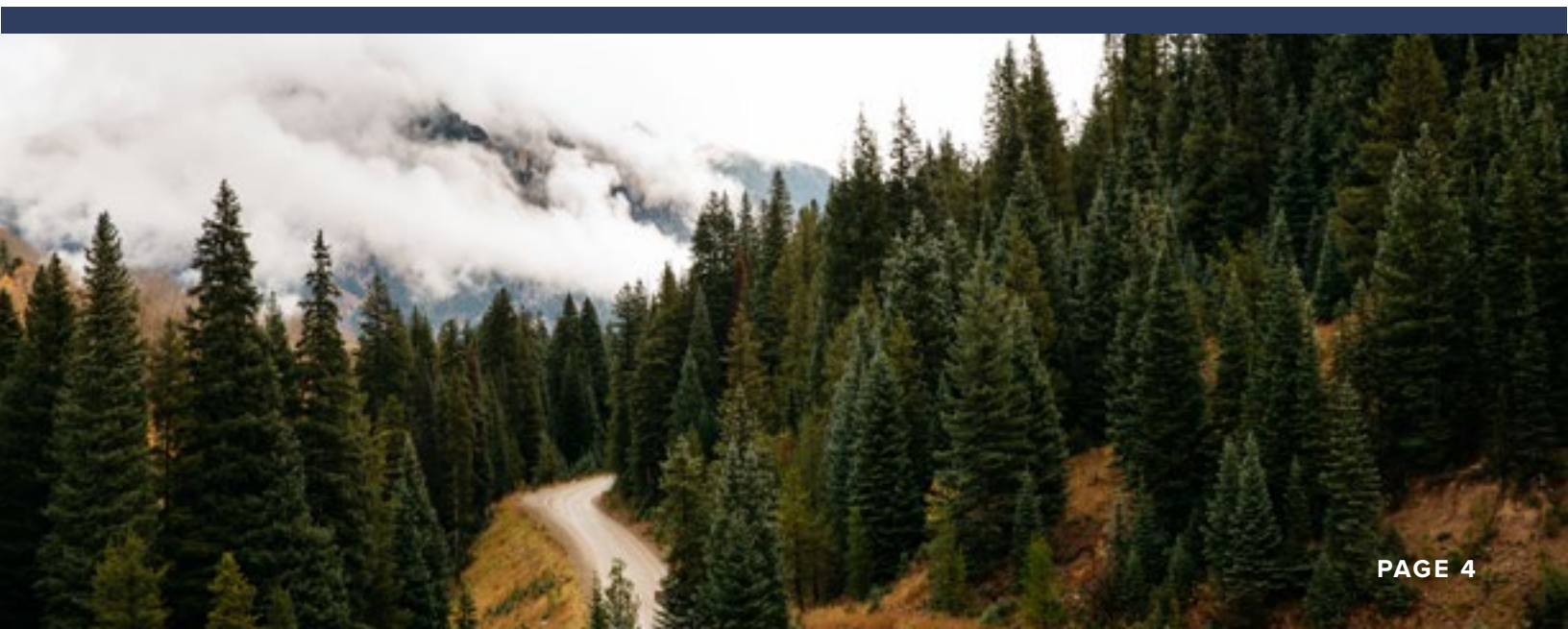
Traditional storytellers sought to melt their audiences into an almost hypnotic state by allowing them to enter the world of imagination and simply listen. When we enter this state of listening, we let down our guard and become more open.

The act of listening to a story can be transformative, but as you already know, this is a course that is all about boldly claiming your **own story**. When we are willing to share our story, we begin to expand our beliefs and perspectives about why something happened the way it did.

Telling our personal story contributes to healing, reclamation of our power, a greater sense of peace and acceptance of our lives, and dialogue that breaks down barriers to connection.

We can come to terms with loss and pain when we choose to tell the stories about the experiences that most impacted us—and by the same token, we can connect with the energy that makes us stronger, wiser, and more resilient. When we share our stories, we reveal the specific differences in our life experience, but we also discover what it means to be human and what we share in common. This is why sharing stories is such a vital part of connection and the cultivation of intimacy—with ourselves and with the people we love.

**Simply put, the fastest, and most scenic, route to transformation is through the stories we tell.**



# TRUTHTELLING 101

The stories that impact us the most are the ones that ring the truest.

Whether fiction or nonfiction, these stories contain protagonists who are very human, meaning that they are deeply complex and beautifully flawed (just like each of us).

Sometimes we tell stories for reasons other than sharing the truth. We create fantastical tales for entertainment or shock value. We also perpetuate the stories that cast us as archetypal damsels in distress, or that help us garner sympathy or approval from other people.

***But as we all truly know down to our core, the most impactful story is a vehicle for our truth.***

In this course, we want to go to a much deeper place than mere “storytelling.” We want to go into the realm of **truthtelling**.

Truth itself is a broad word—everyone has their own definition of it. Some restrict this definition to verifiable facts, while others have a more philosophical and inclusive view of truth.

Verifiable facts might be a part of truth, but they are certainly not the entirety. So, let’s talk about a more holistic, all-encompassing experience of truth: one that engages our bodies, minds, hearts, and souls, while inviting a greater awareness of ourselves, others, and “reality” in general.

We describe truth most efficiently through storytelling, which is a rich and ancient art with many important facets. However, storytelling isn’t necessarily about engaging with truth. It can become a way of mindlessly regurgitating something we once heard or that happened to us long ago. While the best stories keep our bodies, minds, and spirits engaged every step of the way, “storytelling” in and of itself doesn’t demand very much of us. In fact, it can keep us removed from deeply feeling our experiences or considering the bigger picture of what happened.

**CASE IN POINT:** Have you ever known someone who tells the same old story, again and again, without realizing that it’s actually kind of boring to hear? I have!

Truth-telling, on the other hand, compels us to consider how our stories have impacted us. Truth-telling requires that we deeply contemplate the story so that we can feel it on a visceral level.

When we truth-tell, the stories we repeat are no longer the same from one telling to the next. We are constantly discovering new parts and surfacing with previously undiscovered treasure.

*When we truth-tell, we allow ourselves to be touched and transformed by our awareness of what happened.*

While a story has us looking out onto the world through a rather narrow and specific lens, discovering our truth urges us to get a much bigger lay of the land and to view the same thing from multiple angles.

Truth-telling also requires that we engage with all our senses—instead of relying on our memories and our ideas about what happened. While telling a story takes us outside of our bodies (and usually, into the past or future), recounting the truth always brings us back to what is happening for us right now, in this very moment. In fact, an involuntary shiver, a mysterious pain in your heart, or a surge of heat in your body will all inform the way you choose to approach, process, and tell your truth. After all, they're basically clues that are offering you necessary information about what happened to you and how you're still dealing with it.

Now, just to be clear, the “truth” isn't all the terrible things that happened to you, and it is not a sob story that you must repeat to anyone who's willing to listen; it's your willingness to look those events and memories right in the eye and then make the conscious decision as to how you will respond to them.

Embracing your truth is about owning your story and treating it with an enormous amount of compassion, and even a healthy dose of humor. Ever notice how funny some of our most mortifying moments can seem in hindsight?

In this course, we learn to share stories that connect us to our truth. When we look at our own personal narratives, the truth can sometimes resemble a beautifully crafted story with a linear path. But more often than not, the truth is multidirectional, messy, raw, and ripe with the fruits of our humanity—which took tons of fertilizer to grow.

# What is a *truthteller*?

Many people I've met over the years struggle with claiming the truth of who they are, or they struggle to fit it into a prepackaged mold that equates to something pretty and digestible. But perfectionism is not the point here. Being a truthteller is not about embellishing details, making our story sound "good," impressing our audience, or winning an award. It isn't about getting it right—it's about getting it real...for ourselves.

## QUALITIES OF A TRUTHTELLER:

- ➡ A **truthteller** is curious about herself and the world. Instead of viewing the darker aspects of herself and the world as adversaries, she sees them as powerful allies. And she always attempts to surrender to life exactly as it is—in all its messiness and heartbreak.
- ➡ A **truthteller** gains self-knowledge from taking inventory of her life. First, she reflects on what happened and gives herself time to process it; then she lets her awareness take her to a new or deeper perspective; and finally, she is ready to share her truth with others.
- ➡ A **truthteller** values the story of her inner life. She has deeply accepted and integrated her story by viewing her experiences from every possible angle and determining what they mean. In doing so, she is ready to own and share her story in a powerful way.
- ➡ A **truthteller** is willing to grab the reins of her story, so that she can ride into a more complete version of who she is. Through a thorough reflection of her past experiences, she takes action to shift her life rather than viewing herself as a victim of circumstance. She uses her intuition to make powerful choices, so that she can live her deepest joy.
- ➡ A **truthteller** is someone who knows herself, but she also recognizes that she'll continually keep making new discoveries about who she is. She realizes that whether she chooses to share her story with others or simply practice truthtelling as a cathartic exercise in self-love, it has the capacity to transform how she views her past, present, and future.
- ➡ A **truthteller** has moved past "shameful secrets." She holds her life with both humility and pride, and she chooses authenticity over hiding. With her radical openness, she invites other people to be similarly courageous.
- ➡ A **truthteller** is well aware that people might disagree with her, or even hurl insults in her direction. They might whisper (or shout) disdainfully about her audacity to live out loud. Sometimes this hurts, but she refuses to let it deter her from following her own compass. She knows that to suppress her voice would be the same as relinquishing her freedom.
- ➡ A **truthteller** has learned, through a long process of trial and error, that holding back who she is comes at an exorbitant cost. Truthtelling isn't easy, but it's the only way. Besides, now that she has awakened to her truth, she cannot turn back to life as it used to be. She is far more interested in life as it actually is.

TRUTHTELLING IS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO HEAL OLD WOUNDS, GENERATE  
BEAUTIFUL NEW POSSIBILITIES...AND TRANSFORM THE WORLD ITSELF.

1. What is my definition of “truth”?

2. How do I know whether something is “true” or not? What do I rely on to let me know? (For example, verifiable facts, a gut feeling, a sense of whether or not it connects to my values, a sensation of something “clicking” within.)

3. What does it mean to be a truth teller in my own life? How does it make me feel? Does it excite me? Scare me?

4. In what ways have I embraced truthtelling, and how have I been holding back from it?

5. In what ways would I like to commit to truthtelling today—and what aspects of truthtelling am I unsure about or not quite ready for?

*"If you do not tell the truth about yourself,  
you cannot tell it about other people."*

*Virginia Woolf*

# Your Guiding Stories

By now, you know that you have many important stories to tell. One of the greatest clues as to what they are comes from taking a look at some of the **guiding stories** of your own life.

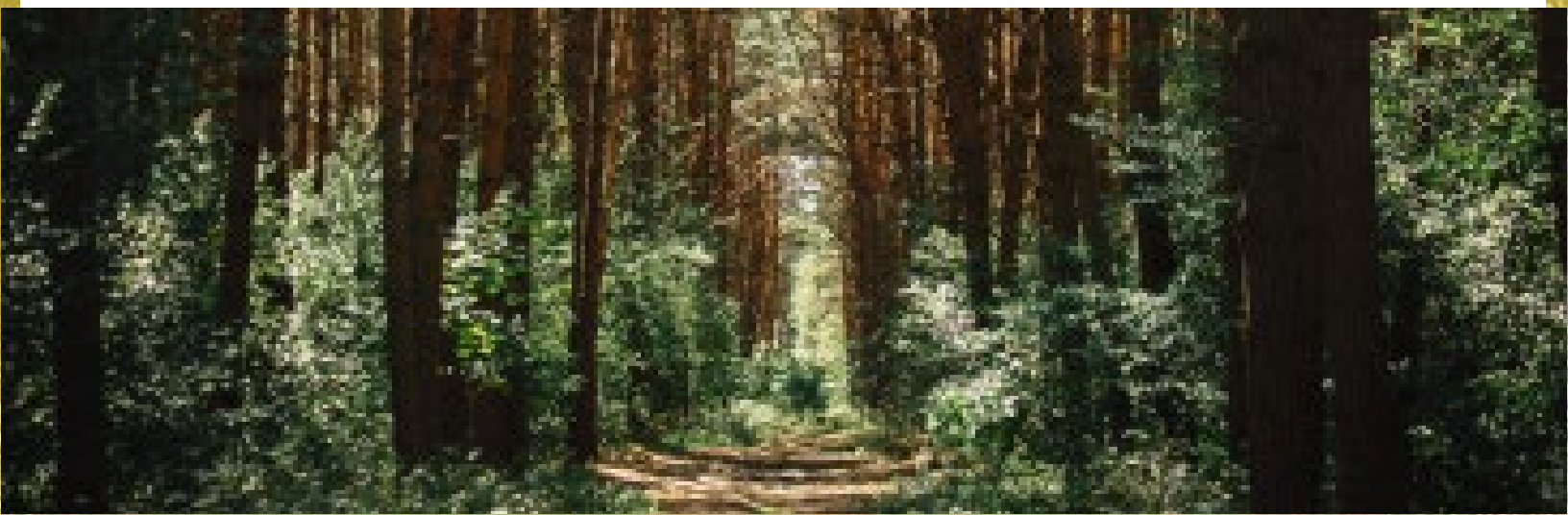
Anthropologists have defined our guiding stories as those personal experiences that have consciously and subconsciously shaped our self-concept—even if we've never fully acknowledged them or shared them with anybody else.

Our guiding stories come from all over the place. For example, these memories are shaped by a collective understanding of who we are—which helps us to make meaning of our lives (e.g., religion and spirituality, or stories belonging to a specific culture or nation). There are also the stories and belief systems that get handed down to us from our family. And even our DNA weaves a compelling account of our lineage that impacts how we look at the world around us and dictates the kind of stories we choose to tell.

Every single one of us is part of a chain of stories that we also help to create. Although these stories arise from specific personal experience, you'll find that large groups of people tend to experience an overlap in their guiding myths.

For example, stories of facing and surmounting obstacles (e.g., sexual abuse, illness, divorce, death, any type of trauma) tend to greatly influence and transform the way we view ourselves and each other. In fact, the stories that arouse anger, rage, and sadness can be incredibly powerful when we choose to face and conquer them, as well as use them for fuel in our writing.

Our guiding stories are not always traumatic in nature, but it is true that our most powerful experiences can be deeply painful and challenging to examine. However, through self-awareness, courage, and a willingness to embrace our lives in all their glorious facets, we can learn to extract the beauty and wisdom that live inside of us.



# There are three parts to a powerful guiding story:

## 1. What happened

(e.g., your parents divorced when you were eight years old, and your relationship with both of them became strained and challenging)

## 2. How it impacted you

(e.g., you escaped your grief by becoming a high achiever who is excellent at taking care of others, but you don't feel you can depend on anyone else to take care of you)

## 3. How it is continuing to transform you in the present

(e.g., you are well aware that you have some healing to do, and you have begun to get in touch with the little girl within you who still feels hurt and abandoned)

Our guiding stories aren't just based on things that happened to us in the past. They are connected to experiences that continue to affect us in the present and that are inextricable from our values, our self-esteem, and our sense of purpose and meaning.

***An important part of being a truth teller is transforming your guiding story into your guiding truth.***

These stories are critical components of our truth—and the more acquainted we become with them, the more effectively we can harness our power. In fact, one of the most important ways to work with a guiding story—after we actually become aware of it—is choosing to integrate its wisdom so that we can live a fuller, richer life.

When we understand that we are not simply victims of the tide, bobbing along passively in an ocean of events that happen to us—but rather, commanders of our own ships and navigators of our own courses—we recognize that our story no longer has power over us. Instead of viewing life as something that happens to us, we shift to being the ones who are capable of making it happen for ourselves. Our story becomes a wise advisor that can offer us guidance on how we want to live.

*"Do you tell your story or does it tell you? Often, too often, stories saddle us, ride us, whip us onward, tell us what to do, and we do it without questioning. The task of learning to be free requires learning to hear them, to question them, to pause and hear silence, to name them, and then to become the storyteller."*

*Rebecca Solnit*

Write down a short description of the three experiences that have most impacted and transformed you. Include your age and what happened. (Your stories might not necessarily be traumatic or dramatic; what is most important is that they continue to shape your sense of self in the world.) Then move on to the questions below.

1. How did these experiences impact and transform me? What kinds of emotions do they continue to bring up in me?

2. Are there any themes that run throughout my guiding stories?



# *Feminine Wisdom*

## The Feminine Breath

Artist and creative mentor Lucy Pearce has written about a powerful tool that she calls the feminine breath. According to Pearce, it is “the internal tide of intuition and inspiration that shapes and influences the out-breath, or masculine form.” When the feminine and masculine are brought back into balance, this can result in creative abundance and projects that are productive and sustainable.

The feminine breath is a deep, slow in-breath. It enables us to momentarily withdraw from our perceptions of the external world so that we can reconnect to the wisdom that lives within. When we breathe deeply into the body, we become increasingly aware of our own inner states. We naturally uncover who we are, and we rediscover truth and power.

The feminine breath is simple, yet so many of us refrain from breathing as deeply as we can. During this module, take the time to inhale fully into your lungs and belly. Send the breath through every cell of your body. Pause and notice how you feel. After this pause, exhale slowly.

Engaging in this mindful feminine breath, especially when we are faced with overwhelming moments, can transform our understanding of what is happening around and inside us. The feminine breath also grounds us into the present moment so that we can view our lives with clarity and discernment rather than continue to spin our wheels in the past or future. It is instantly calming and enables us to touch into our essential nature, which is truly infinite.

*“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.”*

*Helen Keller*

# Feminine Storytelling

When we talk about the power of storytelling to transform our very lives, often the stories we are talking about aren't the straightforward, linear kind. I'm talking about bold, colorful, in-your-face, unafraid-to-go-on-lots-of-circuitous-detours-and-raise-your-eyebrows-with-curiosity kinds of stories.

In short, the ones that people might tell around a campfire, complete with spirited dialogue and lots of well-timed, suspenseful pauses.

## *I'm talking about feminine storytelling.*

Before we go into a detailed explanation of what that is, let's distinguish between "feminine" and "masculine," which are terms that seem to be so common among New Age circles yet draw a blank among lots of people.

Every single one of us contains aspects of feminine and masculine. While the masculine is usually associated with the goal-oriented, rational, fact-based, solution-focused, outwardly directed part of our brain that is damn good at getting stuff done, the feminine is all about communication, creative association, intuition, and a free-flowing, let's-stop-and-smell-the-flowers way of connecting with the world.

When we think about feminine and masculine modes of learning and processing information, the masculine is usually focused on what's happening up in the mental quarters. The feminine, in contrast, is totally connected to all the senses. It's multisensory and kinesthetic in nature. Someone who is very connected to her feminine side might have a tendency to wave her hands wildly when she talks, or to rapidly change the tone of her voice, or to shift gears from talking about one thing to talking about something else that happens to catch her awareness in the moment.

So when we talk about feminine storytelling, you can imagine a sensual, body-oriented type of storytelling that is engaged in one's inner world just as much as one's outer world. It's also all about the details.

For example, what was the expression on your face when your partner disclosed the secret that would change your life forever? What were you feeling? How can you use your body and gestures to convey that feeling?

People remember stories more than they remember facts—and the kinds of stories people most vividly recollect are the ones that are filled with sensory details. To that end, feminine storytelling is all about making other people feel like they are experiencing whatever you're talking about right along with you, in this moment.

The feminine hits you right in the heart and gut, makes tears well in your eyes, and allows laughter to bubble effortlessly from the depths of your belly.

There *is* an enormous amount of value in more masculine modes of storytelling—and we need both the feminine and the masculine in whatever we choose to do. But in this course, we are focusing on the free-flowing aspects of feminine storytelling, which help us connect to our creativity, our feelings, and our innate wisdom—which are touchstones when it comes to knowing and claiming our truth.

As we experiment with feminine storytelling, please feel free to create work that is sprawling, non-linear, and communicates exactly what you want the person reading your story *to feel*.

# How Does It Make *you* feel?

In the words of the late Dr. Maya Angelou, ***“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”***

Stories can be found everywhere all around us—but the most memorable ones are those that evoke deep emotion within us. These are the ones that have the power to stick with us for decades, even when our memories start to get fuzzy.

Stories that fill us with a sense of aliveness, inspiration, empathy, and other profound emotions are reflections of the basic human desire to understand life in all its dimensions: intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

When we use feminine storytelling to engage all our senses, we find ourselves harnessing the power of the well-told story.

Let’s read an excerpt from Dr. Maya Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* that harnesses feminine storytelling to elicit strong feelings from the reader:

*“What you looking at me for?*

*I didn’t come to stay...”*

*I hadn’t so much forgot as I couldn’t bring myself to remember. Other things were more important.*

*“What you looking at me for?*

*I didn’t come to stay...”*

*Whether I could remember the rest of the poem or not was immaterial. The truth of the statement was like a wadded-up handkerchief, sopping wet in my fists, and the sooner they accepted it the quicker I could let my hands open and the air would cool my palms.*

*“What you looking at me for...?”*

*The children’s section of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was wiggling and giggling over my well-known forgetfulness.*

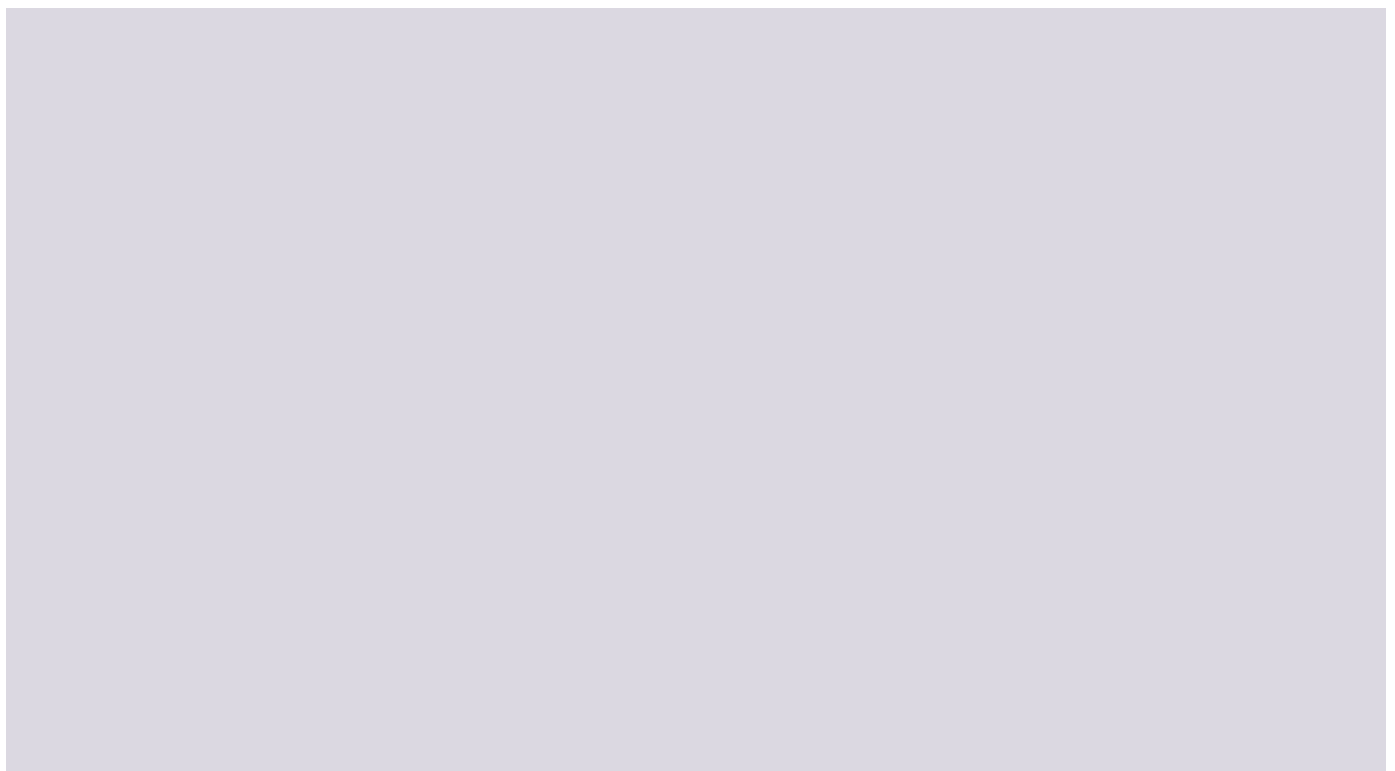
*The dress I wore was lavender taffeta, and each time I breathed it rustled, and now that I was sucking in air to breathe out shame it sounded like crepe paper on the back of hearses.*

*As I’d watched Momma put ruffles on the hem and cute little tucks around the waist, I knew that once I put it on I’d look like a movie star. (It was silk and that made up for the awful color.) I was going to look like one of the sweet little white girls who were everybody’s dream of what was right with the world. Hanging softly over the black Singer sewing machine, it looked like magic, and when people saw me wearing it they were going to run up to me and say, “Marguerite [sometimes it was ‘dear Marguerite’], forgive us, please, we didn’t know who you were,” and I would answer generously, “No, you couldn’t have known. Of course I forgive you.”*

*Just thinking about it made me go around with angel’s dust sprinkled over my face for days. But Easter’s early morning sun had shown the dress to be a plain ugly cut-down from a white woman’s once-was-purple throw-away. It was old-lady-long too, but it didn’t hide my skinny legs, which had been greased with Blue Seal Vaseline and powdered with the Arkansas red clay. The age-faded color made my skin look dirty like mud, and everyone in church was looking at my skinny legs.*

Now that you've read the passage, go through the checklist below, and note how reading it made you feel with respect to your individual senses. Use the space below to jot down your observations. Let your imagination go wild. Even if it seems silly to associate the writing above with the sense of smell, let yourself take every aspect of your sensory experience into consideration. After all, powerful writing can trigger plenty of associations, from the heat of a wood-burning stove to the delicate scent of night-blooming jasmine on a summer night.

- + **Sight (Visually, what did the writing provoke?)**
- + **Sound (Did you associate the writing with particular sounds?)**
- + **Smell (Did the writing trigger any olfactory associations?)**
- + **Taste (What about taste? For example, did the writing feel salty, sweet, sour, or pungent?)**
- + **Texture (Was the writing smooth? Slippery? Velvety? Rough like sandpaper?)**
- + **Temperature and climate (Hot? Cold? Dry? Wet? Tropical?)**
- + **Emotions (Did you feel sad? Happy? Curious? Uplifted? Upset?)**
- + **Specific memories (Did the writing remind you of a personal experience?)**



1. What are some of the most powerful stories I've read, and why?

2. How did they make me feel? Why?

3. What were the elements of the story that made it powerful?



## Exploring your personal stories can be both exhilarating and overwhelming.

We distill personal and collective meaning from them, we discover new ways of healing and problem-solving, and we uncover our connection to other people and all of life. You are likely to gain powerful new insights throughout the week, so be sure to come back to the Feminine Wisdom exercise and the guided audio meditation whenever you need further grounding.

**Respond to the following prompt (and if you choose, post your response in the Facebook group):**

What is one guiding story you are excited about delving into further?



# HOMEPLAY 1

**Use feminine storytelling and write a couple paragraphs** (or, if you prefer, record yourself speaking) about something that you experienced today. Choose a simple moment (e.g., listening to a piece of music, cooking dinner), but see if you can bring out the magic with your words and attention to detail. Feminine storytelling is all about subtlety, detail, emotion, and taking your time to describe something so that your reader can feel it when they read it.

**Pour all your senses into your description. What are you seeing? Hearing? Feeling?  
How can you evoke the senses through your words?**

Remember, this isn't about getting it "perfect." It's about having fun and doing your best to evoke a particular mood. Go all out. Be wild. Be sensual. Be grammatically incorrect. Use words that give you butterflies in your stomach and goosebumps on your skin. Experiment with alliteration: Silky. Soft. Sensual. Smooth. Scintillating.

**Let the words roll off your tongue and your fingers as you write or type.**

A large, empty rectangular box with a light gray background, intended for the user to write their response.



# HOMEPLAY 2

**Sit in a quiet place and listen to the [guided audio meditation](#).** Use the meditation to connect with the energy of your power, and how it feels in your body, to the best of your ability.

When you ground yourself in this power, you discover your truth. Now, write a letter to yourself from your truth. Begin the letter with: “Dear \_\_\_\_\_, I am your truth, and this is what I have to share with you.” Let yourself be surprised. Your truth is your guidance and has a treasure trove of information for you—as long as you are willing to listen.



# HOMEPLAY 3

**The final piece of writing that you will work on refining during Module 4 will emerge from one of the guiding stories that you have identified.** Look back on your life and take a personal inventory of your guiding stories: stories that have deeply influenced who you are and how you live, as well as created great meaning in your life. (For example, “I grew up in poverty, and this difficult experience inspired me to build a successful business.” )

**Ideas for this assignment:** Consider going through old photographs and journals from different periods of your life. While doing so, rack your memory for significant events that happened during those times. Look at the experiences that still manage to stir up your emotions, make you laugh or cry, inspire you, or arouse similarly intense feelings.

Identify at least ten guiding stories. Write down a quick description of each guiding story that includes the four components discussed in the module:

- a) What happened?
- b) How did it impact me?
- c) How does it continue to transform me in the present?
- d) How would I like to engage with my guiding story so that I can move toward greater power and joy?

Again, you don’t need to be a writer to identify your guiding stories. If it’s easiest for you to talk through your ideas out loud, record yourself offering accounts of each story. Come back and listen to the recordings later, being sure to transcribe them.