



SOME TAKEAWAYS FROM THE MENTORS

At the core of the Cassandra Project, there is socially engaged storytelling. It is defined as sharing narratives that resonate with the storyteller's personality and values while addressing issues of global significance. Below, you can read about the mentors and how they approached some of the challenges they faced in their work with the young storytellers. If you want to hear more from them, please listen to the mentors' podcasts in this toolbox.

Tom Van Mieghem (BE)

"As a mentor, I guide them through the basics of storytelling. But I never want people to tell stories the way I do. I want them to discover who they are as storytellers, how their storytelling connects to their personality, and how they can stand on stage in an authentic way. You have to discover your inner self, because real storytelling is deeply connected to who you are.

Gradually, we shifted from purely personal storytelling toward personal themes that connect to broader social issues. For example, Winter explored the theme of coming of age as a young woman. She began with her personal story, then spoke with others who had similar experiences, and connected everything to myths, searching for similarities between them. Once you understand your values and needs, it becomes clearer which directions and communities you should engage with. If you approach a community only because you want to make a show, that's strange. But if you have a genuine inner need, it makes sense to connect. Then the collaboration becomes more authentic.

Each storyteller approached the link with traditional stories in a different way.

Winter didn't tell traditional stories directly, but she drew inspiration from traditional narrative structures. At the end of her performance, she told the myth of Apollo and Daphne, weaving it together with her personal story so that everything came full circle.

Daan focused on his personal journey but used metaphors. For example, he imagined entering the world of Grindr as a prince on a horse waiting for someone. He continued the story using that metaphor. It was fascinating to see how personal and traditional elements merged."

Jacob Elofsson (SE)

"I really value the dialogue between traditional stories and contemporary life. Traditional stories are part of our intangible cultural heritage. There's no copyright; you can shape them however you like, while still working within a framework that has existed—and worked—for

thousands of years. They endure because they contain universal truths about what it means to be human and to live in society.

The idea that everyone owns the story and nobody owns the story is incredibly powerful. There are very few things that belong to everyone in that way.

There are so many ways to tell the same story; changing just the focus can completely change the meaning. In one workshop, I used Hansel and Gretel and asked participants to focus on a specific theme while telling the story. Just holding that theme in mind reshapes the story.

Many people in the Cassandra Project took existing myths or folktales and combined them with personal stories, finding common themes or motifs, whether universal or personal. If the audience already knows the traditional story, it helps the personal story stick. Familiarity creates expectations, and when you twist them slightly, it can be very powerful.”

Rory De Groot (NL)

“My motto as a trainer and coach is: I’m not walking behind you, and I’m not walking in front of you. I walk beside you. Sometimes I whisper something in your ear or ask a question, but you make your own choices. That’s how I approached all three mentees. I walked beside them on their individual journeys. And it’s true: there were three completely different trajectories, timelines, issues, and questions.

In the storytelling community, there’s often a separation between telling folktales and telling personal stories, almost like two different bloodlines. I don’t like boundaries like that. I like it to be both. I use whatever connects with me and bring that to the stage.

For me, there are two crucial elements. The first is authenticity. That’s always what I’m looking for. The second is controllable vulnerability. Vulnerability is important, but it has to remain in the control of the teller.

I always start with the question: what do you want to tell? The story has to resonate with you first; it has to be important to you. Only then do we look for the form. Once we have identified the theme, we ask: is there a community or social group connected to this theme that you can reach out to for research, questions, or even performance?

The danger with “socially engaged” as an assignment is that it can become forced. If you approach a community only because you want to make a show, the connection will fail. But if you have a genuine inner need, it makes sense to connect. The collaboration becomes more authentic, and the audience will feel it.”

Lina Teir (FI/NO)

“My approach was professional but also personal and empathetic. I didn’t want to impose too much of my own preferences, though of course they were always present in the choices I made. They relate to my deeper values and my view of socially engaged art.

For me, there is a clear distinction between a coach, a director, and a mentor. A coach might come in, give advice: “do more of this,” “cut that part” and then step back. A director is more in charge and responsible for the whole performance. There is a clear vision, and the

storyteller performs within that framework. For me, a mentor is something more. It's about the big picture and the long journey. They are responsible not just for the product the young storytellers develop, but for their overall experience and development. Their task is to develop the storyteller more than the story.

It's the person and the artist I'm listening to. I try to understand what wants to be born in them. The single story is almost a symptom of who they are as a storyteller. With that also comes responsibility for mental health, stress regulation, and integrity. Especially when working with personal material, we must be careful not to retraumatize ourselves. A mentor supports not only artistic growth but also personal sustainability.

In our Cassandra intake process, applicants already had to have an idea of what they wanted to tell about. For the interview, I asked them to bring an object symbolizing something we need to talk about. I remember those moments vividly: young people bringing objects and speaking about themselves. Already there, we were touching something personal and something globally relevant.

My task was to sense whether there was a strong theme at the core, something metaphorical that opened up beyond the personal level. All three storytellers I chose operated on different levels. There were metaphors, personal narratives, and engagement. You could see in their body language that this was something that needed to come out."

Adam Marcuszewski (PL)

"Storytelling is powerful because it first changes the storyteller. You must embody the story and understand why you share it. Then it can inspire listeners, offer solutions, or show how needs can be fulfilled. Build a relationship with your story. Be aware of what you do on stage. Sometimes you must remove your shield and be present as an authentic individual with knowledge and emotion. Authenticity is something I truly appreciate.

All the Polish team's stories were about individuation: how to be yourself in society, how to leave your parents' home, how to leave a destructive relationship, how to overcome fears, and how to listen to your own voice.

Connecting with a community was the hardest part. I could inspire the young storytellers to find institutions or people working in their area of interest, but it was up to them to reach out and gather information. Sometimes it worked well, especially when I or Agnieszka helped arrange meetings.

Natalia created a beautiful tale about a bear who is the father of the main protagonist, Zuzanka. The story addressed domestic violence. She told it to her therapeutic group, a community she already belonged to.

Dawid told his story about the tradition of caring for hair in a library and school, and he stayed in contact with those institutions.

Vera explored the theme of hearing your own voice, something common to many young people. She shared her story with friends, empowering them to overcome fear and outside pressures."