

The Third Story — Facilitator Run Sheet

Folder: the-third-story · Category: conflict · 4–10 people · 25 min · offline + online · print props · tool pack

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25

MINUTES

4–10

PEOPLE

print props

SETTING

The Third Story — Facilitator Guide

When two sides are at odds, each is sure their version is the obvious truth. This moves the room off “my story versus yours” and onto a shared, observable scene: each side tells, in the third person, the story a neutral observer — a fly on the wall — would tell about what is happening between them. Then both look for the need under each position, and commit one move that serves a need they share.

Objectives

By the end of the activity, participants will have:

1. Put two observable, third-person accounts of the same clash side by side on the wall.
2. Named the shared scene and the exact sentence where the two accounts diverge.
3. Surfaced one need under each position and committed one dated move that serves a need both share.

When to use this activity

- Two sides have told their first story so often it now sounds like plain fact, and repeating it only hardens the split.
- A disagreement is starting to name villains — “they never decide,” “they always ambush us” — and no one can describe the scene without an accusation in it.
- You have 4–10 people and 25 minutes, and can put both sides in front of one shared board (or a shared doc online).

The two rules

- **Third person only.** “The team is waiting on a decision that isn’t coming” — never “they never decide.” The moment you name a villain, you are back in the first story.
- **Describe what a camera would see.** Behaviours and facts a neutral could record, not intentions you are reading into them. A shared need can only be found once both sides are looking at the same observable scene.

Setup

Space: a wall or shared board with two columns — “Our third story” and “Their third story” — and a strip below for the needs; both sides face the board, not each other.

Materials per side: the prompt cards from the prop sheet and a pen; sticky notes for the needs strip.

Materials for the room: one set of the card faces from [the-third-story-prop-cards.pdf](#), and the A3 poster up on the wall.

Grouping: 4–10 people, most usefully split into the two sides of a real, live disagreement — plus one or two genuine neutrals if you have them.

Roles: each side writes and reads its own third story; you hold the two rules and keep the rounds moving.

How to run it

Time	Phase	What you do
0–3	Frame	Name the disagreement as a shared object, not a verdict. Set the rule: third person only, describe what a camera would see.
3–11	Tell	Each side writes and reads the story a neutral observer would tell about <i>their</i> side of it — no “they”, no blame, just the scene. Post both in their columns.
11–17	Compare	Read both third stories aloud together. Find the shared scene both agree a camera would capture, and mark exactly where they diverge.
17–25	Need + move	Each side names one need sitting under its position. Where the needs overlap, commit one small move that serves the shared one — with an owner and a date.

The card

Use the faces from [the-third-story-prop-cards.pdf](#) : a “tell it in the third person” card, a “what a camera would see” card, a “the need under my position” card, and a “one shared-need move” card, plus a blank. Keep the third-person and camera cards up while each side writes — the rules slip the moment they are out of sight.

Failure modes

- A **“third story” is just the first story with the names filed off**. Stop the read; ask for the sentence again as pure camera footage. If it can’t survive the camera test, it isn’t a third story.
- **One side won’t tell its story**. Don’t force it — have a neutral read the *other* side’s third story aloud and correct only the factual errors. Correction is a lower wall than confession.
- **The needs never overlap**. Sometimes they genuinely don’t. Name that honestly and shift the move from “solve it” to “make the trade explicit” — who gives what, and gets what in return.

Variations

- **Two people, one mediator**: each tells the *other*’s third story aloud; the mediator only stops the ones that slip into blame.
- **Before it hardens**: run it the first time you feel a split forming — a third story is cheapest before the sides have names.
- **On a live thread**: paste the two third stories into the written argument itself; the divergence line alone often resets the tone.

Facilitation notes

- The strongest moment is when a side hears its own hidden worry stated plainly inside the other side’s “neutral” account.
- Seed the first column with one concrete, camera-visible sentence if the room freezes on blame.

Put it on the wall

Print `the-third-story-activity-poster.pdf` (A3) to put the run of show, the two columns and the “third person only / what a camera would see” rules on one wall while you facilitate.

Props in this folder

- `the-third-story-prop-cards.pdf` — poker-spec print sheet (63.5 × 88.9 mm, bleed and cut guides): third-person card, camera-view card, need-under-position card, shared-need-move card, a blank, branded backs
 - `the-third-story-run-sheet.pdf` — the print edition: this run sheet + the debrief, bound as one A4 document with bookmarks (`-Letter.pdf` is US Letter)
 - `the-third-story-activity-poster.pdf` — the whole reframe on one A3 wall sheet
 - `the-third-story-guide.md` · `-debrief.md` · `-start-here.md` — the facilitator guide, the debrief, the one-page start here
 - `the-third-story-license.md` — what you may do, how to rebrand, what shipped when
 - `SKILL.md` · `the-third-story.zip` — the machine-readable manifest, and the whole folder in one download
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Agent version

Every file in this folder has a stable public URL — an AI agent can fetch the cards, the debrief and this run sheet with three curl commands (see `SKILL.md`). The paper version needs nothing but two columns, the card faces and a pen each.

The Third Story — Debrief

You did not agree on the truth. You put two observable scenes on the wall and found the one need both are protecting — and that is where a real disagreement can finally move.

Use with `the-third-story-guide.md` . The need-and-move close at minute 25 is the compressed version; this sheet is the full one.

How to run this debrief

- Keep both third stories **up on the wall** while you talk — you are debriefing the divergence between two scenes, not re-arguing who is right.
 - Point at the exact sentence where the two accounts split; “it’s all different” is the first-person habit creeping back.
 - Land on the dated move — owner and deadline — or you have named a mood, not taken a step.
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Read the wall

1. **What both third stories describe the same way.** The part a camera would capture identically is the ground you’re standing on — say it out loud and count it.
2. **Where, precisely, they diverge.** Not “everything” — point to the one sentence where the two scenes split. That line is the actual disagreement.
3. **What each side’s story can’t see.** The need that only shows up when you describe the scene the way the other side’s observer would.

The four debrief questions

- Which shared need did both sides name almost in the same words — and why does that one matter?
 - Where in the last month did you describe the problem as each other, instead of as a scene a neutral could watch?
 - What is the one dated move (owner, by when) that serves the shared need rather than only your own side of it?
 - What would tell you, in two weeks, that the temperature actually dropped — not that someone conceded?
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Failure modes of the debrief

Failure mode	Why it happens	The rescue
A “third story” is the first story with the names filed off	Old habits return mid-read	Re-ask for the sentence as pure camera footage; if it can’t survive the camera test, it isn’t a third story.
One side won’t tell its story	Confession feels like conceding	Have a neutral read the <i>other</i> side’s third story aloud, correcting only factual errors.
The needs never overlap and get papered over	The shared column absorbs everything	Name the gap honestly; shift the move from “solve it” to “make the trade explicit” — who gives what, gets what.