

Changing the Narrative / *Cambiando la Narrativa*
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Course Title: Introductory Sociology

Class Topic: Reading, PA: Changing the Narrative *Cambiando la Narrativa* *

Lesson Goals: Students will utilize a sociological lens to explore the ways in which dominant community narratives are constructed as well as how these narratives can be reconstructed. Specifically, students will be able to:

- Articulate the ways in which narratives are socially constructed and collectively accepted via intersubjectivity.
- Provide examples of the roles power and privilege (viewed through the lens of intersectionality) play in shaping and reframing narratives.
- Compare and contrast various community narratives through a symbolic interactionist lens in order to explore the ways in which language shapes perspectives and shared meanings.
- Provide examples of ways in which cultural relativism can contribute to an assets-based framing of neighborhoods, communities and cultures.
- Utilizing verstehen and social facts, synthesize findings to create a beginning working model with the purpose of changing the current dominant narrative surrounding the City of Reading and the communities, neighborhoods and cultures within.

(Underlined words denote a linkage to course competencies) [Sociology Dictionary](#) – see this website for definitions of sociological concepts.

Description: This lesson plan was created as the initial piece to a classroom-based and community-grounded service learning project, embedded within an Introductory Sociology course. This service learning project was the outgrowth of collaboration with a community development corporation who, when asked how students could help, recommended that students explore ways in which they could contribute to the changing of the narrative of the City of Reading, PA. The changing narrative project is one part of a broader asset-based approach to community development which this organization is facilitating. With a Latin@ population of 58% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), the City of Reading is an ideal laboratory for the exploration of the strengths and rich diversity of *Latinidad*. This lesson plan could serve as a model for other communities. Ideally, this lesson plan could be utilized in the sociological discipline; specifically in an introductory sociology or urban sociology course.

This particular lesson plan is the first in a series of lesson plans which will build to the final project for the course. In this final course project, students will design a plan to change the narrative of the city, utilizing an asset-based lens to examine the city's strengths. This particular lesson plan is two-pronged. First, students will examine two contrasting narratives of a neighborhood, community or city. Second, students will identify ways in which they can contribute to the changing narrative of the City of Reading. Steps 1 & 2 will occur in the first class session, while Steps 3 & 4 will occur in the second and third class sessions and continue throughout the semester. Since this class is taught in a hybrid format (two, fifty-

minute class periods with fifty-minutes of online instruction per week), online tools such as group message boarding will be utilized as an adjunct to the in-class instruction.

Note: Prior to this assignment students will have engaged in discussions and readings related to: the making of community narratives; social constructionism and intersubjectivity; ethnocentrism and cultural relativism; power and privilege and symbolic interactionism.

Step 1: (To occur in class prior) In the class session prior the instructor will present the concept of narratives and counter-narratives, utilizing three examples to illustrate these concepts. First, the instructor will present a podcast of an interview on NPR with two fifth-grade students from the South Shore neighborhood of Chicago who wrote an op-ed to the *Chicago Tribune*, as a counter-narrative to the frequent news stories of violence from their neighborhood (the full op-ed will be explored in one of the groups in Step 1 below). Second the instructor will present a historical example by showing photographs of Puerto Ricans in New York in the 1970's. The photographs, taken by Photojournalist Bolivar Arellano for *El Diario-La Prensa*, sought to show the *Nuyorican* story that the mainstream English newspapers were not telling. (*From Colonia to Community* [Sánchez Korrol, 1983] can help to provide historical context). Finally, the instructor will show the music video for *La Perla*, by *Calle 13*; a video which expresses pride for the neighborhoods of Puerto Rico (full lyrics will be explored in one of the groups in case studies below). The purpose of this pre-step is to begin with students the conversation of narratives and view them through a sociological lens, utilizing concepts discussed in prior class sessions and course readings. *Fifty minutes (entire class period)*

Step 2: (Class Session One) Break students into five groups of 5-6 students. When possible, try to ensure ethnic and geographic (urban, rural, suburban) diversity within the groups. Assign each group to a “geographic case study” and provide the handouts for their respective case studies. Additionally, provide the handout with the open-ended questions. Instruct students to independently read both of their case study narratives, making notes and highlighting themes that jump out for them. *Twenty minutes*

Step 3: (Class Session One) After students have individually read and viewed their case study documents, instruct them to discuss the contrasting narratives, utilizing the open-ended question sheet as a guide. Instruct each group to identify a recorder for the group. Indicate to students that they will present their case study reflections to the entire class in the subsequent class session. Students who have them can also use their smart phones and tablets to look for additional narratives. *Thirty minutes*

Step 4: (Class Session Two) Provide students with some time (five-ten minutes) to regroup and identify three major conclusions to present to the class. Allow each group 3-5 minutes to present their findings to the class. Instruct the class as a whole to take notes that might be helpful as they move forward in designing their narrative framing project. As each group presents allow time for questions and processing. *Fifty minutes (entire class period)*

Step 5: (Class Session Three) Students will reconvene in their original groups at which time they will be assigned their topical area of focus for the narrative reframing of Reading, PA. Utilizing the brainstorming sheet, students will work in their groups to: 1. Discuss assets of which they are currently aware and 2. Identify sources of data they will need to locate and consult in order to identify assets which relate to their particular area of focus. The five focal areas include: arts and entertainment; food and

farming; business and economic development; social and human development and infrastructural and environmental systems.

List of materials:

1. Photographs and web links for pre-step in class prior, introducing students to the concept of narratives and counter-narratives.
2. Handouts for the two contrasting narratives for the five geographic case studies (10 total narratives). Some of these narratives contain photographs of street art and community projects which have the ability to contribute visually to the narrative. For each of these five case studies, students will be provided with one narrative which provides a negative reflection of the geographic area and a second which provides a reframing of that narrative. The five geographic areas and respective narratives are:
 - a. La Perla, Old San Juan, Puerto Rico: excerpts from tourist brochures and online travel discussion boards AND lyrics to Calle 13's song, *La Perla* (Spanish and English translation)
 - b. Detroit, Michigan: excerpts from newspapers AND excerpt from *Detroit* by Charlie LeDuff and blog from *Positive Detroit*
 - c. Reading, PA: excerpts from newspapers and comments and photos from #RDGMATTERS
 - d. Barrio Capetillo and Río Piedras, PR: excerpts from newspaper and comments AND street art as well as photos and mission statement of community urban garden
 - e. South Side of Chicago: excerpts from newspapers and op-ed for the *Chicago Tribune*, written by fifth grade students
3. Open-ended question sheet (Kolb's experiential learning cycle)
4. Brainstorming sheet for exploration of community assets

Computer Lab needed? For outside class work, yes however it is not needed for this portion of the lesson plan

Comments/additional thoughts: Please see handouts on attached PDF file.

*Credit and special thanks are given to the following for their support and inspiration for this project: My friend and doctoral student at the *Universidad de Puerto Rico Recinto de Río Piedras*, Francisco Javier González Parés who so kindly showed me the non-tourist parts of Eastern Puerto Rico while helping me to further explore *colonialidad*; my Latin@ mentor, colleague and friend, Professora Alexis Jardine; Brian Kelly of redesign Reading for providing the suggestion for this service learning project as well as their approach to community economic development and Johanny Cepeda, owner of Mi Casa, Su Casa for her stalwart community presence.

Materials

Section A: Step one

1.Podcast of Chicago Kids

[Chicago students speak to news media](#)

2. Nuyorican photographs

[Photographing Puerto Rican New York](#)

3. La Perla video

[La Perla long version](#)

Section B: Question sheet for use with narratives (for all groups)

*informed by Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984)

As a group, please respond to the following questions. Please be thorough in your responses.

What?

Please discuss your observations regarding the narrative and counter-narrative provided for your specific geographic case study. Specifically, please address the ways in which these narratives were socially constructed. What major themes and patterns did you observe? In what ways did symbols and meanings help to shape the reality in this particular case (symbolic interactionism)?

So what?

Please discuss what conclusions you can draw regarding how narratives are shaped generally. Specifically, please address the roles power and privilege play in shaping narratives.

Now what?

In what ways can cultural relativism contribute to an assets-based framing of communities? Please explain how you might use verstehen and social facts, to create a beginning working model with the purpose of changing the current dominant narrative surrounding the City of Reading and the communities, neighborhoods and cultures within.

Section C: Geographic Case study narratives

1. La Perla narratives

- “La Perla, located near historic El Morro, is known as the worst slum in all of Puerto Rico due to the rampant theft, violent crime and drug abuse” (La Perla, para. 1)
From: http://www.ehow.com/facts_5184782_puerto-rico-dangers.html
- “...La Perla, Loiza, public residences and other similar places, I would not set my foot on, but just by looking on the overall look of a place, you will easily know if it is a safe area or not” (Re: Warnings and safety in San Juan, para. 5).
From: http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowTopic-g147320-i72-k4373439-Warnings_and_Safety_in_San_Juan-San_Juan_Puerto_Rico.html
- “We didn't venture there, but at the time of our visit some comments surfaced on travel sites warning against venturing into the area known as "La Perla". One quote from a cab driver stated that he would never take a tourist there. Some have said it's the worst barrio in Puerto Rico, stay out of the projects and neighborhoods and STAY IN THE TOURIST AREAS...” (Unsafe at any speed in La Perla, para. 1).
From: https://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Caribbean_and_Central_America/Puerto_Rico/San_Juan_Municipio/San_Juan-1645724/Warnings_or_Dangers-San_Juan-MISC-BR-1.html
- “...a steep cliff drops precipitously into the sea. Wedged between the cliff and the Caribbean lies La Perla, a slum infamous as a redoubt for drug traffickers and a tourist mecca for marijuana, cocaine, and heroin. "They have sophisticated radio equipment so they can listen in on us and signal blockers keeping us from spying on them," says Juan Nieves, a veteran cop with salt-and-pepper hair, as he peers down into the dark, densely built barrio from his cruiser on the higher ground of Old San Juan. La Perla — where police are powerless and the drug trade paramount — is a microcosm of Puerto Rico...” (Miller, 2013, Four hundred feet from the spot, para. 1).
From: <http://www.miaminewtimes.com/2013-03-21/news/puerto-rico-drugs-murders-miami/full/>
- “If you walk from El Morro fort along Norzagaray St headed towards San Cristobal Fort you will notice on your left, down the hill a hodge podge of houses and narrow streets. This barrio is known as La Perla. Although it may look somewhat picturesque, DO NOT GO THERE wondering around and exploring. It is a high crime area and is best admired 'from afar.’”
From: virtualtourist.com

- “I'm not sure why they don't tear this place [La Perla] down and build a luxury hotel here, but it's an interesting area to check out...but only during the day unless you are trying to score drugs or want to get shanked ...This might be the most beautiful slum area ever, overlooking the beautiful Atlantic Ocean between the forts of El Morro and San Cristobal. It started out as a slaughterhouse, then workers and farmers started moving into the area and poverty leads to criminals and there you have it...” (Mimi D., 2010).
From: <http://www.yelp.com/biz/community-la-perla-san-juan>

La Perla counter- narratives

- “The ppl [sic] were SMILING... Not giving deadly stares. They could care less what we were doing. We chatted with the bartender for hours. She was so nice!! There were kids playing games and in and out the bar buying soda” (Lauren R., 2013).
From: <http://www.yelp.com/biz/community-la-perla-san-juan>
- I got lost one night in La Perla in my rental car. I ended up pulling over and asking for help, and then had some mofongo and played dominoes with a shop keeper... La Perla is full of warm and interesting folks, just like yourselves (Khadi G., 2014).
From: <http://www.yelp.com/biz/community-la-perla-san-juan>

La Perla lyrics-Spanish (Calle 13)

Oye esto va dedicado a todos los barrios de Puerto Rico.
¡Trujillo! Dedicado al barrio de la Perla.
¡Pocho! Dile a Johana que me haga un arroz con habichuela bien duro.
Un saludito a Jose los cogemos bajando.
¿Y tú que estás mirando?
Yo tengo actitud desde los cinco años
Mi mae me la creó con tapabocas y reganos
Desde chiquito canito con el pelo castano
Soy la oveja negra de todo el rebaño
Y fui creciendo poquito a poco
Brincando de techo en techo tumbado cocos
Y aunque casi me mato y casi me escocoto
Nunca me vieron llorando ni botando moco
Siempre perfumado y bien peinadito
Pa' buscarme una novia con un apellido bonito
Larita mi primer beso de amor
Se casó la bruja lluvia con sol

(coro)

Allá abajo en el hueco en el boquete
Nacen flores por ramillete
Casitas de colores con la ventana abierta
Vecinas de la playa puerta con puerta
Que yo tengo de todo no me falta nada
Tengo la noche que me sirve de sabana
Tengo los mejores paisajes del cielo
Tengo una neverita repleta de cerveza con hielo

Un arcoíris con sabor a piragua
Gente bonita rodeada por agua
Los difuntos pintados en la pared con aerosol
Y los que quedan jugando basketball
Un par de gringos que me danan el paisaje
Vienen tirando fotos desde el aterrizaje
La policía que se tira sin pena
Rompiendo mi casa pa' cobrar la quincena
Aquí nació mi mae y hasta mi bisabuela
Este es mi barrio y yo soy libre como Mandela
Cuidado con la vieja escuela que no te coja
Que te va a meter con chancleta y palo de escoba
Así que no te me pongas majadero
Porque yo vengo con apetito de obrero
Pa' comerme a cualquiera que venga a robármelo mio
Yo soy el Napoleón del caserío
¡Oye! Esto se lo dedico a los que trabajan con un sueldo bajito
Pa' darle de comer a sus pollitos
Yo quiero a mi barrio como Tito quiere a Jaimito
Yo no lucho por un terreno pavimentado

Ni por metros cuadrados ni por un sueño dorado
Yo lucho por un paisaje bien perfumado
Y por un buen plato de bistec encebollado
Por la sonrisa de mi madre que vale un millón
Lucho por mi abuela meciéndose en su sillón
Lucho por unos pinchos al carbón

Y por lo bonito que se ve La Perla desde un avión
¡Oye dile!

(coro x2)

¡Oye! Esto fue por la inocencia de de Jonatán Román
La Chilinga desde Argentina
Estamos calentando motores. Dale

Esa risa en La Perla la escuche en el chorrillo
Y desde Pito hasta Callao y donde haya chiquillos
Creo en barrios con madres que vivieron iguales de razones
Y al final se murieron sin tener vacaciones
Como decía mi abuela: así fue la baraja en casa del pobre
Hasta el que es feto trabaja por ese barrio eterno también universal
Y el que se mete con mi barrio me cae mal

¡La noche me sirve de sabana!
Veo las luces de La Perla desde Panamá
¡La noche me sirve de sabana!
Brillando en clave Morse y me invitan pa' allá
¡La noche me sirve de sabana!
Un camino hecho de estrellas semáforo la luna
¡La noche me sirve de sabana!
Salí a las siete y media y voy llegando a la una
¡La noche me sirve de sabana!
Nena frótame con vicbaporu como me hacía mamá
¡La noche me sirve de sabana!
Ni dormido me olvido de mi identidad
¡La noche me sirve de sabana!
El hombre bueno no teme no teme a la oscuridad
¡La noche me sirve de sabana!
¡Ea! Y no me falta más nada

(Coro sin lo que canta Residente)

Esa pared del barrio y eso es pa' que te asombres
Cincuenta años más tarde todavía guarda mi nombre

Aquí no se perdona al tonto majadero
Aquí de nada vale tu apellido tu dinero
Se respeta el carácter de la gente con que andamos
Nacimos de muchas madres pero aquí sólo hay hermanos
Y ese mar frente a mi casa te juro que es verdad
Como el de La Perla aunque yo este en Panamá
Y sobre el horizonte veo una nube viajera dibujando la cara del gran Maelo Ribera

Celebra esta reunión compadre.

¿Que te parece esta combinación de Rubencito y Calle 13?

¡La noche me sirve de sabana!

Pero eso no resuelve el blanco sospechoso

¡La noche me sirve de sabana!

La noche no absuelve al verbo mentiroso

¡La noche me sirve de sabana!

Si te perdiste hermano encuéntrate a ti mismo

¡La noche me sirve de sabana!

Vente aquí a Panamá y contribuye al turismo

¡La noche me sirve de sabana!

Mil gracias residente mil gracias visitante

¡La noche me sirve de sabana!

Píllate tribuna en Argentina sigue echando pa'lante

¡La noche me sirve de sabana!

Con Lilia la letra va pa' lo alto a ver si pasa el filtro

¡La noche me sirve de sabana!

Cumplida la terea se retira el ministro

The Pearl lyrics-English

Hey, this is dedicated to all of the neighborhoods of Puerto Rico.
Trujillo! Dedicated to the neighborhood of La Perla.
Pocho! Tell Johana to make me some really good rice and beans.
A shout out to Jose; we'll catch you on your way down.
And you - what are you looking at?
I've had an attitude since I was five years old
My mama raised me with scolding and slaps on the mouth
Had gray hair mixed with brown since childhood
I'm the black sheep of the whole flock
And I grew little by little
Jumping from rooftop to rooftop knocking off coconuts
And even though I almost killed myself and beheaded myself
No one ever saw me crying or dripping snot
Always smelled good and had my hair combed
To look for a girlfriend with a pretty last name
Larita, my first kiss of love
The witch got married, rain with sun

(chorus)

Down there in the hole in the gap
Bouquets of flowers are blossoming
Colorful little houses with the windows open
Next door neighbors of the beach
I have everything; I don't lack anything
I have the night which I can use as a blanket
I have the best landscapes of the sky
I have a little refrigerator stocked with ice beer

A rainbow flavored snow cone
Pretty people surrounded by water
The deceased depicted on the wall with spray paint
And those who stay playing basketball
A couple of gringos who ruin my landscape
Been taking pictures since they landed
The police that shoot and go unpunished
Breaking into my house to get their paycheck
My mother was born here and so was even my great-grandmother
This is my neighborhood and I'm free like Mandela
Beware of the old school that it not catch you

Because it'll get you with a sandal or a broomstick
So don't give me that clown act
Because I come with the appetite of a laborer
To eat anyone who comes to take what's mine
I'm the Napoleon of the country house
Hey! I dedicate this to those who work for low wages
To feed their little chicks
I love my neighborhood like Tito loves Jaimito

I don't fight for paved roads
Or for square footage or for a golden dream
I fight for a perfumed landscape
And for a good steak and onions dish
For my mother's smile which is worth a million
I fight for my grandmother rocking in her chair
I fight for some barbecued kebabs

And for how beautiful La Perla looks from a plane
Hey tell 'em!

(chorus x2)
Hey! This is for the innocence of Jonatán Román
The “Chilinga” from Argentina
we're firing up engines. Do it.

That laughter in La Perla I can hear in the stream
And from Pito to Callao and where there are little ones
I believe in neighborhoods with mothers who lived with similar purposes
And in the end they died without having taken any vacation
As my grandmother used to say: those were the cards dealt to the poor
Even the unborn work for this eternal as well as universal neighborhood
And the one who messes with my neighborhood won't get along with me

I can use the night as a blanket!
I can see the lights in La Perla from Panama
I can use the night as a blanket!
Shining in Morse code and they beckon me
I can use the night as a blanket!
A road made of stars, our traffic light is the moon
I can use the night as a blanket!
I went out at seven thirty and am getting back at one
I can use the night as a blanket!
Girl, put some Vicks vapor rub on me like my mother used to
I can use the night as a blanket!
I will remember where I came from even in my sleep
I can use the night as a blanket!
The good man isn't afraid, isn't afraid of the dark
I can use the night as a blanket!
Ea! And I don't lack for anything

(Chorus excluding what Residente sings)
That neighborhood wall and this'll amaze you
Fifty years later; my name is still on it

There's no forgiving the idiot clown here
Your last name, your money is worthless here
The character of the person we hang out with is respected
We were born of many mothers but we're only brothers here
And that ocean in front of my house, I swear it's true,
Like the one in La Perla, even if I'm in Panama

And on the horizon I see a moving cloud drawing the face of the great Maelo Ribera
Celebrate this get-together man.
What do you make of this collaboration between Rubencito and Calle 13?

I can use the night as a blanket!
But that doesn't take care of the suspicious white man
I can use the night as a blanket!
The night doesn't absolve the lying verb
I can use the night as a blanket!
If you lost yourself, brother, find yourself
I can use the night as a blanket!
Come to Panama and contribute to tourism
I can use the night as a blanket!
A thousand thanks Resident, a thousand thanks Visitor
I can use the night as a blanket!

Catch yourself a platform in Argentina; keep moving forward
I can use the night as a blanket!
With Lilia the lyrics are going up; let's see if they filter through
I can use the night as a blanket!
Mission accomplished; the minister retires.

Taken from <http://lyricstranslate.com/en/la-perla-pearl.html#ixzz3FnjGLsCC>

4. Reading, PA Narratives

- “Only Ex-cons who fled their cities looking for new stomping grounds and immigrants who hideout here while in between jobs or crimes are what seem to have taken over this area. The city is not very appealing and claims to be on the rise but all I saw was that a few eyesores were knocked down and parking lots were built over the craters they left behind. There are more banks than anyone actually needs. Who in Reading has so much money anyway? Everyone here claims to be so broke and destitute? Crime is constant and cops look the other way for fear of being a victim themselves. Also a major problem with bored teens who think they are gangsters who are above the law and go around committing crimes all in the name of trying to prove something to their peers. They are out of control and the parents don't seem to care? Most people here have negative attitudes and constantly cry the "poor me" woes, or walk around with a major chip on their shoulder. Only things I did like were the surrounding areas outside the inner city. Like Gring's Mill Park and the trail that bikers and walkers can enjoy during the seasons changing. Lots of good shopping at the outlets and the auctions/farmers markets in the areas of Boyertown, Leesport, and Ephrata. The cost of living isn't as high as other places but finding a permanent job around the city is not an easy task. This place seams [sic] to be monopolized by the temp agencies and no one ever delivers when they promise you a permanent position from any of the temp to perm jobs they advertise? Your best bet for work is looking to commute to the neighboring cities like Allentown area and Philadelphia areas. Over all. Reading is nothing more than a rest stop on anyone's journey to someplace else” (Sage, 2010).

From: http://www.bestplaces.net/backfence/viewcomment.aspx?id=E67EE171-8FE7-49DF-A47D-28D00D5ED30F&city=Reading_PA&p=54263624

- “...Don't move there or invest in that city!! A few good things still exist, The Pagoda, Stokesay Castle, can't think of anything else... Take the 222 bypass recently completed and avoid the city” (Len, 2006).
- From: http://www.bestplaces.net/backfence/viewcomment.aspx?id=E67EE171-8FE7-49DF-A47D-28D00D5ED30F&city=Reading_PA&p=54263624
- “... Reading, a struggling city of 88,000 that has earned the unwelcome distinction of having the largest share of its residents living in poverty, barely edging out Flint, Mich., according to new Census Bureau data. The count includes only cities with populations of 65,000 or more, and has a margin of error that makes it difficult to declare a winner -- or, perhaps more to the point, a loser. Reading began the last decade at No. 32. But it broke into the top 10 in 2007, joining other places known for their high rates of poverty like Flint, Camden, N.J., and Brownsville, Tex., according to an analysis of the data for The

New York Times by Andrew A. Beveridge, a demographer at Queens College. Now it is No. 1, a ranking that the mothers at the day care center here say does not surprise them, given their first-hand knowledge of poverty-line wages, which for a parent and two children is now \$18,530. The city had been limping for most of the past decade, since the plants that sustained it -- including Lucent Technologies and the Dana Corporation, a car parts manufacturer -- withered. But the past few years delivered more closings and layoffs, sending the city's poverty rate up to 41.3 percent (Tavernise, 2011).

From: *The New York Times*, September 26, 2011

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/27/us/reading-pa-tops-list-poverty-list-census-shows.html>

- Channel 69 News Headline: *Gangsters gone from Reading, but crime remains* (February 19, 2013)

From: <http://www.wfmz.com/news/news-regional-berks/Local/Gangsters-gone-from-Reading-but-crime-remains-officials-say/18987636>

Reading, PA Counter- Narratives

- Reading, Pennsylvania Is Happening!

“When Sharice Towles, independent journalist and founder of #Rdgmatters, blogs about events in Reading, she writes with purpose because she sees the immediate need for community mobilization. She says passionately, “we live in a wonderful city that is far too often referred to as dirty, crime ridden, and poor, but we are so much more than that. The goal of RDG matters is to reach out to our community and show anyone who wants to see a change that it starts with them. When any skeptics voice negative opinions (and there are many) my first question is always, “What are you doing to improve this city?” It’s up to us to take a sense of pride for the place we live in, and make it better.”

Inspired by the story of artist Candy Chang and her “Before I Die” community wall, Sharice and a group of friends launched their own neighborhood chalkboard inviting others to share why they love Reading. The effort generated immediate enthusiasm from residents across the city who stop everyday with hopeful smiles to describe what they love. This is just one of the many things planned to make a difference in our city as we work towards the greater goals of community building and civic engagement...”

From: Redesign Reading website, <http://www.redesignreading.org/>)

- “During another weekly cleaning of our community chalkboard many pass by and stop to share why they still love Reading. Meeting such interesting people with stories and pride for our city is always exciting and today was no exception. Axel, a graduate of Kutztown University, works at a barbershop on 9th and Penn, right across the street from the board. He came over to share what an amazing idea the board is. He wrote on the board that he loves Reading because he was raised here. A lady named Susan stopped to share how much she loves and prays for our city. ‘I’ve lived here for 45 years and it used to really be something. Reading needs more positive things like this and I believe we can make it better’. She writes on the chalk board, “I love Reading because I believe...” (Towles, 2014).

From: http://www.rdgmatters.org/the-love-for-rdg-continues/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+RDGMatters+%28Our+City+%3A+Our+Stories%29

- “...The U.S. Census Bureau reported in 2011 that 41.3 percent of Reading’s 88,000 residents lived in poverty — the top rate in the nation. But now, the city seems to be reinventing itself, defining historic districts, re-purposing factory buildings, noting African American contributions, and acknowledging its large Spanish-speaking population, which was 58.2 percent in 2010... “I’m proud of this area because of the history it represents,” City Council member Marcia Goodman-Hinnershitz told me over tea at Abigail’s, which is in her district of San Francisco-like hills lined with houses. ‘I’m just passionate about this city’... On Willow Street, in the old Reading Hardware building, I wandered into T.E.A. Factory, which

co-founder Cindi Abribat described as “a creative community and co-working space.” Hip-hop artist Walter Pruitt of StreetLawz was in the recording studio. The weekly schedule included a WordPress software workshop, yoga and a local-produce market... ‘We deliberately came into the city,’ Abribat said. ‘We’re trying to get people to come back’ as well. The co-founder, Peter Mitchell, said that when he moved to Reading 18 years ago, ‘on any night you’d see four or five hookers and drug dealers.’ Now, ‘the police are doing a full-court press’ on safety. Reading’s resorts may be long gone, but the city I’d returned to after 39 years is recovering its pride...” (Shuman, 2013).

From: http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/reading-pa-looks-to-the-future-with-a-renewed-sense-of-pride/2014/04/10/47925642-bb65-11e3-9a05-c739f29ccb08_story.html

BEFORE



AFTER



