



# Meridian Stories

## Language Arts Challenge

### Digital Storytelling Project

### *Modern Poetry Visualized*

Designed for Middle and High School Students

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## Introduction

This Digital Story Telling Project will take two to four weeks to complete. This Project targets key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills – creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, digital literacy and presentational skills – in equal measure with the curricular

content. Delivering on all those learning goals requires student immersion and time. The results, as based on our research, are a high level of student engagement, deep learning, and 100% teacher endorsement.

The following project:

- Should be completed by collaborative teams of two to four students.
- Is aligned to Common Core Curricular Standards.
- Contains an Evaluation Rubric that allows the teacher to clearly score and appraise the students' work.
- Is designed to be integrated into the classroom in alignment with existing curricula.
- Can be assigned as an extra credit project to teams of students that you think would benefit from this kind of immersive, deep learning experience.
- Finally, we strongly recommend that all students follow the rules of Digital Citizenry in their proper usage and/or citation of images, music and text taken from other sources. See the Digital Rules section in the Resources section of the site for guidance.

While it is helpful to have a Technology Integrator involved, they are not usually necessary: the students already know how to produce the media. The teacher's primary function in these Challenges is to guide the students as they engage with the content.

At the end of the Challenge, it is often fun and useful to have a screening of all the media productions. Students can vote for their favorite videos that can then be screened in a larger assembly-like setting for the whole grade to see. Or this work can be presented as part of a student showcase for parents and friends. Presentational Skills is another 21<sup>st</sup> century skill that this project enables.

**Let's get started.**

## The Challenge

In a recent article in Harper's Magazine entitled, 'Poetry Slam, or the Decline of the American Verse,' author Mark Edmundson details the three things that he believes all serious poets should possess:

First, the writer must have something of a gift: she must be able to make music, command metaphors, compress sense, write melodiously when the situation demands and gratingly when need be. She must be versed in irony; she must have control of tone. But there is more – a second requirement. She must also have something to say. There must be some region of her experience that has transfixed her and that she feels compelled to put into words and illuminate. She must burn to attack some issue, must want to unbind a knot, tighten it, or maybe send a blade directly through its core.

Given these powers – the power of expression and the power to find a theme – the poet still must add ambition. She must be willing to write for her readers. She must be willing to articulate the possibility that what is true for her is true for all. When these three qualities—lyric gift; a serious theme, passionately addressed; real ambition (which one might also call courage)—come together, the results can be luminous.

Below are three poems recently published in one of the country’s most esteemed literary journals, *The Kenyon Review*. Each poem offers up a visceral vision that, like many quality poems, can be interpreted and enjoyed on a universal and personal level.

Choose one poem: study it, debate it, and find its lyricism, meaning and ambition. Then, create a visual video interpretation of your select poem to accompany a recitation of the poem. The visual content of the video is up to the team. It can be moving picture; a montage of stills; shots of the poem’s reader; all of the above – there are no boundaries to the visual interpretation. Music may be used to underscore your work.

Of course, this Challenge can be done with any modern poetry, but for comparative purposes, we recommend choosing amongst the three provided.

Deliverables include:

- Modern Poetry Video
- Informal Poem Analysis (at teacher’s discretion)
- Storyboard (at teacher’s discretion)

## Evaluation Rubric – *Modern Poetry*

# Visualized

<b>CONTENT COMMAND</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>	<b>4 - 7</b>	<b>8 - 10</b>
<b>Poetic Language</b>	Final piece does not reflect a thoughtful understanding of the poet's use of language	Final piece reflects a thoughtful understanding of the poet's use of language	Final piece reflects a clear and nuanced understanding of the poet's use of language
<b>Poetic Content</b>	Final piece reflects a cursory exploration of the poem's content	Final piece reflects a substantive exploration of the poem's content	Final piece reflects a substantive and enriching exploration of the poem's content
<b>STORYTELLING COMMAND</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>	<b>4 - 7</b>	<b>8 - 10</b>
<b>Visual Choices</b>	The visualization of the poem does not enhance our engagement with the poem	The visualization of the poem enhances our engagement with the poem	The visualization of the poem adds meaning to our understanding of the poem
<b>Poem Recitation</b>	The recitation of the poem does not enhance our understanding of or engagement with the poem	The recitation of the poem does enhance our understanding of and engagement with the poem	The recitation of the poem dramatically enhances our understanding of and engagement with the poem
<b>MEDIA COMMAND</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>	<b>4 - 7</b>	<b>8 - 10</b>
<b>Visual Editing</b>	The editing of the imagery – still or moving – was not visually coherent or engaging.	The editing of imagery – still or moving – was intermittently interesting and coherent	The editing of imagery – still or moving – was visually arresting, creatively coherent and provocative
<b>Sound Design</b>	The mix of music, voice and sound effects did not service our engagement with the video	The mix of music, voice and sound effects services our engagement with the video	The mix of music, voice and sound effects greatly enhances our engagement with the video
<b>21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS COMMAND</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1-3</b>	<b>4-7</b>	<b>8-10</b>
<b>Collaborative Thinking</b>	The group did not work together effectively and/or	The group worked together effectively and had no major	The group demonstrated flexibility in making

	did not share the work equally	issues	compromises and valued the contributions of each group member
<b>Creativity and Innovation</b>	The group did not make a solid effort to create anything new or innovative	The group was able to brainstorm new and inventive ideas, but was inconsistent in their evaluation and implementation of those ideas	The group brainstormed many inventive ideas and was able to evaluate, refine and implement them effectively
<b>Initiative and Self-Direction</b>	The group was unable to set attainable goals, work independently and manage their time effectively	The group required some additional help, but was able to complete the project on time with few problems	The group set attainable goals, worked independently and managed their time effectively, demonstrating a disciplined commitment to the project

## Process

Below is a suggested breakdown for the students' work.

### During **Phase I**, student teams will:

- Select your poem.
- Analyze the poem.
  - Once your team has selected the poem, the best way for your team to explore its meaning is to talk about it. A good way to begin that discussion is to have each team member explain what the poem means to them.
  - Once everyone's interpretation is on the table, a line-by-line analysis will reveal further layers of meaning.
  - If it's helpful, follow the guidelines laid out above: look for the poem's lyricism, meaning and ambition.
  - Interrupt your discussion with a reading of the poem aloud: hearing it in someone else's voice can turn up new moments of meaning or reveal new interpretations.
- Create a list of ideas, images and themes that emerge from your team discussion. Organize this list into a fluid analysis of the poem that reveals your team's range of understanding of the poem's meaning and

ambition. This analysis can help to inform your visual interpretation of the poem.

- **Teacher's Option:** Informal Poem Analysis – Teachers may require that teams hand in this informal analysis.

**During Phase II, student teams will:**

- Visualize the poem
  - Once your team has a strong sense of what the words mean to you; the places in the poem where meaning shifts; the words that excite; and the overall trajectory of the poem, it's time to consider what this poem looks like. Discuss with your team the various visions of each team member, working your way toward a unified visual narrative.
- Create a storyboard - Storyboarding allows you to see the flow of the images that you have chosen. It also allows you to match up images to the words of the poem, providing your team with a sense of movement and pace.
  - **Teacher's Option:** Storyboard – Teachers may require that teams hand in their storyboard.
- Pre-produce the video:
  - Scout locations for shooting (if this is being shot on location)
  - Create costumes, props and other set pieces, as needed.
  - Prepare the logistics for the actual shooting of the video.
  - Decide how the poem is going to be recorded. One voice? Multiple voices? With musical accompaniment? Slowly, with pauses, or straight through?
- Rehearse.

**During Phase III, student teams will:**

- Record the poem – When creating video that is tied closely to a sound track – spoken word or musical – it is often best to record the sound track first. This can be used, in playback mode, to guide the visual shooting. Often producers just record a 'scratch track' which is a rough recording for these purposes, and then record a final track after the whole video has been shot and edited.
- Shoot the video.
- Edit the video, adding stills and graphics as desired.
- Post-produce the video, adding music and sound effects as desired.

## Essential Questions

1. What is modern poetry and why is it meaningful?
2. How has your analysis and consequent interpretation of modern poetry changed your understanding of the power, versatility and beauty of poetic language?
3. How does the visual/audio interpretation of a piece of writing change it's meaning? What is the nature of that change?
4. Conversely, in moving from a written text to a visual interpretation, what elements of the story have you been able to communicate more effectively? Which elements less effectively?
5. How has immersion in the creation of original content and the production of digital media – exercising one's creativity, critical thinking and digital literacy skills - deepened the overall educational experience?
6. How has working on a team – practicing one's collaborative skills - changed the learning experience?

## Student Proficiencies

1. The student will be exposed to samples of current modern poetry and its role in our current culture.
2. The student will have a deeper appreciation and understanding of the power, versatility and beauty of poetic language.
3. The student will interpret his/her poem as a visual and aural work, exploring how meaning changes when media are combined.
4. The student will develop an understanding of the communicative strengths and weaknesses of text vs. video; of words vs. images.
5. The student will utilize key 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, with a focus on creativity, critical thinking and digital literacy, in their process of translating poetic content into a visual story.
6. The student will have an increased awareness of the challenges and rewards of team collaboration. Collaboration – the ability to work with others - is considered one of the most important 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to develop in students as they prepare for life after secondary school.

## Curricular Correlations

The *Modern Poetry Visualized Challenge* addresses a range of curricular objectives that have been articulated by the **Common Core Curricular Standards – English Language Arts**. Below please find the standards that are addressed, either wholly or in part.

## Common Core Curricular Standards – English Language Arts Standards

<b>Standards</b>	<i>8<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>9<sup>th</sup> / 10<sup>th</sup></i>	<i>11<sup>th</sup> / 12<sup>th</sup></i>
<b>RL 2</b>  <b>Reading: Literature</b>  <b>Key Ideas and Details</b>	Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.	Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.	Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
<b>RL 4</b>  <b>Reading: Literature</b>  <b>Craft and Structure</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.	Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful.
<b>SL1</b>  <b>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</b>  <b>Comprehension and Collaboration</b>	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
<b>SL5</b>  <b>SPEAKING AND</b>	Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims	Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in	Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in

<b>LISTENING</b>  <b>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</b>	and evidence, and add interest.	presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.	presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
<b>L4</b>  <b>LANGUAGE</b>  <b>Vocabulary Acquisition and use</b>	Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on <i>grade 8 reading and content</i> , choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.	Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 9–10 reading and content</i> , choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.	Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on <i>grades 11–12 reading and content</i> , choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
<b>L5</b>  <b>LANGUAGE</b>  <b>Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</b>	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

## Poem Selections

### The Elm Tree

By Jennifer Grotz (*Kenyon Review*, Summer 2013, Volume XXXV)

I look up, and there it is, a Gothic bloom, frozen explosion  
sharp against the sky. It's going to come down, but the poem

happens just before that. The poem loves the moment just before,  
like the sculptor loved David, twisted with his loaded slingshot.

What will be flung are shards of shattered windowpane,  
as if the stars had fallen and asked we pick them from our hair.

Last night the sky turned the color of thinning smoke  
and rain came fierce upon the roofs like urgent voices

calling to the tiny wet dresses of the leaves. I look up:  
a hundred-year-old elm can bear an enormous amount,

but it's the saturated ground that will fail. The poem knows  
every moment holds more meaning than can be expressed,

pauses here to consider. After it falls, which it is just about to do,  
there will be no music, no whistle through wet branches, no wind

flinging its heavy velvet cloth. And the poem will be finished.  
What is a poem, then? It's a question, a very attentive form of waiting:

if only death is certain, says the poem, but  
the moment of death is uncertain, then what should you do?

**Jennifer Grotz is the author of *The Needle and Cusp* and translator from French of Patrice de La Tour du Pin's *Psalms of All My Days*. She teaches at the University of Rochester and serves as assistant director of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference.**

## **Just off the Road near Lynchburg, Virginia**

**By Rachel Zucker** (*Kenyon Review*, Summer 2013, Volume XXXV)

John says, *James Wrights says* --- [something about  
how a poet writing about the landscape is  
always writing about himself] ---I'm listening  
but also standing on a bridge over railroad tracks  
& watching some sort of woodchuck or muskrat  
or groundhog scurry in & out of the hilly underbrush  
so not listening closely *Yeah I say It's beautiful here*  
*but I was writing city poems so . . .* how can I explain  
to John I don't believe he exists don't believe  
in Virginia or these horses or houses that tractor  
lawnmower small mammal burrowing it is too  
incredulous such simultaneous lives I'm not sure  
the Earth is round can't perceive that & the hills  
of Virginia mean I can't see where I am except  
right here *Old mountains Old trees*, is what Laurel  
said when I asked her why I love this landscape

even though I don't believe it exists even when  
I'm standing in it *John* I say *I think James Wright*  
*is full of \*\*it* but I don't say the not even  
as a joke not even over the phone I want to say  
on this first day of spring our bodies will not  
break into blossom I want to tell John I don't  
believe in the bucolic or the pastoral I can't  
believe it's possible to waste my life.

**Rachel Zucker is the author of several poetry collections, including *Museum of Accidents* (2009), a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and named one of the best poetry books of the year by Publishers Weekly; *The Last Clear Narrative* (2004); and *Eating in the Underworld* (2003).**

## Quake

By J. Allyn Rosser (*Kenyon Review*, Spring 2012, Volume XXXIV)

Chance had brought the six of us close  
for a few weeks, close enough for liking,  
unstrangered, and would scatter us the next day  
across the wintering continent,  
zipping up our hearts and waving  
with gloves on, breath fogging our last sight  
of each other as we hoisted  
luggage jammed with limitations  
(Patrick would live through July)  
into the trunks of idling cars.  
Perhaps it was for this reason,  
our sense of precarious communion,  
that when the table began to shake  
we all instinctively reached out  
and held hands, the way they do  
at séances, and laughed out  
an incongruous, sweet laughter  
like children getting away with something,  
our fear muted by our distance  
from the fault that, once roused,  
had shifted everything in the world  
but only slightly, an inaudible rumble

stirring the guts of our existence  
as it tickled the candle flames,  
spangled the moment of wine  
balanced on its fragile stem,  
jigged the chairs and table legs,  
and tingled through bootsoles.  
Shock and odd pleasure lay in  
how sharply and simultaneously  
and *consciously* aware we were  
of our heightened awareness  
of each other and our transience.  
For once there was no distraction:  
no lust; no self-conscious adrenaline;  
none of the spiritual glassiness  
that settles over assembled mourners.  
This was just the grave world  
catching us off guard –  
grabbing each of us by both shoulders  
and giving a shake, saying only  
*Here. Now. Take a good look.*

**J. Allyn Rosser's most recent book of poems is *Foiled Again*. She teaches at Ohio University, where she edits the *New Ohio Review*.**