



Language Arts Challenge Digital Storytelling Unit

A Book Without Beginning or End

Designed for Middle and High School Students

Table of Contents	Range of Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • The Challenge • Process • Meridian Support Resources • Evaluation Rubric • Essential Questions • Student Proficiencies • Curricular Correlations (RL4, W3, W4, W5, W6, SL6, L3, L5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic Analysis of the Reading Experience • Exploration of Literary Genre and Salient Components Parts • Imaginative Development • Creative Writing • Digital Literacy Skills - Video - Pre-production, Production and Post-production • 21st Century Skills: Creativity, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Presentational Skills

Introduction

This Digital Story Telling Challenge will take two to four weeks to complete. This Challenge targets key Human Life 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 Challenge:

- Should be completed by collaborative teams of two to four students but can be completed independently, if desired.
- Is aligned to nationally recognized 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. Additionally, will work well in informal educational settings.
- Should 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 area in the free Media Resources section of the Meridian Stories site for guidance.

The [Media Resources](#) section also contains many other **free support materials** from short videos featuring professionals in the field – Artists and Innovators– to short written documents that cover everything from storyboarding to creative brainstorming, interviewing techniques to game design.

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. You don't need to know editing, sound design, shooting or storyboarding: you just need to know your content area.***

At the end of the Challenge, it is often fun and useful to have a screening of all the media productions – they are all designed to run under 4 minutes each. 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 Human Life Skill that this project enables.

Our research indicates this to be a really useful exercise for two additional reasons:

1. Students actually learn from their peers' presentations – it is useful to hear a perspective that is not just the teacher's; and
2. The public setting – painful as it is for some students – provides them with an opportunity to 'own' their work and to be more accountable.

Finally, if you are interested to learn more about the community of schools who annually participate in the [Meridian Stories Competitions](#) – a community that is characterized by a friendly competitive spirit; feedback from Mentors on each submission; and the rewarding of digital badges in content, storytelling and digital literacy – please return to the Competitions section of the website or inquire at info@meridianstories.com.

Let's get started.

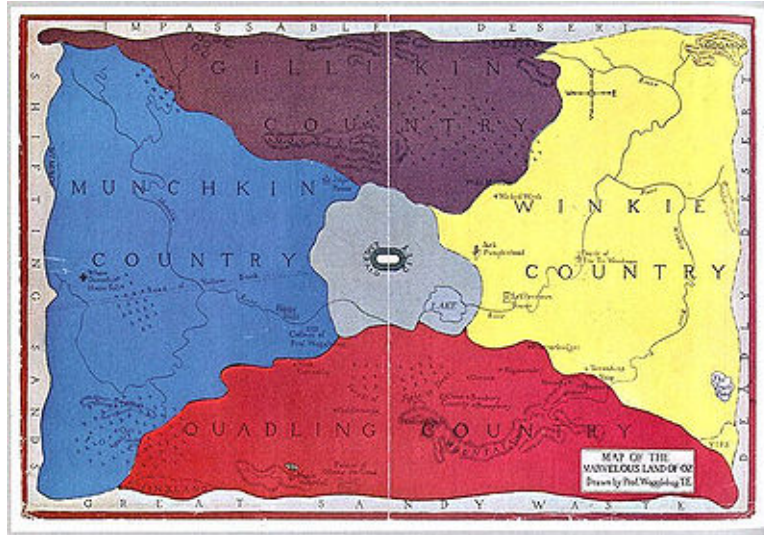
The Challenge

“At such times he had the sensation that there was only one book in the universe, and that all books were simply portals into this greater ongoing work – an inexhaustible, beautiful world that was not imaginary but the world as it truly was, a book without beginning or end.”

Pg. 57, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* by Richard Flanagan

This quote posits that books are portals into a world of books...which is, for this character, the most genuine of worlds.

In this Challenge, your team is going to use this quote as inspiration to create a new imaginary world of books, as if laying the fictional foundation for a new universe inside of which characters will flourish. To get a sense of what we are talking about, think of recent serialized book series, which then become feature films (*Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, *Game of Thrones*, ...). Our serialized model is, however, based on the thirty book series that began with *The Wonderful Wizard of OZ*, which was first published in 1900. In OZ there are four countries: Gillikin Country, Winkie Country, Quadling Country and Munchkin Country. In the center is Emerald City. Here is what that world looks like.



For your World of Books, there will also be four countries and one central city. Each of these four countries must be infused with aspects of literature that are important to your team. Here are some suggestions. Your team may use up to three (or none) of these suggestions for the four countries:

1. **Text and Language** – Language, and its manipulation, is at the core of a book. What is the role of words in this country? (This might include font size and style, word choice, vocabulary, sentence structure, texting, etc.)
2. **Fictional Genre** – There are many different types of fictional genres – mysteries, fairy tales, children’s books, romantic novels, to name just a few. Does a single genre dominate your ‘greater ongoing world’? Or do the different genres mix harmoniously?
3. **Voice** – Perspective – who is telling the story – channels the way that we experience the narrative. How important is the voice of the character – of your protagonist – to your experience with literature? How might ‘voice’ shape a country in your World of Books, literally and figuratively?
4. **Non- Fiction** – The world referenced above in the quote isn’t necessarily all imagined. Non-fiction – autobiographies, biographies, memoirs and historical narratives – account for a large proportion of the books published annually. In your World of Books, is there a place for the lives and musings of real people talking about real events?
5. **Poetry and Plays** – Poetry and plays occupy a special universe that is defined by using language in very disciplined and structured ways, yielding new experiences and art forms: in short, new ways of communication through words. What might a poetic or theatrical country look like in your World of Books?

6. **Physicality** – Books are kindles. Books are e-books. Books are serialized in a magazine. Books are hardcover. Books are softcover. Books are interactive and hyperlinked. How does the physical presence of the book affect the reading experience? How might this come into play in your fictional universe?

The piece that is missing is the central city. What, in your experience, is at the core of the reading experience; at the core of your encounters with a book or a story; at the core of what the character above says is the “inexhaustible, beautiful world that was not imaginary but the world as it truly was, a book without beginning or end”?

The format for this Challenge is a series Show Open - one that needs to fully explain this world in three or four minutes (no more!), as if it were the opening moments in a new series or feature film that will take place in this world. In short, you are setting the scene – the place – a place that will clearly be as much of a character in your bookish universe as the characters themselves. However – and this is important – after presenting the whole universe, you around half of your video should focus on just one of your areas – a country or Central City – in detail. This place is where your ‘story’ starts. And so this Show Open that you are producing begins with the big picture, and then takes us into the heart of one of the places.

This is a challenge about creativity, as well as about probing deeply into the essence of reading and its role in shaping our world today; in giving meaning to our world and, more specifically, to your world. This is your chance to create your *Tomorrowland – King’s Landing – District 13 - The Shire – Oz* - but as seen through the lens of the explosive and infinite universe of books.

Deliverables include:

- The World of Books Show Open Video
- Rough Draft of World of Books Map
- Shooting Script

Process

Below is a suggested breakdown for the students’ work.

During Phase I, student teams will:

- Brainstorm and share their own experience with books: what in your reading and study of literature experience is most salient, moving and thought-provoking? From this session, make a list of the attributes of the reading experience that are most important to your team.
- Prioritize this list and decide on the themes of each of the four countries that make up your World of Books (you are allowed to call it something other than ‘World of Books’!)
 - Create a rough outline of the title, literary essence and attributes of each of the four countries. This Challenge is asking you to substantiate each of these areas with your select knowledge. This may involve direct quotations, characters, book titles, authors, literary journals, recurring literary motifs, alliteration, etc. Your team needs to reveal a certain depth of understanding about each topic that you have chosen. That understanding can be both objective and subjective, the latter as revealed through deep reflection on what reading means for you.
- Based on the above, brainstorm the nature of the Central City. Be sure to ask yourself:
 - How does this Central City connect the four countries?
 - How does this Central City represent the pinnacle of these four countries? Or not?
- Create a first draft of the visual map of this world.
 - ***Teacher’s Option:*** Rough Draft of World of Books Map – Teachers may require groups to hand in rough drafts of their visual maps.

During Phase II, student teams will:

- Now dig deeply into the literary substance of the select country (or Central City) that you will feature; that will start this new TV series. What are the inhabitants like? What is the architecture? What do people do in this country...as it relates to your dominant literary theme? Are there even people in this country? If not people, then what/who?
- Brainstorm the design of the video. Remember, the purpose is to communicate a place that is both reflective of your thoughtfully considered relationship to books, while also being inviting and imaginatively stimulating. Questions to consider:
 - What are you showing? In addition to some sort of map, are you using animation techniques to bring your select country alive?

Might a montage format begin to deliver the look and feel of your country? A diorama or three-dimensional model? Shadow puppetry?

- When presenting your world visually, are you more focused on the whole world, or on your select Country or Central City?
- What are some of the unique props or costumes that might inform this world? Are these things going to be featured in your Show Open?
- What are you saying? This is about books, so language is important. What words are you choosing to sell us on the magic and mystery of this world? Who is speaking? One voice or several? Music: what is the role of music?
- Write a first draft of the script. Once you have settled on a good draft of the script, it may be helpful to create a storyboard to match the visual shots to the script.
- Finalize the script.
 - ***Teacher's Option: Shooting Script*** – Teachers may require groups to hand in final scripts of their Show Open video.
- Pre-produce the scene:
 - Complete the art work, props, related visual materials and other set pieces, as needed;
 - Prepare the logistics for the actual shooting of the scene; and
 - Rehearse the shoot.

During Phase III, student teams will:

- Shoot the video.
- Edit the video, adding stills and graphics as desired.
- Post-produce the video, adding music and sound effects as desired.

Meridian Support Resources

Meridian Stories provides two forms of support for the student teams:

1. Meridian Innovators and Artists – This is a series of three-to-four-minute videos featuring artists and innovative professionals who offer important advice, specifically for Meridian Stories, in the areas of creativity and production.
2. Media Resource Collection – These are short documents that offer student teams a key tips in the areas of creativity and production.

Recommended review, as a team, for this Challenge include:	
Meridian Innovators and Artists	Media Resource Collection
<i>On Fiction Writing</i> – Lily King	“Creative Brainstorming Techniques”
<i>On the Importance of Characters in Storytelling</i> – Scott Nash	“Building Characters”
<i>On Multimedia in Theatre</i> – Roger Bechtel	“Creating Storyboards, Framing the Shot”
<i>On Sound Design</i> – Chris Watkinson	“Three Free Rendering and Animation Programs”

Evaluation Rubric – *A Book Without Beginning Or End*

CONTENT COMMAND			
Criteria	1 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 10
Countries – Depth of Content	The presentation of each country’s content is shallow	The presentation of each country’s content is thoughtful and reflects engagement with the content of books	The presentation of each country’s content is thoughtful and reflects imaginative engagement with the content of books
Singular Country – Depth of Content	The focus on your select country or Central City is shallow	The focus on your select country or Central City is layered and reflects engagement with the content of books	The focus on your select country or Central City is layered and reflects thoughtful and imaginative engagement with the content of books
Central City -	The literary content that defines the core of your world is hard to understand in the context of your four surrounding countries	The literary content that defines the core of your world is sensible in relation to your other countries	The literary content that defines the core of your world is thoughtful and is in sensible and interesting dialogue with the surrounding countries
STORYTELLING COMMAND			
Criteria	1 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 10
Narrative	The world and its component parts do not form a cohesive and imaginative new World of Books	The world and its component parts do form a cohesive and imaginative new World of Books	The world and its component parts form a cohesive and imaginative World of Books, stimulating further interest from the viewer in books themselves
Scripting and Language	The narrative and overall use of language did not effectively communicate the nature and tone of your world	The narrative and overall use of language did effectively communicate the nature and tone of your world	The narrative and overall use of language succeeded in communicating the nature and tone of your world in an engaging way

MEDIA COMMAND			
Criteria	1 - 3	4 – 7	8 - 10
Visual Design	The presentation of the world is not visually interesting or significantly supportive of the content	The presentation of the world is visually interesting and thoughtful, and reflects the content well	The presentation of the world is visually stimulating and thoughtful, and reflects the content in myriad ways
Sound Design	The mix of music, voice and sound effects does 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
HUMAN SKILLS COMMAND			
Criteria	1-3	4-7	8-10
Collaborative Thinking	The group did not work together effectively and/or did not share the work equally	The group worked together effectively and had no major issues	The group demonstrated flexibility in making compromises and valued the contributions of each group member
Creativity and Innovation	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
Initiative and Self-Direction	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

Essential Questions

1. On a personal level, what is the essence of the reading experience for you?
2. What are the most salient elements of literary engagement and why?
3. What are some important works of literature – novels, poetry, plays, short stories, nonfiction – that have impacted your understanding of self and the world around you?
 1. Can you identify the specific elements within those works that help them to succeed?
4. How does one create a fictional setting that could plausibly sustain a new imaginative universe of characters and stories?
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 have a deeper sense of their relationship to reading and literature; a deeper sense of why they read or why they may want to consider starting to read in the near future.
2. The student will understand, after a collaborative analysis, the component parts that make reading relevant for him/her.
3. The student will have analyzed specific elements from his/her inventory of literary experience in the service of creating this new fictional setting.
4. The student, working collaboratively, will have participated in the creation of a new fictional universe.
5. The student will utilize key 21st century skills, with a focus on creativity, critical thinking and digital literacy, in their process of translating literary content into a new narrative format.
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 21st century skills to develop in students as they prepare for life after secondary school.

Curricular Correlations

The *A Book Without Beginning or End 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

<i>Standard</i>	<i>8th</i>	<i>9th/10th</i>	<i>11th/12th</i>
RL4 READING: LITERATURE Craft and Structure	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.	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).	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. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
W3 WRITING Text Types and Purposes	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
W4 WRITING Production and Distribution of Writing	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
W5 WRITING	With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting,	Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most	Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing

Production and Distribution of Writing	or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.	significant for a specific purpose and audience.	on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
W6 WRITING Production and Distribution of Writing	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.
SL6 SPEAKING AND LISTENING Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas	Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.	Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.	Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.
L3 LANGUAGE Knowledge of Language	Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.	Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.	Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
L5 LANGUAGE Vocabulary Acquisition and Use	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.