



Language Arts Challenge Digital Storytelling Unit

Dystopian Drama

Designed for Middle and High School Students

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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

*Brave New World ...1984 ...Fahrenheit 451 ...The Hunger Games ...
The Handmaid's Tale ...The Giver.*

These novels offer their readers a dystopian view of society. Wikipedia defines 'dystopia' as the following:

A **dystopia** is a community or society, usually fictional, that is in some important way undesirable or frightening. It is the opposite of a utopia. Dystopias are often characterized by dehumanization, totalitarian governments, environmental disaster or other characteristics associated with a cataclysmic decline in society. Elements of dystopias may vary from environmental to political and social issues. Dystopian societies have culminated in a broad series of sub-genres of fiction and are often used to raise real-world issues regarding society, environment, politics, religion, psychology, spirituality, or technology that may become present in the future.

In this Challenge, your team is asked to create the basic parameters of a dystopian society, and then write and shoot a scene that takes place in this dystopian society. The catch here is this: the 'undesirable or frightening' society should be connected to technology – a word that is as broad and infinite as you want to make it.

Specifically:

- Create a scene that reveals three basic tenets of a dystopian society that your team has developed. The scene must involve at least two characters. This might be, for example, one character who is representing the organization in power and one character who is its subject.
 - If desired, teachers can have students base their dystopian society on an existing one that they are currently studying. If this is the case, a) the student team needs to identify the book on which their society is based; and b) partially re-imagine that society by changing or adding new rules or laws.
- The Challenge asks your team to create a ‘scene’ and not an entire story with a traditional beginning, middle and end. However, scenes do share some of the same defining features of stories, and they might include:
 - Statement of an objective (“I want to escape!”)
 - Introduction of a conflict that is related to the objective (“They know it and have erected several barriers especially crafted to defeat me.”)
 - Failure or success of the character to reach his objective (“They do/don’t know that I have outside help from a source they could never imagine.”)
- While not all scenes follow this pattern, this can serve as a helpful starting point from which to craft your narrative work.
- Pay particular attention to your use of language. Dystopian societies tend to re-purpose and re-invent language to meet their needs. How is your society managing and re-purposing language?

Deliverables include:

- Dystopia Video
- Background Paper (at teacher’s discretion)
- Shooting Script (at teacher’s discretion)

The Process

Below is a suggested breakdown for the students’ work.

During Phase I, student teams will:

- Revisit dystopian novels that you have read or are currently studying. What fascinates you about them? What don’t you like about them? Are there elements from those dystopian societies that you may want to

- adapt for your scene? Itemize the societal laws, human behaviors, language changes and rituals that engage you the most.
- If your team is working with a specific work of literature, breakdown the laws of that society and analyze how it is working; why it is working that way; and the impact on the general population. This will serve as the basis for re-imagining that world.
 - Create the rules for your dystopia, including a brief backstory for how your society evolved into its current state. (A backstory will be very helpful in giving your scene depth and substance.)
 - ***Teacher's Option: Background Paper*** – Teachers may require that teams hand in this paper that provides a brief history of their new society – their dystopian backstory – as well as the current laws that govern that society, and its implications on human behavior.
 - When creating your futuristic societal framework, keep in mind that the most powerful dystopias are generally recognizable as possible evolutions of our current society; as possible catastrophic trajectories into our future. What technological theme in our society today are you projecting forward?
 - Keep in mind that the best dystopias are not purposefully designed to be overflowing with horror. They are societies that some people from that society think are good or beneficial. Perhaps, therefore, your dystopia is an extension of a technology that appears, at first glance, to be a positive development. But in the scene, the darker truths are revealed.

During Phase II, student teams will:

- Write the scene.
 - This will involve pinpointing a specific moment in the execution of your dystopia; a moment that will reveal the society's architecture. First, brainstorm and outline the scene. Then populate it with interesting characters. Finally, draft the dialogue.
 - When creating your characters, consider what your characters are trying to accomplish in your scene (the objective): Compliance? Rebellion? Understanding? Deception?
 - Consider language: how does spoken cadence and word choice (as well as meaning) change in your new world?
 - Once your first draft is completed, read it out loud, several times, listening for moments that are lively and chilling vs. moments that

are expository and lifeless. Share a reading of your first draft with friends. Are they understanding the rules of this society? Are the characters and the decisions that they make, clear? Based on these discussions, begin your second draft.

- Finalize your scene.
 - **Teacher's Option:** Shooting Script - Teachers may require that each team submit the final shooting script.
- Visualize your Scene: What, visually, distinguishes your world from our world? Does it have to do with color? Clothing? Lighting? Masks and Facial expressions? Gadgets or accessories? What visual clues can you give to the audience that we are indeed in another time and place?
 - Creating a 'Style Guide' on Pinterest can be a fun and rewarding thing to do. A 'Style Guide' is a series of existing pictures and/or original sketches that give you a sense of the look your scene is aiming for. Is it a sleek, polished, sterile look or dilapidated, burnt and stressed? Saturated primary colors everywhere or all grays and beiges?
- Pre-produce the scene:
 - Scout locations for shooting;
 - Create costumes, props and other set pieces, as needed;
 - Prepare the logistics for the actual shooting of the scene; and
 - Rehearse the scene.

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. Media 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. Meridian Resources – These are short documents that offer student teams 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

<p><i>On Fiction Writing</i>– Lily King <i>On Acting</i> – Janet McTeer <i>On the Importance of Character in Storytelling</i> – Scott Nash <i>On Elements of a Successful Horror Film</i> – Aviva Briefel</p>	<p>“Creative Brainstorming Techniques” “Video Editing Basics” “Sound Recording Basics” “Scene Work: Camera Angles and Movement”</p>
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Evaluation Rubric –*Dystopian Drama*

CONTENT COMMAND	
Criteria	1 - 10
Dystopia Genre - Three Societal Tenets	The three defining dystopian tenets are presented clearly and used creatively to propel the scene forward
Dystopia Genre - Language	The choice and presentation of words, phrases and meanings embraces the tone and sensibility of a dystopian society
Dystopia Genre – Whole Scene	The whole scene is engaging and very effective at eliciting the sensations of a dystopia
STORYTELLING COMMAND	
Criteria	1 - 10
Character Creation	The characters are compelling and perfectly suited to the scene
Scene Structure	The scene is clearly structured and very engaging
Technology Narrative Framework	The technology identified to define this dystopia clearly sets up an engaging and driving narrative dynamic.
MEDIA COMMAND	
Criteria	1 - 10
Acting	The acting is exciting and engaging, contributing to the scene’s success
Setting and Cinematography	The setting and use of the camera enhance the action of the scene, creating the necessary tension and tone
Editing and Music	The scene is edited cleanly and effectively The selective use of music and sound effects enhances the tensions inherent in the scene
HUMAN SKILLS COMMAND	
Criteria	1 - 10
Collaborative Thinking	The group demonstrated flexibility in making compromises and valued the contributions of each group member

Creativity and Innovation	The group brainstormed many inventive ideas and was able to evaluate, refine and implement them effectively
Initiative and Self-Direction	The group set attainable goals, worked independently, and managed their time effectively, demonstrating a disciplined commitment to the project

Essential Questions

1. How has your analysis and consequent re-interpretation of dystopian societies changed your understanding of the power and relevance of this genre of literature?
2. How do new societies re-structure and re-contextualize language in order to accomplish their ends?
 - a. Have you seen this happen in your own lifetime?
3. In developing a new scene on paper, what have you learned about character creation, dialogue writing and scene structure?
4. What have you learned about technology as a continually emergent force in today's, and tomorrow's, world?
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 appreciation and understanding of the dystopian literary genre and its relevance to society.
2. The student will understand the power of language as a vital tool to stabilize and de-stabilize human behavior.
3. The student will have created new characters, written dialogue and prepared an original scene on paper as part of an exploration of the dystopian literary genre.
4. The student will take a deep look at the role of technology in the present and forecast that role into the future, thereby creating a greater awareness of the omnipresence of technology in our lives.
5. The student will utilize key Human Skills, with a focus on creativity, critical thinking and digital literacy, in their process of translating literary content into an original 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 Human Skills to develop in students as they prepare for life after secondary school.

Curricular Correlations

The *Dystopian Drama* 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>
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 Production and Distribution of Writing	With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.	Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.	Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.
W6	Use technology, including the Internet,	Use technology, including the Internet,	Use technology, including the Internet,

<p>WRITING</p> <p>Production and Distribution of Writing</p>	<p>to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.</p>
<p>SL1</p> <p>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</p> <p>Comprehension and Collaboration</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>SL6</p> <p>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</p> <p>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</p>	<p>Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.</p>	<p>Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.</p>	<p>Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.</p>
<p>L3</p> <p>LANGUAGE</p> <p>Knowledge of Language</p>	<p>Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>L5</p> <p>LANGUAGE</p>	<p>Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p>	<p>Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p>	<p>Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p>

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use			
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