



Language Arts Challenge Digital Storytelling Unit

Edgar Allan Poe Horror Scene

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

In this horrific Challenge, student teams are asked to channel the deranged but deeply intuitive perspective of Edgar Allan Poe and bring it to life in a new scene of terror. Specifically, read the passage below taken from the Edgar Allan Poe short story, "Ligeia." Select three words/phrases/moments from the passage and based on those words, create your own original 2 – 4 minute horror scene *in the style of Edgar Allan Poe*. After the conclusion of your digital story, the team must create a slate that identifies your select story elements for the mentors.

For example, a team may choose to base their new horror scene on these three elements from the passage below:

‘corpse’
‘repetition of the sound’
‘startled me from my reverie’.

Teams may add their own EA Poe-style ‘horror’ elements to the scene. Additionally, the phrase ‘style of Edgar Allan Poe’ is not meant to lock you into a time period or dialogue style in any way. It is, however, meant to indicate a certain style of horror storytelling of which Edgar Allan Poe remains the master. Raging zombies stumbling through the woods does not an Edgar Allan Poe story make! What characterizes Edgar Allan Poe’s particular brand of storytelling? That is what you are going to want to unearth.

Deliverables include:

- Horror Digital Story
- Style Paper (at teacher’s discretion)
- Story Outline (at teacher’s discretion)
- Shooting Script (at teacher’s discretion)

Passage from “Ligea”

“It might have been midnight, or perhaps earlier, or later, for I had taken no note of time, when a sob, low, gentle, but very distinct, startled me from my reverie. I *felt* that it came from the bed of ebony – the bed of death. I listened in an agony of superstitious terror – but there was no repetition of the sound. I strained my vision to detect any motion in the corpse – but there was not the slightest perceptible. Yet I could not have been deceived. I *had* heard the noise, however faint, and my soul was awakened within me. I resolutely and perseveringly kept my attention riveted upon the body. Many minutes elapsed before any circumstance occurred tending to throw light upon the mystery. At length it became evident that a slight, a very feeble, and barely noticeable tinge of color had flushed up with the cheeks, and along the sunken small veins of the eyelids. Through a species of unutterable horror and awe, for which the language of mortality has no sufficiently energetic expression, I felt my heart cease to beat, my limbs grow rigid where I sat.” (“Ligeia”)

Process

Below is a suggested breakdown for the students’ work.

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During Phase I, student teams will:

- Read and discuss a variety of Edgar Allan Poe stories to acquaint yourselves with his ‘style’ of storytelling. Consider the following:
 - Perspective and Voice – He is often telling a story from a singular point of view. How does this affect our experience?
 - Tension and Time – How does he use time - and waiting and patience and the unknown – to create tension, suspense and fright?
 - Setting – What do his settings generally ‘feel’ like to the reader? What do you imagine in your head as you read his stories? Bright, outdoor spaces with fountains? No. What is the palette of his settings?
 - Language – How do his characters speak? Are they generally urban or rural characters? Does repetition play a role in his writings and use of language?
 - Motivations – EA Poe’s stories are about people. The horror (and the redemption) emanates from within ...people. What are Poe’s mechanics for making horror work through humanity?
 - Genre – EA Poe’s stories are called ‘gothic’. What does that mean?
 - ***Teacher’s Option: Style Paper*** – Teachers may require that teams hand in a two-page paper that articulates four of the key elements of Edgar Allan Poe’s style of writing and horror storytelling.
- Study the “Ligeia” passage and choose your three story elements.
- Brainstorm about your scene. Keep in mind that this is a scene and not a whole story. You are looking to outline a moment that encapsulates the suspense and horror of an EA Poe story, that is possible for local production. Here are some scene questions to consider:
 - Consider how to start your story: what is the hook?
 - Try to limit your scene to two or three characters. Keep in mind some of the characters can be off-screen – only referenced – and still be effective.
 - What are your devices to build tension?
 - What are you building toward? What is the climax of your scene?
 - How will you end your scene?
- By the end of this phase, your team should have a sense of the design and key elements of your scene.

During Phase Two, student teams will:

- Finalize the story outline for the scene.
 - ***Teacher's Option: Story Outline*** – Teachers may require that teams hand in a short outline of the scene for review and feedback
- Write the script. Ideas to consider:
 - While bringing your characters to life, consider what your characters are trying to accomplish in your scene and what is preventing them from their desired goals. Keep in mind ideas that revolve around words like ‘denial,’ ‘bravery,’ ‘revenge’ and ‘fear.’
 - Consider emotion and tone in the choice of your language: how does spoken cadence and word choice (as well as meaning) contribute to your EA Poe scene?
 - 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. Based on discussions, begin your second draft.
 - Finalize your scene.
 - ***Teacher's Option: Shooting Script*** - Teachers may require that each team submit the final shooting script.
- 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.
- Camera Work - After a few rehearsals, your group should think about the camera's role in this performance. Using your camera actively can be important. If your camera remains stationary throughout your whole performance, you risk the boredom of your viewer. Play around with your camera's settings; take turns filming; do what you must to make your script and setting visually exciting. Things to consider:
 - Camera angle
 - Panning speed
 - Zoom intensity/speed
 - Camera location variation
 - Sound: How will you mic your characters?

- Before moving into the final phase, begin to consider the sound design of this piece. Horror scenes often heavily depend on sound and music to assist in creating the atmosphere of dread and suspense. What music and sounds will your team use to help fill out the atmosphere of your scene?

During Phase III, student teams will:

- Shoot the video.
- Edit the video, adding stills and graphics as desired.
- Create concluding slate about the words from ‘Ligea’ that you selected to inform your scene.
- Post-produce the video, adding music and sound effects as desired.

Meridian Support Resources

<i>Meridian Stories</i> provides two forms of support for the student teams:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Meridian Innovators and Artists</u> – 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. <u>Media Resource Collection</u> – These are short documents that offer student teams key tips in the areas of creativity, production, game design and digital citizenry. 	
Recommended review, as a team, for this Challenge include:	
Meridian Innovators and Artists	Meridian Resources
<i>On Script Writing</i> – Kent Pierce	“Building Characters”
<i>On Making Horror Films</i> – Aviva Briefel	“Creative Brainstorming Techniques”
<i>On Acting</i> – Janet McTeer	“Creating Storyboards, Framing a Shot”
<i>On Movement and Rhythm in Video</i> – Charlotte Griffin	“Scene Work: Camera Angles and Movement”

Evaluation Rubric – *Edgar Allan Poe Horror Scene*

CONTENT COMMAND	
Criteria	1-10
Whole Scene	The scene is engaging and effective at eliciting the sensations of horror
Style of Horror	The scene is closely aligned with the tone, sensibility, detail and thrill of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories
Three Story Elements	The three Edgar Allan Poe story elements are presented clearly and used creatively to propel the scene forward
STORYTELLING COMMAND	
Criteria	1-10
Character Creation	The character(s) are compelling and perfectly suited to the scene
Dialogue	The dialogue is believable and aligned with Edgar Allan Poe's command of language; it reveals character effectively and services the plot well
Scene Structure	The scene is engaging and clearly well structured
MEDIA COMMAND	
Criteria	1-10
Acting	The acting is believable and engaging, contributing to the scene's success
Setting and Cinematography	The setting and use of the camera support the action of the scene and help create the tension necessary to sustain a horror scene
Editing and Music	The scene is edited cleanly and effectively The selective use of music and sound effects enhance the horror and drama 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

Essential Questions

1. What is Edgar Allan Poe's style of gothic storytelling?
2. How has your analysis and consequent re-interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe's language changed your understanding of the power, versatility and beauty of language to create horror and fear?
3. How has your analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's stories and consequent digital production experience, increased your understanding of the vital elements of story creation in general; and of story creation in the horror genre, in particular?
4. In developing a new scene on paper, what have you learned about character creation, dialogue writing and scene structure?
5. In developing, prepping and shooting an original horror scene in the style of Edgar Allan Poe, what did you learn about the relationship between words (dialogue), images (setting and character) and music/sound to create effective storytelling?
6. 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?
7. How has working on a team – practicing one's collaborative skills - changed the learning experience?

Student Proficiencies

1. The student will have a clear understanding of Edgar Allan Poe and the tools he uses to create gothic tales.
2. The student will have a deeper appreciation and understanding of Edgar Allan Poe's effective use of language to create a sense of horror and fear.
3. The student will have a visceral understanding of the key elements in scene and story creation, particularly in the horror genre.
4. The student will have created new characters, written dialogue and prepared an entire scene on paper with the purpose of eliciting horror and fear in its audience.
5. The student will understand the differences between telling a horror story through text and telling a horror story through a mixture of text, imagery, music and sound.

6. The student will utilize key 21st century skills, with a focus on creativity, critical thinking and digital literacy, in their process of translating this literary content into a new narrative format.
7. 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 *Edgar Allan Poe Horror Scene 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

<i>Standard</i>	<i>8th</i>	<i>9th / 10th</i>	<i>11th / 12th</i>
RL3 READING: LITERATURE Key Ideas and Details	Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision	Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme	Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed)
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	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	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

	allusions to other texts.	and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).	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 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.
SL1 SPEAKING AND LISTENING	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts,	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led)

Comprehension and Collaboration	and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL5 SPEAKING AND LISTENING Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas	Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.	Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.	Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.
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.