



# Language Arts Challenge

## *I Am Who I Am Because...*

### *(Digital Self-Portrait)*

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

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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](mailto:info@meridianstories.com).

**Let's get started.**

## The Challenge

Every person has an individual set of experiences, passions, and sense of identity which make them unique – adding value to their surrounding community. Similar to people, original artwork adds value to the world that wasn't there before. Let's double the value by combining the two: create art about the individual: you (or your team). In this digital storytelling challenge, you will use video to create a self-portrait exploring three key themes: family heritage, personal passions, and defining aspects of your identity (ex. religion, culture, gender, sexuality, etc.) You have two options for how you create your self-portrait:

1. Option 1 is to create a self-portrait inspired by the three themes through a medium of your choice such as painting, wood working, drawing, knitting, etc. Document this creative process as it is happening, which will serve as the spine of your digital story.
2. Option 2 is for the audio and visuals of the video to *be* your self-portrait. This can mean you write a song, poem, dance, or short story that you pair with visuals. This can mean that your storytelling format can be a vlog, documentary-style video, photo essay, music video or a mixture of formats. It can mean anything really: the narrative form of 'you' is up to you. You can explore more

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than the three themes listed, but be sure to touch on your heritage, passions, and influential aspects of your identity. As you create, be open to the artistic process; it might take you in an unexpected direction. Finally, this can be done as a group process - as a team of two, three or four individuals - who are exploring their collective identities through this exploration.

**Deliverables** include:

- The Digital Self-Portrait
- Personal Essay Draft (at teacher's discretion)
- Storyboard or Draft Script (at teacher's discretion)

*[This Meridian Stories Challenge was developed by Regan Duffy, a student at the University of Minnesota.]*

## Process

Below is a suggested breakdown for the student's work.

**During Phase I, student teams (or just a singular student) will:**

- Start by exploring your personal passions and identity. That's much easier said than done and going about it looks different for everyone. You can explore these things by journaling, meditating, reflecting with friends and family, or sitting alone with your thoughts. The goal of this process is to find what you want to explore and share in your self-portrait.
- To help you along, here are some questions to consider, on a per theme basis:
  - Family Heritage:
    - How have the experiences of your family influenced your development as a person?
    - Are there any family values that have helped you through hard times or made it easier to make decisions?
    - What is your ancestral heritage and what traditions are associated with the family history? Understanding some of the people who came before you - whose movements and choices landed your family where it is today - can be deeply enlightening...and oftentimes, unsettling and confusing. But always informative. Talk to your parents or relatives: where are you really from and how do you think that shapes the other two themes: your passions and identity?
  - Personal Passions:

- What do you aspire to do? (this question can be applied to a short-term goal you have for yourself or longer term objectives, related to occupations or a difference you hope to make in the world).
- What do you highly value? (Art, music, nature, friends, science, etc.)
- What's a unique interest you have?
- Defining Aspects of Identity - \*Note: This portion of the project can be especially personal, so do not feel a need to share anything with which you are not comfortable.
  - What are some foundational aspects of your identity, internally and externally?
  - How have these parts of your identity influenced the daily aspects of your life?
  - How would you be different if you changed any of your defining aspects of identity?
- Take all of this work and write it up. Expressing this in the form of a personal essay can be incredibly useful in helping you to articulate your thoughts while excavating elements of self-understanding. A personal essay is like a personal statement that you write with the express purpose of communicating to others who you are, honestly and authentically. A personal essay can serve the dual purpose of awakening others to the many dimensions that make up you, as well provide increased self- awareness.
  - ***Teacher's Option: Personal Essay Draft*** – Teachers may require that students/teams hand in a short personal essay or summary of ideas that comprise the key points of their identity.
- After thinking – and writing - about these themes, decide what kind of self-portrait you would like to create and what medium you'd like to use. The themes will have a significant impact on the execution of your self-portrait, so take your time with your period of reflection over the themes.
- If this is being done as a TEAM project, all of Phase I still applies: everyone is still working through their own aspects of identity. How it is turned into a collective work of art is a Phase II process.

## **During Phase II, the student will:**

### **Option 1**

- Your project will be the documentation of creating your self-portrait and explaining the artistic process as well as your exploration of the themes. A few questions to consider:
  - Is there an overarching message you want to share?

- Is this video 1 minute, 2 minutes, 4 minutes? Fast paced and punchy or slower and more reflective?
- How do the three themes ‘talk’ to each in other in your art and your story of your art?
- Anticipate **visuals** you want in the video before creating. By knowing what you want to film ahead of time, you won’t miss an opportunity for footage along the way. Consider visual aids you can add into the video that pertain to your project like photos or mementos. Also consider how you will reveal and display your art to viewers. Will the final product only be revealed in the end? Or will viewers see your completed artwork at the beginning of your digital self-portrait, and then work backwards through the creation process? These are just two options.
- Consider the **audio** in your digital self-portrait. Utilizing voiceover or talking straight to camera creates a different experience for viewers. How will you use music and other sound effects to enhance the engagement with your viewers?
- Envision what you’d like the viewers to take away from your digital self-portrait. Often it can be useful to start with a definition of that experience - that impact you want to create - and work your story back from there.
- If this a team work of art, it might be helpful to pick one unifying theme – one thing that accurately reflects all of you – and then build your individual artistic pathways from that one unifying quality.

## Option 2

- You have already written about your exploration of the three themes. What does those ideas on paper look like ...in a video? For example, will the themes be presented in different artistic styles? Or will they look to be a part of one larger artistic piece?
  - Be careful not to overthink this – not to reach too far creatively. You have your ideas. You have word, image and sound/music at your disposal to communicate those ideas. Do it.
- As part of this transformation from paper – personal essay – to digital self-portrait, you are moving from an essay format to a visual story format. What exactly is this story of ...you? What elements of ‘story’ are important in this piece? Plot? Setting? Emotional connection? Character? Think of how the personal themes you’ve identified and explored can be organized into a story.
  - For example, are you the narrator telling your own story? Does the audience know it’s your story or is that revealed at the end?
- How will your visuals and sound work together to enhance the storytelling experience? The combination of sound and visuals can play off of each other to add emphasis. An increase or absence of sound can tell your audience to pay

attention to what's on screen. A change in lighting or an abrupt scene change can tell viewers that a new point is being made. No matter what your project is, paying an equal amount of attention to visuals *and sound* creates a more immersive experience.

- As with Option 1, envision what you'd like the final product of the video to be and how you want to impact your audience. What would you like viewers to take away from their encounter with your digital self-portrait?
- If this is a team digital self-portrait, as with Option 1, it might be helpful to pick one unifying theme – one thing that accurately reflects all of you – and then build your individual artistic pathways from that one unifying quality.

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

- Script and rehearse the video. This is a digital self-portrait: it may take a few takes to get it just right.
- As necessary or desired, storyboard the video. Certain images may be really important to your story. Storyboarding is a critical tool that allows you to “see” your story before you shoot it.
  - ***Teacher's Option: Storyboard or Draft Script*** – Teachers may require that students/teams hand in a draft of their script or a storyboard of digital self-portrait, for review and feedback.
- Shoot the video!
- Record any singing, instrument playing, or voice-over needed for your video.
- Edit the video, adding stills and graphics as desired.
- Post-produce the video, adding music and sound effects as desired, keeping in mind the effect that music – in terms of enhancing the emotions and stories – can have on the audience.

## **Meridian Support: The Digital Storytelling Resource Center**

*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 key tips in the areas of creativity, production, game design and digital citizenry.

Recommended review, as a team, for this Competition include:

<b>Meridian Innovators and Artists</b>	<b>Media Resource Collection</b>
<a href="#"><u>Liza Bakewell on Memoir and Non-Fiction Writing</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Creating a Short Documentary</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Margaret Heffernan on Non-Fiction</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Creating Storyboards/Framing a Shot</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Chris Watkinson on Sound Design</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Producing: Tips for the Shoot</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>Tom Pierce on Editing</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Video Editing Basics</u></a>

## Evaluation Rubric – *I Am Who I Am Because...*

<b>CONTENT COMMAND</b>	
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1-10</b>
<b>The Themes</b>	The student explores the three themes thoughtfully and compellingly
<b>Self-Portrait</b>	The self-portrait is engaging, enlightening and creative
<b>The Process</b>	The necessarily complex process for creating this artistic personal narrative is evident in the final piece
<b>STORYTELLING COMMAND</b>	
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1-10</b>
<b>Narrative Format</b>	The choice of narrative format is creative, honest and appealing



<b>Themes and Self Portrait</b>	The three themes cohere with other elements of the final work, to create a provocative and engaging narrative
<b>The Art</b>	The final artwork effectively and accurately communicates important ideas about the subject
<b>MEDIA COMMAND</b>	
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1-10</b>
<b>Visual Choices</b>	The visual and stylistic choices enhance the story and the content
<b>Editing</b>	The video is edited cleanly and effectively, resulting in an engaging viewing experience
<b>Sound and Music</b>	Sound effects and music enhance the audience's engagement with the digital self-portrait
<b>HUMAN SKILLS COMMAND</b>	
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1-10</b>
<b>Collaborative Thinking</b>	The group demonstrated flexibility in making compromises and valued the contributions of each group member
<b>Creativity and Innovation</b>	The group brainstormed many inventive ideas and was able to evaluate, refine and implement them effectively
<b>Initiative and Self-Direction</b>	The group set attainable goals, worked independently and managed their time effectively, demonstrating a disciplined commitment to the project

## Essential Questions

1. 'Who are you?' and why is it critically important to explore and seriously examine this question, individually or as a group?
2. How has the creation of an artistic personal essay broadened one's understanding of narrative structure, self, and creativity?
3. How has the use of artwork as a form of storytelling diversified one's capacity to tell stories through alternative mediums?
4. How has processing and connecting the three themes helped one explore the concept of self and character?

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?

## Student Proficiencies

1. The student will engage in a complex, far-ranging and creative exploration of personal identity and understand why this level of self-awareness is essential.
2. The student will gain a broader understanding of how writing, inside of a personal essay structure, can expand one’s ability to communicate and understand self.
3. The student will gain the ability to portray a story and message through an alternative medium other than verbal or written communication.
4. The student will build connections with art and identity to develop a stronger understanding of self and character.
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 personal content into a new narrative format.

## Curricular Correlations

The *I AM Who I Am Because...* 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

Standard	Grade 8	Grades 9-10	Grades 11-12
<b>Writing 2</b> <b>Text Types and Purposes</b>	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

<p><b>Writing 3</b></p> <p><b>Text Types and Purposes</b></p>	<p>Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.</p>	<p>Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.</p>	<p>Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.</p>
<p><b>Writing 4</b></p> <p><b>Production and Distribution of Writing</b></p>	<p>Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p>	<p>Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p>	<p>Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p>
<p><b>Writing 5</b></p> <p><b>Production and Distribution of Writing</b></p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p><b>Speaking &amp; Listening 5</b></p> <p><b>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</b></p>	<p>Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.</p>	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p><b>Language 1</b></p>	<p>Demonstrate</p>	<p>Demonstrate</p>	<p>Demonstrate</p>

<b>Conventions of Standard English</b>	command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.	command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.	command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
<b>Language 5</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.
<b>Language 6</b> <b>Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</b>	Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.	Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.	Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.