



# Language Arts Challenge

(History Department Overlap)

## Digital Storytelling Unit

### *Journalism for the Visual Culture*

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 Citizenship 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](mailto:info@meridianstories.com).

**Let's get started.**

## The Challenge

Newspapers have numerous styles of writing to match the topics, the story and the perspective. There is the straight/hard news; the investigative report; the editorial; the review; and the feature. Additionally, each section of the newspaper has their variants on these basic formats. Newspaper sections often include sports, arts, business, technology, lifestyle and fashion.

In this Challenge, your team will take a recent event or story from the news – local or global – and communicate the essence of that story in three different forms of journalistic writing: hard news report, the feature and the editorial. Each piece will last no longer than 60 seconds and each piece will consist of someone reading the piece accompanied by three different forms of visuals: video, photographic and graphic.

In the end, each team will tell a story of sorts about this news event. The hard news piece will introduce the story – the people, the place, the conflict and the facts; the feature will probe some of the interior dynamics that are shaping the story; and the editorial will offer some concluding ideas about this story. The teams are not intended to present the whole story in these three minutes, but we do expect the teams to take

advantage of how each journalistic style delivers content in order to present the essence of the story, which may still be unfolding when your team submits. The different imagery is intended to allow the students to experiment with what stories *look* like, inside of our pervasive visual culture.

**Deliverables include:**

- Journalistic Video
- Three Approaches to Journalism: The Distinguishing Factors Paper (at teacher's discretion)
- News Story Synopsis (at teacher's discretion)

## Process

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

- Research the distinctions in writing styles and intent between these three forms of journalism: the hard story, the feature and the editorial.
- Define the different approaches clearly and come up with clear examples. It's important that your team has an intuitive sense of how these three different approaches to news reporting function: how they sound in words; how their intentions and tone are very different; and how they each have a very different relationship to the story that they are telling.

For example, hard news is very formulaic. It works in short sentences. It begins with a headline and then moves right into the lead. Without a good lead, you will lose your audience. What's a lead? It's the who, what, when, where and how of your story (they don't always fit into a single sentence, but it's worth a try!). Hard news often begins with the most important information first and saves the least important information for last. Hard news uses direct quotations.

As you can see, there are very clear rules around hard news reporting. The same applies to features (soft news) and editorials. The first step in this Challenge is to make sure that you have a solid foundation about how these three approaches to journalistic storytelling differ. Think in terms of a) language use and structure; b) perspective; c) content being communicated; and d) intent.

- ***Teacher's Option: Three Approaches to Journalism: The Distinguishing Factors*** – Teachers may require that teams hand in a two to three-page paper citing the key distinguishing features of the three approaches in question: hard news, the feature and the editorial.
- Find a story. We recommend that your team work with a very current story. It can be a local story that has divided the community or region or state, or it can be a national story that has slowly been evolving: immigration, for example. Your team needs to choose a news story that has ‘resonance’. This means that it’s a story that evokes thought and has societal implications. This is not about choosing a news story that revolves around a local robbery or murder...unless that robbery or murder has larger implications about the justice system, for example.
  - Keep in mind that you will be writing the start of a feature and an editorial, so it’s a story that lends itself to these kinds of investigative and intellectual explorations.
- ***Teacher's Option: News Story Synopsis*** – Teachers may require that teams hand in a one page synopsis of the story they have chosen for approval.
- Research the story. At this point, you may want to assign each team member a journalistic approach to champion. So, one is researching this from the perspective of a writing a feature; one is doing the hard news approach; and others are focusing on the editorial.
  - Keep in mind that you are not responsible for writing full articles. You have 60 seconds to demonstrate your command of the journalistic form; of the style of writing.
- By the end of this phase, you should have a clear understanding of the rules that distinguish these three journalistic forms, as well as the start of an understanding about the complexities of your news story.

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

- Begin to consider the imagery that will accompany each piece.

Your generation is a visual culture. You take in your news and content and information visually. Images rival words in terms of communicating important content. This Challenge asks you to consider this as you move forward: what are the images that can help you to communicate, even enhance, your news story in these three different approaches? This Challenge asks you to compare the efficacy of communicating using different forms of

imagery – video, photography and graphics. And it asks you to examine the relationship between words and images. What can images do that words can't? And vice versa.

- The visual requirements are as follows: each approach must be matched with one visual style. Here are the choices:
  - Video – For one approach, you can shoot the piece. This can simply be a talking head, like a news reporter in front of a green screen or on location. The choice is up to you. Your goal here is to figure out which approach would benefit most from being presented 'live' or being presented with moving images and locations.
  - Photography – For one approach, you will be reading your written content and accompanying that voice over with photos: we recommend 5 – 10 to cover your sixty seconds. Keep in mind that the photos don't have to be literal visual representations of the words being spoken. You want the images to enhance – add to – what you are reading, and not just reinforce. How do you do that?
  - Graphics – This is the wildcard. From emojis to cartoon panels, drawn illustrations to graphic creations taken from free sources on the Internet, you can choose whatever you want. The graphics can move or be static; cross fade into each other or cut: it's up to you. As with the other two journalistic approaches, you need to ask yourselves: which story would benefit most from this kind of visual approach? How can graphics or illustrated art add to the story being told?
- Gather your images as you continue to finalize your written work. For the video, depending on the complexity of the proposed shooting, storyboard your ideas.
- Share your select imagery and brainstorm about what to keep and what to throw away. Then continue to gather images.
  - Keep in mind that this is not about collecting the most images. More isn't necessarily better.
  - Additionally, keep in mind that at the end, you will want to cite your sources for all of the photographs that you are choosing to include in your piece. Be sure to keep track and to prepare a proper citation frame at the end of your video.
  - **Finally – and this is the most important – have fun with the imagery! Don't stress. This part is experimental. Play around this aspect of the Challenge.**

- Finalize your written piece. Keep in mind that you will want to present to the viewer a comprehensive sense of this news story in your three minutes. The suggestion is that the hard news piece is used to introduce the story; the feature piece is meant to introduce some of the complexities and interesting facets of the story; and the editorial is meant to conclude your overall narrative by introducing your opinions about how this news story has played/is playing out.
- Match the images to the text and finalize.

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

- Pre-produce the scene:
  - Scout locations for shooting (if this is being shot on location);
  - Prepare the logistics for the actual shooting of the scene; and
- Shoot the video.
- Record the voice over of the two other sections.
- Edit the pictures to the voice over.
- Edit the three sections of the video together.
- 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 key tips in the areas of creativity, production, game design and digital citizenry.

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

<b>Meridian Innovators and Artists</b>	<b>Media Resource Collection</b>
<b><i>On Character Design</i></b> – Scott Nash	“Digital Rules Resource Center – The Starting Line”
<b><i>On Nonfiction</i></b> – Margaret Heffernan	“Guide to Working in the Public Domain”
<b><i>On Memoir and Nonfiction Writing</i></b> – Liza Bakewell	“Guide to Citing Sources”
<b><i>On Photography</i></b> – Michael Kolster	“Essential Guide and Checklist: The Doctrine of Fair Use”

# **Evaluation Rubric - *Journalism for a Visual Culture***

<b>CONTENT COMMAND</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>	<b>4 - 7</b>	<b>8 - 10</b>
<b>Hard News Writing</b>	The language, structure and content did not accurately reflect the hard news journalistic style	The language, structure and content did accurately reflect the hard news journalistic style	The language, structure and content beautifully captured the hard news journalistic style
<b>Feature Writing</b>	The language, structure and content did not accurately reflect the feature journalistic style	The language, structure and content did accurately reflect the feature journalistic style	The language, structure and content beautifully captured the feature journalistic style
<b>Editorial Writing</b>	The language, structure and content did not accurately reflect the editorial journalistic style	The language, structure and content did accurately reflect the editorial journalistic style	The language, structure and content beautifully captured the editorial journalistic style
<b>STORYTELLING COMMAND</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>	<b>4 - 7</b>	<b>8 - 10</b>
<b>News Story</b>	The story, as presented in its three parts, did not result in a cohesive narrative	The story, as presented in its three parts, resulted in a cohesive narrative	The story, as presented in its three parts, resulted in a thoughtful and thorough, cohesive narrative
<b>Image Choices</b>	The choice of images did not effectively capture the depth and breadth of your content	The choice of images inconsistently captured the depth and breadth of your content	The choice of images effectively captured the depth and breadth of your content

<b>Integration of the Word with the Image</b>	Your mix of spoken word and imagery did not effectively communicate your intended content	Your mix of spoken word and imagery inconsistently communicated your intended content	Your mix of spoken word and imagery effectively communicated your intended content
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<b>MEDIA COMMAND</b>			
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>	<b>4 - 7</b>	<b>8 - 10</b>
<b>Sound Design</b>	The mix of music and sound did not enhance most elements of the video	The mix of music and sound serviced the goals of the video	The mix of music and sound enhanced the goals of the video
<b>Editing</b>	The video feels patched together, and the overall editing distracts from the narrative	The video flows, but there are occasional editing distractions	The video is edited cleanly and effectively, resulting in an engaging video experience
<b>HUMAN 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 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
<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	The group required some additional help, but was able to	The group set attainable goals, worked independently

	independently and manage their time effectively	complete the project on time with few problems	and managed their time effectively, demonstrating a disciplined commitment to the project
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## Essential Questions

1. What are the distinguishing factors in these three forms of journalism: hard news, feature and editorial?
2. How does one write in these three different formats?
3. What is a current news story and how do these three journalistic approaches reveal different narratives within that singular story?
4. What do we mean by ‘visual culture’ and what is the difference in communicative impact between the image and the word?
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 understand the key elements that shape three forms of journalistic writing: hard news, features and editorials.
- 2) The student will have practiced these writing forms as applied to a current news story.
- 3) The student will come away with a deeper understanding of the many facets of journalism and news writing
- 4) The student will gain an understanding of the distinct ways in which words and imagery communicate content.
- 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 current events 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 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to develop in students as they prepare for life after secondary school.

# Curricular Correlations

The *Journalism for the Visual Culture* Challenge addresses a range of curricular objectives that have been articulated by the **Common Core Curricular Standards – English Language Arts & History/Social Studies**.

Below please find the standards that are addressed, either wholly or in part.

## Common Core Curricular Standards – English Language Arts & History/Social Studies

The Standard	8th	9th/10th	11th/12th
<b>RI 4</b>  <b>READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT</b>  <b>Craft and Structure</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical 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 a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text
<b>RI 7</b>  <b>READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT</b>  <b>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</b>	Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different media (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.	Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different media (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.	Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
<b>SL 1</b>  <b>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</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	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,	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,

<b>Comprehension and Collaboration</b>	on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
<b>W1 WRITING Text Types and Purposes</b>	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.	Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
<b>W2 WRITING 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.
<b>W4 WRITING Production and Distribution of Writing</b>	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.
<b>W6 WRITING Production and Distribution of Writing</b>	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.	N/A

<b>W7</b>	<b>WRITING</b>	<b>Research to Build and Present Knowledge</b>	Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
<b>W8</b>	<b>WRITING</b>	<b>Research to Build and Present Knowledge</b>	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.	Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.	Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.
<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.
<b>RH2</b>			Determine the central ideas or information of a	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or

<b>HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES</b>	primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.	secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.	secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
<b>RH 4</b>  <b>HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text
<b>RH7</b>  <b>HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES</b>	Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.	N/A	Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
<b>RH8</b>  <b>HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES</b>	Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.	N/A	Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.