



# Language Arts Challenge Digital Storytelling Unit

## *Producing the Spoken Word*

Designed for Middle and High School Students

| <b>Table of Contents</b>   | <b>Range of Activities</b>  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction</li><li>• The Challenge</li><li>• Process</li><li>• Meridian Support Resources</li><li>• Evaluation Rubric</li><li>• Essential Questions</li><li>• Student Proficiencies</li><li>• Curricular Correlations (W3, W4, W5, SL1, SL4, SL5, SL6, L3, L5)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analysis of Relevant Literary Genres</li><li>• Creative Writing and/or Recitation</li><li>• Public Performance</li><li>• News Report Preparation and Scriptwriting</li><li>• Digital Literacy Skills - Video - Pre-production, Production and Post-production</li><li>• 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills: Creativity, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Presentational Skills</li></ul> |

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

**Let's get started.**

## The Challenge

Poetry Slam! One-Minute, Student Written Stories. Radio Moths. Live Novella Read Aloud. Staged Reading of a One Act. Or a musical. ...the formats are endless.

In this Challenge, your team (or entire class) is charged with a) producing a literary event of some kind - an event that involves a performance of the spoken word; and b) shooting and producing a report of this event for the local community or school media network.

**Deliverables** include:

- Spoken Word News Report
- Summary of Spoken Word Event (at teacher's discretion)
- Timeline of Tasks (at teacher's discretion)
- Rough Storyboard (at teacher's discretion)

**Note to Teachers:** This, on the surface, appears to be an unusual challenge. Most LA Challenges are around specific content like Shakespeare or the short story or non-fiction writing. The 'content' of this Challenge is the production of

a literary event. And while that may seem like a lot of busy work, Meridian Stories would argue that it is not. Essentially, you are asking students to develop and organize the literary event – engage in Language Arts on their own terms – and then create a digital story about it. The organization side of this hits many 21<sup>st</sup> century skills squarely: time management, leadership, collaboration, creativity and problem solving. But they also have to create and perform the ‘spoken word’ content – language, poetry, creative writing, recitation, etc. *Then*, the Meridian Stories Challenge asks them to produce a short news report about the event. That leads to more 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, especially in the Digital Literacy realm. But this final step adds another critical layer of ownership and accountability around their Language Arts work: this digital story is a way for them to show the world what they can do *and* what they have to say, using words.

A few other thoughts:

- There is no requirement that the students perform in this Literary event. It can involve outsiders, like an established local author, or students in theatre or those from the school Literary Magazine. But if it *can* involve them on the stage, all the better.
- This does not have to a big event. The Spoken Word event can happen in a classroom setting and just involve the class: it doesn’t have to be ‘public’. Scale this Challenge to the capacity of you and your students.
- We recommend doing this Challenge as a class, and not necessarily as just a team of four. Perhaps split the class up and have one half produce the First Act and the other group produce the Second Act. And if this Challenge is operating inside of a set group - a class, or an organization or club - then require everyone to participate. This solves the problem of recruiting students to perform content for the event and recruiting audience members to attend it. And it’s a great way to bring parents and outsiders into the process.

Finally, this Challenge is inspired by the *PBS News Hours Student Reporting Lab* program. While there is no direct correlation to this program, for those that are involved with it, this Challenge syncs with those criteria.

## The Process

Below is a suggested breakdown of the students’ work.

### During Phase I student teams will:

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- What literary event do you want to produce? This is the first question your team needs to answer. To help answer this question, consider two things: a) what part of Language Arts is the most engaging for your team? And b) what do you want to see performed; what would make for a fun ‘spoken word’ performance event?
- Below is a list of Content/Format options to consider, although hardly an exhaustive list:
  - Poetry Slam or Student Poetry Readings –
    - Or, in the tradition of the Poetry Out Loud national competition, the poems need to be memorized.
  - Radio Moth – Based on the NPR model, students, teachers and/or community members extemporaneously tell true short stories based around a theme that you give them (We recommend less than 5 minutes)
  - Author Reading – Invite a local author to read their work and discuss their writing process.
  - Staged One-Act – Actors with scripts present a one-act that is blocked on stage (imagine a staging of the last act of *Our Town*)
  - Open Mic Night, limited to original written material ...or favorite literary passages: you pick the theme!
  
  - As you decide on the Content/Format, also consider if you want to provide this event with a theme...like ‘out on a limb’ or ‘disasters that became opportunities’ or ‘when it rains, it pours.’
    - ***Teacher’s Option: Summary of Spoken Word Event*** – Teachers may require that their teams hand in a summary of the content and shape of the proposed Spoken Word Event
- Once you have the content of the event, how do you produce it? This is not unlike producing a social gathering: this can be simple or very complicated. You probably want to aim for simple.
  - The easiest way is to require your entire class/grade/club to participate. Then you don’t have to worry about volunteer acts or poor attendance: everyone has to participate in some way and everyone has to attend.
  - Producing your event will require, at a minimum, a) securing a place and time; b) establishing a clear timeline, including deadlines for submissions (are you going to screen the literary content ahead of time?), for all the tasks that need to be completed; c) marketing through posters around the community and social media; d) preparing the place for your sound and lighting, audience and food (if applicable) needs; and e)

communicating clearly with all the participants in a regularly scheduled manner.

- In the end, there is a lot of planning, collaborating, and responsibility delegation in order to produce an event like this. It may be useful to split the responsibilities between Event Logistics and Content Management. In other words, one group organizes the logistics of the event while the other pays attention to the presenters and their proposed spoken word performances.
- By the end of this phase, the plans should be well underway for your event. And remember: this does not have to be a big event. Four people reading with twelve in attendance – that works! So be sure to scale this to reason and reality.
  - ***Teacher's Option: Timeline of Tasks***– Teachers may require that their teams hand in a timeline of tasks that need to be completed and by whom.

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

- In this Phase, we are focused on development and design of the digital story that you are going to produce for community consumption.
- Brainstorm the shape of the story you are going to want to tell. Here are some questions to get you started:
  - Is it the story of organizing the event?
  - Or the story of the performers and their literary choices and ambitions?
  - Is it a story that reaches out to a larger cultural identity of your school – re-igniting a new literary tradition in your school/community or expanding on an existing one?
  - Is there a personal angle that might evolve?
  - How will you capture the depth and essence of the ‘spoken word’ performances, which is essential to understanding the real nature of this event.
    - We strongly recommend that you highlight at least one performance so that the audience can engage with the literary event itself.
  - Or, is this going to be straight up coverage of the event, with an anchor, footage from the event and an interview or two?

There is no right or wrong...but keep in mind your audience – what do you want your local community to see and learn about this event?

- Sometimes brainstorming what you want this digital story to be titled can help guide you in your story design.

- Be sure to catalogue all your possible visuals as part of this brainstorming. By this we mean, who do you have available to tell this story and what visual shots will you have available to tell this story?
  - For the news reporting segment, consider the use of a green screen if available.
- Correlatively, keep in mind the use of existing still images to enhance your story. These can be found online, but proper permissions to use these images need to be established. See the Meridian Resource Center for more information on royalty free images and Fair Use.
  - It may be helpful to create a rough storyboard of proposed images – begin with a wide shot of the venue or poster advertising the event; followed by Reporter #1 introducing the event; followed by shots of people arriving, etc. – to help shape the arc of the story you want to tell.
  - **Teacher’s Option: Rough Storyboard** – Teachers may require that their teams hand in a rough storyboard outlining the shape and arc of their proposed shooting.
- Prepare the production side of this. How many cameras, where will they be placed and what will they be covering? You have one chance to shoot everything (mostly), so you want to be prepared.
  - All of this production planning is called ‘pre-production’. It’s often helpful, a day or so before the event, to have a Pre-Production Meeting which includes all the organizers or “producers” involved to review what everyone is doing during this event. This is the perfect place to troubleshoot issues. (This is how it’s done in professional TV shoots: the day or two before the shoot, there is a final pre-production meeting with the producers, directors, costume and prop designers, key cast members, etc. to review the details of how the shoot day will flow and to insure that all of the elements – props, costumes, music cues - are ready to go.)
- For more useful information about producing a news report, check out these free ten lesson plans from the [PBS Newshour Student Reporting Lab](https://www.pbs.org/learningmedia/resources/lesson-plans/10-lesson-plans-for-producing-a-news-report/).
- By the end of this phase, the event should be ready to launch and the details and planning around the shooting of this event finalized.

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

- Launch the literary event and shoot the event, according to your plans.
- After the event, review the footage and re-visit the story you want to tell, based on the footage that you shot.

- If desired, re-storyboard your news report as based on your actual footage.
- Pull shots from your footage that you want to use.
- Edit the video, adding stills and graphics as desired.
- Post-produce the video, adding voice over recording, 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:

| Meridian Innovators and Artists   | Media Resource Collection  |
|---|--|
| <i>On Editing</i> – Tom Pierce<br><i>On Fiction Writing</i> – Lily King<br><i>On Interviewing Techniques</i> – Tom Pierce<br><i>On Producing</i> – Tom Pierce | “Producing: Time Management”<br>“Sound Recording Basics”<br>“Producing: Tips for the Shoot”<br>“Conducting an Interview” |

## Evaluation Rubric

| CONTENT COMMAND                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Criteria                            | 1 - 10   |
| <b>Literary Content - Overall</b>   | The content of the event enhances one’s understanding and appreciation of language, literature and/or storytelling                   |
| <b>Literary Content - Specifics</b> | Your focus on a single, select performance (or key moment in that performance) effectively communicated the power of the spoken word |
| <b>Event Organization</b>           | The event appears well organized and reflects the spirit of a community literary event   |

| <b>STORYTELLING COMMAND</b>          |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Criteria</b>                      | <b>1 - 10</b>  |
| <b>Language</b>                      | The script - your choices of words - was lively and engaging   |
| <b>News Report - Overview</b>        | Your digital story, from start to finish, told a compelling and organized story of the community event   |
| <b>News Report – Component Parts</b> | The components of your news report – the set-up, the coverage of the event, the focus on a single performance (or moment) and the conclusion – all testify to your understanding of the genre and your target audience |
| <b>MEDIA COMMAND</b>                 |  |
| <b>Criteria</b>                      | <b>1 - 10</b>  |
| <b>News Report Visuals</b>           | Your news reporting set up, costuming, blocking and visuals reflected a thoughtful understanding of the genre  |
| <b>Directing and Editing</b>         | The final edited piece serviced the narrative and community of viewers effectively and compellingly  |
| <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. What is a ‘literary event’ and why might it be an important event to organize and produce for your community?
2. What does it take to organize an event in which your peers and community members are involved?
3. How does seeing literary works – the spoken word – performed, change your engagement with and understanding of words and story?
4. How do you tell a digital story that is an accurate reflection of the event in question and then shape the story for consumption by your own community?
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. Students will understand that literature and spoken word performances can contribute to a vital part of the cultural fabric of the community.
2. Students will practice key skills around collaboration, time management, task delegation and accountability in preparing and presenting the literary event.
3. Students will experience the power of language and story in a new way through performance by peers and/or local community members.
4. Students will design, organize, produce and finalize a coherent digital story designed to be an accurate reflection of a literary event for a targeted community audience.
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 literary content into a new narrative format and production.
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 *Producing the Spoken Word* Challenge addresses a range of curricular objectives that have been articulated by the new **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>Standards</i>  | <i>8<sup>th</sup></i>   | <i>9<sup>th</sup> / 10<sup>th</sup></i>   | <i>11<sup>th</sup> / 12<sup>th</sup></i>  |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>W3</b><br><br><b>WRITING</b><br><br><b>Text Types and Purposes</b> | Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well- | 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. |

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
|   | structured event sequences.  |  |   |
| <b>W4</b><br><b>WRITING</b><br><b>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>W5</b><br><b>WRITING</b><br><b>Production and Distribution of Writing</b>              | 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.  |
| <b>SL1</b><br><b>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</b><br><b>Comprehension and Collaboration</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 on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.        | 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. | 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. |
| <b>SL4</b><br><b>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</b><br><b>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</b> | Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate                                | Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate  | Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization,                                 |

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
|   | volume, and clear pronunciation.  | to purpose, audience, and task.   | development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.   |
| <b>SL5</b><br><b>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</b><br><br><b>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</b> | 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. |
| <b>SL6</b><br><b>SPEAKING AND LISTENING</b><br><br><b>Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas</b> | 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.   |
| <b>L3</b><br><b>LANGUAGE</b><br><br><b>Knowledge of Language</b>                              | 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.             |
| <b>L5</b><br><b>LANGUAGE</b><br><br><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.   |