Language Arts Challenge
Digital Storytelling Unit

Short Story to Theatrical Glory

Designed for Middle and High School Students

Table of Contents	Range of Activities
	• Literary Genre Analysis (Short Story) • Character and Scene Creation • Staging and Blocking • Scriptwriting • Digital Literacy Skills - Video - Pre-production, Production and Post-production • 21st Century Skills: Creativity, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Presentational Skills

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

> "A country road. A tree.
> Evening.
> Estragon, sitting on a low mount, is trying to take off his boot. He pulls at it with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. As before.
> Enter Vladimir.
> Estragon: (giving up again): 'Nothing is to be done.'"

Thus begins dramatist Samuel Beckett's renowned work *Waiting for Godot*. Though Beckett, a famed Irish author and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, is known for his in-depth, complex explorations of human character and freedom, *Waiting for Godot* on its surface is a remarkably simple play. Its setting is bleakly basic, made up only of "mounds" and rooms and boxes. Film and theater adaptations of *Waiting for Godot* are consistently bare of props, and void of set changes. Performances of the play rely solely on dialogue, lighting and simplistic costume design. This simplicity, though, exposes the depth and explorative nature of Beckett's work.

In this Challenge, from a loosely-Beckettian (read: simple) perspective, act out a short story of your (or your teacher's) choice, and record it on video. Using Beckett's minimalism-- his selective (if at all) use of color, his bare stage-basic setting with minimal props-- and no more than three actors plus a narrator (if desired), present your short story, with a focus on communicating both narrative and theme. In short, to communicate what your team has deduced your story *means*.

Each team has a maximum of 4 minutes to communicate-- through staging, dialogue, and narrative description-- the story and its essence. We recommend that the script use approximately 50% from the language of the author and 50% your words.

<u>Deliverables</u> include:

- Staged Video of Your Short Story
- Story Outline and Staged Treatment (at teacher's discretion)
- Final Script (at teacher's discretion)

The Process

Below is a suggested breakdown for the students' work.

During <u>Phase I</u>, student teams will:

- Select a short story, or your teacher assigns one. Discuss it with your group. What sticks out about this story to your group? Which of its elements do you appreciate most? Discuss:
  - Character
  - Setting
  - Tone
  - Language use
  - Theme
  - Style
- Take the conversation one step further and explore the *meaning* of the story to you. Here are some questions to consider, keeping in mind, as

you explore these questions as a group, that you'll eventually need to turn this story into something visual and staged.

- If you were to describe what this story is about in one sentence to a friend, what would you say?
- What, if anything, surprised you about this story?
- What in the story made you reflect the most; made you ask questions about the characters and their decisions?
- What in the story evoked an emotion – anger, empathy, frustration, joy – and why?

- Based on these discussions - keeping notes about your group meetings will be useful - discuss the elements you think should be included in your 4-minute story performance so that your viewer/audience will feel well-versed with a) the narrative essence of your story; and b) the meaning of your story.
- Outline your story, identifying where you will be using language from the story itself and where you will need to add in your language. *It's important to note that you need to clearly indicate to the audience, in your performance, when you are quoting from the author and when we are hearing original language.*
- Write a treatment of how you will stage the story. A treatment is just couple of paragraphs that begins to detail the key props, characters, lighting plan and staging ideas that will inform your short story presentation.
  - *Teacher's Option*: **Story Outline and Staged Treatment** – Teachers may require that teams hand in the outline of their salient story elements and a treatment, or brief description, of their plans to stage the story.

During Phase II, student teams will:
- Draft the script and begin to map out the staging. To do so, consider the following:
  - Props - What props will your group use? (Try to keep them simplistic and minimal).
  - Lighting - What about lighting? Will your performance play with light and shadows to convey mood?

- Setting - Though Beckett used a clean, blank stage to backdrop lots of his work, you don't need to limit yourself to blankness: but whatever setting you do decide upon should be uncomplicated.
- Blocking - This is how actors move around on film. Will your video presentation of the story feature lots of movement, or will it be conversation-based? How close will people stand to each other when they talk? How important is movement in your plot?
- Costumes - Ornate? Simple? Colorful? Drab?
  - *Teacher's Option*: **Final Script** – Teachers may require that teams hand in their final script for comments and feedback.
- Once you've worked out these details as a team, rehearse with your script. Keep in mind that you need to clearly indicate when you are quoting directly from the language in the story.
- After a few rehearsals, your group should think about the camera's role in this performance. Things to consider:
  - Camera angle
  - Panning speed
  - Zoom intensity/speed
  - Camera location variation
  - Sound: How will you mic your characters?

  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 simple script and setting visually exciting.

During Phase III, student teams will:
- Shoot the video.
- Edit the video.

Meridian Support Resources

Meridian Stories provides two forms of support for the student teams:

1. Media Innovators and Artists – This is a series of three to four minute videos featuring artists and innovative professionals who offer important advice, specifically for Meridian Stories, in the areas of creativity and production.

2. Meridian Resources – These are short documents that offer student teams key tips in the areas of creativity and production.

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

Meridian Innovators and Artists	Media Resource Collection
On Multi-Media in Theatre – Roger Bechtel *On Fiction Writing* – Lily King *On the Importance of Character in Storytelling* – Scott Nash *On Editing* – Tom Pierce	"Scene Work: Camera Angles and Movement" "Sound Recording Basics" "Creating Storyboards, Framing a Shot" "Video Editing Basics"

Evaluation Rubric – *Short Story to Theatrical Glory*

CONTENT COMMAND			
Criteria	1 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 10
Short Story: Genre Command	The students demonstrate little or no understanding of the specific elements that drive the select short story (its characters, plot points, language use, setting, etc.)	The students demonstrate understanding of the specific elements that drive the select short story (its characters, plot points, language use, setting, etc.)	The students demonstrate excellent and expanded understanding of the short stories' specific driving elements
Short Story: Thematic Understanding	The students demonstrate little or no understanding of the short story's larger theme, intent and mood	The students demonstrate understanding of the short story's larger theme, intent and mood	The students demonstrate excellent and expanded understanding of the short story's larger theme, intent and mood

STORYTELLING COMMAND

Criteria	1 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 10
Language Selected from Short Story	The language included from the short story is minimal, off-track, or does not contribute to our experience in a meaningful way	The language taken from the short story is relevant and useful	The language taken from the short story is relevant, engaging, and was utilized in the performance perceptively and carefully
Mixing Original Language with Short Story Language	The team's original language does not add meaningfully to the performance	The team's original language adds meaningfully to the performance	The team's original language meshes with and adds meaningfully and creatively to the performance
Staging	The students' staging is not well planned, or does not contribute to the visualization of the short story in an exciting way	The students' staging is well planned, and contributes satisfactorily to the visualization of the short story	The students' staging is well planned, thoughtful and original, and contributes to the visualization of the short story in a meaningful way

MEDIA COMMAND

Criteria	1 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 10
Acting	The acting is lacking coherence and discipline for the scene to be effective	The acting is good, contributing to the scene's success	The acting is exciting and engaging, contributing to the scene's success
Visual Design	The visual presentation of the story is not interesting or does not follow the parameters of the Beckettian setup (i.e. too many props, complicated scenery, too many characters)	The visual presentation is interesting and thoughtful, following the parameters of the Beckettian setup	The visual presentation is stimulating and thoughtful, following the parameters of the Beckettian setup in a purposeful manner, capitalizing on its

			minimalism as a way to focus the content
Camera Use	The use of the camera and selection of shots does not support the content of your story	The use of the camera and selection of the shots supports the content of your story	The use of the camera and selection of shots supports the content of your story in a creative and engaging manner, and serves in keeping the viewer interested and excited

HUMAN SKILLS COMMAND			
Criteria	**1-3**	**4-7**	**8-10**
Collaborative Thinking	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
Creativity and Innovation	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
Initiative and Self-Direction	The group was unable to set attainable goals, work independently and manage their time effectively	The group required some additional help, but was able to complete the project on time with few problems	The group set attainable goals, worked independently and managed their time effectively, demonstrating a disciplined commitment to the project

Essential Questions

1. What are the key elements of the short story genre and how are they operating in the team's select short story?
2. How has your analysis and consequent re-interpretation of your short story changed your understanding of it?
3. In developing your story performance on paper, what have you learned about character creation, dialogue/prose writing and scene structure?
4. In developing, prepping and shooting a short story, what did you learn about the relationship between words (dialogue), images (setting and character) and camera angles to create effective storytelling?
5. How has immersion in the creation of original content and the production of digital media – exercising one's creativity, critical thinking and digital literacy skills - deepened the overall educational experience?
6. How has working on a team – practicing one's collaborative skills - changed the learning experience?

Student Proficiencies

1. The student will have a clear understanding of the main elements that comprise a successful short story-- character, setting, tone, language use and theme.
2. The student will have a deeper appreciation and understanding of their short story and how the elements above are operational in that story.
3. By re-imagining the essence of the short story for the stage, the student will understand the challenges inherent in writing and story creation in this genre.
4. The student will understand the differences between telling a short story through text and telling a short story through visual performance, using only select elements.
5. The student will utilize key 21st century skills, with a focus on creativity, critical thinking and digital literacy, in their process of translating language arts 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 21st century skills to develop in students as they prepare for life after secondary school.

Curricular Correlations

The ***Short Story to Theatrical Glory*** Challenge addresses a range of curricular objectives that have been articulated by the **Common Core Curricular Standards – English Language Arts.** Below please find the standards that are addressed, either wholly or in part.

Common Core Curricular Standards – English Language Arts Standards

Standards	8th	9th/10th	11th/12th
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).
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	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

	new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.		for a specific purpose and audience.
SL1 **SPEAKING AND LISTENING** **Comprehension and Collaboration**	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.
L1 **LANGUAGE** **Conventions of Standard English**	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.