Objective

Like all activities in the Tell the Story module, this activity supports students to bridge the gap between source material and the creative expression of a story.

This activity specifically explores **making sense of stories and story structure**.

Activity summary

Number of sessions: 3

This activity was originally delivered at SMGS – a college in Ljubljana.

In our context we delivered Story Valley as part of a combination of classes and teachers - in a foreign language unit the students built language skills, while in photography they focused on the strengths of photography as a visual tool with which to tell a story, and the value of photography as an instructional tool in their classroom. This activity specifically deals with how to use photography to teach students to tell stories on a personal level.

Pre-activity preparation

Resources

- Camera / mobile phone with camera

Running the activity

Step 1 – Explaining story plots

Time: 30 minutes

Before diving into the activity, it is important for students to understand how stories work. In our context, we discussed the basic plots as described by Christopher Booker in his book *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. Since discussing all the plot types in one session might be overwhelming for the students, we focused on three that seemed best to adapt to the students' theme:

- **Rags to riches**: the main character seems common in the beginning, but has the potential for greatness. Examples discussed with the students included Aladdin and Cinderella.

- **Overcoming the monster**: there is a monster threatening the community and a hero must rise up, find and destroy it, often finding treasure along the way. Stories with this plot type include different Greek myths, like the ones about Perseus (defeating Medusa and the Kraken) and Theseus (defeating the Minotaur).

- **Rebellion against "the one"**: the hero rebels against an all-powerful enemy who controls the world. This plot type hasn't been present that often in the past, but a lot of the students are familiar with the plot of Star Wars.

This should help students understand how stories are written, which in turn will help them improve their storytelling and / or writing skills.

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Support	Extension
The student will probably understand the plot types easier if they were supported with examples of well-known films or books they are already familiar with.	The students could view movies or read books that represent some of the basic story plots and use this as inspiration for their future work.

Step 2 – Taking photos

Time: One hour

The students are asked to take one photo each to illustrate a topic. In our context, we gave students three options: homeland, being Slovene and ethnicity.

They then must each write a caption or description in about 50 words to go with the story. This story should follow one of the previously discussed plot types.

The photos should also be captioned with the photographer's name and the time and place where they were taken. It is desirable that the students' work is not subject to excessive forms of digital manipulation to retain authenticity of captured images. However, adjustments to crop, colour correction, brightness, contrast, etc. can be used to enhance the visual narrative of the captured image. If there are recognizable people in the photographs, students should obtain the person's approval to use the image.

Support	Extension
Some examples of similar projects the students can use for inspiration: ● SLOVENCI V DNEVNIH SOBAH https://slovencivdnevnihsobah.si/ https://www.rtvslo.si/zabava-in-slog/popkultura/druzabno/slovenci-v-dnevnih-sobah-ta-knjiga-je-o-tem-kako-zivimo/439689 ● ROBERT FRANK: THE AMERICANS https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Frank https://www.lensculture.com/articles/robert-frank-the-americans https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/the-shock-of-robert-franks-the-americans ● PLATON: THE PEOPLE'S PORTFOLIO https://www.thepeoplesportfolio.org/ http://www.platonphoto.com/	After each presentation, the other students can be invited to comment on which basic plot was used as inspiration for the photo. The presenter must confirm the guesses. The elements of the photo that give away the type of plot can be highlighted.

Step 3 – Reflections

Time: One hour

After submitting the photos, the students are asked to present their photos and compare them to the stories they imagined as inspiration. This could be done in the form of a computer presentation or the photos could be printed out and hung on the walls. During the presentation, the students are asked to comment on the photos and whether they actually reflect the source story. Certain elements that connect the two can be highlighted.

Support	Extension
During each presentation, the other students can be invited to comment on which basic plot was used as inspiration for the photo. The presenter must confirm the guesses. The elements of the photo that give away the type of plot can be highlighted.	The students could go to a gallery or a photo exhibition to see works of other photographers. This would help them evolve in their visual language skills and help them reflect on their own work.

Success criteria

Things to look for to ensure this activity has been run successfully include:

- After step 2, each student presents a photo; the photos must be equipped with name, time, date and a short description.

- The photos and the plot types can be easily interpreted by the students.

- Students use the names of the plot types in their discussions and presentations.

- Students are careful in their choices of what to photograph – perhaps going through several options before landing on a final choice.