

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 **story structure**.

Activity summary

Number of sessions: 4

The students write a story as a class project, with the teacher providing the introduction sentence, then individual students continuing the story sentence by sentence. Each student provides their own title and ending, thus coming up with several individual stories.

This helps students to develop storytelling skills in a low stakes context – which can then be applied to telling personal stories.

This activity was originally developed in SMGS, a college in Ljubljana. In our context we delivered Story Valley as part of a foreign language unit – so this activity was also useful for building students' language skills.

Pre-activity preparation

Resources

- Pens
- Paper / notebooks
- A board or computer projector to display the story as it develops

Deliverer preparation

In a foreign language setting it is advisable to revise the use of narrative tenses and past tenses in general; this can be done in a separate lesson prior to running this activity.

When explaining story structure to students it is advisable not to overwhelm them, as there are many different types of plot types to explain. In our setting we focused on story structure as it was defined by Christopher Booker in his book *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories*. The deliverer should therefore choose one or two plot types to explain prior to getting the students to write the story.

Running the activity

Step 1 – Explaining story structure

Time: 30 minutes

The chosen plot type, like **Quest** (here a hero embarks on a journey in order to obtain a great reward, which is usually located far away; examples of this are *Lord of the Rings* or *The Odyssey*) or **Voyage and return** (in this plot type a hero journeys to a strange or magical place far away, which at first seems exciting, but must later escape; examples of this are *The Wizard of Oz* or *Gulliver's travels*) in our case, needs to be explained (with examples given) to the students prior to the main activity - the writing of the story.

Special attention then needs to be devoted to the natural development of the story, usually following the five-act structure of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. During the writing of the story in step 2 students should be reminded which part of the story their sentences should help to develop.

You can even divide the class into 4 groups (the ending will be written by each student individually), each then in charge of developing one specific part of the five-act structure (i.e. all the students in group 1 must come up with sentences that help to develop the exposition of the story, group 2 comes up with a rising action, etc.).

Step 2 – Story writing

Time: One hour

Tell the students they will be writing a story collaboratively – with each then adding their own personal touches. Each student will contribute at least one sentence to the story. The individual contributions need to follow the pre-approved story plot type.

Begin by writing the first sentence of the story on the board. It is useful to begin with a typical fairy tale opening, such as *'Once upon a time there was...'*. Then ask each student in the class to contribute a line. If needed, remind them of the story structure part they are meant to be developing; maybe give helpful suggestions.

You may want every student to contribute once or multiple times before drawing the activity to a close. Do not ask students to write the ending together – each will be creating their own.

<p>Support</p> <p>Some students might drift too far away from the main story; those students will need additional guidance - a reminder of the story plot that is being developed, a suggestion on how to continue the story, maybe three simple alternatives they can choose from.</p>	<p>Extension</p> <p>Students might be encouraged to write down the story in their notebooks as it develops.</p>
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Step 3 – Personal touches

Time: One hour

First ask students to each write an ending to the story. The ending does not need to be only a sentence long – they can write between 1 to 3 paragraphs to draw things to a close.

When students are finished, ask them to write their own title for the story. This should be something that expresses the key aspects of the story in their view.

<p>Support</p> <p>Sometimes students get stuck finding the right words. In those cases they might require direct teacher support – particularly if working in a foreign language. Additionally, having some dictionaries available in the classroom might be useful.</p>	<p>Extension</p> <p>Students might add flashbacks to the story to make it more interesting.</p>
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Step 4 – Sharing

Time: One hour

Ask students to read out their titles and endings to the story. In each case ask them to read the last bit BEFORE the ending, to set up their personal addition.

<p>Support</p> <p>Some students might need extra encouragement while sharing the story in front of the class.</p>	<p>Extension</p> <p>The students could be encouraged to come up with an entirely new story, perhaps based on different genres, which could be assigned by the teacher randomly or chosen by the students themselves.</p>
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Success criteria

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

- The students complete their stories.
- The students show motivation in sharing their work.
- The students stick to the chosen story plot type and manage to write an ending to the story.

Further prompts

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hero_with_a_Thousand_Faces

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Propp