



Collaborative Writing with StoriumEdu

A Curriculum Guide for Educators

storiumedu.com

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Introduction

Storytelling using StoriumEdu presents a unique opportunity for students and teachers to improve students' writing skills in an interactive, game-based environment. With a wide range of storytelling worlds, or **storyworlds**, *StoriumEdu* provides ample backdrops to spur the creative imagination of writers at any skill level. The game-based environment of *StoriumEdu* creates a framework for writing that overcomes many of the initial challenges presented by a creative writing assignment. This curriculum guide will help teachers create a platform for success in a collaborative writing enterprise.

Collaborative, or interactive, writing is a time-honored method of storytelling, and includes many well-respected writers, such as George R. R. Martin, Mercedes Lackey, Joe Lansdale, Caroline Spector, and many more. For most students, *StoriumEdu* will be their first venture into a shared world with other writers. It is important that the teacher set the stage for success in this exciting method of writing.



Collaborative writing is supported as a classroom process in both the ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) and Common Core English Language Arts Standards:

ISTE Global Collaborator Standard:

<div><div>7</div><div>Global Collaborator</div></div> <div>Students use digital tools to broaden their perspectives and enrich their learning by collaborating with others and working effectively in teams locally and globally.</div>	
7a	Students use <u>digital tools</u> to connect with learners from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, <u>engaging</u> with them in ways that broaden mutual understanding and learning.
7b	Students use <u>collaborative technologies</u> to work with others, including peers, experts or community members, to <u>examine</u> issues and problems from multiple viewpoints.
7c	Students <u>contribute constructively</u> to project teams, <u>assuming various roles</u> and responsibilities to work effectively toward a common goal.
7d	Students <u>explore local and global issues</u> and use collaborative technologies to work with others to <u>investigate solutions</u> .

CCS ELA Standard:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting.

Collaboration as a writing process is integral to the modern world, but until *StoriumEdu* it has been difficult to integrate into the classroom. Now, the tools for collaborative innovative writing are at your fingertips.

Partnering & Grouping for Success

StoriumEdu is based on collaboration, so it is important to plan ahead for many aspects of this style of writing. There are three basic methods of group creation, and all have both strengths and weaknesses. Use the method that best suits your desired outcome. Each *StoriumEdu* group must have a minimum of two writers and a maximum of four writers. A teacher can be part of a writing group but will count as one of the writers. Some teachers start in a group and write the opening to the first scene, and then have the option of placing a student in charge and dropping out of the group. A teacher may still observe and moderate that group from the teacher dashboard in the standard manner.

Student choice

StoriumEdu is designed to be fun, and to make writing fun. Students are most comfortable in groups when they are working with their friends. For the first attempt at collaborative writing, taking away obstacles is an important part of establishing a fun environment. Giving students the freedom to select their own groups is one way to establish a supportive writing space.

However, there are challenges to student self-selection: writing skills may be very uneven in the group. There may be social issues that interfere with the writing process. Some students may be “left out” forcing teachers to create groups. In some cases, the teacher may want to be part of any writing groups, to help model collaborative writing in both style and content, and help alleviate social pressure.

Teacher choice

StoriumEdu has built-in options for teachers, including the ability to create a group and then hand over the organizer reins to a student in that group, or even to remove or reassign a student once a story has started. The teacher knows what they want from a class better than any other individual, so being in charge of group selection establishes the authority and structure that will lead to successful writing. How to groups students to ensure diversity of voice and balanced writing skills is an important consideration.

Random choice

By creating groups at random, you and your students will benefit from the unlikely pairings and groups that result. It also takes away the onus of teacher as adversary in group creation. You might remind the students that this grouping is for one story only, and may change as a result of how students respond in their collaborative writing output.

Getting Started: Roles — Organizer

Each group must have an **organizer**. The organizer sets up the game, invites other players to join, and makes the first move. It is often a good idea to have a demonstration game to show students the role of organizer, and how game setup works. The teacher can begin the game as the organizer, and then has options once the game begins to continue or to hand off the organizer role, and either stay in the game as a player or drop out entirely. The teacher can still monitor the game after dropping out.

Story name

The organizer chooses the **name** for the story. The default is the name of the storyworld setting, so it is a good idea to give the class organizers some guidelines in naming so it is easier to monitor specific groups of students.

Game length

The organizer selects the **length** of the story. The default is a short story, comprising three scenes and an epilogue. There are options for longer stories with more scenes. The length can't be changed once a game begins. Each character gets to write one "move" in each scene, plus one flashback per scene. Thus in a short story, each student can write up to eight entries for their character. A move is a paragraph or more (you set the goal for your students) that each student writes. For middle school students, 100 words is a good starting goal, while for older students 250 words is a good starting point.

Consider starting your first games as short stories. Longer games take more time to play and finish and thus may be more challenging for players, so it's often best to save them until students understand the game system and have some play experience under their belts.

Scenario

Some storyworlds include **scenarios**.

A scenario is a predetermined story line. Instead of drawing random cards during play, scenarios specify these cards in advance. This means that games that use the same scenario will all follow the same general storyline even though the characters and their actions will differ. Also often included are brief written instructions to students, telling them what to focus on in each scene.

Scenarios make it easier to direct student writing and storytelling. They're also a great way to ensure that the whole class is working towards the same narrative goals.

As the teacher, you have the option of copying a storyworld, and creating your own scenarios to best match the storyworld with your classroom. If you elect not to use scenarios then your students will instead draw random cards, meaning that each game will develop its own fully independent storyline.

The screenshot shows a 'Game setup' window with the following elements:

- Story name:** A text input field containing 'Beyond the Wall'.
- Game length:** A dropdown menu showing 'Short story: 4 scenes (3 acts of 1 scene each, plus epilogue)'.
- Scenario:** A dropdown menu showing '--- Optionally choose a scenario ---'.
- Game cards:** Four cards displayed in a row:
 - SETTING:** Image of a stone wall. Text: 'It's not safe beyond the town walls'.
 - 1 TONE:** Image of a cloudy sky. Text: 'Dramatic'.
 - 2 BEGINNING:** Image of a stack of books. Text: 'Food is running out'.
 - 3 ENDING:** Image of a stack of books. Text: 'A safe haven is found'.
- Buttons:** 'Cancel', 'Draw again', and 'Done' at the bottom.

Game cards

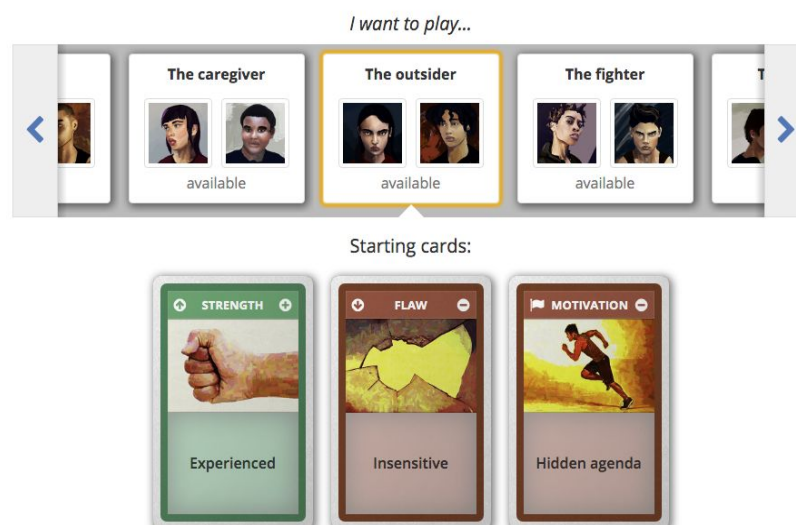
Each game starts with a **Setting**, **Tone**, **Beginning** and **Ending** card. The organizer should work with their group to make sure they all agree on these four aspects of the game/story. The organizer can click to re-draw the set of cards until satisfied. The Setting, Tone, Beginning and Ending cards are drawn from the specified storyworld, or are pre-determined according to the selected scenario (if any).

Getting Started: Roles — Characters

Each group (including the organizer) is comprised of students each playing a character. A game can't start until all students have created their characters. Characters in each storyworld are based on common archetypes (or **character types**) associated with the style of story the creator of the storyworld has in mind.

When a student creates a character, remember they are in a collaborative group. It is recommended that you review the various character types before allowing students to begin organizing and creating games. Encourage discussion about the kinds of characters a student might want to play in the specific storyworld. A whole-class “draft” game is often a good idea, particularly if this is not familiar territory.

As examples, the character types for the “Young Adult Dystopia” storyworld include the Innocent, the Loner, the Caregiver, the Outsider, the Fighter, the Scholar, the Gifted, and the Athlete. Since there can be no more than four characters in each story, it is important that students select a group of characters that can work together and accomplish the story goals.



Character types included with the Young Adult Dystopia storyworld

Getting Started: Pre-Writing

There are strategies you can employ that will help students have an easier time learning how to write in a collaborative fashion. Since this is the first time for most students to write in this style, it is important to be clear on expectations and goals for your writing class. We have found that **pre-writing** is a successful strategy for *StoriumEdu*. This is also one of many times that students can be reminded of what writing expectations there are in your class, such as addressing violence, avoiding stereotyping, etc.


After students have selected a character type, have them write anywhere from a paragraph to a page of background information on the character. This is an exercise that is done outside of the *StoriumEdu* site (using a tool like Google Docs or Microsoft Word), so a teacher has significant freedom in designing preparatory writing exercises that best suit their classroom.

Questions that are useful include:

- Who were they before the story begins?
- What are their character traits?
- What are their goals, based on their background?
- What is their physical description?

It might be useful to choose a character from a popular piece of fiction, examine the character based on these kinds of questions, and have a class discussion to get a clearer sense of how to write a character brief.

Here is a sample character brief written by a teacher used as an example for the *Lake of Dreams* storyworld:



Rain had been studying with the druid, Ereni, until the druid mysteriously stopped appearing at their village. She had learned a handful of spells, useful ones for her and her companions, Milen and Jes, as they all liked to travel in the wilds of the nearby mountains, the Teeth. She had known the two brothers since they were all young, but as the oldest, she exercised some degree of control over their impetuous misadventures. She hadn't seen Ereni in three moons, and had convinced Milen and Jes that their next trek would be to where she had last seen the friendly druid. The trio prepared for the quirky weather the Teeth was legendary for, especially as winter turned into spring.

Sample pre-writing exercise in Google Docs, grades 6-8, Lake of Dreams

Keep in mind that once the game begins but before the students start writing in-game, **Bond cards** are chosen. Bond cards establish a relationship among the characters. These can be in addition to a character's back story as envisioned in the pre-writing. A bond card actually has game/scene value, so it is important that students recognize the difference between any character relationships that arise during pre-writing and those that are spelled out by the Bond cards.

This is also a very good time to talk about **copyright and fair use**. There are many good links to appropriate copyright and fair use guidelines on the Internet. Some of these resources are cited at the end of this guide.

Getting Started: Collaborative Writing in Action

After Bond cards are selected, the game and story are ready to begin. The first scene and each scene thereafter begin with a card draw process. For each scene, a **Place**, **Challenge**, **Success**, and **Setback** card is drawn. The first writer in the scene draws cards until the group likes the drawn choices, at which time the cards are accepted. Encourage group conversation throughout this process.

The Place card is used in addition to the Setting to suggest the environment of the scene. The Challenge card outlines a dramatic obstacle for the group that will be met by playing cards and writing. If the cards played lean **positive** in value, the outcome of the scene will be a narrative success, and the writing can reflect the **Success** card. If, however, the cards reflect a **negative** outcome, the **Setback** card is used as the prompt for the ending of the scene.

Each student takes turns making **moves** that consist of playing a card, and then using that card as inspiration for original writing. We recommend that you specify a minimum word count for each student's move in order to fully engage in the writing process. Any such minimum word count is not (yet) enforced by *StoriumEdu* itself but rather should be verbally specified to the class based on the individual teacher's goals for their classroom. As stated earlier, a sample game or examples from prior games will help solidify this concept in your students' collective mindset.



Finlay (Mateo) is moving



Finlay (Mateo) is typing...

Standby, it's Mateo's turn to move...

In the meantime, once per scene you can optionally make an extra turn called a **flashback**, which lets you tell us some backstory about your character.

Write a flashback

A student waiting for their turn

Each student gets to write one move per scene, and one optional **flashback**. Flashbacks are brief entries that students write to provide backstory on their character. Even if a student is waiting for their turn to come around, they can still write a flashback while they are waiting. If a student has already made their move *and* written a flashback in the current scene, you can encourage them to continue writing drafts outside of *StoriumEdu*. In this manner you can keep them engaged while giving them a way to develop new ideas that they can use in the game when it is next their turn.

In case of a classroom absence, the teacher or organizer can always skip a player's turn in a scene. This means another player will get to make an additional move in that scene, to make up for the skipped player's move.

Teachers always have the option of asking students to revise or edit their work during the course of any scene by clicking "Ask for changes." Students will see your comments marked clearly alongside any relevant move and will be able to revise their work as directed.



Finlay (Mateo) moved



"This is an inspection," the megaphone blared. "All citizens, come outside!"

In his classroom, Finlay's blood froze. Another police inspection! That meant more people would disappear. Wasn't it bad enough that everyone in the village was slowly starving?

The megaphone rang out again. "Students, outside, now!"

He looked at Merrill, sitting behind him, fear on her face. Mom and Dad told him to look out for her and that was what he was going to do.

"This is it," he whispered. "We have to go over the wall and try to find food and safety. It can't be worse than what's happening here, right?" Merrill nodded in agreement.

[Delete](#) • [Ask for changes](#) • [Edit](#)

Teachers can ask students to make revisions

Conclusion

Collaborative writing is often a new process for both students and teachers, but one that brings tremendous opportunities for expanding creative imagination in the classroom. *StoriumEdu* is a sophisticated yet easy to use tool that makes collaborative writing accessible to every student.

The most enjoyable way to learn the collaborative writing process is to engage in it yourself. We have found it to be an exciting, eye-opening experience, both for teachers and their students, when they write together!



Appendices

More *StoriumEdu* resources:

[Teacher's Guide to StoriumEdu](#)

[StoriumEdu FAQ](#)

[StoriumEdu brochure](#)

[Tutorial videos](#)

Copyright and Fair Use Links:

<https://copyright.cornell.edu/publicdomain>

<https://ucomm.wsu.edu/fair-use/>

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/lesson/copyrights-and-wrongs-9-12>

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/lesson/a-creators-responsibilities-6-8>