Storytelling as a Literacy Tool for Children

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Abstract

Storytelling is a very effective learning tool and has shown to be valuable in a variety of fields. A number of studies were reviewed revealing various advantages the use of storytelling can have when used as a literacy tool for children including improvements reading comprehension, oral language, and writing. The advantages of storytelling as a literacy tool can also be applied in the technological age with the advent of digital storytelling, and additional research may reveal further positive results of this approach on literacy development. A unit plan for high school students, a sample of three lesson plans for elementary school students, and a video of the author giving a lesson to a class of elementary school boys that all use storytelling as a technique to teach English literacy follow the review of the literature.

Keywords: storytelling, literacy, children

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Storytelling

Reading, a key element in literacy education, is characterized by an ongoing, personal, long-distance discussion between the reader and the author (Egbokhare & Oyelude, 2010). The distance of this discussion can be bridged, however, by storytelling, an age-old tool used to impart knowledge from generation to generation (Burke, Goodman, & Watson, 1996). In fact, the word "story" is derived from the Greek "istoria," which means knowing, knowledge, and wisdom, and this knowledge can include information, as well as important values and tradition. Stories have also provided a way to maintain cultural heritage (Davidhizar & Lonser, 2003), exemplified by the fact that adults tend to tell stories as a tool to interpret history to children. Ong (1982), in fact, compared literate and oral traditions, pointing out that in oral cultures such as the Homeric epics, narrative has carried all of the information these societies needed to be preserved, including genealogies, the laws of navigation, the names of leaders and their territories, and the catalogue of ships in the Trojan wars.

Stories are told for an array of purposes, including insight into role, self, vision, goals, and values both within organizations and personally (Kowalski & Yoder-Wise, 2003), and give room for creating and sharing a common experience between the teller and the listener (Egbokhare & Oyelude, 2010). They also come in many forms, including motivational, educational, and informational, all of which Dawes (2001) has presumed to be an effective way of representing events in order for others to remember them. The art of storytelling at its core, however, is focused on a desire to connect with the listener in a purposeful and meaningful way.

This connection was supported by research that showed people are more receptive to stories than data-based presentations. The reason for this is that the listener of a story focuses on

the evolving story as opposed to the "yes, but" defensive reaction that is often created with pure data delivery. In essence, stories give us the ability to take a list of basic, key steps or points and make them memorable enough that the listeners do not need a handout to keep track of this list but, rather, they are left with vivid mental pictures, complete with feelings, words, and actions, to implement the story's key lessons in their personal lives (Kowalski & Yoder-Wise, 2003). In this way, stories capture one's attention and interest, bring facts to life, and enable recall of details by association by placing them in personal scenarios (Davidhizar & Lonser, 2003).

Storytelling as a Learning Tool

Not only is storytelling an incredibly effective learning tool, but people actually anticipate learning from stories because it is the medium through which their earliest learning occurred. In the United States, for example, bedtime stories are among the learning experiences of most people. One area in which storytelling can be used effectively as a learning tool is that of organizational change. Telling stories to a group about a desired behavior that is universal to this group helps create a certain cohesiveness. The context that stories provide convey emotions, provide intuition and insight into events, and trigger individual group memories (Kowalski & Yoder-Wise, 2003). The immediacy and simplicity of the storytelling medium offers a powerful tool to contextualize, as well as humanize knowledge, in addition to facilitating a greater understanding of others and self within cultural and ethical contexts (Davidhizar & Lonser, 2003).

Another area in which storytelling has shown to be a valuable educational strategy is in the field of nursing education, in which it has been used to develop skills in clinical settings, as well as assist in the development of assessment skills. For example, stories have been used to assist nursing students in listening and collecting data for cultural assessment, providing an

opportunity to gain insight into the lived experience of clients with different illnesses within the context of their culture. Relatedly, Lonser, a nurse educator, reported positive comments from students regarding storytelling as a teaching technique in their classroom, and found that students also related successes in their learning to the stories told in class, attributing success in testing, for instance, to being able to associate facts with a story. In short, storytelling as a nonlecture classroom strategy was shown to that can capture students' attention, as well as promote critical thinking (Davidhizar & Lonser, 2003).

From the time they begin speaking their native language, children begin to engage in classification of concepts, objects, and names to their corresponding superordinate and subordinate domains. Fortunately, many children's stories teach these ordering systems so vital to their learning and optimal functionality in everyday life. This knowledge is also reflected in the stories children write themselves. As has been demonstrated by Fox (1989), a senior lecturer at Brighton Polytechnic who studied preliterate children's invented stories for several years, demonstrated that elements such as numbers and calculations play a central role in the stories children create. More specifically, children seem to use numbers in stories both as a way of representing reality and to be imbued with a magical significance. For example, one of the children whose stories Fox studied, Josh, showed in his story writing his understanding that numbers can be representative of an object's value, and that they get written down. He also showed that he understand that large quantities have to include the word "hundred" in them. In one of his stories about him and his friends deciding to sell their home-made house, he wrote, "Right then I'll make a sale poster and I'll get my pen and write 'For Sale'; so they write 'FOR SALE' and Joshua writed 'a hundred and fifty pounds for that thingy'" (p. 30). In other words,

children understand that numbers and calculations are part of the fabric of the external world and use them in stories to produce a credible reality.

Storytelling and Children

In the same vein, children have the ability to learn of complex time relationships, such as what Meek (1984) called "shifters," or movements between one kind of narrative to another, from stories they tell and literature they read (Fox, 1989). Two five-year-olds from Fox's study, for instance, were shown to have learned that stories operate within the context of several kinds of time by clearly distinguishing between the time of events narrated and the time of the telling of a story. Fox also attested that children know that stories use the "iterative," a past time in history in which events continuously happen outside the progression of events in the narrative, and signaled often by words like "sometimes," "always," and "never."

The fact that, in powerful story contexts, children easily manage without forethought operations to make simple calculations further supports Moffett's (1968) claim that "for a long time, narrative must do for all" (p. 14). This same phenomenon exists when it comes to other abstract mental processes, such as syllogism, which, when produced in the context of a story, seemingly require zero to little forethought for children. The reason behind this phenomenon, Fox (1989) claimed, is that these calculations are embedded within the narrative's exciting events, and children would most likely find these calculations more difficult in a decontextualized, abstract form. In fact, Fox further asserted that "in their storytelling, the children's most complex utterances arise from an affective base" (p. 32). Perhaps this shows how imaginative stories can be, as Vygotsky (1978) put it, "zones of proximal development" for children. The way this works is that telling stories, being a cognitively demanding task, tends to push children toward decentered viewpoints and new relationships in order for them to reach

beyond their developmental age, or, what Vygotsky called “above their daily behavior” (Fox, 1989, p. 31).

Moffet’s (1968) claim that “for a long time narrative must do for all” (p. 14) is likely true for children long after they first arrive at school, and perhaps even beyond their entry into secondary school, when lessons tend to make a transition from story-metaphors of infancy to standing alone as separate disciplines. Part of the problem, in fact, of why many students have difficulties with terminology and unfamiliar concepts in the discourses of school subjects is because there is often no affective force akin to that which storytelling provides to draw the child into a subject. It would be wise to integrate fantasy narrative in particular in the school curriculum, preferably in the monologue form, because this genre of story seems to uniquely provide a forum for the storyteller to make all the choices of their narrative and linguistic competences available, allowing the child to most fully reveal what thinking through language is like (Fox, 1989).

The Literacy Story

What is Literacy?

One’s definition of literacy affects how long opportunities will be provided to participate in the literate community in both school and beyond school, what we teach, and to whom we provide instruction. The impacts of the literacy definition go beyond mere instructional practices to areas of policy and research. In particular, it has been noted that limited definitions as to what constitutes literacy in general, particularly reading and writing, is one of the reasons for the lack of opportunity for people with extensive needs for support for literacy instruction. The literature often discusses conceptual frameworks, research, and approaches to teaching literacy--which is often identified with reading or writing--without defining what these terms mean. The history of

literacy for those with extensive needs for support is often characterized somewhat by a narrative of pessimism. Particularly, the belief that people with extensive needs for support are not able to acquire literacy skills can easily result in a lack of opportunities to learn these very skills, thereby becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Therefore, it is of primary importance to explicitly define and expand on what is meant by the term literacy, which offers an important point of departure for this challenge. When the literacy definition is broadened, research has indicated that individuals with extensive needs for support can actively participate in their communities and develop literacy skills. And although a perfect definition of literacy will never exist, there is value in developing an encompassing, and shared set of core principles of what constitutes literacy (Copeland & Keefe, 2011).

Notions of literacy. There are a number of historical approaches to the conceptualization of literacy, as well as important relationships between these literacy definitions and literacy opportunities. The notion of literacy as a fundamental human right, for example, was introduced by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), that established the Experimental World Literacy Program in 1966. Luckasson (2006) elaborated on this notion, explaining these rights to be nonnegotiable "aspects of being human that the social contract must respect" (p. 12). This notion developed as a result of people labeled as needing extensive support being, historically, viewed as not being able to develop literacy skills. This group of people included women, people of color, as well as the poor. The labeling that occurred, in turn, allowed for literacy instruction to often be either denied or provided in a fashion that did not meet their learning needs. The "literacy," however, to which people have a right, and whether all people share in this right, regardless of ability perceived or otherwise, largely depends on the definition of literacy being used, of which there is considerable

disagreement. Moreover, one's definition of literacy also affects community services, classroom instruction, and literacy opportunities offered to adults and students with extensive needs for support (Copeland & Keefe, 2011).

Definitions of literacy. There are a few definitions of literacy put forth by international organizations that should be taken into consideration because literacy is not a local or national issue but, rather, a global one, as well as because of the fact that these organizations call for the right to literacy for all people. UNESCO, for instance, stated in their 1957 definition of literacy: "A person is literate who can with understanding both read and write a short simple statement on his (her) everyday life" (UNESCO, 2008, p. 18). The Experimental World Literacy Program established in 1996, on the other hand, used a more functional definition: "A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his (her) group and community and also for enabling him (her) to continue to use reading, writing, and calculation for his (her) own and the community's development" (UNESCO, 2008, p. 18). This definition made clear the fact that literacy is situated in the context of one's own community. Unfortunately, however, global literacy statistics often do not reflect the nuance of this definition because they are often times based on people's answers to the question asking simply whether they are able to read and write, because many countries do not have the means to assess literacy levels (Copeland & Keefe, 2011).

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), an OECD-sponsored organization that reports statistics of global educational achievement that compare one country (or parts of countries when educational jurisdiction is divided) to another in various academic areas, used a more active and interactive definition of literacy. Their definition acknowledges the role the reader brings to written texts, proposing a definition of "Reading Literacy," meaning

"An individual's capacity to understand, use and reflect on written texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society" (OECD--Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006, p. 46). In contrast to the notion that both the community and individual benefit from literacy, as was cited in the UNESCO definition, PISA's definition is based on the conviction that, "literacy enables the fulfillment of individual aspirations" (PISA, p. 46).

Although the UNESCO and PISA definitions may have intellectual merit they nevertheless remain problematic for people with extensive needs for support and who are often not able to read and write in conventional ways. In particular, the PISA definition precludes those who cannot use written texts from inclusion in their literacy assessments, allowing anyone not included to be assumed illiterate. The UNESCO definition, on the other hand, can be considered broader because it does view literacy in the context of the community, rather than the individual. Moreover, it gives the individual the ability to answer the question of whether they can read and write, which leaves open the possibility for other forms of reading and writing, such as augmentative communication, for example, to be accepted, rather than being forced to apply a uniform standard.

Interestingly, based on the above definitions, it may be potentially misinterpreted that the United Nations holds the belief that individuals who are not able to read and write in a conventional way should be excluded from the right to literacy instruction because their definition of literacy limits it to the context of an individual's own community. This possible misinterpretation, however, is contradicted based on other United Nations documents. Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, states, "The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart

information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice" (The United Nations Children's Fund, 1990, p. 4). It can be concluded from this article that the United Nations acknowledges that not all individuals communicate ideas in the same way, and that value should be placed on multiple forms of communications. The National Reading Panel (2000) proposal defined literacy in a different way, namely by dividing the notion into five major components, all of which are conventional forms of reading and writing: phonics, phonemic awareness, reading fluency, comprehension strategies, and vocabulary development. Its narrow definition of literacy has the potential to lead to literacy instruction inappropriate for individuals with extensive support needs or leave these individuals out of the literacy picture altogether (Copeland & Keefe, 2011).

Definitions and Perspectives of Literacy Education

Knoblauch (1990) put forth the idea that literacy definitions do not occur in a vacuum, and cautioned, "Literacy is one of those mischievous concepts like virtuousness and craftsmanship, that appear to denote capacities but that actually convey value judgments" (p. 74). He discussed four types of definitions of literacy. First, there are definitions emanating from a functionalist perspective, that emphasize teaching skills individuals need for daily life as well as complex demands of changing economic and technological environments. The perspective of these types of definitions emanate from the "back-to-basics" movements that characterize the current climate that was created by the US No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and that reoccur with regularity, valuing conventional skills of reading, writing, and math, over all else in the school system.

This definition and perspective seems to be in line with what anthropologist Brian Street has labeled as the autonomous model of literacy, claiming the model to be the one that prevails in current literacy discourse and policy. The model sees literacy "as independent of social context, an autonomous variable whose consequences for society and cognition can be derived from its intrinsic character" (Street, 1993, p. 5). This ideology is, essentially, a bundle of beliefs about the nature of literacy conceptualized, in this context, as a skill learned gradually as the person moves through universal stages of physical and cognitive development. In particular, the autonomous model "isolates literacy as an independent variable and then claims to be able to study its consequences" Street (1984, p. 2). The autonomous approach predicts, thereby, that the individual level of literacy will result in social, economic, and political development at the national level. Many even go as far as to claim that this skill results in intellectual development, individual rational thought, economic mobility, and social development. The limitation of the autonomous model, however, is that it tends to understand literacy in a fairly narrow way. It seems to ignore the immense diversity of literacy practices in that they privilege specific kinds of literacy and specific ways of using literacy, all the while disregarding the arbitrary nature by which particular practices are elevated and made superior to others (Bartlett, 2008).

The second perspective, cultural literacy, includes "an awareness of cultural heritage, a capacity of higher order thinking, and even some aesthetic discernment" (Knoblauch, 1990, p. 77), going beyond the view of literacy as comprising merely basic skills. Anthropologists as well as other sociocultural scholars tend to subscribe to this perspective, which stresses the importance of the socialization process in constructing the meaning of literacy for informants, and thereby, is concerned not just with the educational institutions, but also with those social institutions through which this process takes place. Such an approach, then, focuses on a careful

study of complex cultural and social interactions influencing what kind of "outcomes" will result from schooling, rather than attempting to arrive at causal links. There is a danger inherent in this approach, however, namely in the way it favors the dominant culture and language, while marginalizing others (Bartlett, 2008).

The third type of definition is that of literacy for personal growth whose adherents assume that "language expresses the power of the individual imagination" (Knoblauch, 1990, p. 78), advocating for inclusion of writing that includes people of color and women, inclusion of enjoyable novels, and other ways in which to engage individuals perceived as disadvantaged (Copeland & Keefe, 2011). These three mentioned perspectives have dominated, either singly or in some combination, the fashion in which policy makers and educators have approached literacy in the school system to this day.

The fourth and final perspective Knoblauch described, however, is labeled critical literacy perspective, which has found expression mostly in academic circles. Knoblauch explained this perspective as follows:

> Its agenda is to identify reading and writing abilities with a critical consciousness of the social conditions in which people find themselves, recognizing the extent to which language practices objectify and rationalize these conditions and the extent to which people with the authority to name the world dominate others whose voices they have been able to suppress. Literacy therefore, constitutes a means to power, a way to seek political enfranchisement . . . . (p. 79)

This perspective is influenced strongly by Marxist philosophy, enabling it to be viewed as somewhat radical, and therefore, has not been embraced by the political or educational

establishment. Overall, Knoblauch's (1990) analysis gave a historical overview of the major categories of the definitions of literacy, which are still relevant today (Copeland & Keefe, 2011).

Modern Measures of Literacy and Literacy Ideologies

Modern measures of literacy also incorporate literacy ideologies and, although they claim to measure literacy, they tend to deal primarily with reading. Particularly, assessments incorporating scales of tasks seem to rely upon four general assumptions: (a) the notion that literacy is a cognitive skill possessed by individuals, (b) the notion that skills can be hierarchically arrayed, (c) the notion that hierarchy of skills is universal across different contexts and languages, and (d) the notion that literacy is measurable (Bartlett, 2008).

The idea that literacy assessments treat the notion of literacy as a property of individual cognition is exemplified by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), who used "a model of literacy that treats it as a set of information-processing cognitive skills" (Hamilton & Barton 2000, p. 379). This model, of course, contradicts the sociocultural approach, that foreground social and cultural relations in literacy practices. In fact, it is suggested by cross-national literacy assessments that it is possible to "filter out" culture, which they claim is a distracting variable and that its influence needs to be minimized to eliminate test bias.

Moreover, newer literacy assessments prioritize form over meaning by assuming that the comprehensibility of a language is due to complexity, and not content. As a result, situated within their view of literacy as a cognitive skill, measure levels of literacy, maintaining a developmentalist notion of levels or stages of literacy acquisition. Contemporary sociocultural literacy scholars, however, have roundly criticized this notion of stagewise development. Dyson's research (2002), for example, demonstrated that literacy practices of children entail complex recontextualization of symbolic resources and children's practices in new literacy

events in ways hardly linear or even predictable. Similarly, Luke and Freebody (1997a,b; 1999) (cited by Bartlett, 2008) showed that individuals use multiple cuing systems or skills simultaneously as they read, and how each of these systems are mediated by social and cultural contexts. Luke (2000), in fact, made clear that even phonemic awareness and phonics are thoroughly social and cultural, because they are influenced by diverse linguistic and cultural resources as well as the culturally arbitrary privileges related to class.

Newer literary assessments assume not only that there is a hierarchy of skills, but that the hierarchy is universal, or at least transcontextual and cross-linguistic. This assumption, however, is also called into question by research that suggests that different orthographies and languages require different sets of literary skills, although some skills, especially those of a linguistic nature, may transfer between languages. For example, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998) have put forth the argument that a skill such as phonics cannot be standardized across the dialects of a language, which calls into question the entire validity of standardized tests such as direct literary assessments.

Although literacy assessments assume literacy to be objectively measurable, the construction of literacy measures proves to be an utterly political process. There are, in fact, scholars who question whether those standard psychometric scaling techniques used in standardized assessments are measuring a single, underlying dimension, or several. Moreover, the very levels of literacy in such assessments are arbitrarily fixed or invented statistically in order to allocate a favorable proportion of individuals to each one of the levels. A further point was made by Blum et al. (2001) who analyzed the interpretational and statistical problems with the IALS. They demonstrated the cultural specificity involved with the survey in their analysis of its instruments. In their critique of the data-modeling techniques used in IALS, they mention

that decisions regarding how to differentiate between levels as well as whether to take the best or average answer yielded significantly different results.

It should not come as a surprise, then, that there is also considerable disagreement over the item-construction literacy assessments such as the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). Scholars have criticized the notion that it is possible to select culturally and linguistically neutral test items. For instance, Goldstein (2004), in his comment on the restrictive nature of PISA's analysis, modeling, and resulting interpretations, pointed out that there are data to indicate that "items translate differently in terms of relative difficulty because of the different cultural contexts, and this is extremely difficult to allow for" (Goldstein, 2004, p. 322). Similarly, measures of literacy are drawn from highly politicized, psychometric studies and scientific theories.

Despite all these cautions, however, literacy reports are often taken at face value. Ideological conceptions of literacy argue that any measure of literacy cannot be confused with literacy itself. In summation, literacy practices are so variable and so contextual that it is impossible, a priori, to come up with a single measurement that would be able to account for their diversity (Bartlett, 2008).

Broader Definitions of Literacy

Functional approaches to literacy, although having the benefit of providing access to literacy programs to students with extensive needs for support, also have the drawback of these opportunities possibly being limited by what assumed to be "functional" for these learners. For example, Browder and Spooner (2006) examined the literature spanning 1975 to 2003 that consisted of 128 experiments on reading instruction research of students with severe cognitive disabilities. They pointed out that what has dominated research in the area of reading for this

group of individuals has been functional sight word approach, which begs a need for a wider range of research.

Other broader definitions of literacy, on the other hand, tend to broaden the concept of what comprises "reading" and writing." An example of this is the definition Downing (2005) proposed, in which he included activities involving using, accessing, and communicating about anything in print or image media form, and is not limited to that material accessed specifically through hearing or sight. In a similar fashion, Erickson and Hatton (2007) proposed a framework for visually impaired emergent literacy students, and in so doing refer to literacy as a phenomenon that occurs in relation to "print or its equivalent" (p. 265). This allows for literate possibilities for these types of students that would apply to some students with extensive needs for support as well, and who also have challenges accessing traditional forms of print.

Viewing literacy as something occurring in interaction with other members of the linguistic community, and not only as an individual trait, is another definition of how the literacy definition can be expanded. This view emphasizes the idea of literacy occurring within a social milieu, thereby, not being defined solely as referring to individual literacy skills in isolation. This does not imply, therefore, that students with extensive needs for support will not become independent readers. Unfortunately, the reality is that many literacy goals for individuals with extensive needs for support are decontextualized, reduced to those skills that can be specifically delineated as individual program goals (Copeland & Keefe, 2011).

This notion that literacy is a social phenomenon has given birth to other broad definitions as well. Kliewer et al. (2004), for example, discussed literacy's social nature, noting that "the meaning of the term literacy and the inferences cast by the term literate citizen shift across time and place" (p. 377). Similarly, Kliewer and Biklen (2007) put forth the concept that "local

understanding" is crucial to the framing of what literacy is for individuals with extensive needs for support. Particularly, they described local understanding as "the communal recognition that educational value and participation may be ascribed where history has primarily supported dehumanization and segregation" (p. 2581). This perspective results in the assumption that all learners are members of a literate community. On that note, Kliewer (2008), based on local understanding that developed out of previous qualitative studies, came up with a definition of literacy that gleamed from his research, "I have come to define literacy as the construction (which includes interpretation) of meaning through visually or tactually crafted symbols that compose various forms of text" (p. 106).

On a whole, the broader definitions of literacy assume a certain capability and open up opportunities for literacy for individuals with physical, intellectual, sensory, and motor challenges. Broadening the literacy definition, however, is not intended to replace the conventional notions of reading and writing, but rather to make sure that the literacy definition is not limited to those forms of literacy that are less accessible (Copeland & Keefe, 2011).

The New Literacy Studies

Street (2008) introduced another layer to the literacy definition phenomenon that may also add to the broadening of the concept of literacy. He presented what has been dubbed The New Literacy Studies, a series of writings, in both practice and research, that view literacy and language as social practices, and not technical skills to be learned in a formal educational setting. The research studies literacy and language as they naturally occur in social life, and takes into account the context as well as their different meanings for different cultural groups. The practice requires the taking into account of the variation in uses and meanings that students bring from their home and family backgrounds to formal learning contexts. Overall, the New Literacy

Studies placed emphasis on the importance of "culturally sensitive teaching" in the way it intends to build upon students' own skills and knowledge. Essentially, there exist two tenets to this relatively new way of thinking: (a) the idea of "social literacies," and (b) the idea that language is "dialogic."

Social Literacies. First, the phrase "social literacies" refers to literacy's nature as a social practice and to the variety of literacies that this allows us to observe. This notion leads to new ways of defining and understanding what counts as literacy, and has deep implications for how we teach writing and reading. In other words, if literacy is a social practice, then it varies with the social context. Street (2008) took this view further in posing an "ideological" model of literacy in which literacy not only varies with the cultural norms and social context as well as discourses concerning identity, belief, and gender, but also that its meanings and uses are constantly embedded in power relations. This means that literacy constantly involves contests over definitions, meanings, and boundaries, and control struggles over the literacy agenda. Therefore, in light of this view, it can hardly be justified to teach only one form of literacy, whether in adult programs or in schools.

Recently, however, there has been some concern expressed in regard to this so-called "pluralization" of literacies. Wagner, for instance, claims that this "pluralization" creates a new reification that forces literacy to appear as an essential, fixed thing. Kress (1997), in a similar vein, argued that the claim of the New Literacy Studies for the plurality of literacies is paradoxical because it implies a stability that is present in each literacy that these researchers reject explicitly. He also argued that the metaphorical extension of the literacy concept to other domains of social life, such as politics, computing, and emotions–apart from lazy and glib

rhetorical usages–are flawed because they do not see language as simply one of many modes of communication.

Dialogic language. The second major tenet of the New Literacy studies, dialogic language, focused on the nature of language as a constantly negotiated process of meaning making and taking. Language was viewed as a social process in this research tradition, that is dynamic and interactive (Street, 1993). Bakhtin (1981), for example, explained how language is constantly part of a social interaction, whether with the uses and meanings of words others have employed at other places and times or with imagined others.

The implication of this is that if language is constantly being contested, employed, and negotiated in social interactions, then the appropriateness of particular interpretations and uses have also to be opened for debate. It becomes, therefore, impossible to lay down formal, strict rules for all times, making the authority of particular users such as grammarians, teachers, and politicians problematized. These implications, however, have only recently been felt in applied studies, and in regards to schooling and education in particular, this view has been conveyed recently through the idea of Critical Language Awareness, which states that learners should be facilitated in engaging in debates regarding the meaning and nature of language, as opposed to them being treated as passive victims of the "structural properties" of language.

Implications for practice and research. The New Literacy Studies pointed in certain directions that challenge current orthodoxies of teaching methods. Teaching, for example, needs to be capable of taking into account the variation in literacy practices amongst students, as well as giving value to their varying backgrounds and different literacies they employ in the context of their homes. This emphasizes genuine uses of literacy and an attention to context of use

seems more in line with the tenets of the New Literacy Studies than does a focus on formal or artificial features of the supposed universal literacy (Street, 1993).

The acknowledgement by the New Literacy Studies of the complexity and richness of genuine literacy practices has acted as a basis for some new approaches to classroom practice. Heath and Mangiola (1991), for instance, were commissioned by the National Education Association to develop a text to be used in the classroom that would help teachers address the literacy needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students. The resulting text provided case studies of successful cross-age tutoring programs, in which students who were failing and dropping out were trained to tutor younger, elementary students in reading. The program had dramatic success in terms of pupil improvement in literacy skills as well as teacher attitudes.

In a similar fashion, a Community Literacy project in Nepal, funded by the Overseas Development Administration in England, proposed commencing research into actual literacy uses in different communities as a base for the consideration of proposals for teaching and learning (Rogers, 1994). The project emphasized genuine materials such as the actual texts, whether signposts, posters, wrappers and labels, letters, religious documents, political propaganda, and developmental messages that constitute the literacy environment, as opposed to the traditional reliance on primers like basic text books, often uniform, across an entire country. The task, according to the New Literacy Studies, therefore, seems to be to challenge dominant representations of literacy, as well as to develop collaborative research projects looking t the actual literacy practices of both school and home.

A Proposal for Literacy Definition Core Principles

Based on a synthesis of critical, traditional, and broader definitions of literacy, Copeland and Keefe (2011) developed a distinct set of core definition areas. They went about this by

collaborating with a group of students, 12 teachers, and community providers who are passionate about exploring the issue of literacy for student with extensive needs for support. They labeled this group "Literacy: All Children Empowered" (LACE). Members of LACE began to explore the definitional issues of literacy by receiving input from their students with and without disabilities, family members, colleagues, and others. These LACE members also brainstormed, discussing definitions of literacy based on this input, the literature in the area, as well as their own experiences. They developed a working literacy definition based on this work that has guided their work.

The purpose of Copeland and Keefe's (2011) research was not to propose a single, correct definition of literacy for those with extensive needs for support, however, because they agree with Knoblauch, who espoused that literacy is a "mischievous concept" (Knoblauch, 1990, p. 74), as well as with Kliewer et al. (2004) that literacy definitions will constantly change with time and place. Moreover, they acknowledge the fact that literacy develops across a person's lifetime because it exists on a continuum, as Koppenhaver et al. (1995) acknowledged. On a similar note, they agreed with Koppenhaver et al., Kliewer and Biklen (2007), Downing (2005), and others who totally rejected the notion of a literate-nonliterate dichotomy.

Their purpose, rather, was to offer a set of core definitional principles embodying several purposes. Firstly, these principles made the assumptions on which broader definitions of literacy should be based on explicit at this particular point in history. For instance, as Knoblauch (1990) suggested, any literacy definition goes beyond identification of skills to encoding sociocultural judgments. One's sociocultural judgments, therefore, must be made explicit. Secondly, their proposals broadened the idea of literacy to include all modes of communication as many professionals who work in the field with individuals with extensive needs for supports have

recommended. Thirdly, their principles assumed the fact that literacy is a social phenomenon, and therefore, should not be limited to individual skills, no matter how broadly they are conceptualized. Fourthly, their principles can guide research, instruction, and policy decisions. Finally, their hope was that their conceptions could form the bases for further improvement and dialogue of these very principles.

The core definitional principles that Copeland and Keefe (2011) proposed were as follows: (a) all people are able to acquire literacy, (b) literacy is a fundamental human right and a part of the human experience, (c) literacy creates and requires a connection and relationship with others, and is not a trait residing solely in the individual person, (d) literacy encompasses contact, communication, and the expectation of interaction being possible for all people, (e) literacy has the ability to lead to empowerment, and (f) literacy is the responsibility of every person in the community collectively; meaning, to develop meaning making with all modes of communication in order to receive and transmit information.

Implications for research, practice, and policy. Copeland and Keefe (2011) found that there was a tremendous variability in the ways that literacy was defined. However, despite the wide variation in the way the respondents to the questionnaire defined literacy, there was a strong agreement to the fact that all people could benefit from literacy instruction, as well as to the fact that literacy should, across all ages, be a priority. Overall, their pilot study still suggests that there is a lot of work to be done in terms of establishing a consistent set of core principle to be included in any definitions of literacy. It is of vital importance in the current climate of policy to continue providing evidence of the successful and capable literacy practices, and to continue challenging traditional literacy definitions for individuals with extensive needs for support.

Although there is a tendency for literacy instruction to be viewed as something occurring in elementary grades, there is evidence that adults and adolescents with intellectual disabilities may, in fact, be more likely to benefit from literacy instruction than young children. Therefore, the fact that literacy instruction does not seem to be emphasized beyond elementary school is quite concerning. Fortunately, there are researchers in the field who have recently recognized this. For example, Browde et al. (2009) proposed a model of literacy instruction making clear that literacy instruction in schools should be provided across all ages. At any rate, any and all definitions of literacy must make clear the fact that literacy is important at all ages.

"Effects" of Literacy

There is a popular conception that literacy, in itself, has some kind of "effect," providing those who become literate with improved empowerment or job prospects. Moreover, development publications suggest that literacy confers benefits such as improved political engagement or employment (Bartlett 2008).

The 2006 Global Monitoring Report, for example, claimed literacy to have a positive effect on macro-economic growth, demonstrating reasonable returns on investments. One study, the GMR reports, drawing from data from the International Adult Literacy Survey, "concluded that differences in average skill levels among [the 14] OECD countries explained fully 55% of the differences in economic growth over 1960-94" (p. 143). The GMR also relates a review of three World Bank-financed projects, each showing social and private rates of return of between 15% and 4%. The report concluded that the "sparse evidence that exists indicates, therefore, that the returns to investment in adult literacy programs are generally comparable to, and compare favorably with, those from investments in primary education" (p. 145). Similarly, the 2006 Global Monitoring Report made the claim that participation in adult literacy programs is

correlated with an increase in political participation. The chapter concluded by stating that literacy definitely confers distinct benefits, whether acquired through participation in adult literacy programs or through schooling.

The above stated benefits of literacy, however, are based on studies that relied on large, aggregate sets of data, and therefore, did not consider the type of literacy that is acquired, nor did they investigate school-level processes by which outcomes are allegedly produced. These types of studies, in other words, require and employment of autonomous notions of literacy as independent of a social context.

Bartlett (2008) claimed that ethnographic research solves this issue. Drawing on 24 months of ethnographic data of literacy programs for adults and youth in Brazil, she examined the so-called "consequences" of literacy education in terms of political participation and economic mobility in particular. Bartlett presented, based on findings from her case studies of both nongovernmental and public Freirean literacy organizations that the economic mobility these students achieved as a result of participating in these programs came as a result of the networks and relationships they cultivated in and through schools, as opposed to the literacy they learned in school. Bartlett also found that one of the Freirean organizations of the study did, in fact, have a limited effect on student political engagement by organizing the students to participate in an array of political events. She notes, however, that literacy per se was not what encouraged this political engagement, but rather, it was the rhetoric, in class, urging participation, as well as the visibility of accessible political events.

Bartlett's observations and interviews revealed a link between students' ideologies of literacy and the ways in which they used school to pursue economic opportunities. Particularly, the students noted that sociability, social networks, and manners, as opposed to their emergent

abilities to read and write, granted them access to jobs. As a whole, her research suggests that researchers in the field of education should reconsider those theories concerning the relationship between literacy and development, and distinguish between types of literacy programs and types of literacy. Ample ethnographic evidence challenges the notion that literacy be treated in the singular, or even as a single skill that can be arrayed on a hierarchy of measurable levels. Literacy, in other words, is not an agent, but a tool taken up variously by students with their own literacy ideologies and histories.

Early Literacy Skills

Early literacy skills consist of multifaceted relationships between oral language and code-related skills. The competencies of oral language include expressive and receptive vocabulary, word knowledge, conceptual knowledge, and knowledge of syntax. Code-related aptitude include beginning forms of writing such as writing's one's name, knowledge of conventions of print such as the knowledge that writing goes from left to right (or in some other conventional diction), letters and letter sounds, nonalphabetic languages, as well as phonological awareness such as the fact that the word rat begins with the /r/ sound. The examples used here will focus on alphabetic language, however. Most children attain language and these preliteracy skills through communication with adults and peers who use language in a way which conforms to their respective culture and its corresponding printed word (Elangovan, 2013).

Effective early literacy activities. The development of early literacy skills is the gateway to future academic and reading success. Research has pointed to a number of key components which need to be in place in order for young children to be able to gain the necessary skills in order to become confident and competent in the critical areas of writing and reading. For example, it has been shown that an emphasis on functional print (for example,

lunch menu, labels on classroom materials, men's or women's or neutral bathroom designations) and environment print (e.g., Walmart, McDonald's, Shell) has been shown to encourage children's literacy in a familiar environment as well as their recognizing uses of print (Bruns & Pierce, 2007). Shared book experiences including arts-related activities (e.g., music and movement, painting) and repeated book reading are other activities that help children acquire literacy and print skills. To quote Neuman and colleagues (2000): "The picture that emerges from research in these first years of children's reading and writing is one that emphasized wide exposure to print and to developing concepts about its form and functions" (p. 9).

Above all, however, interaction and construction of meaning are necessary for successful reading that promotes literacy skills. Verbal interaction between the adult and child during reading which involves explanation, scaffolding, and expounding, is crucial to create a real connection to literacy for the child. Children, after all, learn language by a process of social construction as they read print, as mooted by Vygotsky (1962) and Lindfers (1987).

Literacy programs and general early literacy concepts. Effective literacy programs can help young children master the five early literacy skills crucial to benefitting fully from commencing reading programs offered in preschool and the primary grades. These skills include listening, conventions, phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and serial processing. These programs can also positively affect children's long-term success in finding meaning in printed materials. For instance, Torgesen (2000), in his review of five recent studies outlining methods to prevent difficulties in reading for students with learning disabilities, called attention to children who have limited letter-sound correspondence skills, and the relationship to the issues these children have with processing phonological aspects of language. Examining a child's verbal abilities and cognitive skills is also important as an indicator of future reading successes.

Hammill (2004), for example, analyzed combined results of three meta-analyses examining the extent to which multiple measures of specific abilities related to reading. He reviewed more than 450 studies and analyzed almost 11,000 different coefficients, and pointed out the need to address phoneme-letter association along with print awareness and knowledge of the alphabet. Rapid naming, a process of naming pictures, letters, or objects quickly by making connections between language-based and visual properties, has also been shown to be necessary for reading at all levels, and especially for young children.

Components of Effective Reading Programs

There are many available early literacy programs that parents and teachers can investigate in order to assess whether a particular program would help meet the specific literary needs of the children with whom they work. Selecting a literary program should depend on teaching experience of the one providing instruction, current academic and behavioral skills of the child, and the ease of implementation. Moreover, The National Reading Panel (2000) found effective literacy programs to be those that teach children phonological and phonemic awareness, including target comprehension skills and fluency skills in a systematic and structured sequence (Bruns & Pierce, 2007). Awareness of the particular child's early literacy skill development, however, is essential in order to provide appropriate intervention as the child begins his or her formal learning journey (Elangovan, 2013).

Supportive family environment. Parents play a crucial role in contributing to their children's literacy development (Elangovan, 2013). Egbokare and Oyelude (2010), in examining Professor Rudy Wilson's approaches to storytelling as a means of encouraging literacy across cultures of Nigeria and the United States, found that there is an advantage when it comes to literacy in those children who are read to by their parents, as well as those whose parents engage

them in discussions in order to prepare them for their future reading experiences. In addition to phonological awareness and instruction, a number of other literacy-related skills are needed in order for young children's literacy development, including the participation of the family in all aspects of literacy development. Research has developed methods and strategies to address these needs (Bruns & Pierce, 2007). For instance, DeThorne and Watkins (2001) investigated listeners' perceptions of three children, two typically developing peers and one with specific language impairment. The listeners consisted of undergraduate students, teachers, speech-language pathologists, and sixth-grade students. All four listener groups perceived the child with specific language impairment consistently more negatively than typically developing peers. Dethrone and Watkins provided techniques that increase vocabulary, for example, to offer sophisticated words and overdo it with repetition. The authors suggested that "limited vocabulary skills place them at risk in key areas of development such as peer relations and reading achievement" (p. 38).

Torgesen (2000) emphasized how family members often have the best opportunity to support their child's literacy development. Through demonstrations and modeling and reading and writing steps, adults assist children in learning to read. It is, particularly, conversations and interactions that occur around print, however, that form the factor predominant in easing children's learning to read (Elangovan, 2013). Particularly, family members have many natural contexts in which they are able to create opportunities to practice skills related to learning new and more complex vocabulary, early phonemic awareness tasks, and heightening motivation to read. These opportunities include such daily activities as awareness of environmental print during community outings, shared book reading, and modeling a variety of literacy skills (e.g. reading electronic mail, writing letters, reading outdoor advertising, street signs, food packaging,

and money). Through shared literacy experiences such as these, parents can foster parent-child interpersonal skill development as well. For example, many widely used home intervention programs such as Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters provide materials and lessons to parents in order to prepare children for kindergarten, emphasizing literary activities. Book knowledge (e.g., reading from right to left), letter recognition, and phonological and phonemic awareness are the literacy skills addressed (Bruns & Pierce, 2007).

Researchers have recommended specific behaviors for parents to model for their children during shared reading experiences (Bruns & Pierce, 2007). Ezell and Justice (2000), for example, investigated the efficacy of a home-based, book-reading intervention program for stimulating the early literacy skills of children in the areas of word and print awareness and for enhancing parents' use of print-referencing behaviors. Twenty-eight parents and their typically developing four-year-old children were used as participants in a pretest-posttest research design. Based on the results, which showed that parental use of print-referencing behaviors enhanced significantly their children's early literacy skills in several areas of word and print awareness, the researchers recommended asking questions about print, making comments about print, posing requests about print, pointing to print when talking about the story, and tracking the print when reading.

These behaviors can be adjusted to the specific child's attention span and language skills, for example, an advanced four--year old can provide more comments regarding print, whereas a caregiver or parent can help a three year old with language-delay track print. Furthermore, the behaviors are modeled within the context of school and program involvement approaches, which include literary events (e.g. family reading night), skill development in all areas of development, and distribution of books for a family's home library or for short-term use. All of these methods

accentuate reinforcement and practice for young children, which allow them to generalize and acquire critical literacy skills (Bruns & Pierce, 2007).

Importance of reading aloud. If they are read to frequently, children can acquire the language and literacy skills necessary to be able to read. Listening to reading from a young age is, in fact, an ideal path to language development from oral to written language, evolving an understanding that letters make sounds, and comprehension of the individual components of language (Robertson, 2011). It is also the parent-child activity that provides the richest nurturing of language development (Elangovan, 2013).

In particular, Hart and Risley (1995) looked at the daily lives of one- and two-year old children in typical American families and found immense contrasts at the extremes of advantage as well as within the middle class in the amount of interactions between children and parents. They noted how these differences translate into disparities in the children's later vocabulary use, vocabulary growth rate, and IQ test scores. In their research, Hart and Risley showed the pivotal role parents play in enhancing the vocabulary of infants less than one year old. Simple language and picture books have an immense impact on harnessing the repertoire of children's vocabulary because of the conversations that occur around stories and books, and this leads to a superior range of vocabulary at age three.

Words listened to on television and radio, however, do not influence brain activity or the learning process as much because communication between parent and child takes place as live face-to-face conversation. It is, particularly, early language exposure that correlates to enjoyment, as well as the development and enhancement of neural connections, as advances of neuroscience have shown). This activity, therefore, propels future successes in learning language and reading, instilling motivation, activating cognitive skills, and encouraging imitation

skills (the child reads like his or her parent). Moreover, the priming of background knowledge for a given reading text tends to infuse prior knowledge and memory, and activate the thinking process (Elangovan, 2013).

Elangovan, (2013) set out to ascertain the effects of reading aloud to a group of preschoolers with limited opportunity to listen to their parents read to them given their home background. It was hypothesized that this would be an effective strategy to improve their word recognition skills, a key aspect of literacy. This eight-month study used a single-group pretest versus posttest design, observing 18 preschoolers from non-English speaking homes and low-economic backgrounds studying at PAP Community Foundation (PCF), Jurong West Pioneer Kindergarten in Singapore, which put them at high risk of reading difficulties. These participants were selected based on socio-economic background as well as the frequency with which their mothers read to them. Using the Reading Rocks program, they had volunteers read storybooks to them aloud in small groups with the goal of mimicking the joy and support parents who read with their children bring about. The outcomes were positive.

Preschool Children

The preschool years are an indispensable time for developing skills important to succeed in school in general. In particular, young children's ability to read and successful transition to school depends on the expansion of their preliteracy and language skills (Elangovan, 2013). Whitehurst and Lonigan (1994) found that children who progress to the first grade with a foundation in motivation to learn and early literacy skills are able to partake in complex learning to read tasks as compared to those who lack these fundamental skills.

Storytelling as a Means to Improve Literacy Learning

Oral Storytelling and Literacy

The flow and beauty of language are key mechanisms in telling a story and, therefore, a story must be well written in order to capture the heart, imagination, and spirit of its listeners (Lenox, 2000). This fact points to an obvious, yet inherent, connection between storytelling and language. In particular, storytelling is an effective means to address literacy development in that it improves reading comprehension, oral language, as well as writing. In fact, storytelling activities have the ability to motivate even the most reluctant writer or reader. Moreover, because of the interrelated nature of those processes involved in reading and writing, storytelling can be woven into pedagogical instruction effectively to increase student competencies in all areas (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

Miller and Pennycuff (2008) reviewed the literature on the topic of using storytelling as a means to improve literacy learning, and looked at over 30 empirical articles, studies, and sources ranging from the year 1946 to 2008. Their article showed how, in addition to enhancing academic performance of children in reading and writing, storytelling can also improve the arts in education, motivating students to connect with their learning. This literature review has been cited by a number of researchers in the field.

For example, Gillam, Gillam, and Reece (2012), in their early efficacy study, set out to determine whether an existing decontextualized language intervention or a new contextualized language intervention resulted in more significant changes in the narration and language of children. They cited Miller and Pennycuff (2008) when mentioning the recommended approach for teaching the structure of a story to students in primary-grade classroom of attending to the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Deligianni-Georgaka and Pouroutidi (2016), in their case study looking at how creating digital comics can motivate young learners to write, also used

Miller and Pennycuff (2008) as a support to the idea that the purpose during the writing process and the identification of the audience affect positively the learner's writing.

Moreover, Patria (2014), in her research article inquiring into the art of "moolelo," the medium of storytelling and its impact on underserved urban schools, cited Miller and Pennycuff (2008) a few times. She cited them when bringing support for the use of storytelling as a learning and teaching tool in the classroom, the idea that literacy instruction is most impactful when developed through social interaction, the notion that stories can provide a venue for visualization, imagination, and creativity to be developed in the classroom, and the recognition that storytelling can strengthen reading comprehension by helping children develop a sense of story to enable them to derive meaning from particular stories.

Ssentanda's (2014) report on an ethnographic survey study looking at bi-multilingual education in ten Ugandan primary schools, exploring the way teachers manage the process of and understand transitioning from their mother tongue education to English as a language of teaching and learning also cited Miller and Pennycuff (2008). They referenced the review when mentioning the idea that the reason learners seem to have better developed receptive skills rather than expressive skills may be because of minimal opportunities they have had to engage in conversations. Relatedly, Miller and Pennycuff were cited when Ssentanda (2014) explained that learners experience "writer's block" because teachers require them to express themselves in the written form in a particular language before having the words to do so.

Finally, Gómez and Maker's (2011) analysis of the content and themes in children's written stories cited Miller and Pennycuff (2008) as well, when exploring Native-American storytelling research and mentioning that these particular narratives have been used to help

construct important themes that are part of the culture and passed on from generation to generation.

Particularly, research shows literacy instruction to be most effective when developed through social collaboration and interaction with others (Dugan, 1997; Miller & Pennycuff, 2008). Dugan (1997), for instance, examined the meaning-making process of six struggling fifth-graders using an instructional approach for writing, reading, and talking about literature, providing scaffolded discussions and opportunities for collaboration. This method engaged students in reading, initiated student-led discussions, and helped students take responsibility for their meaning-making.

Because part of storytelling's inherent nature is that it relies on both the teller and the listener, it is a strategy that, in turn, utilizes the social element of language, capitalizing on students' desire to interact and talk with others (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008). Interestingly, the weakest writers and readers are often times the most adept at storytelling (NCTE, 1992). Therefore, students and teachers alike can use storytelling to improve the learning of literacy by building on the synergistic relationship between languages in a way that is interactive (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

One way that storytelling can enhance students' literacy in the classroom is in its oral form. Remenyi (2005), in his speculative paper, explained in the context of the performing arts medium that storytelling is a fundamental method for sharing knowledge among people because it allows for participants to be transported to another place and time. Students have the opportunity to have an enhanced experience with literature though the use descriptive oral language of storytelling in this way.

An important component of this phenomenon is the aesthetic way of knowing, which is defined by Wikipedia (n.d.) as "a critical reflection on art, culture and nature" ("Aesthetic," n.d. para. 1). This reflective process is assumed to lead to new ways of perceiving and viewing the world as a whole (Wikipedia, n.d.). Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (n.d.) further defined aesthetic as "responsive to or appreciative of what is pleasure to the senses." Moreover, Eisner (1985) identified two of the most important contributions of the aesthetic way of knowing for the education field as the consummatory and referential functions. He described the consummatory function as the understanding of the importance of the journey as well as the ability to be able to find joy in inquiry along the way. These functions had opportunities to flourish through storytelling as children develop literacy skills within the classroom (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

The Writing Classroom: Storytelling and Writing

The medium of storytelling can be employed in numerous ways to impact student writing. As the NCTE (1992) stated, "the comfort of the oral tale can be the path by which students reach the written one" (p. 2). In other words, by focusing on the telling of a story at the outset, students are not threatened by a written form of that story, but rather can rely on conveying the importance of the story orally. Students can feel overwhelmed by written text because they may think that it is too difficult for them to tackle. On the same note, Nicolini (1994) asserted that "we are by nature storytellers; therefore, it only makes sense to allow students a chance to first do something at which they are already good" (p. 58).

By engaging students in learning and motivating them through the telling of stories, children are taken out of the shadows of instruction, so to speak. This allows students to make key decisions concerning their writing with their teacher as coach, model, and facilitator, instead of receiving instructions passively on how or what to write about (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

Their learning, thereby, becomes inherently more meaningful because the stories come to belong to them (Nicolini, 1994).

In what Miller and Pennycuff (2008) called the writing classroom, storytelling was based on a telling over of a narrative by a student or teacher with the intention of recording this story in written form eventually. This is a pedagogical strategy that easily links to a form of narrative writing, however, it can help students with other types of writing as well. Although story writing is a focus of most instruction, as students become more proficient in their writing, they are expected to become adept in other forms such as expository and persuasive writing. However, research has shown that students can benefit from the use of storytelling to enhance their narrative writing even into middle and high school (Houston, 1997; Nicolini, 1994; Wallace, 2000). They also discovered that students have the ability to transfer skills in the narrative form of writing to other, more analytical writing forms (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

Use of language. In particular, storytelling positively impacts two key areas to improve the writing of students: identification of the audience and use of language. The audience is that whom the writer is addressing and for what particular purpose, while the use of language for writing encompasses the vocabulary as well as the organization of the story. Finding the language in which to write can be quite the daunting task for both adults and children (Nicolini, 1994). Many are familiar with the term "writer's block," and mature writers tend to work through difficult points in their writing, however, many younger students tend to give up and stop writing once they can no longer think of anything to say. A benefit provided by the use of storytelling prior to writing is that students are given a chance to develop language about their story, while at the same time gaining feedback from others before writer's block has a chance to set in (Goolrick, Houston, & Tate, 1991). As the NCTE (1992) put it: "Students who search

their memories for details about an event as they are telling it orally will later find those details easier to capture in writing" (p. 2). On the whole, sharing stories orally can help students develop the language needed for writing, including second language learners, gifted students, and special education students (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

In addition to selecting language for personal writing, students who participate in storytelling are exposed to new vocabulary used by other students or the teacher as well. Hearing either familiar words used in a new way or new words in other's stories can, in fact, expand a student's working vocabulary (NCTE, 1992). Additionally, this mutual learning of students validates their voices as well as their life stories, which helps bridge economic and cultural divides within a school or classroom (Bustamante, 2002).

As mentioned above, utilizing the medium of storytelling prior to writing serves also to aid students in organizing their stories. Experts in the field consider this the prewriting stage in the process of writing. Teachers frequently have their students create a web or outline of those things the students want to include in their stories. This process can be particularly useful for struggling writers who do not have a very strong sense of story and whose prewriting skills are not adequate to design a well-crafted plot (Phillips, 1999). Moreover, using the storytelling medium to discuss different types of stories, students are able to make decisions concerning the type of story they would like to tell as well as which details should be included by participating in oral discussion with the class or partners (Black, 2008). This entire prewriting stage in which storytelling is employed gives the writer the ability to get an idea of how their story should be structured prior to doing any writing. It also allows the student to receive feedback from a peer or the teacher during this prewriting stage. For struggling writers in particular, this oral

storytelling time enables them to be more confident in their ideas, motivates them to craft an interesting story, and serves as a starting point for written planning (Houston et al., 1991).

Identification of the audience. The second general skill impacted by storytelling is the understanding of the audience. Teaching younger children how to think about their audience, however, can be a daunting task (NCTE, 1992). Essentially, the writer's audience is whomever the writer wants to read their work, but this concept can seem quite abstract to a child who, in reality, sees themselves as the audience. To further compound this issue, it is a common practice for teachers to assign writing projects to their students that are ready only by the instructor for a grade, wherein the sole motivating factor for the student is writing something that his or her instructor would like.

If, on the other hand, students are able to tell their story orally as well as share the written form, they quickly develop an understanding of the audience–namely, the class (Craig et al., 2001). Students can then decide the style of language to employ in order to appeal to the audience as well as the type of story to be told. For example, if a student would like to tell a humorous story, she or he will want the audience to laugh. When students are given the freedom to tell the stories they create, they become more aware of the reader or listener's role. As NCTE (1992) noted, "Learners who regularly tell stories become aware of how an audience affects a telling, and they carry that awareness into their writing" (p. 2). When writing, students learn that their role has now changed, they become authors in their own minds and, therefore, feel they must find ways of engaging with their reader. With time, students may internalize how the reader might react with the unfolding of the story. In this way, oral storytelling in particular helps in developing a connection between the author and the reader, a process by which understanding is developed on behalf of the reader (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

An empirical study on the contribution of oral storytelling to literacy development examined the effects of daily, systematic exposure to story listening in the classroom environment on reading achievement. Rosenhouse, Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1997) sampled 15 classes of Israeli first graders who were divided into three experimental groups, four treatment groups, and one control group. The first group listened to stories by different authors, the second group listened to stories by one author, and the third group listened to a multiple-volume series of stories in installments written by the same author as the second group. The control group engaged in everyday activities such as drawing, worksheets, and pasting. The groups were subsequently tested on decoding, picture storytelling, and comprehension. Reading-comprehension test results pointed to a conclusion that any methodological exposure to story reading enriches the vocabulary of children. Particularly, extensive voluntary reading has, uniquely, importance for decoding. The authors noted that children who listened to series stories were induced or motivated to read more. Moreover, they concluded that exposure to reading in class by teachers, and exposure to special sorts of literature in particular, affect reading comprehension.

Vivian Gussin Paley (1981) has been particularly influential in applying storytelling to practical classroom curriculum. What she has dubbed the "storytelling curriculum" has been long recognized for its impact on children's language, psychosocial, and narrative development. Paley, of course, did not invent dictation or dramatization in early childhood curriculum, however, she is to be credited with establishing them as regular and inseparable classroom activities for the field. The curriculum consists of two activities that are interdependent, namely dictation and dramatization, in which the child dictates his or her story to their teacher, and dramatization, in which the story is dramatized to the class. Because of the holistic nature of the

storytelling curriculum, it has been shown to promote learning in practically all areas of development, from making friends to using language to shape and express intention. In particular, however, the curriculum furthers literacy learning in ways that are tailored to group or individual needs (Cooper, 2005).

Overview of the Storytelling Curriculum

Dictation. Dictation is, essentially, the first step of the curriculum, in which the student's intentions and words are respected according to group norms. It consists of individual children telling, or dictating, their story to the teacher, who acts as an editor, scribe, and initial audience. This process ideally occurs during choice or center time. In the absence of either, however, or if the teacher simply prefers to be free during these periods, it can also occur while the rest of the class is involved in independent work. A typical exchange can begin by the teacher asking the students how the story begins, followed by the students commencing their story.

Although the teacher will often need to ask for clarification on confusing points, all topics, true and untrue, are welcome with little qualification. For the sake of efficiency, however, the story is usually held to only one page, with the concept of "to be continued" introduced as needed. The next step of the dictation process entails the teacher rereading what the child has written in order to offer the opportunity for revision. The author then chose several classmates to play the various roles in their story, and those children who are not actors comprise the audience (Cooper, 2005).

Dramatization. In the final stage of the storytelling curriculum, the story itself is acted out, which Paley calls dramatization. This element serves the children's best interests when it occurs the same day as the story is told, but it does not need to happen immediately. Most teachers use this as a transition activity before lunch or after center time, for example.

The process of dramatization begins with the teacher reading the story to alert the actors and audience to the plot, and transitions to this teacher reading it aloud again as the students step into their roles. Teachers, especially with younger students, are expected to serve as producer and director, offering advice to foster dramatic interpretation, for example, "How can you show the class that the monster surprised you?" although dramatic performance expectations are relatively low. Dramatization is, after all, generally a no-rehearsal, one-time through event. Overall, the value of dramatization lies in the fact that children will, over time, begin shape their stories to produce a particular effect in drama (Cooper, 2005).

Paley's theoretical framework seems to be in line with what Frank Smith (1987) once observed: The one thing we know about teaching children to read is that all methods work for some children. Popularly known as "balanced literacy," Paley's approach aims to blend instruction in skills with meaning-centered, language-based activities, relative to the instructional purpose, as well as appropriate to the activity. In short, the balanced approach sees the validity in all three major approaches to literacy–the phonics-based approach, the sight-word method approach, and the social aspects of literacy approach–and seeks to combine them into one coherent whole. This call for a balance in literacy instruction has, in fact, gained an extensive following in recent years (Xue & Meisels, 2004), even among kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers.

Cooper (2005) wrote that, despite the NCLB's (2001) Reading First Initiative that challenged educators to conform to the call for academic instruction at the prekindergarten and kindergarden levels, activities embedded in play, such as drama, are more crucial to young children's developmental needs. Paley's curriculum showed that time spent on more traditional curricular activities does not necessarily lead to a failure to meet children's specific academic

needs. In fact, as exemplified in Cooper's (2005) observations, young children pursue every path presented to them naturally in their search for narrative understanding and meaning, which are two essential elements in any early literacy curriculum. Moreover, this includes engagement with subskills such as encoding, decoding, comprehension, and fluency, naturally directed by the teacher through scaffolded intervention. A curriculum such as Paley's shows that it is possible for educators to provide young children both a holistic learning experience as well as specific academic opportunities (Cooper, 2005).

Speaker, Kamen, and Taylor (2004) also looked at how the use of storytelling promotes the development of early literacy in children, and particularly, how it expands the creative potential in young children. In their pilot study, they set out to assess the qualitative changes in verbal fluency, in three-, four-, and five-year-olds who were engaged actively in a vigorous storytelling program for preschoolers. Each of the five children used in the study displayed an improvement in language skills after the four-week program. Specifically, there was an increase in the use of elaboration as well as the use of complex sentences shown in the post intervention stage. This study suggested the existence of an important developmental trend, namely, that increasing children's exposure to storytelling may foster the emergence of more advanced stages of language development. Moreover, according to the results of this study, using storytelling with young children can enhance vocabulary, grammar, sentence formation, and length of utterance.

Storytelling as a Means to Promote Cultural Literacy in Children

Storytelling is also known to promote literacy in a broader sense of the term than reading and writing in children, namely, in the sense of cultural literacy. Paley (1981) explained how, in her storytelling curriculum, her kindergarten class had the opportunity to discuss topical issues,

beginning with reading a book, and proceeding by discussing it over and over, and relating it to diverse situations. Cultural literacy promotes both the understanding of self and other. As Huck, Hepler, and Hickman (1997) related: "We want to encourage children to discover personal meaning in books in order to better understand their lives and to extend their perceptions of others' lives" (p. 62). In particular, storytelling alows children to come to terms with their environment (Egbokhare & Oyelude, 2010).

Lenox (2000) found, for instance, that storytelling can be used as a resource in promoting understanding of ethnic and racial diversity. Particularly in the early developmental stages of children, is it ideal to engage their hearts and minds to build positive attitudes of respect and appreciation for those unlike themselves. Moreover, Lenox argued, storytelling can be a means to understanding the diversity of life in general, helping to prepare children for life and to live with others in a harmonious way in a dynamic world. Using stories to promote cultural literacy can allow children to understand both their own personal narratives as well as the narratives of other people. Lenox summated that early exposure to ideas stemming from other cultures allows children to broaden their horizon as opposed to living and thinking in isolation. Storytelling may be used as a way to build unity amongst people, building a community of learners who accept one another. This, beyond reading and writing, is one way to help children become moral members of society. Particularly, the child's earliest exposure to literacy most often come from their parents, and oftentimes this is in the context of mealtime talk and the stories told therein. Snow and Beals (2006), for example, found that in addition to offering children opportunity to acquire vocabulary, participation in mealtime conversations also allows them to acquire general knowledge, including learning how to speak in culturally appropriate ways.

Literacy Through Storytelling and Learning Disabilities

Storytelling, the therapeutic process, and children with learning disabilities. Many adolescents and children with learning disabilities are burdened with accompanying emotional issues. These issues may take forms such as low frustration tolerance, low self-esteem, hypersensitivity to failure, impulsivity, maladaptive coping strategies, and poor peer relationships have complex roots. Therefore, psychotherapists working with adolescents and children with learning disabilities must often modify their intervention techniques based on the particular learning issues of their patients. When these treatment strategies are planned and implemented, the interrelated, dynamic links between emotional and cognitive functioning must be considered (Brooks, 1987).

Creative characters. Dr. Robert Brooks, a psychotherapist (1987), wrote an article suggests the use of a storytelling technique to strengthen children's emotional and cognitive functioning. He provided case examples to illustrate the Creative Characters technique that has been found to be helpful with children and adolescents with learning disabilities. Many children in therapy have an easier time communicating about their world and themselves through metaphor or displacement, particularly in the story form. The Creative Characters technique is an attempt to create story to capture essential features of children's lives, particularly their sense of competence or incompetence, self-image, relationships with others, major conflicts, beliefs, feelings, and joys, strategies they use in order to cope with stress and challenge, and learning styles.

The ultimate goal is for these stories to resonate with the emotional life of the child in order that the child become motivated to assume an increasing authorship of the story with the facilitation and encouragement of the therapist. One of the ways this is done is by the characters of the story representing the child as well as significant people in the child's life. This technique

relies much on metaphor, which acts as a tool to achieve one of the main goals of the Creative Characters technique, namely for the children to incorporate what they have learned from these stories into their personal lives.

The Creative Characters technique can be implemented for adolescents and children with a broad range of adjustment difficulties, but certain features of the technique allow it to be especially relevant for children and adolescent with learning disabilities. These features include the promotion of cognitive organization and the reinforcement of a sense of mastery and competence.

In terms of promoting cognitive organization, because children generally find the characters and format of this technique quite interesting, the children, in turn, become increasingly motivated to focus on the Creative Characters' stories. As a result, the children slowly improve their capacity to sustain attention. Moreover, the technique's nature encourages, over time, child and therapist to delineate and, thereafter, elaborate selected aspects of the characters' personalities. This process is reflected in these stories as the beliefs and feelings of the characters become increasingly complex and realistic as there is a movement away from simplistic solutions to problems and simplistic explanations for behaviors. Finally, the elaboration of both the different characters as well as the story itself requires promotes as well as requires improved language and cognitive skills, which is an outcome of great significance for children with learning disabilities.

As mentioned previously, the Creative Characters technique also reinforces a sense of competency and mastery in the children. It is known that many children, because of their learning difficulties, have encountered more situations resulting in failure than their peers who are not beset with learning difficulties.

There are two primary interrelated ways in which this technique reinforces the self-esteem of the child. The first way pertains particularly to fostering a feeling of accomplishment associated with the actual production of a story. In particular, a skilled therapist who is able to engage the child in the story creation process in a way that resonates with the child's inner world, is capable of demonstrating the gratification and relevance of the learning process to the child.

The second way, on the other hand, is concerned with the strengthening of a more general sense of competence through the means of the story plot. A child's self-esteem can be strengthened as well through the means of the messages the story itself contains. For instance, explanations of behavior within the story that attribute success to external factors such as change or luck, and failure to inner deficits that are unchangeable–common features of learning disabled children's thinking–are highlighted and questioned, hopefully resulting in a modification of the story in order for the child's self-esteem to be strengthened.

Overall, with the Creative Characters technique, it was found that the process of story creation that represents major features of a child's world offers a medium through which to strengthen emotional as well as cognitive functioning, including a reinforcement of self-esteem (Brooks, 1987).

Narrative therapy and children with mixed reading ability. Oral narrative ability, in particular is a rather important element to a child's academic success as well as their social-emotional well-being. Moreover, deficits in this ability can restrict a child's social interactions with peers. It is of concern, therefore, that children with reading disabilities show difficulty in the ability to comprehend as well as produce oral narratives.

Gillon and Westerveld (2008) looked at storytelling's positive effects on the literacy of children with learning disabilities, namely the effect of oral narrative therapy on children with

mixed reading disability. The study aimed to address the above issue by investigating treatment effects of oral narrative intervention on measures of reading comprehension and oral narrative ability for a sample of children with specific reading disability who exhibited persistent difficulty in oral narrative ability within the two years prior to intervention.

Ten children between ages seven and 12, with mixed reading disabilities, participated in an oral-narrative intervention program focusing on enhancing children's knowledge of story structure. Prior to intervention, the participants exhibited persistent reading, as well as oral narrative production and comprehension difficulties in a two-year longitudinal study. They used a nonequivalent pretest-posttest control group design in which one group of five children was selected randomly to immediately receive the intervention, while the other group of five children received the intervention delayed. There were significant treatment effects in oral-narrative comprehension performance (Gillon & Westerveld, 2008).

Narrative therapy and dyslexic children. On a similar note, the ability of storytelling to improve on literacy skills has further been shown in the area of children with dyslexia. For example, Rahmani (2011) studied the efficacy of storytelling and narrative therapy in reducing the reading errors of dyslexic children. A sample of 30 first to third graders with dyslexia was randomly assigned to receive 25 sessions of one hour of individual training with narrative therapy by a counselor and storytelling by children. Controlling for the variable of intelligence, the narrative therapy's application accounted for a reduction of 60% in reading errors. The medium of narrative allowed the application of the therapy to be multisensory by nature, which has been shown to be a critical component in successful interventions with children with dyslexia. Children are empowered by such an approach because they experience the words of the story with three sensors made up of felts, allowing them to learn better.

Rahmini (2011) further noted that the success of this therapy was partly a result of the way in which the narrative approach employed in this study viewed learning disabilities, namely, an approach of optimism and one that is interested in the successes and achievements of the child. This differs from those deficit-focused models that focus more on the individual failings of a child. Viewing learning disorders in this way better meets the needs of the students. The narrative therapist acknowledges the child's voice, as opposed to making assumptions about the child's reality. The narrative approach also views the learning disability itself and the child's relationship to it as the problem, rather than the source of the problem being the student diagnosed with the learning disability.

Finally, children respond positively to the narrative framework because it encourages and appreciates the child's playful attitude towards serious problems, and therefore, children with learning disorders have the opportunity to approach their traumatic and serious understandings and experiences in the context of a playful and light space. Overall, this type of narrative therapy that employs storytelling using a multisensory approach, with a combination of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learning may allow certain students who struggle with reading become successful and retain required information.

Literacy through storytelling and deaf children. Storytelling with sign language interpretation has also been employed to improve the multimodal literacy of deaf children. The data of a study conducted by Poveda, Pullido, Morgade, Messina, and Hedlova (2008) stemmed from a larger research project documenting storytelling events in three informal, urban contexts in the city of Madrid, Spain, namely, a children's bookstore, a public library, and puppet shows in a city park. Weekly video recordings of the storytelling sessions and field notes were collected for a period of several months. The researchers examined storytelling events for

children in a children's bookstore and a library in which storytellers were accompanied by sign language interpreters. One of the distinct features of this type of setting is that the simultaneous presence of a sign language interpreter alongside an oral narrator both on the storytelling stage configures a complex narrative event in which features of gesture, oral language, sign language, and other semiotic resources are presented to both hearing and deaf children.

Literacy and Digital Storytelling in Classrooms

Technology as a Storytelling Tool

Technology is an extremely versatile medium that can serve as a valuable learning tool. There are several ways that students can utilize technology within a storytelling curriculum in the classroom setting. Children can access storytelling sessions using technology. They can also use it to access inspiration and other experiences that can be turned into storytelling efforts on their own. In addition to the motivation it is able to enhance, technology also enables children to incorporate sound, text, graphics, and movement in order to take advantage of different learning styles, as well as help English-language learners to be successful storytellers. Technology facilitates communication by allowing information from around the world to be transferred to various formats, and allowing for the sharing the final story itself with a global audience. Furthermore, technology is able to archive and record storytelling for future enjoyment as well as educational assessment (Farmer, 2004).

Digital storytelling. A relatively recent development in technology-related storytelling is digital storytelling, referring to telling one's own story by using technology. Typically, images are collected, and a narrative proceeds to contextualize them. This can take many forms including web diaries, photo journals, and web serials, and, assumingly, the story need not necessarily be one's own. Another new trend in digital storytelling is interactive storytelling in

which hyperlinks are often incorporated into the stories so viewers can interact with the story according to their own needs and interests. This type of linkage also reflects the nonlinear nature of many contemporary stories. Moreover, interactive storytelling gives children the impression that they have some form of control in the story-making decisions (Farmer, 2004).

Despite all the literature that has argued for the positive effects of storytelling methods on children's literacy development, writers have argued for the redefinition of literacy in response to developments in digital technology (Burnett, 2009). In this digital age, the role of technology in telling stories can be important (Farmer, 2004). Writers, moreover, have argued that schools should find ways of taking into account new literacies or perpetuating risk involved in outdated curriculum offering little connection with the present or future lives of children (Burnett, 2009).

Although digital literacy definitions are wide-ranging, for the purposes of this paper, its definition will be confined to any screen-based, written text. One of the major advantages of digital literacy over more traditional forms of literacy is the fact that texts that are text-based are read according to the logic of the image, and not that of the page. For example, in text-based texts images are fitted in where, when, and how the logic of the written text and that of the page suggests. On the other hand, with digital literacy, writing appears on a screen subject to the image's logic. Moreover, hyperlinks allow the reader to take multiple pathways between and through texts, juxtaposing information in varied ways (Kress, 2003). This allows for digital composition to be marked by creativity and innovation (Crystal, 2001), which are assumed to be, as seen above, important factors in the literacy learning of children.

In Burnett's (2009) review in which she examined the different understandings generated through studies of primary technology and literacy reported during the 2000-2006 period, she was able to highlight useful insights into the use of technology in literacy education. Using the

distinction between cultural, operational, and critical literacy, and considering 38 empirical studies, Burnett concluded that digital environments, in some contexts, provide children with opportunities not only to make meaning, but also to express themselves in new ways and reach new audiences.

For example, Baker et al. (2000) explored how digital contexts can transform literacy practice in classrooms. By examining audience awareness in their five-month naturalistic study looking at a fourth grade classroom pervaded with technology, they noted that children's sense of audience increased as the work was displayed unavoidably to others when writing on screen. They found that this technology-rich classroom, valuing inquiry and collaboration, offered pervasive opportunities for interactions between classmates and authors to the point that it was difficult to distinguish between audience and author. Baker and his colleagues concluded that the exploration of children's responses to and perceptions of this sense of audience brings them to new understandings of the site-specific nature of school-based digital writing.

KidPad: An application for children's collaborative storytelling. Digital storytelling can also be a collaborative endeavor for children, and, collaborating in small groups can benefit children's socializing and learning. Collaborative storytelling, in particular, can help children develop story-related and interpersonal skills, as well as communication skills by learning to work with others (Druin & Hourcade, 2004), which are all crucial to collaboration, and key elements in literacy development. Hourcade and Druin's (2004) motivation in building a collaborative storytelling tool for children called KidPad was to provide children with typing, drawing, and hyperlinking capabilities on a large, two-dimensional virtual canvas. The application supports multiple users through the use of multiple mice. The most distinguishing feature of KidPad is its collaboration capabilities. Hourcade and Druin reported consistently

finding that children enjoyed working with each other at a single computer, yet most software had no explicit support for that. They therefore designed KidPad in order to support multiple, simultaneous users, giving each child control over his or her own mouse. The stories created in KidPad are composed of scenes linked together, and scenes are composed of text, drawings, and other elements.

Boltman, Druin, Bederson, Hourcade, and Stanton (2002) used KidPad to look at different types of media and how they affected the way children interpret wordless stories. Each participant viewed one story either on paper, on a computer using KidPad with animated zooming and panning between scenes, or on a computer with traditional hyperlinks and no animation. Interpretations of these stories by the children participants were evaluated based on content and story structure. The use of animated panning and zooming had a positive, significant effect. Children told stories that were more complex in structure in the areas of subordinates and clauses, and more often discussed initiating events with a heightened understanding of superordinate and subordinate goals. As a whole, the use of KidPad's animation, zooming, and panning supported creative interpretations of stories by children more often than when they experienced that same story through traditional hyperlinked media or a book without any animation. This result is important because it also suggests that there are certain advantages to using KidPad, in particular, over other media (Druin & Hourcade, 2004).

Digital storytelling and media literacy. Although this review's focus has been primarily on the impact of storytelling on language-literacy learning, digital storytelling also positively impacts media literacy. Media-literacy education is commonly defined as the ability to analyze, access, create, and evaluate messages in a variety of forms (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993). It can provide the learning and teaching platforms with which students and teachers can

explore together many of the ways that digital and social media tools have enabled greater collaboration and participation with media. Relatedly, and as a result of the changing of media creation, reception, and distribution in response to the current hypermedia age, the need to educate children about the role of new participatory and collaborative media technologies in their daily lives has been increasing (Bennett, 2008). Youth are more actively engaged today with social and digital media innovation and production than any other demographic (McNeal, Mossberger, McNeal, & Tolbert, 2008). The teaching of critical analysis skills around messages of media is necessary in the context of collective, collaborative, mediated, and participatory environments (Mihailidis, 2011).

Remixing, the creation of new content, such as songs and video, using existing content produced by others, is one such act with which youth are increasingly engaged (Hill, Monroy-Hernandez, & Olson, 2010). It has become a routine activity for youth online (Jenkins, 2006). However, the media literacy community has been reluctant to utilize remix technologies in the classroom, partly due to concerns of fair use and teaching about appropriation online.

Mihailidis (2011) conducted a study with the goal of exploring how participatory online tools may enable learning outcomes in media literacy premised on participation, production, and collaboration. Two hundred and eighteen students enrolled at the University of Maryland and Hofstra University in media literacy courses remixed news from major news networks worldwide using national satellite television channel LinkTV's Know the News remix tool. Participants were subsequently asked to fill out a series of questionnaires describing their experiences with media literacy, remix, and learning about perspective, bias, and ethics in the news. Mihailidis investigated the influence of the remixing process on new understandings of perspective, bias, and ethics in the context of participatory web tools and digital technologies.

Students were better able to grasp the storytelling process as well as its limitations by actively remixing and recreating their own media scripts. Students in PK-to-12 education may utilize new media technologies in a better way if they utilize active educational strategies throughout their educational experiences. Teachers armed with such tools and experience with them may be better prepared to enable engagement, participation, and creativity with their students in the 21st century. Moreover, the findings revealed as well the need to retool teaching practice in order to better respond to current digital platforms for news and media, was well as acknowledge the role of online collaboration and the increasingly central role it plays in the democratic values and information habits of youth today.

Although the effects participatory media-environment tools such as remixing remain to be determined, they do provide opportunity for greater interactivity, and that can only offer additional options for learning and teaching about media. Media literacy outcomes depend on active learning, which is the experience in which youth can explore media and its functions by involving themselves with interactive media practices. On the whole, Mihailidis' study provided a new way of thinking about learning and teaching about bias, ethics, collaboration, and perspective.

Implications of digital tools for the 21st century. Although digital tools have many advantages in the classroom setting, it is still imperative that teachers first critically examine the benefits as well as the challenges of using digital tools in writing instruction. Incorporating digital composing into classroom curriculum and using digital tools does not supplant or exclude teaching the actual writing process, focusing on grammar and writing conventions, facilitating writing workshops, or preparing students for writing on demand with the teacher classmates, and others. It does not replace the contribution of face-to-face interaction either. It should be clear,

rather, that digital tools serve as powerful ways for teachers to draw on children's out-of-school talents and practices when composing on academic tasks in school (Haddix & Sealey-Ruiz, 2012).

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UBD Unit Plan

The following is a unit plan based on identifying the elements of a story developed for the 9th grade level, and which, in my estimation, should take approximately a month to teach. Unlike the English classes I developed for the Rabbinical College of Canada, this is an entire unit plan, as opposed to just a few lesson plans. I based the creation of my unit plan on many of the core concepts we learned in Karen Gazith's course, Curriculum Adaptation and also used the unit plan template she introduced the class, called the Understanding by Design (UBD) template, which was developed for optimal unit planning.

The concept of UBD, as we learned in Karen's class, is that a teacher's unit and lesson plans should always beginning with the end goal, or goals, in mind. This means that the form should follow the function, or, in other words, the vision should come first and then the how. This is done practically by designing units from the teacher's vision of what they would like the students to learn and come away with after the lessons, rather than basing units on materials, textbooks, and novels. It starts with knowing the audience one is teaching, meaning, knowing what level they are at in the given subjects and what their interests are so the material can be designed to fit their needs. The teacher must, additionally, be aware of the standards and competencies that the students are expected to meet and achieve. Outlined in my unit plan, for example, are the Quebec Education Plan (QEP) competencies for the secondary level in English Language Arts appropriate for ninth grade students which expect these students to meet (these competencies can be found at

http://www1.education.gouv.qc.ca/sections/programmeFormation/secondaire2/medias/en/5b_QEP_SELA.pdf).

The UBD outline further emphasizes activity-focused learning that keeps the students busy with practical, hands-on lessons and materials, which I particularly emphasized in my Lamplighter's Yeshivah lesson as well as my Rabbinical College of Canada lessons.

There are three stages to UBD's backward design planning. The first stage is to identify the desired results using the Know, Understand, Do (KUD) model. This means that the teacher needs to identify what the students need to know, understand, and which skills they will be able to do by the end of the unit. "Knowing," in this sense, refers to the knowledge of things such as facts, dates, details, or vocabulary words. It is a declarative knowledge that one needs to be able to tell someone else. "Understanding" refers to the essential ideas that the teacher wants the students to grapple with. These ideas should have many layers and nuances, and should be enduring. These are ideas the teacher hopes the students will remember for years to come. Finally, the "do" of KUD refers to skills the students will be able to carry out such as writing, drawing, researching, or reading.

The second stage of UBD's backwards design planning is the assessment stage. This stage entails the teacher determining how he or she will assess the student in order to make sure that they understood and met the standards put forth in the specific KUD model of a particular unit. The way of assessment in the UBD template is, specifically, to make sure the students create something valuable that can be extended and used beyond the classroom. It emphasizes the role of the student as a producer rather than a consumer. This is achieved by the student being encouraged to think like a professional and solve real world problems. For example, a teacher can have the students take on the role of a meteorologist who is giving an instructional

guide to meteorology students of what the most important elements of reporting the weather are as part of a meteorology unit in a high school science class. Additionally, assessment in this model includes pre-assessment, self-assessment and ongoing assessment, as I defined them in the write-up of my Rabbinical College lesson plans.

The final stage of UBD's backwards design unit planning involves the creation of a differentiated unit. I used many aspects of this type of unit in both my lesson at Lamplighters Yeshivah as well as in my lesson plans for the Rabbinical College of Canada. The idea is to differentiate the teaching process of how one teaches, the work done by the students, and the product the students create to be assessed based on students' interests, learning profiles (for example, whether the student is an auditory, kinesthetic, or visual learner), and readiness (which refers to what level each particular student is at in the subject or topic being taught).

Differentiating by interest can be done in several ways. One example is having the students chose a topic or area of interest for the work assigned. Another way is to ask the students individually what interests them in their particular lives, and creating lesson plans partly based on their answers.

Differentiating by learning profile is based on the notion that students learn best when the way they are being taught matches the way that they learn best. Visual learners, for instance, learn by seeing, and therefore, should first be taught the entire concept rather than its discrete parts.

Auditory learners, by contrast, need to learn from part to whole, and therefore, need to learn the discrete parts of a concept, and only after that should they be taught the concept in its entirety. Finally, kinesthetic learners learn by doing, and therefore, needs a hands-on approach

to learning. For example, a kinesthetic learner may find it helpful to study with movement involved such as walking around while memorizing.

Differentiating by readiness can take the form of tiered learning. This is a form of learning where the teacher presents the class with different types of tasks for the same unit for different abilities of students in the classroom. In other words, the complexity of the learning task is adjusted based on the student's individual level.

The following unit plan includes clear goals following the format of KUD outlined above. The assessments assess the articulated goals with a focus on essential understandings as explained above, and the pre-assessments follow the guidelines of KUD as well. Following the teaching of each new concept, I give examples of ongoing assessments. I also outline the entry points of my classes that provide the students with a solid foundation of what will be taught as part of the unit. I elaborate on the concept of entry points in my write-up on my lesson plans for Rabbinical College. I also include tiered lessons, lessons differentiated by learning style, lessons differentiated by interest, and lessons differentiated by choice. I explain the significance of teaching the elements of a story, and storytelling in general as a means to achieve literacy in my write-up on my lesson plans for Rabbinical college as well.

Understanding By Design Unit Template

Title of Unit	Identify the Elements of a Story	**Grade Level**	9
Curriculum Area	English Language Arts	**Time Frame**	1 month

Developed By	Derek Cling

Identify Desired Results (Stage 1)

Competencies

1) **Competency 1:** Use language or talk to communicate and to learn.
   - Adapts resources and strategies to purpose and audience.
   - Collaborate to carry out an inquiry project.
   - Self-evaluates the development as a learner.
   - Interacts with peers and teacher in a specific context.

2) **Competency 2:** Reads and listens to written, spoken and media texts.
   - Reading strategies: Opportunities to discuss the interplay between the constructed nature of texts and their influence on readers, with teacher guidance.
   - Written: Narrative genres intended for adolescents and adults; texts that argue and persuade.
   - Narrative texts

3) **Competency 3:** Produces texts for personal and social purposes.
   - Extends repertoire of resources for producing texts.
   - Constructs a relationship between writer, text and context.
   - Adapts a process to produce texts in specific contexts.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Understandings</th><th colspan="2">Essential Questions</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Overarching Understanding</th><th colspan="2">Overarching</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">1) Students will be able to present an example of a story to a peer.

2) They will summarize each of the five basic elements of a story.
- Plot
- Character
- Setting
- Conflict/Resolution
- Theme

3) Students will be able to classify the different elements of a story in a short-story or television series.

4) Students will provide an example of stories they found in literature, film, or television that represents each element of a story.</td><td colspan="2">1) What is the value of brainstorming an idea for story before writing it?

2) What are the five common elements of a story?

3) Why do authors employ these elements?

4) What are the pros and cons of adhering strictly to these story elements?

5) What are the different methods for brainstorming prior to writing a story?

6) Identify the elements of a story in a piece of literature, film or television episode of your choice.</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Related Misconceptions</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">1) It is expected that there will be overlap regarding the five elements of a story. For example, students might have difficulty discerning between what a plot is and what a theme is.
- To avoid this misconception, students will engage in an activity (see performance task 2) where they are asked to identify the plot and the theme in a story of their choice.</td></tr>
</table>

2) Students might only have experience evaluating or critiquing written literature (e.g., book reports). Although most (if not all) have experiencing watching or reading stories in other mediums (e.g., television, film, and stage performances), they may have limited experience identifying the basic story elements. - To help students with this potential difficultly, we will allow them to have opportunities to analyze the elements of stories in a variety of mediums (see performance tasks 2 and 3).		

Knowledge Students will know . . .	**Skills** Students will be able to . . .
1) Will acquire the knowledge of the different elements of a story. - They will be able to **list**, **recognize** and **describe** each element of a story. **2)** Students will be able to **locate** the elements of a story in literature, film and television. **3)** Students will **select** a topic of a story of their choice. - From there, they will brainstorm the topic into an outline for a story. - They will **present** the story idea to their peers in class.	**1)** Evaluate the elements of stories in different genres of literature, television and film. **2)** Develop an outline of an original story they designed using brainstorming techniques. **3)** Design an outline for their own written story that can be expressed in written text, short-film, or class performance (e.g., a play) that contains the 5 basic elements of a story. **4)** Students will be able to **identify**, **analyze** and **critique** the elements of a story.

Assessment Evidence (Stage 2)	
Performance Task Description #1	
Goal/Role	Students are pretend authors.
Audience/Format	Students/Lecture

Situation/Topic	Students will describe small groups how to make an outline for a story
Product/Performance	5-10 minute oral presentation to a group (3-4 students)
Standards	- Inclusion of all elements of a story - Adequate explanation of all elements of a story - Clarity of explanation
Performance Task Description #2	
Goal/Role	**Story Jeopardy.** The purpose of the game is to assess students' ability to identify the elements of a story (see attachment).
Role/Audience	The teacher is the host of the game. The audience is the students.

Audience/Format	Team competition.
Situation/Topic	The students will be separated into two equal teams. The teams will be randomly selected into groups prior to the game. Students will select a question, and then have to identify the 5 elements of the story in each text (paragraph length) or short video. There will be five different levels of difficulty: 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 points. Each subsequent level increases with difficulty. However, for a team to get the points, they have to have a different member answer each subquestion within the question.
Product/Performance	1-hour class competition to examine their knowledge of the elements of a story.
Standards	- Presenting examples of story elements - Inclusion of all elements of a story - Identifying the elements of a story in a written text or video - Critically evaluating the elements of a story - All students included in the process

Performance Task Description #3	
Goal/Role	Critical analysis of the elements of a story
Role/Audience	Students read a short story or watch a film. Then they will provide a written assignment (3-4 pages), or 10-minute class presentation regarding their analysis of the elements in the story.
Audience/Format	Students
Situation/Topic	Students will be asked to read a short story of their choice (minimum 6 pages) OR watch a film or stage play. Afterward, they will be asked to write a report OR a 10-minute presentation to the class about their story and findings. They will be asked to summarize the story, identify the elements, and describe the pros and cons for how they felt the elements were presented.

Product/Performance	- The paper will be evaluated on clarity and the content being presented, not the quality of writing, unless there are some notable issues with clarity. The presentation will also be evaluated on the content being presented, with some marks going to style.
Standards	- Ability to summarize a story. - Identify the various elements within a story. - Critique the quality of the elements. - Create a presentation of their evaluation of the story and its elements.

Performance Task Description #4

Goal/Role: Conceptual understanding of the story elements

Create an Outline. The purpose of the activity is for students to develop an outline for an original story based on one of three methods.

- The Free-writing template (Appendix A)
- The Breakdown Brainstorming Template (Appendix B)
- The Classic Bubble Method (Appendix C).

Templates from: http://www.brighthub.com/office/collaboration/articles/85405.aspx

Role/Audience

Students will develop an idea for original short story that can be turned into a written, visual

(e.g., film) or performance-based product. The outline must contain the five elements of a story.
Audience/Format Individual or pairs (maximum of two).
Situation/Topic How to make an outline for a story
Product/Performance Students will be evaluated on the clarity of their outline, and whether they included the 5 elements and themes.
Standards -Presenting examples of the story elements -Creating coherent and well structure outline

Other Evidence (general ideas for ongoing assessment, self-assessment)	
Learning Plan (Stage 3) – include ongoing assessment ideas (*separate sheets)	
Where are your students headed? **Where have they been?** **How will you make sure** **the students know where** **they are going?** **Pre-assessment ***	1) A pre-assessment evaluation will be done that will assess how well they think they know the five elements of a story (see Pre-assessment A; Appendix D). 2) They will also complete an assessment of their ability to identify the five elements of a story (see Pre-assessment B; Appendix D). 3) Finally, their ability to brainstorm, and develop an original story including the five elements will be assessed (see Pre-assessment C; Appendix D)
How will you hook students at the **beginning of the unit?** **Entry Point**	1) A short video of a rap about the five elements of a story: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6I24S72Jps 2) Ask students to vote on which of the three television shows (Friends, the Office, or Parks and Recreation) they would like to watch in the next class. The class will then watch a half-hour episode of the show of their choice. They will be asked to make note of each story element presented in the episode. After the show, they will write a one paragraph summary of two themes they noticed in the episode and why (See Appendix E). 3) A video that shows how students can effectively brainstorm.

	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNxb2u3hRcs 4) **Making it up game**. At the beginning of the activity, all the students will be standing up. The teacher will ask all the students to makeup a story together, which includes the five elements. Each student is allowed to contribute one component or storyline to the story; once they say their part, they must sit down. Before everyone sits down, they must develop a coherent story that includes the five elements.
What events will help students experience and explore the big idea and questions in the unit? How will you equip them with needed skills and knowledge? **Tiered Activity ***	1) **Tiered Activity #1:** Appendix F 2) **Tiered Activity #2:** Appendix G
How will you cause students to reflect and rethink? How will you guide them in rehearsing, revising, and refining their work?	1) Partners A and B: Partner A will talk for 1 minute and summarize what he or she learned, and partner B will then talk for 1 minute and summarize what was learned, but cannot repeat anything said by partner A. 2) Have students individually chose and, subsequently, draw a diagram to be associated with each of the five elements of a story. Then, have students share their diagrams with a partner, each one explaining to the other why they chose their particular diagram.

Recoding all new information	3) Have students create a concept map of the five elements of a story.
How will you help students to exhibit and self-evaluate their growing skills, knowledge, and understanding throughout the unit? **Self-Evaluation ***	1) **Double entry journal:** Have students write down what they think they know about the each of the five elements of a story as well as what they know about the five elements of a story. An answer key as to what each of the five elements include will be handed out so the students can compare what they wrote to the answer key (see Appendix H). **2) Preview-Review questions.** -Have students look at each question -Before going onto the next question, a preview will be shown of what the answer is -Students will then orally express the answer to a partner -Students will then write down if they know the question very well or need to review it again (see Appendix I). 4) **3-2-1:** : Have students write down three new things they learned, two things they are not clear about, and one way they might apply what they have learned
How will you tailor and otherwise personalize the learning plan to optimize the engagement and effectiveness of ALL students, without	**1) Lesson differentiated by interest:** Selecting television episode task. **2) Lesson by choice:** Having students select a medium (written story, video, class-presentation or play) to design a story that includes each story element. **3) Differentiate by choice:** have students chose weather to do the class assignments and activities individually, in pairs, or in small groups wherever applicable

compromising the goals of the unit? *** *Differentiate by Interest**	
How will you organize and sequence the learning activities to optimize the engagement and achievement of ALL students? **Maximize involvement of all students**	**1)** Jeopardy game. **2)** Activities that involve lesson of choice and lessons that differentiated by interests

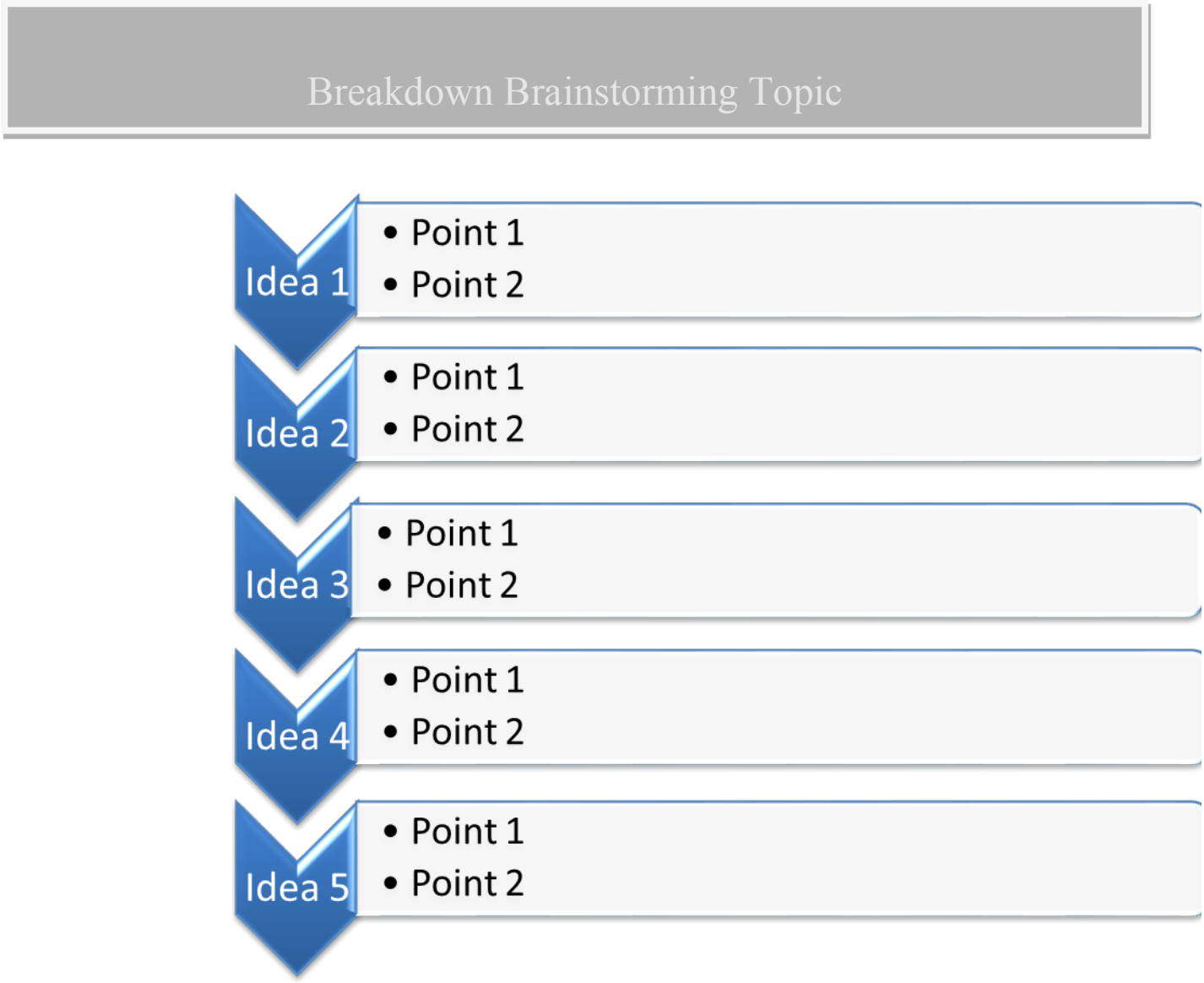
The whole table is directly from: Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (ISBN 0-87120-313-8, pbk)

Appendix A

FREEWRITING TOPIC

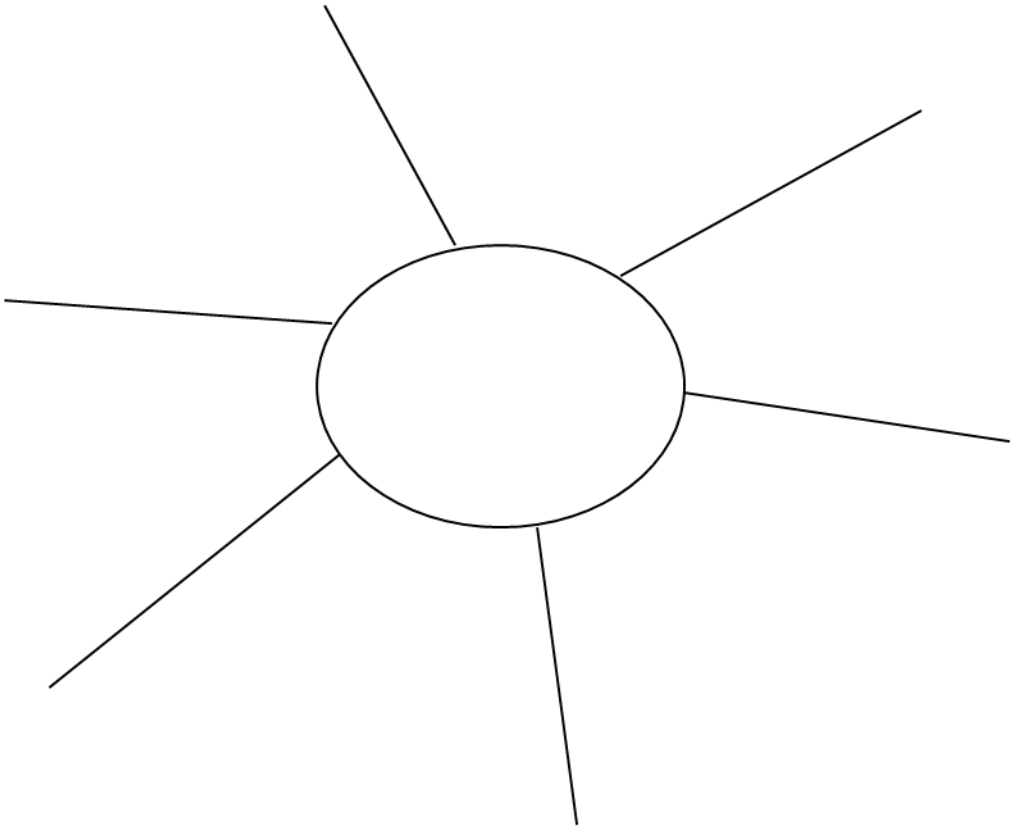
Write for a set amount of time on the above topic. Don't stop writing. Don't edit. You can do this as a group activity as well by using one sheet for each person, then you can discuss what you wrote as a group.

Appendix B


Breakdown Brainstorming Topic
Idea 1
• Point 1
• Point 2
Idea 2
• Point 1
• Point 2
Idea 3
• Point 1
• Point 2
Idea 4
• Point 1
• Point 2
Idea 5
• Point 1
• Point 2

Appendix C

Classic Bubble Brainstorming Topic



Appendix D

Pre Assessment: A

Knowledge Rating

	I know it and here it is	I need some reminders I think it is	Need to learn this. I don't know what it is.
Characters			
Setting			
Plot			
Conflict/Resolution			
Theme			

Pre-Assessment B

1. **Story of Choice.** Pick one of your favorite stories, and identify 2 examples of each element.

	Example #1	Example #2	Identify a theme, and how each element was involved in the theme.
Character			
Setting			
Plot			
Conflict/Resolution			
Theme			

2. **Read the text below and determine each element of a story.**

The Cutoff

I can't find the plug, but that's okay! I'm almost done! My laptop will endure regardless! This is the last entry I have to make on this stupid spreadsheet, and then I'll be finished. For good. The project will be OVER, and I can move onto better things. You can't scare me, two percent battery life! All I need to do is hit save! Ha ha! Victory is Mine!

Setting		
Plot		
Conflict/Resolution		
Theme		

3. **Read the text below and determine each element of a story.**

Hospital Window

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room.

One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs.

His bed was next to the room's only window.

The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back.

The men talked for hours on end.

They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation.

Every afternoon, when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window.

The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake.

Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance.

As the man by the window described all this in exquisite details, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine this picturesque scene.

One warm afternoon, the man by the window described a parade passing by.

Although the other man could not hear the band, he could see it in his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words.

Days, weeks and months passed.

One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep.

She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away.

As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone.

Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the real world outside.

He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed.

It faced a blank wall.

The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window.

The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall.

She said, 'Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you.'

If you want to feel rich, just count all the things you have that money can't buy.

'Today is a gift, that is why it is called The Present.'

	Example #1	Example #2	Identify a theme, and how each element was involved in the theme.
Character			
Setting			
Plot			
Conflict/Resolution			
Theme			

Pre-assessment C

- **Brainstorm an idea for a story that includes each element of a story. Also, fill-in the story elements table.**

	Example #1	Example #2
Characters		
Setting		
Plot		
Theme		
Conflict/Resolution		

Appendix E

1) Fill-in the table below with two examples of each element in the television episode.

	Example #1	Example #2	Identify a theme, and how each element was involved in the theme.
Character			
Setting			
Theme			
Conflict/Resolution			
Setting			

Appendix F

Tiered Activity #1

The following activity is one based on knowledge or skill level. Activity "x" is the standard activity that is most appropriate for the competencies aimed to be met. However, to account for those who may not have the abilty, knowledge, or skills to do this activity there are activities "x-1", "x-2", and "x-3", and for those who are overly capable for task "x", there are tasks "x+1", "x+2", and "x+3" depending on the student's level. I would try to have the overly capable student try the "x+1" task before going on to "x+2" or "x+3", and would have the student unable to do task "x" to start with "x-1" before trying "x-2", or "x-3". This is because is the tasks become increasingly difficult going from "x+1" to "x+3", and the tasks get increasingly simpler moving from "x-1" to "x-3". This technique was explained to us in Karen Gazith's Curriculum Adaptation course.

X+3: Explain how each element of your own short story, television episode, book, or movie are interrelated

X+2: Provide a description of each element of your own short story, television episode, book, or movie

X+1: Identify the 5 elements of your own short story, television episode, book, or movie

X: Identify the 5 elements of a given short story, television episode, book, or movie

X-1: Explain how each element is inter-related

X-2: Define each element

X-3: Identify the 5 elements of a story

Appendix G

Tiered Activity #2

X-2 (x-3, x-4). *In order to perform the identifying elements task in a story or video (appendix), students must first be able to do:*

- List each element of a story.

X-1 (x-2, x-3). *In order to complete the X task, students must first be able to do the following:*

- Describe and define each element of a story.

X. I*n today's class, students will be asked to complete the following:*

- Students will have the choice of reading one of three short-stories (adventure, character-driven, science-fiction). They will then be asked to identify each elements in the short-stories. They will also be asked to critique how well each story element was represented.

- **I want students to understand that:**
  - Most stories contain five elements.
  - Many stories contain particular themes.

- **I want students to know:**
  - How to identify the different elements and themes in a short story.
  - The purpose of the five elements in each story.

- **I want students to be able to:**
  - Identify the elements in a short-story.
  - Critique the quality of each element.
  - Identify the themes in a short-story.

X + 1(x +2, x + 3). *If students are already able to complete the X task, they are now able to do the following:*

- Identify the elements of stories in other mediums (e.g., television, film and plays).
- Critiquing the quality of how well each element is being representing in other stories.
- Begin brainstorming an idea for an original story that includes each element.

X + 2(x + 3, x + 4). *If students are already able to complete the X + task, they are now able to do the following:*

- Develop an outline for their own original story.
- Begin the process of developing the story.

Appendix H

Double Entry Journal

What I think I know about…

Plot:

Character:

Conflict/Resolution:

Theme:

Setting:

What I know I know about…

Plot:

Character:

Conflict/Resolution:

Theme:

Setting

Answer Key

Plot:

-The flow of the story

-The story itself in its most basic meaning

-Orders actions that characters of the story will perform

Character:

-Comprises the personalities and other beings performing the actions of the story

-Arguably the most important factor to a good story

Conflict:

-What makes the story exciting

-The struggle of the story between protagonists and antagonists, and possibly other characters in the story

Theme:

-The overall message or content that the story implies

-Usually provides the reader with a pre-conceived idea of what the story is about

Setting:

- The contextual portion of the story
- Provides reader with the story's background
- Provides reader with the basis for interpreting the story's other elements

Appendix I

Questions	Preview	Review (with partner)	Comments ("I know this very well" or "I need to review this again")
What are each of the 5 elements of a story?			
How is each one defined?			

Lesson Plans for Rabbinical College of Canada

The following is a sample of the first three English language classes that I was planning to give to 5th grade students at the Rabbinical College of Canada elementary school as part of the English curriculum was involved in brainstorming about. The students at the school do not have any secular studies classes as part of their curriculum, and do not even learn basic English or mathematics skills. Unfortunately, the plans to go further with this sample curriculum and build it up to a greater degree in order to implement it into the school fell through for reasons out of my control. However, the following sample lesson plan was inspired by the topic of my special activity topic.

When I was asked to help brainstorm an English curriculum for the students, it was only natural for me to think of a storytelling class to be the engine of this curriculum. The medium is exciting, dynamic, and could be applied to the personal world view and life experience of the children in the school. For example, since it is frowned upon in the particular community in which the school is a part of to learn any strictly secular topics or read any secular books, I figured that the way to teach them English without ruffling too many feathers would be to use the medium of Jewish and Torah (Jewish Bible) stories, as well as have them create and share stories about their own lives as part of the learning process of the class, which of course, is a universal phenomenon that transcends any cultural barriers.

I drew a lot of my inspiration for the design of these classes from the courses I had with Karen Gazith during my MEd. I took both her Teaching of Reading course as well as her Curriculum Adaptation course, and both of these courses provided me with very useful strategies and information in how these classes are structured. One thing I really tried to emphasize throughout these classes was to keep them activity focus–in other words, keep the students busy,

which is one of the main principles of the Understanding by Design (UBD) method of teaching we learned about in Karen's classes.

UBD focuses on teaching in order to reach the goal of understanding and uses a backward design approach. On the same note, UBD espouses that knowledge needs to be transferred to skills. Therefore, I designed my classes so that the knowledge of the story elements is then transferred and applied to the writing of the students' own stories. In our classes on UBD with Karen, we also learned about the importance of the students to understand essential ideas, which are those concepts we want the students to grapple with, and hope they remember for a long time to come. These ideas are the most valuable and valued parts of the curriculum, and are often prodded from the students by asking them essential questions. The questions I ask the students in my first class outlined below such as what a story is and how storied about other places are about me are examples of such questions.

In the first class, I have the students tell me a story from their own life in writing, making the learning personal and meaningful for them, which arouses more interest and attention, and therefore, results in better learning. In Karen's classes about what she calls the "brain friendly classroom," we learned about how, scientifically, our brains are wired for survival and have an alerting, surveillance system. It is emotions, in particular, that get out attention, which is called, in scientific terms, an emotionally competent stimulus, or, in other words, an emotionally charged event. Emotions are, therefore, highly connected to learning. In the second class I also connect storytelling with something meaningful in the children's lives, namely their religion, in exploring the importance of storytelling in the Torah (Bible).

I also begin each class with an entry point, in which I use the medium of storytelling in different interactive ways to catch the students' attention and make the material meaningful.

Stories trigger emotion and allow the children to connect with feelings of "getting" the material, as we learned in Karen's classes. With the interactive nature of the classes and the way in which I present the material, I try to make stories fun for the students, which, like emotion, is also connected to learning because having fun, of course, is an emotionally charged event. I got the idea of every class having an entry point from Karen's classes as well, in which we learned that we should spend the first ten to fifteen minutes of each class with something that triggers emotion and connection, such as a story, in order to capture students' attention, since, scientifically, there are only minutes we have to do so.

We learned a lot about classroom assessment in Karen's classes as well. We learned of the importance of pre-assessment, self-assessment, and ongoing assessment. These assessments answer questions like how the student is doing so far, what the student is finding difficult, what help the student needs, what the student is understand, and what strategies help the student learn. The answers to these questions are helpful for the students themselves in order for them to be more aware of their learning process and, therefore, know how to ask for help and understand what to ask help for. These answers also, granted, provide very important information for teachers who must know how the students are progressing in order to adjust the teaching style and curriculum to particular student needs.

I used a writing exercise in the first class as a pre-assessment in order to know roughly the level of every student's English skills in order to help me better plan my future classes and their curriculum. Moreover, as I learned in Karen's class, since learning takes place only after new information is processed, it is important to provide students the opportunity to recode, which means to have them review what they learned in order to make sure they understood the material. I provided this opportunity in the wrap up sessions of each class, in which I gave the students

self-assessments or on-going assessments. Self-assessments allow students to assess themselves as to whether they understood what was being taught and to what degree. Ongoing assessments provide "just on time" feedback for the students about their learning progress as it is happening.

My wrap-ups for these three classes took the forms of writing down what was learned or discussed in class, students orally helping each other summarize the class, and writing down what was learned, what was not clear, and how to apply what was learned. All of these methods are forms of immediate feedback because the children are testing themselves and others on how well they are processing the information. Moreover, I would provide my own feedback, of course to these wrap-up sessions. Immediate feedback, we learned with Karen, is crucial to successful learning because it helps motivate the student to work on the weaknesses in their learning, encourages them to ask questions, and helps push them to keep progressing in their learning. I assume that the fact that it is a large part the children themselves assessing their own learning that this makes the feedback more comfortable and allows it to feel less judgemental for them. This, in turns, results in less negative emotions in the children as a result of the assessment, which may get in the way of optimal learning. Moreover, these assessments are given to each and every student so that no child "falls between the cracks."

Scientifically, as a whole, and as was learned in Karen's lecture series about the "brain friendly classroom," stories are a great teaching method because the brain is a pattern seeker. This means that the more information is isolated, the more the brain depends on a rote system of learning. The use of our rote system of learning is not a good way to actually remember what we learned. Using stories as a way to convey information, on the other hand, makes connections, and therefore, allow us to remember the information better. Relatedly, once information is processed in the brain, that information then moves to the hippocampus, our brain's temporary

store house, where the information is evaluated as to whether it should be distributed into short-term or long-term memory. If the information has no context, it is forced to remain in our short-term memory. Stories provide our learning with context because the story itself is a context, and therefore, allows for information we learn through storytelling to be stored in our long-term memory.

In building my sample curriculum, I had in mind that there should be one major, overarching goal–in my case, to teach English Language Arts, or literacy if you will–through the medium of storytelling. I then split this goal into subgoals, which included the improvement of the student's English writing skills, an improvement in their English language vocabulary skills, and the development of an appreciation for the medium of storytelling. These subgoals were further subdivided into class goals, and the class goals are provided below.

Class 1

Class goal: Understand what a story is and why stories are important, learn the elements of a story, and assess student's writing skills

Entry Point: Show the students a cryptic picture and have students come up with a story that the picture depicts

→shows how important stories are to the context of things by showing the children how many different stories there can based on one picture

-explain how a picture has limited context without a story by showing the picture and asking students not to think of any story and just look at the picture

-tell the student that the story makes the picture more meaningful by adding depth and meaning to material objects, photos, and ideas

-discuss how stories are crucial in in expressing individuality and each person's point of view because different students came up with different stories based on the same picture as a result of their personal understanding and point of view

Class Discussion 1: Topic – What are stories?

Start by asking the class the following questions:

1. What is a story?
2. How are stories about other places and times about me?
3. Must a story have a moral?

-Every child must write on a piece of paper what they believe a story to be

-These sheets are subsequently handed into the teacher who uses their answers as a basis for discussion, explanation, clarification of what a story is

Class Lesson:

Teach more specifically what a story is by conveying what the 5 elements of a story are:

- Plot
- Character
- Conflict
- Theme
- Setting

-Show a PowerPoint slideshow showing the elements of a story
-Explain to the students what each one means by giving examples on the PowerPoint of identifying the elements of different stories
-Convey these stories with pictures and tell them orally

Self-Evaluation:

3-2-1 Method: Have the students write down 3 new things they learned, 2 things they are not clear about, and 1 way they might apply what they've learned

Class Discussion 2: Topic–Why are stories important?

-Take ideas from the class about why stories are important and why we need them

-Write them on the board and discuss these ideas as a class

Class Activity: Have each student tell a story from their own life in writing

-These stories are stored in individual student portfolios for a teacher assessment of writing skills

Wrap Up: Have the students write one sentence of why they think stories are important

Class 2

Class goals: Connect and understand the importance of stories to the Torah (Bible), assess children's expressive skills in the English language by acting stories out, and learn to identify the elements of a Torah story

Entry Point: Show video of a Torah (Bible) story

Class Activity 1: Where are stories in the Torah?

-Have children act out what they are learning in their other Jewish classes such as Bible study, Talmud study, and Jewish Mysticism

-Student can, alternatively, make up their own story based on a Jewish or Biblical theme if what they are learning in other classes is not practical to be acted out

→This activity allows students to appreciate that stories are everywhere in the Torah and Jewish learning

→This activity also emphasizes the "fun" element of stories by using the exciting medium of acting

Class Discussion: Why are stories important in the Torah and Judaism?

-Show the class the passage from the Zohar, the foremost book on Jewish Mysticism, which explains that the Torah's stories depict much greater secrets than meets the eye, some of which we cannot comprehend without the form of a story

-Class brainstorm: Have students participate in giving their ideas about why stories are important in Torah

Class Activity 2: How do we identify the elements of a story from Torah stories?

-Give out worksheets with stories from Torah on them and have children identify the five elements of these stories

Wrap up: Recoding

-Partners A and B: Partner A will talk for 1 minute in summary of what was learned, and partner B will then talk for 1 minute in summary of what was learned, but cannot repeat anything said by partner

Class 3

Class goals: Make a personal connection to Jewish stories, assess the children's English oral skills, and continue to assess their writing skills

Entry Point: Teacher tells class what his favorite story is, explains why, and tells the story over

→This shows a personal connection to stories

Class Activity:

-Ask the class to think of what their favorite Torah/Jewish story is

-Go around the class and have the students each say which story is their favorite and why

→This brings out the students' personal connection to stories as well as the different elements of stories, and which aspects of stories they connect to

Writing activity:

-Have children select one element of their story and explain the importance of it

-Also have them explain the importance of this element for storytelling in general

→This allows for students to understand the dynamics of a story's context, how the context interacts with and affects the different elements of the story as well as the deeper dynamics of a story's elements

→This entails deeper, higher order thinking than previous class activities

Short Oral Presentation:

-Have children make a 2-minute oral presentation of their favorite story

Wrap up: 3-2-1

-Recoding: Have students write down three new things they learned, two things they are not clear about, and one way they might apply what they learned

Model Lesson at Lamplighters Yeshivah

The following short video is a clip of me teaching a class to a mixed group of ten first, second, and third grade students. This model lesson was part of my interview process for the Jewish elementary Montessori school called Lamplighters Yeshiva I taught at this past year in Brooklyn, New York. It is an example of putting my literature review topic to work because I chose to teach the children about stories. I taught them about the three main elements of a story, which are sometimes divided into four or five elements, however, I chose to divide them into three elements for reasons of simplification, since I was teaching a relatively young group of children with limited mental capacities.

In teaching the three elements of a story–the "who", the "what", and the "where"–I was teaching them how to conceptualize a story in general, because knowing what makes up a story and understanding its different components helps us understand those components better as well as gives us an appreciation of the medium of the story as a whole. This, in turn, will help in understanding the stories they hear in the future in order to better learn from them, and as we saw in my paper, literacy is one thing that can be learned or improved from the medium of stories. In being able to better conceptualize what a story is, the students are also better prepared to create their own stories, since in order to create something properly, we must fully understand that thing to the fullest capacity. We also saw from my review of the literature that story creation improves the literacy of youngsters as well (Fox, 1989).

Moreover, in teaching the students the "who." the "what," and the "where" of a story, I was also teaching them components of the English language and literacy as well. For example, what exactly do the words who, what, and where mean? We fully appreciate the meaning of

words when we are given examples of them. In this case, the students were given clear examples with the help and example of the story medium of what these words mean.

I began the class by introducing the subject of stories by asking the students if they like stories. Most of them responded that they either like or love stories. It can be concluded from this small sample that one of the main ideas brought forth in my literature review was confirmed, namely, the fact that storytelling is a great medium for children, and one they are interested in. The fact they are interested in stories allows them to be excited about stories, and they will, thereby, learn much better through this medium.

I proceeded by spending the next few minutes giving over the concept of the elements of a story. I made this as interactive as possible in order to get the students involved, and I did this by having materials such as photos and props. Relatedly, the more senses are involved in learning, the more optimally children learn, as mentioned in my review as well, and stories are a great and dynamic way to involve as many senses as possible in the learning process.

Also, I often repeat the main concepts that I wanted to teach the students. For example, the fact that the "what" of a story means what happened in the story was repeated multiple times in order for students to recognize the importance of this concept and allow it to sink it.

It should first be mentioned that storytelling is very much a part of the Jewish tradition. The Torah, the Jewish Bible, is essentially made up entirely of stories of the Jewish people and their history, and much of the Jewish religious literature is also taught in the form of stories and parables that are used to convey deeper meanings and truths, and ultimately, practical lessons on how to navigate one's daily life. Also the Jewish secular literature, from Chasidic tales to I. B. Singer, and onward.

I gave the students two examples of how to find the "who," the "what," and the "where" in a story. The first story I presented was what is called in Hebrew as the "akeidah," which means the "sacrifice," and this refers to the story in the Bible of Abraham ("Avraham" in Hebrew) who brings his son to mount Moriah ("har haMoriah" in Hebrew) in readiness to sacrifice his then only son Isaac ("Yitzchak" in Hebrew) at the command of G-d ("Hashem" in Hebrew). As mentioned above, I used a photo capturing the essence of the story in order to help the children picture the story in their head, and they were, thereby, given a clear context that can be used to organize the story in their mind. By having a clear idea of the story, the children are better able to organize the story's elements as well.

While teaching the concept of a story's elements, I did so in a specific order. In other words, I started with the "who," then went on with the "where," and finally, I taught the "what." I taught the elements in this particular order because it is difficult to visualize the "where" without having the "who" to place in the "where," and it is certainly even more difficult to imagine the "what" without knowing "who" and "where" this "what" is. Storytelling is very much about visualization and imagination, and it is, therefore, that is why the order in which I taught the elements was important.

The second story I used as an example was that of the Jewish holiday ("yom tov" in Hebrew) of "Shavuot" which is the commemoration of the Jewish people ("yidden" in Yiddish) receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai ("har Sinai" in Hebrew).

I then proceeded to break the children up into groups of three to participate in the hands-on activity of drawing out or writing out their own stories in the form of a "who," a "where," and a "what" on bristol boards. This allowed them to connect to the lesson, and internalize what they learned. The students got very involved in this part of the lesson. It seemed as though stories

really excited them. Moreover, the medium of storytelling is, indeed, so diverse that one can write out a story, draw it out, imagine it, speak it out, remember it, and I am sure there are many other ways the medium can be created, given over, and received. It is truly a magical tool that can be used in many different ways to teach practically any given topic imaginable.


Jeopardy

POWERPOINT JEOPARDY

Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4	Category 5
10	10	10	10	10
20	20	20	20	20
30	30	30	30	30
40	40	40	40	40
50	50	50	50	50

Category – 10 Points

Demise

At 78 years old, laying on his death bed, Jerry Toll thought back on his life. He thought of his stint in the war, of his time as the manager of a successful company, even of the creation of his blessed children, now grown and bearing children of their own. But that was not enough to keep Jerry happy, and as he slipped into oblivion, surrounded by weeping loved ones, he thought of the one mark of an important man that he would, forever, he lacked: his own Wikipedia page.

1) Name each element of the story (5 points points)
2) What theme do you wish was in the story? (3 point)
- How would you include it in the plot? (2 point)

Category - 20 Points

Have your team select a book that some of you have read. After choosing the book, they must describe each element of the story.

1) Name each element of the story (15 points)
2) What theme do you wish was in the story? (3 point)
- How would you include it in the plot? (2 point)

Category 30 Points

A Fight

The stare down continued, and Tom refused to budge. How could he do otherwise? Looking away would destroy his principles, would forfeit everything he was as a person. He couldn't let this injustice stand. She knew better! How long had they been married now? How could she do this to him?! With a powerful swipe he slapped the top down and grunted, still staring, still fuming. Tonight, they would have words. Tonight, they might get divorced. Tonight, Tom would make it plain that nobody - NOBODY - put mustard on his ham sandwich.

1) Name each element of the story (25 points points)
2) What theme do you wish was in the story? (3 point)
- How would you include it in the plot? (2 point)

Category 40 Points

1) Identify each element of a story in the movie trailer (40 points).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQ5U8suTUw0

Category- 50 Points

1) Describe the plot of a book some members of your group read for a class last semester. Identify the characters, the conflict and the setting (20 points).
2) Identify three important themes in the story. (15 points).
3) Discuss the differences between the themes and the plot (15 points).
4) Provide two themes that would have made the story better (20 points).