

# StoryTellers in the Creative Writing Classroom

## *Introduction*

Where are your students in their creative writing process? Are they still having troubles letting their imaginations run free – or are they spreading their creative wings? Are their concerns over the rules of language and grammar stifling them – or are they mastering new ways of using language to their advantage?

Regardless of how advanced your students are, they'll benefit from relaxing with the creative process, from having a chance to stretch their imagination in a supportive and fun way. That's where StoryTellers comes in. These instructions will show you how.

## *Preparing for the Game*

Preparing for a class of storytelling is quite easy. Follow these simple steps and you'll probably be done in less than five minutes:

- 1) If you only have one copy of the game, bring in some pennies, chips, or chalk to use as extra Bravo Chips. The game has 15 bravo chips in it. You'll need three per player, but just about anything will work.
- 2) If you have some interesting hats, bring them out. You can also encourage the students to bring hats. If you are lacking in hats, make some hat cards out of cardboard. The game includes five hat cards, but you probably have more people than that in your class.
- 3) Decide how long you want to have the writing phase work. Players are going to be writing and then reading (and discussing) their pieces, so keep that in mind. If you write for an hour, the game could take a very long time. 10-15 minutes is a good amount of time.
- 4) Decide which story prompt to use. The game includes 53 storylines to get things started, and there are more at <http://www.thestorytellersgame.com>. Click the link called Storylines to see them.

You should also feel free to use your own storyline – or just pick one at random once everyone has arrived.

- 5) If you picked a Storyline, write it on the blackboard in big letters.

That's it. You're ready for the class!

### ***When the Students Arrive***

If your students are mature enough, separate them into groups of about five players per group. If not, have one big group.

Once everyone is in their groups, you have a few simple tasks to do:

- 1) Make sure everyone has a hat or a hat card.
- 2) Deal out five Craft Cards and 3 Bravo Chips to each player. Depending on how many players you have, you might not be able to get deal out five Craft Cards. There are only 53 in the box. Just deal out as many as you can (making sure everyone has the same number of cards).
- 3) Leave the Heckle Cards, unused Craft Cards, and unused Bravo Chips in the boxes and stash them somewhere. You won't need them.
- 4) If you did not pick a Storyline earlier (see **Preparing The Classroom** above), pick five random storylines from the StoryTellers instruction book and read them to the group. Use a show of hands to select the most popular. Write it on the blackboard so everyone can see it.

Now you're ready to begin!

### ***Introducing the Game***

By now, your students are probably starting to wonder what's going on. It would be good to tell them. If you need help, here's a little script you can use:

*"Today we're going to play a writing game. Here's how it works. We're all going to write based on the story line written here. We'll write for 10 minutes. You can write about whatever you want, in whatever style you want, but you have to include the storyline somewhere in your piece. It can start the piece, end the piece, or be included somewhere in the middle, but it has to be there."*

*"Before you start writing, however, there are a couple of things to go over. One is that you'll be given the opportunity to read your piece aloud after everyone is done. Don't worry. We're not being critical here. You're not being graded. Nothing is stupid or embarrassing. On the contrary, we'll be using the Bravo Chips to applaud each other."*

*"Another thing to do right now is to look at your Craft Cards. When you're reading your piece, you'll get a point for each of those cards that you have incorporated into it. If they look too intimidating, ignore them. You'll also get points if other people incorporate those elements into their stories. The Craft Cards are just additional things to keep in mind – ideas to use if you want to."*

*"We won't start reading until after everyone is done, and you don't have to read if you don't want to. Listeners are great to have too. Ready? Okay, then. Let's have some fun!"*

### ***Playing the Game: Phase I***

Now it's time to write. Everyone writes a piece that somehow incorporates the Storyline selected. This piece can be anything – poem, story, narrative, fiction, recipe book... whatever. The key is to write. Let everyone know the time limit. Ten minutes is a good time limit, but you can go longer if you want.

I encourage you to write also. Nothing will build the students' enthusiasm like seeing their teacher enjoying the creative process.

### ***Playing the Game: Phase II***

When the allotted time is up, give a warning to everyone to wrap things up. Give them a couple minutes, and then insist they stop. Make sure you let them know that their pieces don't have to be finished. They can always continue working on them later.

Make sure every player has a hat (or hat card) in front of them. It's time to do some reading.

Here's a script to read:

*“Now we're all going to get a chance to read our pieces. You don't have to read if you don't want to. When someone is reading, the rest of the group should listen quietly. If you hear something you want to applaud, toss a Bravo chip into the reader's hat. You could be applauding because of the writing or the reading, it doesn't matter. The Bravo Chip is how you say 'Bravo!' and it's worth two points at the end of the game. When you're reading, this is worth keeping in mind. If your piece warrants it, really ham it up and perform for those Bravo Chips. You don't have to sit motionless in your chair while you read. Feel free to stand and move around and gesture. To everyone else, don't forget to toss your Bravo Chips. Otherwise, they'll count against you at the end of the game.”*

*“After each reader has finished, we'll look at our Craft Cards. If something was read that matches one of your Craft Cards, bring it up. If the group agrees, you get to drop that card in your hat. It'll be worth a point to you at the end of the game. You'll also get a chance to complement the reader on what you liked about the piece. Remember, we're going to be keeping things positive. This is a game, not a critical analysis. You're not allowed to make suggestions or say anything negative. Also, remember that you can play a Craft Card on your own reading. You can't, of course, give yourself a Bravo Chip.”*

*“One last note: the groups are going to be reading at the same time, so do be respectful of each other. Try to keep the shouting to a minimum when you're reading.”*

The toughest part of this phase is getting the first person to read. Ask for a volunteer from each group. The readers are only reading to their own group – not to the entire class. It might also help that reading is the best way to score points. Once you have one volunteer from each group, you're ready to get started.

If you have a group that is small enough, use the Craft Cards as a starting point for a discussion on the piece that was read. They point out techniques that the writer used, but each group should feel free to move beyond this and discuss any other effective techniques that were used. Use the game as a launching pad for your own discussions.

If you have too many people, or your groups are not yet at the point where they can have those sorts of discussions, have the reader write on his or her piece which Craft Cards were played during it.

After a reader has finished and the craft cards have been played, someone else in the group gets a chance to read.

### **A Note for the Facilitator:**

Ideally, you'll join one of the groups and not have to lead the discussions. You would simply be another writer. However, your creative writing class may not be at that point yet. If this is the case, spend Phase II drifting between the groups, listening and encouraging.

Keep an eye out for negative comments and respond quickly and emphatically if you hear any. Everything here needs to be kept positive. If you need to address something like swearing, inappropriate language, or subject matter that is not allowed in the classroom, do so in a way that doesn't tear down the writer's work.

You also should make sure you are available in case a group is having trouble getting another person to read. If you are not able to solve the problem, have the group merge with one that has more active readers.

You may also need to handle the problem of no volunteers at all. If no one wants to read, volunteer to read your own work to kick things off. If people still don't want to read, make it anonymous: collect the papers and flip through them. Then select one to read without telling anyone who the author was.

### ***Winning the Game and Scoring***

After everyone has finished reading, each group should vote on awards. There are Award cards in the StoryTellers box to use. If you don't have one copy of the game for each group, however, you can simply hold up the cards and announce what is being voted on.

Awarding these should be an open vote. This is to be a positive experience. Vote on the story that is the most appropriate for each category (Creative, Hilarious, Surprising, or Dramatic). This is not a "who is best" issue. It's a vote on which story fits the award the best. Each award recipient should drop the award into his or her hat.

Here's the script for the end:

*"Now it's time to score. Look in your hat. You score 1 point for each Craft Card, 2 points for each Bravo Chip, and 3 points for each Award. Subtract 2 for every Bravo Chip that you didn't toss during the game."*

## ***Discussion Points***

The key to discussing the works is to get the students thinking positively about their writing. Focus on what works in each piece, and look for unusual things. You want to help your students change focus from what doesn't work to what does.

It's absolutely vital, therefore, that you stay upbeat during the game – which means no suggestions or critiques. You want the students to leave the class encouraged about their writing. There's plenty of time to discuss flaws later. This class should be all about the enjoyment and freedom that comes from creative writing.

Here are some ideas for things to keep an ear out for:

- 1) Great descriptions – particularly those that involve all five senses
- 2) When a reader gets an emotional response from the listeners
- 3) Unexpected details or actions that contradict stereotypes
- 4) Tricks of the trade– similes, metaphors, alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhymes, and so forth.

## ***Follow Up Classes***

The class after the game is filled with possibilities. Here are a few:

- 1) Talk about the stories and what was learned. Discuss techniques that didn't work or could be improved. Point out techniques that have also been used in some of the other reading you've been doing in class.
- 2) Compare and contrast. Five people writing on the same story prompt probably went five different directions. The comparison between those writings can be very interesting.
- 3) Continue! Select a piece (or pieces) that you want to have the class continue as a group. Talk about where the story could go next, or how it could be best developed.

## ***Attitude and Celebration***

This game is intended to stimulate creativity and discussion. If you find that any element (Craft Cards, Award Cards, Points, etc.) does not work for your class, leave it out.

On the other hand, if your class really grooves on the competition, start looking to see what kind of tangible awards you can hand out. Maybe have a giant cookie (big enough to share, of course) as the award for whoever wins the day. You could also print up a StoryTeller competition ladder so that students can draw their competition out between classes.

It's all about great writing, building camaraderie, and having a laugh or three along the way. So relax and have fun with it!



[www.liveoakgames.com](http://www.liveoakgames.com)