

StoryTellers for the Writer's Workshop

Introduction

What sort of activities do you use in your writer's workshop to foster creativity? Do you start with a story prompt and let everyone write for ten minutes? Maybe do some stream of consciousness writing, encouraging the writers to loosen up and just let the words flow?

StoryTellers can make a great addition to your workshop, either as a regular feature or as an occasional break from your regular routine. These instructions will show you how.

Setting the Stage

Don't worry. This won't take much time at all. In fact, you probably already do most of this before each session now. Here's what you'll need to do to set up for the group:

- 1) Make sure you have one copy of the game for every five participants. You can stretch the game for more people, but you'll run out of Bravo Chips. Once the game starts, you'll be playing – not facilitating. Running multiple groups simultaneously is quite simple.
- 2) Each player needs to have a writing surface. You do not need a table for each group of players, but it would be good to have the ability for the members of each group to be able to move to face each other after they are finished writing.
- 3) If you have some interesting hats, bring them out. You could also encourage your participants to bring hats. If you are lacking in hats, don't worry. The game includes hat cards you can hand out.
- 4) 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.
- 5) 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.

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

- 6) If you picked a Storyline, write it some place in big letters where everyone will be able to see it.

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

When the Writers Arrive

As everyone arrives, encourage them to separate into groups of no more than five players per copy of the game. You can use more players per game (as mentioned earlier), but five per copy is a good maximum.

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. They don't have to do anything with it at this point, but they need to have it.
- 2) Have each group deal out five Craft Cards and 3 Bravo Chips from its copy of the game to each player.
- 3) Leave the Heckle Cards, unused Craft Cards, and Bravo Chips in the boxes and stash them somewhere. You won't need them.
- 4) If you did not pick a Storyline earlier (see **Setting the Stage** above), have one player from each group look at his or her Craft Cards. See the numbers on the bottom of them? Have that player look up those Storylines in the StoryTellers instruction book and read them. Let the group pick one of the five to use. Write it somewhere that everyone can see it – a white board, a black board, or even just a big piece of paper.

Now you're ready to begin!

Introducing the Game

By now, your writers 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. This is not a time for anyone to be critical. 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.

Now... Write!

Playing the Game: Phase II

Once everyone has finished writing, it's time to move everyone so that the writers in each group can see each other. A circle works well. Each player needs to have a hat (or hat card) on the floor or table in front of him or her.

Each person now has the opportunity to read his or her piece out loud. Players don't have to read if they choose not to. However, reading is the best way to score points. While someone else is reading, the other members of the group should be quiet and listen attentively.

Once everyone is set, here's a script to read:

“Now we're all going to have the opportunity to read our pieces. You don't have to read if you don't want to. When someone is reading, the rest of us 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. 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, 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. We'll use the Craft Cards as a starting point for our discussion of the piece. We'll also explain why we tossed Bravo Chips and talk about the piece in general. However, we're going to be keeping things positive. This is a game, not a critical analysis. Also, remember that you can play a Craft Card on your own reading. You can't, of course, give yourself a Bravo Chip.”

The Craft Cards are the 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.

Winning the Game and Scoring

After everyone has finished reading, each group should pull out the Award cards from the StoryTellers box. 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.”

Attitude and Celebration

This game is all about relaxing and having fun with your writing group. It’s intended to stimulate creativity and discussion. If you find that any element (Craft Cards, Award Cards, Points, etc.) does not work for your group, leave it out.

On the other hand, if your group 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 people can draw their competition out between sessions.

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

