The Storypath Approach: Using the Power of Story for Academic Learning

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Welcome

Today’s agenda

• Introduce Storypath Approach
• Examine specific example
• Connect to best practice for English Learners
• Resources to create your own Storypath
“Researchers...argue that people... make a best guess about a new word’s meaning based on the **context** in which they initially encounter it, and hold onto the meaning unless it is clearly found to be wrong.”

“Word-Learning Study Finds Sudden Insights Trump Flash Cards,”

*Education Week, June 8, 2011, p. 6-7.*
What is Storypath?

Storypath uses the components of story--setting, character and plot--to organize curriculum into meaning and memorable learning experiences.

It is more than reading a story, it is living the story guided by the teacher as learners create the setting, become the characters, and solve the problems presented through the plot.
Storypath for English learners

Storypath…

- provides rich exposure to English;
- structures experiences so they are comprehensible to students through story;
- provides scaffolding to support language acquisition;
- provides opportunities for meaningful interaction;
- “levels the playing field;” and
- affirms learners’ contributions.
The Power of the Narrative

Creating the setting
Creating the characters
Building context
Solving critical incidents
Concluding the story
Families in their Neighborhoods
Storypath

Episode 1: The Neighborhood
Episode 2: Families
Episode 3: Understanding Families
Episode 4: Finding the Way
Episode 5: Litter in the Neighborhood
Episode 6: Speeding Cars
Episode 7: A Neighborhood Celebration
Episode 1: Creating the Setting

Students create the setting by completing a frieze (mural) or other visual representation of the place.
The Setting

A Block in the City
In this neighborhood, apartment buildings line the street. The buildings look like big boxes with lots of little windows in rows. Some of the windows have flower boxes and others are just plain. Across the street is a park. There are trees and grass to make it a cool place to sit in the summer. There are a few benches in the park and the retired people of the neighborhood sit there when the weather is warm and visit with each other. The street between the apartment buildings and the park is busy with lots of traffic. A bus stop and mailbox are at the street corner. Next to the mailbox is a row of newspaper vending machines.

This is a present day story...

To create the setting the teacher reads the description, discusses it with students, clarifies academic language and builds a word bank for reference and then organizes the class to create the setting.

In the discussion, the teacher gauges student understanding of the features and if necessary provides visuals to support understanding. (The teacher also includes information about art skills including perspective, scale, and color.)

Students work together to create the neighborhood. While the work is underway, the teacher talks with students about their work deepening their understanding of the place reinforcing the language of the place.
What challenges do you anticipate?

What do you need to do to support student learning?
Scaffold collaborative work...

**SELF-ASSESSMENT: WORKING TOGETHER**

How well did you work with your partner?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Not often/Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. We listened to each other’s ideas.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We shared the work.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. We helped each other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. We did careful work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. We worked together to solve problems.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Reflect on the setting

- Add to the word bank
- Write about the neighborhood…

Take a photo of the setting to make a “postcard” to send home with families. Use sentence starters.

Writing for a purpose
Episode 2: Creating Characters

Students create characters for the story whose roles they will play during subsequent episodes.
What challenges do you anticipate?

What do you need to do to support student learning?
Who are the members of a family?
# Reinforcing Language in Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Members</th>
<th>Describing Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Niece/Nephew</td>
<td>exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousins</td>
<td>nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunts/Uncles</td>
<td>kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Grandparents</td>
<td>loving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Godparents</td>
<td>wonderful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets</td>
<td>friend/silly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limousine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each student makes a character for the story.

Character Biography
- Character’s name
- Family role
- Age
- Place of birth
- Job
- Fun things character likes to do
- Favorite foods

Assessment:
The biography is appropriate to the family. The figure of the character matches the biography.
Creating the Characters

Families
Scaffold introductions—oral communication skills
Model for students

Prepare for introductions…

- Get into role. What will be interesting information to share about your character?
- Keep your introduction short and to the point.

Checklist for a good introduction:

- Am I in character?
- Am I including important information and interesting details?
- Am I speaking clearly and confidently?
- Am I making eye contact with my audience?
Episode 3: Building Context

Understanding Families…

Family Crest Activity
  Family Name(s)
  What families do together
  Holiday celebration
  Family heritage/tradition
  Family values

What challenges to you expect?
Building Context

What is important to families?

Valuing the conversation
Family Crests

Students collaborate to make crest.

Affirming students' knowledge and experience
Add to the word bank...
The Plot of the Story: Critical Incidents

Characters confront problems typical of those faced by people of that time and place.

- Role-play to understand
- Engage in inquiry and problem-solving
- Construct new and deeper understandings
- Foster critical thinking, imagination, and personal connections
- Apply literacy in context—read, write, speak and listen—to resolve critical incidents
Critical Incidents

Episode 4: Finding the Way

Episode 5: Litter in the Neighborhood

Episode 6: Speeding Cars
Finding the way: How can the letter carrier deliver the mail?

Teacher role-plays delivering the mail but can’t because there are no street names or house numbers.

How to solve the problem?
Teaching map skills in context of the story… Students’ created neighborhood

Map credit: Herman Adler Design
Cooperative activities for problem-solving and social skills support English learners.

Valuing the conversation...

- Choices engage children dramatically in “real-world” dilemmas; they work together to solve the problems.
- They come to school asking, “What will happen in the Storypath today?
- “Outsiders” become insiders when they offer ideas important to the community.
- Problem tackling as a cooperative endeavor promoting the values of trust and respect for differences. We see problems differently and through the problem solving discourse, we can appreciate each other’s contributions.
Litter in the neighborhood: What happens when there is litter in the neighborhood?

The setup: Teacher places litter on their setting so when students enter the room they notice the problem.

Students decide what to do…

The classroom is a place where each student is valued.

- Imagination affirms that each student has something to contribute.
- Each student has an experience that connects to the story.
- Students come together to work on a common problem.
Speeding Cars

What do we do about speeding cars?

Reading for information
What challenges do you anticipate?

What do you need to do to support student learning?
Learners need meaningful reasons to read and write... Not just to be compliant!

Writing in context

Writing: A Letter About the Problem

(Date)
Dear __________________________,

(In this part, state the neighborhood problem.)

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

(In this part, tell how to fix the problem.)

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Sincerely,

(Your Storypath Name)

Assessment: The letter is carefully copied from the board. The student reads the letter to a buddy.
Advanced Writing includes an interesting lead sentence, accurate information about the neighborhood problem, and an appropriate solution to the problem.

Reinforcing concepts

Rights and Responsibilities

In the column on the left, write the rights that citizens have in their neighborhoods. In the column of the right, write the responsibilities that citizens have in their neighborhoods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rights</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment: Rights and responsibilities are in the correct columns and are copied accurately from the board.
Storypath experiences include:

- “sandwiching” known expressions with new academic language;
- using word banks, labeling;
- writing for a purpose;
- using visuals and manipulatives;
- using interactive activities to foster conceptual understandings; and
- role-playing events to understand scenarios and use academic language in context.
Concluding Event

Students plan and participate in an activity that brings closure to the story.

A neighborhood celebration!
What makes Storypath distinctive?

- Student engagement
- Memorable through the lived experience—imagination and play
- Student efficacy
- Problem solving
- Use of academic language in context
Importance of social studies for high needs schools

- Access to knowledge
- Application of skills to meaningful and purposeful situations
- Development of dispositions for living in a democratic society
- Development of critical thinking and problem solving skills
- Believe that “School is for me!”
Research base...

Storypath is based on humans’ innate ability to remember and make sense of their world through stories.
“...very young children are familiar with and adept at using **narrative modes of thinking** for describing and remembering things that are important to them” (p. 178).


And others...


Last words…

- All children deserve a content rich environment.
- They deserve instruction that supports their learning and the belief that they are capable.
- The Storypath experience supports acceptance of all children in the classroom community so essential for their future learning.

For guidance for creating your own Storypaths, go to: http://www.socialstudiesk8storypath.com/storypath-structure.html