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Writing to Discover

GRADES 7–8

TYPE
NARRATIVECOMMITMENT
3 SESSIONS, 90
MINUTES EACH

Why do we love writing, reading, and listening to stories? We love to imagine what's out there waiting for us and our favorite characters. What does your future hold? Let's write to discover!

SESSION 1:

Students learn how to go from a blank page in the present to a story in the future with details, characters, and plot by looking at examples in texts and video.

YOU WILL NEED

- Blank paper (2 pieces per student: one cover page; one divided into 8 boxes, 2×4)
- Lined paper (at least 3 sheets per student)
- Pencil; coloring supplies (crayons, markers, pencils)

BEFORE YOU START

Gather materials listed above for each student.

HOW TO BEGIN (15 MINUTES)

Prime students for a futuristic discussion by asking them to imagine: Would you have your own robot in the future? If so,

what kinds of things could it do, and what would you name it? If not, why not?

Tell students that today we're going to embark on an adventure, discover new stories, and imagine ourselves as characters in the future. What might happen? There could be robots, flying cars, cities in the skies, hoverboards, new hairdos and fashions—anything's possible! In this lesson, we want to imagine what our own futures might be like and write ourselves as characters in our futuristic stories.

We'll also be talking about the future of our writing itself. How do we go from a blank page in the present to a final story with a setting, characters, and lots of meaningful detail in the future?

STEP 1 (30 MINUTES)

Getting Started: Visions of the Future

First, check out a student vision for 2040 and read "[What It Would Be Like in the Future! 2040](#)" by 826michigan student Maia Sears. As a group, discuss what students liked about this piece and what ideas we might have for the future.

From here, have students watch a clip from the movie *Back to the Future: Part II* to view a scene of one imagined future; the clip of Marty McFly first walking through his town after traveling thirty years into the future can be easily found online (about 3 minutes long). In the film, the main character, a high school student named Marty McFly, travels from 1985 to thirty years in the future—2015!

As a group, discuss: How did that clip represent an imagined 2015, and how does that representation compare to what 2015 was really like? The stories we imagine and write for ourselves today may not come true five or ten years from now, but it will be fun to look back on how we imagined our lives might be.

Pass out blank paper folded into 8 sections (2×4). Together, number each box 1-8, and label the boxes with the following headings (explain to students what each heading means by reading aloud the text in parentheses):

1. 1. 1. Your **name**
2. **Setting** (time and location where your story takes place)
3. **Characters** (who is in your story)
4. **Beginning** (how your story starts)
5. **Inciting Incident** (what happens that makes your character take action)
6. **Midpoint** (a big change/conflict in the story—the “tables turn”)
7. **Climax** (tension/conflict at its highest—most exciting point of the story)
8. **Resolution** (the world of your story after everything, at the end)

Return to **BOX 1** and come up with a creative title for your story!

STEP 2 (30 MINUTES)

Prewriting: Imagining the Future and Beyond

We’ve talked about how life might be different in the future, gathered ideas from examples of student writing from *Visions of the Near Future*, watched a *Back to the Future* clip, and discussed our visions as a group. Now, let’s lay out the backdrop of our story: its **setting**. What is setting? The setting of a story is the time and location where the story takes place (2020, in Ann Arbor, for example). Students can pick a different time and specific city, country, or even another planet! A setting gives the story a backdrop and helps to set the mood.

1. 1. 1. Discuss examples of descriptive language/detail/adjectives that set the scene—can be settings from *Visions of the Future* or *Back to the Future*.

2. On our own: quick-write (5 minutes) your story's setting (a list of key descriptive words is OK) in **BOX 2** and (optional) draw a picture to accompany it.
2. First at tables, then as a group: share our setting descriptions.

Next, let's talk about **characters**. Let's think about who *we* might be five or ten years from now and beyond, what we hope we'll be doing, and how we'll be different (or the same!). You can make your future self come to life through descriptive detail, actions, dialogue/speech, thoughts, and interactions with other characters who you may write in your story.

1. Discuss examples of characterization from *Visions of the Future* and/or *Back to the Future*.
2. On our own: quick-write (5 minutes) in **BOX 3** your story's characters, including your future self (use descriptive words and other details, such as their favorite things, what they like to do for fun, etc.).
3. Then, using these descriptions, let's **sketch** self-portraits our future selves for the cover pages of our stories! (Use blank sheet of paper.)
4. First at tables, then as a group: share character descriptions and sketches. Ask all students: "What does your character want most in this story?"

Begin outlining the main points of your story in boxes 4-8—what do you want to happen in your future? Emphasize that this is brainstorming and encourage students to come up with many ideas. Next time, we will use our best ideas from these boxes 4-8 to draft our stories.

STEP 3 (15 MINUTES)

Share and discuss

1. With partners, then reflect as a group: discuss the main ideas of our stories so far and where we hope to go with them. What has been most challenging up to this point? What about the most fun? Anything else you want to share?
2. Next time we'll expand on our ideas and start drafting our stories!

SESSION 2:

Students discuss their prewriting exercises and begin to draft their stories by sharing and reflecting on their writing process.

BEFORE YOU START

Gather copies of self-portraits and boxes from the prewriting exercise.

HOW TO BEGIN (15 MINUTES)

Discuss and share prewriting from last time.

1. Struggles/challenges/questions? Exciting things to share before we begin?

STEP 1 (30 MINUTES)

Drafting: Writing the Future

Now that we are all warmed up and have the outline of our story in place, let's get to everything in-between—the adventure of discovery!

Your story can be written however you like best. Maybe you want to write a **first person** point of view (POV) of your future life. What is a first person POV? (Ask students. Writing from a first person perspective or POV means your main character is “I” and the reader is seeing the story directly through your main character.) Maybe you want to observe like a fly on the wall and write about life in the future from the **third person** POV. What is a third person POV? (Ask students. Writing from a third person perspective or POV means observing your main character as she/he/their or her/him/them.) No matter what you choose, use rich detail and all five senses and be open to the unknown. There’s no wrong way to write!

As you write, if your story starts to take you in new direction, **mark it in the margin**—then, when you read your story later, you’ll be able to see where your imagination chimed in to unlock new possibilities. Sometimes the best ideas come from the act of writing itself, even if you didn’t consider it during prewriting.

Begin writing. Keep writing as if it’s all unfolding out of you like a rainbow ribbon from a magician’s sleeve—!

STEP 2 (15 MINUTES)

Mid-Workshop Teaching Point

There is excitement in uncertainty—in not knowing what the outcome will be but keeping on going anyway! And any story—just like the future—is free for you to imagine, write, and make real.

One suggestion for expressing this point is to have students take a writing break to watch JK Rowling’s speaking to Harvard graduates on the benefits of failure and the importance of imagination, beginning at 2 minutes and 45 seconds into the recorded speech.

Have students share and reflect on their writing so far. Did you surprise yourself by writing anything you weren’t expecting to write? Did your story take you on an adventure you didn’t see coming? (If

so, share a few lines where you put a sticker in the margin.) Or could you predict the future of your story before you finished writing it? Let's share our unique outcomes to reflect on our experiences as a group (or in small groups).

STEP 3 (30 MINUTES)

Writers' Workshop & Story Revision

With a partner or in small groups, read each other's stories and give comments (write on a separate sheet of paper if helpful). After 10 minutes of reading time, we'll discuss with our partners the strengths of our stories and any suggestions for improvement.

SESSION 3:

Students finalize their stories with feedback given from their peers as well as the teacher and then reflect on the previous sessions and the student's progress.

BEFORE YOU START

Gather drafts with revisions, self-portraits, and prewriting boxes.

HOW TO BEGIN (15 MINUTES)

Discuss as a group what we've done so far: Brainstorming, Prewriting, Drafting, Writers' Workshop, Revising—and now to craft the finished product!

STEP 1 (30 MINUTES)

Revising Our Stories

Read through your own story once again—as you revise, if you take your story in a direction you weren't expecting,

make a note of it in the margin—then, when you read your story later, you’ll be able to see where your imagination chimed in to unlock new possibilities!

If there’s time, read through another friend’s story for any extra feedback before we take our stories to publication.

STEP 2 (30 MINUTES)

Sharing Our Stories

Ask students to reflect on their writing process: How has your story changed through the revision process? Did your story take you on an adventure you didn’t see coming? Or could you predict the future of your story before you finished writing it? Let’s share our unique outcomes to reflect on our experiences. What did we learn from our friends’ work today? What about from our future selves?

As a group, discuss: What was your favorite part of today’s activity? What did you find most challenging? What was most useful for your writing? What are some of your biggest hopes for the future?

When students have their originals back, have them read their stories out loud in groups. You may get volunteers to share stories with the class—if you’d like, wear a futuristic costume while you read! (See lesson conclusion below.)

STEP 3 (15 MINUTES)

Final Reflection

Writing can be a way to discover things you maybe never realized you knew or had the power to imagine. Writing can be like a roller coaster and a time machine and a magician's hat all rolled into one—it can unlock new possibilities and take you places you never dreamed of! Have confidence and be fearless in the face of uncertainty. If you can improvise and use your imagination, you can go anywhere, and you can take your readers with you!

Today our sparkling imaginations led us into the unknown—and we emerged with such spectacular stories! Thank you all for your awe-inspiring creativity. The more we write, the more we'll discover—so keep writing, writers!

STEP 4 (CONCLUSION)

To celebrate everyone's great work, have students share their stories aloud in groups, or with other classes. You can even act them out and cast fellow authors in each other's plays. You might also scan all of your students' stories to combine them into a print and/or digital anthology (one copy per author and class). Students should feel free to ask questions of one another and engage with each other's stories of our potential futures.