

{ } LESSON

Fantasy Sports: Designing Games that You (or Elves or Dragons) Want to Play

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GRADES 5–6

TYPE
NARRATIVE

COMMITMENT
2 SESSIONS: 60-90
MINUTES EACH

We're going to talk about sports. But not just any sports, sports that can't exist in the real world. How would magic, superpowers, or zero-gravity change the rules of your favorite sport? You might have to invent a whole new one.

We'll be doing this workshop in two sessions: Today you'll create a sport that could be played by your favorite fantasy creature and practice making rules (no disintegrations) and statistics (most rainbows climbed in a single game). Next time, you'll work to share your newly created sport with an audience by writing a newspaper article about the exciting championship game.

Many students in the original workshop chose to focus on animals rather than fantasy creatures. We're still reeling from that last-second sardine catch in the Penguin Bowl.

SESSION 1:

In this session, students will learn about different types of sports, create a sport that could be played by their favorite fantasy creature, and practice making rules and statistics.

YOU WILL NEED

- Copies of the “Sports Taxonomy” handout
- Copies of the “Types of Stats and Where to Find Them” handout
- Copies of the “Who’s Playing?” handout

HOW TO BEGIN (5-10 MINUTES)

Start off with a Whip-Around question: “What’s your favorite fantasy creature and why? What abilities do they have that interest you?”

It may be helpful for the teacher to start with an example, such as: “My favorite fantasy creature is the dragon. They can fly and breathe fire!”

STEP 1 (5 MINUTES)

Next, launch into an overview of the lesson: Today we’re going to talk about sports. But not just any sports, sports that can’t exist in the real world. How would magic, superpowers, or zero-gravity change the rules of your favorite sport? You might have to invent a whole new one.

We'll be doing this workshop in two sessions. Today, you'll create a sport that could be played by your favorite fantasy creature and practice making rules (no disintegrations) and statistics (most rainbows climbed in a single game). Next time, you'll work to share your newly created sport with an audience by writing a newspaper article about the exciting championship game.

STEP 2 (10 MINUTES)

Taxonomy

Hand out the "Sports Taxonomy" handout. Ask your students to come up with two or three of your favorite sports. With their table group, have your students work together to think about what all of their favorite sports have in common and try to come up with some different ways you could classify sports, and an example for each. For example, some classifications could include volley sports, bat and ball sports, goal sports, races, or judged choreography.

STEP 3 (10 MINUTES)

Sports? Sports!

Every sport has some basic structure and rules that allow people to play it consistently and make it competitive but not impossible. For example, the ten-foot basketball rim or not throwing a baseball at someone to tag them out. These are all based on the limitations of human ability and our life here on earth. Only some of the best athletes in the world can jump high enough to dunk a basketball on a ten-foot rim. How would basketball be different with a thirty-foot rim? What about a two-foot rim?

Ask your students to pair up, and as if their partner had never heard of it before, try to explain soccer or baseball. What logical rules go into structuring the game?

Now we know all about human sports, but what if these sports weren't being played by people? Let's

think about how the rules would need to change to accommodate the new abilities and environments of giants or manatees or aliens. For example, a basketball court would be too small and the hoop too short for dragons. How would we deal with their fire-breathing abilities? What changes could we make to have the game be dragon-friendly?

STEP 4 (10-15 MINUTES)

To Boldly Go

Next, pass out the “Who’s Playing?” handout and describe the task at hand to your students. Now that you’ve thought a little bit about how everyday sports might have to change to accommodate mythical players, it’s time to decide where and when the new game you’re going to create is played and by whom. You can start with a human game you’d like to change, or invent an entirely new game based on the attributes of your creature. Define the characteristics of the athletes, playing field, and equipment that could affect the game. Share your ideas with a partner. Use their questions about the sport as a guide to help you create a detailed description.

Remember: No matter the genre, writers need to take their universes seriously — without all the details and consistent logic, your readers will be confused!

STEP 5 (20 MINUTES)

Let’s Make a List of Rules!

Define rules for your students: Rules define how a game is played — what do you want people to be able to do or not do? Think about the characteristics of your players that you brainstormed previously. What rules need to be in place to keep the game competitive and fair? Make sure to cover each area of the game: offense, defense, turnovers, coaches, and penalties. Once you think you have all your rules down, try going through an imaginary game in your head. Can you follow all the rules? Did you cover

all the bases (literally and metaphorically)?

About halfway through this step, take a break and have your students practice giving a partner directions about how to do a simple task such as peeling an orange—how detailed do you need to get in order for them to accomplish your goal in an efficient way?

STEP 6 (10 MINUTES)

Numbers Never Lie

All sports have statistics! They help us measure and compare how well (or poorly) a game is played and are important for tracking who wins and loses (if you're into that sort of thing). There are two main type of stats: counting stats and rate stats. Counting stats tell you the number of times something happened (817 goals), while rate stats tell you how often something happened or an average (2.7 assists per game). Rate stats are really useful for giving context to counting stats or making comparisons between different players or teams.

Give each student a copy of the “Types of Stats and Where to Find Them” handout. This will help them learn more about the difference between counting and rate stats, see some examples, and learn how to calculate their own statistics.

STEP 7 (10 MINUTES)

#STEM

If you're creating your own sport, you'll need to create a statistic or two to describe it. Think about what's important to measure in your new sport—how do players know they've done well? What do fans get excited about seeing? Come up with at least one counting stat and one rate stat that can be applied to your new sport.

STEP 8 (5 MINUTES)

Wrap-up & Transition

End with a quick wrap-up discussion. Today we started putting together the quantitative side of our story (the numbers), next session we add the qualitative (story).

SESSION 2:

Now that we've created this sport, how do we share it with other people? Your students will work to show off their newly created sport to an audience by writing a newspaper article about the exciting championship game.

STEP 1 (10 MINUTES)

The Basics

Start off the session with a quick discussion on the basics of journalism. What key information do you need to include in any newspaper article? What is important for the reader to know to be able to understand the news that you're trying to share? Remember the 5 W's—who, what, where, when, why, (and how). These tell the reader what they need to know about the event you're reporting on, whether it's a sporting event or a city council meeting.

When you're writing about sports, it's also important to consider balancing your play-by-play (recording the scoring and statistics from the game) with narrative (why that play-by-play information is interesting or important). It could be helpful to provide students with an example of sports reporting on your local team.

STEP 2 (20 MINUTES)

First Draft

Have your students write the first draft of their article. Have them think about how you're going to tell the story of this championship game and start getting some ideas down on paper. They can start by creating an outline of what scoring happened when, or maybe focus on a single player and follow them through the course of the game.

STEP 3 (10 MINUTES)

Sparkle Words

Have your students brainstorm additional details to fill out your article, like interviews with players or coaches, personal stories, or any special records or statistics that happened.

- Based on what happened in the game, is there anyone you would want to interview? What would they say?
- Is there a central character in your game? If so, who? Why are they important?
- How are you going to use the statistic(s) you created in your story? Don't just list numbers, tell us why they matter—was this game the most/least/fastest/most upside down ever?

STEP 4 (5 MINUTES)

Next, ask your students to create an appealing lead for your story. This should be an exciting,

descriptive opening that really draws your reader in.

Here's a not-so-great example:

"The Sydney Wallabies faced off against the Queensland Koalas yesterday in marsupial cricket."

This lede is clear and informative, but doesn't do much to make your reader care about the game. Here is a much better example:

"When the Queensland Koalas defeated the Sydney Wallabies yesterday, it was only the second time in this storied rivalry that a match was decided by less than three runs."

In one sentence, we learn that these teams are rivals and that the score in this game was unusual. There must be so much more for us to find out if we read the rest of the story!

STEP 5 (20 MINUTES)

Revision

Now that your students have come up with some additional material to add to their story, ask the to go back and work it into the first draft they created earlier.

While they're revising, ask your students to think about these questions:

- Have you used sensory details to give your reader the experience of being at the game?
- Is your writing active? Remember, you're writing about a thrilling and athletic game and you want the language you use to reflect that, not to mention be compelling to the reader. Consider the choices you've made with verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.
- Does your story include narrative, not just a list of scoring and stats? Why should your reader care

about this game?

- Use specific details. Winning “the championship” is good. Winning “the coveted Dragonrider Cup of Victory” is better!

STEP 6

Conclusion: Sharing and Wrap Up

Go around the room and have everyone share their favorite highlight from their game. Bonus points if they use a statistic to describe it!