

## **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 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, and celebrating their own writing.

### ***Preparing for the Game***

Follow these simple steps and you'll probably be done in less than five minutes:

#### **Step 1: Bravo Chips**

If you only have one copy of the game, bring in some pennies, chips, or chalk to use as extra Bravo Chips. You'll need three per player, but just about anything will work.

#### **Step 2: Hats**

You'll need hats. You can use yours, the hat cards from the game, or students can bring their own.

#### **Step 3: Time**

Decide how long the writing phase will be. Players are going to be writing, reading, and discussing their pieces, so keep that in mind. 10 - 15 minutes is a good amount of time for writing.

#### **Step 4: Writing Prompt**

The game includes 53 storylines to get things started, and there are more at [www.liveoakgames.com](http://www.liveoakgames.com) (click the StoryTellers link). You can also use your own, of course.

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.

Once everyone is in their groups,

1. Make sure everyone has a hat or a hat card.
2. Deal out five Craft Cards and 3 Bravo Chips to each player. If you don't have enough cards for five per player, just make sure everyone has the same number.
3. Leave the Heckle Cards, unused Craft Cards, and unused Bravo Chips in the box. You won't need them.
4. If you didn't pick a Storyline earlier (see Preparing for The Game above), either pick one now, or offer the group a list for them to pick one. Write the storyline somewhere that everyone can see.

Now you're ready to begin!

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

If you need help introducing the game, here's a script:

*"Here's how the game works. We're going to write for 10 minutes on this storyline. Use it however you like."*

*"After the 10 minutes, you'll each have the opportunity to read your piece aloud. This is not a time for criticism. On the contrary, we'll be using the Bravo Chips to applaud each other. Even so, you don't have to read if you don't want to."*

*"Take a moment to look at your Craft Cards. When you hear someone (including yourself) use one of those elements, you'll score points. Feel free to ignore them, also. The Craft Cards are just additional things to keep in mind – techniques 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. Ready? It's time to write!"*

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

Now it's time to write. Everyone writes a piece that somehow incorporates the Storyline selected. Depending on your class, you may want to let writers create whatever they'd like: poem, story, narrative, fiction, recipe book, whatever. The key is to write. Let everyone know the time limit.

Consider writing, yourself. Nothing will build the students' enthusiasm like seeing their teacher enjoying the creative process.

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

As the allotted time is running out, give a warning so your writers can wrap things up, then insist they stop. You may want to point out that they can always continue working on their pieces later. They can always continue working on them later (or in future classes).

Make sure every player has a hat (or a hat card).

Here's a script to read:

*"Now, we're all going to get a chance to read. You don't have to, 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. Each Bravo Chip is worth two points at the end of the game.*

*Make sure you spend all your Bravo Chips! after all the readers are finished, any that are left will count against you.*

*After each reader has finished, we'll look at our Craft Cards. If something read matches one of your cards, bring it up. If the group agrees with you, you get to drop that card in your own hat. It'll be worth a point at the end of the game.*

*One last thing: groups are going to be reading at the same time, so please be respectful of each other. Try to keep the shouting to a minimum."*

Getting people to read can be the most difficult part of the game. Ask for a volunteer from each group. Readers are only reading to their own group, not the entire class. It also might 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. Each group, should feel free to move beyond the craft cards and discuss any other effective techniques that they recognized. 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, it's time for the next person in the group to read.

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

Ideally, you'll join one of the groups and not have to lead the discussions. You are simply another writer in the group.

However, your class may not be at that point. If this is the case, spend Phase 2 drifting between the groups, listening and encouraging.

Keep an eye out for negative comments and respond quickly and emphatically if you hear any. The goal of this game is to keep everything positive. If you need to address something (swearing, inappropriate language or subject matter, etc.), do so in a way that doesn't attack the writer's work.

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 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 that doesn't work, make it anonymous. Collect the papers, flip through them, and read it without telling anyone who wrote it.

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

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

Awards should be an open vote. It's not a "who is best" issue, but a "who fits the award best" issue.

Here's the script for the end:

*"Time to score! Check your hat. You score one point for each Craft Card, 2 for each Bravo Chip, and 3 for each Award. Finally, subtract 2 points for each Bravo Chip that you didn't give away during the game."*

### ***Discussion Points***

The key to the discussion is to get students thinking positively about their writing. Focus on what works in each piece, and look for unusual elements. You want to help your students change focus from the negative to the positive.

Because of this focus, stay upbeat during the game. Resist the urge to suggest or critique. There will be time later for “You might want to think about doing something like...” This class is 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 stories and what was learned. Discuss techniques that could be improved.
2. Point out techniques that have been used in some of the other reading you’ve been doing in class.
3. Compare and contrast. Writers undoubtedly went in very different directions. The comparison between those directions can be interesting.
4. Continue writing! Either encourage people to continue their stories, or select a piece (or pieces) that you want to have the class continue. They can continue as a group, or simply discuss ways the story could turn.

### ***Attitude and Celebration***

This goal is to stimulate creativity and discussion. If you find any element (Craft Cards, Award Cards, etc.) that don’t work for your class, leave it out.

On the other hand, if your class really grooves on the competition, look to see what kind of tangible awards might make sense, or create a StoryTellers competition ladder.

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



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