



Meridian Stories

History Challenge

Digital Storytelling Unit

Democracy Awaken!

Designed for Middle and High School Students

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Introduction

This Digital Story Telling Challenge will take two to four weeks to complete. This Challenge targets key 21st century skills – creativity, collaboration, critical

thinking, digital literacy and presentational skills – in equal measure with the curricular content. Delivering on all those learning goals requires student immersion and time. The results, as based on our research, are a high level of student engagement, deep learning, and 100% teacher endorsement.

The following Challenge:

- Should be completed by collaborative teams of two to four students.
- Is aligned to Common Core Curricular Standards.
- Contains an Evaluation Rubric that allows the teacher to clearly score and appraise the students' work.
- Is designed to be integrated into the classroom in alignment with existing curricula.
- Can be assigned as an extra credit project to teams of students that you think would benefit from this kind of immersive, deep learning experience. Additionally, will work well in informal educational settings.
- Should follow the rules of Digital Citizenry in their proper usage and/or citation of images, music and text taken from other sources. See the Digital Rules area in the free Media Resources section of the Meridian Stories site for guidance.

The **Media Resources** section also contains many other **free support materials** from short videos featuring professionals in the field – Artists and Innovators– to short written documents that cover everything from storyboarding to creative brainstorming, interviewing techniques to game design.

While it is helpful to have a Technology Integrator involved, they are not usually necessary: the students already know how to produce the media. ***The teacher's primary function in these Challenges is to guide the students as they engage with the content. You don't need to know editing, sound design, shooting or storyboarding: you just need to know your content area.***

At the end of the Challenge, it is often fun and useful to have a screening of all the media productions – they are never designed to run over 4 minutes each. Students can vote for their favorite videos that can then be screened in a larger assembly-like setting for the whole grade to see. Or this work can be presented as part of a student showcase for parents and friends. Presentational Skills is

another 21st century skill that this project enables.

Our research indicates this to be a really useful exercise for two additional reasons:

1. Students actually learn from their peers' presentations – it is useful to hear a perspective that is not just the teacher's; and
2. The public setting – painful as it is for some students – provides them with an opportunity to 'own' their work and to be more accountable.

Finally, if you are interested to learn more about the community of schools who annually participate in the Meridian Stories Competitions – a community that is characterized by a friendly competitive spirit; feedback from Mentors on each submission; and the rewarding of digital badges in content, storytelling and digital literacy – please return to the Competitions section of the website or inquire at info@meridianstories.com.

Let's get started.

The Challenge

The United States is divided between Republicans and Democrats in ways that threaten our very democracy. This begins with the politicians and extends to their constituents – the current and future voters. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that each side is unwilling to listen to the other; is unwilling to seek compromise between their two divergent positions.

This Challenge is designed to address this divide head on by probing secondary and then primary sources. It begins with some secondary source research into the positions of the two parties. But then it gets interesting. Find one or two people that consider themselves staunch Democrats and one or two people that consider themselves staunch Republicans. We recommend that they be adults (voters). The next part of this challenge asks you to interview them separately – take the Republican participants for example, and find out the two or three basic ideas that drive their thinking; that inform their positions. And then do the same for the other side. That conversation should last no longer than 10 minutes a side. The third part of this challenge asks you to put them all in a room for 20 minutes. Just 20 minutes. Design a series of five questions that will prompt the parties to both outline their point of view, but seek common

ground with the other. In other words, this is about prompting the parties to exchange, listen and seek a position that bridges their beliefs.

This may not happen and that is OK. Your job is to then edit the footage – the individual interviews and the 20-minute dialogue - into a 3 – 4 minute piece that highlights the conversation that you have prompted. The first minute of this piece will be made up of cuts of your participants and their belief systems. The remainder of the piece is a document of their dialogue as based on your prompts.

One key to this Challenge will be the prompts that you design. The idea here is to ask questions that will ignite the participants to find common ground and not further inflame their differences. The point here is not to engender a fight. That's way too easy to do, unfortunately. No, the harder thing is to see if your team can start a discussion amongst the participants that can help to begin the healing between these two entrenched sides.

It's a big task!

Deliverables include:

- Documentary Video
- Outline of Political Differences/Solutions (at teacher's discretion)
- Prompts and Discussion Framework (at teacher's discretion)

The Process

During Phase I, student teams will:

- As a team, using mostly secondary sources, explore two or three of the most topical issues that are defining the Democrats and the Republicans. These two groups can be defined any way that you want, acknowledging that within each party, there is a fair amount of divisiveness.
- Create a basic chart outlining the driving issues and the basic stances of each party. It's important to limit yourself to just a few issues – we recommend just two or three - to keep your team's knowledge base deep rather than broad: the more you know about a few issues, the better.
- Be sure to delegate amongst your team, perhaps allowing half the team to research the Democrats and the other half to research the Republicans. If you do break it up this way, perhaps you will want to

consider researching the political point of view with which you are least familiar.

- Keep in mind the secondary sources from which you are gathering your information. Are they reliable, objective sources?
- Debate amongst yourselves the issues, with the aim of finding common ground – a bridge between the issues – amongst the disparate points of view. Record those areas of compromise.
 - ***Teacher's Option – Outline of Political Differences/Solutions*** - Teachers may require that teams hand in a paper that outlines the key issues that separate the political parties and includes the summary of 'common ground' areas that they have identified in their own internal team debates.
- Brainstorm the prompts – the questions – and any other structural ideas, in preparation for your a) singular interviews with your participants; and b) group discussion.

To get you started, here are some ideas that you may want to consider to help structure the discussion.

- Prompt: 'What's one issue on which you are pretty sure you can find common ground?' Conversely, 'What's one issue on which you are pretty sure you can't find common ground? And then let's see if we can find a compromise position.'
- Dialogue Framework: For a portion of the conversation – perhaps the start – you may want to ask your participants to do the following: One side gets 45 seconds to state their belief system and their passion for their belief system. After this, the other side repeats what they heard: in essence, they articulate the other side's beliefs. Then this is repeated the other way around. This is a way to model active listening as part of your discussion. It also prompts the participants to clearly articulate the beliefs of the other side, perhaps for the first time in their lives.
- Dialogue Framework: As part of the process below, your team will be looking for potential compromise solutions. One approach may be to communicate some of your team's solutions to your participants to get their opinions on your proposed compromise positions.
 - ***Teacher's Option – Prompts and Discussion Framework*** - Teachers may require that teams hand in their questions and prompts in preparation for the shoot.

During Phase II, student teams will:

- Identify your participants (your primary sources). We recommend that you use adults – preferably anyone over 21. The assumption is that adults will have some experience voting and being a part of one political party or the other. The goal is to identify one or two participants from each of the two political sides.
- In identifying your participants, be sure to a) inform them that the nature of this discussion is to find compromise and room for dialogue with the other side; and b) that they will be recorded and edited. The participants need to be very comfortable with this aspect of the activity.
- In order to record and edit, your participants may need to sign a Release Form giving you permission to record, edit and post this discussion online. Research generic and simple Release Forms online to find the right language for you.
- Pre-produce the shoot. Consider the following questions:
 - Begin by asking yourselves what you think this final video product will look like. Will you, the interviewers, be on camera? Will this be set up like a news talk show? Or more casual?
 - Where are you shooting the dialogue piece? In a living room setting or a more formal corporate one, like in a small conference room? Perhaps it's outdoors. Where you shoot can be informed by the overall mood that you want to set. How will you make the participants comfortable? (The same question goes for the shoot of the individuals.)
 - What is the lighting?
 - What will you advise them to wear?
 - Where will the cameras be during the discussion? Keep in mind that you will most likely need two cameras, as you will want to be able to edit between shots (a medium/wide and a close-up). Your goal is to take a 20-minute conversation and edit it down to 2 – 3 minutes.
 - Once you have the set-up details resolved, communicate a specific date and time and place for your participants.
- Review your prompts one more time as a team.
- Confirm the shoot details.

During Phase III, student teams will:

- Shoot the individual interviews

- Based on how these went, re-visit your questions, prompts and organizational structure for the 20-minute dialogue. Does it all still make sense, or does it need to be adapted?
- Shoot the 20-minute dialogue.
- Edit the video, adding stills and graphics as desired.
- At this point, your team may find that you need to script some voice over or VO. This is a narrator's voice that might be used to set up the entire story to be told and may be needed to bridge gaps in your storytelling. Sometimes this can be done using text as well.
- Post-produce the video, adding music and sound effects as desired. Keep in mind that while this is essentially a documentary, the use of music to increase and decrease tension; to emphasize the dramatic turning points in the work you have recorded, can be very effective.

Media Support Resources

Meridian Stories provides two forms of support for the student teams.

1. Meridian Innovators and Artists – This is a series of three to four-minute videos featuring artists and innovative professionals who offer important advice, specifically for Meridian Stories, in the areas of creativity and production.
2. Media Resource Collection – These are short documents that offer student teams a few key tips in the areas of creativity, production, game design and digital citizenry.

Recommended review, as a team, for this Challenge include:

Meridian Innovators and Artists	Media Resource Collection
<p><i>On Interviewing Techniques</i> – Tom Pierce</p> <p><i>On Non-Fiction</i> – Margaret Heffernan</p> <p><i>On Documentary Films</i> – Sarah Childress</p> <p><i>On Sound Design</i> – Chris Watkinson</p>	<p>“Creating a Short Documentary”</p> <p>“Conducting an Interview”</p> <p>“Producing: Tips for the Shoot”</p> <p>“Royalty Free Music”</p>

Evaluation Rubric – *Democracy Awaken!*

CONTENT COMMAND			
Criteria	1 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 10
The Prompts	The questions and discussion guidance did not yield a substantive dialogue	The questions and discussion guidance yield a productive dialogue	The questions and discussion guidance yield a substantive dialogue
The Depth and Clarity of the Political Issues	The range and depth of topics covered is not expansive	The range and depth of topics covered is thorough	The range and depth of topics covered is expansive
The Resolution	The resolutions reached (or not reached) are not evident	The resolutions reached (or not reached) are evident	The resolutions reached (or not reached) are authentic and thought-provoking
STORYTELLING COMMAND			
Criteria	1 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 10
Individual Interviews	The lead-in interviews did not effectively set up the ensuing dialogue	The lead-in interviews did effectively set up the ensuing dialogue	The lead-in interviews did a great job of setting up the ensuing dialogue
Narrative Coherence	The presentation of your participants and their conversations does not reveal narrative cohesion or insight	The presentation of your participants and their conversations is logical	The presentation of your participants and their conversations reveals narrative cohesion and insight
Setting and Location – Tone and Visuals	The setting and location did not match the tone of the piece or give the audience a positive visual experience	The setting and location matched the tone of the piece and gave the audience a positive visual experience	The setting and location enhanced the tone of the piece and reflected a thoughtful sense of visual design

MEDIA COMMAND			
Criteria	1 - 3	4 - 7	8 - 10
Editing for Narrative Clarity	The piece feels patched together and the overall editing detracts from the narrative	The piece works, but there are occasional editing distractions	The piece is edited cleanly and effectively, resulting in a seamless video experience
Sound Effects and Music	The selective use of music (or decision to forego music) does not enhance the overall experience	The selective use of music (or decision to forego music) enhances the overall experience	The selective use of music (or decision to forego music) effectively places the viewer closer to the experience
21ST CENTURY SKILLS COMMAND			
Criteria	1-3	4-7	8-10
Collaborative Thinking	The group did not work together effectively and/or did not share the work equally	The group worked together effectively and had no major issues	The group demonstrated flexibility in making compromises and valued the contributions of each group member
Creativity and Innovation	The group did not make a solid effort to create anything new or innovative	The group was able to brainstorm new and inventive ideas, but was inconsistent in their evaluation and implementation of those ideas	The group brainstormed many inventive ideas and was able to evaluate, refine and implement them effectively
Initiative and Self-Direction	The group was unable to set attainable goals, work independently and manage their time effectively	The group required some additional help, but was able to complete the project on time with few problems	The group set attainable goals, worked independently and managed their time effectively, demonstrating a disciplined commitment to the project

Essential Questions

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1. What are some of the defining issues in politics today in America?
2. What are some of the key issues informing America's two political parties: Republicans and Democrats?
3. What is the nature of the caustic divide between these two political parties? How does belief in one set of ideas relate to the distortion, dismissal and denial of the other's set of beliefs? What is the nature of the evolving relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in reporting on these political divides?
4. What role can a mediated discussion play in bridging the divide? What are some areas where common ground can be found between Republicans and Democrats?
5. How has immersion in the creation of original content and the production of digital media – exercising one's creativity, critical thinking and digital literacy skills - deepened the overall educational experience?
6. How has working on a team – practicing one's collaborative skills - changed the learning experience?

Student Proficiencies

1. The student will have a clear understanding of some of the defining issues driving discussion, debate, politics and government in America today.
2. The student will have a clear understanding of the fundamental issues that define and divide the Democratic and Republican parties in current times.
3. The student will have an understanding of the various societal forces at play – formal media, government voices, social media – that facilitate the deepening of the rifts between the two political parties.
4. The student will have facilitated a discussion between rival parties with the sole purpose of finding common ground amongst them.
5. The student will utilize key 21st century skills, with a focus on creativity, critical thinking and digital literacy, in their process of translating their research into a story about politics in America today.
6. The student will have an increased awareness of the challenges and rewards of team collaboration. Collaboration – the ability to work with others - is considered one of the most important 21st century skills to develop in students as they prepare for life after secondary school.

Common Core Curricular Correlations

The *Democracy Awaken!* Challenge addresses a range of curricular objectives that have been articulated by two nationally recognized sources:

1. The **Common Core Curricular Standards – English Language Arts & History/Social Studies**; and
2. The **Themes of Social Studies**, as outlined by **National Council of Social Studies (NCSS)**.

Below please find the standards that are addressed, either wholly or in part.

Common Core Curricular Standards – English Language Arts & History/Social Studies

The Standard	8th	9th/10th	11th/12th
RI 4 READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT Craft and Structure	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text
RI 7 READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.	Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.	Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

RI 8 READING INFORMATIONAL TEXT Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.	Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.	N/A
SL 1 SPEAKING AND LISTENING Comprehension and Collaboration	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL 3 SPEAKING AND LISTENING Comprehension and Collaboration	Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.	Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.	Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.
W7 WRITING	Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry

Research to Build and Present Knowledge	additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.	when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.	when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
RH2 HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES Key Ideas and Detail	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
RH 4 HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES Craft and Structure	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text
RH8 HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.	Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.	Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.
RH9 HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES	Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.	Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.	Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas			discrepancies among sources.
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Goals – NCSS – The Themes of Social Studies

INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS

Institutions such as families and civic, educational, governmental, and religious organizations, exert a major influence on people's lives. This theme allows students to understand how institutions are formed, maintained, and changed, and to examine their influence. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science, and history.

POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE

One essential component of education for citizenship is an understanding of the historical development and contemporary forms of power, authority, and governance. Through this theme, learners become familiar with the purposes and functions of government, the scope and limits of authority, and the differences between democratic and non-democratic political systems. In schools, this theme typically appears in units and courses dealing with government, history, civics, law, politics, and other social sciences.

CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES

An understanding of civic ideals and practices is critical to full participation in society and is an essential component of education for citizenship. This theme enables students to learn about the rights and responsibilities of citizens of a democracy, and to appreciate the importance of active citizenship. In schools, the theme typically appears in units or courses dealing with civics, history, political science, cultural anthropology, and fields such as global studies, law-related education, and the humanities.