FLASH FICTION!
CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE
LESSON PLAN.

By 826VALENCIA, JANE BOYLE, and DAVID NG

Time: ~1.5 hours
Grade Level: Grade 6 and 7.
(Kids are set in groups of 4 or 5).

Materials: pencils, handouts (attached)
Equipment: Computer, projector.
Staff: 1 writer and (ideal) 1 illustrator.

This activity is modified (with permission) from an excellent 826Valencia fieldtrip[1] that focuses on crafting stories, where the initial story elements are set up democratically (and in real time) as a class. Here, we've taken this awesome activity and have embedded themes around biodiversity – to coincide with its partner microscopy science experiment[2] – as well as a "Choose Your Own Adventure" mechanic that seems to be especially engaging.

1. Brainstorming exercise: Create a new animal (10 minutes)

Note this section is optional. Introduce the idea that when we write, we can use our imaginations, but we still have to think about whether or not things make sense.

Create an imaginary animal as a class by soliciting the following types of questions:

Which biome does this animal live in?
What does this animal eat?
What adaptations does this animal have?
What does the animal look like?
What is it called?

If the kids are kind of quiet, you can get the children to break into smaller groups of about 4 or 5, give them 5 or so minutes and then solicit responses. Write some of the answers on the board.

2. Introduction (<5 minutes)

[1] See http://826valencia.org/our-programs/field-trips/ (accessed April 22nd, 2015)
[2] See http://www.bioteach.ubc.ca/portfolio/science-creative-literacy-symposia/ (accessed April 22nd, 2015)

For more information, please contact David Ng at 300-2185 East Mall, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, V6T1Z4 (db at mail dot ubc dot ca)

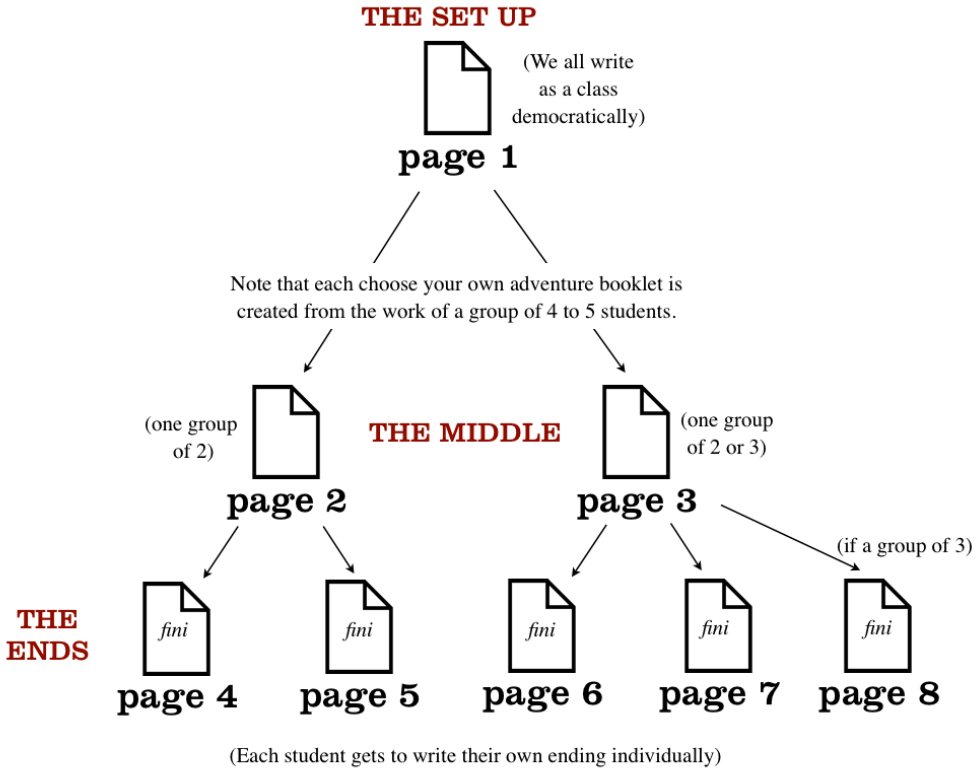
CC BY NC SA

Ask the class: Could we write a story where we just describe this animal? Explain that we couldn't because it would be boring. In a story, something has to change or go wrong and the characters have to decide how they are going to respond (or adapt) to the change.

Ask class if they know what a choose your own adventure story is and explain the concept or have a student explain – don't spend too much time on this as the concept will become clear once the exercise begins.

3. Beginning the story (<15 minutes)

Explain that we're going to write choose your own adventure story as a class. We will start the story together and then break into smaller groups. This explanation can be confusing so make sure to go slowly, use examples (or the diagram below), and ask questions to make sure the kids are following along. It is worth explaining the entire exercise at the beginning because the kids need to know where the activity is going to go in order to write effectively – if they don't understand the nature of the activity they may wrap up the story too quickly or fail to create interesting choices for the main character. Some groups will also work faster than others and if you don't explain the final phase of the activity at the beginning they may move on without knowing what they're doing.



It's good to begin with a topic or a prompt or else the students may take the exercise in completely random/ silly direction, ultimately making it difficult for them to write a coherent story. Possible prompts include:

cc BY NC SA

- Write a story from the point of view of one of the creatures we saw in the pond water
- Write a story about the imaginary animal we created as a class
- Write a story about an animal whose environment is changed by human intervention, i.e. a squirrel in a forest that is cut down

Explain what an editor does. Tell the class you're going to be the editor in this case and shape the story as necessary (this can include vetoing inappropriate ideas, simplifying the story, being the deciding vote the class is split, etc.)

Solicit the following from the class:

Who is the main character?
What is the setting?
What is the conflict?
Who is the villain or opposing force?
What is the character's greatest fear?
How does the main character respond?

Using the children's answers (in a give and take fashion, sometimes taking votes to democratically decide amongst multiple choices) attempt to type out an opening for the Choose Your Own Adventure Story. Try to do this in real time, as details are decided upon, and do this so that the text is projected for all to view in real time. If you're lucky enough to have an illustrator on board, it is also great fun to have an illustration being produced in real time as well.

Note: Sometimes, the kids will sometimes give problematic responses and it's necessary to rein them back in. This can be a good opportunity to explain some of the practical and legal aspects of the writing business. For example, if the kids try to make the animal into a Pokémon explain that writers can't use copyrighted material without permission.

When thinking about "how the character will respond," try to make sure to end on a cliffhanger where the main character is faced with two possible choices. i.e.

If [character] does this, go to page 2.
If [character] instead decides to do this, then go to page 3.

4. Writing in groups of two or three (20 minutes)

Explain to the class that each group of 4 or 5 will now split into two groups of two or three, whereby one group will continue the story on page 2 (the first choice) and the other group will continue the story on page 3 (the second choice). Tell them they need to make sure that their part of the story leads up to more choices, basically so that for the next round of writing, every student gets to do their own ending.

While the students write, walk around the room and ensure they're making progress (the illustrator and any other instructors present can also help with this). Some students may need help getting started or organizing their ideas. Sometimes the students get into disagreements and you'll need to help them negotiate a compromise. If students have finished writing very quickly, you can suggest getting them to produce another illustration or two. Keep an eye on the clock and tell the students when they need to finish up the second section of the story and move onto the ending.

5. Writing their endings individually (20 minutes)

For the final section of the activity, the students will work individually to write different endings. In the page 2 group, one student will write an ending on page 4 and one student will write an ending on page 5. In the page 3 group, one student will write an ending on page 6, one on page 7, and one on page 8 in cases where there are three students in this group.

If possible get the students who finish early to share their stories with each other so they don't bother the kids who are still working.

Give the class plenty of warning when it's time to clean up.

6. Clean up (5 minutes)

7. Sharing their stories! (20 minutes)

Always make sure there is time for students to read their work for the class. You can read for them if they're not comfortable with public speaking, but don't offer this option initially, or else you may find that all students will get you to read!

To begin with, you can read the first page aloud, and as dramatically as possible. Then let the class vote on which story to follow (i.e. "Do you want to go to page 2 or page 3?" "Do you want to go to page 4 or page 5?"), and then let the students read their sections as the story progresses.

Some students will be disappointed if they don't get to read their work. Remind them they can take the stories back to school and share them later.

8. Wrap up/ Questions (<5 minutes)

Thank the class for their hard work and creativity, and as a wrap up (if there's left over time), you can ask the class if they have any questions for the instructors about biology and/or writing.

2

IF _____ GO TO PAGE 4

IF _____ GO TO PAGE 5

3

IF _____ GO TO PAGE 6

IF _____ GO TO PAGE 7

IF _____ GO TO PAGE 8

3

IF _____ GO TO PAGE 6

IF _____ GO TO PAGE 7

4

THE END!

5

THE END!

6

THE END!

7

THE END!

8

THE END!