



Teachers, have your students create a story from their imagination that is inspired by a photo! Use this guide to help them create something fun and silly (or listen to a Story Pirates Podcast for inspiration). Then submit their story for a chance to be featured on the Story Pirates podcast. Visit storypirates.com/theweekjunior to enter.

Battling the Blank Page with a Picture

We all know the best way to get better at a skill is to practice and that is totally true with writing, too. But sometimes good ideas seem few and far between. Especially for new writers. Don't worry! We are here to help. One great way to battle a blank mind and a black page is by starting with a picture.

First, curate a collection of interesting pictures by browsing the Photos of the Week section in *The Week Junior* magazine. Or do a quick image search online using the phrase: "picture prompts for kids" and print several. Mount the pictures on cardstock and laminate them for multi-year use! Overtime, you can build a collection of these great images.

Once you have your pictures ready, let students walk around the room to view posted pictures or pass different photos around. Every picture is a new opportunity to spark a story. After a few minutes spent imagining, have students choose their favorite picture to explore further by walking students through the activities below.

List it Out!

Not all ideas are good ideas. Often, the first idea that comes to mind isn't the best one... it's just the first one. (Not to mention often cliché or overused!) Creating a list gives students options, which is much better than facing a blank page! Here are some prompts to help your students generate a variety of story ideas.

- Make a list of things you notice in the picture. Use your imagination and sensory details.
- Make a list of questions you have when you look at the picture. What do you want to know more about?
- Make a list of things you DO NOT want to happen in your story. Sometimes it's easier to start by eliminating the things we don't want to have happen.

Guided Imagery Exercise

Another great activity is to ask students to close their eyes and visualize themselves within the scene depicted in the photo. Prompt them to walk around and explore this place while you ask questions like:

- Who is in this place with you?
- What is the weather like?
- What is the time of day?
- Are you looking for something or someone?
- What could make this place even better?

Tell students to record their thoughts and then keep this list nearby to inspire them when they feel stuck. This activity will enhance their sensory details and emotional connection to the picture, making story ideas come more easily.



Time to Write!

With fresh ideas in mind, it's time to put them to paper (or on screen). Set a timer for fifteen minutes and write! Decrease student stress by encouraging them to simply move their ideas from their head onto the page. Tell them to just get as much down as they can without worrying about spelling and grammar, or getting hung up on tiny story details. Sometimes dimming the lights and turning on instrumental music helps calm nervous energy and lets students more easily slide into their story. Try this strategy three to four times.

Motivational Tip: Keep track of each session's word count and challenge students to top their total each time.

Time to Revise

Self Revision

Direct student to read what they have written to themselves, asking these questions:

- Do the events in my story follow a clear path?
- Do I have enough character details to make each person in my story feel real?
- Is it obvious where my story is taking place?
- Is there a solid beginning, middle and end to my story?

Try having your students read their story to a pet or stuffed animal! These creatures serve as a great (and non-judgemental) audience and will help students gain confidence as well as hear what needs to be fixed as they read it aloud.

If possible, allow students to set their story aside and come back another day with fresh eyes to make final revisions. Remind them that good writing means REWRITING. Even the best authors in the world revisit their work many, many times!

Peer Revision

It can take a lot of bravery to share your story with someone else, but it is worth it. When students are ready, ask them to share their stories with a peer. Invite students to offer one another GEMS and OPPORTUNITIES.

Gems = specific pieces of writing that are going well in the story

Opportunities = chances to make improvements

Encourage students to offer their feedback kindly in the form of a compliment sandwich, placing an opportunity between two gems, like this:

I love that your story takes place in outer space (GEM), but I was confused by who was piloting the rocket ship (OPPORTUNITY). The exciting ending to the story was my favorite part (GEM).



If there is a specific standard or skill you are working on, create a list of questions for students so they can read with those aspects of writing in mind when on the hunt for gems and opportunities. For example:

- Does the writer clearly showcase the time and location of their story's setting?
- Does the writer use correct capitalization for proper nouns?
- Does the writer use life-like dialogue?
- Does the writer use transition words to tell how time is passing?

Submit and Celebrate!

After your students write a story from their imagination inspired by the Photos of the Week section in *The Week Junior*, go to storypirates.com/theweekjunior to submit their work to have a chance to be featured on an upcoming podcast episode! If the Story Pirates read your story and adapt it, it could look like *The Alien That Discovered Banana Bread*.

Finally, celebrate by sharing your story with your family and friends. Students can read their story aloud at classroom celebration or add a printed copy to the classroom book collection and school library.

Taking it a Step Further

Once your students settle into a writing routine, you can challenge them to level up their storytelling powers with these two extension activities.

Multimedia Expansion

Using an online tool like PowerPoint or Canva, encourage students to bring their stories to life by adding sound effects or visuals. It's a fun way to mix art and storytelling and will definitely make sharing their stories more fun too!

Historical or Scientific Twist

Ask students to weave real facts into their tales. Use library or computer time to research some behind the scenes facts about their story topic, time period, or characters and then incorporate those details into the narrative. This is a great way to learn something new while being creative and teach students about the concept of genre!

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