



# Once Upon a Podcast: Storytelling



## STEAM CONNECTIONS

Technology: Creative Communication  
English Language Arts: Speaking and Listening  
Media Arts: Creating and Producing



## DURATION

60 Minute Lesson



## MATERIALS

- **Podcaster's Pad Pages** (1 per learner):
  - **Once Upon a Podcast: Storytelling**
  - **Your Story in Pictures...**
  - **Hook the Audience... What's Your Opening Line?**
- **Devices with web browsers and built-in microphones** (1 per learner)
- **Headphones** (1 per learner)
- **Pencils** (1 per learner)
- **Computer with projector, speakers and access to the internet**
- **Podcasting Daily Slides** (optional but recommended)

## SCHEDULE

- Introduction to Storytelling (5 min)
- The Art of Story Slamming (15 min)
- Create Your Own Story to Share (35 min)
- Wrap-Up and Cleanup (5 min)

## OBJECTIVE

Learn storytelling tips to hook an audience and record a podcast that catches listeners' attention.

## ALIGNED STANDARDS

### Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.4/CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.4/CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.4: Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience in an organized manner, using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.5/CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.5/CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.5: Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

### International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards

1.6: Creative Communicator: Students communicate clearly and express themselves creatively for a variety of purposes using the platforms, tools, styles, formats and digital media appropriate to their goals.

### National Core Arts Standards (NCAS)

Creating Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Producing Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

## 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS

- Initiative and Self-Direction
- Creativity and Innovation

## HABITS OF MIND

- Taking Responsible Risks
- Finding Humor
- Thinking and Communicating with Clarity and Precision

## KEY TERMS

**Unscripted:** When podcast hosts do not read from a script and have more of a conversation, like in a chatcast.

**Story Slamming:** Telling a loosely planned story without a script to a live audience.

**Hook:** Usually the first sentence in a story (written or spoken) that will grab the reader or listener's attention.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Behind every good story or podcast, there is a storyteller — an original writer. Before anyone else comes into the picture, someone has an idea worth sharing. Podcasts can be written by one person or an entire team of people who develop a storyline together. Writers, producers and editors often work as a team to create stories that people will relate to, learn something from or be entertained by.

Once an idea for a podcast is established, the team plans out the podcast's structure. The structure is broken into parts called *segments* that take the listener on a journey from start to finish. A good storyline has a beginning, middle and an end — podcasts follow the same rules.

There are many ways to write a podcast. Some podcasts follow a script that's read word-for-word, while others, like chatcasts, only follow an outline that reminds the storyteller to cover specific information. It takes practice to learn how to tell a story that makes people want to listen. One organization out of New York offers volunteers an interesting opportunity to develop their storytelling talents.

*The Moth* is an organization that started in New York City with live story slamming events and storytelling workshops. Now it's also a podcast and radio show that shares these stories with the world. During a Moth show, storytellers, or "slammers," take part in "story slams." These open mic events invite everyday people to tell stories about their lives. Volunteers put their names in a hat, and if chosen, go on stage to tell a true story to an audience. They have about 5 minutes and can't use notes.

"Featured slammers" submit their story ideas ahead of time so they can have the chance to attend workshops before the show. As the stars of the story slam, they get extra practice sharing their stories with coaches who give them advice about how to improve. Slammers learn to use opening lines, or "hooks," to get the audience's attention, how to give more details so people can better imagine a scene and more.

**Note:** Some of the Moth stories have explicit language, so try to stick to the provided samples to avoid any embarrassing situations.

## LESSON OVERVIEW

Today's lesson is loosely based on the writer or *lead producer* on the podcast team. Overall, we're looking at the podcast's storyteller, whoever that may be. Emphasize that podcast teams can consist of one person that performs many different functions or several people that share the workload. As a basic building block to a podcast, learners identify compelling stories to share with audiences. Another huge takeaway is to learn to grab the listener's attention with the all-important hook. With several practices throughout the first half of *Podcasting*, formulating a story will become easier for campers when they start creating their own episode.

## TIPS FOR INSTRUCTORS

When we teach writing, we use mentor texts to show our students models of great writing. So when we want our learners to record a podcast, we need to introduce them to the many amazing types of podcasts available. Feel free to swap any of the storytelling examples here with some of your personal favorites or by telling a story of your own in the no-notes, no-reading, story slam style. You want your students to see how people can love (and become obsessed with) podcasts as much as TV shows!

## DAILY PREP

- Test your technology ahead of time, making sure the volume works.
- *Important:* Make sure you've set up your "classroom" or groups in Soundtrap so students can login and start recording their first story. Check out this tutorial from Soundtrap about how to set up your classroom and import users:

<https://youtu.be/m9CAEQ8mxgs>

For more detailed Soundtrap onboarding information according to LMS type, check here:

<https://edu.soundtrap.com/teacher-resources/onboarding/>

- Find quiet places where multiple learners can record at the same time.
- Check and open all video links ahead of time so all you have to do is hit play. If that's not an option, watch the videos beforehand so you can discuss them with your learners.

 The Moth: The Best Storytellers in the World - THNKR  
[00:00-05:10]

<https://youtu.be/23frsMMKud8>

 The Moth Story Map - Dante Jackson - Moth EDU  
[00:00-06:14]

<https://youtu.be/ngjGwh4EfWY>

 How to Start Recording with Soundtrap for Education - Soundtrap for Education

<https://youtu.be/upRvlbZhw5g>

 How to Record Audio For Your Podcast - Podcasting 101 Ep 3 - PRX

[00:00-02:33]

<https://youtu.be/6UckmHoAa2E>

 How to Fix Common Audio Issues in Soundtrap - Soundtrap for Education

[00:00-5:18]

<https://youtu.be/69jFzDTWNeg>

## STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS FOR INSTRUCTORS



### Whole Group

#### INTRODUCTION TO STORYTELLING

Welcome everyone back to Podcasting and get them pumped to become storytellers as a podcast team. Today, learners practice the art of storytelling and recording themselves.

On Day 1, we listened to clips of different podcasts styles or *formats* — but many podcasts can be broken down into two categories: *nonfiction* and *fiction*. Whether they're real or made up, podcasts are really just a collection of stories.

Ask learners to start thinking about today's guiding questions about storytelling:

#### Guiding Questions:

- What makes a story "compelling" or makes us want to listen?
- How do you get an audience's attention?

Use information from the Background Info or Daily Slides to show learners how important storytelling is to podcasting.



### Group Discussion

#### THE ART OF STORY SLAMMING

Introduce learners to the excitement of live "story slamming" as a way to improve their storytelling abilities in their own podcasts. Use information from the Background Info, Daily Slides and video below to introduce *The Moth*.

Let's get some insider storytelling tips from workshop coaches and slammers at the The Moth:

 The Moth: The Best Storytellers in the World - THNKR  
[00:00-05:10]  
<https://youtu.be/23frsMMKud8>

Ask learners what tips they picked up in the video from the story slammers and coaches.

- What surprised you about how the featured storytellers prepare for the event?
- What tips are useful for you in telling a story?

To understand one of the most important parts of telling a good story, talk to learners about the focus of their listening and practice today: the use of a hook to catch a listener's attention.

Let's take a look at an effective storytelling technique that *The Moth* story slammers use. A "hook" is an opener. It's usually the first few sentences in a story that will grab the listener's attention. A good hook doesn't need to stop the world but it should leave us wondering what happens next or help us identify with the person telling it. Check out some examples of what hooks can be:

*Hook the Audience...What's Your Opening Line?*

	<b>CREATE A MYSTERY:</b> "Your principal called me today," my mom told me when I walked through the front door. This is how it all began...
	<b>PAINT A PICTURE:</b> Imagine if you were suddenly at a new school in a new town and didn't know anyone...
	<b>ASK A QUESTION:</b> What if Instagram, TikTok and Facebook didn't exist...or even the internet? How would your life be different?
	<b>USE A SURPRISING FACT:</b> Did you know that you can't smell anything while you sleep? I wish I would have known this...

Let's see if we can pick out the hook in this podcast story from Dante, a high school student looking back on a big turning point in his life at the 8th grade prom.

Identify the hook you hear in the following clip with your students so they can put what they're learning into practice. This story from a young slammer that participated in *The Moth's* workshops for high school students serves as a main example for learners to dissect. The video guides learners through "The Moth Story Map" or the different stages of the story arc.

 The Moth Story Map - Dante Jackson - Moth EDU  
[00:00-01:39]  
<https://youtu.be/ngjGwh4EfWY>

Can you pick out the hook in Dante's story? ("Back in middle school, I wasn't really the type of kid to let myself have any fun. I was afraid that if I let myself have fun, I'd end up being judged.")

What type of hook could this be from our list of examples? (Painting a picture)

Dante's hook could be considered "painting a picture." Painting a picture helps people imagine when they've felt the same way or been in a similar situation. This helps listeners to have empathy or create an emotional connection to the storyteller. What situations have made you feel nervous or judged?

Let's continue to build that bond with Dante. As The Moth Story Map tells us, Dante has just revealed the way he once felt in the past or the "World As It Was" stage. We know he is afraid of putting himself out there at the prom because he might be judged. He's got our attention and we identify with him.

Let's hear what happens next. This is the second stage of the story called "And Then One Day", or when a situation changes the person's attitude.

Continue playing the video from 01:39-03:55. In this section, listen for what sets the story in motion.

What sets the story in motion? What changes for Dante? (Dante finally decides to go to the prom to see what it's about after friends and family have constantly bugged him. He starts to look forward to the dance a bit when he sees his friend Shannon in a different light.)

What do you think will happen next for Dante? Will he stay in the corner or dance? Will he get embarrassed? What would you do?

The next part of the story is called "Raising the Stakes." As listeners, we're all invested in what will happen to the storyteller. The big moment has arrived and the pressure is on. Will the person experience a change?

Play the video from 03:55-05:37. Here, notice a change in Dante's attitude about dancing during his "moment of change."

When the pressure is on, Dante decides to go through his "Moment of Change." How does Dante's attitude change at the dance? (He decides to leave the corner to dance. He starts with a simple two-step that turns into a shuffle and then a criss-cross. He realizes that he's having fun dancing!)

In your story, you can show a really big change that happened in your life or a small one that still changed the way you think and act in a big way. Let's see how Dante's story ends and what he's learned in the last stage of the story called "The World As It Is Now."

Watch the rest of the video from 05:37-06:14. In this last clip, listen for "the takeaway" in Dante's story.

What is different about Dante now after the dance? (He learned to put himself out there and have fun. In the past he felt like he was trapped in a dark room, but learned to unlock the door and let himself out.)

How do you think Dante will face future situations that make him uncomfortable? Can you think of a time you've changed your attitude or overcome your fears and actually had fun? Keep that in mind as we create our own story slams. We'll follow a similar formula.



### Whole Group

## CREATE YOUR OWN STORY TO SHARE

After listening to Dante's story from The Moth, it's time for learners to prepare to tell their own stories. Guide them through the what to do and what not to do sections from The Moth website: <https://themoth.org/share-your-story/storytelling-tips-tricks>

Let's check out some last bits of advice from *The Moth* for choosing an interesting story. Now we're turning the stage over to you to tell your own story.

**What we do want:** Hook us in. Make us care about you. Paint the scene. Clearly state your fears, desires, the dilemma. Make us invested in the outcome. Introduce the conflict. Make us worried for you. Impress us with observation that are uniquely yours. Rope us into the moment when it all goes down. Conclude as different person: Triumphant? Defeated? Befuddled? Enlightened? ...**CHANGED**



### Podcaster's Pad

Tell learners they can use pictures instead of words as a visual outline of their personal stories in their Podcaster's Pad. This is helpful to English Learners as well as anyone who might have a hard time not reading their story. A picture is a good visual reminder, but won't make the person sound as if they are reading.

In your Podcaster's Pad Day 2, there's a place to take notes to plan the story you want to tell. Make an outline for yourself with pictures to remember what you want to say.

Many times in podcasting or radio, the person telling the story is asked to "paint a picture" for listeners. Use your drawings to help you paint a picture with words for your story. Close your eyes and go over your story in your imagination to get started. It helps!

Your Story in Pictures...	
Tell your story in 3 easy answers with	3 pictures that represent the information.
<b>The World As It Was:</b> Set the scene for the story. Make listeners care about you.	Draw a picture to represent this:
NOTES:	
<b>And Then One Day The Status Was Raised:</b> What? How did it build up to that? How did you react? Did you change?	Draw a picture to represent this:
NOTES:	
<b>The World As It Is Now:</b> What did it all mean to you in the end? What have you learned?	Draw a picture to represent this:
NOTES:	



If campers need help getting started, talk over the story guidelines and sample prompts in the Podcaster's Pad.

**The Story Slam**

**Guidelines for Your Story:**

- 2-3 minute true story.
- Use a "hook" to get the audience's attention.
- Use your "visual outline" or drawings to prompt what you want to say. No script reading, please.
- Why is this story important to you? If you don't know, choose a different story.
- Make sure the last sentence is clear so the audience knows you are finished.

**Story Ideas to Get You Started:**

- Tell a story about yourself. How have you changed or learned something important?
- Tell about a favorite friend or family member and something you did together. Why was it important or memorable?

Give your learners time to polish their hooks to make their listeners care and want to find out more. Encourage them to use the examples in their Podcaster's Pad to guide them.

Imagine if...      What if...?      Picture this...      Did you know that...?

Write your hook here:

.....

.....

.....

Practice your story a few times and then record. You're a slammer now... maybe even a writer of sorts. 😊

Have your learners practice their stories out loud with this advice from the storytelling gurus at *The Moth*:

*Know your story well enough so you can have fun! Watching you panic to think of the next memorized line is harrowing for the audience. Make an outline, memorize your main points and play with the details by practicing out loud. Enjoy yourself!*

After practicing, we'll record ourselves telling our stories. When everyone's finished recording, you'll share your recording with the rest of your group.



## Whole Group

Before learners use Soundtrap to record themselves, watch the tutorial video together. Then find a good spot to record in and practice recording in Soundtrap. Provide one device per student and, for today, use the device's internal microphone. Have students do a brief test recording to make sure their audio is clear. If not, refer them to the troubleshooting audio tutorial.

- ▶ How to Start Recording with Soundtrap for Education - Soundtrap For Education [00:00-2:21]  
<https://youtu.be/upRvIbZhw5g>

Note: This clip shows how to select the proper microphone, name tracks, check audio levels, record your voice, and save the recording in Soundtrap. Random files can get confusing so make sure you name each track independently.

- ▶ How to Record Audio For Your Podcast | Podcasting 101 Ep. 3 - PRX [00:00-02:33]  
<https://youtu.be/6UckmHoAa2E>

Note: If time allows, this clip is really helpful. It covers an intro to the USB microphone and cardioid mic pattern, recording in a quiet place without unwanted noises and how to use soft surfaces like couches or the isolation shield to reduce background noise.

- ▶ How to Fix Common Audio Issues in Soundtrap - Soundtrap for Education [00:00-5:18]  
<https://youtu.be/69jFzDTWNeg>

Note: Refer learners to this video if their test recording sounds too loud and causes "clipping." The cleaner and clearer learners can record something, the less they will have to do in the editing stage.



## Individual

The biggest challenge will be finding enough quiet spaces where multiple campers can record at once. Try finding smaller rooms, closets or spread learners out along a hallway. Remember what Sean said: record at least 30 seconds of room tone. To do this, stay in the same spot you were in when you recorded, hit record and remain silent for 30 seconds. Editing will be able to take out isolated sounds, but if the sound is over a speaking voice, there isn't much you can do to fix it. Wearing headphones can help you keep track of your tone and inflection.

Once campers have found a quiet place, they can record their stories in Soundtrap. If you're running short on time or asking campers to take turns, campers can start by recording just their hooks.

When everyone has had a chance to practice recording in Soundtrap, ask campers to share their recordings with their groups. If you have enough time, campers can volunteer to tell their story live as "story slammers" for the whole group!



## Whole Group

### WRAP-UP AND CLEANUP

Make sure all recordings are saved. Close out computers and put Podcaster's Pads and any other materials away.

### CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

- What makes a story compelling? (*A compelling story should be relatable and include enough detail to paint a clear picture for your audience.*)
- How do you get an audience's attention? (*Offer them a great hook!*)

Other questions to consider:

- After sharing your story, what did you do well?
- After hearing how other people reacted to your story, are there any parts that you'd change to make them even more funny, dramatic, etc.?
- How did your voice affect the audience's reactions to your story?

### EXTENSIONS

#### Hook, Line and Sinker

Play *The Moth* storytelling podcast samples to get more practice identifying story hooks or have the group choose 1-2 of the following clips to listen to together in their entirety. These stories are longer, but listening to the entire story is worth it in order to get the full impact the storyteller wants to convey.

Joy - The Moth

[00:00-5:10]

[https://player.themoth.org/#/?actionType=ADD\\_AND\\_PLAY&storyId=11490](https://player.themoth.org/#/?actionType=ADD_AND_PLAY&storyId=11490)

A man talks about how he learned the joy of sharing.

Hook: "When I walk down the street, people usually ask me for change (money)...But it wasn't always this way..."

Cub to King - The Moth

[00:00-5:53]

[https://player.themoth.org/#/?actionType=ADD\\_AND\\_PLAY&storyId=9168](https://player.themoth.org/#/?actionType=ADD_AND_PLAY&storyId=9168)

A group leader on a teen wilderness program tells the story of a kid who cried and complained the entire excursion. Then one morning he surprises everyone.

Hook: "Before I had to dress like this, I used to take kids on backpacking trips in the backcountry near Jackson Hole."

The Bad Haircut - The Moth

[00:00-5:06]

[https://player.themoth.org/#/?actionType=ADD\\_AND\\_PLAY&storyId=388](https://player.themoth.org/#/?actionType=ADD_AND_PLAY&storyId=388)

A young man tells the story of the time he let his cousin cut his hair.

Hook: "You know how when you're a kid, you don't really care how your hair looks? Or maybe that's just me."

Pastels and Crayons - The Moth

[00:00-6:47]

[https://player.themoth.org/#/?actionType=ADD\\_AND\\_PLAY&storyId=16088](https://player.themoth.org/#/?actionType=ADD_AND_PLAY&storyId=16088)

A girl whose mom is from Afghanistan and dad is from Pakistan draws a self portrait when she is young and is told by a teacher that she used the wrong color.

Hook: "I was six years old in the first grade and sitting at a table with my three best friends. We were all really similar."

### Story Slamming

Check out more videos of story slammers performing live. What tips can campers get from watching the slammers perform? See this list of classroom-friendly stories: <https://themoth.org/education/stories>.

Or check out YouTube videos of high school slammers that have participated in Moth-sponsored workshops.

### Attend an Event

Attend a storytelling event in your community. The Moth hosts storytelling events across the country. Check out their calendar to see when they'll be in your area: <https://themoth.org/events>.

Many cities have started their own storytelling nights like Boise, Idaho's Story Story Night that's also available as a podcast. <https://storystorynight.org/podcast/>

What's happening in your area?

### Become a Workshop Coach

Host your own story slam in the style of The Moth for campers to practice telling their stories out loud for their peers. Or lead storytelling workshops in groups where learners can practice telling their stories to a smaller audience. Coach how to offer feedback like editing out portions of the story, adding detail or using your voice to emphasize important points of the story. Then take the time to rotate learners through the USB microphone set-ups to more professionally record their story. See additional resources for leading a workshop:

- Read over basic guidelines and advice from *The Moth* about how to lead your own story slam and coach learners how to offer feedback: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/themoth-images-development/The-Moth-Tips-for-Storytelling-Safety-and-Best-Practice.pdf>
- Use the *The Moth's* monthly storytelling activity on their blog to lead listening, writing and storytelling activities based on their recordings: <https://themoth.org/categories/storytelling-school>
- Sign up with *The Moth* as an educator to get access to their storytelling curriculum: <https://airtable.com/shriulBhzp56k6FTA>
- Apply to participate in a virtual workshop series for teachers led by *The Moth*: <https://themoth.org/education/teachers/teacherinstitute>

### Fable, Folklore and Fairy Tales

For campers who struggle with finding a story of their own, or for low-stakes recording practice, suggest they record a famous folktale or fable they know. Use silly voices and lots of expression while telling the famous story. Give each character a different voice. Learners whose families are from different countries can tell their own versions of the folktales: <https://library.ivytech.edu/c.php?g=231279&p=1534896>

### Adding Voice

Listen to clips of *Mars Patel, 6 Minutes* or *Eleanor Amplified* to familiarize learners with fictional storytelling podcasts. Have campers review their recorded stories and decide where they could add the voice of the other people or characters. This story could be expanded into an audio drama.

CURRICULUM SAMPLE



# Once Upon a Podcast: Storytelling

## Podcaster Talk:



**UNSCRIPTED:** Not reading from a script.

An unscripted podcast or chatcast may have hosts and guests that have a conversation. Hosts may plan their questions ahead of time or have a general outline for what they want to talk about, but let conversation flow.



**STORY SLAMMING:** Telling a loosely planned story without a script to a live audience.



**HOOK:** Usually the first sentence in a story (written or spoken) that will grab the reader's or listener's attention.

## Questions to Consider:

What makes a story "compelling" or makes us want to listen?

How do you get an audience's attention?

## The Story Slam

### Guidelines for Your Story:

- 2-3 minute true story.
- Use a "hook" to get the audience's attention.
- Use your "visual outline" or drawings to prompt what you want to say. No script reading, please.
- Why is this story important to you? If you don't know, choose a different story.
- Make sure the last sentence is clear so the audience knows you are finished.

### Story Ideas to Get You Started:

- Tell a story about yourself. How have you changed or learned something important?
- Tell about a favorite friend or family member and something you did together. Why was it important or memorable?

## Your Story in Pictures...

Tell your story in 3 easy answers with 3 pictures that represent the information.

*The World As It Was: Set the scene for the story. Make listeners care about you.*

Draw a picture to represent this:

NOTES:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

*And Then One Day The Stakes Were Raised: Whoa! How did it build up to that? How did you react? Did you change?*

Draw a picture to represent this:

NOTES:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

*The World As It Is Now: What did it all mean to you in the end? What have you learned?*

Draw a picture to represent this:

NOTES:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## Hook the Audience...What's Your Opening Line?



**CREATE A MYSTERY:** "Your principal called me today," my mom told me when I walked through the front door. This is how it all began...



**PAINT A PICTURE:** Imagine if you were suddenly at a new school in a new town and didn't know anyone...



**ASK A QUESTION:** What if Instagram, TikTok and Facebook didn't exist...or even the internet? How would your life be different?



**USE A SURPRISING FACT:** Did you know that you can't smell anything while you sleep? I wish I would have known this...

Imagine if...

What if...?

Picture this...

Did you know that...?

Write your hook here:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Practice your story a few times and then record. You're a slammer now... maybe even a writer of sorts. 😊