

An Interactive Online Project for Language Practice: Creating a Narrative Flipbook

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LEVEL: Upper beginner and above

TIME REQUIRED: Variable; class time, as needed, over two weeks

GOALS: To improve students' English language proficiency as they express and listen to ideas, read samples, and create a narrative; to work collaboratively to create a flipbook version of an original story

MATERIALS: None, but access to the Internet and to platforms for communicating online is necessary.

BACKGROUND:

The new norm of incorporating digital tools in lessons and a previous trend toward encouraging students to be involved in producing learning materials have merged. Research on e-modules has shown positive outcomes; Situmorang, Yustina, and Syafii (2020) demonstrated that incorporating the flipbook is a valid approach for increasing motivation and learning outcomes, while Moiseenko (2015) showed that students can be responsible for producing materials and described types of materials students can develop.

One way for students to be autonomous learners and producers of reading materials is

by creating a simple narrative and converting it to a flipbook. A flipbook offers a page-turning (book-like) user experience and can be read in a linear fashion—from start to finish. This article suggests guidelines to engage students completely online to create a narrative, complete with pictures, and convert it to a flipbook.

AIMS OF THE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH:

The flipbook project can be a short-term project and incorporated into the syllabus of a communicative, creative, or social-media course. Alternatively, it can be an extension activity to an existing lesson.

Flipbook creation, design, and production combine various skills, with the potential to improve students' English language proficiency as they share ideas, read samples, and create a narrative.

The project also incorporates higher-order thinking skills. To create a storyline, students brainstorm, plan ideas, and then review suggestions. They make decisions while listening to their peers, and everyone can contribute to the discussion. Giving ideas and seeing the drawings that they produce can create a vibrant, fun online atmosphere where students reflect and comment. Indirectly, other cognitive skills like problem solving,

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project management, and giving presentations are infused in the project. This project enhances a student-centered pedagogical approach facilitated by a teacher.

PREPARATION:

1. *Become familiar with flipbooks.* View samples of simple flipbooks on the Internet and identify at least one that is suitable for your students to view as a sample. Take note of the content, language, theme, number of pages, drawings, layout, title page, and colors. All these aspects will be part of the project when students begin production of their own flipbook.
2. *Understand the overall project.* The flipbook project is not done individually, but it is a class project where all students participate actively. This collaborative effort involves negotiation and discussion as a class or in smaller groups. All students are encouraged to make comments and give views throughout the process. There is no specific age group that is best for this project, as storytelling is emerging as a part of learning pedagogy and not confined to young learners. The only boundaries are one's imagination and creativity.

Students have different English proficiency levels, drawing abilities, and technology competence, and the project accommodates all these skills and talents. Students can volunteer to contribute in different ways; the division of the tasks depends largely on students' interests and can vary from class to class.

3. *Plan student roles.* If the class is small, fewer than 12 students, there might be a single graphic illustrator, a

few storywriters, and design-idea contributors. There will also be students in charge of converting the work to the flipbook format and later promoting it. If the class is bigger, small groups can be formed. Each group can be responsible for several pages of the book, with group members dividing the necessary tasks to complete those pages. Another student might be responsible for compiling all the pages into a single PDF file.

4. *Prepare for the technical aspects.* Besides the language aspects, the technical part of producing the flipbook is essential. There are basically three steps:

- a. Write and draw (or insert images) on a word-processing, drawing, or slide-based document.
- b. Save the document as a PDF file.
- c. Convert the PDF file to a flipbook file.

PDF-to-flipbook converter programs can be found with an Internet search (try, for example, “free PDF-to-flipbook converters”) and are generally easy to use. Note that most programs also have advanced options that require payment and that free versions limit the number of pages you can convert; before starting the flipbook project, you should check a few free converter programs and choose one that will fit your needs. In most cases, when the flipbook is produced, a link will be provided to be shared with others.

5. *Prepare a timeline.* A timeline can ensure students stay focused and remain responsible for the project. The excitement and novelty of

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participating in the project should be sustained, and the project should be completed within 14 days. The flipbook should be modest and not too ambitious in terms of content, language, or length. Preparing ten to 14 pages of a flipbook with only online participation can be a challenge for the teacher and students.

PROCEDURE:

1. *Arrange online lessons.* With all class members, schedule a time to meet online (through a platform that is available to you and that you feel comfortable using) and create a group channel (e.g., on Signal, Telegram, or WhatsApp; others might also work well in your context) where students will be able to carry out discussions and can post drawings and storyline ideas to elicit feedback. They do not need to purchase any software.
2. *Go over the project plan.* Inform students of the objectives and outline of the project so that they are aware of the purpose and the stages. For example, the overall goal may be for the class to collectively produce a single narrative flipbook, where past tense verbs are incorporated. A goal might also be to create a narrative on friendship that incorporates elements of fiction writing (e.g., a plot with a beginning, rising action, climax, and ending). Identify the necessary roles (suggested roles are graphic illustrator, storywriter, page compiler, online networking specialist, and design-idea contributor) and allow students to volunteer.
3. *Introduce the narrative flipbook.* Students may not be familiar with a narrative flipbook, and looking at a sample can

arouse their interest. The Internet has samples, and you can view them ahead of time and pick an appropriate example.

Students should view the flipbook at least twice. For the first screening, flip through the pages slowly so students can comprehend the narrative and begin to understand the whole task. For the second screening, the following can be listed in the chat column of the online platform: characters, theme, colors, drawings, and number of pages; students can identify these and type or give their responses. You can pause at various pages to highlight a particular aspect, such as the plot, language use, or design, and to ask questions.

Questions to ask include, “Who is the main character, and how does he/she feel?”; “What is this character worried about?”; “Can you describe what you see on page 3?”; “What did you enjoy about the flipbook?”; and “What makes this flipbook attractive?”

An alternative is to forward the link of the flipbook earlier to the class chat group, along with some questions, and students can post their replies in the group channel.

4. *Brainstorm for the theme.* Elicit responses from students on stories to motivate them and make them comfortable with the task. Questions such as, “What kind of stories do you like to read?” and “Can you share a story you recently read?” may help them focus. Next, begin the brainstorming discussion by asking what type of story they would like to create. The story could be about an unexpected incident, a wonderful experience, a problem and solution, or a description

of an interesting event. It could also be about how students have faced the COVID pandemic. Responses can be written in the chat column online. Encourage students to share views and give comments. You might want to copy and paste the responses from the online platform to the group channel, to share them with class members who could not join the online class or for future reference.

5. *Engage with the storyline.* After students choose the type of story and/or theme, the next stage is creating the storyline. Discussion is at the whole-class level, as everyone should know how the story is developing and continue to give responses. For an initial attempt, decide the number of pages (e.g., ten or 12) and identify the main character, supporting characters, the issue to be resolved, the plot, and the outcome. The class must also discuss the sequence of events for the story. *Each of these scenes is depicted on a separate page.* As students discuss and ideas become more organized, list briefly (in the chat column) what happens on each page.

For example, if the story is about Maria, a student who is coping with the pandemic, the sequence might be as shown in Figure 1.

6. *Write and draw collaboratively.* With the storyline agreed on, students collaborate and work as a team to write and draw. Delegate parts of the script and drawings to students. Writing can be done online as students discuss and decide on word choices. Meanwhile, the drawing can be carried out on paper; then students snap a picture and insert it in a Word or PowerPoint document. Some students may prefer to use online platforms to draw. The choices depend on the students and their convenience.

The division of tasks can be either of the following:

- whole class (multiple students can team up to share the roles suggested in Step 2)
- small groups (group 1 creates the first few pages; group 2 creates the

Page	Event
1	A cheerful Maria is playing.
2	Maria hears about a lockdown.
3	Maria is happy to be home.
4	Maria misses her friends.
5	Maria shares her feelings with her friends online.
6	Friends discuss the issue.
7	Friends share a solution.
8	Maria follows their advice.
9	Maria is happy again.
10	Maria thanks her friends.

Figure 1. Possible sequence of events in a story

There can be numerous “Aha!” moments when students see that the drawings reflect the scenes of the storyline and when the writing and drawing really fit together.

next few; and so on); each group comprises one or more graphic illustrators, storywriters, and other roles (see Step 2).

This stage may take a few lessons as students draw and write. Encourage students to always share their work in the chat group or other online platform so that everyone is involved. Discussion will focus on each page, which usually has a few sentences and a picture or pictures showing the scene and event. Encouragement and praise can build the morale of the team and create a conducive learning experience. Note that if everyone is reluctant to draw (it is a *language* class, after all), the Internet provides copyright-free pictures for students to copy and paste. Using emoticons is another option.

7. *Compile and review.* With all students, look at the pieces (pages) of the puzzle (the story) as a complete book. Have one or two students compile the pages and arrange them in order. Display these pages online during the next lesson; students check the flow of the storyline and the pictures together. Peers can suggest revision, including corrections to the language. This is a collective effort, and everyone participates. There can be numerous “Aha!” moments when students see that the drawings reflect the scenes of the storyline and when the writing and drawing really fit together.
8. *Create a title and a cover.* The flipbook needs a title and should have a cover. Students can list suggested titles, and these can be posted in the online class. Students vote and make a decision. They

brainstorm ideas for the drawing on the front page, too, and can work together to create it.

You can also have an acknowledgements page. On this page, all students’ names and perhaps their task descriptions are listed to show everyone’s contributions and commitment.

9. *Convert the work to a flipbook.* The final step is to save all the pages and convert them to a flipbook (using Flipsnack or another converter). When the story is converted, the URL will be displayed, and students can copy it. The link can be shared and appreciated by others within the school or posted online to be shared with others, with the approval of all members.

For converter options, you might try Common Sense Media at commonsensemedia.org; click on “for teachers” under “Apps & Games” and then search for “e-book converter” or “flipbook converter” or similar terms for descriptions of e-book creation sites. (Note that *flipbook* and *e-book* are sometimes used interchangeably.)

10. *Evaluate the project.* The flipbook project provides an opportunity for students to apply their language skills and develop an innovative story. You can decide what elements to emphasize when evaluating, but it is important to let students know at the beginning of the project what the main criteria will be. The project can be assessed according to various criteria, such as the following:

- Content is relevant to the objectives (and syllabus).

Have fun and see where the students' imaginations take them!

- The book shows evidence of planning.
- Ideas and events are organized logically.
- The story uses appropriate vocabulary effectively.
- The project reflects creativity.
- Students demonstrated teamwork and management skills.
- Students participated willingly and responsibly, and they shared ideas productively.

EXTENSIONS

The global challenges of the pandemic have required both teachers and students to be more resourceful and innovative. The online flipbook project integrates various skills and can incorporate technological tools and social-learning platforms. When the flipbook is completed, ask students to reflect on the

project. What did they like about it? What skills did they use—and what new skills did they learn? Have students brainstorm ways they can continue to develop these skills. They might wind up creating another flipbook or collaborating on a new kind of project. Have fun and see where the students' imaginations take them!

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