

# Generating Story Problems Strategy

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### Timing

10 minutes

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### Space

Kids should be able to see the sample puppet play and they should not have their puppets in their hands for this activity.

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### Additional supports

Visit

[TeachwithArtsConnection.org](http://TeachwithArtsConnection.org)



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Introduce this strategy to help kids invent stories with conflict.

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## 1. Generate & Chart ideas for story problems

Write them on a large sheet of paper or document to project on a smart board. You will need to save and post it in future puppet play sessions. Consider drawing some quick pictures next to the words for visual and multi-language learners.

### What are some problems that ...

- the puppet characters you made might have?
- might happen in the setting that you made?
- might happen when characters are alone?
- might happen between characters?
- happen in real life?
- from your favorite books, movies, shows & video games? (see tips)
- from a book or unit your class is studying?
- That you can add to your puppet story from your own imagination?

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## 2. Model choosing a problem

With a partner (adult or a child), model choosing a problem from the list to play together. It's helpful if you and your partner can have different ideas about what to play, so that you can model compromising by agreeing to play one idea first and the other one next time.

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## 3. Model playing the problem

Model *briefly* playing the problem with your partner using your puppets and puppet backdrops.

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## 4. Challenge the kids to try it!

Post their chart of ideas each time they play and invite them to decide with their partner(s) on a story problem to play. Offer to add more problems to the chart if they come up with more ideas.

# Generating Story Problems Strategy

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## Tip-

When students offer very specific problems from books, movies, shows and video games, model the process using something that you respond to in a work of art to inspire your own ideas, rather than just copying it.

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### *Example:*

*Student: A problem is that Princess Elsa has the power to create snow and ice and it makes winter all the time.*

*Teacher: Yes! Maybe your character has some kind of superpower that they don't know how to control! What are some super powers that could cause problems if you didn't know how to control them?*

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## Example of a story problem chart

**(Generated by first grades at PS 229Q)**

- Sinking or Floating away
- Getting wet
- Getting broken/ getting hurt
- Somebody taking something
- Losing something
- Bad weather
- Being attacked
- Running late
- Needing help
- An intruder
- Feeling hungry or eating too much
- Not sharing
- Having an argument
- Bullying
- Feeling lonely or confused
- Getting lost

# Extending Story Problems Strategy

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### Timing

10 minutes

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### Introduce this strategy to

- help kids extend their story problems
- get inspired to make choices that transform their stories

The examples here came out of a real classroom improvisation by teaching artist Laine Barton and her partner classroom teachers at PS 62Q.

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## 1. Review the story problem chart

### Sample script

- Let's look at all of these story problems we came up with!
- Read through the charted ideas
- I think that today I will play this problem- Being attacked!

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## 2. Model solving the problem too quickly

### Sample Script to act out with puppets

- T-Rex lumbers into the playground
- The children run away
- The end

### Model reflecting and deciding to revise

- I wonder if I can make my story scarier?

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## 3. Let's get scared!

### Sample Script to act out with puppets

- T-Rex lumbers into the playground.
- The children tell him to go home. T-Rex roars!
- The children run and hide. T-Rex follows them
- The children throw a toy at him. T-Rex eat it and growls!

### Model reflecting and deciding to revise

- Was that scarier? I wonder if I can make my story funny now?

## Steps to model the...

# Extending Story Problems Strategy

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## 4. Let's be funny!

### Sample script to act out with puppets

- T-Rex lumbers into the playground.
- The children tell him to go home. T-Rex roars (but it sounds silly)
- The children run and hide. T-Rex follows them and bumps his head
- The children throw a toy at him. T-Rex eat it and burps!

### Model reflecting and deciding to revise

- Was that funnier? I wonder if I can make my story really sad?
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## 5. Let's be sad

### Sample Script to act out with puppets

- T-Rex lumbers into the playground
- The children tell him to go home. T-Rex starts to cry.
- The children run and hide. T-Rex follows them and catches them and the children start to cry too.
- The children throw a toy at him. T-Rex eats the toy. The kids start crying about how they loved that toy. T-Rex apologizes and tells the kids that they hurt his feelings when they ran away. The kids feel bad and cry some more.

### Model reflecting and deciding to revise

- Was that sad... or was it silly? Or was it silly and sad?
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## 3. Challenge the kids to try it!

### Sample Script

- How can make your stories scarier, funnier or sadder by taking longer to solve your story problems today?

# Extending Story Problems Strategy

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## Tips for taking more time to solve the problem-

- **Let your first solution fail!** Example: You hit T-Rex with a rock, but it just makes him angrier!
- **The solution to the first problem can cause a second problem!** Example: You scare T-Rex by lighting a fire, but when he exhales his breath catches fire and now he is chasing you with fire breath!
- **The solution is can be temporary!** Example: You threw a hamburger at T-Rex and he's eating it, but now you have to find more food before he gets hungry again.
- **Let one character try and fail and then bring in another character come in to help!** Example: The kids can't get rid of the T-Rex but their pet cat comes to the rescue because the T-Rex loves cats and has to stop to scratch its neck.
- **Use the setting!** Example: The kids keep finding different places to run and hide in the playground.

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### *Example:*

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*Teacher: Yes! Maybe your character has some kind of superpower that they don't know how to control! What are some super powers that could cause problems if you didn't know how to control them?*

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# Solving Story Problems Strategy

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### Introduce this strategy to help kids

- Understand that different characters can cause, experience and solve story problems
- improvise stories collaboratively with a clear role for each person in the group
- create stories with problems and solutions

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## 1. Review the story problem chart

### Sample script

- Let's look at all of these story problems we came up with!
- Read through the charted ideas
- Today I'm making playing with two partners (can be adults and/or kids). Partners, can we play this story problem? Getting lost?

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## 2. Model deciding on roles

### Sample Script

- **One of us is going to have the problem** (Victim) Your puppet will **enter in the beginning** when the forest seems nice and safe, but then they will get lost. Who wants this job?
- **One of us is going to cause the problem** (Villain) That puppet can **enter in the middle** and do something to make first puppet get lost. Can I do this part?
- **One of us is going to solve the problem** (Hero) Your puppet will **enter the end** and solve the problem. Don't come in too fast, let the lost puppet really have a long problem before you help them!

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### Tips for casting

- Your partners may insist on a different problem or roles than you planned! Be flexible!
- The terms victim, villain & hero are optional. They can be useful for clarity and entertainment, but there are many stories where these roles don't apply. Example: Solving their own problem.
- Model against stereotype- Make a big, strong character have the problem and a small character solve it. Cast a female character as a villain or a hero but not a victim.

## Steps to model the...

# Solving Story Problems Strategy

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### 3. Model playing the problem

#### Sample Script to act out with puppets

- **Before the problem-** Once upon a time a \_\_\_\_\_ was walking through the forest on a beautiful sunny day. (The victim puppet can skip through the forest, sing, talk about where they are going)
- **Introduce the problem-** But then, a \_\_\_\_\_ was using magical fog to confuse the \_\_\_\_\_ so that they would be trapped in the forest forever (Villain talks about their plan/ evil laugh)
- **React to the problem-** The forest filled with fog and the \_\_\_\_\_ got confused (The victim can show they're lost, express how they feel, call for help and/ or try to solve the problem.)
- **Solve the problem-** The \_\_\_\_\_ was just about to give up hope when a \_\_\_\_\_ heard their cries for help and came to the rescue! (The hero enters with an idea for how to solve the problem. If your partner does not have an idea, pause and ask the kids in the audience for ideas.)
- **After the problem-** The \_\_\_\_\_ saved the day! The fog left the forest and the \_\_\_\_\_ was able to find their way out of the forest. (The characters can improvise ending dialogue and action)

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#### Tips for improvising- Help your partners to...

- Speak, listen and take turns
- Build on each other's ideas
- Play inside the puppet theater
- Use their puppet movement & voices to show how characters feel
- Ask for help thinking of ideas if they feel stuck!
- Have fun!

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### 4. Challenge the kids to try it!

Encourage the kids to decide who will have, cause and solve the story problem before they play. They can try out one role and then switch next time! If they are in big groups, more than one character can have, cause or solve the problem. If kids are in pairs, combine them into groups of 4-6.