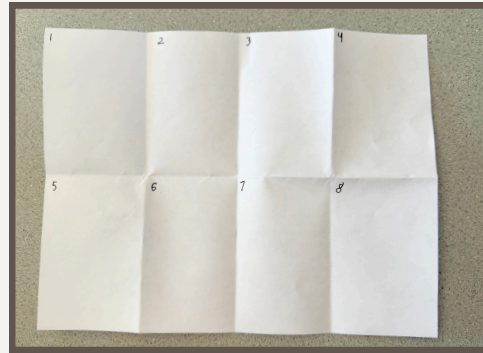


DOODLE Your Way to Short Stories

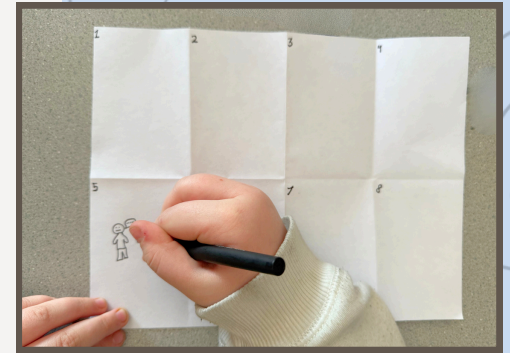
In this playful and collaborative 8-Panel Story exercise, your writers can explore causality, build community, and have fun writing together. Give it a try!



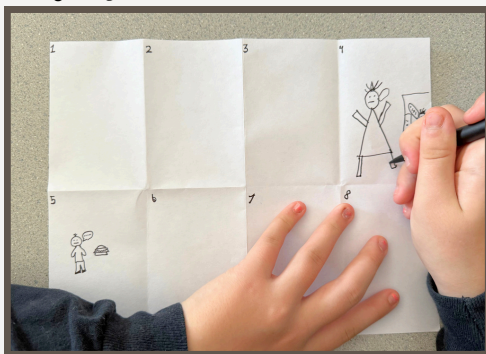
1. Gather your materials. This is easy. All you need are blank copier paper and writing implements, preferably the kind that do not erase. You might use a page of chart paper to demonstrate and build your first story together.



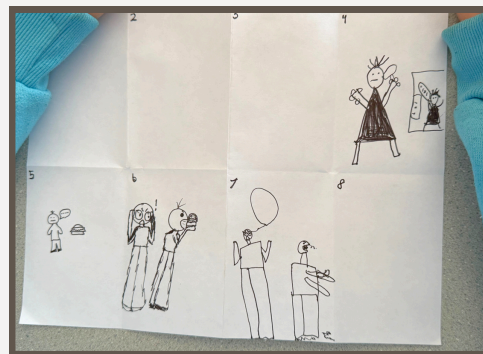
2. Fold your piece of paper in half. Open it up, and fold it in half again, the other direction. Then fold it one more time. When you unfold your paper, you should have eight panels.



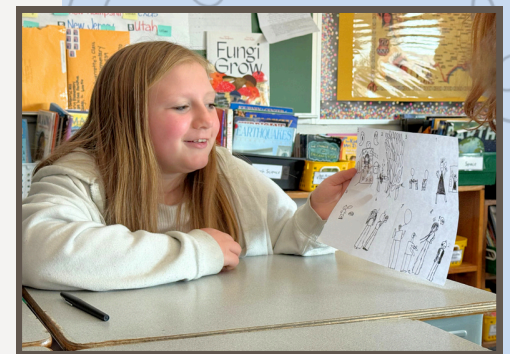
3. Start building your story by drawing in the 5th panel. Keep your drawing simple and uncomplicated, do not use words. In Panel 5, draw something that happens to someone. Pass the page to the next doodler.



4. When the doodler gets the page from their neighbor, they can choose to draw in Panel 4 (something that caused Panel 5 to happen) or Panel 6 (what happened because of Panel 5). Then they pass the page to the next doodler.



5. The next doodler is faced with the same choice: draw in the panel before or the panel after. Their doodle must be connected to one side of the story-in-progress or the other. (It is possible that they will eventually have only one choice, before OR after.)



6. When all eight panels have been drawn, invite someone—the original doodler or another creator—to tell the story drawn on the page.

- Did everyone “see” the story the same way?
- Did the story go as expected, or did something change?

The End: You might decide the story ends here. Maybe once was enough, and maybe you can return to this activity another time. Or...

Teacher Take: You can take this in so many directions!

Reflect and Add: Guide students to look for panels on the page that would tell the story better with a little more detail. What facial expression would say more? What details would show the setting more clearly? Have them add to the panel with another colored tool.

Practice Revision: Use tracing paper and a light table—or a bright window—to show students how they can trace over the parts of the panel they want to keep and modify the part(s) they would change. Or, use spare paper panels or sticky notes to redo a single panel that might work better if doodled differently.

Add Detail: Use the doodled panels as an outline for writing a narrative story. Help students choose panels with more importance to stretch longer with more detail. Use panels to help students practice paragraphing or using transitions in their written work.

Play with Dialogue: Explore how adding dialogue to the panels helps to elaborate and/or move the story. What would speech bubbles add to the story? Could they add emotion? Explanation? Do they help us understand the characters in ways we didn't before?

Add words: Use the doodled panels as an outline for writing a narrative story. Help students choose panels with more importance to stretch longer with more detail. Use panels to help students practice paragraphing or using transitions in their written work.

Writer Wisdom: Professional writers do this, too!

Lots of writers storyboard before writing — and this activity can be used in exactly the same way. Use the panels to create a story logic out of basic events, check causality, and do simple doodle revisions. Voila! An “outline” in pictures!

Working from the inside out creates the cause and effect that shapes things, as does a limited number of panels. You can see that the end is near, right? You've got to resolve things soon. Then, you might have the students brainstorm a solution. Do they need another panel? Would that really resolve things? Is there a panel that has too little forward momentum? A panel that tries to carry too much story weight? How would you revise it? Can you draw a different panel and tape it over the one(s) that you would change? That's revision, too! Sometimes authors write an entirely different chapter, or we break the action of one chapter into two.

Often revision—for both visual and written narrative—is adding detail! So often a writer drafts something very loose and sketchy. On their next revision pass, they add details. Maybe sensory details that let the reader better understand place or time, maybe important story details. What happens in between the panels? What is the character feeling or thinking or smelling or tasting? Can we put that into words and transform an image-heavy comic into a spot-illustrated story? Or, can we do more labeling? How does the writing develop when we play?



Melissa Guerrette is an intermediate-level teacher (and occasional writer) in western Maine with 24 years of experience in grades 4–6. She holds National Board Certification and received the 2025 Claudette and John Brassil Distinguished Educator Award from the Maine Council of English Language Arts. Melissa is continuously exploring ways to facilitate authentic writing experiences and support the development of student writers' writing lives. You can reach Melissa via email at nbct.melissa@gmail.com.

Linda Urban writes picturebooks, chapter books, and middle grades novels. Her works include *A Crooked Kind of Perfect*, *Hound Dog True*, *Mouse Was Mad*, and, most recently, *Olive Little Gets Crafty*, part of The Kids in Mrs. Z's Class series. Her books have appeared on more than 25 state reading lists, as well as best books lists from The New York Public Library, Kirkus, NCTE, and IndieNext. Linda is presently the Program Chair of VCFA's MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults. Visit her at www.lindaurbanbooks.com.

