Write About Outer Space and the Future

1. Focus

Introduce Science Fiction Writing

Display pictures of a spaceship and a robot. Use the sample think-aloud below as a model of how to talk to students about science fiction.

Sample think-aloud. Say: I want to share some pictures with you of things that inspire me to write stories. When I see this spaceship, I want to write about what it would be like to be the pilot of a mission to a distant planet in the year 5000. I try to imagine what it might be like for a person to travel faster than the speed of light. This robot makes me wonder what might happen if it started to think for itself. I would like to write a story about a robot that disobeyed instructions from its evil owner in order to perform good deeds.

Say: These are just a few of my ideas inspired by these pictures. Pictures can inspire you to think up stories about space travel, time travel, robots, and life in the future. Stories that depend on real or made-up information about technology and science are called science fiction. For the next several weeks, we are going to read, write, and share science fiction stories with each other.

Introduce the Purpose and Audience for Science Fiction

Say: I write science fiction because it allows me to imagine worlds that don’t exist yet. I can also explore scientific subjects that interest me, and I can make up anything I want, such as a flying car or a hat that makes me invisible when I put it on. However, an important purpose of my science fiction is to think harder about the challenges of the world we live in right now. For example, if I write about the robot with a mind of its own, I am also asking my readers to think about the possibilities for good and evil in new technologies and inventions.

Say: Some science fiction stories have had a big impact on public thinking. A famous example is The War of the Worlds by H. G. Wells. It is a science fiction story that was turned into a play and performed on the radio in 1938. At that time, television did not exist. People listened to radios for information and entertainment. The science fiction story on the radio announced that a Martian spaceship had landed in New Jersey and was shooting out heat rays and poison gas and sending out other spaceships to take over New York City. Thousands of people who heard this science fiction story believed it was true. They called the police and fled their homes in panic. Some listeners even thought they smelled the poison gas. These people missed the announcements that said the play was a science fiction story. The War of the Worlds was performed at a time shortly before World War II when people worried about countries invading each other. This science fiction story made people think about what it might really be like to be invaded by a strong foreign army.
2. Rehearse

Practice Telling Science Fiction Story Ideas

Invite students to work with a partner. Ask each partner to choose a spaceship, robot, or other science fiction–themed photo or image and think of an idea for a science fiction story. Encourage partners to think about where their story could take place, who the main characters would be, and one or more important events that would happen. Students should share the ideas they have, based on the picture. Ask them to think about who or what the main character would be and what main events would happen in the plot.

Use “Strategies to Support ELs” to assist English learners or other students who need support.

Share Stories with the Class

Invite volunteers to retell their stories. Ask them to tell how they used their photographs or images to develop story ideas. Use one or more of the following questions to engage students in discussion about the exercise:

Storyteller
- How did you feel as you were telling your story?
- What scientific subject is part of your story?

Listener
- As you listened to this story, what did you think was going to happen?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: When you write science fiction, you can start with science you know and speculate about what might be possible in the future. Pictures can help you think up ideas about what might happen someday on our planet or in another universe.

Encourage students to look at science images and see what kinds of story ideas they inspire during independent writing time, as appropriate. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share science fiction story ideas they have come up with.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning
Meet with beginning ELs one on one while other students work with partners during “Practice Telling Science Fiction Story Ideas.” Encourage them to describe the picture they have selected in any way they can—with words or gestures. Expand on their idea with simple sentences.

Intermediate
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner practice. Display simple sentence frames on chart paper and model how students can use them to talk about their science fiction ideas. For example:

My science fiction story is about ______.
The story takes place ______.
The main character is ______.
One thing that happens is ______.

Advanced
Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice.

All Levels
If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates to help them understand the lesson focus: robot/el robot; science fiction/la ciencia ficción; space/el espacio.

Display images using the interactive whiteboard resources as additional visual prompts for telling science fiction stories.