

Prop-Me-Up Challenge

A Desperate PROPosition!

Oh-no! The evil failed-inventor, Balzer has kidnapped his rival, G! He's taken G to his lab at the top of Balzer Tower. Balzer plans to use his latest invention, The Brain Vacuum™, to suck out all of G's inventing knowledge and transfer it into himself. It's going to be up to G's grand-kids, the Inventsons, to save him before it's too late!

Walt, Sue, and Jesse Inventson rush to Balzer Tower but stop short when they see the challenge before them.

"Look at how high the tower is! How are we going to get all the way up there?" exclaims Walt, the oldest yet not always the bravest, Inventson.

"Height doesn't bother me, but what about those giant steel doors?" points out Sue, middle child but first in confidence.

"How will we even make it to the steel doors with all those robot guards surrounding the building?" asks the daredevil of the group, Jesse, who actually *does* look before he leaps... but he always leaps!

The three pause to think for a moment, then Walt snaps his fingers. "Hey! I've got an Idea!"

Sue looks at her brothers with a knowing look. "Are you guys thinking what I'm thinking?"

Jesse brims with enthusiasm, "I bet we are! We can build what we need to solve this problem!"

Sue chimes in, "Right! Once we're finished we'll have G back safe and sound!"

Walt looks back at his siblings with the confidence that comes from working as a team! "Come on, guys! G's counting on us. Let's get to work on our..."

What are the Inventsons going to build? It's up to YOU to finish the story!

Introduction

Props are a big part of storytelling. Imagine how much-less interesting it would be if we didn't see cool gadgets in spy movies, or futuristic equipment in science fiction shows, or amazing artifacts in stories about archaeological adventure or magical hijinks. The Prop-Me-Up Challenge invites you to come up with your own prop to use to complete the above story.

Implementation

Step 1.) Read the story included above. Brainstorm different items you would want the Inventsons to use to save their grandfather, G. The device (or devices) can be real or imaginary.

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Step 2.) Once you have an idea of what you want, draw it or build it!

Option A.) If all you have to work with is paper, pencil or maybe other art supplies like pens, markers or crayons, draw out your device. Here are some tips:

1. Sometimes its best to draw an item from several views. Show what it looks like on the top, front and side.
2. You can also draw it being used by a person to show how it works.
3. Use call-outs! Call-outs are labels or short descriptions that you add to your drawings with arrows pointing to the specific detail you are describing.

Option B.) If you have more materials you are encouraged to build your prop. Building a prop does not have to be hard. Here are some tips:

1. Remember that a prop is just a model. It doesn't have to work!
2. You don't need high end materials to build a prop. Use what you have available. Old toys, broken electronics or even just hot glue and cardboard are all you need to build a prop. (The medical scanner used in the original Star Trek TV show was a salt-shaker!)
3. Your prop does not have to be full scale. If your idea is for something huge, make a small model.

Step 3.) Write out how your device would be used in the story. Write a description of what the device does and how it would be used to save G.

** Another option: Finish the story! Instead of just writing a description of your prop, write the rest of the story. Include the prop and a description of how it saves the day!*

Lessons Learned

The Prop-Me-Up Challenge is a creative writing, drawing, and building exercise. Students are introduced to the way props are used in a narrative to help tell a story. The physical appearance of a prop and the way an actor can interact with it have a dramatic impact of how well an audience understands the content being communicated.

With regards to product development and industrial design, this challenge is an excellent preparation tool for building a model of a product concept and using the model in a presentation pitch.

Finally, for students who struggle with conventional writing assignments, the Prop-Me-Up Challenge offers the opportunity to approach creative writing in a tangible, tactile way. It allows the student to apply their creativity in ways that they may be more comfortable with or more interested in. The result is a student who may be more motivated to complete the story because they feel a personal connection to its resolution.