

50 REVIEW GAMES GAME 07

Story Builder

Vocabulary in context, one sentence at a time

Story Builder encourages students to use previously learned vocabulary in meaningful context. Rather than signing isolated words, students work together to create a story one sentence at a time — and each turn has to connect to the one before it.

TIME NEEDED

15–25 minutes

GROUP SIZE

Whole class or small groups

GRADE LEVELS

Middle, High, College

01 Purpose & Objective

Strengthen expressive and receptive ASL by encouraging students to apply vocabulary, grammar, sequencing, and creativity in connected stories. A word used in a story has to agree with everything around it — tense, space, and character — which is work an isolated sign never requires.

Students will collaboratively create a complete ASL story while accurately incorporating previously learned vocabulary.

02 Materials & Skills

Materials

- Story prompt cards (*optional*)
- Vocabulary list (*optional*)
- Timer (*optional*)

ASL Skills Practiced

- Expressive and receptive ASL
- Storytelling and sequencing
- Nonmanual markers and facial grammar
- Classifiers, role shift, and spatial referencing

03 Setup

1. Arrange students in a circle or small groups so everyone can see every signer.
2. Choose a story theme, or let students select one from the prompts on page 4.
3. Review expectations for taking turns and maintaining eye contact.
4. Set the length. Decide how many turns the story runs before you stop and retell it.
5. Name the connectors students should reach for — see the story connectors on the next page.

Before You Start

Tell students you will not be correcting during the story. Knowing that in advance is what makes them willing to attempt a sentence they are not sure of, which is where the useful mistakes come from.

04 Directions

1. The first student signs the opening sentence.
2. The next student repeats the main idea and adds another sentence.
3. Continue around the group until everyone has contributed.
4. Encourage students to connect each new sentence to the previous one.
5. At the end, ask volunteers to retell the complete story.

05 Story Connectors

A story is more than a run of sentences. Post these devices and point to them when a turn does not quite link to the one before it.

DEVICE	WHAT IT DOES
FINISH	Marks that one event is complete and the next can begin — the most common way to move a story forward.
THEN / NEXT	Simple sequencing between two events.
SAME-TIME	Signals that two things are happening at once rather than in order.
Spatial referencing	Place each character or location in the signing space, then point back to it instead of re-signing the noun.
Role shift	Shift the shoulders and eye gaze to become a character, rather than describing what they did.
Facial grammar	Carries the tone. A surprise in the story only reads as a surprise if the face says so.

06 Suggested Story Prompts

Assign one, or let the group draw at random.

1. My First Day of School
2. A Trip to the Zoo
3. Lost at the Mall
4. The Funniest Thing That Happened Today
5. A Surprise Birthday Party
6. My Dream Vacation
7. A Snow Day Adventure
8. A Visit to the Beach
9. The Mystery Box
10. If Animals Could Talk

07 Variations

Beginning

Use picture prompts and simple vocabulary, and allow one sentence per student.

Intermediate

Require transition words and complete ASL sentences that link clearly to the previous turn.

Advanced

Require role shifting, classifiers, and detailed description rather than plain narration.

Challenge Mode

Assign a surprise vocabulary word every third turn that must be worked naturally into the story. The student cannot simply name it — it has to fit what has already happened, which forces a quick decision about where the story goes next.

08 Assessment Ideas

Observe students for:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Vocabulary accuracy | ☐ Story sequencing and cohesion |
| ☐ Grammar and facial expressions | ☐ Classifiers and role shift |
| ☐ Creativity and willingness to attempt | ☐ Attention during others' turns |

Note what you see during the story and save it for the debrief. Patterns across several students are worth more class time than any single correction.

09 Troubleshooting

IF THIS HAPPENS

TRY THIS

The story becomes unrelated sentences

Enforce step two – the main idea must be repeated before anything new is added.

One student derails it with a wild twist

Allow it, then require the next student to resolve it. Derailments make good stories if someone has to clean them up.

A student freezes on their turn

Let them pass and rejoin at the end, or hand them a prompt card to work from.

The story runs too long to retell

Cap it at eight or ten turns, then stop and retell while the thread is still intact.

Paul's Best Practice

Don't interrupt the flow of the story to correct every mistake. Let students communicate first, then discuss patterns and improvements after the activity.

Communication first. Correction after.

Why It Works

Students remember vocabulary more effectively when they use it in meaningful communication rather than isolated drills. A collaborative story also raises the stakes on receptive skill: a student cannot take their turn without having understood the turn before it, so everyone in the group has a reason to watch closely.

Quick Tips

- ✓ Keep stories light and fun.
- ✓ Rotate story themes often.
- ✓ Encourage imagination and humor.
- ✓ Cap the length so the retell stays possible.
- ✓ Save the best story and open with it next class.

Continue Exploring

Next in the collection:

- ▶ **Game #8: Four Corners**
- ▶ **Game #9: Speed Signing**
- ▶ **Game #10: Picture Prompt**

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Extend the Activity

Record the finished story, or ask a volunteer to retell it at the start of the next class. A story students built themselves makes a stronger warm-up than any prompt you could hand them, and it gives the retelling a real audience.