

STORY-BUILDER



Picture Cards for Language Activities

User Manual

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www.story-builder.ca

Hello!

The purpose of this manual is to introduce the Story-builder card set and provide some tips on how it can be used for language teaching and linguistic fieldwork. Beyond what's in the manual, you are encouraged to explore and find new and creative ways to use the cards to meet your own language goals.

The Story-builder card set itself consists of two files which may be downloaded along with this manual from www.story-builder.ca:
Story-builder-Character.Cards.and.Tokens.pdf &
Story-builder-Action.Cards.pdf.

Story-builder is distributed freely in order to benefit language groups and research linguists. Once you have had a chance to use Story-builder, please send feedback in order to benefit the wider community of potential users. A sample feedback form is included at the end of this manual.

If you have any questions or comments about Story-builder, please feel encouraged to get in touch (see page 20 for contact info).

Enjoy!

Katie Sardinha

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1. What is Story-builder?



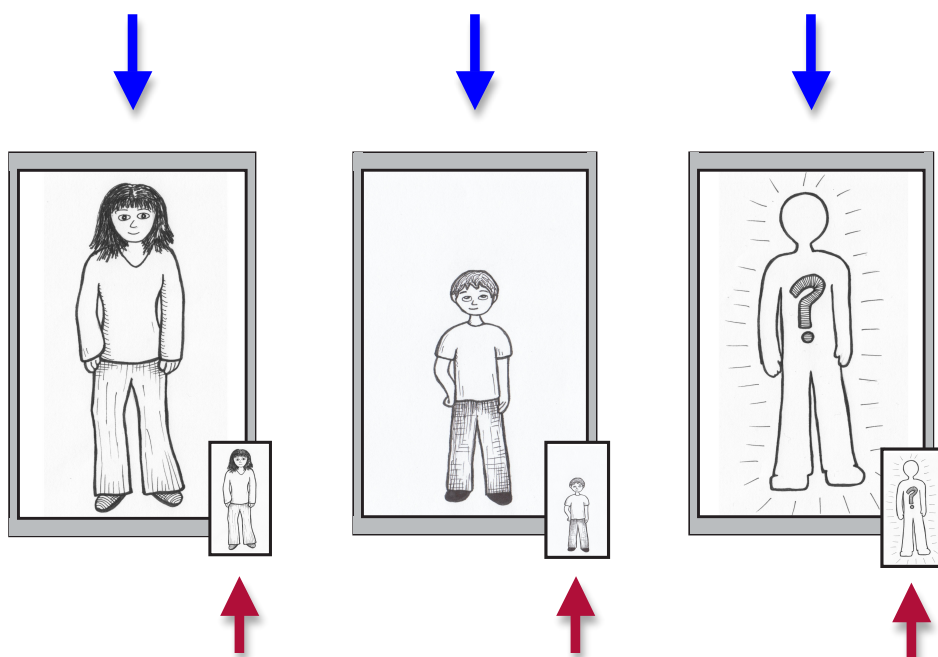
- Story-builder is a set of picture cards for language activities.
- The cards are specially designed to facilitate creative story-telling and to get speakers producing natural speech on a wide range of topics.
- Story-builder was developed with both language-learning communities and research linguists in mind. It can be adapted for many uses, from language-learning games, to linguistic fieldwork.
- Because it is picture-based, Story-builder can be used with any language, or in multi-lingual contexts.

2. The Story-builder Deck:

The Story-builder deck consists of 62 cards. The cards fall into two types:

2.1 Character Cards and matching Character Tokens (7):

Character cards show a character which is female or male, adult or child, or indefinite. These are the protagonists of stories – the people that stories can be told “about”.



Character tokens are miniature versions of the character cards. These may be (optionally) used as memory devices to help remember who-did-what when telling longer stories (see Section 4 for details).

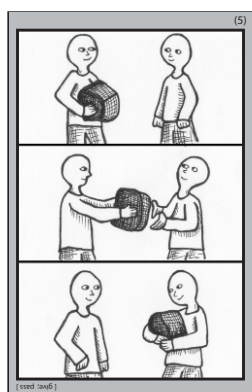
Note: In addition to using the character cards as story protagonists, speakers can incorporate people they know into their stories. Thus, they can tell stories from their own perspective (“I”) and can include their peers (“you”, “my friend Annie”, etc.).

2.2 Action Cards (55):

Action cards represent 'actions' or 'events'; they are the pieces of a story. Just like beads can be strung together in sequence to create a necklace, action cards can be strung together in sequence to create a story.

Each action card can be thought of as representing a verb or a phrase. For instance, the following cards represent the verbs 'to give', 'to be angry', and 'to smell':

'to give'



'to be angry'



'to smell'



Example translations are provided (in English) in the bottom left-hand corner of each card. These translations are not the only possible ones, however – speakers may wish to interpret the cards in different ways. Some cards are fairly constrained in their possible translations (e.g. Card #33 'to drink'), while others (e.g. Card #29 'to hug, embrace; to love') may support a variety of translations.

The androgynous characters and indefinite objects depicted in action cards are there to help illustrate a particular verb or phrase. Speakers are free to refer to these details of individual cards, or abstract away from them and just use the verb or phrase, as desired for individual stories.

3. Verbs Represented in the Deck

The Story-builder deck has been designed to visually represent basic verbs from across the semantic spectrum.¹ This means that the 55 verbal concepts depicted on the *action cards* represent a wide selection of meanings. The meanings depicted are also those that are likely to occur in many of the world's languages, thus making the cards useful for cross-linguistic use and comparison.

- For language teachers, this means that playing with the deck exposes students to a wide variety of verb types for effective language learning.
- For linguists, this means that the Story-builder deck is particularly well suited to studying verb classes and argument structure.

Intended Translations of Action Cards (English):

(1) to put, place	(21) to hear, listen	(42) to be injured, hurt
(2) to bring, carry, take, move	(22) to smell	(43) to die, be killed, be stabbed
(3) to push	(23) to be angry	(44) to break, shatter
(4) to pull	(24) to be scared, frightened, startled	(45) to cook
(5) to give; to pass	(25) to scold, be yelled at; to be scolded, be yelled at	(46) to live, dwell, be at home
(6) to trade, exchange	(26) to search (for)	(47) to appear
(7) to buy; to sell; to pay	(27) to argue, fight	(48) to disappear, vanish
(8) to hide	(28) to help, assist; to reach	(49) to arrive, come, approach
(9) to throw (at)	(29) to hug, embrace; to love	(50) to leave, depart
(10) to hit, punch; be hit, be punched	(30) to ask, request	(51) to go, walk (around)
(11) to touch	(31) to tell (a story); to teach	(52) to jump, leap
(12) to stir, mix	(32) to converse, talk	(53) to guide, lead; to accompany, go with
(13) to read	(33) to drink	(54) to be sunny
(14) to build, stack, pile	(34) to eat	(55) to rain
(15) to sing	(35) to cough	
(16) to dance	(36) to cry	
(17) to imagine, daydream, fantasize	(37) to bleed	
(18) to think, ponder, consider	(38) to spit	
(19) to show, reveal	(39) to smile; to become happy	
(20) to see, watch	(40) to laugh	
	(41) to sleep	

¹ The verbal concepts depicted on the *action cards* were chosen with reference to Beth Levin (1993), "English Verb Classes and Alternations: A Preliminary Investigation." Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

4. “Story-building” Explained

“Story-building” is the process of using *character cards* and *action cards* to tell a visual story.

Story-building involves 2 types of moves:

1. First, one or more character cards are chosen and placed down on the playing surface in order to represent the main character(s) of the story-to-be.
2. Next, action cards are placed alongside the character card(s) in sequence; stories are narrated by relating the actions/events depicted in the cards with the story's characters.

The only rule that speakers must follow in telling their stories is that they must express a word or phrase that relates to what is depicted on each *action card*. Aside from this, speakers are free to improvise and embellish their stories as much as desired.

Note: Story-building works best if speakers are allowed to introduce additional characters at any point in their story, even if these new characters are not pictured. Character tokens can optionally be used to represent these new characters.

In order to see how story-building works, let's look at two examples...

Story-building Example #1:

(1 character card, 4 action cards)

Step 1: A *character card* is placed on the playing surface and the character of the story is introduced.



(1) ***“Once upon a time there was a woman named Lola.”***

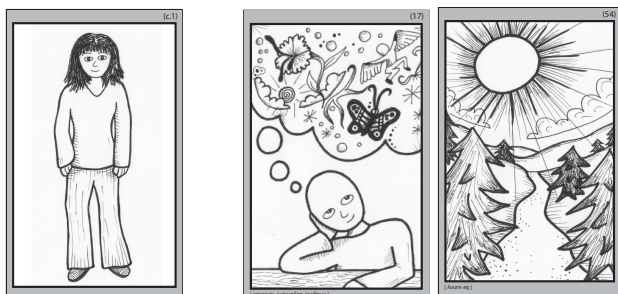
Step 2: An *action card* (#17, to imagine, daydream, fantasize) is placed next to the character card. The speaker then finds some way to relate the *action card* to the character, and begins to tell a story:



(1) ***“Once upon a time there was a woman named Lola.”***

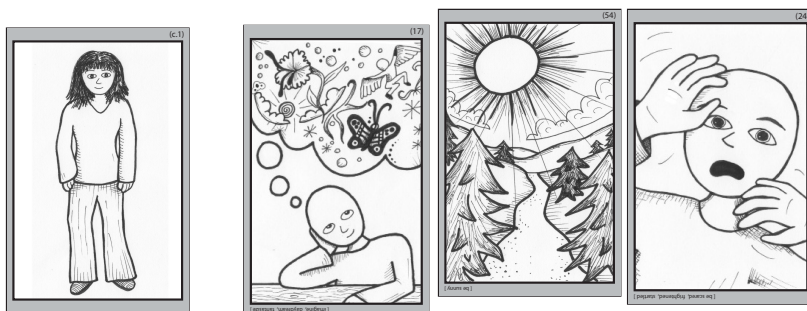
(2) ***“One day at work, she was sitting around daydreaming.”***

Step 3: Another action card (#54, 'to be sunny') is placed next to the first action card, in sequence. The speaker relates this card to the previous ones, and continues the story.



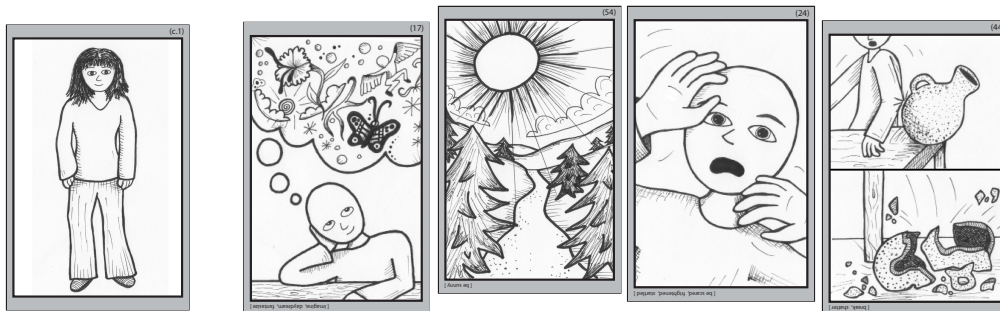
- (1) "Once upon a time there was a woman named Lola."
- (2) "One day at work, she was sitting around daydreaming."
- (3) **"She imagined that it was sunny out, and that she was going for a walk in the sunshine."**

Step 4: A third action card (#24, be scared, frightened, startled) is added into the story:



- (1) "Once upon a time there was a woman named Lola."
- (2) "One day at work, she was sitting around daydreaming."
- (3) "She imagined that it was sunny out, and that she was going for a walk in the sunshine."
- (4) **"But all of a sudden, something at her workplace startled her out of her pleasant daydream."**

Step 5: A fourth action card (#44, to break, shatter) is added and concludes the story:



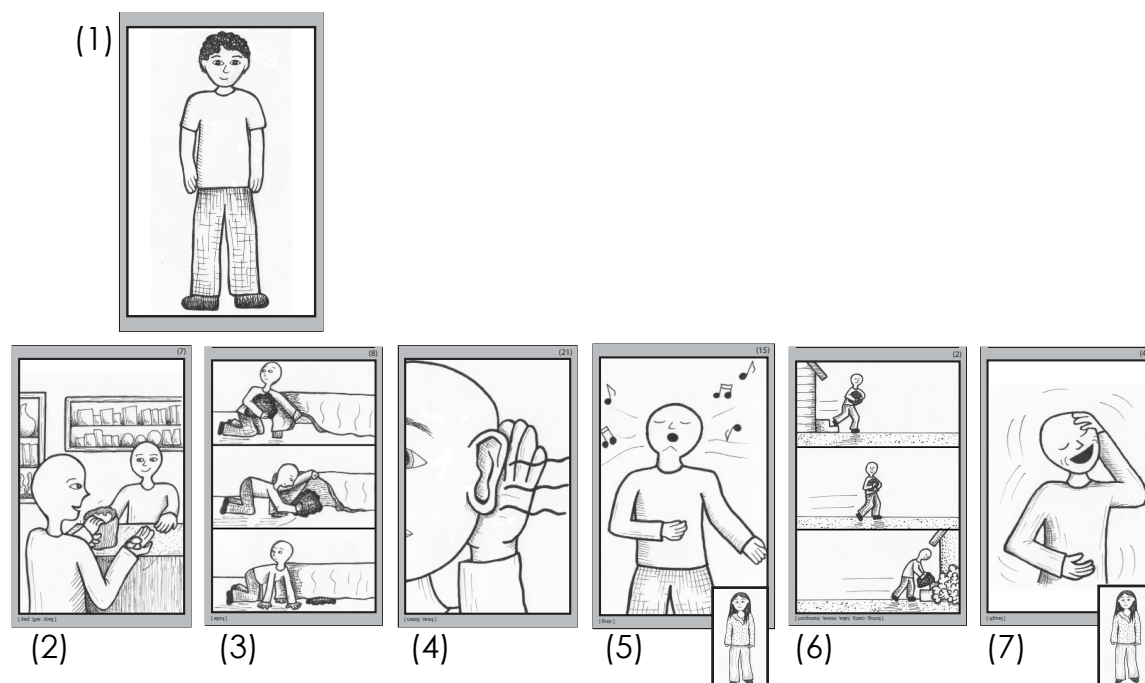
- (1) "Once upon a time there was a woman named Lola."
- (2) "One day at work, she was sitting around daydreaming."
- (3) "She imagined that it was sunny out, and that she was going for a walk in the sunshine."
- (4) "But all of a sudden, something at her workplace startled her out of her pleasant daydream."
- (5) **"She got so frightened that she flung her arms out and knocked over a cup that was on her desk. It fell to the floor and broke."**

Notes:

1. The story in Example #1 expresses the words and phrases depicted in the *action cards* numerous times and in various ways; these expressions are underlined below.
2. Some parts of the story are entirely improvised by the speaker, beyond what is depicted on the cards; these parts are **bolded** below.

"Once upon a time there was a woman **named Lola**. **One day at work**, she was sitting around daydreaming. She imagined that it was sunny out, **and that she was going for a walk in the sunshine**. But all of a sudden, something **at her workplace** startled her out of her pleasant daydream. She got so frightened that **she flung her arms out** and knocked over **a cup that was on her desk**. It fell to the floor and broke."

Story-building Example #2: (1 character card, 2 character tokens, 6 action cards)



The Story:

- (1) "So there's this man named Bill.
- (2) Now he really likes cookies. So he decided to go to the store to buy some.
- (3) When he got them home he started to hide them in his closet, because he didn't want to let anybody know he had them, or else he would have to share.
- (4) But just then, he heard someone coming.
- (5) It was his sister, and she was walking down the hall singing.
- (6) So he got out of there quick, and he brought the cookies with him so he could hide them somewhere else – maybe in the shed.
- (7) But his sister saw him sneaking out the window and started laughing at him, because she knew exactly what he was up to."

Notes:

1. In this example, *character tokens* are used to represent a second character (Bill's sister) that is introduced into the story part way through. *Character tokens* can be used in this way to help remember who-did-what.
2. As in the previous example, the story refers to the actions depicted on each *action card* in sequence. Even so, much of the story is completely improvised by the speaker – for instance, the fact that Bill likes cookies, and the fact that he has a sister.

5. Example Games and Activities

Pick-1

- Speakers simply take turns picking an *action card* (either randomly or by choice) and making up a short story, description, or anecdote involving the verb or phrase represented on the card.



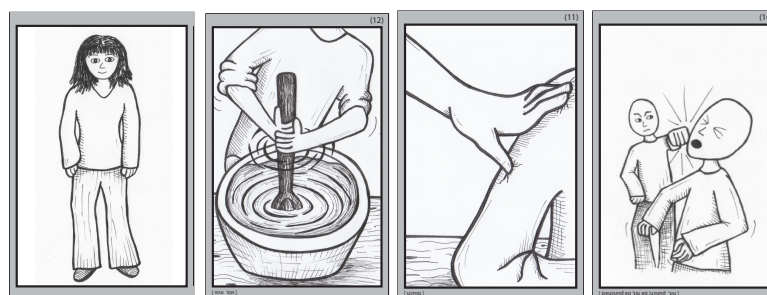
Example: (Card #27, to argue, fight)

Pick-1 story: "The two men were having a heated argument. And they weren't coming to any resolution of their argument. Their hearts were hard. [Their friend] Rita overheard them, and she was very saddened by what she heard." (VB)

Pick-3

- Speakers either pick or are given 3 *action cards* that they then must use to create short stories.

Example: (Card #12, to stir, mix; Card #11, to touch; Card #10, to hit, punch; be hit, punched)



Pick-3 Story: "This woman was making a cake, stirring it. All of a sudden a guy came along and touched her. So she gave him a big punch in the face." (RDC)

Variations on Pick-3: challenge speakers to reorder their cards or trade cards with other speakers to create new 3-card stories; have speakers join their 3-card stories together to create longer stories; see how many 3-card stories speakers can make in a specified amount of time; etc.

Group Story-building

Have speakers work together in pairs, small groups, or one large group to cooperatively build stories.

- Begin with one or more *character cards*. Then, speakers in the group take turns each adding one *action card* (a card of their choice, or one taken randomly from the deck) into the story.
- Each time a speaker adds a new card to the story, he or she repeats the story all the way from the beginning, including the newly placed card.
- If applicable, groups can share their final stories with other groups.

Variations on Group Story-building: Allow speakers to re-order *action cards* whenever they wish; challenge speakers to make up stories on particular themes (e.g. love stories, tragedies, fables); make really long stories, so that re-telling the story becomes a memory challenge; etc.

Multi-player Competitive Story-building

This game combines creative story-telling with elements of chance to make a fun, social, and mildly competitive story-telling game...

Materials needed: one or more Story-builder decks; some manner of marking *action cards* into three arbitrary groups (e.g. three colours of felt markers or stickers); one die; a piece of paper for keeping score.

- A single deck can support 2-5 players, with an increased risk of running out of cards when played with 6 or more players. Multiple decks can be combined to support larger groups.
- In order to introduce a point system, the *action cards* need to be split up into three arbitrary groups and marked before game play (e.g. with a blue, red, or green sticker). Each group of cards is assigned a point value before playing²; for example, all cards with a blue dot may be worth '1 point', all cards with a red dot may be worth '2 points' and all cards with a green dot are worth '3 points'. Players will aim to collect the most points possible.
- Six action cards are continuously kept in the middle of the table – these represent a pool of cards from which the players will draw from throughout the game.



- Players roll a die to see who goes first. At the beginning of play, each player obtains a *character card* depicting a person who their story will be 'about' and one *action card* from the shuffled deck.

² These point values should be rotated each time the game is played, so that certain cards (e.g. cards marked arbitrarily with a green dot) have different point values in different game instances.

- Note: If at any time a speaker ends up without any *action cards*, he or she must take one from the shuffled deck.
- Players take turns. For the first turn, players simply narrate their first *action card* by relating it in some way to their *character card*.
- All subsequent turns are initiated by a die roll which determines what that person's turn will involve. The die rolls correspond to the following actions:
 1. Rolling a 1 means that the roller must choose any card from the central card pool that is from group 1 (in our example, a card that is marked with a blue dot). The speaker must then incorporate this card into a story with his/her other cards. If no cards from group 1 are in the central pool, the player simply rolls again.
 2. Rolling a 2 means that the roller must choose any card from the central pool that is from Group 2 (in our example, a card that is marked with a red dot). The speaker must then incorporate this card into a story with his/her other cards. If no cards from group 2 are in the central pool, the player simply rolls again.
 3. Rolling a 3 means that the roller must choose any cards from the central pool that is from group 3 (in our example, a card that is marked with a green dot). The speaker must then incorporate this card into a story with his/her other cards. If no cards from group 3 are in the central pool, the player simply rolls again.
 4. Rolling a 4 means that the roller must trade any one of his or her *action cards* with either a) an action card owned by another player, or b) an action card from the central pool. The roller thus trades away one of his/her action cards and obtains another card of his/her choosing. The roller must then incorporate the new card into his/her story. If the roller trades with another *player*, that player will need to re-work his/her story during his/her next turn.
 5. Rolling a 5 means that the roller must steal a card from another player to incorporate into his/her story. The roller is free to choose which card is stolen, and from whom. The player that is stolen from (the victim) loses a card; if this action leaves the victim with no *action cards*, he/she must obtain a new one from the shuffled deck; otherwise, the victim will be forced to re-organize his/her story on his/her next turn.

6. Rolling a 6 forces the roller to “restart” their story. All of the roller’s current stock of *action cards* are put back into the shuffled deck, but not before the roller adds up the point values of all the cards in the story (e.g. blue cards are worth 1 point, red cards worth 2, etc.). These points get added to the roller’s score. The roller takes a new *action card* from the shuffled deck and narrates it, and then the turn passes to the next player.³
- Players are allowed to re-order their *action cards* (and thus re-make their stories) each turn, but they must always narrate it from beginning to end.
 - Players are free to incorporate as many characters as they wish into their stories, and to freely use character tokens as mnemonic devices. Character tokens do not, however, have a point value.
 - At the end of a time or turn limit, players can count up their points to see who won the game.

Game-play is simultaneously motivated by a point system, intrinsic motivation to tell a good story, and social factors. Thus speakers may choose cards which they think will make their stories most interesting/funny/entertaining; they may steal or trade to obtain cards with high point values to maximize their points; or they may aim to ruin other players stories on purpose.

There are countless ways to modify the rules of this game to accommodate different situations and groups – feel free to experiment.

³ In order to allow longer stories to form in games with 3 or more players, the game can be modified so that stories are “restarted” less often. One way to do this is to say that if a 6 is rolled, a player will be required to roll again: if their subsequent roll is odd, they then do whatever action is associated with that number, but if their roll is even, they must restart their story.

6. Notes for Language Teachers

- The Story-builder card set can be adapted into many different games and activities conducive to language learning. Games and activities can involve whole language classes, small groups of students, or individual students.
- Story-builder is especially useful for intermediate-to-advanced language-learners who are learning how to connect ideas and sentences into larger stories and discourses.
- Beginners in a language can use Story-builder cards as flash cards for increasing their vocabulary.
- Story-builder is well suited to conversation-based classes.
- **Game/Activity ideas:** flash-cards, small-groups story-telling, question-and-answer games, charades-style games, songs, narrated skits...

Tips:

- Students may need time to get acquainted with the cards and associated vocabulary. For less advanced language learners, teachers may wish to introduce only a few cards per lesson. In this way, students may gradually build their vocabulary until they are able to use a word or phrase to describe each *action card*.
- It may be helpful for teachers and/or students to select just one or two specific translations to learn for each *action card*. These translations can be written onto the back of the cards so that if a student forgets a translation, he or she can just turn the card over. When working with students with large vocabularies, however, teachers may wish to allow these students more freedom in interpreting the cards.
- If desk space in the classroom is limited, try making the cards into magnets and using magnetic boards on the walls.

7. Notes for Research Linguists

- Story-builder is a useful and adaptable tool for research linguists investigating the structure of individual languages.

Methodological advantages:

1. Linguists can use Story-builder to create discourse contexts within which to elicit more specific data. Because discourse contexts are constructed visually, they delimit their own spatio-temporal framework. This means that language consultants are less likely to be influenced or confused by contexts introduced previously.
2. Language data can be elicited directly in the target language without interference from the metalanguage.
3. Story-builder helps to elicit spontaneous, natural speech with one or more speakers.
4. Being picture-based, data elicited with the Story-builder cards are amenable to cross-linguistic comparison.
5. Using story-builder is a fun way to break up tedious elicitation sessions, and is a good resource to have on hand in case there is time to spare in a session.
6. Language consultants tend to enjoy working with the cards. The cards help consultants “think through” difficult constructions and allow them to be creative story-tellers.

Possible linguistic domains to explore:

1. *Argument Structure*: exploring argument alternations
2. *Referent-tracking*: finding out how subjects and objects are tracked in discourse.
3. *Discourse-level properties*: causality within stories; also gestures, focus, narrative structure, intonation, etc.

8. Licensing Information



Story-builder is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-ShareAlike 3.0 License (for details, visit <http://creativecommons.org/>).

In a nutshell, this license allows you to...

- Use, copy, and distribute Story-builder wherever you like – in your classroom, language program, linguistic research, etc. – as long as you attribute (cite) the creator when it is appropriate to do so.⁴
- Create derivative works and otherwise expand/modify the deck as desired. Note that the “ShareAlike” clause means that if you choose to publish your derivative work, you must publish it under the same open terms as the original work.

This license does *not* allow you to...

- Use Story-builder for commercial purposes (i.e. to make money).

If you have questions about usage or are interested in using Story-builder in a way that might violate these terms, please contact the creator (see page 20 for contact information).

The card illustrations, Story-builder website, and this manual are copyright © Katie Sardinha 2011.

⁴ E.g. citation: Sardinha, Katie (2011). Story-builder: Picture Cards for Language Activities. Retrieved from www.story-builder.ca on Aug 23, 2011.

9. Acknowledgments

Story-builder was initiated as a Cognitive Systems 402 research project in Spring 2011 at the University of British Columbia (see <http://www.cogsys.ubc.ca> for program details). To read a more in-depth discussion on the theoretical and cognitive motivations behind Story-builder's development, visit www.story-builder.ca and download the Cogs 402 final class paper.

Special thanks to Henry Davis for supervising the project, and to Erik Vatikiotis-Bateson and the Cogs 402 class for providing helpful feedback on the work. Many thanks also to Colin Steinmann for his help designing the card layouts and website. I am very grateful to the many volunteers who tested and translated the cards and inspired many important revisions, especially my Kwak'wala language consultants, RDC, VB, JN, and MH. Kwak'wala fieldwork was supported by a Jacobs Grant and an SSHRC grant #410-2008-2535 awarded to Henry Davis.

10. Contact Information

Comments and questions concerning Story-builder, the website (www.story-builder.ca), or this manual are very welcome and may be directed to the following email address:

katie.sardinha+story-builder@gmail.com

11. Sample Feedback Form

Thank-you for taking the time to give feedback on Story-builder! Your comments and suggestions will be used to benefit other Story-builder users, and will contribute to a general understanding of how picture cards can be effectively used for language activities. Please feel free to elaborate on the questions in this form in order to share your experiences.

If you would like your feedback shared via the Story-builder website in order to benefit the community of potential users, please indicate which content you would like to share online.

Feedback can be sent to katie.sardinha+story-builder@gmail.com.

1. *What types of activities have you used Story-builder for?*

2. *What does Story-builder work well for, in your experience? Why do you think this is so?*

3. *What are the limitations of Story-builder, in your experience? What problems have you encountered using the card set? Using individual cards?*

4. *What changes, if any, should be made to Story-builder? Would you like to see Story builder expanded in any way?*

5. *Do you have any other comments or suggestions?*

Thanks again!