

Guide to the Storyline Approach

OMG, Van Eyck was here



This guide will help you on your way.

Storyline Approach

Target group: 10 – 14 year olds

Teaching method: active, cooperative education for class groups in the form of a story.

What is a storyline approach?

This teaching package is based on the so-called storyline approach. This educational technique was developed in Scotland over thirty years ago. It is called 'storyline approach' because teaching takes place within the context of a story: all learning activities are planned as part of a storyline, which provides students with a framework in which the activities make sense. There is a challenge, a request for help, etc. and this can only be addressed as a group. The essence of the storyline approach is that students become part of a network aimed at promoting the well-known Flemish masters worldwide. The students are challenged to develop an activity regarding Jan Van Eyck which they can offer to Flemish and foreign tourists. When taking up the challenge, they learn to see things through the eyes of historical figures. The accompanying assignments not only provide more information, but are also an active form of processing and reveal the connection with the present-day world. The end product is intended to present the essence of the storyline approach in an attractive manner: what have we learned from this experience? What do we want to share with the world?

The storyline approach is in fact practising for the real world in a fictitious setting, a kind of intensive "pretending". As a result, education becomes exciting and attractive for students and they become more involved. Students do as much themselves as they can. The task of the teacher is to provide students with materials that activate them and offer help and structure if required. In this context, the storyline serves as a supple rope held by the teacher. This rope can be slackened if students are absorbed in the story and present proposals that may go beyond the activities the teacher had in mind. This rope can also be tightened if students run the risk of wandering off course.

In practice, the storyline approach always consists of the following elements:

- **The plot:** what it is all about.
- **The storyline:** the sequence of events through which the story unfolds. This constitutes the setting for all classroom activities.
- **The episodes:** different components of the storyline, like chapters of a book. They merge into each other until the storyline is complete. Students are actively involved in each episode. The teacher ensures a smooth transition to another episode by asking key questions.

- **The key questions:** the teacher’s “good questions” give students food for thought and encourage them to find solutions and take action within the scope of the storyline.
- **The learning activities:** active working methods for groups to answer key questions which can be found in ‘OMG, Van Eyck was here!’ as a digital learning polyptych.
- **An incident** (optional): an unexpected event or turn in the story which challenges students to continue their efforts. This is not included in ‘OMG, Van Eyck was here!’.
- **The expert:** person who is relied upon in the course of the story and provides an answer to the final questions. At this point, students already know a great deal about the plot and ask questions as “one expert to another”. This creates a different dynamic.
- **A classroom display:** all things created by the students within the context of the storyline approach are displayed in the classroom. This provides an overview of the progress of the storyline and helps to pick up the threads after an interruption. In addition, it makes the strength of group work visible and decorates the classroom with beautiful and valuable objects.

Good key questions

Asking good key questions is crucial to the success of the storyline approach. At the same time, it is perhaps the most difficult aspect of this approach. Educators ask students numerous questions to guide them to a ‘good’ answer (learning conversations). The teacher usually already knows the answer to the question. This does not apply to key questions: they enable students to come up with the answers themselves. Key questions are open, “real” questions not intended to check the students’ understanding but to make them think.

A good key question has the following characteristics:

- More than one answer is possible.
- It inquires into something that really matters.
- It facilitates analysis and reflection.
- It stimulates the imagination.
- It creates the opportunity to gain experience and actively acquire knowledge.
- It enables students to refresh their knowledge.
- It is asked within a safe context.
- It gives students responsibility.
- It results in new questions from students.
- It challenges students to take action themselves.

The success of the storyline approach depends on asking the right key questions. Correct wording is essential! Key questions make it possible to establish a natural link between the storyline and the appropriate learning activity. Different questions evoke different ideas to students. You should be

aware of the importance of good key questions. It is advisable to memorise them word for word before entering the classroom. Incorrectly worded questions will sound contrived to students and will make the magic disappear.

Of course, not everything can be formulated as a question. Asking good key questions is usually combined with providing (some) information at the beginning of an episode. The information is sometimes brought to students by means of an object which appears in the classroom, a letter, an unexpected event... but sometimes simply by the teacher who reveals some part of the story. Lifting a corner of the veil, as it were.

The storyline approach in the 'OMG, Van Eyck was here!' package

It is not evident to explore a no longer existent reality with young people. However, we find it important to teach students about a distant past which is still considered relevant to the present and to our reality. The presence of the Van Eyck learning polyptych creates a safe atmosphere in which it is possible to discuss topics such as religion and social status. Jan Van Eyck's universe also makes young people aware of their immediate living environment. Historical education enables students to explain historical phenomena, recognise similarities with the present and consider the effects of the past on the present.

The storyline of "OMG, Van Eyck was here!" consists of four episodes:

- Episode 1: An appeal
- Episode 2: Immersion in the world of Van Eyck
- Episode 3: Ambassadors at work
- Episode 4: Our offer finds its way

The storyline, the accompanying key questions and the associated learning activities are summarised in one table for each episode. The table can be read from left to right: all elements of the storyline, key questions and learning activities which belong together are on the same level. Next to this are the classroom materials you need for the assignment. Some materials are specified in the Van Eyck learning polyptych.

Storyline Approach: 'Oh My God! Van Eyck was here'

Episode 1: An appeal

<i>The storyline</i>	<i>Key questions</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Materials</i>
<p>In 2020 Ghent celebrates painter Jan Van Eyck. Culture Ghent, the city's cultural service is looking for ambassadors for this theme year. Do you want to help make Jan Van Eyck and his work understandable to your peers from all over the world? Then we need you in your creative, contemporary and opinionated way to make others enthusiastic about this fantastic Flemish master and his oeuvre!</p> <p>Go to https://padlet.com/PBSOG/vaneyck and register.</p>	<p><i>Who has launched this appeal? What is the purpose of this appeal? What is an ambassador? Why does the City of Ghent need ambassadors? How can we find out more about this topic?</i></p>	<p><i>Circle discussion: stimulate the students' curiosity and inspire them to become an ambassador.</i></p> <p><i>Search for further information about the Van Eyck year: website research.</i></p> <p><i>The group registers.</i></p> <p><i>Circle discussion: share the outcome of the website research, express the first ideas about what being an ambassador involves.</i></p>	<p><i>'City magazine Ghent' inviting people to become an ambassador</i></p> <p>Computers https://padlet.com/PBSOG/vaneyck</p>

Episode 2: Immersion in the world of Van Eyck

<i>The storyline</i>	<i>Key questions</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Materials</i>
<p><i>Being an ambassador requires a lot of background knowledge and skills as to the topic!</i></p> <p><i>To expand their knowledge, the students can have a look at several panels of the 'Van Eyck learning polyptych'. Behind each panel of the polyptych, there is a person, a story and an activity linked to the world of Jan Van Eyck.</i></p>	<p><i>What do you know about Jan Van Eyck? Name some of his works. What do you know about the period in which he lived? Tell something about the people he knew.</i></p> <p><i>Which panel will you work on? Who can help you? How can you share your know-how?</i></p>	<p><i>Circle discussion: measure and share knowledge and skills, create a mind map</i></p> <p><i>Presenting the 'Van Eyck learning polyptych', explaining how to use.</i></p> <p><i>Gaining experiences and impressions of Jan Van Eyck, his oeuvre and his world.</i></p> <p><i>Share experiences.</i></p>	<p><i>flipchart</i></p> <p><i>Van Eyck learning polyptych: http://vaneyck.storylinegent.be</i></p>

Episode 3: Ambassadors at work

<i>The storyline</i>	<i>Key questions</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Materials</i>
<p><i>You probably enjoyed some activities more than others. Or perhaps you only carried out activities that appealed to you and otherwise communicated attentively with your fellow students.</i></p> <p><i>Don't worry! As an ambassador, you make use of your talent. Others have already experienced this before.</i></p>	<p><i>What did you enjoy the most? Which activity was best suited to you? What talents do you have?</i></p> <p><i>How do you intend to further develop your role of ambassador? Which activities do you want to carry out?</i></p>	<p><i>Having a look at what others have done within the scope of the Van Eyck year.</i></p> <p><i>Circle discussion regarding the development of an activity within the scope of the Van Eyck year.</i></p> <p><i>Further development of the activity. Presentation to the class group: be open to suggestions and adjust the activity if required.</i></p>	<p><i>The Van Eyck learning polyptych: contemporary Van Eyck ambassadors</i></p> <p><i>Materials adapted to the different activities.</i></p>

Episode 4: Our offer finds its way

<i>The storyline</i>	<i>Key questions</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Materials</i>
<p><i>The offer is ready! Younsters post their offer of activities on https://padlet.com/PBSOG/vaneyck</i></p> <p><i>The offer of activities can now be consulted by everyone.</i></p> <p><i>The ambassadors receive the label of certified Van Eyck ambassador.</i></p>	<p><i>What activities do other people offer?</i></p> <p><i>How did you experience the ambassadors training? Would you recommend it to your friends? Any suggestions?</i></p>	<p><i>Regularly consult the offer of activities. Enjoy the different perspectives to promote Van Eyck.</i></p> <p><i>Ceremonial award of the ambassadors certificates.</i></p>	<p><i>Padlet</i></p> <p><i>Van Eyck ambassador label</i></p>