

Fifty (or so) Ways to Leave Your . . . Term Paper or Book Report and Tell Your Story

Although we believe that students need to develop the skills to prepare a thoughtful, well-written research paper, or a formal response to literature, our students have so many other product and publishing options. They can acquire subject knowledge, practice critical thinking and develop transferable information fluency and technology skills through a variety of creative activities.

Consider some of these alternative project options. As you select options, you should consider the importance of student choice and authentic audience. Student work is far more engaging when choice is involved. Student work is most meaningful when it has real purpose and real audience.

Infographic: Infographics are packed with opportunities for exploring all types of literacies and students can create them to display their knowledge and analysis of a topic, issue, piece of literature, event, system, person's life. Students collect and synthesize content on any topic with an eye toward presenting patterns using charts, timelines, maps, and other graphics to illustrate conclusions. For example, the topic of Italian Renaissance artists could be presented through charts to compare style, training, support of patrons, colors used, and subjects of paintings. Check out [this Guide](#) for models, as well as resources and inspiration on using Infographics as a creative assessment. Also check here for [charting tools](#).

Annotated bibliography: Students search for the best materials relating to their question or thesis and evaluate them for relevance, scope, point of view, and credentials of the author. Posted on the Web, these selective lists may be especially useful for future researchers. Check this [Guide](#) for a model. (Scroll down left column.)

Curation pages/Pathfinders: Students create a path or curate feeds for current awareness for researchers on a defined knowledge niche. Students carefully evaluate available resources and select and annotate the best print and online sources, offering search strategies, context for the topic, question or thesis, and concluding summaries reflecting on the issues they discover while researching. More static pathfinders options include wikis, blogs or [LibGuides](#), [Livebinders](#), [Google Sites](#). Online curating, pinning and scrapbooking tools include: [Sqworl](#), [BeeClip](#), [Mixbook](#), [Storify](#), [Diigo](#), [Scoop.it](#) or [Paper.li](#), [Educlipper](#), [Pinterest](#).

Newsletter: Using a desktop publishing program or a blog and ask students to set their newsletters in another time or place or culture. They create classified ads, theater and book reviews, sports stories, and business information. This is a perfect collaborative project. Consider using Microsoft Publisher, a Google Docs Templates, or [LetterPop](#), or blogging software.

Debate: Choosing two historic (or modern) figures and an issue, students duke it out, with evidence, of course. The rest of the class is responsible for asking questions and judging the effectiveness of the debaters. Videotape the debate for later discussion or for sharing with another class. Consider using a VOIP program like Skype to involve a class from another school.

Ignite Talk: Share your passion with others in a 5-minute talk featuring 20 slides which automatically advance every 15 seconds.

Pinterest Board: Use a pinboard-style display to visually share linked resources on a common theme.

Interactive Visual: Choose or create a compelling image and make it interactive by adding videos, text, audio, hyperlinks, additional images and more. Consider using [ThingLink](#), [Stipple](#), [ImageSpike](#), [Luminate](#), or [Speaking Image](#),

Brochure: Using a desktop publishing program, like Publisher, [Google Doc templates](#), [MyBrochureMaker](#), or [SimpleBooklet](#) students create flyers to advertise a product they've developed, a place they've researched, a period of time to travel back to, a solution to a problem, or health advice.

Résumé: Using a desktop or web-based publishing program, (like Google Docs or LetterPop), students create professional-looking résumés for a famous person and attach cover letters in the individual's voice. They might simulate

interviews of the historical figure applying for a job at a university or business. Students think critically to determine elements to include or exclude, present their résumés and “sell” their character’s qualifications. For the interviews, consider involving an expert or administrator, possibly using Skype.

Family tree: Students design a tree for a character in a novel. They can make the boxes large enough for illustrations and enhanced descriptions of characters and their relationships. Templates are available online.

Press conference (with famous people of a time period): Select a group of famous people to be interviewed and have the bulk of the class prepare questions. Students being interviewed should prepare their evidence well enough to predict how their famous person would respond to provocative questions. Consider recording these interviews to post on class and library websites as resources.

Trip itinerary: Students studying countries, cultures, states, or time periods, and literary journeys prepare a detailed itinerary listing sites of importance, what to pack, costs considering exchange rates, temperature for the season, where to stay, how to get from place to place, special events, advice, etc. Consider using [Google Lit Trips](#) or [Meograph](#) as a model or use any of a variety of [interactive mapping tools](#).

Journal entries: Write about an historical event or period from more than one point of view.

Detailed journal entries or blog: For a fictional or historical character, students imagine what a real week would be like and create a series of entries in the life of a person present at a historical event or that a book character might have kept during a specific period. Include interaction and quotes from family and friends. Reveal deep feelings, thoughts about others, and respond to big events.

Chapter of historical novel: Write the first chapter or two from the point(s) of view of interesting character(s) in an event in history.

Critical review: prepare a review of a book, movie, album for publication in school or local paper, Amazon, etc.

Mock trial for a controversial historical figure or fictional character: Bring Napoleon, Hitler, Socrates, Lee Harvey Oswald, Saddam Hussein, Galileo, or Richard Nixon in front of a well-prepared class made up of jurors, attorneys, witnesses, and a judge. Or hold a court simulation with students deciding a major issue, such as affirmative action, assisted suicide, or major constitutional controversies.

Acceptance speech: For a fictional or historical character, prepare an acceptance speech for a real or invented award. And then host an . . .

Awards event: Students plan a science fair for famous scientists; Grammy awards for classical musicians; or Latino culture awards for a Spanish class. Students present rationale/evidence for their selected person to win; they write detailed acceptance speeches, and plan the entertainment.

Board game: Let an event in history or a novel inspire a carefully researched and realistically playable game. Host an hour of game playing in the classroom as your evaluation

Web page: Web pages can advertise fictitious businesses, invented products, or present electronic résumés for historical or fictional characters. Consider using GoogleSites

Visit by a person in history to the school (à la Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure): Students plan an entire visiting day and imagine and record the visitor’s reactions to gym, lunch, your classes, the mall, etc. Get cameras ready. Present as a skit, video, web page, or monologue.

A day in the life of plant/machine/disease/person: Students prepare an essay or speech in first person to give the class a better idea of the history and daily life of the AIDS virus, for instance.

Dinner party: Students invite individuals from a particular period and plan what to serve and who will sit next to whom. Design the invitations. And describe the entertainment. Re-create the conversation. Or hold live, and teachers may evaluate the interaction among characters. Videotape and reflect on the highlights.

Historic experience simulation: Try a Civil War battle or a day at Ellis Island. Assign each student a role. The teacher should assume the role of a critical player to ensure the continuation of the action.

Skit: Students represent a typical day at a job for a career project or a major historical event. Consider videotaping the activity and sharing for later discussion.

Online threaded discussion: Teacher poses questions among a group of related historical figures or characters in a play or novel. Students maintain assigned roles as they respond to each other's posts in threaded discussion. Break classes into smaller communities to encourage more active discussion. This could happen in Edmodo, Wikispaces, etc.

Film treatment: For a historical event or a novel, have a critical character or the author plan the film version. Address a letter to a producer suggesting and defending choice of actors based on knowledge of characters, select locations, and describe how you would stage specific scenes.

Design the movie poster: For a book, scientific discovery, hot topic, historic event, plan and publish the poster. Consider [Smore](#) or [BigHugeLabs](#) offers a movie poster template.

Movie trailer: For a book, scientific discovery, hot topic, historic event--plan and film, the trailer. There are lots of digital storytelling options for trailers! Animoto is just one.

News article: Write an authentic newspaper-style article about a historic event or event from a novel. Include quotes from the major players. (Use primary sources and artifacts.)

Dear Abby letter: Have a novel protagonist or historical, or current figure write to an advice columnist. Present the character's problems and create a sincere, researched response from the columnist. Expect the advice columnist to use historic or book evidence and furnish serious insights.

Letter or email or text stream from one character or historical figure or scientist to another: Characters can share deep thoughts and reveal their personalities and rationale for their actions in personal letters. The letter should reveal something about the recipient's character, as well.

Letter/email to a government official sharing and advocating action relating to a controversial issue.

Plan a program to address a local need based on evidence collected in research/surveys

Twitter: Students can communicate and interact in a series of Tweets, using the voices of historical figures or characters, in period language and style.

Facebook: Who is the character in your book or the individual you are studying? Who would they friend? What would their updates look like? What issues would they support? What groups would they join? What links and photos would they share? Use a tool like: [Fakebook](#)

Manual: Create a detailed manual for life during a particular period of time or life in a particular ecosystem, or how to execute an experiment or for how to effectively use a particular technology. Many available digital publishing tools will make your manuals look polished.

You are the president, the general, the inventor, the senator: Explore the what ifs? Create two reasonable alternate scenarios for a historic event or decision. How else might Lee have responded at Gettysburg? After the student presents the three possible scenarios, have the class determine the most reasonable choice, or the choice actually made.

You are the author, playwright, or filmmaker: Respond to newspaper and magazine reviews of your work.

Write a short story about people who lived during a particular period or event or in a particular place: For instance, describe the last few minutes of the Space Shuttle disaster from the perspectives of three of the astronauts. Publish using a [digital publishing tool](#) like [ePubBud](#) or [Issuu](#), or [scrapbooking tool](#).

What if? If you could change one aspect of an event or book, would you choose to change the setting—place or time? Would you alter a character's personality or one of his choices? What if Richard III were the protagonist in *Macbeth* and *Macbeth* were the protagonist in *Richard III*? What if the Pilgrims met more hostile Native Americans? How would one change affect the big picture? What if *Romeo and Juliet* had cell phones?

Phone message or telegram: Students write a lengthy message from one historic character to his or her spouse or other contemporary about an important event. (this can also be accomplished using Google Voice or SpeakPipe <https://www.speakpipe.com>)

CD or album cover with inside background pages: Students design a cover to represent an event and plan the songs with descriptions. They decide on the producer and musicians and perhaps even record a song parody. Consider using [BigHugeLabs](#) for templates.

Petition: Students lobby for or against an authentic issue they have researched with a formal petition.

“Survivor” television show: Place teams of your students in a historic time or far off place. Provide challenges to solve to see who knows enough to “outwit, outplay, outlast.”

Epitaph and obituary or eulogy: Focusing on a person in history, students write epitaphs for tombstones, write newspaper obituaries, and deliver well-researched eulogies for fictional or historical characters.

Recipe: What ingredients, in what measure, and what conditions would students need to create the French Revolution? How would they prepare and cook their recipes? What changes would a slight alteration in the ingredients cause?

Photograph album or scrapbook: Students seek authentic historical photographs and label all the pictures in their albums, sharing “personal anecdotes” with the class, and including journal entries and letters. This assignment could be creatively extended to be the album of a character, a teen of a period in history, a disease, animal, or invention. Consider using an online [scrapbooking tool](#).

Political cartoon: Students satirize a political or historic person or event by creating a cartoon. (Use Web-based tools like [ToonDoo](#) or any of the [others listed here](#).) And discover [models of professional cartoons here](#).

Report card: evaluate the effectiveness of anything: an invention, a presidency, a relief effort, a military action, economic sanctions

Change it up: For an event or book, would you choose to change the setting—place or time? Would you alter a character's personality or one of his choices? What if Richard III was the protagonist in *Macbeth* and *Macbeth* were the protagonist in *Richard III*? How would one change affect the big picture?

Lesson plan and lesson: Have students creatively present the results of their research in a lesson of their own. The lesson should not be a lecture; it should actively engage the class. Consider creating a screencast that can be archived for continual use.

Original song, song parody, rap: Ask students to describe an event, a person, a concept, or a character musically. Encourage a catchy refrain or chorus to get the class involved.

Oversized baseball card or wanted poster: What is the essence of the person you've studied or met through a novel? Capture those qualities economically in the form of a large baseball card (with quotes, stats, image) or wanted poster. The baseball card should include statistics and quotes, and use the border effectively. Use a tool like [BigHugeLabs](#).

Alternate book jacket with blurb: Ask students to create new art to advertise a book—fiction or nonfiction. A compelling blurb to draw readers in. NCTE offers a [template](#) for book covers.

Advertising campaign: Ask students to examine and deconstruct existing effective [media campaigns](#) and to inform the construction their own full-blown campaign for an invention or industry or a book. Or choose an important person and run his or her campaign for a major political office. Use any digital film or storytelling tool to film commercials.

Postage stamp for a person or event in history: Students attach a desktop-published stamp design to a three-paragraph essay describing why the subject was important enough to deserve a commemorative stamp. Post the students stamps online, on an image sharing site or a wiki.

Picture book or comic book: Students explain a concept or event through artistic illustration, using economic language. Consider using online bookmaking tools—[cartoon](#) or [photo](#), [scrapbooking](#) tools, or scan print work and use a [digital publishing tool](#) like [ePubBud](#) or [Issuu](#), or [scrapbooking tool](#).

Phone message, telegram, series of texts: Students write a lengthy message from one historic character to his or her spouse or other contemporary about an important event.

CD or album cover with inside background pages: Students design a cover to represent an event and plan the songs with descriptions. They decide on the producer and musicians and perhaps even record a song parody. Consider using [BigHugeLabs](#) for templates.

Crossword puzzle or word search: Students use related vocabulary to create a puzzle for the class to attempt. Encourage puzzle creators to include questions requiring critical thought.

Petition: With evidence, students lobby for or against an authentic issue they have researched with a formal petition.

“This Is Your Life” television show: Students videotape or enact the biographical show complete with guests, illustrations, and special surprises.

“Survivor” television show: Place teams of your students in a historic time or far off place. Provide challenges to solve to see who knows enough to “outwit, outplay, outlast.”

Epitaph and obituary or eulogy: Focusing on a person in history, students write epitaphs for tombstones, write newspaper obituaries, and deliver well-researched eulogies.

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Political cartoon: Students satirize a political or historic person or event. (Use Web-based tools like [ToonDoo](#) or any of the [others listed here](#).) And discover [models of professional cartoons here](#).

Invent a new country and describe how it would affect the balance of power in its region and globally.

Monologue: Your more dramatic students may opt to create a scene from the life of a famous person or a fictional person caught up in a real event.

Want ad: Students compose an ad requesting personnel to solve a problem in history.

Timeline: Students create a wall-sized, annotated, and multimedia time line, including important quotes. Consider parallel timelines—perhaps, one of actual history, another of book events—to enhance the reading of historical fiction. Consider also using [Web-based timelining](#) tools like [Meograph](#), [MIT's Timeline](#), [Mnemograph](#), or [Xtimeline](#)

Soap opera based on a historical event: Students can add lots of drama and over-the-top characters. Use a Google Docs template for storyboarding. After storyboarding, students may use a variety of digital storytelling tools to produce scenes.

Invent a new animal and describe how it would adapt to and impact an ecosystem.

Survey: Students use a tool like [Google Forms](#) to design a survey instrument, collect and analyze authentic data relating to a selected topic or issue. [Additional polling tools](#).

What about that traditional paper? And how about taking the most excellent of those papers and publishing them digitally? Share them on your websites and encourage learners to add them to their own portfolios of work. Use [digital publishing tools](#) like [ePubBud](#) or [Issuu](#), and embed and celebrate!

Digital storytelling: Use an online tool such as [Voicethread](#), [GoAnimate](#), or [PowToon](#) to teach a concept related to the topic studied. Include Creative Commons or Public Domain images and include proper credit through citations.

Fundraising: Write a proposal to fund a project for an imaginary inventor or entrepreneur for Kickstarter <http://www.kickstarter.com/> Look on the website and see what type of projects that are asking to be funded. What kind of language and images do convince people to fund your projects?

Source: Valenza, Joyce Kasman, "School Library Journal", August 21, 2013.