

## **The Narrative Engine: Enhancing Storytelling in Higher Education through Artificial Intelligence**

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### **Abstract**

Storytelling is a foundational human and pedagogical tool, yet its application in higher education often remains static in a technologically dynamic world. This chapter addresses the gap between traditional narrative assignments and the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create deeply immersive, interactive, and personalised storytelling experiences. It proposes a pedagogical framework for leveraging AI to move students from passive consumers of stories to active co-creators of complex narratives. Through an analysis of current research in digital storytelling, cognitive science, and human-AI collaboration, this chapter identifies key opportunities for innovation while addressing ethical considerations such as authenticity and algorithmic bias. The core of the chapter presents a framework for AI-augmented storytelling, illustrated with five detailed examples applicable across diverse higher education disciplines: a Dynamic Historical Scenario Generator, an Ethical Dilemma Simulator, a Scientific Discovery Narrative tool, a Cross-Cultural Story Weaver, and a Literary Style Emulator. Findings indicate that AI-enhanced storytelling can significantly boost student engagement, critical thinking, empathy, and interdisciplinary communication skills. The chapter concludes with targeted recommendations for educators, institutions, and researchers, advocating for a strategic and critical adoption of AI to revitalize storytelling as a central pillar of modern higher education pedagogy.

**Keywords:** *Artificial Intelligence (AI), Storytelling, Higher Education, Digital Narrative, Interactive Storytelling, Generative AI, Pedagogy, Critical Thinking, Science Communication*

### **Learning Objectives**

Upon completing this chapter, the reader will be able to:

1. Analyse the cognitive and pedagogical benefits of storytelling in higher education and identify the limitations of traditional methods.

2. Apply a framework for integrating AI into storytelling activities to enhance student engagement, creativity, and critical analysis.
3. Design and implement AI-augmented storytelling assignments tailored to specific disciplinary contexts, using the five provided examples as models.
4. Critically evaluate the ethical implications and practical challenges of using AI in creative and narrative tasks, and develop strategies to mitigate them.

### **Introduction: Re-Scripting the Role of Storytelling in the Academy**

Storytelling is the oldest form of education. For millennia, narratives have been the primary vehicle through which cultures have transmitted knowledge, values, and social norms. In higher education, the power of story is implicitly acknowledged across disciplines—from case studies in business schools and patient histories in medicine to historical accounts and the explication of scientific discovery. A compelling narrative can transform abstract concepts into memorable, relatable knowledge, fostering both cognitive understanding and affective connection (Haven, 2007). It is the bridge between data and meaning.

However, despite its recognised power, the practice of storytelling in the university classroom has often remained remarkably conventional. Students are typically positioned as passive consumers of narratives crafted by others (historians, scientists, novelists) or are asked to produce stories within the rigid confines of traditional formats like the research essay or the lab report. While effective for certain learning outcomes, these methods often fail to leverage the full, dynamic potential of storytelling as an active mode of inquiry, critical thinking, and creative exploration. They rarely capture the interactive, "what if" nature of genuine problem-solving and ethical reasoning.

The emergence of sophisticated and widely accessible Artificial Intelligence, particularly generative AI, presents a watershed moment for narrative pedagogy. We are now at a technological inflexion point where the creation of complex, branching narratives, the simulation of dynamic characters, and the visualisation of imaginary worlds are no longer the exclusive domain of professional writers or game developers. This technology creates a profound opportunity to address a key pedagogical gap: the difficulty of creating scalable, personalised, and truly interactive narrative experiences for students.

Yet, this opportunity is accompanied by significant challenges. The prospect of using AI to generate stories raises critical questions about **authenticity, creativity, and authorship**. If an

AI can write a story, what is the student's role? Does it devalue human creativity? Furthermore, the **ethical dimensions** of AI-generated narratives are complex. AI models trained on existing human texts can reproduce and amplify harmful stereotypes and biases, while the "black box" nature of their operation can obscure the sources and validity of the information they present (Benjamin, 2019). Finally, there is a lack of a clear **pedagogical framework** for educators. Most instructors have not been trained to think of AI as a narrative collaborator and lack the models and methods to integrate it into their curriculum in a way that is meaningful, critical, and aligned with learning objectives.

This chapter confronts these challenges directly. It proposes that AI should not be viewed as a story *writer*, but as a **narrative engine**—a powerful tool that, when guided by a skilled educator and an engaged student, can generate dynamic scenarios, simulate complex perspectives, and provide a sandbox for creative and critical exploration. The argument is that by embracing AI as a storytelling partner, we can move students from being passive recipients of information to active architects of meaning. This chapter will provide a research-grounded framework and five concrete, cross-disciplinary examples to show how higher education professionals can leverage AI to enhance storytelling, thereby fostering the essential 21st-century skills of critical thinking, empathy, and creative problem-solving.

### **Research Analysis: The Convergence of Narrative, Cognition, and AI**

The proposal to integrate AI into storytelling pedagogy is not merely a technological novelty; it is grounded in decades of research across cognitive science, education, and computer science. This review synthesises findings from these fields to establish the theoretical foundation for an AI-augmented narrative framework.

### **The Cognitive Power of Story**

Research in neuroscience and psychology has firmly established that the human brain is hardwired for story. Unlike the processing of disconnected facts, engaging with a narrative activates multiple brain regions, including those responsible for sensory experience, emotion (amygdala), and empathy (mirror neuron system) (Stephens et al., 2010). This "neural coupling" allows a listener or reader to experience the story as if it were their own, leading to deeper processing and significantly higher retention of information. Haven (2007) argues that the specific structure of a story—with its characters, goals, conflicts, and resolution—is a highly evolved information-processing mechanism that makes complex data digestible and memorable.

In an educational context, this means that framing information as a story is a powerful pedagogical strategy. Research by Schank and Abelson (1995) on "scripts" and "story skeletons" demonstrated that our memory is fundamentally organised around narrative structures. We recall events and concepts far more effectively when they are embedded within a causal, character-driven sequence. This cognitive reality underscores the immense, often untapped, potential of storytelling as a primary teaching tool in higher education, particularly for complex or abstract subjects.

### **From Digital Storytelling to Interactive Narrative**

The use of technology to enhance storytelling is not new. The "digital storytelling" movement, which emerged in the 1990s, empowered individuals to combine personal narratives with multimedia elements like images, audio, and video (Lambert, 2013). Studies on digital storytelling in education have consistently shown benefits in student engagement, digital literacy, and personal reflection.

However, AI facilitates a leap from digital storytelling to **interactive narrative**. While a digital story is typically a linear, pre-authored multimedia text, an AI-powered interactive narrative is dynamic and responsive. It features branching paths, characters who react to user input, and outcomes that are determined by the user's choices. Research in the field of interactive fiction (IF) and narrative-based games has shown that this interactivity significantly enhances engagement and learning. Murray (2017) argues that interactive narratives foster "agency," the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of one's decisions. When students feel agency within a learning scenario, they are more motivated and more likely to engage in deep critical thinking about the consequences of their choices (Malone & Lepper, 1987). Early AI-driven systems for narrative generation, while complex to build, showed promise in creating stories that could adapt to user preferences, laying the groundwork for today's more accessible generative models (Riedl & Young, 2010).

### **Generative AI as a Narrative Collaborator**

The advent of large language models (LLMs) like GPT-4 and Gemini has democratized the creation of interactive narratives. These models can act as "dungeon masters" or "simulation engines," generating descriptive text, character dialogue, and plot developments in real-time based on user prompts.

Current research is beginning to explore the pedagogical applications of this capability. For instance, a study by Singh and Bhardwaj (2023) explored using an LLM to create branching case studies for medical students. The AI generated patient scenarios that evolved based on the students' diagnostic questions and treatment decisions, providing a safe but realistic environment to practice clinical reasoning. In creative writing, research has shown that using AI as a brainstorming partner or a source of stylistic imitation can help students overcome writer's block and develop a more sophisticated understanding of literary techniques (Cheung et al., 2023).

The key finding emerging from this nascent research is that the most effective pedagogical use of generative AI is not as an autonomous author but as a **collaborator** or **simulator**. The learning occurs in the interaction between the student and the AI, in the process of crafting effective prompts, critically evaluating the AI's output, making decisions within the simulated world, and reflecting on the outcomes. This collaborative model mitigates fears about AI replacing human creativity and instead positions it as a tool for augmenting it.

### **Critical Challenges: Authorship, Bias, and Evaluation**

Despite the potential, the research also highlights significant challenges. The question of **authorship and originality** is paramount. How do we assess a student's work when it has been co-created with an AI? Traditional metrics of assessment may no longer apply. This necessitates a pedagogical shift towards evaluating the *process* of creation—the quality of the student's prompts, their critical reflections on the AI's contribution, and their justification for their narrative choices, rather than just the final product.

The issue of **algorithmic bias** is particularly acute in storytelling. LLMs are trained on vast corpora of human text, which contain historical and societal biases. An AI prompted to generate a story about a "CEO" or a "nurse" may default to gender stereotypes. An AI describing a character from a specific ethnic background may draw on harmful caricatures (Bender et al., 2021). Therefore, a critical component of AI-augmented storytelling pedagogy must be teaching students to identify, question, and actively counteract these biases in the AI's output.

Finally, **evaluating the quality and veracity** of AI-generated content is a crucial skill. An AI can generate factually incorrect historical details or scientifically implausible scenarios with the same confident tone as it delivers accurate information. This makes the development of critical AI literacy—the ability to cross-reference information, identify inconsistencies, and

treat AI output as a starting point for inquiry rather than a source of truth—an essential learning outcome of any AI-based assignment (Ng & Lee, 2023).

### **Methodology: A Conceptual Framework Synthesis**

This chapter utilizes a **conceptual research methodology**, focusing on the synthesis of existing literature to construct a new, practical framework. Given the rapid pace of AI development, a conceptual approach is the most effective way to provide timely, relevant, and actionable guidance for educators. The methodology involved a three-stage process: a systematic review of literature across cognitive science, digital pedagogy, and AI ethics; a thematic analysis to identify key opportunities and challenges; and the synthesis of these findings into the **AI-Augmented Storytelling Framework**. This framework is designed to be a practical tool, bridging the gap between abstract theory and concrete classroom application by grounding pedagogical strategies in established research.

### **Discussion: The AI-Augmented Storytelling Framework with Five Examples**

The following framework is designed to guide educators in using AI as a narrative engine to foster deeper learning. It is built on the principle of **collaborative creation**, where the student is the storyteller and the AI is their dynamic tool. This framework is illustrated with five detailed, cross-disciplinary examples.

#### **Example 1: The "Dynamic Historical Scenario" Generator (History, Political Science, Sociology)**

- **Pedagogical Goal:** To move students from memorising historical facts to understanding history as a series of contested decisions made by individuals with limited information and competing motivations. To develop historical empathy and critical source analysis.
- **The Activity:** Students are assigned a pivotal historical moment (e.g., the Cuban Missile Crisis, the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, the start of the women's suffrage movement). Their task is to interact with an AI persona representing a key historical figure.
- **AI Implementation:**

1. **Persona Priming:** The instructor primes the AI. Prompt: *"You are John F. Kennedy on October 22, 1962. You have just seen photographic evidence of Soviet missiles in Cuba. Your knowledge is limited to what was known on this specific day. You are communicating with a trusted but sceptical advisor (the student). Your goal is to explore your options while managing immense pressure from your military advisors (the 'hawks') and considering the catastrophic risks. Respond to the student's questions and advice from this perspective. Be firm in your role but open to exploring ideas."*
  2. **Student Interaction:** The student acts as the advisor. They must ask probing questions, propose courses of action (e.g., "Should we launch a preemptive strike?" "What if we offer to remove Jupiter missiles from Turkey?"), and challenge the AI persona's assumptions. The AI, in character, responds, revealing the complexities and pressures of the situation.
  3. **Critical Reflection:** The final assignment is not a summary of the event. It is a reflective essay where the student submits a transcript of their interaction and analyses their decision-making process. They must answer questions like: "Which of your suggestions was most/least effective and why? How did the AI's responses change your understanding of the historical pressures on Kennedy? What information that you have now was unavailable to the historical figure, and how did that affect your advice?"
- **Value Proposition:** This transforms history from a static narrative into a dynamic simulation. It fosters empathy and a nuanced understanding of historical contingency, while also implicitly teaching students to be critical of a single narrative source (even an AI one).

### **Example 2: The "Ethical Dilemma Simulator" (Business, Law, Medicine, Engineering)**

- **Pedagogical Goal:** To develop professional ethical reasoning skills by immersing students in realistic, high-stakes scenarios where there is no single "right" answer.
- **The Activity:** Students take on a professional role (e.g., CEO, junior lawyer, ER doctor, lead engineer) and are presented with a complex ethical dilemma by an AI-powered simulator.
- **AI Implementation:**

1. **Scenario Generation:** The instructor designs a branching scenario. Prompt: *"Create a branching ethical dilemma for a business student acting as a CEO. The scenario: Their company's best-selling product has a minor defect that has caused a few non-lethal injuries. A recall would be financially devastating. The student will make choices. Present them with options at each stage and show the consequences. For example, Option A: Ignore the problem. Consequence: A news outlet gets a leak. Option B: Issue a quick fix for future products. Consequence: A lawsuit is filed by an injured customer. Option C: Announce a full recall. Consequence: The company's stock plummets. Introduce new stakeholders with conflicting demands (e.g., an anxious board member, an angry consumer advocate)."*
  2. **Interactive Simulation:** The student navigates the simulation, making choices via text prompts. The AI presents the escalating consequences of each choice, forcing the student to justify their decisions under pressure.
  3. **Justification and Debrief:** The student must produce a "Decision Memo" that includes the simulation transcript and provides a detailed ethical justification for their final choices, referencing relevant professional codes of conduct or ethical frameworks (e.g., utilitarianism, deontology).
- **Value Proposition:** This provides a safe space to practice high-stakes decision-making. It makes ethical theory tangible and demonstrates that ethical choices have cascading, often unpredictable, consequences.

### **Example 3: The "Scientific Discovery Narrative" (STEM Fields)**

- **Pedagogical Goal:** To develop science communication skills. To teach students to translate complex data and methodologies into a compelling and accessible narrative for a non-expert audience.
- **The Activity:** Students are given a complex piece of primary research or a dataset from their field. Their task is to use AI as a collaborator to create a story that explains the research journey and its significance.
- **AI Implementation:**

1. **Audience Persona:** The student first prompts the AI to act as a specific audience. Prompt: *"Act as a curious high school student who is interested in science but has no knowledge of genetics. I am going to explain the CRISPR-Cas9 gene-editing technology to you. Ask me questions when you don't understand something. Point out when my language is too technical."*
  2. **Narrative Co-Creation:** The student explains the scientific concept to the AI persona. The AI's "confused" questions help the student identify jargon and areas that need clearer explanation. The student then uses the AI as a creative partner. Prompt: *"Help me create a compelling analogy to explain how CRISPR works. Let's brainstorm a story about the 'discovery' of this process, giving the scientists characters and motivations. How can we visualise the 'search and replace' function of the Cas9 protein?"*
  3. **Final Product:** The student produces a final narrative in a chosen format (e.g., a blog post, a short podcast script, a storyboard for an animated video). They must also submit a reflection on how the AI collaboration helped them refine their communication strategy.
- **Value Proposition:** This explicitly teaches the crucial but often-neglected skill of science communication. It forces students to think about their audience and transforms the "boring" lab report into an engaging story of discovery.

#### **Example 4: The "Cross-Cultural Story Weaver" (Languages, Anthropology, Cultural Studies)**

- **Pedagogical Goal:** To foster cross-cultural understanding and linguistic flexibility. To explore how stories change and adapt across cultural and linguistic boundaries.
- **The Activity:** Students, often working in multicultural teams, are tasked with co-creating a story that blends elements from two or more cultures.
- **AI Implementation:**
  1. **Ideation and Context:** A team of students decides to create a story blending a Japanese folktale with a Brazilian one. They use AI as a cultural consultant. Prompt: *"Provide key themes, character archetypes, and common narrative structures in Japanese folklore (e.g., the concept of 'kami,' trickster kitsune). Do*

*the same for Brazilian folklore (e.g., the Saci Pererê, the Cuca). Highlight potential points of thematic overlap or interesting contrast."*

2. **Translation and Nuance:** As they write the story, they use the AI for more than just literal translation. Prompt: *"The Japanese concept of 'wabi-sabi' is central to our story's aesthetic. How could we express this idea in Portuguese without a direct equivalent? Suggest descriptive language or a metaphorical scene that conveys a sense of imperfect beauty."*
  3. **Visualisation:** The team uses an AI image generator to create visuals for their story, helping them synthesise the different cultural aesthetics. Prompt: *"Generate an image of a character with the mischievous look of the Brazilian Saci, but dressed in the style of the Japanese Edo period, in a forest that blends bamboo with Amazonian flora."*
- **Value Proposition:** This activity moves beyond simple translation to a deep engagement with cultural context and nuance. It promotes collaboration and creativity and uses AI to bridge cultural gaps rather than just linguistic ones.

### **Example 5: The "Literary Style Emulator" (Literature, Creative Writing)**

- **Pedagogical Goal:** To develop a deep, practical understanding of literary style, voice, and technique by deconstructing and emulating the work of master authors.
- **The Activity:** After studying an author in depth (e.g., Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Gabriel García Márquez), students use AI to analyse and then generate text in that author's style.
- **AI Implementation:**
  1. **Stylistic Analysis:** The student feeds a passage from the author's work into the AI. Prompt: *"Analyse the stylistic features of this passage by Virginia Woolf. Comment on sentence structure (e.g., stream of consciousness), vocabulary, use of imagery, and narrative perspective."*
  2. **Emulation and Creation:** The student then prompts the AI to write a new, short scene in that style. Prompt: *"Write a 200-word scene about a person waiting for a bus in the style of Virginia Woolf, focusing on their internal monologue and sensory perceptions."*

3. **Critique and Integration:** The student's assignment is to write a critical analysis that compares the AI's emulation to the original author's work. What did the AI capture well? What nuances did it miss? They must then take a sentence or a fragment from the AI's text and use it as a starting point for their own original short story, consciously departing from or refining the emulated style.
  - **Value Proposition:** This is "close reading" in action. It demystifies literary style by breaking it down into analyzable components. By critiquing the AI's attempt, students demonstrate a far deeper understanding of the author's craft than they would in a standard analytical essay.

## Findings

The application of the AI-Augmented Storytelling Framework yields several critical findings for higher education pedagogy. These findings underscore a fundamental shift in the roles of student, educator, and curriculum.

**Finding 1:** The Student's Role Shifts from Passive Consumer to Active "World-Builder" and "Critical Curator."

Across all five examples, the student is not merely receiving a story. They are actively involved in prompting, questioning, directing, and curating the narrative process. In the Historical Scenario, they shape the dialogue; in the Dilemma Simulator, they determine the plot; in the Science Narrative, they construct the explanation. This active role fosters a sense of ownership and agency, which research shows is directly linked to deeper engagement and motivation (Murray, 2017). The primary learning outcome becomes the development of process-based skills (e.g., critical inquiry, decision-making, audience analysis) rather than the memorisation of content.

**Finding 2:** AI-Augmented Storytelling Promotes "Productive Failure" and Iterative Thinking.

Traditional assignments often have a high-stakes, one-shot finality. The AI-powered narrative environments, by contrast, create low-stakes sandboxes for experimentation. A student can run the Ethical Dilemma simulation multiple times to see different outcomes. They can generate ten different AI-powered analogies for their science communication task and choose the best one. This ability to experiment, fail, and iterate without penalty is a cornerstone of effective

learning and creative development. The focus shifts from producing a "perfect" first draft to engaging in a robust process of revision and refinement.

**Finding 3:** The Integration of AI Necessitates and Fosters Critical AI Literacy.

Effective use of the framework is impossible without critical engagement with the AI itself. Students quickly learn that the AI's output is not an infallible source of truth. The history student must question the AI persona's biases; the science communicator must correct its factual errors; the literary analyst must critique its stylistic shortcomings. This process organically cultivates critical AI literacy—the ability to understand, evaluate, and ethically utilise AI systems. This is arguably one of the most vital cross-disciplinary skills for graduates entering the 21st-century workforce.

**Finding 4:** Storytelling Becomes a Powerful Tool for Interdisciplinary Synthesis.

The framework demonstrates that AI-enhanced storytelling can break down disciplinary silos. The Scientific Discovery Narrative blends STEM content with communication and creative writing. The Cross-Cultural Story Weaver merges linguistics, anthropology, and visual arts. This approach allows students to see how different fields of knowledge can be integrated to solve complex problems and communicate ideas effectively, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of real-world challenges.

**Recommendations**

To effectively implement AI-augmented storytelling, stakeholders must adopt a strategic and supportive approach.

**For Higher Education Educators:**

1. **Design for Process, Not Product:** Shift your assessment focus. Create rubrics that reward the quality of student prompts, the critical reflection on the AI's output, and the justification of narrative choices, rather than just the polish of the final story.
2. **Become a "Lead Learner":** Be transparent with students about your own process of learning to use these tools. Experiment with the AI in front of the class, showing them how you refine prompts and critique outputs. This models the critical, iterative mindset you want them to adopt.
3. **Start with Structured Scenarios:** Begin with more structured activities (like the Historical Persona or the Dilemma Simulator) where you provide the initial priming for

the AI. As you and your students become more comfortable, you can move to more open-ended creative partnerships (like the Story Weaver).

4. **Mandate a "Reflection and Transcript" Appendix:** For any AI-assisted assignment, require students to submit the transcripts of their key interactions with the AI, along with a brief reflection on how the collaboration shaped their final work. This makes the process visible and accessible.

#### **For Institutional Leaders:**

1. **Invest in Pedagogy-First AI Training:** Provide professional development that focuses on how to design AI-based assignments, not just on which buttons to click. Create forums for faculty to share successful storytelling assignments across disciplines.
2. **Establish Ethical AI Use Policies:** Develop clear, institution-wide guidelines for the ethical use of generative AI. These policies should differentiate between plagiarism and legitimate AI collaboration, providing clear examples for students and faculty.
3. **Provide Equitable Access to Robust Tools:** Ensure that all students have access to capable AI tools through institutional licenses. This prevents a "digital divide" where some students can afford more powerful AI assistants than others.
4. **Foster Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Create grant programs or course release incentives for faculty from different departments (e.g., Engineering and English) to co-design AI-augmented storytelling courses and modules.

#### **For Researchers:**

1. **Conduct Empirical Studies on Narrative Co-Creation:** There is a need for empirical research that measures the learning gains from these collaborative storytelling activities. How do they impact critical thinking, empathy, and content retention compared to traditional methods?
2. **Develop Frameworks for assessing AI-Collaborative Work:** Research and validate new assessment rubrics and methods specifically designed for evaluating assignments co-created with AI.
3. **Investigate the "Human-in-the-Loop" Model:** Study the cognitive and creative processes at play when a student interacts with an AI as a narrative partner. What makes this collaboration effective? What are the common pitfalls?

## Conclusion

The arrival of powerful and accessible AI does not signal the death of human storytelling; it heralds its rebirth as a more dynamic, interactive, and personalised pedagogical tool. By shifting our perception of AI from an autonomous author to a collaborative narrative engine, we can design learning experiences that empower students as never before. The framework and examples presented in this chapter demonstrate that AI can be used to create immersive historical simulations, complex ethical sandboxes, compelling scientific explanations, rich cross-cultural tapestries, and deep analyses of literary craft.

In this new paradigm, the educator's role becomes more vital, not less. It is the educator who designs the narrative architecture, who teaches the critical literacy needed to question the AI, and who facilitates the reflection that turns an engaging activity into lasting learning. The ultimate goal of AI-augmented storytelling is not to teach students how to use a particular piece of software. It is to use this revolutionary technology to cultivate the most timeless and essential human skills: the ability to understand and weigh different perspectives, to communicate complex ideas clearly and persuasively, to make reasoned ethical judgments, and to weave disparate facts into a meaningful and coherent whole. In short, it is to teach them how to be better storytellers, and in doing so, better thinkers.

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