

# Story Logic

Make English compelling. Make learning stick.



A practical guide for English program directors and teachers  
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## Section 1: The Problem



Most learners, left to their own devices, default to test prep, grammar drills, and vocabulary lists. They open apps. They memorize word lists. They grind through grammar exercises. It feels productive. It looks like studying. But something is wrong.

**| None of it compels. None of it sticks. |**

Krashen saw this clearly. Learners don't acquire language by memorizing rules or grinding on drills. He said, "We acquire languages by understanding messages."<sup>1</sup> Yet here's a harder truth: comprehensible input isn't enough either. Of course, output is important too. But the problem isn't just a lack of input and output.

Bored learners tune out. Disengaged students forget. Unmotivated people produce unmotivated results. The problem is that most input lacks pressure. It sits flat on the page. It asks nothing of the learner. Nobody wants it, nobody needs it, and so nobody

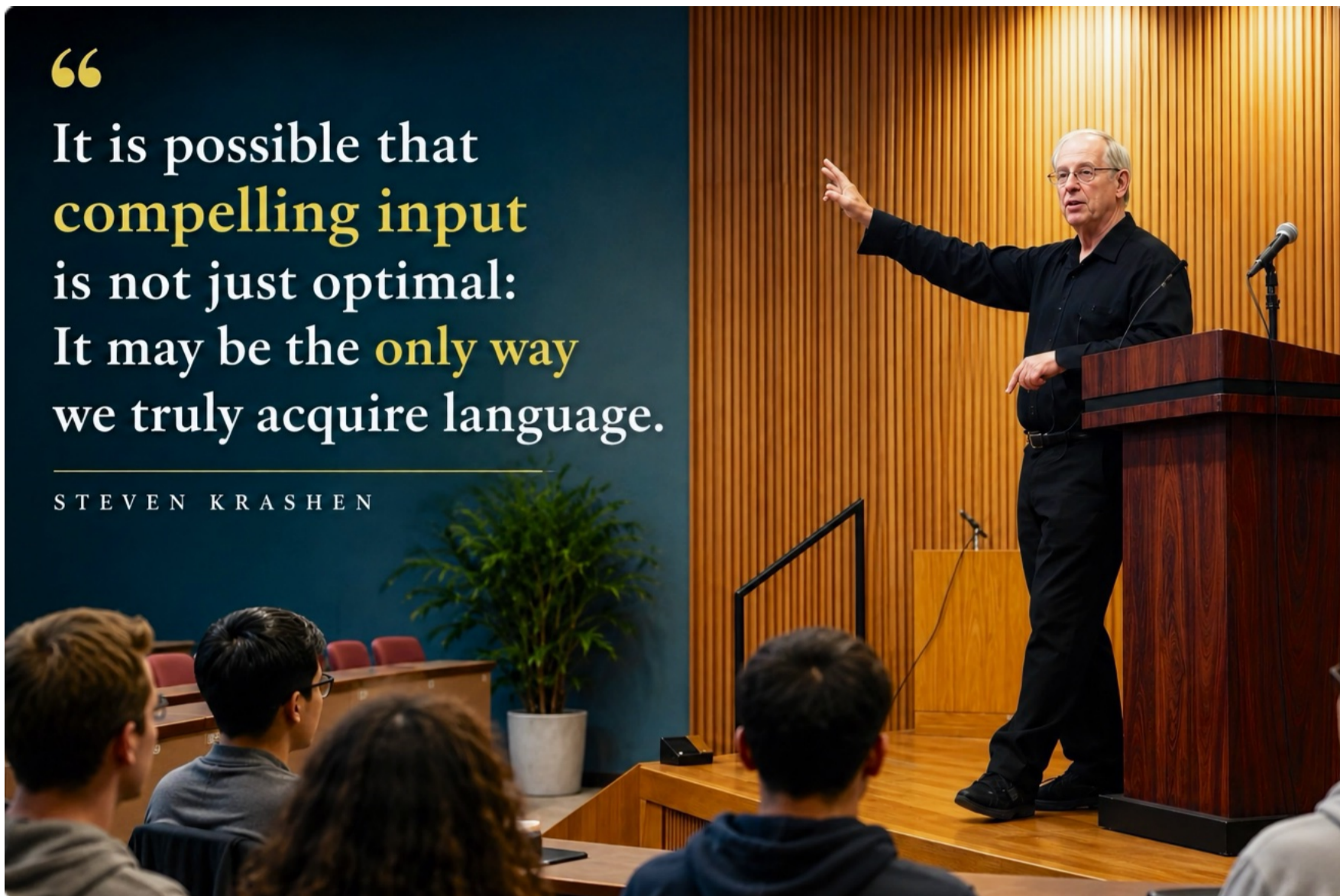
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<sup>1</sup> Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. Longman.

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It is possible that **compelling input** is not just optimal: It may be the **only way** we truly acquire language.

STEVEN KRASHEN



remembers it. Story Logic solves this problem, not by adding more content, but by changing the shape of the content teachers already have.

## Section 2: The Principle

Krashen's input hypothesis stands as a central principle in language education with decades of research supporting it. We can remember it with this acronym: ALBUM.

**A**cquire **L**anguages **B**y **U**nderstanding **M**essages. We drive language acquisition when learners understand meaningful messages – when the level is right and the content is meaningful.

But Krashen went further. He said we need a special kind of comprehensible input. He called it **compelling input** – messages so engaging that students forget they are studying. With the "compelling input hypothesis,"<sup>2</sup> input compels, motivation stops being a problem, and learners lean in. They want more.

### | So what makes input compelling?

<sup>2</sup> Krashen, S. D. (2011). The compelling (not just interesting) input hypothesis. *The English Connection*, 15(3), 1.

# THE STORYBRAND 7-PART FRAMEWORK

Donald Miller, Author of Building a StoryBrand



## Story Logic does. |

Story Logic gives compelling input its structure. It organizes language around the one pattern the human brain never tires of – someone faces a problem, tries something, and something changes. Narrative researcher Jonathan Gottschall defines it precisely: **character + conflict + attempted extrication.**<sup>3</sup>

Donald Miller, author of Building a StoryBrand, maps it this way: a character has a problem, meets a guide, gets a plan and a solution, takes action, and reaches either success or failure.<sup>4</sup> In most basic terms, the shape is: problem + solution + result. In this frame, the learner is the hero – like Frodo – and the teacher is the guide – like Gandalf. Though Miller wrote this framework for branding and marketing, we can dynamically apply it to how we plan lessons and present information.

<sup>3</sup> Gottschall, J. (2012). The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human. Mariner Books.

<sup>4</sup> Miller, D. (2017). Building a StoryBrand: Clarify your message so customers will listen. HarperCollins Leadership.

Neuroscientist Paul Zak measured story logic directly. He tracked twelve biological signals including, oxytocin, cortisol, heart rate, skin conductance – as subjects engaged with story-shaped content. Story-logical input triggered attention, drove empathy, and motivated real-world behavior.<sup>5</sup>

We confirmed this in two classroom studies for English language learners. Students who read story-logical texts remembered more, enjoyed the content more, and felt more empathy for characters – with no extra difficulty. Same level. Same length. Different shape. The story logical shape changed everything.<sup>6,7</sup>

Story Logic isn't magic. It's structure. And structure is teachable.

### Section 3: The Formula

Story Logic runs on a clear and simple formula. Teachers can learn it in thirty seconds and use right away with any content they use in class.

#### | **Basic Story Logic: Problem → Solution → Result** |

In simple terms, we attempt to see classroom content within this frame. For any piece of content, fiction or nonfiction, we simply ask:

- **What problems are connected to this content or related to this content?**
- **What are the potential solutions to these problems?**
- **What are the happy endings if we follow these solutions?**

Gottschall defines Story Logic more in line with narrative structure:

#### | **Character → Conflict → Attempted Extrication** |

A character wants something. Trouble, conflict, or danger block them. But they fight through. The word extrication works perfectly – from the Latin **extricare**, where **ex-** means "out" and **tricae** means "perplexities." To extricate means to free someone from a constraint or difficulty. That is exactly what every compelling story demands. This universal

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<sup>5</sup> Zak, P. J. (2015). Why inspiring stories make us react: The neuroscience of narrative. *Cerebrum: The Dana Forum on Brain Science*, 2015, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Poulshock, J., Ikeo, R., & Miyata, M. (2022). Language teaching with story-logic. *Senshu University Institute for the Humanities, Annual Report*, Number 52, March 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Poulshock, J., Ikeo, R., & Miyata, M. (2023). Teaching language and communication with story logic. *Senshu University Institute for the Humanities, Annual Report*, Number 53.



story structure isn't a literary device. It's the shape of life that the human brain expects and rewards. As the graphic above shows, Haven<sup>8</sup> identifies eight elements that give story its grip, and his research shows how these elements work for both fiction and non-fiction.

Now let's look at what story logic does to typical language learning tasks:

### Vocabulary

- Flat: A vehicle is a form of transport.
- Story Logic: They escaped in a stolen vehicle.
- The word now has pressure. It shows action. Students feel it.

### Reading

- Flat: Read about Chaser – a border collie who learned 1,026 words.
- Story Logic: John Pilley watched his dog Yasha die in his arms. He swore he would never love another dog. Then Chaser arrived.
- Same facts. Different shape. Students lean in.

<sup>8</sup> Haven, K. F. (2014). *Story smart: Using the science of story to persuade*. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.



### Grammar – Spoken Practice

Introduce Sebastian with picture of him riding a giant wave. "This is Sebastian. He is a big wave surfer. And maybe he is crazy!" In pairs, students can practice the dialogues.

**(A) What is he doing?**

**(B) He is surfing.**

Show the next image. The wave is bigger. Sebastian is still going. The giant wave falls down towards Sebastian. Will he escape?

**(A) What is he doing now?**

**(B) He is escaping.**

The wave crashes. Sebastian disappears.

**(A) What is he doing now?**

**(B) He is crashing.**

Same present continuous drill. Completely different shape and pressure. Students don't zone out. They lean forward. They want to know what happens. The grammar sticks because the stakes drive attention and emotion.

# STORY LOGIC & NARRATIVE DESIGN

Applying a Narrative Design Principle at Every Level of Language Education

! PROBLEM → CHALLENGE → ★ RESOLUTION / RESULT

1 WORD LEVEL	2 SENTENCE LEVEL	3 LESSON LEVEL	4 COURSE DESCRIPTION LEVEL	5 UNIT LEVEL	6 COURSE LEVEL	7 COURSE EVALUATION LEVEL	8 CURRICULUM LEVEL
! Teachers put vocabulary inside pressure. A word doesn't sit in a list.	! Grammar lives inside stakes.	! Every lesson opens with a problem students feel the need to solve.	! English lessons can trap you in grammar drills and test prep.	! Each unit has a theme and a central question. A conflict creates pressure.	! The course starts somewhere. Students are the hero.	! Track transformation, not numbers.	! The narrative design principle runs through everything.
It does something. It solves a problem, escapes a danger, or names what a character desperately needs.	Sebastian isn't just surfing. Maybe he is crazy. The structure sticks because students want to see the resolution of the conflict.	They engage with the conflict. They suggest solutions. They attempt something. They envision change.	In this course, you build real English power through story-driven input and output.	Learners explore problems, find solutions, and take action through stories and tasks.	Each unit raises the stakes. Each lesson adds pressure. Multiple stories deepen the central questions.	Students move through a narrative and earn Experience Points (Story Points). Every 10,000 words earns one Story Arc.	Every strand—input, output, fluency, language focus—organizes around meaningful challenge and consequence.
★ Students learn meaning from what happens, not from definitions.	★ Meaningful sentences. Memorable grammar.	★ The lesson closes with a result—a happy ending, or at least a resolution.	★ Leave this course more confident, capable, and ready for real communication.	★ Resolution brings insight, growth, and a new perspective on the theme.	★ By the final class, something real has changed.	Visible proof that something has changed.	★ Nation's four strands provide the framework. Story Logic gives every strand its engine.
MEANING FROM CONTEXT	STRUCTURE WITH STAKES	CHALLENGES TO SOLUTIONS	PROBLEM. SOLUTION. RESULT.	THEME. QUESTION. RESOLUTION.	THE SYLLABUS IS THE JOURNEY.	PROGRESS IS TRANSFORMATION.	A COHERENT STORY ACROSS EVERY STRAND.

STORY LOGIC MAKES LEARNING MEMORABLE, MEANINGFUL, AND TRANSFORMATIVE.  
Every level. One principle. Real change.

## Speaking Prompt

- Flat: Describe your week.
- Story Logic: What troubles or challenges did you face this week? What did you do?
- One prompt produces lists. The other produces language from life.

The formula works at every level of learning for both input and output – a single word, a grammar dialog, a reading text, a speaking task. Language stops sitting on the page waiting to be memorized. It moves forward. It pushes action. It solves something.

## Section 4: The Narrative Design Principle

Most teachers apply Story Logic to a text or a lesson and stop there. That's a good start. But Story Logic points toward something bigger.

When teachers apply Story Logic consistently across every level of their program – words, sentences, lessons, units, courses, and curricula – it stops being a technique and becomes a design principle. Call it the narrative design principle: the deliberate use of story structure to shape not just what students learn, but how the entire learning environment is built and experienced.

# VEHICLE



**We escaped  
in a vehicle.**



**Bad guys chased us  
in vehicles.**



**We ran away from  
a dinosaur in a vehicle.**

This is what separates Story Logic from ordinary storytelling techniques. A storytelling technique touches content. A narrative design principle touches everything. It isn't a content type. It's a shape. And that shape scales from a single vocabulary example to an entire curriculum.

**At the word level,** teachers put vocabulary inside pressure. A word doesn't sit in a list. It does something. It solves a problem, escapes a danger, or names what a character desperately needs. Students learn meaning from what happens, not from definitions.

**At the sentence level,** grammar lives inside stakes. Sebastian isn't just surfing. He's fighting for his life against a giant wave. The structure sticks because students want to see the resolution of the conflict.

**At the lesson level,** teachers frame every class as a story arc. The lesson opens with a problem. Students feel the need to solve the problem. Class content exists to address that problem, and students know it from the first minute. They engage with the conflict. They suggest solutions. They attempt something. They envision change. The lesson closes with a result – a happy ending, or at least a resolution. Learners don't complete activities. They move through challenges to solutions.

**At the course description level**, Story Logic shapes how teachers frame the course itself. One sentence names the problem. The next breaks it. Consider this:

**| English lessons can trap you in grammar drills and test prep. In this course, you build real English power through story-driven input and output. |**

Three sentences. Problem, solution, result. Teachers who write their course descriptions this way signal to students immediately – this class is different. Something is going to change here.

**At the unit level**, each unit focuses on a theme – well-being, motivation, successful people, resilience – and learners work through problems, solutions, and results connected to those themes. Each unit carries its own story logic: a central question, a conflict, and a resolution. Ideally, the units themselves form a larger narrative arc across the course – each theme building on the last, each question deepening the one before. This is the ideal: a course planned with the diligence of a great story, where the final unit feels like an earned resolution, not just the last topic on the syllabus.

**At the course level**, every great story has a shape. It starts somewhere, builds through challenges, and ends with change. A Story Logic syllabus works the same way. The course itself becomes a story. Students don't just move through topics. They move through a narrative arc – from who they are at the start to who they become by the end. Each unit raises the stakes. Each lesson adds pressure. And by the final class, something real has changed. The student is the hero. The syllabi below show the journey. Each unit builds around two or three stories that pressure the question from different angles.

The Story of Modern Music	The Psychology of Wellbeing
<b>Where does music come from?</b> <i>The Blues — Music of Survival, Every Day I Have the Blues, Lady Sings the Blues</i>	<b>What causes unhappiness?</b> <i>The Winning Mindset — from Gap to Gain, What Makes People Happy?</i>
<b>What happens when life breaks you?</b> <i>Hank Williams — Drifting Cowboy, Johnny Cash — The Man in Black, On the Road Again</i>	<b>What does science say about happiness?</b> <i>Happiness in 59 Seconds, The Happiness Class</i>
<b>What can music become?</b> <i>The First Lady of Song, Nature Boy — a Jazz Classic</i>	<b>What bad habits stop growth?</b> <i>How Not to Learn English</i>
<b>What does music do for a community?</b> <i>The Motown Sound</i>	<b>What makes life meaningful?</b> <i>Meaning to Live, Find Meaning in Life's Story</i>
<b>What is the price of fame?</b> <i>Michael Jackson — King of Pop, The Biggest Band</i>	<b>Can happiness survive hard times?</b> <i>Hard Times and Happiness</i>
<b>Can music change the world?</b> <i>Master of Words — Bob Dylan</i>	<b>How do people learn to enjoy work?</b> <i>Say No to Overwork, Making Work Fun, Make Communication More Fun</i>
<b>Who do people become through music?</b> <i>The Queen of Glamour Rock</i>	<b>How do people create the life they want?</b> <i>Learn to Be Lucky, The As If Principle, A Law for Thinking</i>

**At the course evaluation level,** the arc is transformation. Consider how one Story Logic syllabus tracks progress in a course that has an extensive reading element. Students don't accumulate word counts. They move through a narrative and get experience points or story points. Each arc is a milestone – visible proof that something has changed. Students aren't tracking numbers. They're tracking their own transformation. The learner is the hero. The course is the journey. The Peak is the resolution. Story Logic doesn't just shape the content – it shapes how students experience their own progress. With every 10,000 words they read, learners earn one Story Arc:

- *The Start – Your journey begins.*
- *The Spark – Reading comes alive.*
- *The Climb – You keep going.*
- *The Flow – Stories pull you in.*
- *The Shift – Confidence grows.*
- *The Strength – You get stronger.*
- *The Voice – English speaks inside.*
- *The Horizon – Goal in sight.*
- *The Leap – You rise up.*
- *The Peak – You become a reader.*

**At the curriculum level,** the narrative design principle runs through everything. Every strand – input, output, fluency, language focus – organizes around meaningful challenge and consequence. The curriculum itself becomes a coherent story. Nation's four strands<sup>9</sup> – meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, fluency development, and language focus – provide the practical framework for building this at scale. Story Logic gives every strand its engine.

**| This is the full scope of Story Logic. Not just better content based in story structure. Better programs that follow narrative design. |**

## Section 5: What To Do Monday

Story Logic doesn't require a new curriculum, a new textbook, or a new platform. Teachers can start tomorrow with what they already have. Here are five moves that work immediately.

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<sup>9</sup> Nation, P. (2007). The four strands. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 1(1), 2-13.

## REFRAME ANY LESSON AS A STORY ARC.



## EXAMPLE: THE POWER OF DELIBERATE PRACTICE.



### Reframe one lesson as a story arc.

Before you plan, ask three questions. What problems and conflicts does today's content connect to? What solutions does the content offer? And if students follow those solutions, what good results will they get? Open every lesson with the problem, point to the solution, and promise the result. Students will know why they are there – and why the content matters. Here is a lesson example about: **The Power of Deliberate Practice:**

- Many people believe talent is fixed – you either have it or you don't. That belief stops people from trying. Open class with this arc:
- Problem: The talent myth traps people. They stop trying before they start.
- Solution: Deliberate practice breaks that trap. Effort and focus grow talent.
- Result: With enough deliberate practice, ordinary people build extraordinary skills.
- Now students don't just read a story about The Power of Deliberate Practice. They read it because they want to know if it's true for them.

### Storify vocabulary with the One Word Story Generator.

Drop in a single word. Choose a survival lens – Fight, Flee, Feed, or Bond. The generator builds a cinematic three-panel story around it: pressure, struggle, outcome. The word now lives inside a problem. Students don't memorize a definition. They watch a character live the definition in a mini-story. Free at: [bit.ly/1-word-story](https://bit.ly/1-word-story).

## Rewrite your course description.

Open with the problem your students face. Break it in the next sentence. Point toward the result in the third. Here is one example:

*Many English classes trap you in grammar drills and test prep – but drills don't build real language. Real language grows from understanding and responding to compelling stories. In this class, you build English power by reading, listening, speaking, writing, and thinking about stories that pull you in.*

Three sentences. Problem, solution, result. Do it now and your students will read it differently on the first day of class.

## Add pressure to one grammar dialog.

Take a flat A/B exchange from any textbook. Give it a situation. Make the characters need something. Make the stakes real. Sebastian isn't just surfing. He's fighting against giant waves. The grammar drill becomes a story.

## Turn your evaluation into a story arc.

Students don't want to track numbers. They want to track transformation. Dörnyei shows that learners sustain motivation when they pursue a vivid image of their future self – not a grade, not a score, but a person they are becoming.<sup>10</sup> Rename your progress levels. Give each milestone a narrative beat. The Start. The Spark. The Climb. The Flow. The Peak – you become a reader. Students stop asking 'what's my grade' and start asking 'what's my next level.' They aren't studying English anymore. They are becoming English speakers. That shift in identity changes everything.

None of these moves require permission, budget, or training. They require one thing: the decision to give language pressure, action, and consequence. That decision changes everything.

## Section 6: What's Next

Story Logic works. But it raises a practical question that program directors and teachers naturally ask. Where do I get compelling, story-logical, level-right input at scale? Building it yourself takes time most teachers don't have. Rewriting textbooks, storifying vocabulary lists, hunting for level-right content – that work adds up fast. And it never stops.

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<sup>10</sup> Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The Psychology of the Language Learner*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

**| ReadOasis solves this. |**

ReadOasis gives students thousands of story-driven, level-right English texts with audio, vocabulary quizzes, and an AI Study Buddy that lets them interact with every story they read. Students read, listen, speak, and write – all with story-logical input that compels and sticks. In the ReadOasis LMS, teachers track progress, set goals, and watch word counts grow. The platform does the heavy lifting so teachers can focus on what they do best.

**| This is Story Logic at scale. Done for you. Ready tomorrow. |**

If you want to go deeper – live examples, classroom demonstrations, and Q&A – join the free webinar:

**Story Logic: Make English Compelling. Make Learning Stick.  
Thirty minutes. Real examples. No cost.**

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