THE WORLD BUILDING TOOLKIT

New world? Build it well.

Eight skills for inventing a place that feels real.

1 Start with what if
PREMISE

What is the one big idea?

2 Map it out
SCALE

Where is everything, and how far?

3 Make the rules
CONSISTENT

Does this follow my rules?

4 Fill it with life
ADAPT

How does it fit where it lives?

5 Meet the people
CULTURE

Why do they live this way?

6 How it all works
SYSTEM

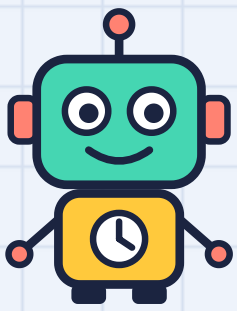
And then what happens?

7 Give it a past
TIMELINE

What happened here before?

8 Tell its stories
CONFLICT

Who wants what, and what's in the way?



Imagine a place. Give it rules. Fill it with life and stories.

1 WORLD SKILL ONE

Start with what if

Premise say: PREM-iss

The big idea that a made-up world is built on.

THREE WAYS TO FIND A PREMISE

Change the place
A world inside a cloud. A city on a whale.

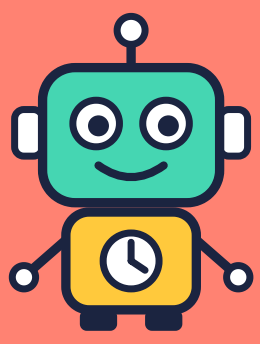
Change a rule
No gravity on Tuesdays. Shadows are alive.

Change the size
Everyone is as small as an ant.

THEN ASK

"What else would have to change because of it?"

TOP TIP Change one big thing, then follow the chain of changes.



ASK YOURSELF

What is the one big idea?

2 WORLD SKILL TWO

Map it out

Scale say: SKAYL

How much real distance each part of a map stands for.

WHAT EVERY GOOD MAP NEEDS

A compass
Shows north, south, east and west.

A key
Explains what each symbol means.

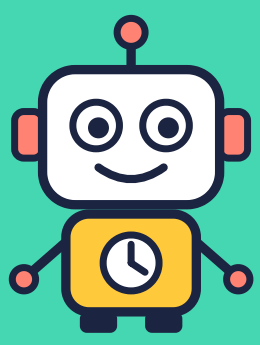
A grid
Letters and numbers: "the cave is at C4".

A scale
Tells you how far things really are.

IN MATHS

If 1 square stands for 5 km, a river 6 squares long is 30 km long.

$6 \times 5 = 30$



ASK YOURSELF

Where is everything, and how far?

3 WORLD SKILL THREE

Make the rules

Consistent say: kun-SISS-tunt
Staying the same, and following the same rules every time.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT ANY RULE

What can it do?
Be exact.

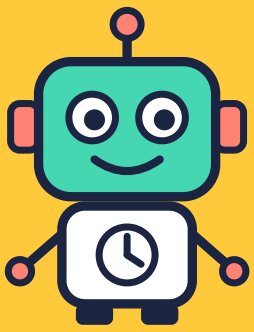
What can't it do?
Every power needs a limit.

What does it cost?
Time, energy, something given up.

THE RULE
Magic only works by singing.

BREAKS THE RULE
A wizard claps and the door opens.

REMEMBER
A power that can do anything is boring. Limits make it interesting.



ASK YOURSELF
Does this follow my rules?

4 WORLD SKILL FOUR

Fill it with life

Adapt say: uh-DAPT
To change over time to suit the place where you live.

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR ANY CREATURE

Where does it live?
Hot, cold, wet, dry, dark, high?

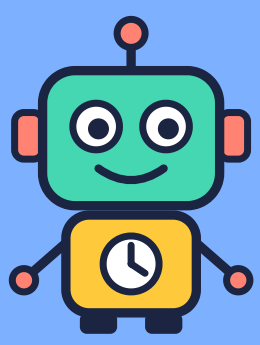
What does it eat?
And how does it get it?

What eats it?
And how does it stay safe?

What is special?
One feature that fits its home.

IN OUR WORLD

Polar bears have thick fur for the cold. Camels store fat in their humps for long desert trips.



ASK YOURSELF

How does it fit where it lives?

WORLD SKILL FIVE

Meet the people

Culture say: KUL-chur

The way a group of people live: their food, homes, beliefs and celebrations.

SIX THINGS TO DECIDE ABOUT A PEOPLE

Homes
Built from what, and why?

Food
What grows or lives nearby?

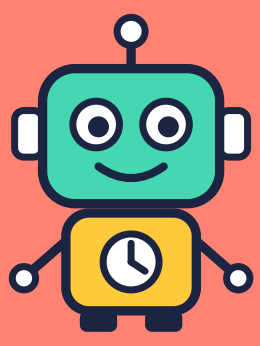
Clothes
What is the weather like?

Jobs
What needs doing here?

Celebrations
What matters most to them?

Greetings
How do they say hello?

REMEMBER Give your people good reasons for what they do.



ASK YOURSELF

Why do they live this way?

6 WORLD SKILL SIX

How it all works

System say: SISS-tum

A set of parts that work together and affect each other.

FOLLOW THE CHAIN

Dry summer > Less grain > Bread costs more > People move

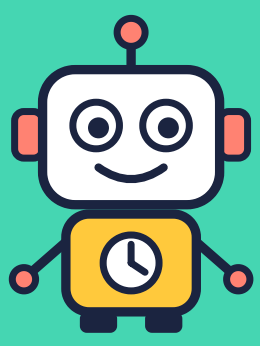
KEEP ASKING

"And then what?"

IN MATHS

If 1 shell is worth 3 beads, a hat that costs 4 shells costs 12 beads.

4 × 3 = 12



ASK YOURSELF

And then what happens?

7 WORLD SKILL SEVEN

Give it a past

Timeline say: TYM-lyn

A line that shows events in the order they happened.

EVENTS THAT LEAVE A MARK ON A WORLD

A disaster
A flood, a fire, a long winter.

A discovery
A new land, a new tool, a new power.

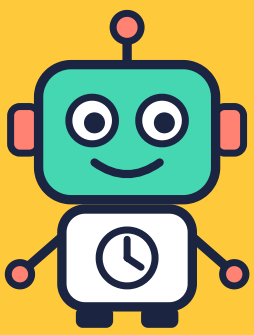
A decision
A peace, a promise, a new law.

Year 0 > Year 120: the flood > Year 185: the bridge

IN MATHS

From the flood in year 120 to the bridge in year 185 is 65 years.

185 − 120 = 65



ASK YOURSELF

What happened here before?

8 WORLD SKILL EIGHT

Tell its stories

Conflict say: KON-flikt

The problem at the heart of a story.

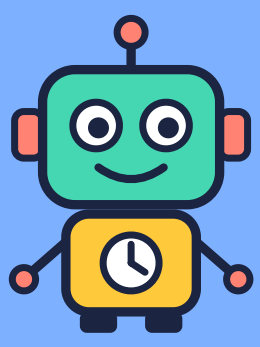
A STORY RECIPE THAT WORKS IN ANY WORLD

A want > A problem > Try and fail > Find a way

A STORY THAT GROWS FROM ITS WORLD

"A snail must deliver a letter before the rain goes home."

Share your world as a story a game a comic a guide book



ASK YOURSELF

Who wants what, and what's in the way?