Learning Through Arts & Technology

Back to Main Page

Introduction

What is Digital Storytelling?

In a broad sense, digital storytelling is the process of using story and digital media for personal expression. This includes expressive outlets such as blogs, podcasts, and social media.

In a strict sense though, and more to the topic of this module, digital storytelling is the process of creating short, personal stories that are told through a recorded, first-person voiceover, still and/or moving images, and music or sound. Digital stories are often informal in tone and 2–3 minutes in length. This genre of digital stories generally includes a 250 word story combined with 12–15 pictures to create a personal movie format that is archived as a quick time file on a personal computer, burned to a DVD, or housed on web platforms such as YouTube, personal/class web pages, and online story-maps.

Devising and performing digital stories encourages youth to move beyond the role of consumer and into the role of "producer" of media, and thus of culture. This process helps build cultural capital among young people. At its core, digital storytelling invites youth to combine technology, performance, and personal experience to reflect on--and contribute to--the world around us.

Digital stories can represent an individual's voice/perspectives, as well as those of a group or community.

Back to Top

Objectives

Teachers can expect to learn:

- Basic steps for devising a digital story.
- Elements of an effective digital story.
- Sample activities for devising story and narrative with youth.
- Applications of digital storytelling in school settings.
- Resources for digital storytelling and applied theatre projects/programs.

Back to Top

Background Knowledge and Skills

A Bit of Background on Digital Storytelling

The digital storytelling movement was started by Joe Lambert and the late Dana Atchley who were interested in making media production available to "ordinary people." Since the 1990s, Lambert and his colleagues at the Center for Digital Storytelling (Berkley, CA) have continued to experiment with the Digital Storytelling Workshop, developing and disseminating best practices from their work with teachers, young people, business professionals, and other non-media specialist interested in sharing and listening to stories, as well as developing community: www.storycenter.org

Digital storytelling includes a special emphasis on the group process and the experience of individuals sharing stories with each other. Rather than focusing primarily on skills in technology and the development of high quality media products, facilitators take care to build and further community connections through a process of listening to and reflecting on the stories in the room.

Digital Storytelling is Used in the K-12 Classroom to:

- Build community through personal exchange and reflection
- Support creativity, communication, and collaboration
- Structure hand-on, interdisciplinary, project-based learning and assessment
- Foster connections between curriculum content (inside the classroom) and students' lived experiences (outside the classroom)

- Engage youth in research, writing, and reflection
- Hook students into a topic and create a "need to know" around curriculum
- Support peer-to-peer teaching and learning
- Promote language skills, as well as visual and media literacy
- Document and disseminate teaching and learning

Prior Knowledge and Skills

Digital storytelling draws on basic skills in media/technology, as well as writing and performing personal stories. Furthermore, effective digital storytelling relies on creative, group facilitation skills and an ability to structure a safe space for young people to share, listen to, and reflect on personal experiences. Partnering with specialists in media technology and applied theatre/performance can help facilitate a smooth digital storytelling process, but is not always necessary for developing dynamic digital stories. Planning how to manage digital assets (which take up a lot of computer space and a great deal of time to upload/download) will prove essential to a smooth process with youth. Finally, a successful digital storytelling process and a high quality digital storytelling product usually grow out of significant pre-planning and opportunities for youth to experience "choice within structure".

Back to Top

Step By Step Guide

Step-by-Step Skill acquisition: techniques and processes relevant to the topic are presented in a step-by-step manner to assist the novice learner in getting started with this specific technology while providing consideration of elements and principals of design in the arts.

1. **Why Digital Storytelling?**
   Digital storytelling has the potential to contribute to the formation of new knowledge (about identity of self and community), expand dialogue (get to the heart of matters in the participants' lives), and fuel the exchange of ideas (participants collaboratively reflect on sites of possibility for positive change).

   The process of digital storytelling requires that students explore the relationship between narrative, audio, and visual text, offering the storyteller and the audience/listener/viewer multiple layers of meaning-making within each story.

2. **Layers of a Digital Story**
   Overview of the tracks/layers that might be included in a digital story

   a. Visual track
   Still images
   Video clips
   Movement and juxtaposition of images
   Transitions between images/video

   b. Voice-over track
   Recorded narration of the story
   Quality/tone/pacing of the storyteller's voice
   Silent pauses

   c. Sound/music track
   Music
   Sound effects

3. **Elements of an Effective Digital Story**
   "Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling" from the Center for Digital Storytelling
   Many different ideas exist around what makes an effective story, as well as an effective digital story. Joe Lambert's book *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, as well as the *Digital Storytelling Cookbook* (storycenter.org) offers "Seven Elements of Digital Storytelling" that help students work toward an engaging digital story, rather than a typical "family slide show."

   a. A Point (of View)
   (This suggests that each story must communicate the perspective of the storyteller.)

Ask the students:
What are you trying to communicate?
What is the point of telling the story?
What does the story really mean?
Where is your own perspective in the story?

b. A Dramatic Question
(This suggests that each story invite the listener to consider a question that keeps their attention and will be answered by the end of the story. The audience should be able to discern the reason/purpose the story is being told.)

Ask students:
What is each character looking for in this story?
What is at stake in the story?
How will you keep the audience engaged in the topic/idea/question?

c. Emotional Content
(This suggests that each story should make an emotional connection with the listener.)

Ask students:
How did you feel at the time of the story?
How do you feel about the moment in the story now?
What emotion do you want to leave the storyteller with?

d. The Gift of Your Voice
(This suggests that each story is from the teller's perspective and that the storyteller's voice should sound natural and less performed than many kinds of storytelling.)

Ask students:
How can you use your voice to communicate your point of view/perspective/feelingsabout your story?
Invite students to tell their story from memory several times rather than reading orreciting a memorized narrative.

e. The Power of the Soundtrack
(This suggests that because various types of music can provide meaning and shift perceptions, music and sound effects should be chosen with great attention and intention.)

Ask students:
How does the music/sound affects change your story?
What kind of sound track will help the audience pay attention to your story/idea/message/voice?

f. Economy
(This suggests that the story use just enough assets to tell the story and not overwhelm the viewer. The images used in a digital story should add value to the story, rather than simply repeat or demonstrate what is said in the narrative. Less is often more.)

Ask students:
What needs to be shown and what needs to be said?
How might images convey ideas and emotions that words cannot and vice versa?
What is the simplest way to convey idea/emotion in the story?

g. Pacing
(This suggests that the tempo and rhythm play an important in conveying the meaning of the story and connecting with an audience.)

Ask students:
Where might you pause to allow the audience more time to take in an image or consider ideas in the narrative?
How might the tempo of your voice over vary throughout the piece to reflect the emotions of the characters in the story?

4. **Steps/Process for Digital Storytelling**
   The steps/process for digital storytelling can vary quite a bit depending on the group of participants, the purpose/goals of the project, and the facilitator's style/skills/emphasis.

   However, most digital storytelling work includes the following five steps:
   a. **Write and Record Story (Voice Over)**
   b. **Collect Assets (Video, Photos, Music)**
   c. **Storyboard or Map Out Digital Story**
   d. **Edit Assets into Digital Story**
   e. **Share/Disseminate Digital Story**

5. **Digital storytelling as an applied drama/theatre process**
   Applied drama and theatre (ADT) is an umbrella term often used to describe theatre and drama practices that take place in educational, social, and community-based settings with youth and other non-professional artists (as opposed to professional theatre practices that take place in theatres and tend to engage professional actors in putting on a play). Applied drama/theatre programs tend to focus on building human relationships and a sense of community among participants before moving into story

sharing and performance work that includes more risk-taking. To this end, applied drama/theatre practices offer many engaging activities and techniques for helping youth work together, build trust, develop strong communication and collaboration skills, participate in, reflect on, and dialogue. Together, applied drama/theatre and digital storytelling practices offer a dynamic model for integrating arts and technology into the K–12 setting and for creating new media with youth.

a. Set the Stage: Build Intentional Community

- Employ theatre/drama activities, exercises, warm-ups, and games to intentionally build trust and foster collaboration among students. Specifically, applied theatre activities and exercises invite youth to use body, face, and voice to express themselves and/or accomplish a group task. This step is ESSENTIAL for building community before jumping into higher-risk activities around story sharing.
- These activities also tend to invite "choice within structure," offering youth various ways to participate and/or solve a problem within a highly structured game or exercise.
- Applied theatre activities ultimately set the stage for youth to share and listen to personal stories, as well as to reflect on their relationship to each other and the world around them.
- See list of applied theatre resources for books that detail these types of theatre activities, excises, and warm-ups. The following web-pages also list theatre activities and games that can be used to build intentional community with a group of students:

  Games developed by Viola Spolin
  YouTube Video on One-Word Stories with Students
  Games for Actors and Non-actors by Augusto Boal

b. Introduce Digital Stories, Structure, and Tools

- Share examples of youth-created digital stories and facilitate a discussion around what makes an effective story/digital story. Consider using the DAR (Describe, Analyze, & Reflect/Relate) method to facilitate student conversation around the digital stories and to help them analyze particular choices and the meanings communicated through those choices.

  DESCRIBE – What do you see?
  ANALYZE – What could it mean?
  REFLECT/RELATE – How does it relate/matter to you?
  How does it connect to overarching goal/ topic/ curriculum?
- Point out effective examples of story structure (a clear beginning/middle/end), as well as how narrative, sound/music, and images contribute to the story being told.
  Click here for examples of effective digital stories.
  Sample storyboard template for students to create DS using that model and assets provided on the site?
  umass.edu/wmwp/DigitalStorytelling/Storyboard.htm
  umass.edu/wmwp/DigitalStorytelling
- While sharing completed examples of digital stories, invite youth to reflect on the storyteller's use of Lambert's "7 Elements of Digital Stories," as well as how the various visual and audio tracks/layers function within each story.
  digitalstoryteller.org/docs/languagearts.htm
- Finally, encourage students to identify some of the digital devises used to perform digital stories, such as transitions, special affects, and sound affects.

c. Devise stories

1. **Group topics, themes, and guiding questions**
   Based on students' interests, teacher/curricular goals, and common threads arising from the group's interests, teachers may want to focus digital storytelling work around a group theme or guiding question. If broad enough, themes can accommodate most any story; however, landing on a group theme (such as *family, change, or home*) can help students shape a particular story and/or decide what story to work on. Furthermore, themes and guiding questions can help frame how an audience views a group's collection of digital stories.
2. **Remembering/Sharing Personal Stories**
   Use various story starters/prompts; embodied theatre/image/and improvisation activities; and visual drawing/mapping exercises to help students recall and share stories and significant moments in their lives. (tellmeadigitalstory.wikispaces.com) Invite students to remember and retell many different stories from their lives before deciding which story they will move into a digital story. Taking time to share stories continues to build community in the room, and it also helps students realize that we must fill in gaps in our memories/stories as we share them aloud. Embracing the opportunity for creative license is an important part of storytelling and can help youth move away from trying to literally re-create the past with their digital story. Structure intentional moments of reflection for students to reflect on the stories they share and listen to:
   What makes a story effective or interesting for an audience?
   What stories do you need/want to tell?
   What stories might someone else need/want to hear?
   How does each story relate to or disrupt the group theme/topic/question?
3. **Pitching to a Story Circle**
   Once students decide what story they want to work on, invite them to pitch their idea to a small group or the entire class. Ask the group to sit in a circle and allow each student two minutes to share the main ideas, dramatic question, and possible structure of their story. Allow another 2 minutes for the listeners to ask questions and/or offer feedback about what stands out to them from the story. Also invite students in the circle to share images that the story evoked for them.
4. **Writing/Editing Script**
   Encourage each student to type and print their narrative/story/voice-over script. One double-spaced page of narrative usually results in a 2–3 minute digital story. Using a typed, double-space script helps students deliver their narrative to others in the room, and also document editorial changes with ease. Furthermore, the typed/printed script allows students to mark up their narrative with suggestions for performing their voice-over, such as underlining words for emphasis or

5. **Collecting and Devising Assets**

   The next step is to create, collect, and upload all assets onto the computer. This includes the voice-over recording, still photos or video clips, and music/sound files. It is useful to help students manage their assets in clearly marked desktop folders on the computer or on individual thumb drives. Asset management can be time consuming, making pre-planning essential for this stage.

   a. Voice-over

   Once the script is typed out, invite students to practice performing their voice-over out loud for a small group. Some students enjoy listening to other people perform their narrative out loud; both performing and listening to one's story can be a helpful step in preparing to record the voice-over. The voice-over can be recorded into a video camera, a hand-held audio recorder, or directly into an editing program on the computer. *This step often takes a great deal of time because it requires a quiet space and only allows one person to record at a time.

   b. Images (still and moving)

   Invite students to brainstorm still images or video clips that might accompany their narrative. After brainstorming images that will extend the meaning of their story, encourage students to create a shot list, or a list of images that they need to bring from home, shoot with a camera, or find on the Internet (see resources for free images below). The shot list becomes a road map for gathering visual assets that will accompany the digital story. *Still images are often easier to manage than video clips, taking less time to upload, find, and edit. ([Tips for Teaching Photography to Youth](#))

   c. Music/Sound

   Invites students to explore free music sites and/or develop their own musical scores in programs such as garage band. Encourage students to avoid music with lyrics, as it detracts from the words of the narrative and takes focus away from the student's story. Sound affects can be added directly in most editing programs. (Royalty Free Music: www.jamendo.com)

6. **Storyboarding**

   Storyboards are a visual representation of a digital story, offering a road map for the creation of the digital story product. Students can create storyboards to communicate what the digital story will look and feel like. The storyboard allows students to plan and show the sequence of images that will accompany lines of narrative in their story, as well as technical details and aspects of design, such as the kinds of transitions or affects that will used as the story progresses. Storyboards can be created on note-cards, on pre-printed templates, in power point, and/or through poster-board presentations. This step is essential for planning and cementing the digital story and significantly expedites the digital editing process.

   [Sample Storyboard Template developed by the University of Massachusetts](#)
   [More Storyboard Templates](#)

d. Bring it all together: Editing a Digital Story

At this stage, students should have all of their assets digitally stored and organized for easy access. Using the storyboard as a road map (or outline) for creating the digital story, student employ programs such as iMovie, Adobe Premier Elements, or Windows Movie Maker to build their digital story. These programs invite students to import their assets into the three tracks (visual, voice-over, and music/sound), and to add special design elements such as transitions, visual affects, audio affects, and titles. These programs include their own tutorials and with some guided experimentation, students often find them intuitive to navigate.

[Helen C. Barrett's tutorial and tips for putting a digital story together](#)
[Jason Ohler's tips and tutorials for putting a digital story together](#)

e. Publish/Disseminate Digital Stories

The publishing and dissemination of digital stories has great potential to shape productive interactions between students and their communities.

After students' stories are digitally constructed/edited, decide on a method for archiving the stories for performance and/or dissemination. Stories may be saved as quick-time or other file formats that can be exported through email and/or uploaded to sites such as YouTube. In addition, students may wish to move their stories into platforms such as iDVD, which allow users to create an aesthetically dynamic screen and organizational frame for one or more digital stories. Finally, web-based story maps (such as "Intersect") are available to house and visually organize digital stories for easy access by the public.

In addition to the logistics of publishing digital stories, consider where and how students' digital stories might engage an audience or a wider public. The digital storytelling movement is focused on creating community and dialogue through the creation and the sharing of personal stories. Invite students to develop a plan or program for showing their work and leading discussions about the issues raised in their work.

Why are these stories being told?
Who is the intended audience for these pieces?
How can youth foster community and dialogue through the sharing of their life stories?

[INTERSECT – a story mapping site](#)
[Voice Thread – a social network for story mapping)](#)

[Back to Top](#)

Vocabulary

Devising: the process of remembering, creating, performing, and documenting a story or performance.

Digital Story: a 2–3 minute personally narrated story, or "movie", that includes a voice-over and photographs or video, as well as music or sound.

Editing: the process of digitally arranging, altering, or combining assets to create a digital story.

Moving image: a digitally recorded video, animation, or other digital documentation that includes changing elements.

Narrative: the words of or script for a digital story.

Pitching: formally presenting stories, ideas, or storyboards for a group with the expectation of feedback.

Performing: to use one's body, face, and/or voice to deliver a story, line of dialogue, gesture, or meaning. In digital storytelling, we often use the word "perform" to refer to the delivery of a narrative or voice-over.

Shooting: filming or digitally capturing photos and/or video.

Soundtrack: the music or sound affects that underscore a digital story.

Still image: a digitally recorded photograph, drawing, collage, etc that does not include video, animation, or other moving elements.

Storyboard: a visual representation, outline, or map of a digital story. The storyboard usually includes different tracks that represent how various pieces of the digital story will line up and progress throughout the story: the visual elements, the words of the voice over, the music, and sound effects.

Transition: a visual process for moving from one digital image or video sequence to the next.

Voice Over: the recording of a storyteller's voice narrating his/her story.

Back to Top

Resources

1. **Digital Storytelling Resources**
   Each source in this section offers sample digital stories, as well as resources for curriculum design and tips for novice digital storyteller.

   - Center for Digital Storytelling
   - University of Houston's "Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling"
   - "Integrating digital storytelling into your classroom"
   - Levine, Alan's "Story Tools"
   - Tech Head Stories
   - Digital Storytelling in Education and Publishing Digital Stories
   - Tell me a Story: 7 Elements of Digital Storytelling
     Digitales: The Art of Telling Digital Stories www.digitales.us
   - Scott County Students Digital Stories
   - Ultimate Guide to Storytelling

2. **Community-Building and Applied Theatre Resources**
   Each source in this section offers information on applied theatre and descriptions of activities, warm-ups, and theatre games to help build community and encourage a group to develop trust, as well as communication and collaboration skills.

   - Applied & Interactive Theatre Guide. Accessed May 2, 2011. www.tonisant.com/aitg
   - Boal, Augusto. Games for Actors and Non-actors, 2nd edition. Trans. Adrian Jackson. New York: Routledge, 2002. ISBN13: 978-0-415-26708-3
   - Drama Resource. "Theatre Games." Accessed May 5, 2011. www.dramaresource.com/games
   - Rohd, Michael. Theatre for Community, Conflict, and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 1998. ISBN: 0-325-00002-6

3. **Storytelling Resources**
   Each source in this section offers ideas for helping students' access and tell their own stories.

   - Pratt, Nancy. Digital Storytelling Prompts. Accesses May 7, 2011.
     ascslinks.wikispaces.com/file/view/Digital+Storytelling+Prompt+Ideas%5B1%5D.pdf
   - Hansen, Kathy. A Storied Career. "Links to storytelling prompts, platforms, and tools." Accessed April 28, 2011.
     astoriedcareer.com/links_to_storytelling_platform.html

4. **Free Music/Audio Resources**

   - Creative Commons Audio creativecommons.org/audio
   - Download.com music.download.com
   - Free Play Music www.freeplaymusic.com
   - The Free Sound Project freesound.iua.upf.edu
   - Ghost Note ghostnotes.blogspot.com
   - Partners in Rhyme www.partnersinrhyme.com

5. **Free Image Resources**

   - BigFoto www.bigfoto.com
   - Creative Commons Images creativecommons.org/image
   - Flickr Creative Commons www.flickr.com
   - Open Photo openphoto.net
   - Photobucket photobucket.com

Equipment

1. Computer, Keyboard, and Mouse
2. Digital Camera
3. Digital Video Camera
4. Flat Bed Scanner
5. Headphones
6. Microphone/lapel mic
7. External Hard Drive or Individual Thumb drives
8. DVDs, Labels, Cases
9. Printer
10. LCD Projector and speakers
11. Digital Editing Software

- For MAC: iMovie, Final Cut Express
- For PC: Adobe Premier, Windows Movie Maker
- ALL: Photoshop

Lesson Plan/Materials

Table of Contents
Lesson Plans

Lesson Materials

We hope you'll join us in bringing the Arts and Technology to life in classrooms across the country! Please click on **Submit Lesson Plans/Materials** to find out how to share your classroom successes.

Submit Lesson Plans

We hope you'll join us in bringing the Arts and Technology to life in classrooms across the country! Your lesson ideas will help teachers step into what is sometimes unknown, and even frightening, territory! Your work will help others to realize the important links between the arts and technology.

To provide consistency in how information is presented online, we have developed a ***Lesson Plan Template.*** This WORD document provides a guide to the information that we'd like you to share – and will expand to meet your needs!   Please use our Template to share your lesson ideas.

In addition, we'd really like to include **examples of the support materials** that make your lessons "work" in the classroom. Things like worksheets, powerpoint presentations, worksheets, assignments, rubrics, assessment tools, photographs of students (and you!) in action, classroom video showing your process...and anything else that you use to bring your lessons to life for your students. YEP...we want your support materials even if you don't share a lesson plan at this time!

NOW...how to get your work from YOU to FAAE? Click on the ***Submission Form.*** In this form, we'll collect info about you so that we can properly "credit" your work when it's placed online. In addition, you'll be asked to give FAAE "permission" to share your work with the world! (Imagine it! You are about to impact the entire world!) In this form, you'll also be asked to upload your files (it's really as easy as locating your file and clicking on it!) If you are in "the advanced class" and want to send video files, there are directions for that, too. (By the way, we love video – and photos!)

Burn the midnight oil...and share your best work! Linking the arts and technology is where it's at in today's classrooms! Join us!

Questions: faaeinfo@gmail.com

Download the following WORD document; *voila!* you have the Template to use for your lesson plan submission.
You'll upload the completed Lesson Plan Template as well as any lesson materials as part of the Lesson Submission Form. If you won't be submitting a Lesson Plan at this time, please go directly to the Submission Form to upload your Lesson Materials.
Note: If the document below does not open immediately after clicking the link, please check your downloads folder.

[Lesson Plan Template](#) 📌

Submission Form