

## Digital storytelling

Like paintings, personal narrative stories that mix images, graphics, sound, and music with the author's own storytelling voice will exist over time and be enjoyed long past their creation. The ideas and content for this Digital storytelling guide have been compiled and written by Bernajean Porter, whose book, *DigiTales: The Art of Telling Digital Stories*, includes detailed step-by-step processes for bringing this emerging oral storytelling style into today's classrooms.

Learn how software like Adobe Photoshop Elements and Adobe Premiere Elements can become effective digital storytelling tools in your classroom. Unleash your students' imagination as they create unique, personal 3- to 5-minute movies.

### What's all the buzz about digital storytelling?

While any products — slideshows, filmmaking, photo essays, or websites — using any multimedia are technically called digital stories, digital storytelling is a special genre organized around using the author's own voice as the centerpiece of content while artistically dancing multisensory elements into personal understandings about self, family, knowledge, ideas, events, or experiences.

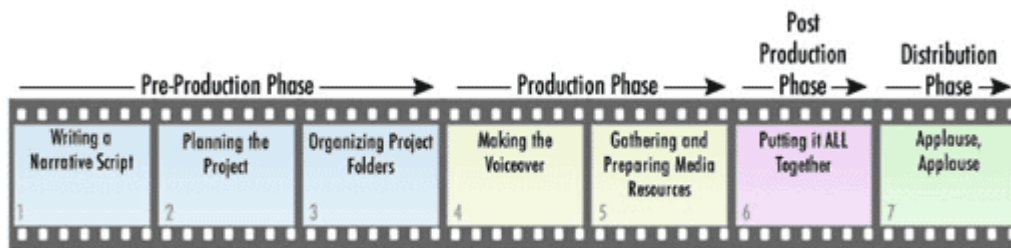
#### The special charm and enchantment of a multimedia experience

The rich heritage and art of storytelling around campfires, family tables, or circles of friends is merged with a palette of technical tools to make highly personal experiences and understandings come alive for others. Good storytellers are extremely powerful people. They use their power with words to guide, motivate, teach, inspire, and influence. While we will always enjoy professional storytellers, the availability of audio-editing, image-editing, and video-editing tools is calling all of us to learn the craft of being modern-day digital storytellers who put our own good and inspiring stories into one another's lives.

#### Take Six: Elements of Good Storytelling

- Living in the story
- Lessons learned
- Creative tension
- Economizing
- Showing not telling
- Craftmanship

As we tell our own personal stories of what we know and understand, digital storytelling gives us a chance to offer our own learning as a profound insight for others who may have had similar experiences. The storyteller's voice weaves a special charm and enchantment while unfolding a multimedia experience to make a kind of magic that touches others who view the digital storytelling product. These personal stories are designed to deeply touch hearts and connect us to the humanity of one another.



#### Staying organized ... and telling a story from the heart

Using the Seven Steps to Digital Storytelling, anyone crafting or leading a storytelling experience focuses **FIRST** on developing a personal narrative **STORY** about an experience or understanding as if they were sharing it with a small group of friends or family members. This first process step for digital storytelling begins with shaping a tightly written narrative script that is then recorded as a voiceover. The final voiceover is the starting place for myriad decisions that will follow. All images, sounds, transitions, special effects, and music are selected and organized around the author's narrative voiceover.

Preparing a language-rigorous script can take from 30 percent-50 percent of the total production time as authors grapple with finding their real story – writing and rewriting their tale to incorporate the Take Six: Elements of a Good Story into a powerful story that is told from the heart, not from the head. The Take Six Elements provide essential guidelines guaranteed to morph good stories into memorable great ones! If there is no substantive story to tell, no amount of technological techniques will fix a poorly written, or flat, impersonal story.

Digital storytelling gives everyone a unique, enchanting experience of discovering their own voice, artistic talent, and originality. Even more important, students discover they have something worth sharing with others along with learning the joyful art of creating effective, memorable pieces of communication.

### Digital storytelling in the classroom

Digital storytelling is not just for language arts! The stories being told by the storyteller do not all need to be personal memories or fictional tales. The Take Six: Elements of a Good Story can easily be incorporated into non-fictional content storytelling to share what students know and understand about topics with a special twist. In order to create thoughtful first-person narrative stories, students are forced to make deeper meaning of the content, events, or topics. The process of personalizing the content challenges authors to truly clarify their own thinking and understanding before beginning the process of communicating their story to others. The key is to go beyond the literal factoids by adding personal meaning. All good storytelling imbeds a moral of the story or lesson learned.

Sharing our personalized understanding of what we know about an event or topic provides a “sense-making” process that enables us to deal with myriad data details in a profound way that sticks with us over time. Artificial intelligence research is showing that the more people are buried in the mind-numbing avalanche of today’s information, the greater the importance of stories in making sense of the endless pieces of data. Designing information requires learning a new type of grammar — beyond writing words — that helps students deepen their understanding of content while increasing their visual, sound, oral language, and information literacy skills.

#### An essential process for conveying information

While storytelling does not replace analytical thinking, good storytelling does provide an essential process for conveying information in an easily absorbed form. People today are quite simply up to their eyeballs in information. There is increasing urgency to develop communication skills that translate raw information into valuable knowledge for ourselves as well as others — a sense-making of the world around us. When using resources like video clips and still images found at United Streaming or the visual and audio resources found at the Library of Congress, teachers can guide students in making biographical, historical, current event, or science facts come ALIVE for themselves and others through the process of digital storytelling.

#### Sample ideas for going beyond factoids

The following sample ideas for digital storytelling are based on shifting from retelling the literal facts about a person or event into using first-person narratives and the author’s voice as a storyteller to create a personalized experience as if they were actually there in order to make their topic come alive for others. All of these nonfiction digital stories still incorporate Take Six: Elements of a Good Story using personal voice narratives that culminate in a moral or lesson learned that shares with others an explicit connection with the importance of the topic to themselves, community, or humanity. The storytelling goes beyond the factoids to develop a personal understanding of how this topic, event, or person matters.

- Develop a short story about a historical, scientific, literary, or current political/social hero students most want to be like, telling the story as if they were actually that person. The storytelling goes beyond the facts to unfold a deeper meaning about their hero’s importance to themselves, their community, or humanity through the lesson learned.
- Act as if you are a totem pole (panda bear, invention, math/science concept, or song), telling your autobiographical story through the use of personification culminating in a lesson learned about the deeper meaning of their inanimate object’s importance to themselves, their community, or humanity through a lesson learned.
- After completing a literature book like *Ishmael*, ask students to develop a personal narrative story unfolding their own life question and the dialogue that they imagine would take place modeled after the concepts and values gained from their readings.

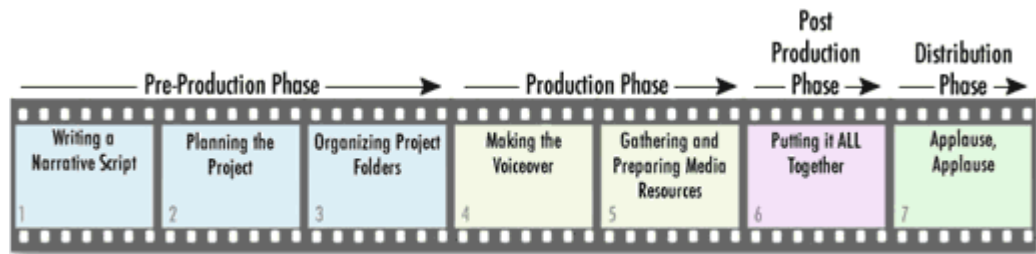
- Turn a current event into a personalized narrated myth or tall tale that would be told many years to many generations into the future.
- Create a multimedia experience of existing poems or famous writings (The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere, O Captain, My Captain, or Preamble of the Constitution) by not only vocally performing the emotional content but choosing to create a montage of images and sounds that go beyond the literal meaning to illuminate a deeper personalized understanding of the meaning found or intended.
- Translate complex scientific, historical, or political ideas into understandings through a personal narration that guides deeper understandings rather than re-telling information.
- Relate the cause and effect of a dilemma like stem cell research using digital storytelling elements. What is the personal story and meaning for our lives, community, or humanity if the research works in positive ways? What is the personal story and meaning for our lives, community, or humanity if the research works in negative ways?
- After students finish a class or community service project, ask them to tell their own personal story of a defining moment in which the work and experiences changed the way they understand or view their world. How did the senior citizen they were helping touch their own lives? How did the work of cleaning up the neighborhood make a difference to them personally? How did the study of cultures, religions, or leadership styles affect or change them or their view of the world?

Digital storytelling about events and topics need to reflect the author’s full intellectual, emotional and personal engagement with the subject — not just a reporting of facts and information. As we practice the craftsmanship of designing information through mixing colors, images, symbols, voice tones, music, sound, and artful pacing, we are also striving to crystallize our perspectives into memorable digital tales that reveal meaning and understanding out of the data and complexity in our lives. We want students to be able to artfully use the digital media in ways that dance ideas together into illuminated understandings — digital storytelling is a powerful process that taps into these skills.

### Getting started: Seven steps for digital storytelling

Our students are ready to read and write information beyond words — to use the media technologies of our era for effective communication. For those who have experienced process writing as a series of steps from brainstorming to a finished product, you can also think of digital storytelling as a series of process steps from start to finish. There are seven process steps divided into four phases: Pre-Production, Production, Post-Production, and Distribution. The technology tools, resources, and skills needed vary with each phase, but following these process steps will help your students translate their imagination and talents into exemplar digital stories worth the time and energy spent creating them.

Even though there are seven process steps outlined to guide students, digital storytelling is not a precise lock-step linear process. It is a creative process that sometimes takes its own path. Sometimes there are left turns — taking them may be the right intuitive thing to do. Other times, a project deadline prohibits taking the time to deviate from the storyboard in any significant ways.



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It is estimated that the first storytelling process may take up to 24 hours of time because students are generally learning 3-4 software programs along with a wide range of technology tools. Some of the work, like gathering media resources, can be assigned outside the classroom over a period of time while other units are under study. The next storytelling projects will take less time because students will be more technically experienced even though creativity cannot be micromanaged. Teachers and authors find the following seven process steps helpful in organizing

benchmarks for working on projects over time. Beginners might want to keep expectations simple the first time or two. Beware that there is such a thing as dabbling with the processes and choices — like trying all the fonts or transitions before settling on a choice — until you literally have a never-ending story! Deadlines will need to be clearly established with authors taking responsibility to meet those timelines.

### **Pre-production Phase — Finding and organizing ideas worth communicating**

*"There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you."*

— *Maya Angelou*

#### **Step One: Writing the script**

The written narrative script telling the story in the author's own voice is the heart and soul of digital storytelling. It is meant to organize all the other media elements used and should be completed **FIRST!** This differs from digital products that narrate or describe images that have been sequenced first viewing the narration as an enhancement. The script is tightly crafted to tell a memorable story of understanding while also keeping in mind how the various media can help show, rather than tell, the information or ideas with words. Teachers hold conferences with students to ensure that the content and thinking in the script is robust and worth communicating.

Finding the right story requires brainstorming ideas that fit the assignment purpose and audience. Mind maps can help students explore ideas, organize details, and decide which ones will be used to tell the essence of the story. Whether developing fiction or nonfiction, researching the background and details of the topic will help the story be more authentic and credible. A great deal of thinking, planning, and synthesizing takes place during the creation of a script — sometimes as much as 30 percent-40 percent of the project time. Whatever story is chosen to make into a digital story, the written script needs to be about how this particular topic touched the author's life — not just presenting the facts and information gathered. The narrative written script is captured later as a digital voiceover during the production phase.

*Time management:* 6-8 hours over a week

*Processes:* Mind mapping, drafting, teacher conferencing, peer review, rewriting and rewriting

*Technology tools:* Word processor and printer.

#### **Step Two: Planning the project**

This step of creating storyboards and image/sound lists is the modern version of making an outline for a written report. The time spent here increases the quality of the communication as well as definitely saving lots of time and frustration during the Production and Post-Production phases. Storyboard templates are graphic organizers that allow authors to visualize and detail out all aspects of their story — narration, images, titles, transitions, special effects, music, and sounds — **BEFORE** actually using any of the technology tools.

Start the storyboard with the actual text from the script along with the images and titles being planned. Then fill in the storyboard with any transitions and special effects being used. Sound effects and music are added last, even though ideas may be forming along the way. The storyboards may look similar to comic books, but they are rough sketches, keywords, or symbols as the scenes are mapped out enough to out show how all the media mixes together. It is highly recommended that all storyboards be signed off by the teacher **BEFORE** students are allowed to go to their next steps of using the technology tools!

As the storyboard is developed to unfold the written script, students will need to compile image and music/sound lists to guide them or other teams members in creating and editing the media resources.

*Time management:* 2-3 hours over a week

*Processes:* Storyboarding, Image/Sound Lists, and Teacher Conferencing / Peer Review

*Technology tools:* Word processor and printing.

#### **Step Three: Organizing folders**

Managing all the files — text, images, sound, music, and final product — is an important and often overlooked management system needed to ensure everything is where it needs to be for each student's product. You need a well-organized system for file management, keeping in mind that video-editing software references (rather than actually embeds) the media elements. If the media elements are not kept together, the project will need to be re-pointed to the original files. Each student needs his or her own folders containing all media elements.

*Time management:* 15 minutes

*Processes:* File management with back-up procedures

*Technology tools:* N/A

## Production Phases: Gathering and preparing digital media

*"Photography suits the temper of this age as a perfect medium for active bodies and minds teaming with ideas."*  
— Edward Weston

Production includes creating the digital voiceover from the written script, collecting guest voices or digital interviews, filming, photography, downloading files from digital libraries like United Streaming or the Internet, digitizing images or sound, and creating or editing your own media resources with Adobe Photoshop Elements, Adobe Premiere Elements, or Adobe Soundbooth software. The image and sound lists will guide you in how many media resources you really need. Without the image/sound lists, time management may get away from authors at this stage.

### Step Four: Recording the voiceover

Earlier in the process, students created a written narrative script that will now be recorded into a digital voiceover. Coach students to perform the meaning and emotional tone rather than read or recite the words on the paper. The author's voice should be the emotional conduit for viewers to experience the information or story being told.

It is highly recommended that voiceovers be created first as separate audio files to focus on the art of creating a storytelling voice. These voiceover files should be normalized if possible to increase sound clarity. You can use any audio-editing software that allows the recording of audio files, but you want to invest in an external microphone attached to your computer with a spit guard if possible. The internal computer microphones pick up a lot of ambient white noise that lessens the quality of the voice recording.

*Time management:* 30 minutes-1 hour

*Processes:* Oral speaking — performing, pacing, and living in the story as a storyteller

*Technology Tools:* Audio-editing (Adobe Soundbooth)

### Step Five: Gather, create, and edit media resources

Each media chosen either decorates, illustrates, or illuminates the message. Encourage students to gather, create, or edit images, sound, music, and other media with the deliberate intention of extending the understanding and increasing the power of their message. While there may be temptation to indulge dabbling in the novelty bumps and fun of this technical playground — this is where the time taken to develop a storyboard and image/sound lists to guide the work will pay off!

Creating and editing images with software like Adobe Photoshop Elements provides students with unlimited creative opportunities to extend their technical and communication skills. Making original images, composites, montages, special image effects, and unique title screens can be time-consuming but very rewarding if the image is JUST the thing they need to illuminate an idea, emotion, or concept.

Creating and editing your own music loops or ambient sounds likewise gives students an opportunity to experience technical and creative skills in communication. George Lucas says that music/sound is 50 percent of the information or story experience. Music and sound provide tone, setting, emotional context, and nonverbal meaning to the message. Sound and music should not be used as a background to the story — each piece of music or sound chosen illuminates and extends the message.

*Time management:* 5-6 hours over a week

*Processes:* Using image/sound lists, understanding file formats, honoring copyright

*Technology tools:* Cameras, Internet access, scanning, image-editing software (Adobe Photoshop Elements), audio-editing software, music-making software, royalty-free subscriptions

### Organize for copyright uses of media

In all cases, be sure that the media selected is being used legally and ethically. Fair Use Guidelines of copyright materials have been developed for classroom use assuming that the percentage of media used is 1) limited and 2) non-commercial. But WARNING to all students and teachers who expect to distribute their work outside their classrooms — Education Fair Use does NOT include the student work leaving the classroom in any way based on a third legal interpretation of fair use called 3) spontaneity. Distribution of any kind outside the classroom does not meet the full definition of Fair Use. It is highly recommended that students and teachers plan from the beginning for their digital projects to rigorously meet copyright standards that will support wide spread distribution of the student work.

It will be important for educators to identify and obtain rich resources that students can use without violating copyright laws. Many resources are public domain or available for nominal fees. Consider building royalty-free

libraries, encouraging students to generate their own images and music or rehearsing processes to obtain written permissions from copyright holders.

### Post-Production: Putting it all together

*"We want a story that starts out with an earthquake and works itself up to a climax."  
— Samuel Goldwyn*

You are now ready to spin your tale with powerful digital tools — like Adobe Photoshop Elements (which includes a multimedia slide show feature) and Adobe Premiere Elements — that easily let you mix all the media elements together. The ultimate goal is to draw viewers into the story and hold their attention as it unfolds. While your storyboard provides the initial decisions and elements, it is now time to mix and dance the elements together in a compelling and memorable story that illuminates understanding for others.

### Step Six: Creating rough cut FIRST and final cut LAST

It is useful to organize the Post-Production steps along with learning technical features within Adobe Premiere Elements in two stages called ROUGH CUT and FINAL CUT versions of the product. The rough-cut step provides the author with a FIRST view of the story sequence — made up by inserting the voiceover, guest voices first along with sequencing images/video and titles. It is a rough cut of how the story will flow. NO transitions, special effects, fine-tuning the durations, or adding music/sounds yet! Reviewing the rough cut saves the author project time by determining what might still be missing or in need of additional editing before proceeding with the fine-tuning. If the author needs to reconsider or revise the sequence or overall images used, let it be at the rough-cut stage before all the other elements are mixed together. General feedback about tone and design from teachers and peers can be very useful at the ROUGH CUT stage.

*Time management:* 3-4 hours with approximately a 30-minute tutorial

*Processes:* Working with storyboards, importing media resources, and inserting voiceovers, guest voices, images, and titles.

*Technology tools:* Video-editing software (Adobe Photoshop Elements, Adobe Premiere Elements); utilities for file format conversions may be useful

If the ROUGH CUT generally flows for you, begin fine-tuning the additional digital elements considered the FINAL CUT stage. Titles, openings, closings, special effects, and transitions provide a world of playful creativity for designing powerful communication that immerses the viewer in your thinking and experiences. Plan for credits that identify dedications along with citing the specific resources used to create the digital story. Add music and sound effects LAST according to the storyboarding plan! If you modify any of the other elements, it changes the timing of the music's entry, exit and fades, etc.

*Time management:* 3-4 hours with approximately a 30-minute tutorial

*Processes:* Working with storyboards; inserting transitions, special effects, music, ambient sounds; fine-tuning durations, sound levels; and identifying credits

*Technology tools:* Video-editing software (Adobe Photoshop Elements, Adobe Premiere Elements), utilities for file format conversions may be useful.

The FINAL CUT stage is fun and extremely creative. Many authors go into a timeless flow state intently engaged in bringing their script alive! However, this fine-tuning stage is also where novices can get overwhelmed or lovers of novelty and experimenting might find themselves bogged down. Again if the storyboard step was skipped, it takes a lot more time to make all the Post-Production decisions. Depending on project time, storytellers may want to consider keeping technical expectations very simple the first time or two. If time is not a variable, enjoy playing with all the choices and variations before wrapping up the project. But beware of the danger of eternal dabbling, polishing, or modifying, thus creating a never-ending, never quite ever, ever finished story project. Sometimes it is time to say "good enough!"

### Step Seven: Applause! Applause!

*Anything less than reverence for each and every story can result in a deeply emotional sense of betrayal. Student authors put themselves into these stories in ways that surprise them. Cherish each and every story.*

*— Joe Lambert, Digital Storytelling*

And now each digital story will be able to live happily ever after, literally a living artifact that each storyteller now leaves as a personal legacy to others. What a joy to finish a digital story! The bringing together of the author's own voice, the images, music, and sounds with technical craftsmanship into a meaningful story is a sheer delight for the

soul! It is time to celebrate as well as find a multitude of ways for others to experience the author’s work in real time. Make sure any feedback responses or comments are very respectful and appreciative — the time for any revision is past. This is the time for pure celebration for what has been accomplished!

Digital products are easy to distribute across time and space to others who were not part of the class work with Adobe Premiere Elements. Distribution includes making digital movies that can be inserted into other media, making DVDs, posting on school, community or student websites, having parent, student or community gatherings to view the projects collectively or taking student work to showcase at conferences to celebrate the amazing talents of our kids! Be sure student work is copyright friendly and permission is obtained to distribute their work following the Acceptable Use Policies (AUP) within your school district.

It is highly recommended you NOT create a competitive climate with awards like best film, most humorous, best artistic story, or other categories. It is counterproductive with few gains compared to the goal of creating a safe non-judgmental climate for students taking risks in practicing the art of expressing themselves.

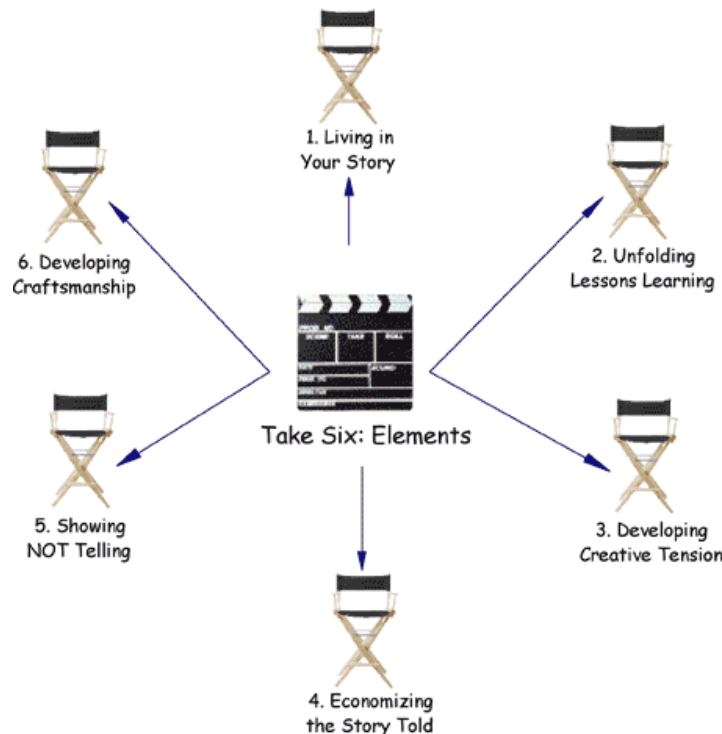
May all your student stories be heard far and wide!

*Tell your tales; make them true. If they endure, so will you.*  
— James Keller

### Take Six: Elements of good digital storytelling

*"There is a great deal to consider in constructing a digital storytelling script. While there are endless approaches to crafting stories, depending on purpose and audience, at least six elements are considered fundamental to this particular storytelling style."*

— Bernajean Porter



#### Living Inside Your Story

The perspective of each story is told in first person using your own storytelling voice to narrate the tale. You share through the story who you are, what you felt, and what this event or situation means for you in such a personal way that it acts as a “conduit” for viewers to engage in their own very real and emotional experience. Rather than a detached telling that this happened and that happened, viewers experience you living inside this story. Your story is shared through the heart, NOT the head.

### Unfolding Lessons Learned

One of the most unique features of this specific digital storytelling style is the expectation that each story express a personal meaning or insight about how a particular event or situation touches you, your community, or humanity. A good story has a point to make, a moral conclusion, a lesson learned, or an understanding gained. The author develops a personal connection to the story facts by answering “so what!” Each story needs to have a point that is revealed in the end either implicitly with the media or stated explicitly with words on how the topic matters.

### Developing Creative Tension

A good story creates intrigue or tension around a situation that is posed at the beginning of the story and resolved at the end, sometimes with an unexpected twist. A hook is created to intentionally draw the viewer into wondering how it will unfold and how will it all end. What does the title mean? Who is that little girl? What will happen to the fish? What does the young girl discover when she leaves home? Does Amber ever have friends? What is the meaning of having a life without a father? The tension of an unresolved or curious situation engages and holds the viewer until reaching a memorable end. Pacing is an invisible part of sustaining story tension as we know so well from the era of Hitchcock films. Pacing uses starts, stops and pauses, letting us wonder what will happen next and how will it be resolved. Viewers always enjoy a surprise turn-of-events as long as a few clues are tucked into the storyline.

### Economizing the Story Told

A good story has a destination — a point to make — and seeks the shortest path to its destination. Each digital story is no more than 3-5 minutes based on a written script that is no more than one (1) page or five hundred (500) words. The art of shortening a story lies in preserving the essence of the tale — using the fewest words along with images and sound to make your point. By holding clarity about the essence of the story, the additional narrative that would normally be part of storytelling can be pared down.

### Showing Not Telling

Good stories use vivid details to reveal feelings and information rather than just saying something was tall, happy, scary, or difficult to do. It was a dark and stormy night does not have to be said in the script. Unlike traditional oral or written stories, images, sound, and music can be used to show a part of the context, create setting, give story information, and provide emotional meaning not provided by words. Both words and media need to reveal through details rather than named or simply stated.

### Developing Craftsmanship

A good story incorporates technology in artful ways demonstrating craftsmanship in communicating with images, sound, voice, color, white space, animations, design, transitions, and special effects. All media elements are selected to illuminate the meaning of the tale rather being bells and whistles that become distracting, overused, or misused or simply used to illustrate what is being presented. Good craftsmanship creatively combines media elements to convey significant meaning rather than being used for “decorating” the story. Ask whether your media resources are decorating, illustrating, or illuminating.

## Beyond words: The craftsmanship of communication

Developing Craftsmanship is one of the Take Six: Elements of Good Storytelling considered essential to powerful digital storytelling. A good story incorporates technology in artful ways demonstrating *craftsmanship* in communicating with images, sound, voice, color, white space, animations, design, transitions, and special effects. All media elements are selected to *illuminate* the meaning of the tale, making it come ALIVE for others rather than being bells and whistles that become distracting, overused, or misused, or simply used to illustrate what is being presented. Good craftsmanship creatively combines media elements to convey *significant meaning* rather than being used for “decorating” the story.

In order for students to be effective communicators in the 21st Century, they need to be sophisticated in expressing ideas with multiple communication technologies, not just the written word. Effective communication starts with an author having content that is worth sharing. Novelties like flying words or spinning images sprinkled with a multitude of transitions, special effects, and boinks and bonks divert the attention of the viewer from the original message. Encourage students to intentionally develop content as a genre of communication focused on making their message come ALIVE for others rather than displaying their technical wizardry by “doing” digital storytelling movies.



### **The medium IS the message**

Marshall McLuhan declared that the medium IS the message. Each medium offers unique design choices for using images, sounds, animations, video, music, transitions, and special effects — influencing in its own way HOW we represent our information. The media element selected shapes and forms ideas into a communication piece that reaches out to inform, influence, and touch others. Technical knowledge doesn't ensure that information will be designed in creative, effective ways. The goal is to artfully mix the technical elements of the medium in ways that illuminate the impact of the communication. From dramatic openings through memorable conclusions, the author should strive to keep viewers hooked throughout the production.

### **Student scoring guides (content PLUS craftsmanship)**

A comprehensive set of student scoring guides for digital products were developed, prototyped, and copyrighted as a partnership between Bernajean Porter and North Central Regional Lab (NCREL). These Scoring Guides are available online at [www.DigiTales.us](http://www.DigiTales.us) for teacher and student use in their classrooms. Porter's book, *Evaluating Digital Products*, is available as additional training and resource materials for using the online scoring guides.

Rather than having rubrics focused on types of technologies such as web tools, multimedia, movies, or slide shows, the sixteen (16) scoring guides were each designed as a specific genre into Types of Content Communication. The traits and detailed elements found in each of the Types of Content Communication were constructed using national benchmarks. Authors need to declare the type of communication (purpose and structure) before developing the product or planning the product's assessment. Digital storytelling can be applied to multiple types of communication as long as the storytelling voice used as the centerpiece of the communication and a "lesson learned" is incorporated. Describe and Conclude; Docudramas; Myths; Folk Tales; Short Stories; and Personal Expressions are examples of types of content communication that would easily be able to incorporate the digital storytelling style.

To incorporate the technical skills as part of the assessment, six traits in Craftsmanship of Communication were developed to represent the functions of technologies that would consistently guide each type of communication.

1. Text Communication
2. Image Communication
3. Voice/Sound Communication
4. Design of Communication
5. Presentation of Communication
6. Interactivity of Communication

### **Image communication**

Images, graphics, or videos should illuminate content in the message through showing — NOT telling — information. Rather than narrating the images that have been gathered like a photo essay, exemplar use strives to use images in such a way that without them there is less understanding, influence, or impact. When choosing images, authors need to consider whether it decorates, illustrates or illuminates their message.

### **Voice/sound communication**

George Lucas contends that sound is 50 percent of the motion picture experience. Music/sound should be more than background sound. It establishes tone, mood, and emotional context in ways that deepen the impact of the message. There are four general types of sound that can be used to illuminate the message meaning: narration, guest voices, ambient sounds (gun shots, roosters crowing, or clocks ticking), and music. The right combination of sounds will quickly and nonverbally draw a viewer into the author's world. When choosing music/sounds, authors need to consider whether it decorates, illustrates, or illuminates their message.

When recording voiceovers, authors need to strive to "perform" the content of the message rather than read or recite their words. The pacing, tone, and clarity provides meaning beyond the words. The author's narrative voice needs to be a dynamic conduit for viewers to connect to the emotion and meaning of the story.

### **Mixing media is designing communication**

Using technology is more than being able to master technical skills. From beginning to end, choices for using images, music, sound, video, fonts, and title styles should be intentional. If there are multiple authors collaborating on a single product, it should not look like a stitched quilt with everyone taking turns doing a section or adding a narration their own way. A tightly designed storyboard BEFORE using the technical tools should be created by all author(s) to ensure a unified feel for each product. As each choice is made, be curious about whether they are

decorating, illustrating, or illuminating the message. Decorating may be fun and demonstrate technical skills, but beware of students who are inserting as many font styles, transitions, and special effects as the program offers. Bells and whistles distract and dilute the strength of their messages. Illustrating is the literal use of images, sounds, and special effects generally giving the same message even if they were not there. Talking about a cow — insert a cow. Talking about a baby — see and hear a baby. An illuminated design is where all elements dance together to create a memorable effective communication that is more than the sum of its parts based on author and purpose. A great design — combined choices made about mixing the media — gives "sticking" power to the message for viewers. Openings and closings are made compelling and memorable through sensory experiences. Is the piece riveting? Haunting? Provoking? Indifference is a deadly reaction to craftsmanship!

### Storying around for 21st century skills

Time is a very precious resource in all classrooms today. Whatever projects or activities on which students are directed to spend efforts in school or at home, the time involved needs to reflect highly purposeful and results-based outcomes worth the time engaged.

All student projects/products begin with two basic *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins) questions, so that student work adds intellectual value (standards, skills, deep enduring understandings) rather than being created for fun/motivation or to practice technical skills:

1. What knowledge, skills, and deep understandings do you want students to have with this unit of study? (Learning Outcomes Remembered 5-Plus Years)
2. How will students demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and deep understandings of this unit of study? (Evidence of Learning)

With time considered a limited resource, the time needed to develop digital storytelling products at first glance seem a frivolous use of classroom time unless creative teachers find or steal extra time from other work. But when examining the multitude of skills and connections to other national curriculum initiatives, creating digital storytelling products can easily stack a multitude of skills and results that really have BIG payoffs for the time invested in student digital storytelling products.

### A Baker's Dozen Digital Storytelling Skills

Below are brief definition excerpts from Chapter 4 — "Storying Around for 21st Century Skills" — of *DigiTales: the Art of Telling Digital Stories*. The following skills have been identified and cross-referenced with National Standards, NETS-S, and 21st Century Skills.

1. Cognitive Apprenticeship — practicing real-world work of digital communication
2. Creativity and Inventive Thinking — creating multi-sensory experiences for others
3. Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) — going beyond existing information to add personal meaning and understanding
4. Enduring Understanding — by telling the story of what you know and understand for others, authors deepen their own self-meaning of the topic
5. Visual Literacy — using images to show, not tell, the narrative story
6. Technical Literacy — mastering the craftsmanship of applying the technology tools to create powerful communication, not to just use the tools, but to mix and dance the media into illuminated understandings
7. Information (Media) Literacy — thinking, reading, writing, and designing effective media information
8. Effective Communication — reading and writing information beyond words
9. Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles — addressing not only the opportunity for students to use their preferred mode of learning and thinking, but also enabling them to practice the effective use of all modalities
10. Teaming and Collaboration — growing skills through practiced opportunities to co-produce group projects
11. Project Management Mentality — Melvin Levin's challenge for students to practice time management of complex, involved tasks to successfully meet deadlines modeling real-world tasks

12. Exploring Affinity — Melvin Levin's findings that when students create meaningful, engaged work, they discover themselves as successful learners.

### **National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)**

Many of the curriculum standards developed for digital storytelling are drawn from English/Language Arts. But any state that has communication skills as part of math, science, social studies, and other areas will find a common thread of curriculum that expands beyond words for students to think, read, write, and express their thinking and understandings. Writing has long been shown to help students find their understandings, not just report them. The process of getting concepts from inside to outside is a journey in awareness.

Three position statements from NCTE combine to support digital storytelling curriculum in schools, creating a well-founded basis for expanding communication across the curriculum beyond text and traditional writing styles. The heart of digital storytelling is creating a tightly written narrative script. The rigorous work invested in the script engages students in purposeful written skills along with oral language skills needed to digitize their script into a voiceover. At least 30 percent–40 percent of production time is spent finding their story and preparing the script.

- (1975) NCTE Position Statement Promoting Media Literacy  
Digital technology demand new critical student abilities in developing essential skills with a new form of literacy — "in reading, listening, viewing, and thinking" that would enable students to deal constructively with complex new modes of delivering information, new multisensory tactics for persuasion, and new technology-based art forms.
- (1992) NCTE Position Statement: Promoting Storytelling  
Storytelling is a universal tool for communicating understanding between cultures and generations. It is how people learned their history, settled their arguments, and came to make sense of the phenomena of their world. Storytelling is an important vehicle for passing on factual information. It is unsurpassed as a tool for learning about ourselves, about the ever-increasing information available to us, and about the thoughts and feelings of others.
- (2003) NCTE Position Statement: On Composing With Non-print Media  
Teachers are challenged to develop instructional strategies for students to master composing in non-print media that can include any combination of visual art, motion (video and film), graphics, text, and sound — all of which are frequently written and read in nonlinear fashion.

### **Twenty-first Century Skills**

One of the more recent set of standards emerging to shape curriculum in schools are known as the 21st Century Skills. There are four categories, each containing a set of expectations. The process of digital storytelling encompasses 18 of the 20 expectations for what learning students will need for their work world.

1. Digital Age Literacies
2. Inventive Thinking
3. Effective Communication
4. High Productivity

### **National Standards for Visual Arts Education**

Achievement components from the content standards:

#### **Standard 1**

- Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories.
- Students select media, techniques, and processes; analyze what makes them effective or not effective in communicating ideas; and reflect upon the effectiveness of their choices.

#### **Standard 2**

- Students describe how different expressive features and organizational principles cause different responses.
- Students employ organizational structures and analyze what makes them effective or not effective in the communication of ideas.

#### **Standard 3**

- Students select and use subject matter, symbols, and ideas to communicate meaning.

### Standard 5

- Students reflect analytically on various interpretations as a means for understanding and evaluating works of visual art.
- Students correlate responses to works of visual art with various techniques for communicating meanings, ideas, attitudes, views, and intentions.

### Standard 6

- Students compare the materials, technologies, media, and processes of the visual arts with those of other arts disciplines as they are used in creation and types of analysis.
- Students compare characteristics of visual arts within a particular historical period or style with ideas, issues, or themes in the humanities or science.

## Classroom tips for keeping exciting digital storytelling projects on track

### Quality management

Storyboards need to be completed BEFORE any time with technology tools is permitted. Insist on students having something worthy to communicate and being organized BEFORE heading into the technology tools. Signing off on the script and storyboard FIRST has repeatedly created more effective language and has increased the power of their products. Authors are far less inclined to “decorate” a story with bells and whistles when they have developed content they are passionate about. Content should drive all media choices, supporting and unfolding their storytelling to be as alive as possible for their viewers.

**Technical note:** The slide show feature in Adobe Photoshop Elements has narration tied to the images. This means expecting a very precise storyboard that sequences the images and voiceover text together so the narration flows as if it was one continuous storytelling voice.

### Classroom management

Make a distinct process step during the Post-Production stage of planning a critical friend review that gives feedback on the ROUGH CUT version of their product before moving into the FINAL CUT stage (adding transitions, special effects, and fine-tuning durations to pace the voiceover, images, music, and sound effects). During the ROUGH CUT step, authors place their voiceover narrative first, add any guest voices, PLUS lay out all images, video clips, graphics, and title screens into “rough” sequences. Ask critical friends to review for quality/and meaning conveyed by the voiceover and images. Suggestions should be left for the author to consider what “the critics” think should be considered before proceeding.

### Time management

Storyboards save a lot of time during the Production and Post-Production stages. They provide a map of what images are needed rather than gathering a bunch and then seeing what might be needed. Storyboards provide a big picture of their choices as the sequencing and mixing of media begins.

### Group management

Three-Before-Me is a cooperative learning strategy that expects learners to try at least three ways to help themselves before going to the “teacher” or “expert.” It grooms independence and encourages learning communities to support each other.

Expect individuals to meet their assigned deadlines. Set the standard for “gotta make the deadlines!” early and notice that the commitment level of team members goes up immediately for all future projects. Projects can unravel quickly when groups that depend upon each other fail to contribute in a timely and quality-conscious manner. Consider swift and immediate removal (fired, booted, pink-slipped) from the project team if any deadlines are missed. Students unprepared NO MATTER WHAT per the team’s project timeline can be assigned alternative assignments not involving technology. Do this as a matter-of-fact, no shame or blame consequence — not as a gotcha punishment. Something like, “Oh-oh, you missed the bus!” Teams then shift into “Plan B” of re-assigning the task to existing team members who can get it done. While there may be any number of legitimate reasons for missing a deadline,

good reasons do not necessarily mean accepting excuses that compromise the deadlines and quality of a group project.

**Accept no hostile takeovers!**

Set a standard that emphasizes “good leaders engage and engage others!” Many students trust only their own talents and work-style approach when getting projects done. It is easier to do the other team members’ work than trusting or working things through with other team members. Making the grade should not be a higher priority than trusting that others can and do have something to contribute. Consider swift and immediate removal (fired, booted, pink-slipped) from the project team if any group members move into “takeover” mode. Assign them alternative work that does not involve technology. Do this as a matter-of-fact consequence with no shame or blame.

Cooperation means teachers assigning individual tasks or roles to students who focus on being a good group member while only taking responsibility for their assigned role. Teachers organize and supervise the group’s working relationships.

Collaboration means self-managed teams with everyone taking responsibility for the project’s process and delivery of an exemplar final product. Students divide up or delegate the work to take a “lead” in a task(s) ensuring that the work is completed but not necessarily doing all the work. The group organizes and supervises its own working relationships in ways that engage team talents while respecting differences. The entire team shares the leadership, problem-solving, and any communication needed to complete any and all tasks. Each member commits to doing whatever it takes to develop a quality product.

Consider the following roles in which individuals would take the “lead” in organizing and delivering for the group project. Being a lead does not necessarily mean doing ALL the work! Leaders organize, coordinate, and follow up to ensure that the work is completed in a timely and quality-conscious manner.

1. **Copyright Supervisor** — Ensures all resources being used are legal, documented, and credited.
2. **Graphics Coordinator** — Uses the product’s image list to locate, gather, create, and/or prepare any images and video needed while becoming proficient with Internet searching and image-editing (Adobe Photoshop Elements) software.
3. **Script/Storyboard Manager** — Develops the script and storyboard, ensuring that the personal connection is developed and integrated into their work. Also helps develop and communicate image and sound lists for the team.
4. **Sound/Music Technician** — Uses the product’s sound list to locate, gather, create, and/or prepare any ambient sounds and music needed while becoming proficient with Internet searching and sound-editing software.
5. **Video-Editing Producer** — Translates the storyboard into a final product while becoming proficient with image- and video-editing software. (Photoshop Elements 4.0 and Adobe Premiere® Elements 2.0)
6. **Voice Narrator** — Performs or supports the Script-to-Voiceover narration while becoming proficient with voice-recording software.

**Technical tips**

**Copyright**

It is not enough to ethically supervise what kids CAN’T use — they need generous and proactive support in what they CAN use. Be aware that Educational Fair Use of media does not apply if student projects are distributed outside their classrooms. So make school-wide plans to include generous budgets for Royalty-Free Music and Image Libraries. Purchase software that allows students to create their own music loops. Initiate a service club of students who would build over time a database of music.

Creative Commons (<http://creativecommons.org/>) is a very useful site for obtaining legal media.

**Audio**

Increase the quality of the Narrative Voiceover by using external microphones and spit guards. Internal microphones tend to pick up unnecessary white noise.

It is recommended to digitize voiceovers outside of video-editing software in order to focus due attention on digitizing the script as a FIRST and SEPARATE step. There is a tendency to adlib or modify the narrative stories if

the authors record their narration when viewing their images. Voiceovers FIRST — then all media decisions made and sequenced to pace and match the storyteller's voice.

Using the storyboard as a guide, record each section as a separate "chunk" of the script. These "chunks" are intentionally divided by the natural break of the breath (pauses or paragraphs) in ways that will match the text/image layout in the storyboard. Recording in "chunks" also allows readers to center themselves in order to perform rather than read or recite their words. Voices need to be a conduit to the emotional context of the story being told to a circle of friends or family. It is easy to re-do the small chunks of voiceovers rather than trying to deliver the entire script with no flaws. If the voice is too hurried, slurred, mumbled, or has unintentional speaking goofs, it is easy to record the one small chunk. When the chunks are sequenced in the video-editing, it will flow AS IF the voiceover was done as one take.

Using software like Adobe Soundbooth enables voiceover tracks to be "normalized," which enhances the clarity of the delivery. Audio files can be spliced and faded in/faded out along with other special effects like echoing. Separate audio files can mix sound and music into single tracks. This is helpful if your Post-Production software is limited to one track.

### **Images**

Use pan and zoom effects judiciously to increase intimacy with the subject or topic or give the feel of moving inside a still as part of the storyline. This special effect can easily be overdone and is certainly not something you would add to every image.

### **Transitions**

Each transition should be a subtle or dynamic part of the message. Beware of sprinkling transitions into the story as if they were decorating the story. It is very distracting and distills the story for viewers. There is no rule that there HAS to be a transition — Hollywood uses lots of direct cuts to the next screen shots.