

O'Brien

***The House on Mango Street* Digital Storytelling Project**

Digital Storytelling combines video, images, music, and spoken word to tell a story in a short video. This technique allows you to use and learn about video editing tools while also expressing yourself creatively and engaging with the text at hand. By going through the process of creating a topic, collecting your resources, storyboarding the video, and creating a soundtrack, you will be exercising many of the same skills involved in writing a paper, as well as developing your visual literacy skills.

Using *The House on Mango Street* as your basis, you will create a Digital Storytelling Project where you adapt one of the text's main themes to an important person/event in your own life. Using Stupeflix (a free online video software tool), your digital story will use images, graphics, text, narration, and music, and will be told mainly through pictures that "show" your story not "tell" your story.

Consider the following key points as you generate potential topics/ideas for your digital story: (adapted from John Orech's "Tips for Digital Storytelling," <http://www.techlearning.com/news/0002/tips-for-digital-story-telling/64068>)

STORY TOPICS Certain prompts can help generate ideas: (1) Think about a time you had to grow up, made a friend, lost a loved one. (2) Tell the story of your name. (3) Pay tribute to a family member – these all can inspire you to begin thinking about your own experiences. In this assignment, your "story" must tie into the ideas/themes that are present in Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*. Refer back to the novel's Table of Contents and review the titles of the vignettes; this will help to remind you of the many events that occurred throughout the text.

WRITING THE STORY Economy is one of the most important elements of a digital story. One of the best ways to write economically, and at the same time vividly, is to master the skill of

showing, as opposed to telling. That is, you should write using "observations" instead of "inferences." We experience the world through our senses, and we achieve effective storytelling through creating vivid pictures with words. Instead of telling the audience, "I was scared," an effective narrator shows fear with observations such as "sweaty palms," "shaking knees," and "trembling arms."

IMAGES When you begin collecting pictures to accompany your story, emotion may overtake you and you'll arrive to class with dozens, and dozens, and dozens of pictures that all have sentimental value. If all the pictures are used, the result is a digital scrapbook, not a story. Limit your collection to a set of images that are most important to your story. This achieves two goals: first, it forces you to make value decisions on the photos, and results in only the "best of the best." Second, it focuses the attention back to the story. You must rely on the story driving the images, instead of the images driving the story.

DIGITIZING / ALTERNATE MEDIA To supplement your own pictures, you may search for images online. Although the standby search tools, such as Google will work, I strongly recommend using royalty-free images (there are a variety of websites from which to peruse these images). No matter where images are harvested, make sure the size exceeds 640x480 pixels. Any smaller, and the images will appear blurry/grainy. This is especially true if pans or zooms are utilized. Also, if the story is to be published, make sure to emphasize ethical use of artistic property, and always adhere to copyright laws. You can search creative commons for images that are free from copyright.

STORYBOARDING Storyboarding allows you to "structure" your story and "sync" images to words. One advantage is that it enhances revision of the story once you see how the words work with the images. At times, it is wise to trim, or even omit, narration altogether if the image creates enough of an impact. There are several effective methods of storyboarding, but you can use the attached template as your model. The most important advantage of storyboarding is that it creates an efficient blueprint for the movie once you finally begin using the digital tool.

NARRATION Most of us get nervous when we speak to an audience, and our heart rate and blood pressure rise. Your audience needs time to process images, and that a slower pace at least most of the time is much more effective in accomplishing this. Also, blocks of time with no narration can be even more poignant at certain times. Where you are using narration, sloooooow doooooooooown.

SOUNDTRACK A carefully chosen soundtrack can have a dramatic impact on the entire story. Pacing, emotion, and point of view are all enhanced with appropriate music. The question remains, "What makes a powerful soundtrack?" The first rule, is that lyrics during narration is an ill-advised idea. However, appropriate lyrics with no narration can be very powerful. Many editing software titles contain "packaged" music that can be easily dropped into the story. Often, however, you will want to bring in your own favorite music, which is fine, as long as the tone is appropriate. Movie soundtracks are excellent places to look, but, again, be aware of

copyright issues. Also, you should only select one piece of music. Abrupt, frequent changes can often confuse the audience.

VISUAL EFFECTS Consider the following when adding effects:

- **Transitions** between images help tell the story. Think about the following when adding transitions: A "cut", or no transition, is like a comma or no punctuation mark, and serves to quickly move between two closely related ideas. A "dissolve" resembles a period, and suggests a change to a related idea. A "fade" is like a new paragraph and suggests a change of topics or passage of time. A particularly effective technique is the use of a black screen for several seconds: with or without sound. Beyond these, most transitions are superfluous and distracting and should be discouraged.
- **Pans and zooms** can add movement to static images, focus the audience, or give a sense of place for an object. In most cases, slow movement is best so as not to distract the audience.
- **Text as art** can be an effective method for focusing the audience on a particular line, by using actual text on the screen. Select lines that are particularly important and use a plain font. Text can be used in lieu of narration or in addition. Printed words can also be used to emphasize song lyrics.

Remember that each of these techniques creates a different effect. There are of course thousands of other effects such as manipulating color, contrast, lighting, use of split screens, overlays, etc. However, less is more. The common denominator is that effects should enhance the story instead of dominating it.

SHOW TIME! For a story to be a story, it must be shared. Before finalizing your digital story project, please view it several times, editing out mistakes and ensuring that the final product is a polished video. We will share these videos with the class!

Consult the attached rubric for grading criteria.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING RUBRIC

	EXEMPLARY "A" Work	PROFICIENT "B" Work	DEVELOPING "C" Work	INSUFFICIENT "D" / "F" Work
Point of View - Awareness of Audience	Strong awareness of audience in the design. Students can clearly explain why they felt the vocabulary, audio and graphics chosen fit the target audience.	Some awareness of audience in the design. Students can partially explain why they felt the vocabulary, audio, and graphics chosen fit the target audience.	Some awareness of audience in the design. Students find it difficult to explain how the vocabulary, audio and graphics chosen fit the target audience.	Limited awareness of the needs and interests of the target audience.
Point of View - Purpose/Theme	Establishes a purpose/theme early on and maintains a clear focus throughout.	Establishes a purpose/theme early on and maintains focus for most of the presentation.	There are a few lapses in focus, but the purpose/theme is fairly clear.	It is difficult to figure out the purpose/theme of the presentation.
Soundtrack / Voice	Music/Voice stirs a rich emotional response that matches the storyline well.	Music/Voice stirs a rich emotional response that somewhat matches the storyline.	Music/Voice is okay and not distracting, but it does not add much to the storyline.	Music/Voice is distracting, inappropriate, OR was not used.
Images	Images create a distinct atmosphere or tone that matches the theme of the story. The images may communicate symbolism and/or metaphors.	Images create an atmosphere or tone that matches some parts of the theme. The images may communicate symbolism and/or metaphors.	An attempt was made to use images to create an atmosphere/ tone, but it needed more work. Image choice is logical.	Little or no attempt to use images to create an appropriate atmosphere/ tone.
Economy	The story is told with exactly the right amount of detail throughout. It does not seem too short, nor too long.	The story composition is typically good, though it seems to drag somewhat OR need slightly more detail in one or two sections.	The story seems to need more editing. It is noticeably too long or too short in more than one section.	The story needs extensive editing. It is too long or too short to be interesting.
Duration of Presentation	Length of presentation was 3 minutes.	Length of presentation was 7-8 minutes or 2 minutes.	Length of presentation was 1 minute.	Presentation was less than 1 minute OR more than 8 minutes.
Editing	All transitions, effects, and edits are appropriate to the subject matter and add to the flow of the video. Edits do not distract, rather they add to the story.	Most transitions, effects, and edits are appropriate to the subject matter and add to the flow of the video. Most importantly, edits do not distract from the story.	Some transitions and/or effects. Edits are appropriate to the subject matter, but do not add to the flow of the video. At times, the edits distract from the story.	Little to no transitions and/or effects. Edits are not appropriate to the subject matter, nor do they add to the flow of the video. Edits distract from the story.
Grammar, Spelling, & Punctuation	Grammar and usage were correct and contributed to clarity, style, and theme development.	Grammar and usage were typically correct and errors did not detract from the story.	Grammar and usage were typically correct, but errors detracted from the story.	Repeated errors in grammar and usage distracted greatly from the story.

