# Digital Storytelling
## More than the Sum of Its Parts

Larence Wawro

"Hey kids! Want to read a story?"

If that doesn't get kids' attention, how about, "Hey kids! Want to *tell* a story?"

In this increasingly technological world, keeping kids interested in both reading, writing, and the processes of storytelling can sometimes use a bit of an upgrade. Why not incorporate digital storytelling at your library?

Last year, I attended a workshop at the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California. Although the workshops are for teaching adults how to create and express their own stories, there are some wonderful opportunities for librarians serving children to introduce these skills to patrons and students, giving children another tool to find their voices and express themselves in the digital age.

So what, exactly, is digital storytelling or a digital story? The website for the Center for Digital Storytelling (www.storycenter .org/index1.html) defines it as "a short, first person video-narrative created by combining recorded voice, still and moving images, and music or other sounds." You combine the recorded voice with the visual elements of photos or pictures with other elements, such as music or sound effects, to create a unique multimedia piece that is more than the sum of its parts.

There are many reasons for sharing digital stories with patrons. It encourages children and adolescents to think about how stories are created. We read stories to children, but how do we go about telling our own stories? Many children watch YouTube clips, but giving them the opportunity to create their own content and stories is a powerful tool—it helps them consider the elements of stories as well as increasing their awareness of the elements of the media they see around them.

It also allows them to express themselves. As so many of us know, children have amazing stories to tell. Whether they are stories of personal struggles or achievements, or some fantastic story they've dreamt up, digital storytelling gives them another avenue for self-expression.

## A Digital Stories Toolbox

So what tools does one need to create digital stories? There are programs available on your computer and online that can be used to create digital stories. At the workshop I attended, we used Apple's Final Cut Express, a powerful program that gives its user many options for layering visual and audio tracks. Although this is a great program, the expense may not make it a viable option for all libraries.

Most PCs and Macs, however, come with their own video-editing software. Windows Movie Maker for PCs and iMovie for Macs are ideal resources.

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Although your options are more limited than more robust video-editing programs, the simplicity can actually make the process simpler because it limits the bells and whistles that can begin to weigh down a project. (For computers with Windows 7, I recommend downloading a copy of Windows Movie Maker 2.6 from the Microsoft website; the timeline function makes it easier to edit still pictures than the updated Windows Movie Maker Live that comes with Windows 7.)

In terms of audio-recording software, Audacity, a free audio-recording program for PCs, or Garageband for Macs are great tools—just add a microphone and you'll be ready to record the narrative in no time.

Last, but by no means least, don't forget about images. With the prevalence of digital cameras and cell phone cameras, many children may have easy access to pictures to use for their stories. Other options are scanning photographs the children may have or scanning pictures that they have drawn.

If you don't have access to a scanner or if you need other options, you can find pictures available online under Creative Commons licenses, such as Flickr Creative Commons, which can be used for free as long as you give credit to the owner of the image and do not use it commercially. There are numerous websites, such as Jamendo, that offer music under the same stipulations.

## Ready, Set, Record!

Once you have your tools ready, what's next? There are multiple methods, but I'll outline one possible strategy. The time expended on each step will depend on your audience and resources. However, you may want to plan this project over multiple sessions and allow extra time to deal with unforeseen technical issues or time spent scanning images.

- **Have the children write out the stories they wish to tell**. This can either be an overview of what they want to see or the script that they will record. These could be original stories or they can share a personal experience. Although playing with the technology may sound like more fun than writing, having them focus on the story will give them a better appreciation for the process and make for a better finished project.

- **Record the children telling their stories.** This can be accomplished in a quiet space using a microphone and one of the recording programs. If you are working with a group, you might have the other children working on creating storyboards (on computer or on paper) by making rough sketches or notes about what pictures they want to appear within the different parts of their script.

- **Gather their images.** Children could bring in pictures on a flash drive, or they can scan a hard copy. They also may be able to access their own pictures on Facebook or use public-domain images. Another possibility is to have them draw pictures and scan them or have them create pictures with a computer program such as Microsoft Paint.

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### Digital Storytelling Resources

**Audacity**
http://audacity.sourceforge.net

**Center for Digital Storytelling**
www.storycenter.org

**Flickr Creative Commons**
www.flickr.com/creativecommons

**Henry the Superhero**
http://youtube/m5_M_Zkxl9c

**Jamendo**
www.jamendo.com

**Windows Movie Maker 2.6**
www.microsoft.com/download/en/details
.aspx?displaylang=en&id=34

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*"Digital storytelling is an empowering and creative way for kids to tell their stories, and when they're all done, they won't just stick it on their refrigerator— they can share it with the world."*

- **Arrange the images and audio in the editing software.** If you are using Windows Movie Maker 2.6 or iMovie, import the audio and image files. This incorporates all the files within the program so you can use them like ingredients in a recipe. The next step is fairly simple—both Windows Movie Maker and iMovie allow you to click and drag the audio into the appropriate audio timeline. You can then click and drag the images that you want onto the video timeline, then click and drag how long you want each image to appear on the screen. By doing this, you can make the images sync up with the audio and have them appear with the corresponding dialog.

- **Throw in a little movie magic.** If you have some extra time, add effects in Windows Movie Maker or iMovie to make the transitions blend more seamlessly. Or, try having the image pan (move from one side to the other), much like in a Ken Burns film. In fact, iMovie has an effect titled after the famed documentary director himself.

- **Export the work to a movie file.** After you have assembled the audio and visuals, export the file into a playable movie file, such as a WMV file for Windows or MOV for Macs.

This is just one way to accomplish a digital story. Experiment and find what works for you and your patrons or students.

For one project I did with my son, who was four at the time, I gave him index cards on which he could draw each scene or panel of his story. After he finished creating, I laid the cards out and recorded him telling me the story.

I scanned the index cards, added the audio file and a title screen, and we were done. This method skipped the initial writing and just let him have fun drawing images and thinking about the story more as a comic book.

Another possibility—if it is too difficult to record the children or you don't have access to a microphone—is to create text screens between the images that help tell the story, such as in silent movies. You could let music be the soundtrack and let the images and text do the "talking."

These examples are not meant to be a definitive guide; rather they are a starting point for digital storytelling.

What's important is to find what works for you and your participants and fits the resources available. Digital storytelling is an empowering and creative way for kids to tell their stories, and when they're all done, they won't just stick it on their refrigerator—they can share it with the world. ↶

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## WE PLAY HERE!, continued from page 10

We reiterate that children's librarians have an important role in the repositioning of play as a vital aspect of childhood for *all* children. We hope that our collective experience as children's librarians in a variety of roles has provided you with insight, ideas, and inspiration about how you can continue to support play in your programs, spaces, and conversations. The library is the perfect place to show the way through play and we invite you all to become advocates for play in your libraries. ↶

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