

Excerpted from

Digital Storytelling Guide for Educators

Midge Frazel

With digital storytelling, students can use music, sound effects, video, and more to create multimedia presentations that develop creativity, collaboration, and technology skills. Leading you through the preparation, production, and presentation of digital storytelling, this guide gives you an understanding of the technology and how to implement projects in your classroom. *Digital Storytelling Guide for Educators* offers ideas, instruction, and resources.

Chapter 6 demonstrates the power of digital storytelling to engage and excite students, discussing the importance of an audience and the students' personal connection to the subject matter. It also covers a number of different types of digital storytelling, including scrapblogs, photo essays, and ePortfolios.



Building Enthusiasm for Learning

For K–12 students, digital storytelling can add sparkle to difficult topics. It can stimulate questions that other approaches might not. It is an active, not passive, process that can produce an atmosphere of excited learning and is inherently appealing to students.

But beyond this, students (especially older students) respond to having an audience and to having a real-world purpose for their work: to inform, to advocate, to reach out into the community and the world. Digital storytelling offers them this potential.

The Power of Audience

The power of audience and the appeal of publishing online can foster a new level of enthusiasm for the learning process in K–12 students. In the past, only the teacher, classmates, or family

provided audience for student work. Now, knowing the work may be public in some way, and that it will be archived in the form of a movie, students tend to be more concerned about the end product than they were with paper-and-pencil projects.

In his article “The Power of Audience,” (www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/nov08/vol66/num03/The_Power_of_Audience.aspx) school designer Steven Levy notes:

When student work culminates in a genuine product for an authentic audience, it makes a world of difference. Writing teachers know about the power of audience. When you write an essay, you have to know who your audience will be so that you can adjust your message and style accordingly. Chorus and band directors know the power of audience. Why do students work so hard practicing the same passages over and over, week after week? Because the audience is coming for the concert!

Personal Connections

There are two points on which teachers of digital storytelling projects usually agree: quality counts and should, in part, be evaluated according to the tenets of good composition; and the subject of the story should be something that the student feels emotionally charged about or has a definite personal interest in exploring.

Today’s news media provide an endless stream of visual topics for students to choose from. Students’ lives are affected by a wide

range of issues such as global warming, war, and disease—issues they have no control over but do feel strongly about, whether they feel an emotional connection to them, are intellectually interested, or both.

Digital storytelling offers these students a voice. Students can learn to convey their views effectively to a wider audience than is usually available to them. They can share information or urge action on real-world issues that affect their schools and communities.

Some of my colleagues have found that short periods of reflective journaling during the preparation process assist students in focusing and narrowing the subject of the digital story project, whether it will be produced individually, in small groups, or by the whole class. Whole-class projects have proven to work most effectively with single subject disciplines. Whole-class digital storytelling might also be part of problem-based learning where students work to understand open-ended world problems they feel strongly about. Some high school classes are participating in community service projects, and through these activities, students have found a natural fit for digital storytelling.

Visual Literacy and Scrapbook Stories

At first glance, it may seem unusual to think of digital storytelling within the realm of old-fashioned scrapbooking. Teachers have traditionally used scrapbooks as an art form or, in photography classes, to have students learn the basics of composition, layout, and self-expression. So how does digital technology improve on the hands-on process of scrapbooking?

Digital scrapbooking, sometimes called e-scrapbooking, adds depth to traditional scrapbooking in two ways: first by teaching the art of preservation, and second by providing an expanded venue for students to share their work.

Digital scrapbooking is yet another hands-on activity that helps inform visual literacy, finding meaning with images, for K–12 students. In the past, teaching from textbooks provided students with only two ways to learn: reading text and looking at pictures. Students were passive observers. Classroom teachers augmented textbook experiences with visual media such as the chalkboard, filmstrips, or 16-millimeter movies.

Digital scrapbooking can be combined with traditional scrapbooking, providing the student with opportunities for hands-on learning. Students first create physical scrapbooks using scanned and digital photographs. Then they might add hand-drawn embellishments or even three-dimensional items (such as buttons, pins, ribbons, or paper clips) glued on for special effects. These pages can then be digitally photographed and combined into a movie with photos of the scrapbook creators and narration of the scrapbook stories. No one way is the right way, because this is an art form as well as a hands-on learning activity.

Visual digital storytelling can also be created from scraps purposefully quilted together as pieces of information, thoughts, emotions, and memories.

e-Scrapbooking

Annette Lamb provides an array of e-scrapbooking resources at her website (<http://escrapbooking.com>). Her background as a librarian and media specialist helped her create this superbly organized portal to related pedagogy, focused questions, books in print, and links that can jump-start any educator's interest in scrapbooking. Lamb defines e-scrapbooks as "tools for reflecting on ideas and sharing perspectives." She suggests that the *e* stands not only for electronic but also for educational, experiential, engaging, and expression.

The screenshot shows the website interface for 'escrapbooking'. On the left is a vertical navigation menu with the following items: HOME, BASICS, DEFINITIONS, E-SCRAPS, PROCESS, questioning, project focus, thinking focus, content focus, collection, organization, TOOLS, PROJECTS, and RESOURCES. The main content area is titled 'Process: Creating Escrapbooks' and contains the following text: 'Much of the fun and learning that comes from escrapbooking occurs during the process of questioning, inquiry, exploration, organization, and creation. Before jumping into a project, spend some time thinking about your own thinking. Is this project for learning and/or fun?' Below this text is a list of steps: 'Use the following steps to complete your project' followed by a bulleted list: Questioning, Project Focus, Thinking Focus, Content Focus, Collection Materials, and Organization of Project. To the right of the text is a black and white photograph of a large, light-colored flower. At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the text: '(edscapes | Teacher Tap) | 42Explore | About Us | Contact Us | ©2008 Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson'.

Annette Lamb's e-scrapbooking web pages

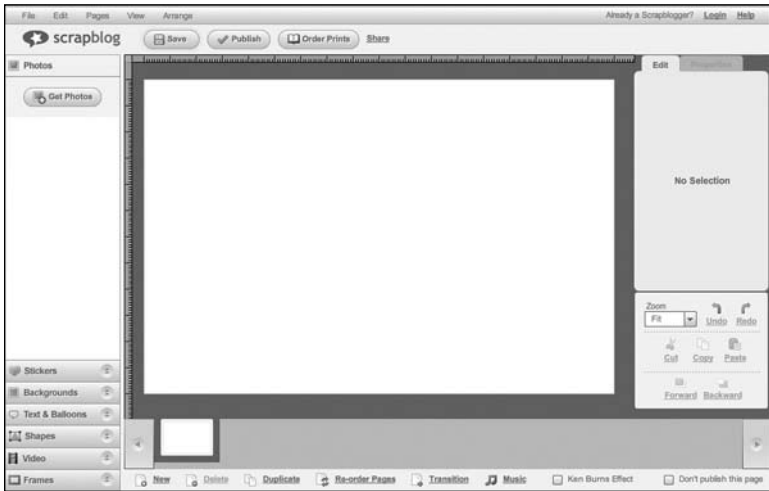
Working with primary sources is required by many states for standards-based learning lessons, projects, and activities. Lamb's activities offer ideas for using the American Memory collection from the Library of Congress (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/>) to create e-scrapbooks and digital stories, and for teaching visual literacy.

Scrapblog: Online Multimedia Scrapbooks

Alex de Carvalho and Carlos Garcia of Scrapblog (www.scrapblog.com) describe Scrapblog as “the first web-based service for creating and sharing multimedia scrapbooks online. It enables everyday people to express themselves online in creative ways. Users can aggregate their photos and videos from multiple online sources and mix them with audio, music, text, and thousands of creative elements in an environment that is truly drag-and-drop easy.”

Scrapblog works well for classrooms because it’s free and there is no online registration; therefore the Scrapblog service can be used by students at any computer, regardless of location. Students can create Scrapblogs in the classroom, computer lab, or library-media center and finish them as homework. Teachers can enhance the mentoring process by viewing the projects in progress in class and then quickly perform an assessment once students have published their Scrapblogs. Scrapblogs are also good story starters for larger projects.

I suggest teachers try making a three-slide Scrapblog themselves. If access is limited in the classroom, reserve time in the computer lab and work with the school technology facilitator, who may be able to teach the basics of using the Scrapblog Builder. Note that this is a browser-based tool, and any pop-up blocker should be disabled so that the Scrapblog Builder interface works in a separate window.



Scraplog Builder, opening screen

Creating a Scraplog

The following steps can be used to create a Scraplog using the Scraplog service.

1. After brainstorming story ideas, have students create a timeline in order to write a rough draft of the script. (See the Timelines section in Chapter 2.)
2. Then, students need to decide on the photo elements to include. Students can take their own pictures using a digital camera, scan and use an existing photo, or use photos copied from the web. Students also credit the sources of each photo or scan as part of this step. (This is a great opportunity to introduce an intellectual property lesson.)

3. Visual literacy lesson: Ask students several important critical thinking questions about the chosen photographs. Students then create and edit their rough draft based on discussions.
4. Students begin using Scrapblog to add their photos and/or scanned documents. If the resulting scrapbook pages are to be exported for printing in physical scrapbooks, the pages built should contain text to be read; if they are to be exported to be used in another application, such as Movie Maker, Photo Story, or iMovie, then the text should be only a visual clue for the vocal narration. Also important at this step is teaching good design and layout using backgrounds, stickers, shapes, and frames; students make the decision to use a theme or a blank page first.)
5. Scrapblogs should be saved frequently but should not be published until you have checked them with the prearranged assessment rubric.
6. There's an option for private or public viewing after publishing—only published Scrapblogs can be exported.
7. Exported Scrapblogs (JPEG format) can be sent to an existing photo-sharing account or to the computer's hard drive. You may wish to have students save their Scrapblogs to the computer so that the material is kept private.
8. Because the pages of the resulting Scrapblog are in a common format, they can be used as elements in movies, photo essays, or PowerPoint presentations. They can also become graphics for web pages.
9. Scrapblogs can be edited after they are published, but they must be exported again if changes were made to the pages.



Example Scrapblog page

A Sample Scrapblog: The Mariner and the Medal of Honor

Creating a Scrapblog and sharing it can an immensely rewarding experience. As an example, I created a Scrapblog: James A. Barber, Civil War Hero (www.scrapblog.com/midgefrazel/476B3397-C8CA).

The U.S. Civil War is a great topic for a Scrapblog. Because photography was becoming more popular and common during the Civil War era, this war is the first so-called visual war: photographs began to tell the story of the conflict that both split and unified the United States. Many regional historical societies' photo collections contain photographs of local Civil War veterans returning home. There are also national collections of photographs, such as those by Mathew Brady, which capture amazing faces and terrible scenes of the battles.

Nearly every eastern U.S. city or town has memorials to this war with the names of those who served and an opportunity for students to record the names and learn about the people behind them. Local genealogy societies or veterans' organizations often have records of the location of veterans' graves, providing opportunities for students to visit and take photographs. Historians have created immense websites devoted to the details of the battles. These resources can make learning about this period of history engaging for students while providing a connection to local history. This way of preserving history is often called "Stories in Stone."

Links to several other examples of Scrapblogs are given in the Resources section at the end of this chapter.

ePortfolios

ePortfolios differ from regular digital stories in that they focus on the learning process, documenting the student's education experiences. ePortfolios may, for example, take the form of journals or photographic essays. Reflection and remembrance can make the process of creating an ePortfolio enjoyable. Creating an ePortfolio requires excellent planning, organizational, and archival skills. Making an ePortfolio is a dynamic way to show growth over time. Creating this type of digital story demonstrates that the student has mastered the curriculum goals and has the technological prowess to create, present, and store a project of this nature.

Having students respond to each other's ePortfolios is good practice for learning to give and receive constructive criticism

and praise for a job well done. Sharing an ePortfolio with others who are just beginning can help them think clearly about the tasks and goals ahead and is a good mentoring experience for students.

Photo Essays

Photo essays are photograph collections that tell stories through this visual medium, with minimal or no text or narration. The story is in the pictures, and sometimes in the order of their presentation. Photo essays can be created with many software products.

A digital photo essay can be part of a digital story and can be part of an ePortfolio. Music tracks can be added to the product for added emphasis or to set the emotional tone. Photo essays are sometimes used to promote discussion in the classroom. The impact of an attractive presentation can elicit a strong emotional reaction from the audience.

Digital photo essays are sometimes used in the classroom to assist teachers—for example, to introduce the writing process in a poetry unit, or to teach students the steps of digital storytelling. In science classrooms, for example, it is important for students to understand the sequence of events in a life cycle. When presented with photographs of the stages of development, students demonstrate knowledge and understanding of growth and development by correctly sequencing photos. From this initial understanding can come critical thinking concerning what happens to an organism whose life cycle is interrupted or changed by the environment or predatory threats. By creating

a photo essay, young students might begin to understand the scientific and mathematical concept “What comes next?” The possibilities are almost endless.

A Sample Photo Essay: Monarch Butterflies

Raising monarch butterflies in the classroom and taking digital photographs of each stage of development from egg to adult butterfly is a good hands-on, standards-based science lesson for elementary and middle school students.

Two excellent websites where you can find educational resources on the development and migration of monarch butterflies are Journey North—Monarch Butterflies (www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/monarch/jr/KidsJourneyNorth.html) and Monarch Watch (www.monarchwatch.org).

The following figure is a one-page photo essay, in collage format, on monarch butterflies. Created with Scrapblog’s School theme, the monarch butterfly collage was published as a Scrapblog, exported in JPEG format, sent to a Flickr account, and enhanced with a Museum border by using Picnik tools. This is an example of how, with just a few photos, a teacher could create a photo essay and use it to demonstrate a lesson or tell a story.

PART II | Applying Digital Storytelling

Crossing into the Blue:

www.scrapblog.com/viewer/viewer.aspx?sbid=60174

James A. Barber, Civil War Hero:

www.scrapblog.com/midgefrazel/476B3397-C8CA

Journey to Rwanda:

www.scrapblog.com/viewer/viewer.aspx?sbId=140952

Midge Frazel, a strong believer that any educator can master technology in the classroom, is known for her enthusiastic teaching style at the professional development workshops she conducts. A frequent contributor to the educational community, she is the author or co-author of 10 books for classroom teachers, specialists, administrators, and librarians. She maintains a website and blog on educational technology. Frazel recently received her master's degree from Lesley University.

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