Get started with Digital Storytelling in the Classroom

Engage learners with this powerful process.

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The Art of Digital Storytelling

Living in the Story and Unfolding Lessons Learned - two elements that can transform a digital story into effective digital storytelling.

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

Gather round those roaring campfires, picnic tables, or even a fondue pot, because the ancient art of storytelling is being revived into an emerging communication mode called digital storytelling. Stories are as old as people and are more important than ever for our spirits, minds, and human progress. Becoming good storytellers gives us personal power as we guide, motivate, entertain, educate, inspire, and influence others through the artful use of story.

Designing and communicating information requires students to deepen their understanding of content while increasing visual, sound, oral language, creativity, and thinking skills. Making meaning out of an experience deepens the communication for both the author and the viewers. The author's narrative voice is the center of all the multimedia decisions. The story's narrative is first made into a voiceover and then all images, sound, music, transitions, and special effects are organized around unfolding this story.

Telling stories together about things that really matter has an extraordinary effect on people. Digital media and digital distribution to the world community is reshaping the power of oral storytelling, enabling us to unfold a highly sensory experience that dances a narrative voice with images, sound, and music into illuminated understandings. What an experience to incorporate digital storytelling into your classroom and guide a new generation into becoming 21st- Century StoryKeepers™, knowing their personal narratives will endure for others long after the fires die down!and thinking about a problem. The implicit message of "what's another way" is accepted so long as students can demonstrate the mathematical thinking behind their suggestions.

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Take Six: Elements of Good Storytelling

To help increase the quality of student stories, I developed Take Six: Elements of Digital Storytelling. For example, Showing not Telling is a quality long expected in good writing pieces, and this same element also creates exceptionally good stories as well. However, I want to focus on two specific elements in this article because they are considered especially essential for good storytelling: Living in the Story and Unfolding Lessons Learned. If either of these two elements is missing, you likely are viewing a great digital story... but not storytelling.

Living in the Story

So many digital stories are telling about their topics; even personal ones such as a story about grandma, a pet, or getting a first bicycle. Even if told very well, we often can't feel the author in these about tales. Digital storytelling encourages authors to write a very personal emotional connection with the tale being told. The power of storytelling is not in telling about an event or someone else's life, but rather in shifting the lens to using the setting, details, and events for telling your story with the experience.

You may not be a character in the story, but your audience should still be able to feel what you feel or how the situation affects you. In A Whole New Mind, Daniel Pink defines story grammar as the "ability to encapsulate, contextualize, and emotionalize information, understanding, and experiences for yourself and others." Emotionalizing information gives important "sticking power" in our brains and for our audience. The written narrative for storytelling should be coached as a first-person perspective, unfolding the storytelling from the author's heart, not his or her head.

Unfolding a Lesson Learned

Have you ever been with someone who is telling a story and seems to be going on and on and on? You begin to get restless, wondering… is there a point here you are trying to make? Good storytelling needs a "spine" to hold the audience's attention and deliver a timely, memorable ending. Good storytelling strives to find the essence of meaning or value this person, experience, or situation made in their lives. The lesson learned is a kind

of moral of the story, such as the ones we find in fairy tales—revealing the wisdom or understandings gained from the experience or knowledge. Wrapping up each digital storytelling with a lesson learned also gives it depth and meaning beyond the "what happened" story points.

Finding the Lessons Learned

Frequently an author knows the story he or she wants to tell but has not made meaning out of it yet. What does my sister's autism mean to my life? How do I find meaning in my life as a foster child? What do I now know, believe, or understand about the world from this experience? It requires the author to dig deep, reflect, and make personal meaning beyond the facts. Finding the lesson learned significantly changes authors as well as the experience they create for their audience.

Good storytelling is a journey for every author who is digging deep into the meaning of their stories for themselves and others. As part of a digital storytelling week, I worked with Ms. Liza Medina's middle school class at Ramapos Central Schools, New York. Students were given the task of finding their own visual parallel personal stories to unfold while narrating Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken".

When students began, they struggled to create more than a literal connection to the poem. When we tried to get them to uncover their own emotions and feelings behind their experience with Frost's poem, students clammed up. After numerous efforts, Ms. Medina decided to share her own story two different ways (see below).

After sharing her first story, Ms. Medina said, "See? I almost wasn't a teacher at all!" Joshua, sarcastic as usual, shouted out, "Good!" After sharing the second story, she turned back to Joshua asking, "Do you still feel like saying 'good' after this one?" "No," Joshua said, "The first one was just a summary, like the words on the back of a book. It's telling what happened, but not telling it real. But I feel sad after the second one about how that teacher treated you. You had to kinda face a bully, but you won. You made it very real."

Story Transformation

Version 1
When I was in college, I left the education department for six months. One of my education professors refused to take me on school visitations to observe classrooms. She told me I looked too much like the kids and didn't act my age. Once when I turned in a paper two days late, she refused to grade it. She pulled me aside and told me that I was never going to be able to become an effective teacher because I was too immature. I became angry. She had recommended to the head of the education department that I be removed from the program. Rather than fight with her, I dropped my education major and took up jewelry making and photography. After one semester outside of the education department, I decided to appeal to the head of the education department. With a renewed conviction, I rejoined the education department.

Version 2
Dr. Sawyer looked down her narrow pointy nose at me. "So why do you want to teach?"

Because I taught Michelle how to tell time when I was in second grade. Because I taught Samantha how to speak Spanish last summer. Because I don't know how not to be a teacher.

None of these answers would be enough for her. Intimidated by her icy stare, I muttered, "I don't know."

"Then there is no reason for you to waste your time in this department." she declared. "You do not have the disposition of a teacher. Your behavior is no better than that of the children."

Because Hope Ann and I smile in your classroom? Because we giggle and chat with students in the hallways?

Anger boiled in my head. I like children. They're happy! Why is it a crime for me to be, too? "You look like students, you dress like students, and you act like students. You are not fit to be in the classroom." She turned away from me with a dismissive tone. Stunned and outraged, I only managed a passive nod.

Defeated and humiliated I wandered in a daze, reluctantly arriving at my advisor's door. I handed him my second semester registration form with "Fine Arts" scrawled in my shaky handwriting across the top next to the word Major. He signed his approval.

I lived with my misery every day the following semester; making jewelry, taking photographs, and doing art critiques. My spirit was flat and unconnected. I missed the kids. I missed my dream of making a difference, student by student, through the years.

When time came to register for next semester's classes, I realized that I was wasting my time and ambition. I appealed to the head of the education department and won. With renewed conviction, I rejoined the education department. I knew then that I would never again let someone else dictate my future or take my life dreams away. My dreams are mine to make true, even when others don't believe in them. I believe, and that is all that matters.

Then something very interesting happened—Joshua volunteered first to tell his story. Normally, Joshua is a Hockey Player—capital H, capital P, ALL Hockey, ALL the time. Joshua told us very briefly about being six years old and choosing to play hockey for the first time with a traveling team. He talked about getting up at 4 AM, going to practices early in the morning before light and coming home late at night when it was dark. He talked about having no time for family and no time for friends.

In that moment, Joshua became more than just a Hockey Player to us—Joshua became a scared, insecure human being. This is not the boy his classmates are used to—usually wisecracking, quick witted, and sarcastic. This person sounded like he wasn't so sure that being ALL Hockey, ALL the time was the best choice. This person sounded unsure—not his words— but his voice. At the end of the period, I took Joshua aside. I told him that knowing him as I do, I couldn't imagine him not playing hockey. I told him this is the reason I find his story fascinating. "You do?" he seemed surprised. "I think you sacrifice an awful lot for that sport, and I think there is a seriously interesting emotional level to your story that other people can relate to. Consider doing it in your group with the Frost poem." He smiled, "Okay."

Sharing Stories that Need to Be Told

> *"After a digital storytelling is shared, it should be remembered for its soul, not the bells and whistles of technology." — Bernajean Porter*

Good storytelling reaches down deep into our minds, hearts, and spirits—it connects the humanity in all of us.

Through storytelling elements we can craft stories about life, experiences, and understandings into being very real for others. Good storytelling lets our students be deeply heard and honored. And those are the stories that need to be told!

Digital Storytelling across the Curriculum

The process of crafting a digital story builds communication, collaboration, creativity, visual and sound literacy, and project management skills.

By telling thoughtful stories, we clarify our own thinking about what we have learned to share with others in a profound way that sticks with us over time.

—Annette Simmons, The Story Factor

In an age of mathematical, logical, and scientific thinking, storytelling is often considered appropriate only for language arts projects for young learners. However, in today's information-loaded world, storytelling is being rediscovered as an effective tool for helping us make sense of this data barrage. According to the brain research explored by Roger Shanks, storytelling provides a memory structure and depth of context that engages learners in a sense-making of facts.

The digital storytelling process helps us transform isolated facts into illuminated, enduring understandings. By "living in the story," we make information come emotionally alive. By exploring "lessons learned," we go beyond telling about content to find its deeper meaning.

Storytelling Builds 21st-Century Skills

Creating digital stories provides us with important opportunities to practice and master a number of specific 21st-century skills, content, and technology standards (NETS). The process of crafting the digital story becomes rich in technical, communication, collaborative, oral speaking, creativity, visual and sound literacy, and project management skills. It also helps develop a range of digital communication styles necessary to function in a knowledge society. Since every good story requires great content that is worth sharing, digital storytellers must first become "meaning makers." The written script requires deep understanding of the topic. From initial investigation to rough draft and then through refinement

as draft after draft is polished and improved, writing should take about 40% of the project-building time.

Building 21st-Century Skills

- Creativity and inventive thinking
- Multiple intelligences
- Higher-order thinking (lessons learned)
- Information literacy
- Visual literacy
- Sound literacy
- Technical literacy
- Effective communication (oral, written, and digital)
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Project management
- Enduring understandings

The final narrative script is next recorded as a voiceover for the story. The author must work to ensure that the oral delivery has power and emotion. When an author "feels" his or her words, the voice becomes a conduit for others to experience the message.

Storytelling enables innovation and creativity. Authors become creative in designing information and communicating understandings with the images, graphics, movement, and music of digital media. Digital storytelling provides a unique opportunity to mix and dance media together until they coalesce into something that did not exist before.

Communication across the Curriculum

Organizing story prompts around the type of communication expected of authors helps focus students as they develop the content of their stories. Here are four ideas for types of communication that connect storytelling with curriculum.

1. Myths, Legends, and Tall Tales

Myths, legends, and tall tales provide a familiar place to start. Most families and organizations use legends to represent values and pride. Myths help explain our cultural origins, values, and beliefs. Tall tales are romanticized exaggerations that highlight accomplishments or events. Justine, a classroom

teacher in Arizona, has invited her third-grade students to create a multimedia tall tale about themselves, exaggerating their great qualities and achievements in a way that will be passed down to family and friends for generations to come.

- Create a myth about the origins of a modern-day invention to share with future generations.
- Develop myths from "what would happen if."
- Create myths of "how things came to be" in your life, family, school, or business.
- Change a current event into a tall tale or myth.
- Develop a legend of a family member's life or accomplishments.
- Create a legend of your own life for your great, great grandchildren to pass on.
- Create legends or tall tales of a literary character, mathematical concept, or social studies event.

2. Docudramas

Story prompts asking students to act as if they are living in the times or events they are studying helps make facts come alive for both authors and the audience. These docudramas require students to conduct in-depth research and practice their creativity to role-play a storytelling narrative as George Washington, a freed slave, a character in literature, the life of pi squared, a circle's happiest accomplishments, or the lessons a Granny Smith apple learns from her life cycle.

Docudramas require learners to "step into the shoes" of a person or an object as a creative personal approach

> *Thread the beads of your facts together with a plot, so they don't roll away.*
>
> *—Annette Simmons, The Story Factor*

for weaving together significant facts. The event, person, or learning experience is expressed first-person, during which students demonstrate understanding of key concepts and deliver a lesson learned to reveal deeper thinking about their topics.

Jeanne Halderson's Coulee Kids Podcasting students developed a community project honoring the

contributions of women to their town. After the interviews were recorded and posted to iTunes, students created docudramas and reenacted the events and stories shared by the interviewees, synthesizing the entire interview and crafting a personal story showcasing the lesson learned.

- Create the storytelling journey of a leaf eaten by an earthworm. Make the facts come alive from beginning to end as if you were one of the digestive parts along the way.
- Be the youngest child of a Japanese family living in California, unfolding the facts and emotional experience of the Japanese internment camps.
- Be a decimal point, sharing your journey of being misunderstood and needing to clearly make a difference in the world.
- Be a literary, scientific, or historical character sharing a defining moment when a choice you made touched the world forever.
- Dialogue with another person across other eras or time periods, sharing your perspective and lessons learned on issues and events.
- Dialogue as parts of the brain on memorable experiences with the body.
- Be the pen that signed the Declaration of Independence, a treaty, or one of the Amendments, and explain how your life has impacted the lives of countless others.

3. Describe and Conclude

Describe and conclude tasks often require students to simply tell about a topic. To deepen the learning, ask students to share the wisdom of what they learned from the topic—the "so what?"- developed from learning about people, events, or situations. A personal point of view can be added by asking: how does the event affect my life, thinking, or beliefs? How does knowing the facts about a famous person or event influence my own thinking or beliefs? This type of storytelling reflects the author's full intellectual and personal engagement with the subject, not just a reporting of facts and information.

To show the impact of a coal mine explosion 22 years ago on her community of Centralia, Illinois, Phyllis

Hostmeyer's story conveys the connection she made between the event and her own life today. Her storytelling journey in making sense of men who knew the dangers and still went down into the mines every day found a conclusion that brings a lesson learned to all of us. View Ordinary Heroes Everywhere.

- Describe an event and why it matters, connects, or makes a difference to our humanity or communities today.
- Tell about a person and what his or her life or work has taught us—or perhaps how his or her work or choices in life continue to touch our lives today.
- Describe bees and what you now realize about their contribution or importance to our world.

4. Advertising or Public Service Announcements

This type of digital storytelling uses the power of personal appeal along with voice, music, and images to create influence and impact. Authors combine their personal messages with the lessons learned to provide a compelling call to action. A popular television version of this approach is the "Above the Influence" series calling attention to the consequences of choices made or not made.

- Help convince others to make better choices by sharing a defining moment when a decision or experience (e.g., drugs, guns, Internet chat rooms, dropping out of school, drinking, smoking, recycling our garbage, helping a friend, or stopping the bullying of others) changed or touched lives forever.
- Be a squirrel, eagle, bear, whale, or toucan convincing others to take care of the environment through a personal story of what happens when you do not.

Telling stories together about things that really matter has an extraordinary effect on people. This effect is further magnified when the story is distributed and related meaningfully to the world community through the Web. May your students discover the magical power of releasing their own storytelling into your communities!

Build Literacy through Digital Storytelling

The process of creating a digital story provides an authentic opportunity to practice essential literacy skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Digital storytelling provides students with a powerful learning experience that capitalizes on their interest in technology and their skills with it. Because they are creating as well as consuming media as they develop stories, the process of researching and creating a digital story provides an authentic opportunity to practice essential literacy skills in areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts state, "The need to conduct research and to produce and consume media is embedded into every aspect of today's curriculum" so students develop the ability to "analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new." Digital storytelling gives students these opportunities while making deep connections to content.

While the technical aspect of digital storytelling may be the "hook" for students, technology is secondary for student learning during the process of developing a digital story. Effective digital stories combine extensive research, ideation, critical thinking, organizing, writing, editing, and media literacy. Digital storytelling provides a compelling need to read and listen carefully and to write and edit effectively.

Reading

Science and Social Studies, with their wealth of information, data, and primary sources, are great places to implement digital storytelling projects that require students to "gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas."

When reading informational text, students often overlook the author's perspective on an issue. A great digital story doesn't just share facts about something, but

shares information through a story from a specific narrator. Digital storytelling requires students to research a topic and read information with an eye to author's perspective, helping them learn to carefully analyze informational text for point of view.

While students may be able to quickly locate information online, they will need guidance in digging deeper to find high-quality information. Primary sources generally have a name attached to the creator, but you will want to include instruction on how to evaluate the quality of secondary sources. Who is the author of the information? How many other authors are cited as research to support the information?

Students also need instruction and coaching on how to analyze and use the information they find. The use of graphic organizers during the research and organization process helps students evaluate and organizer the information they are gathering. As students become more savvy using organizers, discuss how to choose an organizer most appropriate for the content and ideas.

Writing

While digital storytelling implies a focus on technology, a powerful digital story cannot exist without powerful writing. While students will be reading, researching, and even creating soundtracks, the heart of a powerful digital story is a well-written script. Digital stories are concise moments in time, usually consisting of approximately 300 words.

When students are trying to tell a story from their research, 300 words won't initially be enough. They

may start with 500-1000 words and then work down to make the story more concise, focusing on precise language for powerful communication. The editing and redacting process helps them dig to the heart of the issue they are exploring.

As you begin to incorporate this process in your classroom, you may want to utilize how-to videos. Most students have used YouTube videos to learn more about something they find compelling whether it is creating rubber band bracelets or learning the latest soccer move. Students may have also encountered how-to videos in flipped classroom environments. Student's familiarity with this format means you have to teach them less about the process and more about the criteria makes them effective.

3.When you lean a little forward kick your legs over your head.

Digital storytelling also provides students with authentic opportunities to write in all three forms mentioned in the Common Core State Standards (Appendix A): argument, informational/explanatory, and narrative. The best digital storytelling projects often combine these forms of writing for powerful effect.

Many PSAs include argument and persuasive elements to change the behavior of the viewer. Students can funnel their passion about issues into informative PSAs to raise awareness and educate others about an issue.

When creating documentaries, students often make the mistake of simply summarizing facts instead of telling stories that will engage viewers. To avoid this, encourage students to share the information as a

docudrama or dramatization of events from a specific character's perspective.

Listening and Speaking

In today's digital world, research materials come in many forms. Students will, of course, read many texts, but they may also be listening carefully to music for lyrics, intonation, and mood.

They may also be listening to interviews and other oral forms of storytelling or even conducting their own. As they listen to this information, especially content from primary sources or interviews, they need to become critical listeners to better evaluate point of view and personal perspectives.

As students are work to get the narration just right, they don't often notice they are reading and practicing fluency. Effective digital storytellers don't "wing it;" they write scripts, read, reread, edit, and practice, practice, practice. They work on intonation, using grammar cues to help with cadence and flow.

If your students aren't strong readers or confident speakers, or if they are new to the English language, creating a digital story provides an authentic reason to practice fluency. To provide a non-threatening environment for this practice, use headset microphones. This allows them to record, listen, and re-record until they are comfortable with their fluency and ready to include their speech within their digital story.

Media Literacy

The plethora of options for images and soundtracks can lead to stories with a lot of flash and not much depth. Educators can structure the process and provide feedback to help students build essential digital age communication skills. For example, many teachers require a script to be written and even a storyboard and pitch to be given before work on the computer can begin.

As with any skill, students will grow into their ability to "take advantage of, rather than suffer from, the visually stunning effects today's tools provide." As students work to combine a compelling narrative with powerful imagery and a meaningful soundtrack, they become increasingly savvy about the media they are creating. It takes practice to become effective communicators, regardless of the medium.

The creation process also turns them into more astute media consumers. As they add pans and zooms to their stories to focus the viewer's attention, they start to see these same techniques being used on them in the commercials and movies they watch.

Digital storytelling provides a wealth of opportunities to engage students in content learning in your classroom. No matter what content they explore, the process of research, writing, creating, and editing a digital story builds essential 21st century literacy skills.

Lesson Plans

The following lesson plans provide specific, detailed examples of the ways you can use digital storytelling to engage students and improve content knowledge and retention.

Each lesson includes:

- the **task** students will perform,
- ideas to **engage** students in the content,
- a description of what students will **create** with a technology tool,
- ways to **share** student work beyond the classroom walls, and
- tips for **assessing** student work.

Animal Interviews

Students research the physical characteristics, adaptations, and habitat of an animal and share their findings through a question and answer session with the animal.

Apps: Wixie® or Frames®

Task

Everyday scientists are learning more and more about how animals "talk." For example, there is now an elephant voices dictionary that helps humans understand the meaning of elephant calls and gestures subsonic.

Students will use their powers of research, observation, and questioning to create an interview with an animal; interviewing it to help others learn more what makes it so amazing.

Engage

Inspire your student's curiosity about animal's unique characteristics by visiting the San Diego Zoo Kids web site and exploring some of the amazing animals found there. Depending on the literature you have been reading with students, you may want to start with a specific animal. For example, if you have been reading Verdi, by Janell Cannon, to your class, start with the python.

Ask your students to share what they know about other amazing animals. Help lead students to the realization that a unique physical or behavioral adaptation is what makes the animal interesting. To get them talking, ask students to share:

- What the animal looks like.
- Where the animal lives in the wild.
- What makes it interesting.

Let students know that they will become animal researchers who will inspire others about the wonders of animals and their adaptations through an interview with the animal!

Group students together in pairs by interest in the same animal, keeping in mind work style, ability, and personality. Working together will make the research process a bit easier and provides for an easy split into interviewer and interviewee (animal) when they record the interview. If students have a team mate to question first, you will also have a bit more time to talk to different groups and identify misconceptions.

Students should begin by completing research about the animal. Graphic organizers, like clusters, may be helpful for them to organize the information they find about the habitat, food, physical characteristics, and predators of the animal they are studying.

Their research should answer questions like:

- What are the physical features of this creature?
- Why are these features needed in this habitat?
- What does this creature eat?
- What does this creature do during the day? Or is it nocturnal?
- Does this creature have any natural predators?

Create

Tell your students they will be sharing their research through an interview with their animal. Their animal will describe how it looks, what it eats, and where it lives by answering questions from a reporter.

This might be a good time to talk to your students about personification. While the goal is to share information in a fun and unique way, you can focus on writing and language skills by asking students to consider:

- How do you feel about your looks?
- What are you afraid of?
- How do you feel about what you eat and where you live?

When they have enough information about their animal, students should begin dividing up the information into questions and answers. While you can provide the questions, having students develop the questions on their own is a powerful way to have them start organizing information and thinking like scientists.

Using a tool like Wixie® or Frames®, have students enhance their interview with images and voice narration.

If your students are ready, give them flexibility to choose how many pages or slides in their interview as well as how it is organized. If they need more structure, you could suggest they create pages for:

- What the animal looks like.
- Where the animal lives in the wild.
- What makes it interesting.

Have students develop illustrations for each question and answer and record the interview. They can create original illustrations, find photographs, and even capture their image to add to the project using a digital camera or web cam.

Share

Have students present their interviews to the rest of the class or local animal expert, such as a ranger from a local park or nature center. Post interviews to your class website, a station in the school media center where other students can use for their own research purposes.

Assessment

As The final interview and student work during the process will help you evaluate understanding of physical characteristics, habitats, and adaptations.

Monitor progress and encourage the use of graphic organizers as students begin their research. Work closely with students as they develop their interview questions, as their formulation of the questions will demonstrate comprehension of big ideas behind the facts they find. Their written interview may also serve as both a formative and summative assessment.

The resulting interviews serve as an artifact for a unique summative assessment of informative writing. Be sure to evaluate student recording for fluency and content accuracy.

Resources

Nicola Davies. **Extreme Animals: The Toughest Creatures on Earth.** ISBN: 0763641278

Pamela Hickman. **Animals in Motion: How Animals Swim, Jump, Slither and Glide.** ISBN: 1550745751

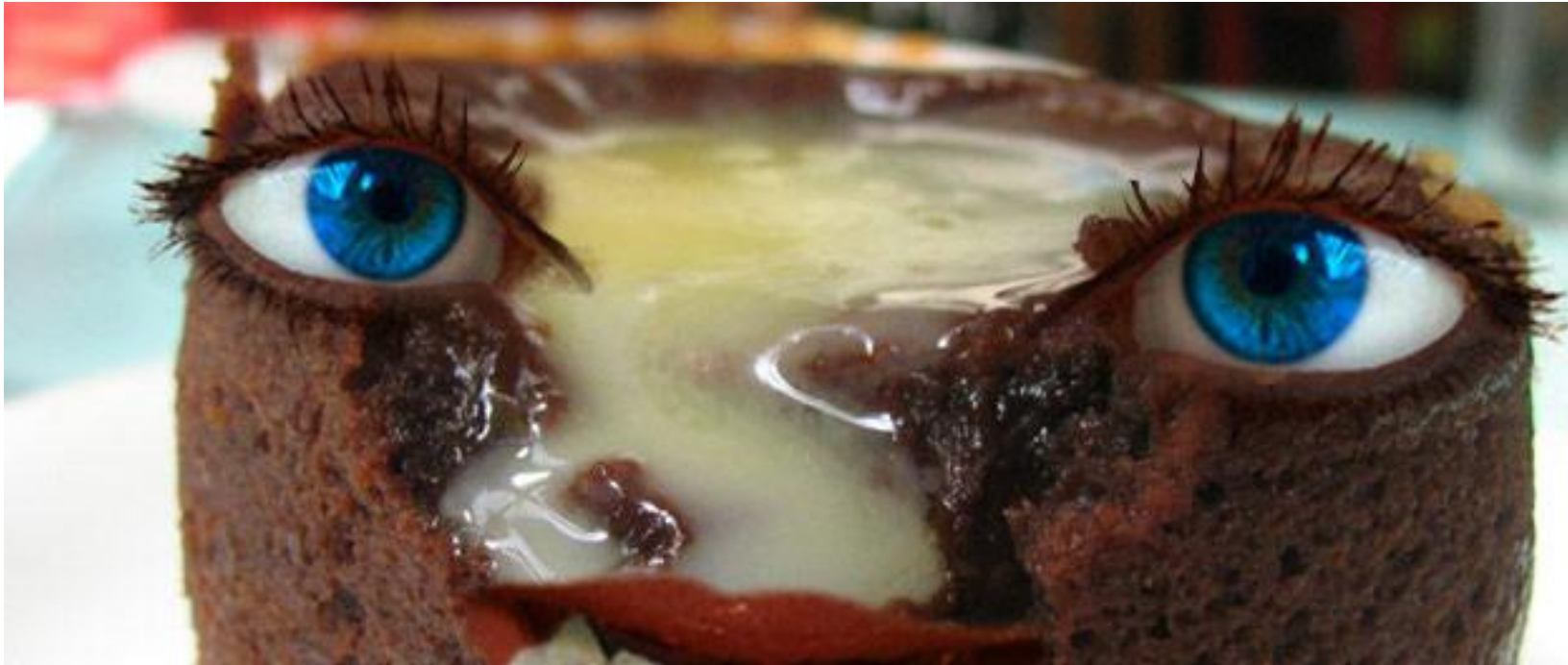**San Diego Zoo Kids: Animals**

Shedd Aquarium: Animal Facts

Ranger Rick: Animals

National Geographic: Animals

Personification Stories

Students will personify an object and write a story as part of an online book or animated adventure. The story will use conflict, experiences, and situations to help the viewer imagine what it might be like to be a particular object.

Apps: Wixie® or Frames®

Task

Hey diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle…Personification is a figure of speech in which human qualities are given to objects, animals, or ideas. For example: the fire breathed hot in our faces and its flames grabbed at our clothes, or the chocolate cake is calling my name. Personification can make your writing much more interesting.

In this project, you will personify an animal or object and develop your story into an online book or animated cartoon.

Engage

Nursery rhymes, fairy tales, fables, and children's stories commonly personify animals. When you give human characteristics to animals, it is called anthropomorphism. Your students have probably heard

of the three bears that eat porridge and sleep in their beds or the fable of the Tortoise and the Hare. You may have even read Fantastic Mr. Fox by Roald Dahl.

Revisit these stories or others your students may be familiar with. You might also want to share the work of Lewis Carroll in his poem The Walrus and the Carpenter or The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland. Remember the white rabbit and Alice playing croquet with a deck of cards?
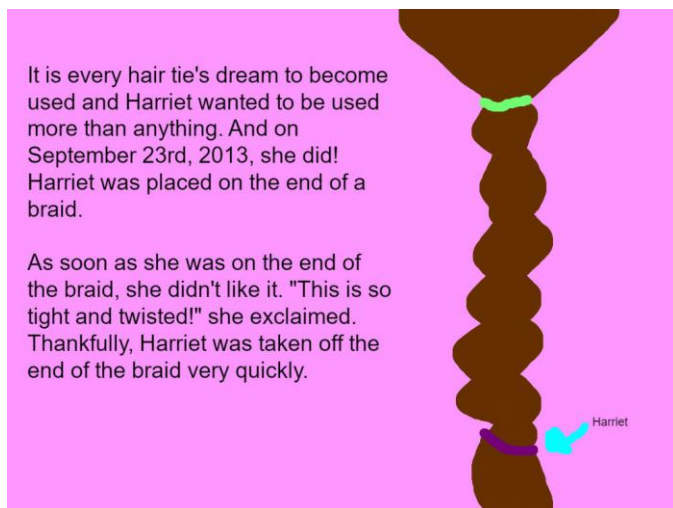
After exploring examples of personification, work with your students to personify an object in your classroom. Brainstorm human traits that can be applied to it. Start by identifying parts of it that are similar to human body parts. Then, brainstorm feelings it might have about itself or how it is used. Ask students to become the object and answer these prompting questions:

- What/how do you see?
- What/how do you hear?
- Where do you live?
- What are you afraid of?
- What do you dream of?
- What are you good at?
- What do you hate to do?
- How do you feel about the people or objects you meet?

Create

Have individual students, or a small team, choose an object to personify. Ask students to brainstorm ways to personify the object. You might ask them to answer the same questions you did as a class.

Students should use the object's feelings or fears they have brainstormed to develop the conflict that will drive their story and begin writing. You may have them scaffold work or continue brainstorming by identifying character traits, determining setting, and codifying the plot diagram or at minimum beginning, middle, and end. Have students share their ideas and drafts with their peers for feedback and review and then work on their revisions.

It is every hair tie's dream to become used and Harriet wanted to be used more than anything. And on September 23rd, 2013, she did! Harriet was placed on the end of a braid.

As soon as she was on the end of the braid, she didn't like it. "This is so tight and twisted!" she exclaimed. Thankfully, Harriet was taken off the end of the braid very quickly.

Harriet

Choose the type of product you want students to create, such as a printed book, interactive story, cartoon animation, claymation video, or better yet, allow them to choose the product they believe will most effectively convey their story.

Have students translate their written story into a visual map or project storyboard. This will help them determine how best to convey the story through individual pages or scenes. Have students create an illustration of the object, or build a tangible character from modeling clay or other materials.

Students can capture still images for stopmotion, create pages that combine text, illustration, and narration, or take video to build their story.

Share

Have the students present their story or animated short to the rest of the class. Share the stories and animations on your school web site, during morning announcements, or in your school/community library. You may also be able to share them on your local access television station as a celebration of student learning.

You could even turn this project into a parent night or community event by asking students to write personification stories along a conservation theme like Earth Day.

Assessment

After you have read and shared examples of personification, you can begin assessing student understanding as the entire class works together to personify an object.

Use the brainstorm and written story to assess a student's ability to personify. You will also want to check in with individuals or listen to each group's process to help you evaluate their skill at identifying character, setting, and plot, as well as how creativity they have personified the object.

The final stories and animation will help you evaluate how well students are able to translate their brainstormed traits and emotions into effectively personifying the object.

Resources

Lewis Carroll, The Walrus and the Carpenter

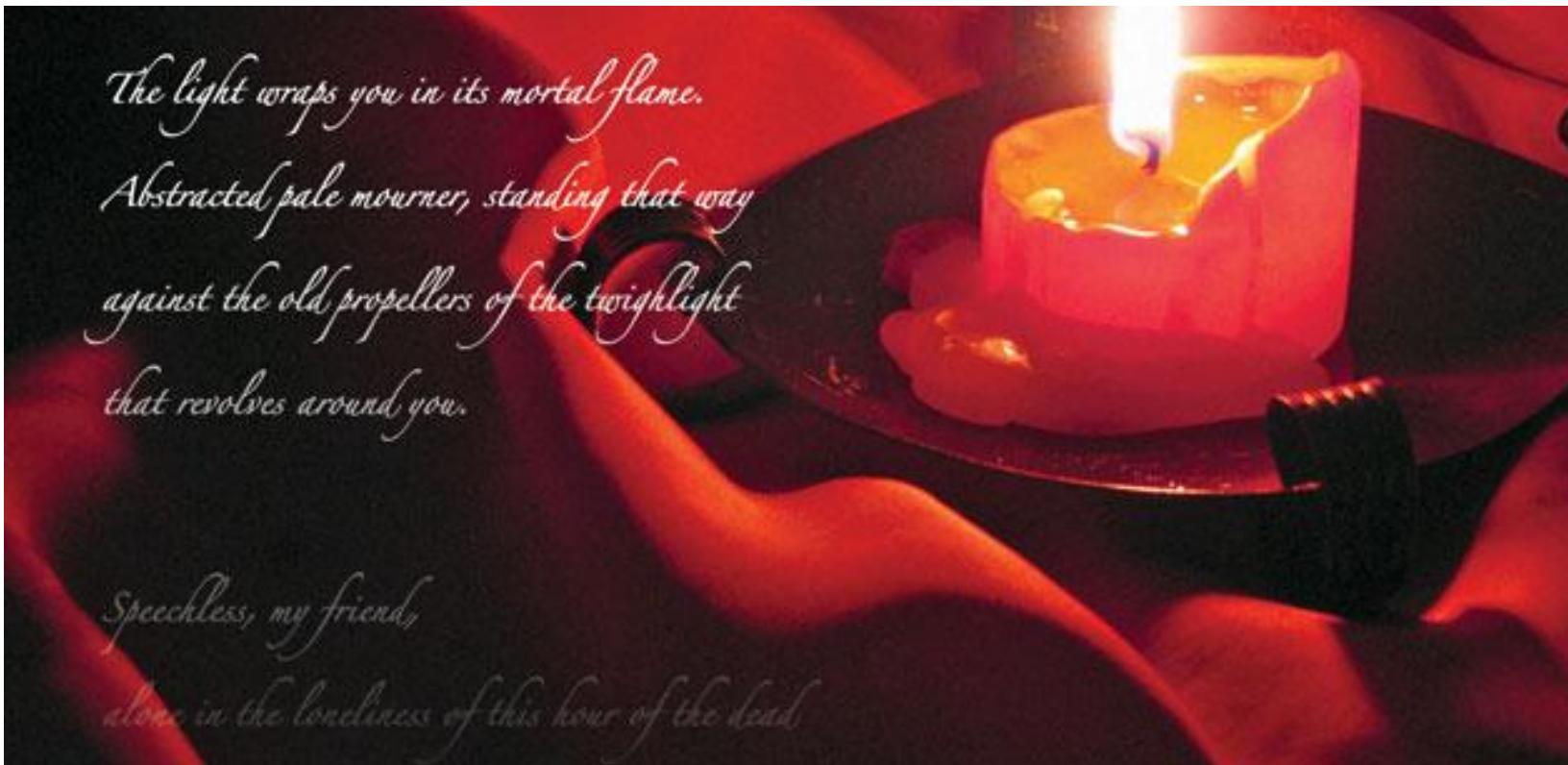Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Emily Dickinson, The Train

Create a Visual Poem

Students will analyse verse and explore meaning by creating a visual poem.

The light wraps you in its mortal flame.

Abstracted pale mourner, standing that way

against the old propellers of the twighlight

that revolves around you.

Speechless, my friend,

alone in the loneliness of this hour of the dead

Apps: Wixie® or Frames®

Task

The National Poetry Council is looking for ways to promote interest in poetry. Since most homes have a television, they have decided to broadcast short poems set to music and pictures. They have asked for help to build their collection.

Engage

Explore examples of visual poems online. Search SchoolTube or YouTube for your favorite poet or a poem your class has recently read and watch the Getty Institutes how-to video at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWpMB6gmBYA

Before having students work individually, or in small teams, develop a visual poem as a class.

Read the poem you wish to model to our class or distribute for them to read.

What does the poem mean? Work together to identify specific words that help the reader visualize the author's meaning or feel a certain way. Discuss the intent of the author in using these specific words.

Search an image site like Pics4Learning.com to find images that support the meaning of the text in each line or stanza.

Use a tool like Wixie or Frames to combine the images and text. Have a student with strong fluency narrate the visual poem.

Work together to discuss the mood of the poem and find music that is appropriate and add it as a background soundtrack.

Create

Now that you have modeled the process, task students with creating their own. Group students into small teams and assign specific poems or create a collection for students to choose from.

Teams should begin by identifying key words in the poem and discussing the mood or feeling it is meant to evoke.

Using graphic organizers like t-charts and clusters can help students focus on key words and their meanings to determine mood and better comprehend the author's intent.
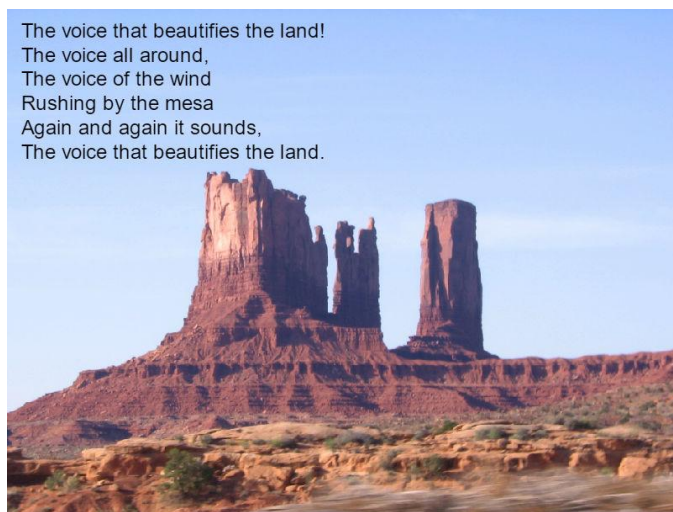
The voice that beautifies the land!
The voice all around,
The voice of the wind
Rushing by the mesa
Again and again it sounds,
The voice that beautifies the land.

Have teams focus on individual lines or verses and locate images that help the viewer better comprehend the meaning and connect to the content. Encourage students to use digital cameras to capture original photos. Tools like Wixie and Frames also have tools students can use to create illustrations.

Teams should combine the images with text, voice narration, and background music to complete their visual poem.

Share

Share student's visual poems at a poetry festival or poetry event at your school. You can project the visual poems between students reciting poetry orally or showcase during a school-wide event.

To extend the learning and focus on really analyzing each poem, post them individually to your classroom web site, or on morning announcements.

Assessment

After you have read the poem as a class, you can begin assessing student understanding as they choose key words that evoke feelings or ideas. Evaluate each student's comprehension as they complete a cluster graphic organizer sheet for their part of the poem. You will want to be available for questions and discussion as they work through their analysis.

You can also evaluate their choice of an image. Remember, the quality of the image reflects both their understanding and analysis of the poem, as well as their ability to complete an effective internet search, visual ability to draw, and/or skill capturing an image with a digital camera.

As they make the movie, listen to the discussions between students. They will be making observations and comments and may even change their mind about their picture. If you are adding music to the background, the musical selection may also indicate student understanding of the poem.

Resources

Janeczko, Paul B. (2000**) Teaching 10 Fabulous Forms of Poetry. Teaching Resources.** ISBN: 0439073464

Sweeney, Jacqueline. (1999) **Teaching Poetry: Yes You Can!** Scholastic. ISBN: 0590494198

[Poetry Anthologies and Thousands of Poems](#)

[Project Gutenberg](#)

Historical Journal

Students will create a historical journal from a fictional character's point of view.

Apps: Wixie® or Frames®

Task

When we think about the Civil Rights Movement, we often focus on the progress toward equality for African Americans. There have also been movements toward equality before the law for many different groups.

Your local history museum wants to include journals from the Civil Rights era for their history and culture virtual exhibits to interest kids in equal rights before the law. Your task is to create a historical journal from the perspective of an individual who might have been faced with indifference during a movement for civil rights.

Engage

Historical research comes alive when students explore a range of alternate genres instead of writing a traditional research report. Using journal writing as a learning method requires learners to reflect on new information, and promotes critical self-reflection when evolving worldviews are challenged.

Many students will have already read "The Diary of Anne Frank," while others may have read or seen the movie, "Diary of a Wimpy Kid." Explore examples of diaries, journals, and family scrapbooks. Let students know that they will explore one group's move toward civil rights by creating a fictional historical journal.

Students are probably most familiar with the African American civil rights movement in the United States. This movement was characterized by nonviolent marches, speeches, and campaigns that were often met by a very violent response. As a class, explore important events in the African American journey toward civil rights. Ask students what it might have felt like to be on both sides of this movement.

Ask students to brainstorm other movements for civil rights. For example:

- Gender / Equal Rights Amendment
- Chicano Movement
- LGBT
- American Indian Movement (AIM)

Have students choose a movement to research and explore further. Have them complete a Venn diagram to compare events in these movements with events in the African-American civil rights movement. Encourage critical thinking and allow students to come to their own conclusions about these events.

Create

As they start to complete research about a movement, ask students to develop a fictional character from which they will write their perspective. Have student's list character traits for this person and create a character analysis focusing on the events in the civil rights movement they are studying. Things to consider for the character include:

- The 5 W's
- The character's actions in response to the outcome an event
- The character's emotional state
- Effects of the character's behavior on other individuals (family, friends, community)
- The character's fears of what might happen if things do not go according to plan

Once the character analysis is complete, students should prepare an exciting script for their historical journal including:

- Three events that take place in the movement
- Vivid descriptions each of these events
- Narration of these events from the perspective of their character
- An interesting hook to introduce the character

Students can take these resources and combine them into a rough draft of the journal entries. Have students share their drafts with a peer for feedback and make appropriate edits.

Have students translate their writing into a visual map or storyboard that includes information on which portion of the journal each page will include. Students should also identify images and sound files they will use to support each entry. Have students add the text for their journal entries to different pages in the project.

Give students an opportunity to find images, music, and sound effects that will support their script and storyboard. They may want to explore the collections at the Library of Congress. They can also add copyright-friendly images from Pics4Learning using the Library in Wixie. Students can also use the drawing tools to create their own illustrations.

Share

Host a school-wide gathering where students present their journals. You might choose to include them in the library by printing the journals or creating an interactive civil rights research kiosk.

If students are creating videos, play them on the morning announcements. If students have used media that is copyright-free, submit their work to museums of tolerance and civil rights. Share your students' work to help bring awareness of the civil rights movement to others!

Assessment

The final historical journal is a great summative assessment for student skill communicating in a visual medium. During the process, you can assess their progress using their Venn diagram and character analysis planning sheets. Having students turn in their scripts and storyboards prior to creating the historical journal on the computer will help make sure they are on the right track during the process.

Resources

Landau, Elaine. **The Civil Rights Movement in America**. ISBN-10: 0531187659

Historical Journals and Diaries

Diary of a Wimpy Kid

Cycle Stories

Students tell the story of a scientific cycle by recreating the adventure of its "main character."

Apps: Wixie® or Frames®

Task

Science doesn't have to be a list of boring facts. How does a drop of water feel as it evaporates or plunges down a gulley after a fierce rainstorm? How does rock feel when it transforms into a liquid and is ejected from a volcano? Create a digital story that shares a science cycle from a first person perspective!

Engage

With its wealth of information and data, science is a great place to implement reading and writing across the curriculum with digital storytelling projects that require students to "gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas." Combine informational and narrative writing to make facts and information come alive.

If you teach in the primary grades, you might encourage students to create a digital story that shows the life cycle of different insects. Elementary-age students might show phases of the moon, planetary orbits or the water cycle. Intermediate and middle-grade students can show the rock cycle, carbon cycle, plate tectonics, or even the process cell division.

This project works great as a performance task you can use to evaluate students understanding. You will need to work with students to explore the cycle or process before they begin working. You may already be raising silk worms or hosting caterpillars and there are lots of fun ways to begin exploring life and earth cycles.

To introduce them to their performance task for this project, read a story like Iggy Boulder and the Rock Cycle or share a cycle story video to give them an idea of how the information about a scientific cycle might be shared through a narrative story.

Create

Allow students to form teams around a cycle they are most interested in. Have the teams begin completing research and cycle organizers to demonstrate their understanding of important stages in the cycle. You can use cycle graphic organizers to help students record and organize their information and observations.

After students have gathered the information, they need to transform it into a narrative story. To make the cycle really come alive, have students tell the story from the 1st person perspective of its "main character" to share the process. This process of personification can help them make more personal connections to the story, as well as help you avoid stories that are a simple copy and paste of facts.

You can have them begin brainstorming what this might look like with a Cluster graphic organizer that shows potential character traits. You can get students started by asking them to identifying parts that are similar to human body parts. Then, brainstorm feelings the "character" might have about itself or its experiences. For example: What is it afraid of? What is it good at?

Depending on the age and writing ability of your students, you can have them organize their writing by beginning, middle, and end; the number of stages in their cycle; or by using a plot diagram to brainstorm and organize the action in the story. Since the story will also be broken into pages, or scenes, you can have students organize their work with a storyboard.

Have team members edit the story individually or have one student read the story out loud to the rest of their team, taking time to write down questions and comments before making revisions. Teams should share these revisions with another team for feedback and then further changes.

Once the story has been edited, it is time to create an electronic version. Students can use the paint and drawing tools in Wixie or Frames to enhance their text with pictures to support their writing. They should record narration to each page, so that viewers will be able to hear the story as well as read it. When the work is complete, they can print the file from Wixie as a 4- or

6-panel comic, export the file from Wixie as an ePub for sharing and reading on tablets. If students are using Frames, they can export a video for sharing online or on video sharing sites like YouTube.

Share

Sharing student work will motivate students to research accurately and write creatively. Organize an event or two where students have an opportunity to show off their work.

Post student work on your classroom web page, and consider also creating a YouTube or TeacherTube playlist, to make it easy for other science teachers to find and use your student's work to engage their classrooms in science.

If students have published comics, print and display them around your classroom and school. You may also consider uploaded images of these pages to sites like Shutterfly to create and publish a book you can keep in your classroom or school media center.

If your students published their work as ebooks, or ePubs, create a page on your school web site to host the eBooks for download.

Assessment

This project works great as a performance task you can use to evaluate students understanding. During the process, evaluate student understanding from the cycle graphic organizer.

The final product, whether it ends up as an eBook, animation, or video provides an opportunity for summative assessment. You may also want to include soft skills like team work, responsibility, organization, and problem solving as part of this final assessment.

Resources

Michael Ross. **Earth Cycles**. ISBN: 0761319778

Veronica Lopez. **Iggy Boulder: And The Rock Cycle.** ISBN: 147920773X

Cycles of the Earth System

What is a Cycle?

Additional ideas from real student projects

Informational Texts

> My Snail can clam to the top of a lef.
>
> My snail is 4 yers old.
>
> He likes a lot of roks.

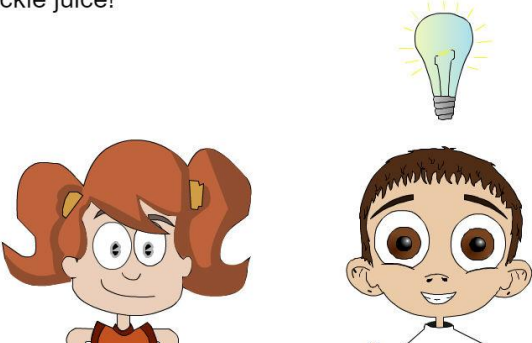Younger students can retell an event from school or home. View sample online.

Book Trailers

> That's it! Freckles will solve my problems! My mom won't be able to tell if I don't wash before school.
>
> And Sharon has a solution. She has a recipe for freckle juice!

Tell the story of your favorite book and why you would want to read it. Movie-trailer style. View sample online.

Docudramas

Students can create docudramas to tell the story of an important event or era in history. View sample online.

Artifact Interviews

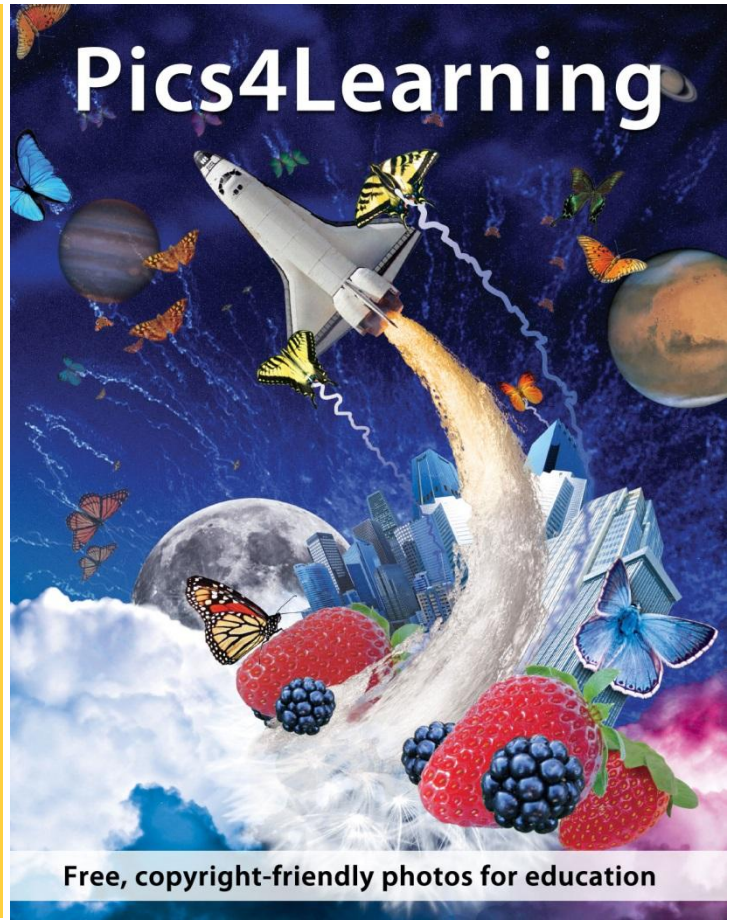Students can interview an artifact or historical site to share perspectives on the past. View sample online.