

LESSON PLAN

DIGITAL STORYTELLING

This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.



LEVEL: Grade 9

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: MediaSmarts

Overview

In this lesson, students learn about the digital story format. They watch a video that explains the elements of a digital story and how to make one that is compelling, then brainstorm their own short digital stories. They use a story table to plan the project in detail and then create a video using the MediaSmarts Digital Story Maker.

Learning Outcomes

Big ideas/key concepts: Students will understand that...

Each medium has a unique aesthetic form:

- Different media forms have different rules of notice that media creators use to communicate

Key questions:

- What makes a compelling digital story?

Essential knowledge: Students will know...

- Reading media: Elements of a digital story
- Making and remixing: Digital storytelling tools and techniques

Key vocabulary:

- Digital story: a multimedia movie, made of segments with an image and spoken narration that goes with it
- Render: Rendering turns a project file into a format that can be downloaded and played by others.
- Segment: In a digital story, a segment has one image and one video clip.

Performance tasks: Students will be able to...

- Recognize the elements of a digital story and analyze their effectiveness
- Create a story table that effectively uses what they have learned
- Use their story table as a rough draft towards creating a finished video
- Use the Digital Story Maker to create a finished video

Student-friendly outcomes:

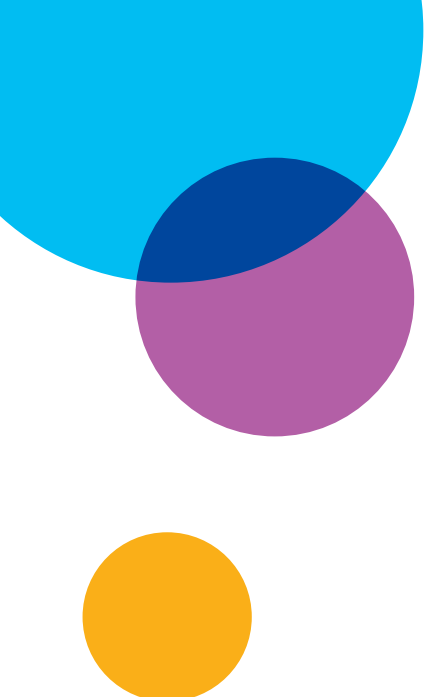
- We will learn about the elements of digital stories, the tools and techniques used to make them, and important vocabulary like “digital story,” “render,” and “segment.”
- We will think about what makes a digital story compelling and how different media have their own rules and styles for communicating ideas.
- We will recognize and analyze the parts of a digital story, create a story table as a rough draft, and use the Digital Story Maker to produce a finished video.

Preparation and Materials

- Watch the [Digital Storytelling Instant Expert Video](#).
- Prepare to show the video [Telling Your Story](#)
- Ensure that students can access the [Digital Story Maker](#) tool.
- Prepare to distribute the handouts *What is a Digital Story*, *Exploring Digital Stories*, and *Story Table*
- Prepare to distribute the assignment sheet *Your Digital Story*

After delivering the lesson, you may wish to have students use other tools to produce more ambitious digital stories that incorporate moving video and other elements. If so, you may want to familiarize yourself with storyboard apps and programs.

Consult [alternativeto.net](#) for examples of video editing apps and programs they can explore.



Procedure

INTRODUCTION

Start by asking students to consider this question: “What is your unique voice?”

After asking each of the questions below, give students 30 seconds or so to write down an answer.

- Are you serious? Quirky? Professional? Casual?
- Do you like to tell lots of little stories or one big story?
- Do you like to share the little victories in your life or the big challenges?
- Would you rather be a star in front of the camera, or do you want other pictures to do the talking for you?
- What kind of music do you love?

Next, give them another thirty seconds to write down anything else they can think of about their unique voice.

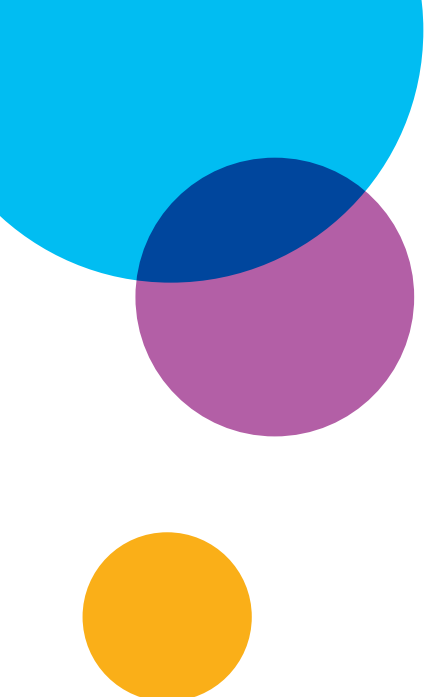
WHAT IS A DIGITAL STORY?

Have students view the video [Telling Your Story](#) and identify the three elements of a digital story (*Answer: images, narration, and music*). You can click or tap “CC” to turn on closed captioning.

EXPLORING DIGITAL STORIES

Next, distribute the *What Is A Digital Story? Fill in the Blank* handout. Play the video for the students again have students complete the fill-in-the-blanks exercise on the handout to identify what makes a compelling digital story.

- *Answer:* A digital story should be clear. People should understand your point of view and understand why the story is important to you. The parts should work together to make your audience feel a certain way. You can have the words and images tell a story together or let just the words tell the story and use the images to set a mood or feeling.



Next, show one of these digital story examples by Volunteer Toronto, [A Failed Rapper Finds his Beat Volunteering](#) or [Volunteering Can Lead to Better Health](#), to the class. You can show the class altogether on a projector or, if you prefer, you can distribute video links to the students virtually and have them watch individually. Then, have them answer the following questions on the Exploring digital stories handout:

- Did they like it? Why or why not?
- What audio and visual elements were used to tell this story?
- How well did they work together?
- What do you think the message was? How clear was it?
- If they were asked to make a digital story on the same or similar theme, what (if anything) would they do differently?

When students have answered the questions, have them share their thoughts with the class.

YOUR DIGITAL STORY

Explain to students that it can also be helpful to give your digital story a **structure**, especially when you're making your first one.

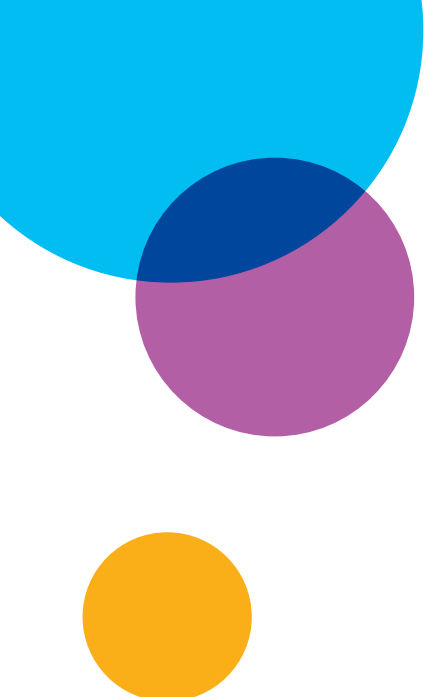
One simple structure has three parts: a goal, a challenge, and a resolution.

In a simple digital story, like the ones they'll be making to start off, each of these might be a single segment.

- The **goal** is the place they're trying to get to in the story. It might be something they want or a problem that they need to solve.
- Next is the **challenge**: what is making it hard to reach the goal? What might have happened that made things more difficult?
- Last is the **resolution**. What did you do to overcome the challenge and reach the goal? It doesn't have to be a happy ending! It might be something you're still doing – or it might be something that didn't work in the end.

Brainstorming a structure can also start from the resolution and work backwards: What challenge did they have to overcome? Why did they face that challenge?

Remind students that this is just a simple structure to get them started. They don't have to follow this structure if it doesn't make sense for their



story, and they can adapt it as well. For instance, if they were telling their “story” to advocate for a cause or an issue, the “resolution” might be what they want their audience to do after they watch.

Now have students make a simple outline using the *Your Digital Story* handout. If you choose, you can have them do this in pairs or small groups.

STORY TABLE

Next, distribute the *Story Table* handout and explain to students that once they have their three-part structure, they can plan their stories with a story table.

Explain that a story table is a bit like a script, except it’s organized to make it easier to see all the parts together. It’s where you write down exactly what you’re going to say, what images you’ll use to go with the narration, and what music will play over it.

Have students write the narration for each segment on the left side and write what image will go with it on the right.

If they already have lots of images, they may want to start by organizing those to tell the story like a comic and then write the narration after. If not, they can start by writing the narration and then find images to illustrate them, like a picture book. Explain that they don’t have to write down exactly the image they will use, just a general description of what it will be or how it should make the audience feel.

They can also wait to fill in the second column until they have browsed the Digital Story Maker’s image gallery.

DIGITAL STORY MAKER

Now distribute the Digital Story Maker handout and have students visit the MediaSmarts [Digital Story Maker](https://digitalstorymaker-app.mediasmarts.ca/en/login) at <https://digitalstorymaker-app.mediasmarts.ca/en/login>. Explain that they are going to use this tool to make their three-segment digital stories.

The digital story maker can be accessed on any device that has an internet browser such as Chrome, Firefox, Safari and so on.

Students can make an account with either their names and email addresses, or just a username. If they use their email addresses, they will

be sent a confirmation link to that address. They must click it to activate the account. If they ever forget their password, a recovery email will be sent to that address. If you want students to use this method, it is recommended that you have them **set up accounts a day before you do this activity**, so that class time is not used waiting for emails to arrive and accounts to be activated.

If students use just a username, they will be logged in right away. There is no way to recover a lost password if they use this method, so they should make sure to record their usernames and passwords.

- This is particularly important if you plan to deliver the *Second Draft* lesson, in which students revise the digital story project they are creating in this section of the lesson.

Go through the handout with the students, going over the steps of using the tool with them:

Creating a digital story

To start making a digital story, students will need to click or tap “Start Here”:

Create a new digital story

Start here 

Next, go through the instructions. Point out to students that they have already done a lot of this while planning their stories and making their story tables.

Students should then give their stories a name and click or tap “Start”:

Start a New Digital Story

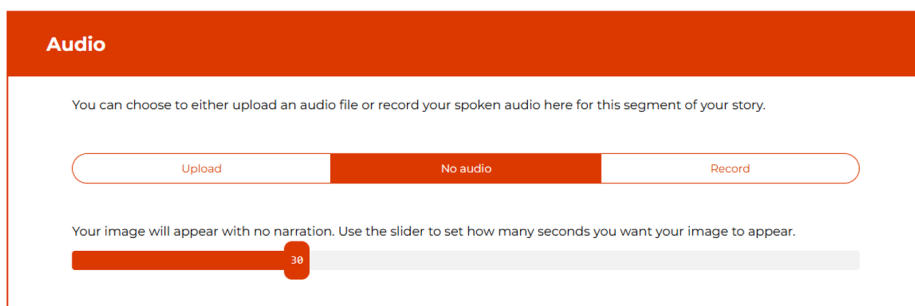
What would you like to call your digital story?

Story title

Start

Adding segments

Next, students add the audio and image for each segment. For the audio, they can use the story maker to record their narration or upload narration they made previously, such as with their phones. They can also leave a segment silent by choosing “No audio”.



They can either upload an image for each segment or choose one from the gallery.

Note to students that it is only possible to use still images in the digital storymaker. Explain that this is intended to keep things simple while they are learning the format.

- For both the audio and images, if students are using imported files, they will have to identify under what right they are using them. Some sources of royalty-free and copyright-cleared images include [Pixabay](#), [Pexels](#) and the [Internet Archive](#). You can use the Council of Ministers of Education's [Fair Dealing Decision tool](#) to determine whether your students can use other online sources for this project. For a more thorough explanation of Fair Dealing and Creative Commons, see the lesson *Remixing Media* or the article [Fair Dealing for Media Education](#).

Choosing music

Once students have made at least three segments, they can choose their music. There are a limited range of music options. Have students listen to the options and click or tap the circle next to the title of the one they want:

Choose a background music option for your video.

☒ **No background music**

☐ **Atmosphere**
CC Naoya Sakamata
 ▶ 0:00 / 3:51

☐ **Better Days**
Royalty free music from Bensound
 ▶ 0:00 / 2:33

Rendering and downloading

Once students have made at least three segments and chosen their music, they can render their videos. That turns the project into a video format that can be played in other apps and on other devices. To do that, they click or tap Render video:

Needs rendering...

Length: 00:00:41

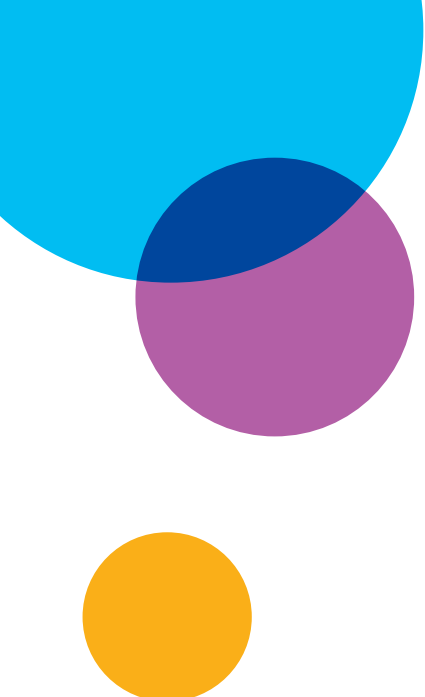
Segments: 5

Created: 2024-06-13

Render video

Once the video is rendered, students will be able to download it onto their device by clicking or tapping Download video:

Download video

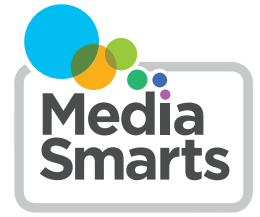


If you like, you can have students share the videos they made with the class.

For each video, ask students:

- Was the story clear?
- Did they understand the video maker's point of view and why the story is important to them?
- Did the images, narration and music work together to make them feel a certain way?

DIGITAL STORYTELLING



What is a Digital Story? Fill in the Blank

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Fill in the missing words to show what makes a compelling digital story.

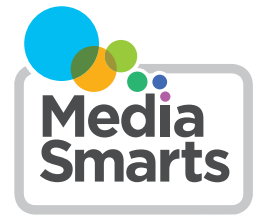
A digital story should be _____.

People should understand your _____
and understand why the story is _____
to you.

The _____ should work together to make
your audience _____ a certain way.

You can have the words and images tell a story _____ or
let just the _____ tell the story and use the _____
to set a mood or feeling.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING



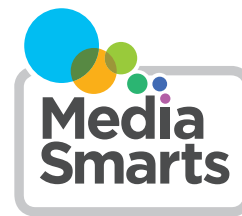
Exploring Digital Stories

.....

Write your thoughts about the example digital story we watched in class. Be ready to discuss your answers with the class.

Did you like it? Why or why not? <i>Think about: images, music, narration.</i>	
What audio and visual elements were used to tell this story?	
How well did they work together?	
What do you think the message was? How clear was it? <i>Think about: Images, music, and narration.</i>	
If you were asked to make a digital story on a similar theme, what might you do differently?	

DIGITAL STORYTELLING



Your Digital Story

.....

Because it has just those three elements, a digital story can be made using almost any digital device, like a phone or a tablet, and the parts can be put together with tools that are free to use.

A digital story could be about anything you like. It could be about something that happened to you or someone you know, or a story that you made up. It doesn't even have to be a "story": it can be a video essay that you use to persuade people or to make a point.

To practice, try making a digital story that's three segments long.

Jot some ideas for your digital story. If you need help, you can answer one of these prompts:

- What is something that has given you hope?
- What is something that made you happy?

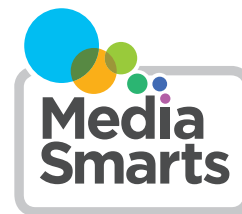
Now think about your story in terms of beginning, middle and end. Another way to think about that is goal, challenge and **resolution**.

Write your video's goal, challenge and resolution below:

The goal is the place you're trying to get to in the story. It might be something you want, or it might be a problem that you need to solve. What is your video's goal?	
Next is the challenge: what is making it hard to reach the goal? What might have happened that made things more difficult?	
Last is the resolution. What did you do to overcome the challenge and reach the goal?	

This structure is just to help you plan your story. Feel free to adapt it to make sense for your story. For instance, if you're telling your "story" to advocate for a cause or an issue, the "resolution" might be what you want your audience to do after they watch.

DIGITAL STORYTELLING



Story Table

.....

Once you have your three-part structure, you can plan your story with the story table below. This is a bit like a script, except it's organized to make it easier to see all the parts together. It's where you write down exactly what you're going to say, what images you'll use to go with the narration, and what music will play over it.

Write your narration for each segment on the left side and write what image will go with it on the left.

Here's a sample story table:

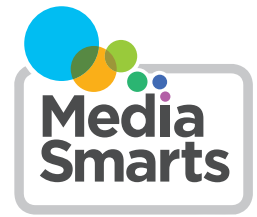
NARRATION	IMAGE
About a year and a half ago we got two cats, Boo and Pumpkin. We were told they were a bonded pair, but they weren't that interested in each other.	Boo and Pumpkin looking very tense.
Boo had a lot more energy than Pumpkin. He bothered her all the time, and she mostly just wanted to relax.	Boo getting ready to pounce on Pumpkin.
Because he was bored, Boo got in a lot of trouble, too.	Boo about to knock over the flowers.

If you already have lots of images, you may want to start by organizing those to tell the story like a comic and then write the narration after. If not, you can start by writing the narration and then find images to illustrate them, like a picture book. You don't have to write down exactly the image you will use, just a general description of what it will be or how it should make you feel.

If you want, you can wait to fill in the second column until you browse the Digital Story Maker's image gallery.

NARRATION	IMAGE
MUSIC	

DIGITAL STORYTELLING



Digital Story Maker Program Instructions

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You can make an account with your name and an email address, or just a username.

If you use your email address, you'll have to open the email you get and click on the confirmation link. If you ever forget your password, a recovery email will be sent to that address.

If you use just a username, you will be logged in right away. **There is no way to recover a lost password** if you only have a username, so make sure to **record your username and password**.

To start making your digital story, click or tap "Start Here":

Create a new digital story

Start here 

Next, go through the instructions. You will have already done a lot of this while planning your story and making your story table.

Give your story a name and click or tap "Start":

Start a New Digital Story

What would you like to call your digital story?
Story title

Start

Now you'll add the audio and image for each segment. For the audio, you can use the story maker to record your narration or upload narration you made with a different app. (If you upload it, you will need to say whether you made it or what right you have to use it.) You can also leave a segment silent by choosing "No audio".

Audio

You can choose to either upload an audio file or record your spoken audio here for this segment of your story.

Upload
No audio
Record

Your image will appear with no narration. Use the slider to set how many seconds you want your image to appear.

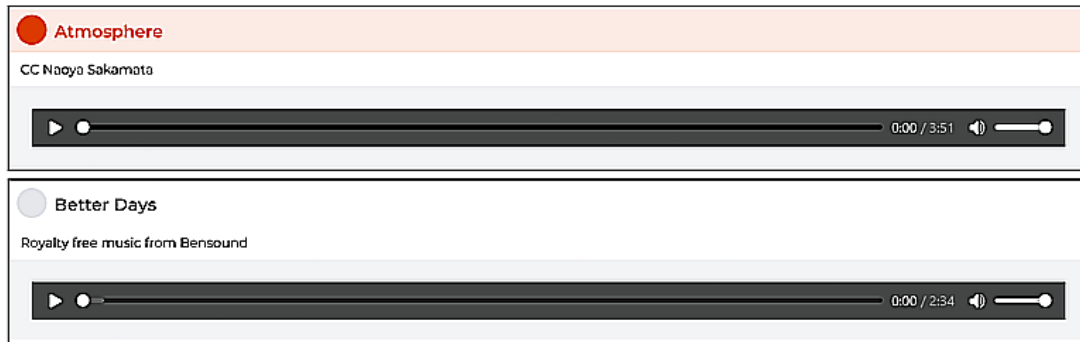
30

You can either upload an image for each segment or choose one from the gallery. (If you upload it, you will need to say whether you made it or what right you have to use it.)

Once you have made at least three segments, you can choose your music.

You can play the different music options, and click or tap the circle next to the title of the one you want:

Choose a background music option for your video.



When you've made at least three segments and chosen your music, you can render your video. That turns it into a video format that you can play in other apps and on other devices.

To do that, click or tap Render video.

Needs rendering...

Length: 00:00:41

Segments: 5

Created: 2024-06-13

Render video

Once it's rendered, you will be able to download it onto your device by clicking or tapping Download video:

Download video

If you're not satisfied with your digital story, you can still go back and add more segments or change the ones you already did, then re-render and re-download it.