

Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling projects allow youth to create personal narratives about their experiences and express them through the medium of a short video. This tool can be used as a reflective activity to dive deeper into young people's understandings of a subject or a program and its impact, and to use their creativity to expand and strengthen their learnings.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Prepare** your team and participants by brainstorming a story to tell. During these conversations, you can review and discuss basic storytelling concepts, including different points of view, narrative order, language and imagery, emotions, meaning, and message. Keep your story ideas simple and ensure the intended audience will care about the topic.
2. **Storyboarding** is the process of creating the structure or framework of your story for maximum impact. Think of a storyboard like a comic book, where the page is divided into sections. Provide each participant with a sheet of paper and divide it into a 3x3 grid (the grid size can vary based on preference). This will provide nine sections that can be separated as the beginning, middle, and end of the story.

Participants do not need to have any artistic skills to engage in this activity. They can fill each section with simple drawings, words, and shapes. Make sure that each storyboard does not include too many sections, as participants will want to focus on key moments, problems, decisions, and outcomes – they can add details in the following steps.

3. **Creating a narrative** is the process of using unique language, words, sound, music, and imagery to bring your story structure to life. Emphasize to participants that there is no right way to film their story; some may choose to speak into the camera, while others may prefer a more complex approach, such as using different angles, voiceovers, photos, and special effects.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

Youth participants and the program facilitator(s).

WHAT DO I NEED?

- Paper and writing materials
- A camcorder (tapeless digital or mini DV camera), smartphone or tablet
- Tripod or stand (if filming alone)
- Video editing platform

WHEN SHOULD THIS BE DONE?

This activity can be done at any time throughout a program cycle, depending on the questions you are looking to answer.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE?

The time commitment will depend on the complexity of the video projects.

4. **Housekeeping** is the process of filing and backing up your work appropriately. To keep files in order, participants should upload video and sound files to a computer and name them accordingly. Back up files using cloud storage (e.g., Google Drive or Dropbox) or an external hard drive.
5. **Editing your video** is the creative-intensive part of the process. The video and sound files can be imported into editing software such as Windows Movie and Apple iMovie, which are free, easy-to-use platforms. Depending on participants' levels of experience, other subscription-based software to consider include Apple Final Cut Pro and Adobe Premiere Pro.

When editing their videos, participants should consider the order of clips, shortening clips according to the video length, adding in transitions (fade in or out, circle closing, overlap, etc.), and editing audio (turn off, add-in, voiceover, etc.).

6. **Sharing your video** is the final step to exporting the video and disseminating it to popular platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo. Once participants have edited their videos, they can export the videos to their chosen platforms. They may also want to create shorter versions of their videos or share memorable clips on social media platforms that do not allow for longer videos, such as Instagram or TikTok.

GOOD TO KNOW

- When storyboarding, it may be helpful to organize the beginning sections to focus on a problem or issue and those involved (e.g., helpers or mentors). The middle sections can focus on the challenges endured and how they were overcome. The final sections can include climax/crisis points, key learnings or lessons, and ways to build awareness and create change. Sharing their storyboard with others can help participants to make revisions and bring their stories to life in subsequent development stages.

- When creating a narrative, consider the following strategies: interview style; free flowing expressions; a day in the life; art expressions, such as dance or poetry; use of light and shadow to complement script; and the use of a simple backdrop.
- Vimeo Video Schools has created instructional videos that cover all aspects of video creation, from importing to exporting, using the free platforms iMovie and Windows Movie Maker.
- Respect copyright laws when incorporating music into digital stories. Participants will need permission to use music from well-known artists, but they can also produce their own variation of the song or beat. Some platforms with free instrumentals and sound effects include Creative Commons and Free Music Archive.

LEARN MORE

Action for M.E. (2014). *Digital storytelling toolkit*. <https://www.actionforme.org.uk/uploads/pdfs/digital-storytelling-toolkit.pdf>

Switzer, S., & Abramovich, I. A. (2012). *Digital storytelling and youth*. Empower Project. <https://youthrex.com/factsheet/empower-digital-storytelling-and-youth/>