

CHAPTER

3

Storytelling for This Generation

One Thursday morning while making the long trek down the still-quiet hallways toward my classroom, my mind was preoccupied with all the things that I needed to accomplish that day. As I rounded the corner, I saw a small group of students camped out in front of the classroom door. Their heads were bent together in a serious discussion, but they looked up and smiled as I approached.

“We thought you’d never get here,” they said, with relief.

I unlocked the classroom door, and they hurried in, taking my laptop bag and carrying what they had been working on while in the hallway. As the rest of the students were sitting in the bus room waiting for classes to start, these students set up the laptop and diligently worked for the next forty-five minutes.

Standards and Skills

- Research and inquiry:
The American Revolution
- Collaboration
- Critical thinking, problem solving,
and decision making
- Narrative, expository, and
descriptive writing
- Self-assessment
- Digital citizenship

Technology Tools

- Photo Story (free software)
- Digital videos to build
background knowledge

More, Please

Whether working before, during, or after school, my students couldn't get enough of writing lessons supported by an array of digital tools. Because of the way my students were thriving with technology-infused writing projects, I knew that I would have to learn more about free, easy-to-use tools that would slake their amazing thirst for learning. As I watched them writing and creating, the looks in their eyes seemed to say, “More, please.”

In searching for quality professional development, I found a webinar series offered by ISTE. (See Chapter 2 for more details about webinars.) Many webinars share projects that integrate technology across grade levels and subjects, so I always extend an invitation to the faculty to join me during the after-school sessions. And then I had a brainstorm: Why not invite students to join me as well? I didn't set firm criteria; I issued an open invitation, and those students who wanted to participate could do so as long as they obtained written permission from their parents and transportation home at the conclusion of the webinar.

The opportunity to interact with adults is always a draw for students in the intermediate and middle grades. I wasn't sure if they would be interested in or able to absorb the content of the webinars, but I hoped they would learn something about professional behavior and expectations. I also knew that in a couple of years they would probably encounter webinars in their academic pursuits, and I wanted them to have the confidence to jump into a learning opportunity in this venue, becoming leaders among their peers.

The first ISTE webinar that I signed up for was on digital storytelling. Six of my students—Ashlyn, Sean, Rachel, Matthew, Elizabeth, and Kynslee—were able to attend this webinar with me and several other faculty members. My initial reason for choosing this webinar was because narrative is one of the writing modes tested on Alabama's standardized assessments. I also hoped that the webinar would offer some additional strategies for teaching storytelling using tools and formats that might appeal to my students. However, I discovered that digital storytelling has a much broader scope than I ever imagined.

The focus of the webinar was on how digital storytelling could enhance learning and how teachers could effectively evaluate students' work products. It was not just a how-to session, which pleased me because it reinforced my goal of using technology to deepen students' understanding of the content standards.

One of the points made in the webinar was that students should be moving away from “about” presentations—those that merely summarize information—and toward higher-level presentations that draw conclusions and make applications with the information they learn. I started thinking about how I could

incorporate these suggestions to enhance writing instruction as well as mastery of standards across the content areas.

At the conclusion of the webinar, I escorted the students to their awaiting rides. As usual, I had to fight the urge to lead the conversation as we walked. Having realized the benefit of listening to my students' voices, I knew I would gain a deeper understanding of their point of view if I just waited a little longer before offering my opinions. Sure enough, they did not disappoint me.

"Those digital stories by the second graders were impressive," Matthew said.

Elizabeth agreed: "They are so smart."

"I wish we could have done digital stories in second grade," Kynslee said.

"Yes," Rachel agreed, "but we'll get to do them now. Most other kids won't get to do that either."

"You know," Sean said, "we could make a sample digital story for the class to see, maybe even to teach the other students."

All heads turned toward Sean, and the students' eyes lit up. The conversation quickened, and they were so excited that they talked over one another.

"Mrs. Ramsay could use it in her lessons," Ashlyn said. "Then we could each help the teams make one of their own."

"What would be our subject?" Elizabeth wondered.

"Whatever it is, that lady on the webinar said it was content first," Sean responded.

"Right," Rachel thought out loud. "What if we used it in social studies? I think we'll be studying a war soon. I'll have to look in our textbook to see what comes next."

"But we can't just tell about the war," Matthew reminded the group. "The webinar said we had to relate it to our lives or something."

They were quiet for a minute and then Rachel said, "Let's go home and look at our [textbook] chapter on that and maybe we can brainstorm some ideas. Mrs. Ramsay, would it be okay if we meet you before school to start working? We need to write everything down and plan our story out."

I was elated! These ten- and eleven-year-olds had not only understood the webinar but also were using the information to think like teachers. My mouth said, "Sure, I'd be happy to see you guys in the morning," but my mind was turning cartwheels. What had just happened here? My students had participated in a professional webinar that I had assumed was over their heads, had a quick brainstorming session, planned a digital story to teach their peers, and were working on an idea to help the rest of the students create more digital stories. They understood that the content standards and writing had to come first. Not once did they focus on the technology aspect of the project. They saw the

relevance of telling real stories that applied to them today. Now I had to race to keep up with them.

Mining for Gold

I went home and created a time line and checklist to guide my students. I also developed a storyboard graphic organizer to help them plan their writing. I thought that the outlining and sequencing process would be good practice for the narrative prompt on the upcoming standardized writing assessment. I stayed focused on the content and the writing because without that foundation the digital part of the story wouldn't have much substance.

Back at school the next morning, a welcoming party met me again at the classroom door. Before I could share the organizers that I had assembled the night before, the students showed me what they had created. They had talked to each other on the telephone and had collaboratively designed their own time line and storyboard.

We went to the back table where we have small-group instruction, and I asked the students to explain their model. They had chosen to focus on the Revolutionary War, but their background knowledge was extremely limited because we had not studied this yet. I knew they were going to have to read and research more before writing their story. In addition to addressing the curricular goals for writing, literacy, and mechanics, I wanted this digital storytelling project to link them to the past and help them understand the impact that history has on us today. They would have to probe the choices and consequences of the American colonists and the British government during the late eighteenth century.

Of course, at this point I shouldn't have been surprised to discover that the students had already begun some research on their own. They had read the related chapters in our required textbook, talked to family members, and searched for information online.

Our conversation revealed that they were stuck at a superficial level of information—small facts about the war—but their enthusiasm for the subject was inspiring. Whenever they brought up another nugget, I asked, “Why was that important?” They continued to repeat the facts or tell me it was important because it had happened and we had to know it. So I asked, “What happened then that changed who we are today? What would life be like today for us if the colonists hadn't made those choices?”

These types of questions were not new to my students. During my social studies classes, I often guide my students through finding cause-effect relationships, predicting the outcome of events, and making connections between

the past and the present. Our social studies discussions lead to some of the most in-depth thinking each day, and we often exceed our mandated time for the class.

I start this kind of questioning from the beginning of the school year, guiding them in finding history's relevance to contemporary issues. They learn that as long as they can justify their answers with good reasoning and examples, their answers will not be judged or graded. In this way, they overcome the fear of being wrong that tends to stifle classroom conversations.

As we were sitting at the table that morning discussing these students' knowledge of the American Revolution, I was surprised that they were struggling to understand the significance of their ancestors' actions. We'd been having these types of discussions for months in class, so I knew that they understood how to reason and draw conclusions. As I started reflecting, I realized that we usually discussed the history story first and then made higher-order connections second. This time the process had been reversed. I had made the mistake of assuming that because they had read the chapter and completed some personal research, they understood both the facts and the context. They had so amazed me with their other thinking regarding this project that I had forgotten that they still needed guidance about how to interpret new information.

Because this group of webinar students asked to continue to come before school and after school a couple of times a week to work on their project, I planned time for us to discuss the American Revolution so they could connect the interesting facts they were compiling into a bigger picture. I pulled some related videos, many from Discovery Education streaming (see Box 3.1), so we could watch and discuss them together. Some of the videos were reenactments; others were interviews with experts. However, the video that appealed most to the students was one that came from American Village, a living history site not far from our school in Montevallo, Alabama. They had produced a video called *Spirit of Liberty*, which reenacted the events leading up to the American Revolution. It tied the relevance of the past to the future while mixing music and narration with the dialogue. Through this resource, the students were able to not only visualize and discuss the importance of the choices made in the production of a digital story but also witness how important it is to connect the past to the present for an audience.

A New Frame of Reference

Once my webinar students had spent several days before and after school building their background knowledge and the big picture of the American Revolution, their conclusions about the relevance of the American Revolution

Box 3.1 Building Background Knowledge with Digital Videos

Discovery Education streaming (<http://streaming.discoveryeducation.com/>) includes an extensive library of student-friendly, nonfiction videos on social studies, science, math, and English that are appropriate across grade levels. Most videos are broken up into smaller segments so that you can select the couple of minutes that may pertain to the lesson that you are teaching at the time. This is not a free service. A site license or membership must be purchased for access to the video library. The Web site states that there are 40,000 video clips that can be directly connected with each state’s standards. It also gives teachers access to a high-resolution image library, interactive quiz center, black-line masters and teachers’ guides, and a calendar of events that tie video and image content to important dates in history. I encourage you to check it out, perhaps through your school district’s IT department. Another nice feature is that the educational videos are not usually blocked by school firewalls and other filtering devices.

Because many of my students have limited background knowledge of world events, Discovery Education streaming has enabled me to easily access content to enhance their understanding of literature, science, math, or social studies. For example, when my students were reading about the Holocaust, I found a video about a boy who had experienced it firsthand; this helped my students connect with the characters in our book. Often during our science conversations,

my students will ask questions about how or why something works. I can usually find a short video clip that explains and demonstrates the answer for them, helping them to connect and understand the content in a much more real way than just a written or verbal explanation.

If you don’t have access to Discovery Education streaming, I have found some video clips at sites such as SchoolTube (www.schooltube.com) and TeacherTube (www.teachertube.com). Those sites are not blocked by our school filters, but their video libraries are not as extensive as Discovery Education streaming. Also, the quality can be inconsistent.

One site with high-quality digital videos across content areas is SqoolTube (www.sqooltube.com). The site also includes interactive activities that meet most of the standards my students are expected to master. The site includes clips from Bill Nye the Science Guy, School House Rock, The Magic School Bus, and many others.

Another Web site that provides videos is Next Vista (www.nextvista.org). It has three categories of video collections: Light Bulbs, which introduces topics in the areas of careers, health and fitness, history and culture, literature, math, performing arts, science, technology, visual arts, and writing; Global Views, which promotes understanding of people and their cultures worldwide; and Seeing Service, which highlights the work of people who are working to make this world a better place.

came much easier. I asked, “What was important about the American Revolution that has impacted us today?”

Rachel concluded, “We wouldn’t have freedom now.”

“What do you mean by freedom?” I asked.

“We would probably still have a king and have no say in government,” she responded.

“Yeah,” Sean agreed, “we wouldn’t be able to have a say in our taxes and laws.”

“Tell me how we got that freedom,” I continued.

They thought about that for a moment, and then Ashlyn replied, “People like Patrick Henry were willing to speak up for what was right and all of those men were willing to sign the Declaration of Independence even though they knew they were risking their lives.”

Elizabeth interrupted, “And the lives of their families.”

“Kinda like Rosa Parks in a way,” Ashlyn said, connecting with her previous knowledge of the Civil Rights era.

“So how do those people and the freedom that Rachel is talking about apply to us today?” I asked.

“If it weren’t for those people risking their lives, we wouldn’t be free,” Matthew answered.

“Many people died for us too and not just in that war. Freedom isn’t free,” Rachel concluded.

I gave them a few moments to process this before I asked, “What story do you want to tell about the American Revolution?”

“I think it’s important for all of us to think about the price of freedom,” Sean said. “Like Rachel said, it’s not free. People gave their lives for us to have it. We can’t just forget about it.” His five teammates agreed with him. They had found their story.

I have been through this process with digital storytelling several times since then. What amazes me is that the students always find a different story to tell. They make unique applications to the present and the future based on what they have learned about the past. It fascinates me to see where their minds take them, often leading them to places that I had not thought about myself.

Finding a Voice

When I initially explored digital storytelling, I thought it would improve our narrative writing lessons and reinforce the required pacing guides, curriculum plans, and standardized test preparation. However, what I discovered was that digital storytelling provided many more opportunities for students to write and create outside of the limited label of narrative writing. My young authors now write across expository, narrative, and descriptive writing modes or genres throughout digital storytelling projects. Students write letters between characters, fictional and nonfictional; create docudramas; conduct interviews; produce television shows; and write comic books. With some guidance, they each select a genre that meets the needs of their story.

Because I let the students choose the various genres in which to write, I decided to revise my initial prewriting planning sheet. Our district provides a

prewriting planning sheet for students to use as part of the preparation for the standardized writing assessment. My students have used these prewriting sheets in the Writing Lab class for several years, so they feel comfortable with the tool and use it throughout the writing process. I wanted to create something to guide their thinking and composing while giving them enough freedom to try different formats (see Figure 3.1). Figure 3.2 shows a student’s prewriting tool for our digital story project. I have found that this prewriting tool usually will work for any genre of writing. Adding the highlighting direction at the end helps students visualize whether they have focused on their message or just on the “about” aspect of their digital story.

In that first year when my small group of webinar students were embarking on their digital storytelling project, we created a prewriting plan through trial and error. They had determined their topic (the American Revolution) and the message that they wanted to communicate (“Freedom isn’t free”). They brainstormed ways to share the message about “the price of freedom” while also teaching their peers about the American Revolution.

FIGURE 3.1
Prewriting Tool

Topic: _____
Message: What is the lesson that you want people to learn that applies to life today?
Introduction:
Focus:
Conclusion:
Highlight the statements or points that you will include that lead to your audience learning your message.

Digital Story Brooke, Brandon, Jesus, Breayana	
Message: What is the lesson that you want people to learn that applies to today? The lesson that we want people to learn that applies to today is that if you are confident and determined like Phillis Wheatley, then you can achieve your most challenging goals.	
Introduction: Phillis Wheatley was born in Senegal, Africa in 1753. She had a very difficult life of a slave child of seven. Phillis had an early interest in poetry when she was about twelve years old. The people who owned her soon knew that she was very intelligent and out-going. What they didn't know, was that their slave will be a huge benefit to the	
Focus: Colonists in the war. Phillis Wheatley was very confident in her writing because all though she was a servant and a difficult life, she kept writing and kept sharing her writing with the world. Phillis was also very determined because although people mistreated her and were very prejudice, she kept trying to change the world with writing. When times were hard, she kept a positive outlook and kept moving forward.	
Conclusion: Phillis Wheatley benefited the thirteen colonies during the war by encouraging people through her writing. If it wasn't for her, we might not have won the war, which would affect the past and even affect today. Her confidence, determination, and positive outlook inspires everyone to make the world a better place.	
Highlight the areas that lead to your audience learning your message.	

FIGURE 3.2
A group of students used the prewriting tool to create this plan for their digital story.

Then Elizabeth and Rachel came up with the idea of telling the story through letters written between characters. Kynslee and Matthew agreed and suggested that the letters be written by imaginary cousins who lived in key places during the American Revolution, such as Philadelphia and Boston. The students created a time line of important events and dates to ensure that they incorporated accurate details from the period. They divided into pairs, each

assuming a name of one of the two imaginary cousins, and decided what should be included in their letters to teach and enlighten. Then each pair took turns verbally composing a letter and sharing it with others before they wrote.

We spent time conferencing each day before school so I could check their writing and focus. Now that they had a stronger understanding of the historical period, a time line of events, and an objective, they gradually needed less and less input from me.

At this point, we did not have a rubric or any type of assessment in place for their writing because they had volunteered to work on this project beyond their regular school work. They did edit each other's work for historical accuracy, organization, grammar, and mechanics, using a method similar to the one they had learned while writing their e-pal letters.

Going Digital

Because digital storytelling was new for me and I didn't have the money to buy software, I found a free tool from Microsoft called Photo Story. Since then, I've discovered that there are many options for creating digital stories, including free open source software, such as Gimp (www.gimp.com), and a wide range of tools for integrating music, transition, and effects. For more information on creating digital stories, see Dr. Helen C. Barrett's (2009) handouts and tutorials at <http://electronicportfolios.com/digistory/howto.html>. Another helpful site is “The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling” from the University of Houston (2010) (<http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/>). I chose Photo Story because it was easy to use on our Windows-based laptop. Many teachers have told me that they use Apple's iMovie, but currently we are an all-PC district.

Photo Story creates video using still pictures. After downloading the free software (www.microsoft.com/downloads/en/default.aspx), you can set up a slideshow/video of your digital pictures, adding narration and music. Photo Story has some nice features, such as pan and zoom effects, picture rotation, photo editing, and cropping tools. It also has a built-in feature to allow you to create your own music. Photo Story also lets you share the final project in various ways: through playback on your computer, in an e-mail message, or through playback on a pocket PC or smart phone with Windows Media Player.

While watching the Discovery Education streaming videos, I had drawn the students' attention to the filmmaker's use of music to enhance the feeling of the films. They were surprised to discover that music can help tell a story. That gave them a frame of reference when it came time to add music to their own digital stories.

After they uploaded photos and images to Photo Story and placed them in the correct order to enhance their writing, they used a small microphone to record their voices into Photo Story to narrate the story. The students saved everything into a project file within Photo Story. The last step was to convert the project file into a movie file. With Photo Story, all you have to do is click a button, and voila!

When these webinar students shared their digital stories with their classmates, their peers were very focused and engaged. The webinar students led a discussion about the price of freedom and applied the topic to current events, such as the U.S. military operations in the Middle East. When the presenters suggested that their classmates create their own digital stories focusing on a patriot from the American Revolution whose choices impacted us today, the enthusiasm and excitement were palpable.

Developing the Rubric

Each of the teams collaborated with one of the digital storytelling experts from that initial group of webinar students. The teams formed the categories for a rubric to evaluate the digital storytelling. This rubric differed from previous ones in that it was designed to assess teams, not individuals. It would have to evaluate teamwork and collaboration in addition to writing and technology skills.

Why work in teams? Because of strict time constraints and pacing guides in our school districts, as well as a limited number of computers, I had to compromise. I considered the benefits of letting students fulfill different roles within their teams, experience writing in a new genre, and gain experience with a new technology tool.

Although my students had created other rubrics, I still felt uneasy about their ability to identify all of the important elements in creating a digital story. I was tempted to use one of the rubrics available online but decided to see what the students could come up with on their own. They didn't disappoint me.

Although their rubric was simpler than many online versions, it met the basic criteria of focusing on the written story and making connections and applications to their lives today. There wasn't a lot of debate about which categories to include in this rubric, unlike our experience with previous rubrics. I think one of the differences was that the students had already seen a specific example—that of the webinar students. They could visualize their destination. As we discussed the project, the experts shared their insights about what they had learned about the focus of their digital story: the application of the history

content to the present day. They not only modeled the writing and production of their message for the whole class, but they also had experience to draw on as they guided within their small groups (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2 My Students’ Digital Storytelling Rubric

In Figure 3.3 you will see the rubric that the students used with one another and, in Figure 3.4, a version of the rubric that I’ve used. Both are very similar to the rubrics shown in previous chapters. The major difference is that, for the digital storytelling project, I score teams instead of individuals. I still conference with each team, and in the conference we discuss their team’s strengths and weaknesses. I’ve found that students often already know their skills before we begin the conference. Many times they begin the conference explaining what they should or should not have done in their digital story. Some teams have even requested to go back and make some adjustments before we publish their work on the class Web site and/or share the work with other classes.

As with the other rubrics, this one varies from year to year depending on the students and what

they feel is important to include in their publications. The rubric shown in Figures 3.3 and 3.4 includes the categories of content and message—the factual information that students use to justify their main application of the past to today. It also includes grammar and mechanics and the digital publication, all of which should support the overall lesson that each story is teaching the audience.

The student rubric (Figure 3.3) does not include teamwork as a category, because they do not score other teams on their teamwork—just on their digital story. They only assess their own team members’ collaboration skills.

Although this rubric is much simpler than many published rubrics, I have found that student-created rubrics really do work in spurring high-quality, thoughtful composing and creating.

FIGURE 3.3
A Student’s Digital Story Rubric

Wizkids Digital Story on Samuel Adams		
Categories	Score	Comments
Content	3	Try to be more descriptive about her life. <small>give more for about etc.</small>
Message	2	You made good points; but how does that apply to me?
Mechanics	3	The wording of your sentences was so + clear
Digital	2	Sometimes the narration was hard to understand.
I enjoyed learning about Samuel Adams through your digital story.		

Box 3.2 My Students' Digital Storytelling Rubric (continued)

Team Name	Content (20 points)	Message (20 points)	Mechanics (20 points)	Digital (20 points)	Teamwork (20 points)	Goals
Wildcats	15 points	20 points	20 points	20 points	20 points	Check accuracy of ALL facts; great message relevant to today; beautiful production supporting message (95%)
Mathletes	20 points	20 points	20 points	10 points	20 points	Your facts support your message; great message; the music overwhelms the narration; nice teamwork throughout project (90%)
Word Wizards	10 points	15 points	20 points	20 points	15 points	Mostly opinion; only one fact; nice application to today; could have been stronger with more facts supporting; great production supporting your writing; good job of working out beginning teamwork disagreements (80%)
Team Unstoppable	20 points	15 points	15 points	20 points	20 points	Great content supporting your message; one point unclear on application of the message; great job supporting your focus with your production (90%)
Tiger Tide	15 points	10 points	15 points	10 points	20 points	More information needed to support your message; good qualities shared about Patriot, but how does it apply to today? Check your subject-verb agreement; great teamwork (70%)
Superstars	20 points	15 points	10 points	20 points	20 points	Be sure that all of your points/facts support the overall message of your story; watch the use of subject-verb agreement; nice teamwork (85%)

FIGURE 3.4 My Class Digital Story Rubric

Meanwhile . . . A Digital Detour

While my young authors were in the process of researching their digital stories based on the Revolutionary War, the class read “The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere” by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The language in this elegant but lengthy poem can be difficult to understand, so after we read each couplet I would do a think-aloud to help students interpret the meaning by drawing on their growing knowledge of the time period. We were about halfway through the choral reading when one of my students raised his hand.

“Mrs. Ramsay,” he said, “this is still kinda hard to get. But I was thinking that if we turned it into a digital story we might be able to understand it better.”

Great idea! Wish I had thought of that. By breaking up the poem and finding an image or creating an illustration to expand on the meaning, we could let all students deepen their reading comprehension and vocabulary skills while dipping their toes into digital technology. I knew the Midnight Ride digital story project wouldn’t take much time to complete, because I already had six Photo Story experts and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow had already written the poem. (I was also delighted that my students were intuitively addressing ISTE’s [2007] NETS for Students, using Standard 4: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making.)

The students who had created the first digital stories set up the laptop computer with Photo Story on it in a corner of the classroom. After we assigned different sections of the poem, the students found related images or created illustrations, which they uploaded to a new project file in Photo Story (see Box 3.3 for information about guiding students in their search for copyright-free materials). The digital story experts took turns working with their peers to record the reading of each section of the poem. This was all done during free moments throughout the day while students were continuing with their regular routines. Of course, we had many announcements of “quiet on the set” when they were recording, but the students were generally respectful of one another because they knew that each of them would get a turn to contribute to the production. If I heard a student who was having difficulty explaining or reading, I would pull him or her aside for a one-on-one tutorial. If there was a difference of opinion, I was there to settle the dispute as needed. Later I realized that this process of turning a classic piece of literature into a digital story had enhanced my students’ learning far more than I had expected. See Chapter 8 for a complete explanation of how the students were inspired to produce a related video during the last week of the school year.

Box 3.3 Publishing and Copyrights

Today students are regularly creating and publishing work for the global community. The issue of fair use and copyright licensing is a very real concern, and students need to know what is appropriate (see ISTE [2007] NETS for Students, 5, Digital Citizenship). I've found that, typically, students don't fully understand the importance of using others' work only with permission, including photos and music easily accessible on the Internet. Once we have a discussion about what it means to "borrow" the work of others, we look at ways for them to locate materials that they can freely use to enhance their writing.

Creative Commons is a nonprofit organization that seeks to increase collaboration through a variety of different licensing conditions, such as attribution, no derivative works, noncommercial, and share alike. You can find comprehensive information about Creative Commons at <http://creativecommons.org/>.

In my class, we look at the differences among the categories (the types of permissions or rights

for publication), and I model a search process. For example, with the Paul Revere project, we search for images and discuss the different licensing that would apply. Many photo Web sites, such as Flickr, have photos categorized by types of Creative Commons licensing agreements, making a search much easier for students. One thing that I stress is that although they may have the permission to incorporate another person's photos, artwork, or music, they still must cite the creator/author of the work used.

When searching for digital support for their writing, my students usually prefer to Google "Creative Commons music" or "Creative Commons photos" instead of visiting a certain Web site. I think they like the hunt that is unique to their project. When my students find work that they want to use for a project, they contact the owner and explain the educational purpose of the project at hand, and the owner will usually extend permission.

Coming Full Circle

In class, we spent two to three days a week studying and discussing the Revolutionary War content during our social studies period, and on the other days during that period, we worked on the patriot digital stories. Having seen the digital story expert students come to work before school, many of the learning teams also wanted to show up early. I used the checklist that the first group of students created, adding a few items, to keep the digital storytelling process on track (see Figure 3.5). The photos or illustrations for a digital story can be created by hand and scanned. They can also be created using drawing tools on the computer, or students can use copyright-free images. The music can be created using Photo Story or found on copyright-free music sites. Although we designed the checklist for Photo Story, you can adapt it for other software programs.

FIGURE 3.5
Digital
Storytelling
Checklist

Digital Storytelling Checklist	
_____	Brainstorm ideas
_____	Develop topic
_____	Identify message (the lesson that applies to today that you want the audience to learn)
_____	Prewrite
_____	Write first draft
_____	Edit
_____	Write final draft
_____	Segment the writing into a storyboard
_____	Create illustrations or add photos
_____	Insert photos in Photo Story
_____	Practice oral reading fluency
_____	Record voice into digital story
_____	Create/add music to enhance your message
_____	Check for any mistakes
_____	Publish as a video file

Managing this collaborative storytelling project was challenging at times. One difficulty was finding an equitable way to evaluate and score the individual contributions the students made to the team project. I created a chart listing the different levels of engagement within the team (see Figure 3.6). I shared this with the students and we discussed how we would use it.

Because I worked with each team at least once on the days they were writing and creating their stories, I thought I had a good basis for knowing how to score each team member's contributions. However, the students had con-

Category	4	3	2	1
Collaboration	Regularly offers productive ideas to the team; fulfills team role; works hard	Usually offers productive ideas to the team; tries hard to fulfill team role	Sometimes offers productive ideas to the team; sometimes fulfills team role; only does what is required	Rarely offers productive ideas to the team; rarely fulfills team role or participates
Cooperation	Mostly listens, shares, and supports team's work and ideas; encourages teamwork	Usually listens, shares, and supports team's work and ideas; does not cause problems for the team	Often listens, shares, and supports team's work and ideas; sometimes is uncooperative	Rarely listens, shares, and supports team's work and ideas; often is uncooperative
Engagement	Always stays engaged in what needs to be done	Usually stays engaged in what needs to be done	Often, with reminders, stays engaged in what needs to be done	Rarely stays engaged in what needs to be done
Critical Thinking	Always looks for ways to solve problems or meet challenges	Usually looks for ways to solve problems or meet challenges	Sometimes looks for ways to solve problems or meet challenges, but tries others' ideas	Rarely looks for ways to solve problems or meet challenges; not willing to try others' ideas
Scheduling	Regularly completes work in a timely manner	Usually completes work in a timely manner	Sometimes completes work in a timely manner, with reminders from team members	Rarely completes work in a timely manner, even with reminders from team members

FIGURE 3.6
Teamwork/
Participation
Chart

cerns that some of their peers would not uphold their part of the job when I was not looking. So we decided that each team member would rate one another in addition to my rating.

One student asked, “But what if they are mad at you and just give you a low score to be mean?”

She made a good point. I asked, “What do you think we could do to prevent this from happening?”

“We could give specific examples of why we give someone a score, like when we give you answers in class,” one student suggested.

“But what if two people gang up on someone?” the first student said, worried.

“Then maybe Mrs. Ramsay could talk to them and discover if it’s a real problem or not. Like when we have problems anyway,” the second student answered.

“So what you’re saying is that each team member scores the other members and makes specific comments explaining the score, and then we combine that score with my score for a grade for that week on teamwork. If there are any disputes, we’ll discuss those together,” I reiterated.

The students agreed that the suggested process would be a fair way to assess teamwork. They seemed really invested in the idea of having a say in the scoring of their team projects. This was something that I had not thought about before—the idea of letting them assess one another with guidelines. I could follow their logic: They created the story project. They created the rubric. So why wouldn’t they score the work as well?

I had always done all of the scoring. After all, it affected their grades for the course. But were the students looking to assess one another for a grade? No. Grades for the grade book were not mentioned. Project completion and teamwork were the concerns. This shift from learning for grades to learning for enjoyment had happened when they started writing their e-pal letters. They were writing to an authentic audience, striving to meet their personal writing goals.

Without question, the students were creating these digital stories not only for one another but also to post for their writing friends across the country who were also studying American history. They also suggested that we share these stories with the other fifth-grade classes at our school. Later, we discovered that the third-grade classes were reading a story that had a setting of the American Revolution, so we shared our stories with them as well.

Now that the students had an audience for their creations and wanted to become accountable to each other through their rubric, I decided to let them score one another’s digital stories while I simultaneously scored the projects using their rubric. My thought was that if the students did not score each other equitably, I could just use my scoring as the final grade for the project.

Our classroom became a digital story production whirlwind. Any time students completed their other course work they would work on their digital stories. In this whirlwind, I took opportunities to refocus students and get them to reach a deeper understanding as I circulated among working groups. One group focused on John Adams. When I met with the team members I asked,

“What was special about John Adams?” They responded with a list of his accomplishments. I asked, “Why are those accomplishments important?” They listed the accomplishments again. “But why are those things important for us to know?” Blank stares. I gave them time to think, then asked, “How would our lives today be different if John Adams and other men and women like him didn’t do those things you listed?” Confused looks. More time to get the brains in gear. “What do you think our country would be like today if those people had not made the choices that they did?”

Kevin said, “You mean like we would have a king still telling us what to do?”

“Good,” I said. “What else would be different?”

The other group members jumped in, making a list of civil rights that might not be possible without the sacrifices made by Americans during the Revolutionary period. The list included some wonderful fifth-grade twists, including singing “The Star-Spangled Banner,” having a say in what our taxes pay for, and being able “to go home and watch the Vikings play football this weekend because we would have to do what the king said and he probably wouldn’t like football.”

The students’ rapid conversation and contributions continued. These were their answers, not mine. They owned that project because of their personal stake in the interpretation.

Just as with the original webinar group, the focus was on writing the meaningful story and emphasizing relevant information first, and only then enhancing their learning by sharing it in a digital format. Because each team had an “expert” member, they had someone who could walk them through any technical difficulties that might arise.

One day, as I was traveling from team to team, I overheard a conversation between Elizabeth and her team. She said, “I think we need to change this picture on this slide to another one. Look, this one is dark and foggy. It looks spooky, making you feel a bit scared, which is probably what they felt risking their lives for freedom.”

“I wouldn’t want to go in that picture,” Tony said. “Someone might jump out and get you.”

“Right,” Elizabeth continued. “It would have been scary to do what the Sons of Liberty did. This picture is perfect.”

Elizabeth, the expert in her group, guided her teammates in making choices that would support their story. Without her leadership, the feeling of their story may not have been as powerful to the audience. Having experts on each team helped to alleviate many of the hands in the air for answers to small items and questions. When students have a question, they often shut down the

Student Reflection

Kevin Valladares, fifth-grade student

In digital stories, while processing, you have to think what you're going to write about. That means that digital stories start off as content and then evolve into wonderful sounds in your ears by using Photo Story 3. Before I get any further into using digital stories, I'm going to announce how we created and started our digital story. We first were talking about important people writing and double checking the Declaration of Independence. We chose to write about John Adams. We had a hard time thinking about what to do. So we went and looked at a sheet of paper that had different kinds of writing, and we saw comics. My friend Steven and I were good at comics, so our group decided to do a comic digital story. Then we had to think about how we were going to do it. Our teacher and group decided to do it about how if John Adams never lived. So now we have our own John Adams digital story. I loved doing this instead of on a poster board because I think you learn so much more using technology than our parents did in like the 1930s. This is the 21st Century and we have technology now to help us learn better.

working process and wait. Waiting leads to boredom and lack of focus, which often leads to off-task, disruptive behavior. For a teacher, trying to prevent this cascade can be extremely frustrating because you can only be at one place at a time. I've heard many teachers complain that this is why they don't implement more technology projects to support their curriculum. My solution is to have experts in the classroom who can answer and solve minor problems or questions. Then I can really focus on discussing the writing and the content and guiding the teams in their choices throughout the process.

After students completed the digital stories, we arranged to have a screening day to present and evaluate all the projects before we published them on our Web site and invited friends, family, and other classes to view them.

Each student scored each of the digital stories, including their own, using the student-created rubric. Each team then averaged the scores given to each story by the members of that team and compiled the comments to turn into me. They gave their individual score sheets to the team whose story they had just scored. I took the six student-scored rubrics (one per team) and averaged them. That score represented 50 percent of the grade, and my score would represent the other 50 percent, unless I found a major discrepancy. Each individual turned in participation scores for his or her team members.

I discovered that the students' assessments of one another were usually aligned with my reviews. The same consistency has shown up every time I have used this type of assessment. The idea to require comments to justify scoring choices seems to weed out most of the petty or vindictive marks. Giving students a voice beyond just creating a rubric really brought this project full circle. My students were empowered to control not only the process but also the final outcome.

(For examples of the digital stories mentioned in this chapter, see www.stenhouse.com/skiplunch.)

