

Dos and don'ts of digital stories

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Digital stories can be used in a task-based course with any level of language learner, and can be language-focused or content-focused. They provide an opportunity for students to practise listening, reading, writing, speaking and vocabulary skills in a motivating and meaningful context. For a simple digital story the students create a story using photos, music, and voiceover. Other aspects such as video and interactivity can also be incorporated depending on the aims of the course, the resources available, and the confidence of students and teachers with the various technology tools.

In this session I will share some examples of digital stories, as well as resources and tools available to anyone with access to computers. Although the basic concepts are straightforward, there are some potential pitfalls which can be avoided with planning and preparation. I will share some dos and don'ts from my experiences with students and teachers, in order to encourage teachers to design a suitable digital story task for their own classroom situations.

Examples

1.5 kg baby girl – Shoo-in Leung

http://storiesforchange.net/story/1_5_kg_baby_girl

My trip to Lebanon – Nurul Husseini

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxaSniWXiEQ>

All about polar bears – Monica Schnee's ESL pre-school ESL

<http://eslschnee.weebly.com/kinder--polar-bear-voicethread.html>

The Jungle Hotel

<http://www.zimmertwins.com/node/1401748>

Resources

US college ESL (MiraCosta College Community Learning Center)

<http://mccdigitalstory.blogspot.co.nz/>

Examples from the courses over several years, and lots of links. Click on "class web page" to see a nine-week course outline with links to grammar info, assessment rubric, etc.

Özge Karaoglu (2009)

<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/blogs/%C3%B6zge-karao%C4%9Flu/digital-storytelling>

A blog piece with the advantages of an overview of digital storytelling sites.

54 sites of resources and info (some links may no longer work)

http://www.freereslmaterials.com/digital_storytelling.html

Free software websites

My StoryMaker

Click and drag pictures, with space for text.

<http://www.carnegielibrary.org/kids/storymaker/embed.cfm>

The Zimmer Twins

Animated cartoons.

<http://www.zimmertwins.com/about/teachers>

VoiceThread

Pictures where others can make comments in text, audio or video.

<http://voicethread.com/about/library/category/esl/>

Do ...

- Get to know the technology first - or have a techie on hand!
- Focus on the language outcomes - or be clear about the others, e.g. narratives (past tenses), text cohesion (conjunctions), pronunciation (stress and intonation, phonemes).
- Include other language-related outcomes as appropriate, e.g. copyright/referencing, visual communication.
- Prepare tasks for each stage of the process, some of which don't need to be with computers.
- Provide a forum for students to share the final product.

Don't ...

- Assume that "digital natives" are all confident with new technology.
- Underestimate the time needed with each student.
- Panic when the students are all doing their own thing rather than listening to you!

References (annotated)

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http://ctl.laguardia.edu/journal/pdf/InTransit_v1n1_DigitalStorytellingESL.pdf
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- Vinovogradova, P., Linville, H. A., & Bickel, B. (2011). "Listen to my story and you will know me": Digital stories as student-centred collaborative projects. *TESOL Journal*, 2 (2), 173-202.
A teachers' description of use in English language cross cultural communication classes – includes an outline of process and assessment rubric.