

FEATURE





One School Librarian's Digital Journey

Sally Smollar

sally.smollar@palmbeachschools.org

The Magic of Digital Storytelling

Magical!

This is the word I use to describe the excitement in the room when students have been given digital tools and the chance to create and share their own stories and/or illustrations.

If you have ever watched students sitting in front of a blank piece of paper, especially during state writing assessments, you know that look—pure torture! Students are not highly motivated to produce a well-crafted story that is destined to be seen only by the teacher or, at best, posted to a bulletin board somewhere in the hallway. In testing situations, students often have even less motivation to use their imagination and storytelling abilities.

However, in the digital world everything changes. When stories are shared via online publishing platforms, students are excited about their own creativity and collaboration and feel pride in their work. It doesn't matter if we use basic presentation software or the latest iPad app, the result is always the same—pure magic!

As an elementary school librarian, I have had access to the latest technologies since document scanners were considered cutting edge. We developed a writing lab in the back storage room of the library, and it was the most popular place in the school. Even then, allowing students to scan images to insert into their stories was a game changer. Since those days I have never stopped experimenting with various platforms and applications to let students express themselves. As with most experiments, sometimes what works with one group might flop

with another, or the whole activity may just bomb completely!

Over the years I have amassed a wide number of lessons and activities related to digital storytelling. In your exploration of the treasure trove of examples I am going to share with you here, keep one thing in mind: you don't need to master or even learn how to use a particular application. Give yourself the gift of freedom and flexibility. Think about creating a digital story as you would a new recipe! In fact, I often tell my students that my classroom is my test kitchen and they are the chefs!

For example, if you give kids a loose project outline and a brief introduction, I guarantee they will figure it out. Or even (Yikes!), "Here is something new I want to try—let's explore it together!" What I love most about teaching the art of digital storytelling is when kids are immersed in a project and come to me with "Is it okay if I do it like this instead?" The answer is almost always "Yes!" I want them to be independent thinkers and always encourage changes to the project as long as the changes make sense in the context of our learning objectives.

Now, if I haven't scared you away yet, let's dive into some examples. Keep in mind, the examples of these projects used as illustrations and at the webpages for which URLs are provided were created by the kids and are in their raw, unedited form.

Digital Storytelling Applications and Projects: Kid Pix, PowerPoint, Picaboo, and More: Creating Stories and Memoirs!

The Snowy Day

Kid Pix 3D is a drawing application designed primarily for children.

**GIVE YOURSELF THE GIFT
OF FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY.
THINK ABOUT CREATING
A DIGITAL STORY AS YOU
WOULD A NEW RECIPE!**

Originally released for Apple computers, a Windows version is now also available.

My first attempt at creating a digital e-book using student-created illustrations was in 2010 when *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats was selected for "Read for the Record." I cut apart the pages and let each student pick one and then create his or her own interpretation of the artwork using Kid Pix on our Apple iMac computers. A second-grade teacher was our guest reader, and I recorded her as she read the story to the class. To combine the images with the audio, iMovie was an easy choice, and the results were not only available to share digitally, but the printed pages (imported into PowerPoint slides as .jpeg files) were displayed on the bulletin board outside the school library. The hallway was buzzing, and kids were lining up to read *The Snowy Day*! You can view our project on YouTube:

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrCSoWPQ2ao&feature=youtu.be>>.

Grab a copy of the book and follow along.

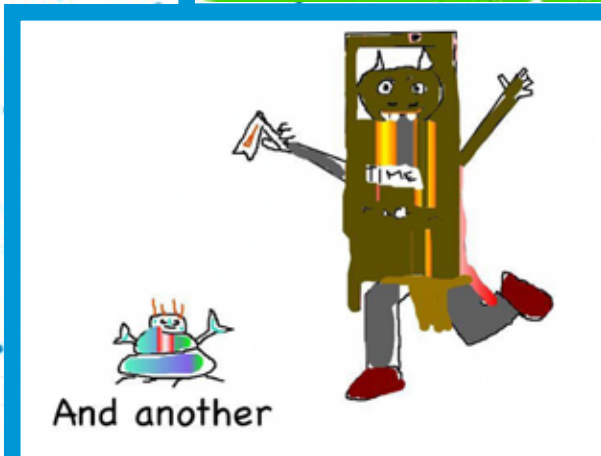
Over the years students have been inspired by other books, too. Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* inspired *Where the Generous Things Are* (see figure 1 for excerpts of a book created with Kid Pix and Microsoft Word).

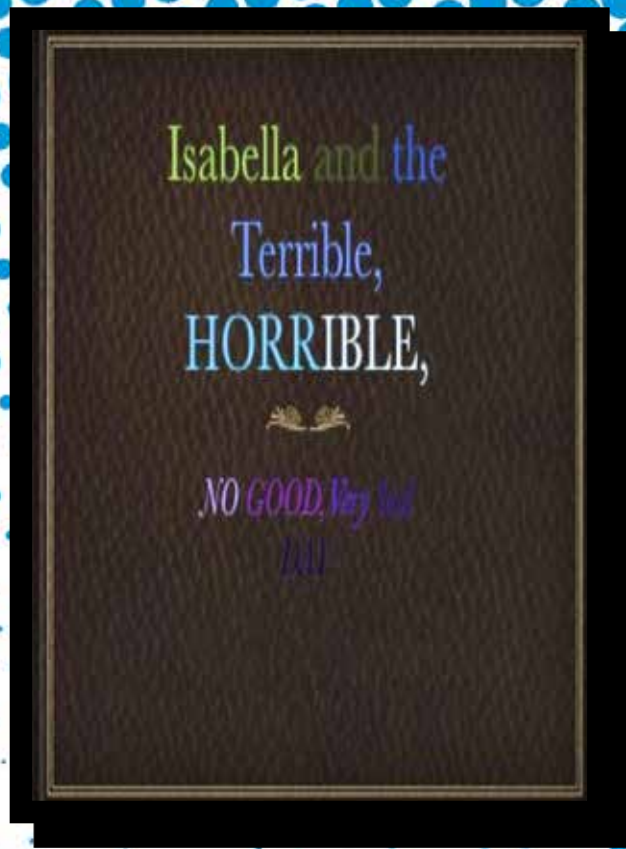
Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day

Alexander is a favorite in our school library, so I thought it would be a great way to teach the students to use PowerPoint, a widely used presentation application. Students love to tell stories about themselves. This project is a fun opportunity for them to tell a story about events that ruined their day just like Alexander's. First, students



Figure 1. Darcey's story inspired by *Where the Wild Things Are*.





created storyboards to plan their own mishaps. They created digital art using Kid Pix on our iMac computers and then exported each image as a .jpeg file and organized the files into a folder. Next, they created PowerPoint slides, inserted the images that they created, and then saved their slideshows (see figure 2).

Hometown Alphabet Book

The Snowy Day process used for digital storytelling was flawless. The kids loved it! So I soon jumped into another project using the exact same workflow. This time I used the format of an alphabet book about the town we lived in: Delray Beach, Florida. First, we discussed what makes a city unique. For example, in our town, we have the historic Colony Hotel with an original iron-gated elevator. We also discussed what things in a city are the same wherever you go, like Dunkin' Donuts. Then we took a field trip to the downtown area so students could experience the city from a different point of view. We even got to take a ride in the old elevator! Students chronicled their experiences in their own stories, which I compiled into an ABC book format. When the book was finished, I gathered all of the text into a Wordle for the front cover (see figure 3). The results were so fantastic that I used the Picaboo website <www.picaboo.com> to create a hardcover book. We invited the Delray Beach mayor to come to our school and presented him with a copy. You can view our final product at: <<http://tinyurl.com/qxj3z96>>.



Figure 2. Isabella's own *Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* with original illustrations she created with Kid Pix.

6-Word Stories

For my students I adapted the concept of the 6-word memoir, in which the writer chooses six words to capture a memory, and called the project *6-Word Stories*. Here is how I begin my introduction

The ABC Book of Delray Beach

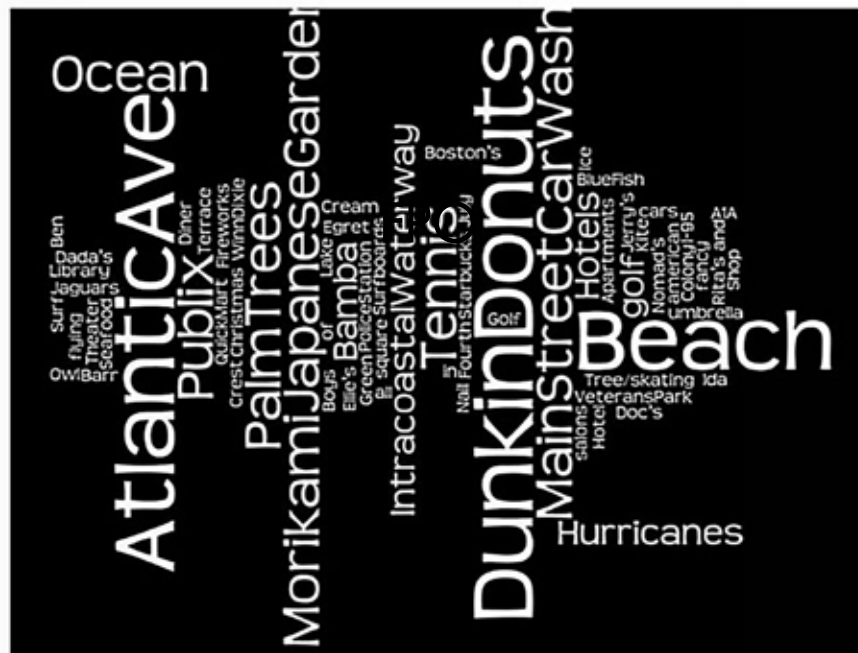


Figure 3. Cover of hometown alphabet book created by students.

(adapted from a Wikipedia article on Hemingway):

Ernest Miller Hemingway (July 21, 1899–July 2, 1961) was an American author and journalist. His distinctive writing style is characterized by economy and understatement. In the 1920s Ernest Hemingway's colleagues bet him that he couldn't write a complete story in just six words. They paid up. He wrote: For sale: baby shoes, never used.

Hemingway is said to have considered it his best work.

Next, I ask the students to try to interpret the meaning behind Hemingway's 6-word story. After a lively conversation, I give them a questionnaire titled, "All about

Me." We use it as our planning sheet for writing 6-word stories. As part of the project, the students create images using Kid Pix and insert them into PowerPoint slides. The project is always a hit! One year, I turned the slideshows into a new Picaboo book and used Wordle to create the book cover. I was delighted to see that the most common words were "friends," "family," "home," and "love"! You can view a slideshow at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOF5oa6PMBM>.

GarageBand: Poetry Podcasts

Our school library has an extensive collection of children's poetry books, but many of them are underutilized and just sit, collecting dust. The students tend to gravitate towards Shel Silverstein's and Jack

Prelutsky's poetry, and that's it. To expand our students' exposure to poetry I decided to involve them in a project using GarageBand on our Apple iMac computers. To start, I loaded up a cart with the neglected poetry books and gave the students ample time to browse and pick out a poem of at least twelve lines to practice reading aloud. The students then used GarageBand to record their voices and added beats and rhythm. We also discussed how the mood of the poem influenced the choice of audio elements and overall effect of the poem on the listener. When our podcasts were complete, we had a Poetry Slam event where we enjoyed listening to each other read poetry. What an awesome day! As a result of this activity I created a tutorial for a professional development workshop to show others how to

Students collaborating on using claymation and iMovie (right).



Fourth-grade students Wyatt and Myles using the iMovie app to create book trailers to promote books nominated for the Sunshine State Award (above).

Isabella using the iMovie app to create a book trailer for Natalie Babbit's *Tuck Everlasting* (left).



create poetry podcasts. You can see it at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRJz54sJ4oE>>.

VoiceThread: Literature Circles

I used the literature circle model in my first attempt to use VoiceThread for digital storytelling. I purchased thirty copies of Lynne Jonell's *Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat*. I then sent fifteen copies of the book to a third-grade class across town and invited them to join in on the conversation. My class read the book and used Kid Pix to create an image of their favorite scene. We used the Literature Circle model to ask questions created by my students, and uploaded the questions, along with the artwork, into VoiceThread. Then we invited the other class to respond by sending them the VoiceThread link. The author of the book was kind enough to join in our VoiceThread conversation and answered questions for the students. The experience was, indeed, purely magical! A recording of our VoiceThread discussion is at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EP8St2V_6Rw>.

Drawing Pad: Sticker Stories

When we first received our iPads, I downloaded several drawing and painting apps, hoping to find one that the third-grade students would enjoy as much as Kid Pix and, ultimately, found the Drawing Pad app. I typically don't let students use clip art because I want to encourage them to create their own artwork. However, since we were evaluating various apps, I let them explore all of the features. They loved creating original "Sticker Pictures" by drawing pictures using the graphics and clip art in the Drawing Pad app. As I watched students play with the stickers and clip art, I had a brainstorm! "Now, let's try to create a story to go with your Sticker Pictures." Using Microsoft Word,

we wrote narratives based on our pictures. Then I taught students how to import the images into the story. Go to this URL to see the results: <<https://youtu.be/ipVDebvH684>>. Enjoy!

StoryKit: Endangered Animals and Wordless Books

StoryKit is my all-time favorite app for the iPad, for the simple reason that kids of any grade level can figure it out without much help and instantly their imaginations take off! In this project third-grade students researched endangered animals while learning to use various electronic databases. Then they used the StoryKit app, which allows them to use photos, original art, text, and audio on the iPad. Also using StoryKit, students in my summer program, ranging from third grade through middle school,

worked on stories together. The multiage collaboration was a magical experience. I observed a third-grade student assigning roles to the older kids who collaborated to act out her story, and they loved it!

Here are URLs for some examples of StoryKit projects:

<<http://iphone.childrenslibrary.org/cgi-bin/view.py?b=mthvpcjdtzsizdvlcpitz>>

<<http://iphone.childrenslibrary.org/cgi-bin/view.py?b=mjmdyjgr2qfquvfxpivu>>

<<http://iphone.childrenslibrary.org/cgi-bin/view.py?b=g2sqg4jjautvguwytjcb>>

<<http://iphone.childrenslibrary.org/cgi-bin/view.py?b=4gbbc7nu2nxfcodgf3fd>>

**IT DOESN'T MATTER IF WE
USE BASIC PRESENTATION
SOFTWARE OR THE LATEST
IPAD APP, THE RESULT IS
ALWAYS THE SAME -
PURE MAGIC.**

Red Goes to School

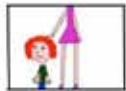
By Tammy Lynn



Figure 4. Tammy Lynn's original EPUB e-book, created with Kid Pix and Microsoft Word.

Red Goes to School

One day a boy was born with really red hair. His mother named him Red. One day when he was two Red had his first cake. Guess what? It was flavored strawberry and had red icing Red hated it.

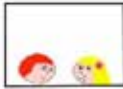


Soon Red was four and ready for school. He had a teacher with red hair. Her name was Mrs. Christmas. Red liked that name. On the first day of school, he cried once his mom left. Mrs. Christmas had to call Red's parents. Red's parents picked him up and decided to wait until next week for Red's first day at school.

Red was five with that. UNTIL the day came for him to go to school. Red put on a pretend brave face and walked in to Pre-K once again. And he started to cry a little. Then he stopped. NO CRYING. He thought, I'M A BIG BOY! "Alright class, please welcome back your classmate Red," Mrs. Christmas said. "Yess!" A girl with bright yellow hair asked, "Is not Red's name is Red?" He said, "My name is Sonny 'cause of my yellow hair!" The girl said, "Is Red. I'm named that because of my red hair!" Red said,



After that, Red loved school. Sonny and Red always played and ate together. Then Mrs. Christmas said a very important test was coming up. Red had heard of this earlier. Him and Sonny practiced every night. "You have a spelling test next week. This is really important. Whoever gets the best grade gets a prize!" Mrs. Christmas said. "Why?" All the kids yelled. "Whoever gets the most 100's or above wins a... FOLD TEEP TO THE PLAYLAND PARK!" Mrs. Christmas announced. Red had been to Playland Park before. It had roller coasters, (which he had never been on) fun slides, and cotton candy!



Red raised his hand, (which he had learned) "Yes, Red?" Mrs. Christmas asked. "But the older kids are smarter than us." Red pointed out. "Yeah," Some kids agreed. "Well, this is about how well the kids do on THEIR level. So, Pre-K can beat 3rd grade!" Mrs. Christmas explained. "Oh..." The kids said together. Then the bell rang. "That's the bell! See you tomorrow class!" Mrs. Christmas said.

Red and Sonny waited at the bus stop for the bus. "Hey!" A girl said. It was Briana. Briana was Sonny's older sister. "I heard about the Playland prize. 3rd grade is going to cream Pre-K!" Briana said. "NO!" Red whined. "We're going to whup them you!" Sonny agreed. "Yeah! And I'm gonna eat all of your cotton candy!" when it was Red, Sonny, and Briana's stop they got off and walked together to the DeCafe where Mrs. Jade, Sonny and Briana's mom, worked. Mrs. Jade gave Sonny and Red a jukebox and Briana got a muffin.

"Man, we have a big test soon," Briana started. "And the grand prize for the class with the best grades gets a free trip to Playland Park!" Sonny nodded. "Well then, the minute you get home you study. I'll tell the coach of your

soccer team you can't make it!" Mrs. Jade told Briana. Briana moaned. "Dad, I'm going to tell your mom to let her know you're going to study with Sonny of my house!" Mrs. Jade said as she ran off to the storage room. Red and Sonny studied ALL day and night. Briana ditched. She played on her computer.

Soon the day of the spelling test came and Red was ready. "Ready Reddy!" Sonny laughed. "Sunny Sonny!" Red giggled. The two kids laughed. Mrs. Christmas told everyone to stand up. "Alright class, all you have to do is say if to the nine judge from the school's district. Please welcome Mrs. Anita Balth." Mrs. Anita Balth stood up and bowed. Red said to Sonny "Mrs. Anita grada nial! Why does she need a judge?" Unfortunately Mrs. Balth heard and frowned. "That is my name, young gentlemen, you shall respect my teacher's name. These rules to these heart!" Sonny tried not to giggle. "And here need the both for thy ugly face. THIS NICTA BATH!" The class clom, Sonny yelled.



Mrs. Christmas sent him to the office, and Red didn't get in any trouble.

When the spelling test ended, Red had spelled five words correctly. Sonny spelled six. Mrs. Anita Balth left after she had marked down how many the class got right out of how many she gave. Mrs. Christmas was so proud. "You were great! You only spelled one incorrect!" Red went to sleep that night proud.

The next month the results came in. "WE WON!" Mrs. Christmas screamed. "WE'RE GOING TO PLAYLAND PARK!" Everybody celebrated with cupcakes the principal brought after he found out. Briana was so mad. "Well, Red, get ready for Playland. They're going next week. We brought you a strawberry lollipop!" Red's mom said. "Again! I hate strawberry!" Red whined. "Kidding! It's lemonade!" Red's mom did jazz hands. They hugged.

"Have fun next week!" Red's mom said. Red smiled. "I will! And he meant it."

Wordless Books: *The Snowman*

I love wordless books for sparking creativity; students create original stories as they turn the pages just as if they were watching a movie—simply magical! The students loved using the StoryKit application to create a story inspired by the wordless book *The Snowman* by Raymond Briggs. First students wrote stories and recorded the audio narration; next, they created artwork to go along with the story. Here are URLs for pages where you can view a couple of examples of works in progress:

<<https://vodcast.palmbeachschools.org/player/8R3SN>>

<<https://vodcast.palmbeachschools.org/player/P4KWN>>

You can find a complete StoryKit tutorial at: <<https://elementaryedtech.wordpress.com/2012/05/14/story-kit-and-the-ipad-its-not-just-a-toy/>>

Story Starters and Sharing Platform

Scholastic has a wonderful resource called Story Starters for generating ideas to help students develop their stories. The website allows you to select a theme such as Adventure, Fantasy, Sci-Fi, or Scrambler and then a grade range. After selecting a theme, students pull down a "slot machine" arm that spins four wheels and comes up with a random writing prompt they can use to get started with their story. To write and share stories we used Edmodo, a web-based platform that enables students to connect, collaborate, and share content. Here is the URL of the Story Starter website and an example of using the Edmodo application:

<<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/story-starters/>>

<<https://www.edmodo.com/post/444345587>>

Storybird

Storybird.com is a fabulous website of curated artwork by illustrators and animators; this art can be used by writers in telling their stories. Students use this application to access illustrations that they can insert into an original picture book, long-form book, or poem. When I taught a digital storytelling class at the local community college this past summer we began brainstorming ideas using the Scholastic Story Starters website mentioned above and then inserted pictures from Storybird. Here is a link to an original story by Sophia called "The Butcher and the Baker": <https://storybird.com/chapters/the-butcher-and-the-baker/?token=xd2u7px6g2>.

iMovie Trailers: Extreme Weather and Book Trailers

In my years as a school librarian I have done many projects using iMovie, a movie production program found on Apple computers. I regularly teach students how to create movie trailers using the iMovie app on our iPads and incorporate this application into many projects. The project that gives me the most pride is the Extreme Weather Research Project. Students were very engaged in researching information for their extreme weather movie trailers. When a local meteorologist Chris Martinez visited our school library, he was very impressed with the students' knowledge about extreme weather topics. Here is the URL of a documentary video of our Extreme Weather project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqUezpdcIVo>

We also love making book trailers about our favorite books. Here are URLs of some examples:

<https://vodcast.palmbeachschools.org/player/SHTL8>

<https://vodcast.palmbeachschools.org/player/D0HiU>

<https://vodcast.palmbeachschools.org/player/1N522>

<https://vodcast.palmbeachschools.org/player/6DV8I>

Claymation Project: Endangered Animals

We hired a company called The Director's Cut www.thedirectors-cut.ca to bring claymation into our school library where, as part of an in-house field trip, the students learned to create backgrounds and clay characters and to use stop-motion animation. Students first researched endangered animals and then created their claymation animations. This was indeed a magical day for the students and for me. Here is the URL of a documentary video of our experience: <https://vodcast.palmbeachschools.org/player/TL84W>.

E-Publishing with Apple's Pages: Red Goes to School

In this project we used EPUB, an open e-publishing standard compatible with many devices, to create e-books that would open in the iBooks app on our iOS devices. Learning how to use this e-publishing standard was a little bit more of a learning curve for me than some of the other projects, but it was worth the effort because students were able to experience the magic of opening up their own e-books on their iPads. To create the publications students created the images in Kid Pix, then used Apple's Pages to write the text. When students were finished with their stories, they exported them to the standard EPUB format. I was very fortunate to experience some real magic as part of this project when one fifth-grade student discovered she was a real storyteller. Before we began the e-publishing

project Tammy Lynn was extremely shy and would never allow anyone to see her work except me. When Tammy started her project and realized how awesome her story was going to be, she decided on her own to use a fictitious name so it could be published for the world to see (see figure 4). You can imagine her delight when the students opened up the iBooks app on the iPads and saw her book published there!

Until then, no one, not even Tammy, had a clue that a budding author was sitting in the classroom! Here is the URL for her story "Red Goes to School": <http://bit.ly/IIsGf6A>.

Share the Magic of Digital Storytelling

I hope you have enjoyed reading about my journey into digital storytelling and will try some of these ideas or create your own magical experiences for your students. I have created a VoiceThread where we can share ideas with each other. Join the conversation at: <http://voicethread.com/new/share/6976597/>.

All of these examples are tried and true, tested on real kids, and can be adapted to any topic or story idea. The common takeaway from each idea is that students will engage their imaginations when they can become publishers and not just consumers of stories.



Sally Smollar has served for the past nine years as the librarian at Plumosa School of the Arts, a Title I public

choice school in Delray Beach, Florida. A 2015 School Librarian of the Year finalist, Sally strives to "utilize library resources and access to technology to engage students in a variety of projects that encourage them to jump out of bed in the morning."