

Integrated Media Literacy Project

Creating a Mystery E-Book (Intermediate Grades)

Project Description

The goal of this project is to have students fully create a storybook from beginning to end, writing, illustrating and narrating it utilizing several web 2.0 platforms. Students can begin with Popplet (www.popplet.com) to brainstorm plot/character ideas, use Pixlr (<http://pixlr.com/>) to create illustrations, and finish their projects using Voicethread (www.voicethread.com), to upload illustrations and narrate the book. Students will learn about the components of idea creation, story writing, website design and web 2.0 digital citizenship.

Before the Project

- Research and Learning: Students should have a general idea of the story they would like to write. In this case, students were given a genre (mystery) and explored that genre in-depth. This required students gaining a solid understanding of the components of a story (characters, themes, and plot development from inciting incident, rising action, climax, and dénouement to conclusion) and also building an understanding of the conventions of mystery stories (including strong, identifiable characters and often a first-person narrator; some kind of mysterious or even supernatural event or crime that needs to be solved, and a protagonist to investigate; building of suspense and intensity towards the climax, and; surprises and twists in the story, especially at the end). Each genre has its own conventions, which can be studied and possibly subverted by student writers.
- Technical and Media Setup:
 - Students should have their own emails created, or teachers may want to create a class-set of Hotmail accounts (eg. schoolname.student1@hotmail.com). The email address is required for both Popplet and VoiceThread, and information should be stored in a master account by teachers.
 - Teachers should also review and experiment with these very easy-to-use websites in advance, to become generally familiar with their capabilities and limitations. For example. Popplet users can create up to 5 Popplet mind maps; however, if logged in on the same account, and working on networked computers, students can accidentally log-out their fellow users. We recommend that no more than 2 students share the same login information.
 - Teachers should also run through VoiceThread in advance to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the tool. For example, students can upload images, videos, documents and PowerPoint presentations, then can record narration to accompany each slide. However, the length of the narration becomes the length of time each slide appears in the presentation. Students can also leave comments on eachothers' presentations, but these comments (in text, video or voice recording) play/appear upon

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each slide, and lengthen the amount of time each slide remains on the screen. We recommend that teachers watch Voicethread's video tutorials to gather ideas for how best to use Voicethread for this and other projects.

- Students and teachers should ensure that they have voice recording capabilities on their computers (sound cards and microphones), or if this is not available, should instead briefly test the phone recording application within Voicethread.
- The teacher should arrange for computer equipment and group accordingly to availability. It is a good idea to warn the students in advance about bandwidth and other unexpected technological limitations to avoid frustration later on.

First Online Session

- The teacher can begin by introducing the class to Popplet, demonstrating how to create a popple, how to add text and images to the popple, and how to move it within the mind map space.
- Students should then login and begin to explore the software. Once the students have had enough time to explore, they can then start brainstorming their stories within Popplet, moving their popples to create a chart that illustrates the story arc they wish to create (including at least one popple for each of: inciting incident, rising action, climax, dénouement and conclusion). As students work to add text to each of these popples, describing the point-form story events occurring at each point.
- Teachers should review these points, offering feedback before students start writing the text that will form the story and VoiceThread narration.
- Teachers should also encourage students to pull inspiration from photos and scenery from Google images. Pictures can be added to popples (small boxes), but students should make sure to include the links/sources they acquired the images from.
- For homework, students can print their outlines if they don't have computer access at home, or can login to their Popplet accounts to complete the writing of their stories. Time permitting, students can also start thinking of illustrations to add that will accompany their written text; regular class time may be required for each of these steps.

Second Online Session

- Teachers can start this session by verifying that all students have completed their story text, and are ready to move on to the illustration phase.
- Teachers may then direct students to Pixlr (<http://pixlr.com/editor/>) to begin to create the images from their book. By the end of the session students should have minimum of 6 illustrations, over which they will be speaking their story's text.
- Students may also upload their own downloaded images taken from the web (for example, of a space background, or a country meadow, or a spooky castle) into Pixlr, and can then layer their own drawings over top of these images.

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- Students may also choose to add the text of their story to these illustrations (if the text is sufficiently short), or can add whole pages that just include the story text, to be interspersed with image-only pages. These design elements are important to decide at the start of the Pixlr session to save time in their creation.
- This session may need to be repeated, depending on student progress and the complexity of the story and design elements demanded by the assignment parameters. Students should have all illustrations complete before moving on to the next phase of the project.

Third Online Session

- Ensuring that all student illustrations and images are complete, teachers can start this session by introducing Voicethread to the students, logging into the account and clicking the “create” button to begin making a Voicethread.
- Teachers should continue by uploading a sample student image, and should discuss with students the various ways to “comment” on these images, which will build the narration of the story. These options include: calling, video conferencing, voice audio recording, text-based and drawing. In this case, assuming there are quiet places to record, and any kind of computer microphone available, using “Voice audio recording” is what will work best. If no microphones are available, telephone calling may also work.
- Teachers should demonstrate once how to upload the image and record the story narration.
- Students can then find quiet places in the room or school, upload their images, and record their story narration. Depending on students’ confidence and language abilities, this phase will take varying amounts of time to complete.
- Once students have completed their mysteries, the class can take turns watching them online. It should be noted that to export a project there is a small cost (approximately \$2-3 per project); however, online viewing remains free while the Voicethread account is open.
- To engage students after the project ask them the following discussion questions:
 - Were any of the digital tools you used difficult? Why or why not?
 - What problems did you come across in planning your story using digital tools? How did you solve them?
 - How could you use Popplet or VoiceThread in the future?
 - What did you learn about storytelling from using Popplet and VoiceThread?

Prepared by: The Cinematheque Education Department, Classroom Facilitator Jocelyne Leszczynski and Vancouver School Board Teachers Nathalie Davis and Jennifer Chu