



Crossing Borders with Digital Storytelling

Using digital storytelling to capture immigration stories is a powerful way for teachers to create opportunities for “empathetic moments” among students and shape their classroom environments. Telling stories of family immigration history – no matter how distant or recent – allows for common threads and variations of the immigration experience to be seen, heard, and reflected upon. Digital storytelling offers the advantage of authentic engagement to reach all learning styles as well as to teach technological skills while exploring connections and understandings to an important issue.

In this Common-Core aligned unit plan, teachers are guided step-by-step through a process for launching a digital storytelling project on immigration in their own classrooms. Recommended writing prompts, easy to use digital platforms, as well as resources and collaborative planning tools are shared and explained.

Objectives

Teachers will be able to:

- understand what a digital story is, why it's valuable, and the steps to develop one
- create their own digital story immigration history project
- learn tools & resources that support continued learning and collaboration among students and among teachers

Essential Question

How can writing digital stories create empathy and understanding about immigration?

Grades

K-12 (adapt [Digital Storytelling Elements and Common Core Narrative Writing Correlations for Grades 3, 7, 9-10](#))

Materials

- Computers and/or laptops with Internet connection
- [“Crossing Borders with Storytelling” Prezi](#) – This presentation covers how-to steps to creating your own digital story projects graphically as well as exemplars. Parts of this presentation you may choose to share with your students.
- [Digital Storytelling Resources and Examples Padlet](#) – Use this “virtual bulletin board” for a one-stop location to articles, tools, exemplars, and best practices for the classroom.
- [Teacher Digital Storytelling Collaboration Padlet](#) – Please add to what you learn and collaborate with other teachers by posting to this “virtual bulletin board.” Share great ideas and best practices about immigration and digital storytelling with other teachers.
- [Digital Storytelling Tool Comparison Chart](#) – This chart addresses some of the considerations when selecting two tools (Little Bird Tales and WeVideo) for your classroom.
- [5Ws Prewriting Questions](#) - Have student complete the questions from the perspective of a personal, familial, historical, or fictional immigration story.
- [Storyboard Organizers Collection](#) - Choose from among four different types of storyboard organizers to assist students as needed.

Crossing Borders with Digital Stories Exemplars

- [“My Grandfather Ben”](#) by Maya Young, Winner of the 2011 Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest (Little Bird Tales)
- [“My Grandfather Ben”](#) by Maya Young, Winner of the 2011 Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest (WeVideo)
- [“The Immigrant: From Immigration to Integration”](#) by Tim DaGraca, 2015 American Immigration Council Multimedia Contest Entry, The story of Valerie Bermudez’s the emigration from Colombia to the United States and her integration into a new society.

What is a digital story? It's a multimedia movie that combines photographs, video, animation, sound, music, text, and often uses a narrative voice. - *Roland, C. (2006). Digital stories in the classroom. School Art, 105(7), 26.*

Why is digital storytelling valuable for the classroom?

- Builds and strengthens reading and writing skills.
- Allows for exploration and creativity.
- Creates a space for listening, understanding, and empathy as students connect with each other and the stories.
- Allows for a multifaceted approach to understanding a complex issue.
- Develops presentation skills.
- Engages students and fosters an inclusive classroom environment.

For a comprehensive overview and digital storytelling resources, see our [“Crossing Borders with Storytelling” Prezi](#) and [Digital Storytelling Resources and Examples Padlet](#).

How to Create an Immigration History Digital Storytelling Project

1. Write the story

This is the most important part of creating an engaging digital story. Engage your students in the idea generating process of writing by using one or all of the following methods.

- a. Pre-Write: Ask questions. Peak Curiosity. Try writing with your students:

Webbing, Journaling, Diagramming, Drawing, Listing, Family Trees, Turn and Talks, etc.

Family Heritage & Immigration Probing Questions (some adapted from [NPR's StoryCorp Great Questions](#) list)

- What is your ethnic background?
- Where are your various family members from? Has anyone ever visited there?
- What traditions have been passed down and still exist? What traditions have been lost through the years?
- Who are/were your favorite relatives when you were a child or adolescent?

- Do you remember any favorite family stories that a specific family member loved telling?
- What is "American" about you?
- What does it mean to be an American? (see our [Celebrate America Creative Writing Contest for companion lessons](#) on this question)

For an organizer with reflective questions for student s to complete, please our [5Ws Prewriting Questions](#).

- b. Modeling: Write alongside students and/or show them exemplars of good writing that showcase the immigrant and family experience.

Recommended Models:

- "Flashcards" - Rita Dove
 - "Dusting" - Julia Alvarez
 - ["Eating Together"](#) – Li-Young Lee
 - ["Those Winter Sundays"](#) - Robert Hayden
 - ["In Colorado My Father Scoured and Stacked Dishes"](#) – Eduardo C. Corral
 - [Winners from our previous Celebrate America contest](#) open to 5th graders
- c. *Drafting:* As with any story, engage students in the revision process either one-on-one with you, in pairs, or as a class. This is also a good time to target a specific writing trait that students need to develop. See our focus questions in the [Digital Storytelling Elements and Common Core Narrative Writing Correlations \(for Grades 3, 7, 9-10\)](#) for revision and student writing development as correlated to Common Core Writing Standards.

2. Find Media

Amplify the stories with images and sound.

- a. For image searches, we recommend:
 - [Photos for Class](#) (G Rated, Creative Commons, Automatic Attribution)
 - [Library of Congress Prints & Photographs](#)

Tips:

- *Image searching takes a lot of time and some platforms even allow for digital drawing so you may want to limit slides for students you think will take a lot of time searching if it all is to be done during class time.*
- *Students might also benefit from saving their images with a phrase from their story so they remember what image connects with which line when it comes to build their story digitally.*

- b. For audio, we suggest using digital storytelling platforms such as the ones featured in this plan with built-in audio, so you do not have to be concerned with curating audio clips. Check to ensure your student computers have a microphone and voice-over recording capability.
- c. Option to create storyboards

Though not integral, some students may find it easier to create a storyboard to help them visualize their story. You could create a template or simply have them sketch images on index cards with captions from their story.

For organizers with multiple variations to meet student abilities, please see our collection of [storyboard organizers](#).

For a digital organizer, see [StoryboardThat.com](#)

3. Choose a tool to tell your story

No tool will be perfect. Every tool will take some trial and error. Your students can also learn from the experience of exploring new technology.

We have found the following two tools: [Little Bird Tales](#), [WeVideo](#) to be the most student-friendly digital storytelling platforms. Please use our [comparison chart](#) to help make a decision right for your classroom.

Some considerations when choosing a digital storytelling tool may include:

- How easy is it to use?
- What is the cost?
- How would it tell my student's story?
- Is it appropriate for my students?
- Can the stories be easily shared and/or published for further collaboration and learning?

4. Share your stories

Once your students have completed their stories, create a space for them to share and reflect upon them.

Some opportunities to share include:

- *Gallery-walk and listening tour* – have students circulate and view the digital stories on headphones and debrief on what they learned.
- *Student presentations* – allow the student audience to listen and then ask follow-up questions of the student-writer.
- *Website publication* – post to a class page or school website (as long as you have obtained parental/guardian permission).
- *“Oscar-like” awards ceremony* – host a friendly competition and allow students to pick categories for the “best” digital stories.
- *Community Viewing Event* – Invite parents, guardians, fellow teachers, administrators and community members for a digital story movie event with popcorn and soft drinks.

Ask reflective questions:

- What are some similar images that emerged after watching these videos?
- Which story did you find the most memorable? Why?
- What are some feelings that were expressed in the videos? How do you know?
- How did you connect with any of the videos you watched?
- How has your understanding of immigrants changed after watching these stories?
- What did learn about writing about your family’s immigration experience? What did you learn from listening to other immigration experiences?

5. Continue learning

a) Upload your own immigration story and share your learning and best practices with other teachers. If you find other great tips, tools, and resources about teaching immigration in the digital storytelling format, please post them on our [Teacher Digital Storytelling Collaboration Padlet](#), a virtual bulletin board. Also, feel free to email us at teacher@immcouncil.org

b) Find out what your students are left wondering and thinking about immigration. Search our [website](#) for [content-driven lessons](#) as well as [book reviews](#) to continue learning.

Common Core Standards

[Digital Storytelling Elements and Common Core Narrative Writing Correlations \(for Grades 3, 7, 9-10\)](#)

About Us

The [American Immigration Council](#) is a non-profit, non-partisan, organization based in Washington D.C. Our legal, education, policy and exchange programs work to strengthen America by honoring our immigrant history and shaping how Americans think and act towards immigration now and in the future. We strive to promote a better understanding of immigrants and immigration by providing [free educational resources](#) that inspire thoughtful dialogue, creative teaching and critical thinking.

Tell Us How You Use This Lesson in Your Classroom

We'd love to know how you have adapted this lesson or any feedback you want to share with us. Please send us a message at teacher@immcouncil.org

Please note that as a teacher, you are eligible for community grants, books for your classroom, free professional development, leadership opportunities, and more! Visit our website: www.communityeducationcenter.org

We welcome contributing book reviews and guest blog posts from educators. Stay connected by following our blog, [Immigration In and Out of the Classroom](#), and our twitter [@ThnkImmigration](#)