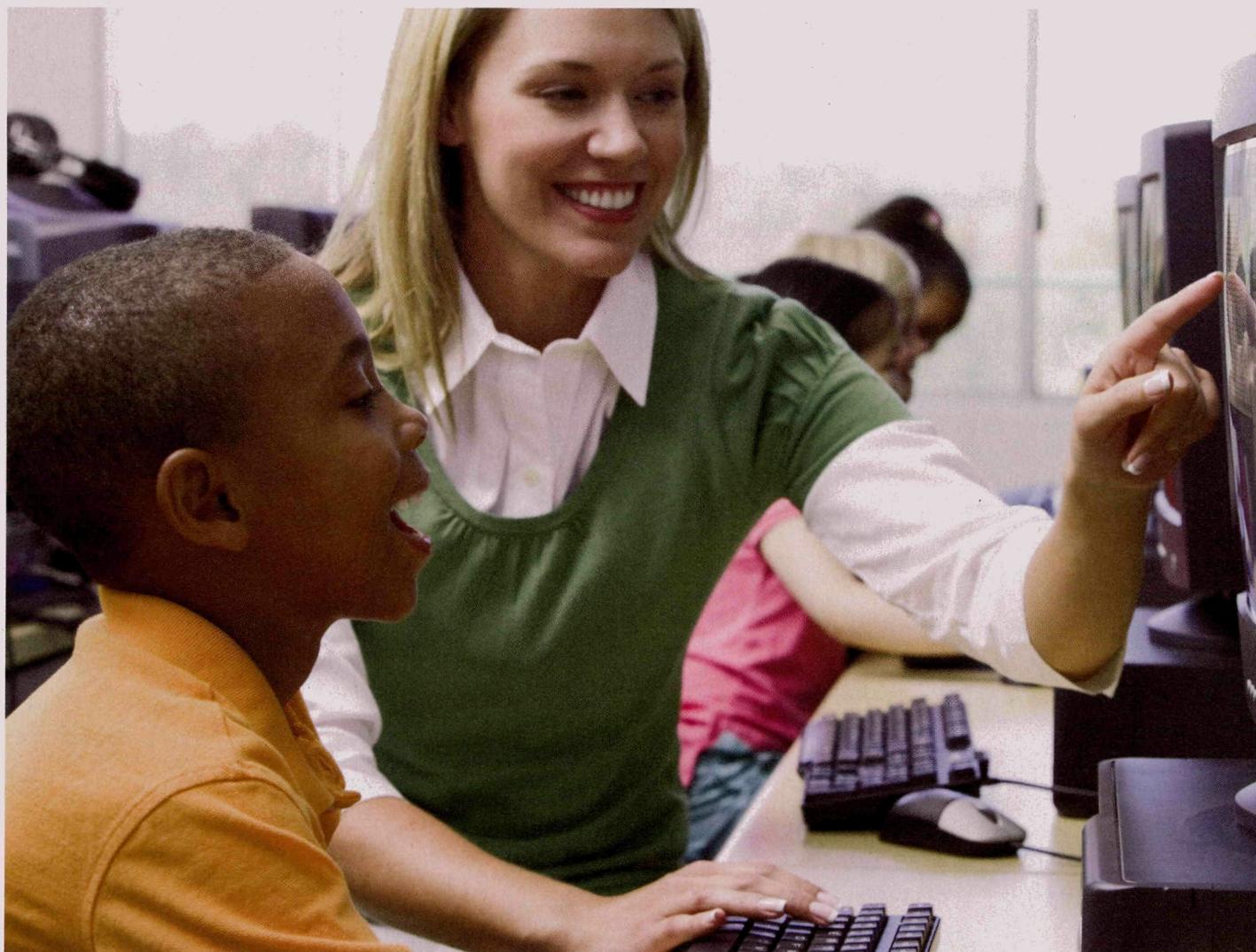


The Digital Media Writing Project: Connecting to the Common Core

Anne M. Butler, Lisa E. Monda-Amaya, and Haeny Yoon



Ms. Jones and her co-teacher Mr. Carter are beginning a new writing unit with their second-grade students. They've been struggling with teaching writing and feel that their previous lessons haven't engaged reluctant writers or those having difficulty meeting writing standards. Those students struggle with getting started and with organization. The teachers have discussed strategies to help them complete the writing activities, but they note that the students still seem to put in minimal effort and are completely disengaged. Abram, a student with learning disabilities, rarely participates in journal writing. When he does, his limited entries consist of a random series of letters. Another student who uses assistive technology for communication has only participated minimally in his planned writing activities.

The teachers would like to try incorporating a new digital narrative project they learned about during a professional development workshop. They are aware of the Common Core State Standards' heavy emphasis on technology and peer collaboration and feel that incorporating digital narratives could be an excellent way to offer meaningful instruction across the curriculum that would engage all of the students in their class.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), designed to establish consistency and set high expectations for all students (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010a), are intended to be "robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers" (CCSS Initiative, 2012). The standards are replete with terms that invite the use of technological innovation in instruction: *collaboration, interpretation, problem solving, self-expression, investigation, analysis, evaluation, and critical thinking*. Further, references to technology in the CCSS extend far beyond basic computer navigation skills. Technology is integrated throughout the standards at all grade levels, placing emphasis on the

use of a variety of digital tools, generating inquiry using digital content/resources, the use of technology to convey ideas, and the design and production of digital/multimedia projects.

Various standards specifically connect technology with literacy across the curriculum, particularly in the area of writing (e.g., "Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others," National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010b, p. 18). As technology use in classrooms continues to evolve, significant opportunities are afforded to pro-

Defining Digital and Media Literacy

Students currently engage in writing through a variety of digital formats: e-mail, social media, web site and Internet navigation, and online job applications. Digital writing instruction should include reading, writing, listening, and collaborating to address the changing literacy demands for students (DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, & Hicks, 2010). The National Writing Project defines *digital writing* as "compositions created with, and oftentimes for reading or viewing on, a computer or other device that is connected to the Inter-

Digital writing instruction should include reading, writing, listening, and collaborating.

vide all students with access to high-quality literacy instruction, while incorporating key aspects of universal design for learning (i.e., multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement; Rose & Meyer, 2002). Students with disabilities struggle with various aspects of writing ranging from knowledge of conventions, organization, or story elements (Saddler & Graham, 2007), to motivation and persistence in writing (Thomas, Englert, & Gregg, 1987), to using self-regulatory writing practices (Graham & Harris, 2011). Researchers whose work focuses on evidence-based practices for students who struggle with writing suggest that this population benefits from (a) explicit instruction in the writing process (e.g., organizing, editing, and revising; Gersten & Baker, 2001; Peterson-Karlen & Parette, 2007); (b) collaborative writing practices (Graham & Harris, 2011); (c) organizational writing tools such as graphic organizers; and (d) the use of technology including word processing, text prediction, and speech-to-text software (Wissick & Gardner, 2011). Digital media projects (DMPs) incorporate these strategies in a way that also dovetails with the CCSS emphasis on technology across the curriculum.

net" (DeVoss et al., 2010, p. 7). The CCSS refers to *multimodal strategies for writing*, which can include the use of print, recorded music, photographs, drawings, the Internet, and computer-based programs to create digital narrative stories.

Using DMPs to Teach Writing

The beauty of using a DMP to teach writing is that students quickly become engaged and excited about completing writing projects. Teachers can scaffold instruction by using various types of writing supports (e.g., graphic organizers), and students who struggle with writing report a level of ease at using their voice to tell their stories.

In applying digital media to narrative writing, consider the core story elements: (a) telling a story from a particular point of view, (b) emotionally engaging the audience, (c) overall tone of the story (i.e., humorous, sad, mysterious, or exciting), (d) using spoken narrative, (e) incorporating soundtrack music to enhance the story, (f) the role of pictures or video in telling the story, (g) use of creativity and originality, and (h) awareness of time and story length (Ohler, 2008). The overall aim is to incorporate elements of high-quality

Resources for Digital Media Projects (DMPs)

National Public Radio's "This I Believe" project has been collecting and airing personal essays by Americans since the 1950s. The web site includes a page designed for young people (<http://thisibelieve.org/essays/age/under18/>), with sample essays that can be read or played aloud and also with educator resources.

Storycorps is a similar project that collects personal reminiscences. Selected stories are available as animated shorts at <http://storycorps.org/animation/>.

Pics4Learning (<http://pics.tech4learning.com/>) and the New York Public Library's **Digital Gallery** (<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm>) have "copyright-friendly" images educators and students can use in creating DMPs.

FreePlay Music (<http://www.freoplaymusic.com/>) and **FindSounds** (<http://www.findsounds.com/>) assist students in locating music and sound effects they can use free of charge.

Photostory is a Microsoft free download (for Windows OS) that students can use to add sound and voice narration to a slide show format (<http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=11132>).

narrative writing and digital media. Stories are designed to be brief (3–5 minutes), so students can focus on elaboration of detail. There are strong collaborative and feedback components to the project, as well as multiple opportunities for revision. For students who have difficulty writing, this process provides structure and several opportunities for the teacher to address students' needs. Using graphic organizers, prompts, and multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement, the DMP is tailored to guide students through a productive and engaging experience in narrative writing. There are several online resources teachers can use in planning and carrying out a DMP (see box, "Resources for Digital Media Projects").

Even if teachers are unable to regularly incorporate DMPs in their classroom, they can apply the components of DMP in writing exercises throughout the year. If technology is unavailable in the classroom, the teacher can still incorporate aspects such as student voice recording and playing the stories to the class, like a radio broadcast. Students can use tools such as graphic organizers and *story spines* (Adams, 2007) that provide structures for writing. Story spines (see Table 1) provide prompts to help students to organize

their ideas and generate additional details.

Planning a Narrative DMP

The first step in implementing a DMP is determining what aspects of writing should be incorporated into the lesson. The focus of DMPs is on assuring that critical writing standards are met rather than helping students become more

tech-savvy. Ms. Jones and Mr. Carter found that their DMP addressed several CCSS second-grade literacy standards (see box, "Second-Grade Common Core State Standards Addressed by a Digital Media Project"). Aside from meeting the CCSS, DMPs also can readily incorporate goals and objectives for individual students.

After establishing overall goals and objectives, determine how students will tell their stories. The project should be viewed as an opportunity for students to share their voice by telling a story that matters to them, and by designing and sharing the story in a way that truly makes it their own. These approaches can be very distinct for different students (e.g., can a student record his or her story using an assistive communication device?).

In planning the narrative itself, teachers should address the following questions:

- How is the project embedded in the curriculum?
- How are the project components adapted for students with disabilities or struggling writers?
- What equipment will be needed to complete the project (e.g., iPods,

Table 1. Story Spine

The platform (setting up the story)	Once upon a time . . . Every day . . . One time . . . Each summer/week/month/year . . . Every now and then . . .
The catalyst (the problem)	But one day . . . But this time . . . Then something changed . . . However . . .
The consequences (how you build the story)	Because of that . . . (can be repeated) And then . . .
The climax (something in the story that changes)	Until finally . . . Then suddenly . . .
The resolution (transformation)	Ever since then . . . And the moral of the story is . . . And the funny thing was . . . I realized that . . . From that day on . . .

scanners, computers and software, the Internet, digital recorders, cameras, microphone)? Is that equipment accessible to all students? Logistically, how and when will all students access the equipment they need?

- What additional resources are needed (e.g., graphics, sound effects, music) to lend greater depth to students' narratives?
- How will students share their completed projects?

Just as with paper and pencil narratives, the digital narrative should contain a story core (i.e., character, problem, transformation or solution; Ohler, 2008) and writing elements (e.g., impact, point of view, and tone; Miller, 2010). Explicitly teaching these elements benefits all students, but particularly helps students with disabilities and struggling writers. Teachers should consider creating and sharing their own digital narratives to model each component of the project.

Teachers should consider creating and sharing their own digital narratives to model each component of the project.

In addition, teachers should discuss with students the components that distinguish digital from written narratives. A digital narrative tends to be a shorter story that quickly captures and maintains audience attention (Miller, 2010). Teachers should plan immersion activities to expose students to the power of a brief digital narrative, discussing with students how the author portrayed the story and how various techniques (e.g., music and sound effects) were used to elicit emotion.

Next, teachers should determine options for displaying the graphics of the story (illustrations, scanned images, capture images using a digital camera, copyright friendly images from the Internet). Along with images, consider possible options for sounds within the story. This includes allowing stu-

Second-Grade Common Core State Standards Addressed by a Digital Media Project

- Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.
- With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.
- With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.
- Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
- Ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics and texts under discussion.
- Ask and answer questions about what a speaker says in order to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.
- Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.
- Create audio recordings of stories or poems; add drawings or other visual displays to stories or recounts of experiences when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts, and feelings.
- Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., read a number of books on a single topic to produce a report; record science observations).
- Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.
- Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

(National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010b, pp. 19–23).

dents to select background music or available sound effects, or offering students the choice to use a digital recorder to create sound effects.

Finally, teachers should plan the supports needed by struggling writers (e.g., selection of writing partners, additional writing strategies) that will help them create their narratives. Although the steps for implementing the DMP are fairly structured, struggling writers may need explicit instruction in strategies to use when planning, revising, and editing compositions (Graham & Harris, 2011).

Implementing the DMP

Immersion Activities

For students to become familiar with the digital storytelling process and characteristics, they need to be

immersed in activities that expose them to narrative digital writing. Immersion activities provide concrete models of a DMP, helping students generate ideas about detailed narratives and story telling as well as helping them to understand the end goal. This type of modeling is particularly important for students with disabilities and struggling writers (Baker, Gersten & Graham, 2003). Teachers can use online examples of digital media to introduce students to these activities, and then engage in discussions about techniques authors used to relay their stories and emotionally engage listeners.

Additional immersion activities could include listening and discussing music samples. What types of emotions are elicited when listening to

music, as opposed to reading books? Food-for-thought questions along these lines can spark discussions about the power of narrative. Teachers also can use exercises that get students to think about topic brainstorming, or about how to generate details that describe or support the topic. For example, give students a prompt such as asking them to describe something they love (e.g., food, color, animal) using as much descriptive language as possible to illustrate their passion for that item. Students can share ideas with a peer and the peer can ask additional clarifying questions.

Designing the Narrative

The second step in the process of implementing the DMP is to assist students in planning the components of the story. Graphic organizers such as the story spine described in Table 1 can help students organize their writing and create a plan for their stories (Graham & Harris, 2011). Story spines are helpful when creating a digital media narrative story, because the aim is to be succinct yet still incorporate the elements of a good story.

Using a *story pitch* or *story core* (Ohler, 2008) also can help students focus on a way to hook listener/audience, sparking interest in the story. The pitch for a narrative has three key elements:

1. Character: the author (i.e., student) and whoever is also involved in the story.
2. Problem: a dilemma, conflict, or challenge.
3. Transformation: something that the character realized, a physical or emotional change, a lesson learned, a moral, or a turnaround.

Teachers can demonstrate a story pitch using current literature, situations in the classroom, or personal experiences. Concrete examples along with brainstorming and peer collaboration help students feel more comfortable selecting a topic about events that have occurred in their own lives that might lay the foundation for their own stories.

After establishing the story pitch, students write their ideas on a graphic organizer (see Figure 1). Partners share ideas and provide feedback about pitches that might make the most intriguing stories. Students ask clarifying questions about the pitches to help the author develop additional details to the story. Teachers should take time while introducing the concept of story pitch to discuss appropriate strategies for collaborating, questioning, and providing useful feedback to peers.

It can be helpful for the teacher to model developing a story pitch and then have students generate questions about that pitch. The teacher can discuss with students the importance of constructive feedback while also being respectful collaborators. Providing students with a list of prompts (e.g., “I like the way you . . .,” “I am confused by . . .,” “It would be exciting if . . .”) in advance can help them generate ideas for how to engage in feedback and asking clarifying questions.

The final step for initial planning activities is to have students develop a **Storyboard**. The storyboard is a series of pages on which the students sketch an idea for a graphic or describe what they would like each image to be, and then write the spoken narrative for each page. The goal of the storyboard is for students to organize their ideas and have a visual cue for each part of the story (see Figure 2).

Capturing Images and Creating Media

After storyboards are developed students can begin to capture the media that they will use in their narrative. Media elements include digital photographs, scanned artwork and photographs, soundtrack music, voice-over narration, sound effects, animation, and video (Ohler, 2008). Students can create their own music or sounds using programs such as Apple’s GarageBand or by recording sound effects like a baby crying or a door slamming.

Drafting and Revising

Once students have finalized the images and media to tell the story, they can begin the process of drafting.

Throughout the process the digital project should be fluid; in drafting, students will continue to add details and make decisions about how well their story flows, adjusting as needed. At this stage, students should develop a draft of sound and images with the story and edit the stories as needed. A critical goal at this stage is to structure opportunities for partner, group, and teacher feedback. Partners should ask clarifying questions about the story to help the author add details, or change or delete information. Students also might decide they need different images or media to better capture elements of the story.

Producing and Presenting

Once revisions have been made, students produce the final piece to present to the class. In the final stage, the students can use software such as Apple’s iMovie or Microsoft PhotoStory to record the story in connection with the images selected. Presentation software such as Microsoft’s PowerPoint and Apple’s Keynote also can be used to develop slide show digital stories (which can be converted into “movies”).

Based on the class discussion about types of music and sound effects that support storytelling, students then select music to accompany and set the tone of the story. PhotoStory and iMovie include readily accessible music samples that might be used. Students may also embed other copyright-friendly music.

Have students reread their work if necessary to ensure fluency, and provide opportunities for students to revise and edit during this stage. As writing is a fluid process, students can record the story, and may decide after hearing it play back that a section needs revision. Students who struggle with writing or reading benefit from being able to edit, revise, and re-record stories for fluency—as many times as necessary.

Don’t forget to end with a class celebration! Once the stories are complete, the class can have a special viewing party to celebrate each student’s writing.

Figure 1. Sample “Story Pitch” Graphic Organizer

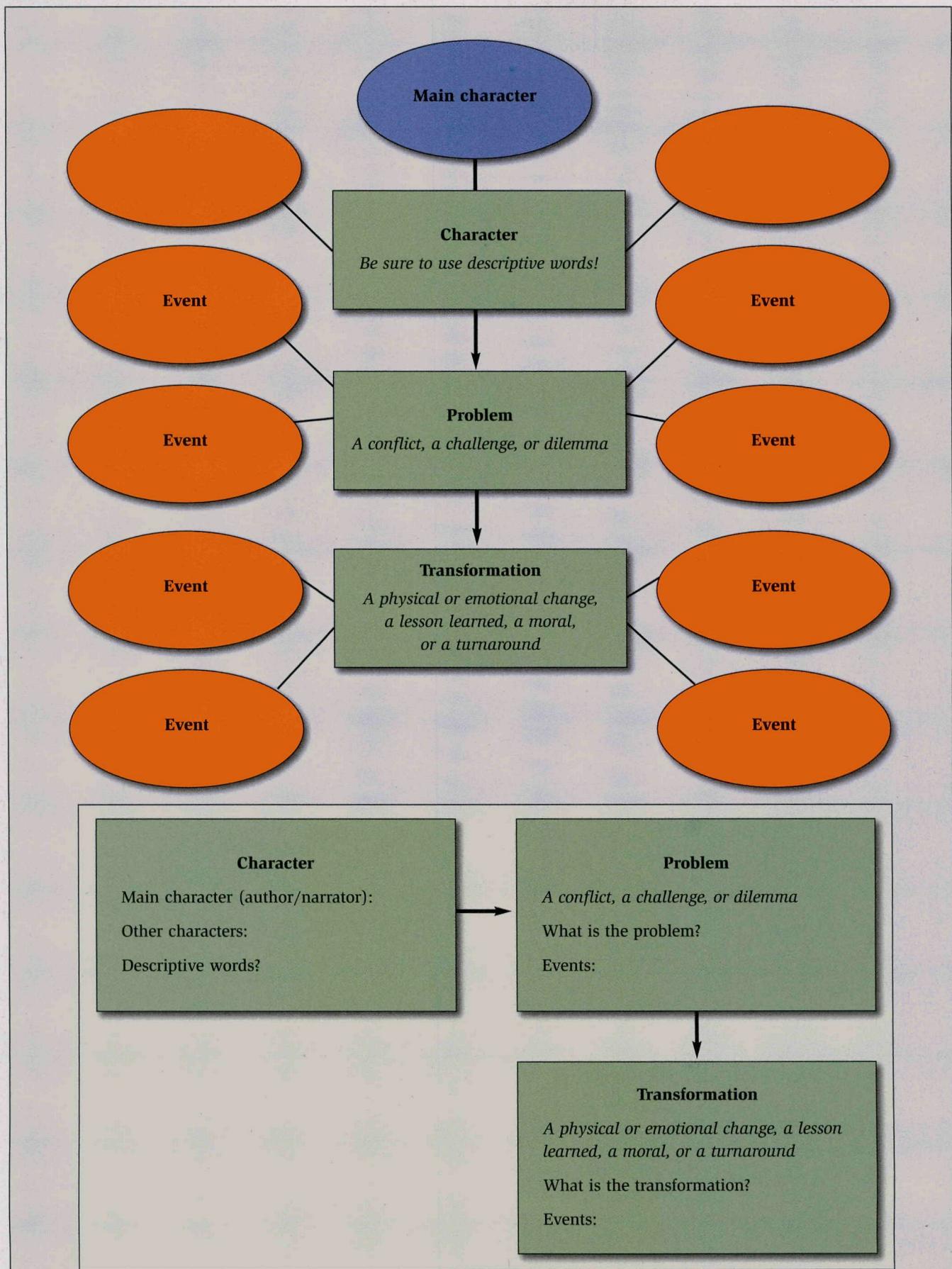


Figure 2. Sample Storyboard

Name		
STORY TITLE:		PAGE #:
Story Spine Section (Check one): Platform _____ Catalyst _____ Consequences _____ Climax _____ Resolution _____		
Sentence/Line from Spine:		
Graphic Sketch (What will you see on the computer screen?)		
Narration (What will you read into the microphone?)		
STORY TITLE:		PAGE #:
Story Spine Section (Check one): Platform _____ Catalyst _____ Consequences _____ Climax _____ Resolution _____		
Sentence/Line from Spine:		
Graphic Sketch (What will you see on the computer screen?)		
		
<p>I didn't notice that my shoe lace was upside down. Now it's stuck on the kick chain.</p>		
		

Note. Storyboard adapted from a form developed by H. Yoon and L. Sims, Center for Education in Small Urban Communities.

Applying Digital Media Writing Projects Across the Curriculum

DMP uses specific strategies that readily can be incorporated across content areas. The CCSS literacy standards in reading, writing, and speaking/listening apply not only to English and

language arts, but also to social studies, science, and “technical subjects.” Table 2 provides an example of how to implement a DMP in social studies.

The CCSS for mathematics emphasize mathematical reasoning, conceptual understanding, and practical applica-

tions. DMPs in mathematics should encourage students to apply mathematical concepts to real-world contexts. Ms. Jones and Mr. Carter decided to incorporate narrative writing in mathematics and have students create a DMP to tell a story from the point of view of

Table 2. Sample DMP in Social Studies

Step	Goal	Activity
1. Immersion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide students with a concrete example of a DMP Introduce components of writing Students become familiar with DMP and writing expectations 	The teacher reads the story <i>Faithful Elephants</i> (Tsuchiya, 1951), about animals at a zoo during World War II. Class discusses what made the story interesting and why they think the author wanted to tell the story. Teacher shares a DMP about a veteran of the war and teaches elements of persuasive writing.
2. Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan piece Organize ideas 	Students use graphic organizers to identify the main idea of a persuasive writing piece about World War II and a storyboard to begin organizing their ideas.
3. Capturing images and media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students collect and design images and media to use in the DMP 	Some students illustrate their story while others search for copyright-friendly images. Others may begin creating sound effects, recording them on a digital voice recorder.
4. Drafting and revising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put images and writing together Work collaboratively for feedback on the writing piece Revise the writing piece based on the feedback 	<p>Students put words and images together. The teacher provides a list of clarifying questions partners use when discussing the writing. Students think about what revisions, additions, or deletions might strengthen their stories.</p> <p>Students revise their stories and images. Some students look for new images; others add details to their illustrations; others write new sections to add clarity.</p>
5. Producing and presenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalize the piece using digital media Add additional media (i.e., music and sound effects) Share the DMP with the class! 	<p>Students finalize their persuasive writing pieces, putting images and media together with a voiceover.</p> <p>The class has a special viewing celebration where students present the final DMP.</p>

Note. DMP = digital media project.

a geometric shape. They began an immersion activity by reading *The Greedy Triangle* (Burns, 1994), which was followed by a discussion of geometric shapes and angles. After watching two geometric shape videos on YouTube, students worked in small groups to select a shape and create a fictional story about the kinds of problems that particular shape might encounter. As a group the students discussed their story pitches and completed a story spine describing the transformation the shape underwent and the lesson the shape learned. After drafting the story, they used a digital camera to capture images of the shape from around the classroom and school to accompany their story. The students

shared their stories in class and discussed the transformations. As a follow-up activity, students worked in teams to locate additional representations of the shapes in the classroom. Finally, Ms. Jones and Mr. Carter used a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the different shapes students used and the characteristics of their stories.

Final Thoughts

The CCSS are standards that establish high expectations for all students and connect technology and literacy across the curriculum. The DMP allows for teachers to systematically incorporate technology and media into literacy instruction. When planning the DMP, teachers can consider the unique needs

of the learners in their classrooms and address these needs. The use of graphic organizers and other writing strategies allows for all students to access the writing content. In addition, the DMP allows for students to gain confidence in their writing abilities.

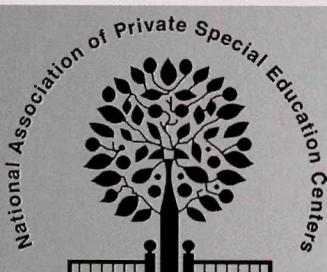
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- TEACHING Exceptional Children, Vol. 46, No. 1, pp. 6-14.
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