Upping Your Digital Storytelling Game

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I n the spring 2021 issue, we discussed the benefits of Vivian Paley's storytelling practice on language and literacy skills, social emotional development, creativity, and motivation. Traditional storytelling is powerful in its own right, but we would be remiss if we did not also mention the benefits of digital storytelling—the process of using multimedia tools to tell a story. A digital story can be something as simple as narrating a story over a single photo or as complex as a movie with audio and visual effects. Allowing children to use technology to tell stories can generate interest and motivation in content creation, ignite creativity, and support the development of twenty-first century literacy skills. Here's a look at some storytelling tools that can be used to elevate the voices of children and families across settings.

Preschool
Draw and Tell
https://apps.apple.com/us/app/draw-and-tell/id504750621
The Draw and Tell app allows children to create art with digital crayons, colored pencils, or paint. Users can adorn their creations with a selection of patterns, images, letters, and numbers and then record and save a narrative to go with it. Digital coloring sheets are provided for users who may not know what to draw or what story to tell. Narratives can also be recorded and saved.

Sesame Street Storybook Builder
https://pbskids.org/sesame/games/story-book-builder/
This app helps young learners create virtual stories by asking users to choose characters, settings, activities, and feelings from a predetermined set. The text for their adventure is visible on screen and words are highlighted as they are read aloud to the user. The resource is available on the PBS website and through the PBS KIDS Games app.

School Age
Book Creator
https://bookcreator.com/
In this web-based tool, students can create their own books from scratch or work from existing templates (e.g., photobook, newspaper) and themes (e.g., neon, fantasy). The platform allows students to add texts, images, shapes, and audio to their books that can be published online, downloaded as an ePub file, or printed as a PDF. It also allows the text to be read aloud with word highlighting and also read aloud in multiple languages.

Comic Master

http://comicmaster.org.uk/comicmaker/js/main.html

On this website, users are provided with written prompts guiding them through the graphic novel creation process. The project begins with a layout selection and follows with users dragging and dropping backgrounds, characters, speech/thought bubbles, captions, and other images into cells. Finished products can be saved and printed.

MakeBeliefs Comix

https://makebeliefscomix.com/

Users can create comics in multiple languages by dragging and dropping characters, emojis, objects, speech/thought bubbles, words, and backgrounds into comic strip panels. The option to record a voiceover is also available. If users need inspiration, the site provides picture and text prompts as springboards. Pieces can be saved, printed, and emailed to others.

My Storybook

www.mystorybook.com/

This web-based platform walks children through the digital storybook creation process beginning with the cover page. Users can enter a title and description in designated areas and can select scenes, items from different categories (e.g., animals, school), personal images, and people to adorn the cover. Additional pages can be added with a click and text and images can be added to identified spaces. Finished books can be saved to a personal library and printed.

PBS KIDS ScratchJr

https://pbskids.org/learn/scratchjr/

This is a coding app for children ages five to eight, featuring characters from a number of PBS KIDS shows like *Wild Kratts, Nature Cat*, and *Odd Squad.* Children select PBS characters and settings and snap together virtual coding blocks to make their characters move as they create games, tell stories, and solve problems. A facilitator guide and additional resources for hosting a Family and Community Learning (FCL) series around the app (see https://bit.ly/3sTNSEL) exist along with a workshop for educators (see https://bit.ly/3h9w0mE). Reach out to your local PBS station for more information and to inquire about collaboration.

Pic-Lits

https://piclits.com/

On Pic-Lits, stories begin with the selection of a photograph. Users can add meaning to their photo by typing text or dragging and dropping different parts of speech from curated lists. Creations can be saved, printed, emailed, and shared via social media.

Puppet Pals HD

https://apps.apple.com/us/app/puppet-pals-hd/id342076546

Users can select up to eight different characters, including a personal photo, to perform across five different backdrops on a stage. Characters can move, and backgrounds can be changed as a user records their fairy tale that can also be saved.

Storyboard That

www.storyboardthat.com/

Users can craft simple stories using a drag-and-drop interface. Various characters, items, shapes, and infographics can be inserted into an array of scenes. Character features and basic poses can be edited, and text can be added to speech bubbles and objects.

StoryJumper

www.storyjumper.com/

In this web-based platform, children can write a book using a story starter (e.g., *The Monster, All About Me*) or craft something completely original. Authors can drag and drop backgrounds and props, design characters, upload photos, and record voiceovers of their text. They can also add sound effects and background music. Co-authors even have the ability to work together on the same book if they are using different computers. When books are finished they can be saved in a private library, shared with friends and family, and made available to a larger network with parental permission. Downloading and printing books comes with a fee.

WeVideo

www.wevideo.com/

WeVideo is a web and app-based video creation tool. The free version provides users the ability to export five minutes of video per month, 1 GB of cloud storage, some templates and free music, voice and screen recording, and the option to create podcasts and GIFs. Novice users can create videos by dragging and dropping images into a storyboard template and adding audio. More knowledgeable users can edit in timeline mode which allows for greater customization. The website hosts a number of support materials including a getting started guide, how-to videos, a help center, and a blog for inspiration. **&**