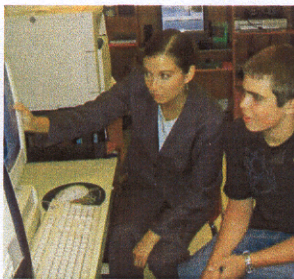


# CREATING DIGITAL WAR STORIES

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It is six o'clock in the evening, yet my classroom is still bustling. Students are clustered around computers poring over scripts, photographs, video clips, and audio files. Others are rehearsing narration and voiceovers for the twentieth time. They approach my desk with a rush of urgency: "Mrs. Dorman, is it okay if our movie is a couple of minutes longer than the rubric asks for?" and "Mrs. Dorman, did you know that our soldiers missed their landing drops on D-Day?"

I could be sitting down to a relaxing dinner, but I cannot pull myself away. I am experiencing the "teacher's high," the exhilaration when students are engaged, excited, and motivated to learn. Students rarely want to spend



The author, Jennifer Dorman, reviews student Jude Habib's digital documentary project.

more time than absolutely necessary on schoolwork or go beyond the minimum requirements of their research. But

mine do. I struck a balance between their obsession with tech gadgets and giving them valuable learning experiences. Instead of making my classes simply about history, I now challenge students to chronicle it through original digital documentaries.

## Digital Stories

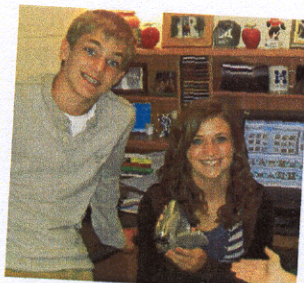
I have been teaching ninth-grade American history for nine years and infusing my teaching with digital media for the past seven. World War II is a favorite unit for my students and me because at the end of the lesson, students present their documentaries—digital movies they research, plan, and produce—demonstrating their learning.

Digital documentaries are one form

of the broader digital-storytelling genre. I have been using digital storytelling in my classroom for the past five years, even though I have only one computer with a digital video-editing program in my classroom. Since much of the editing software can be downloaded for free, students can work on most of the project outside of class. But my students are learning far more than how technology works in this lesson. I have found that when students have to recount history in story form—or especially using technology—it forces them to dig deeper for information, to think of personal connections to the historical event, and to articulate it in interesting ways. For example, some students will find personal accounts in their research, or they will interview their grandparents if it the subject is about something relatively current, such as World War II. They also retain the information better and have a deeper understanding of the consequences and ramifications of events in the war.

## The War in Pictures

At the beginning of the World War II lesson, I show two Discovery Education *unitedstreaming* photographs on my SmartBoard ("The Dropping of the Atomic Bomb on Nagasaki" and "Concentration Camp Inmates 2") and ask students to analyze what they see as the enduring aftermath of the war. As we investigate the causes and events of the war, I show various *unitedstreaming* photographs and videos. I make sure that the video segments I show in class are editable, so students can use those clips in their digital documentaries. I also build the skills students will need to create their own digital stories during the course of the year. This process, which uses several *unitedstreaming* resources, includes developing stories from one image ("The Arizona Burning After Being



Students Isaac Wood and Kristin Bonacum take a break from digitizing and importing their captured *unitedstreaming* video. They then edited the video for their project.

Attacked at Pearl Harbor"), creating stories from a sequence of images ("Hitler with His Troops," "France Surrenders to Germany," "Concentration Camp Inmates 1," "Roosevelt Asking Congress to Declare War on Japan," "The Ruins in Stalingrad," "American Troops Coming Ashore at Normandy," "Germany Surrenders"), and producing original narrative with a free audio-editing software called Audacity for a video clip with the audio stripped. For this, we used segments from the "Witness: Voices from the Holocaust."

After students have a fairly comprehensive understanding of the war, they select a topic to research. I keep a website of online references for students to access during their research: ([www.cbsd.org/holicong/jendorman/curriculum\\_internet\\_links.htm](http://www.cbsd.org/holicong/jendorman/curriculum_internet_links.htm)). With their stories in mind, students search for images and editable *unitedstream-*

*ing* video segments from among the many I download. My students have used segments from two dozen videos as well as hundreds of images from *unitedstreaming*'s Image Library to craft their digital documentaries.

## Citing Your Resources

As students research, I constantly reinforce that they must record source information and copyright licenses on their annotated bibliography. This is a very important part of the project.

While the students understand what plagiarism is, they find crediting information from the Internet and other digital media murky. They can forget that a downloaded picture or audio file must be cited. I have them create an annotated bibliography, a two-column table that includes a thumbnail image of all visual media in one column and the accompanying citation and copyright information in the other. This process reinforces that all forms of media are intellectual property and forces students to consider copyright and fair use as they are researching.

Students end their World War II digital-documentary experience with an enduring understanding of the political, economic, scientific, and social forces that have shaped our world. The combination of using technology and digital media to create documentaries has motivated my students in ways that other learning experiences cannot begin to match and that I could scarcely have predicted.

## Working with Editable Clips

To find editable clips on the *unitedstreaming* website, click on Advanced Search and then check the Editable Titles box when searching for your specific topic. Once you download the clip, you can edit it to fit your curricular needs.