

Stories of Culture and Place

Blending oral, written and digital storytelling in a unique approach to art, literacy and content exploration

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DVD of student performances available on request

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Overview

Stories of Culture and Place is a program that helps students create, illustrate and perform original stories about their cultures and the places in which they live. It uses a cross-curricular, project-based approach to learning that addresses a number of content and skill areas simultaneously. Students develop oral and written literacy skills. They research geography, local history and cultural values so they can apply their research results to the creation of an original story. They learn project planning skills that are transferable to other activities. They create original artwork to support their stories. They learn about using computers and other digital technologies to help tell their stories. And they develop the self-confidence and social skills that come with performing before an audience.

The final product is a DVD of student performances in which their original artwork is added to their recorded performances during post production using the chroma key editing process. The result is students performing original stories in front of original artwork.

The Storytelling Process

Stories of Culture and Place uses the following story development and telling process:

1 - Students research issues and ideas related to their culture and place within the context of an academic area, such as geography, social studies or language arts. Their research becomes the basis of an original story.

2 - Professional storytellers lead students through a story creation process that uses story mapping, the writing process and other literacy development techniques.

3 - Professional storytellers teach students how to use a number of effective storytelling techniques in order to prepare them to perform in public.

4 - Students create original artwork on regular size paper (typically 8½" X 11½"). Their artwork is added to their recorded performance during post production using the chroma key editing.

5 - After writing and rehearsing their stories, students perform them before an audience in front of a “chroma key” background, like the weather announcer uses.

6 - Performances are video recorded; students are part of the audio/video team and are involved in the recording process.

7 - During post production, student artwork is scanned and “slid behind” student performances to serve as story backgrounds. A final DVD is created and distributed to students and their families, as well as other interested community members. Students are as involved in post production activities as time and circumstances allow.

School Requirements

Typically, a project requires the following to be successful:

1. **A committed teacher.** The project requires a classroom teacher who is willing to spend time with the project. Typically, this involves helping students research, write and practice their stories, as well as create the background art needed for the final production. Time commitments vary from project to project, but usually involve 1–2 hours per day over the course of a week. If students are involved in post production, then more time is required.
2. **A performance venue.** This can be makeshift. Ideally, the background is a wall that is painted green for chroma key editing purposes. Otherwise, a portable green background cloth can be used. The performance venue also needs good lighting. The better the lighting, the better the quality of the DVD. The venue should be large enough to accommodate the anticipated audience. While students usually perform in front of peers, parents and the public are always welcome.

For more information, including an explanation of the chroma key editing process, read about digitally enhanced oral storytelling (DEOST) at www.jasonohler.com/deost. A sample DVD is available upon request. To contact the program, email Dr. Jason Ohler at jason.ohler@uas.alaska.edu.

We look forward to talking to you about how to adapt **Stories of Culture and Place** to your unique school environment.

Guidelines for artwork

Observing the following guidelines for creating background artwork will help the final DVD production greatly:

1. Use regular paper. 8 ½ X 11 works just fine.
2. Turn the paper on its side. This better resembles the actual shape of a TV or computer monitor, allowing the artwork to completely fill the background.
3. Try to make sure that artwork contains larger objects created in vibrant colors, rather than smaller objects done in light colors. These show up a lot better.
4. Place the main object in the artwork off center. This is because performers tend to stand in the middle of the stage when they perform, blocking whatever is behind them. Placing an important character or object off to the side a bit will keep this from happening.
5. Have students move as they tell their stories. This allows the entire piece of artwork to be seen.
6. Make sure storytellers don't wear anything that is close to the color of the chroma green used in the background. Otherwise the artwork they create will show up on their clothes!