Six Elements of Good Digital Storytelling

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"There is a great deal to consider in constructing a digital storytelling script. While there are endless approaches to crafting stories, depending on purpose and audience, at least six elements are considered fundamental to this particular storytelling style."

① Living Inside Your Story

The perspective of each story is told in first person using your own storytelling voice to narrate the tale. You share through the story who you are, what you felt, and what this event or situation means for you in such a personal way that it acts as a "conduit" for viewers to engage in their own very real and emotional experience. Rather than a detached telling that this happened and that happened, viewers experience you living inside this story. Your story is shared through the heart, NOT the head.

② Unfolding Lessons Learned

One of the most unique features of this specific digital storytelling style is the expectation that each story express a personal meaning or insight about how a particular event or situation touches you, your community, or humanity. A good story has a point to make, a moral conclusion, a lesson learned, or an understanding gained. The author develops a personal connection to the story facts by answering "so what!" Each story needs to have a point that is revealed in the end either implicitly with the media or stated explicitly with words on how the topic matters.

③ Developing Creative Tension

A good story creates intrigue or tension around a situation that is posed at the beginning of the story and resolved at the end, sometimes with an unexpected twist. A hook is created to intentionally draw the viewer into wondering how it will unfold and how will it all end. What does the title mean? Who is that little girl? What will happen to the fish? What does the young girl discover when she leaves home? Does Amber ever have friends? What is the meaning of having a life without a father?

The tension of unresolved or curious situation engages and holds the viewer until reaching a memorable end. Pacing is an invisible part of sustaining story tension as we know so well from Hitchcock films.

Pacing uses starts, stops and pauses, letting us wonder what will happen next and how will it be resolved. Viewers always enjoy a surprise turn-of-events as long as a few clues are tucked into the storyline.

④ Economizing the Story Told

A good story has a destination — a point to make — and seeks the shortest path to its destination. Each digital story is no more than 3-5 minutes based on a written script that is no more than one (1) page or five hundred (500) words.

The art of shortening a story lies in preserving the essence of the tale — using the fewest words along with images and sound to make your point. By holding clarity about the essence of the story, the additional narrative that would normally be part of storytelling can be pared down.

⑤ Showing Not Telling

Good stories use vivid details to reveal feelings and information rather than just saying something was tall, happy, scary, or difficult to do. It was a dark and stormy night does not have to be said in the script. Unlike traditional oral or written stories, images, sound, and music can be used to show a part of the context, create setting, give story information, and provide emotional meaning not provided by words. Both words and media need to reveal through details rather than named or simply stated.

⑥ Developing Craftsmanship

A good story incorporates technology in artful ways demonstrating craftsmanship in communicating with images, sound, voice, color, white space, animations, design, transitions, and special effects.

All media elements are selected to illuminate the meaning of the tale rather being bells and whistles that become distracting, overused, or misused or simply used to illustrate what is being presented.

Good craftsmanship creatively combines media elements to convey significant meaning rather than being used for "decorating" the story. Ask whether your media resources are decorating, illustrating, or illuminating.

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