What is a digital story?

A digital story is a short digital video that combines your voiceover, photos, video clips, and music to tell a true story from your own life.

How are they different?
* The stories are short. Most stories are between 1–5 minutes.
* They are told in first person point of view.
* Digital stories use mostly still photos, unlike shooting a film or video, which makes it a lot easier to finish your project in a short amount of time.

Make your own media
Most of us are surrounded by media messages everyday. We watch TV, listen to music and the radio, and use the internet. But it’s not very often that we get the chance to put our OWN message out into the world, and it’s even less often that we get to do it in the same visual language used for television, movies, and advertisements.

Think about it: It’s like being able to read but not knowing how to write. Digital storytelling teaches you the language of the media and lets you speak it. It’s your chance to get your voice heard.

So, why does MY voice matter?
Well, for one thing, we all have interesting stories and ideas about our lives, and digital storytelling is one way to creatively express them. Of course there are lots of ways to express your ideas, so why make a digital story? When you share your story, you reach out to others who may benefit from knowing they are not alone. Sharing your story can inspire others to tell theirs, and that can help change the world.
DIGITAL STORYTELLING FOR YOUTH

How do I make my story?

You will make your whole story during the workshop. Most of our workshops are three or four days long, with a group of 8–10 people.

Day 1: Story Day
On the first day of the workshop, we spend time talking about how to make a digital story, how to choose what story to tell, and how to start writing. Then there’s time for you to work on your writing and edit it with the help of the facilitators and other people in the workshop.

Day 2: Picture Day
The second day, you will record your voice and learn how to use the photo and video editing software. You will also collect images: photos, drawings, and anything that can be scanned such as old letters and newspaper clippings.

Day 3: Movie Day
The third day is spent putting all the parts of your story together in the video editing program. And at the end of the day, there’s a screening to show off everyone’s work. Plus you get to take home a DVD of your story to show your friends and family, or even post it on the internet for all the world to see (if you want).

What can I do before I get there?
Watch some stories
Think about what story you want to tell
Write your script
Collect images
Finding an Idea

Everybody has a story to tell. Sometimes we are so used to what we see in the media that we don’t think our stories are good enough or exciting enough to make into a digital story. But, as we all know, it’s the little things in life that count – so go ahead and write a story about why your best friend is important to you, or why you hated the first day of 8th grade.

Here are some tips for how to pick a story to tell and how to start writing:

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words
One way to start is to use a photo you have that you really like. What’s so great about that photo? What’s happening in it? What does it remind you of? Is there a story behind it? Sometimes people like to use two photos to write; find two photos of you at different times in your life and then write about what has changed and how and why.

I Remember When...
Think about what you’ve experienced in your life. Is there an adventure you’ve had? A big decision you had to make? Have you lost anyone who’s important to you? Is there a challenge or obstacle you’ve overcome? Or a place that you will always remember?

Don’t Think, Just Write!
If you’re stuck, one thing that can help is to just start writing something, anything really, and see where it takes you. There’s some writing prompts that we like that might lead you towards a story. Try picking one of these and just write for five or ten minutes, anything that comes into your head. Then read what you wrote and see if it reminds you of a story you could tell.

Tell me about a first time.
Write a letter to someone you can no longer talk to, thanking them for something. When did you know you weren’t a kid anymore?
Writing tips

Okay, now that you have an idea, how exactly should you write about it? Here’s some things to think about as you write.

Think small!
You’ll have much more luck making a digital story if you pick one small story to tell than if you try to tell your entire life story. After all, your final story will only be about 2–3 minutes. Try to make your story as focused as possible on one or two key moments that help us understand the most important part of the story. Make sure to use “scenes” to tell the story. When and where, exactly, did something happen? Bring us to that place.

Make it real.
Be as honest as you can. Write about something that really matters to you. When you tell a story from your heart, other people listen. Pretend you are writing in a diary – when you are done letting the story flow you can delete anything that seems too personal to share.

Sound like you.
Making a digital story is different from writing for school. When you write your story, try to write it just the way you would say it. Imagine that you are talking with your friends and write it in those same words.

Tell what happened.
Try to remember a scene from the story you want to tell. Write out exactly what happened. Use details. Where were you? Who was there? What did they say? How did you feel?

During the workshop, we’ll spend a lot of time working on your story and your writing, and we’ll talk more about what makes a really great story.
Collecting images

The other key thing to do to prepare for the workshop is to start collecting images for your story. Maybe you have photos and images already that will fit your story really well. But maybe you don’t. Either way, it’s a good idea to spend time thinking about what kinds of images you want to use to tell your story.

That’s what makes a digital story so different than just a piece of writing: the pictures and words work together to tell the story. The words can tell a lot, but the pictures also add details and meaning to your story.

Ideas to think about
Can you create artwork like a drawing or a collage that would tell your story?
Do you have old photos of you, your family, or friends that fit your story?
Do you have letters or postcards that will help tell your story?
Is there a newspaper story that you could scan?
Do you want to take some new digital photos that would tell your story?

Be creative
When you think about what images to use, remember that they don’t have to just show exactly what you talk about in your voiceover. You can also use pictures to set the mood of your story, add more details, or create a certain feeling.

Think about what themes you have in your story. If one theme of your story is loneliness, what kind of pictures could you use to show that? One way to show it might be a picture of a person sitting all alone in the corner of a room. But maybe you could also show loneliness by using a picture of an empty field on a gray day, or a rainy window, or a street with no cars.

Map it out
If you start thinking about these image choices right from the beginning, you will have an easier time in the workshop when it’s time to put it all together. Check out the sample storyboards below to help you get started.