

RAINBOW FAMILY TREE

HOW TO MAKE A DIGITAL STORY

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HOW TO MAKE A DIGITAL STORY

■ what are digital stories?

Digital stories are short films, normally 2-3 minutes long. They are composed of photos, drawings, music, sound effects and, most importantly, a personal narration. Sometimes they are reflective, about a memory or a transient mood. Sometimes they are a call-to-action, made because the storyteller really wants to get a difficult point across.

■ why would I want to make one?

Witnessing the impact your story has on an audience can be one of the most empowering experiences of your life. Really being heard (often for the first time) can be transformative...

Imagine the tears in the eyes of a loved one when they finally understand what it is you've been trying to tell them for years... imagine the shy young person who seeks you out after a screening to tell you how relieved they are to discover that they're not alone...

■ how do I make one?

Over a month long period, both in person and online, you'll be guided through the process of writing your story, assembling 'assets', capturing them and compiling them in a time-line, adding music and sound effects... and finally watching the finished product on DVD...

If you're a bit techno-phobic, conquering the technology is immensely satisfying. And, don't worry, you'll have plenty of support!



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■ what will I need?

- ✓ **A computer** either a PC or Mac
- ✓ **Some free software** MovieMaker for PC and iMovie for Mac – we'll help you download and install what you don't have
- ✓ **Some time** three workshop days and 3 - 7 hours 'homework' during each of the two week blocks between workshops
- ✓ **Some energy** telling a really honest personal story can be a big thing... it can be confronting and tiring, but also very rewarding

■ things to prepare:



Some ideas... During this workshop we are asking you to explore **stories** on themes around homophobia and acceptance; being an 'ally' or 'champion' for a cause; gender or sexual identity; and unconventional definitions of 'family'...

The **script** you will write during the first stage of the workshop will ideally be about 250 words in length... it should fit on a 4x6 index card. Start with a much bigger piece of paper for brainstorming first!

Be prepared to **share your ideas** with the other storytellers in the group. Offering constructive feedback will help others in the story circle 'finesse' their tales too...

During the second stage of the workshop you'll start thinking about what images, sounds and music you'll need to help tell your story. These are called **assets**. Some people find that ideas for stories actually come to them as they start sorting through photos that they might like to bring along to the workshop.



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■ creative things to think about:

- ① **What** is my story really about?
- ② **Who** am I making my story for?
- ③ **How** do I want the audience to feel after viewing it?

If this story is about a specific time, person or incident in your life you may have already told the story to other people many times. Is there another new way of telling it? Or another way of looking at the incident? This is sometimes called '**point of view**'.

When is the best point in the story to start telling it? You can choose when and what to reveal to your audience... tension and surprises can help engage the audience. This is sometimes called '**narrative structure**'.

What kind of **tone** do you want the story to have? Sad, funny, angry, ironic? Sometimes telling a sad story in a funny way can have a bigger impact than a story where the emotion is overladen. Similarly, a subtle appeal for understanding can be more effective than a soapbox lecture.

What kind of energy best suits your story? Lots of images flashing past quickly will have a very different impact to a series of slow dissolves. This is sometimes called '**pacing**' or 'cutting style'.

Finally... the K.I.S.S acronym... otherwise known as **Keep it Simple, Stupid!**
A short story, economically told with few words and images can leave the audience with lots to think about!



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■ step-by-step:

During the workshops you'll be provided with manuals and technical support that will help you learn to:

- ✓ Digitise story elements or 'assets'
- ✓ Scan images
- ✓ Capture pictures from your camera, phone or the web
- ✓ Capture video
- ✓ Record a voiceover
- ✓ Capture musical soundtracks (or make your own)
- ✓ Capture sound effects (or make your own)
- ✓ Add transition and motion effects
- ✓ Add titles and captions

There are also plenty of online tutorials and support forums that can offer extra instruction – we'll give you the links...

During the 'homework' periods between workshops there'll also be a couple of opportunities to check in with the group on the 'Rainbow Family Tree' forum. You'll get creative and technical support from facilitators and the other group members... and some guidance as to *'what you should have done by now'* (otherwise known as deadlines!)



■ digital editing overview:

Regardless of whether you're using MovieMaker, iMovie or a programme that allows you to edit sound or images, there are some basic underpinning principles in common.

set up

When you first 'boot' the software (normally by double clicking on an icon) you'll often be prompted to name your project and nominate where you would like it to be saved. For this workshop you'll be saving your project onto your USB drive.

file management

Right from the beginning, organise your 'assets'. These are all of the 'raw' digital files you'll be importing into the computer for your story (photos, music, sound effects, voiceover narration). You should save your assets in the separate folders on your USB drive.

desktop display

Get familiar with the look and feel of the software program you are using.

Often there will be several windows. Sometimes there's a space for all of the assets you are using to make your story and another space where you can view the story as it comes together. Sometimes there's a 'timeline' where you can see a visual representation of each shot or sound, laid out in order, left to right.

Toolbars will offer you a range of functions, including basic cutting and, often, simple visual effects like dissolves. Different programmes offer different 'navigation' – often you can drag and drop assets or effects from one window to the next.



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import/capture

You'll need to get your assets into the computer. For example you may have some photos - you'll probably need to scan them and save them as jpegs or tiff files.

If you have photos already saved on your computer you'll need to save copies onto your USB drive or the computer won't be able to find them later. You will also need to put your music files (mp3, wav or aiff files) that you've found online on the USB. Remember, all your assets must be 'copyright free'.

You can bring all sorts of assets into your project from all sorts of places (including your mobile phone or camera). Most common file formats will be 'readable' by most of the software programmes we are using, however if there are problems, you may need to consult an on-line trouble shooting guide and/or a facilitator for more specific guidance.

timeline

Timelines vary in complexity from one programme to another. They always display 'clips' (visual representations of your assets) in running order from left (start) to right (finish). Normally images are displayed in the upper layers and sounds in the lower layers. Captions, titles and visual effects are often on the uppermost layer.

Once you have a series of clips in a timeline you have the start of a 'rough cut' or 'work in progress'.



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work in progress

You should save your 'rough cut' every 10 minutes or so (or set up the programme so that it saves automatically). Each new version of the project overwrites the previous version. If you have several ideas about how you'd like your project to take shape and you want to save different versions, you should give them different names or add a tag like v1 after the name.

When you take your USB drive home you should be able to open the most recent saved version of the project by booting the edit software. Sometimes you'll need to tell the computer where to find your project and the files of assets (i.e your USB drive).

During the periods between workshops you'll be able to log onto the *Rainbow Family Tree* forum to ask technical and creative questions of facilitators and other participants.

effects

Visual effects can be anything from a 'dissolve' to a 'page turn' depending on the software you are using. Think about the impact you want to have on your audience. You may also consider using sound effects (alarm bells, birds chirping etc) to create mood. Photos can be 'cut out' and placed on different backgrounds; handwritten captions can be superimposed over images.

In many cases you'll need to use a different software programme to achieve these effects. For example 'Audacity' allows you to compile several layers of sound that you can then export as a single file, ready to import back into your main project. 'PhotoPlus' allows you to manipulate images that you can then import into your main project. In these cases, you'll need to save both the original file and the 'manipulated asset' in separate places on your USB drive. Label everything clearly so both you and the computer will be able to find what you're looking for later.



exporting your finished project

When you are happy with your project you should give it a final title and save it as *yourprojecttitle_final*. This is still a file you can come back to and alter later if you wish. However, for screening purposes, you will also export your final project as a single consolidated file (more than likely a Quick-time Movie) that can be saved to DVD or USB drive for play back on most systems. See the manual specific to your software programme for detailed instructions.

■ in conclusion...

Most importantly - have fun with your project! If you get stuck – ask for help! If you're able to offer advice to another participant – do so!

Whilst there are moments when you may feel overwhelmed by what you're undertaking... be prepared to surprise yourself. Nothing beats watching your finished project with a captive audience...



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