Guide to Making a Digital Documentary

Digital Documentary: A movie, slideshow, or radio show that presents objectively an important social, political, scientific or historical subject in a factual or informative manner. [modified from wikitionary.org]

Choose a topic
* Find a general topic or subject for the movie, slideshow, or radio program i.e. global warming.
* The topic could be a unit from your curriculum, or a smaller lesson.
* Effective digital work is founded in curriculum power standards, vocabulary, and important concepts.
* Determine prior knowledge by having students brainstorm or perform a quickwrite around the important aspects of the topic. Use the results of the brainstorm to determine the foci of students' projects.

Narrow the topic by creating an essential question and focus questions.
The goal of any research based project is to have students learn to ask researchable essential and focus questions. Teacher created questions can model for students how to ask essential questions and the three types of focus questions. As you move toward student-generated questions, have students answer the same essential question but let them choose from a list of teacher created focus questions. Eventually let students brainstorm focus questions that revolve around the essential questions.

* Essential Questions:
    o Are broad questions
    o Have no simple or obvious answer
    o Are answered after soundly researching the focus questions
    o Are not answered with one word or one sentence
    o May require the student to take a stand when answering
* Focus Questions
    o Focus questions are used to guide research
    o These questions are more narrow than essential questions
    o These lead to definite answers
    o When answered, focus questions lead to an answer for the essential question
    o Think of these three types of focus questions:
        * *What questions*– get at the important facts
        * *So What questions* – ask what the facts tell us; probe how the facts relate to the EQ; ask why the facts are important to know
        * *Now What questions* – ask what has been learned; look at what are the next steps; investigate the implications of what has been learned; often lead to the next project

Fill out a contract

Having students or groups of students create and sign a contract can create a foundation for organization and differentiation. A well organized contract can serve as the day to day lesson plan for students during the research and creation processes. The contract can guide assessment and feedback and can be a vehicle for differentiation through the listing of specialized learning goals. An effective contract is one that is drawn up based on a student's strengths and needs. The contract should include:

- Power standards and individual learning goals
- Essential question
- Focus questions
- Due dates
- Type of medium
- Anticipated audience

Do good research to gain answers to questions

The research part of any project can be time consuming and messy. Students often find themselves following pathways that are unproductive and may need direction in order to find more effective approaches. Teacher generated research sources can streamline the process and model appropriate sources. Your teacher web page can offer a workable method for providing useful URLs, suggested texts, and lecture notes.

Good research:
- Is focused on finding answers to focus questions
- Requires many different kinds of sources
  - Books and periodicals
  - Internet sources (best if provided by teacher)
  - Primary sources — (materials created at the time of the event being studied)
  - Experiential sources — (student created work such as a science lab, painting, wood working project, interview…)
- Follows established criteria established by teacher.
- Honors the intellectual property of others with proper citations.
- Requires that students use critical thinking skills to determine reliability

Write: (Organize the documentary by choosing one of these writing projects.)
"An Experience is not finished until it is written." – *Anne Morrow Lindberg*

- **2-4 page Research Essay**
  - The paper should be a 2-4 page essay using the *research essay rubric* and/or *essay organizer.*
  - The introduction and conclusion should be clearly connected by being based on the essential question.
  - A sound essay will incorporate these components:
    - *Insight*: The thesis should fully answer the essential question and show original and interesting insight into the meaning of the issue.
    - *Evidence*: Examples and quotes need to be used to clearly and fully answer each focus question. These answers support the answer to the essential question.
    - *Craft*: Fluency and artistry are important in writing the essay.
      - Points are expressed clearly.
      - Essay is graceful with smooth transitions tying each paragraph to the thesis and to the previous paragraph.
      - Quotations are introduced by sufficient context to make them understandable.
      - Papers express the writer's individual voice and are grammatically sound.

- **1-2 Page Written Treatment (*Treatment: A description of the documentary.*)**
  - A treatment is a description of the project that provides a focus for the documentary and serves as a guideline.)
  - The treatment should be organized around the treatment rubric and treatment organizer.
  - A treatment explains and legitimizes the project to others.
  - Follow these guidelines:
    - <u>Introductory paragraph</u>: Explain the main topic or ideas of the documentary. The explanation should include the essential and focus questions.
    - <u>Middle Paragraphs</u>: Describe how the information will be presented. Indicate how the story will be told. List the segments / scenes to be included. Describe what the audience will see, think, feel. Include research sources.
    - <u>Final Paragraph</u>: Describe why this documentary is important. Tell who is the intended audience? Indicate what you hope the audience will learn.

Create Storyboard
- A storyboard charts the course of the documentary as described in the research paper.
- Each section of the storyboard should effectively sequence the story being told.
- The essential question and your thesis should be obvious in the first few sections.
- Middle sections add evidence and support through answering the focus questions.
- The last sections organize a conclusion that reinforces the essential question and offers answers to the "Now What" questions.
- Add notes to indicate pace, transitions, music, voiceovers, effects, credits and titles.

Gather digital Artifacts
- Record video or audio interviews. (See *How to Conduct an Interview*)
- Answer the question: "What video, image, or audio file will best represent the researched answers to the focus questions?"
- Gather images or video from the Internet, scanner, or digital camera.
- See these artifacts through the audience's eyes. Think: "How will the audience interpret the imagery/audio presented?"
- Gather more than seems necessary and store in an organized fashion.

Make the Documentary
- Choose a medium that will offer the most effective telling of the documentary's story. (PowerPoint, Keynote, iMovie, Final Cut Express).
- Arrange graphic, video, and audio elements according to the sequence described in the storyboard.
- Carefully edit the length of clips and images. Think: "Once the clip tells its story, move on."
- Use on-screen titles sparingly. Let the video, and audio tell the story.
- Be fussy about what clips will stay in the final cut. If it helps to tell the story and is of good quality, it stays.
- Be aware of the audience. Think about where the audience will look; what the audience will hear; what the audience will feel; what the audience will think.
- Add credits to cite others' work.
- Keep a reasonable length. 3-6 minutes is sufficient for most documentary movies.
- Allow extra time for technological problems.
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Assessing the Documentary
Assessment is the fuel that drives quality work. Well-defined assessment guides students' attempts toward producing superior work, describes accomplishments, and leads to further growth. Assessment is not the last step in the learning process but an important landmark in a continuing cycle of growth.

Good assessment follows three steps:
* Describes student's work ("Your opening title was a bit confusing")
* Evaluates strengths and needs ("You need to see through your audience's eyes")
* Provides pathways to growth ("Your next presentation will include a clearly defined introduction.")

Growth Oriented Assessment:
* Gives feedback on the process as well as the product
* Describes rather than judges
* Avoids flattery & criticism
* Is specific
* Encourages further improvement
* Evaluates authentic criteria
* Avoids *Gotchas*

Types of Assessment:
* Teacher based assessment
    * Based on project rubric.
    * Provides a structure for student work.
    * Communicates a definition of quality work.
    * Clearly describes expectations.
    * Is given as part of the original assignment and re-evaluated at the end of the project.
    * Allows teachers to be the authority but offers a feeling of empowerment to the student.
* Peer Assessment
    * Based on critical friend sheet.
    * Is based on class goals and expectations.
    * Allows the student to see his/her work through others' eyes.
    * Is designed to help guarantee the success of a project.
    * Is given throughout the developmental states of a project.
    * Can benefit the assessor as well as the recipient.
* Self Assessment
    * Based on project rubric and/or *Artist's Summary*.
    * Places responsibility for growth on the student.
    * Allows students to understand their own strengths and needs.
    * Teaches students to make accurate descriptions of their own work.
    * Allows students a sense of ownership in their own work.
    * Allows students to feel a sense of power over their own learning.