



Stories Worth Telling

A guide to creating student-led documentaries

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Sharing Our Start

What started out as a family conversation during Thanksgiving dinner in 1996 turned out to stimulate a whirlwind of exciting and meaningful projects within our classroom and community.

My dad, who is now 85 years old, doesn't like to talk much about the past (he claims he can't remember). But this particular Thanksgiving was different. On his own initiative, he started describing life during The Great Depression—how he could recall the taste of every orange he had; how he treasured every bite of chocolate; how they used to collect bones, batteries, and cow chips; how he is thankful for the abundance of “good things” he can now share with his children and grandchildren. To me, those “good things” include the wisdom he has gained and the wealth of experiences hidden behind his stories—stories that I wished I had on tape for posterity.

Not long after this storytelling debut, I noticed an ad in our local paper calling for teachers who wanted to explore the world of connecting technology with curriculum. With images of The Great Depression still on my mind, I knew I wanted our students to have the same experience I had had on Thanksgiving. After proposing the idea of student-led documentaries to my teaching partner, Perry, who casually said, “Sure, why not try?,” we wrote the grant proposal and received enough money for our start: two Apple Power Mac 6500 computers equipped with Avid Cinema and one camera (for 80 students).

We were on our way to transforming the way we taught, the way students learn, and the way our community viewed teenagers and education.

That first year we went into this project without a compass: We knew our final destination, but didn't really know the steps to follow to complete a class documentary. My partner, a social studies teacher, had no background in technology or journalism, but he understood the worth of a story. I had an academic background in English and communications and some experience in photography and desktop publishing, having advised the student paper and yearbook for a number of years. Completing a full-length documentary with 80 students, however, was going to be a different beast. But we fostered a vision of the far-reaching power of this kind of project.

The First Attempt

Since no one in our district knew anything about video editing, we needed to experiment with a project of our own before we opened it up for the students. Doing this was the way we both learned the editing software. We were driven by a purpose: to learn the basics and to complete an authentic task. After relying on the tutorial and manual as we worked on our projects at home, we felt we could move on to the next step: introducing the idea to our students. The school year was already half over.

That first project was a blur as we learned something new and tackled unfamiliar issues every day. But we studied. And we worked. And this is the process we followed:

Step 1: We wanted to pick a topic that involved our curriculum and that would be meaningful to students and the community. The Great Depression. That decision was easy after recognizing that the majority of the people who have lived through this era were quickly fading away; plus, a variety of interesting topics could be covered.

Step 2: We identified resources in our community. One of the first places we asked for help was our state historical society, which sent its head archivist to talk about The Great Depression era and the process of recording oral history. He provided insight into interviewing techniques as well as questions to ask regarding that time period.

Step 3: We all (the teachers and students) started to ask around—who has grandparents, neighbors, or friends who lived through The Great Depression or who else has expertise in that area? We were trying to find those who would be willing to be interviewed.

Step 4: The class developed a list of topics to be covered and questions to be asked.

Step 5: We made those community connections and set up and conducted interviews, after discussing camera techniques and etiquette with the class.

Step 6: This is where we got stuck. We had the interviews in hand, but now what? We also needed to keep moving in the rest of our curriculum. Luckily, we had students in each class who were just as curious and as eager as we were to see this thing through. And students came back from their interviews excited to tell their subjects' stories.

So, as a class, we discussed the "Now what?" We established an outline, filled in that outline with sound bites students selected, and "hired" a set of student screenwriters to write the scripts and producers to oversee the computer editing process.

Step 7: We really didn't know what we had or how good the documentary was until the night we held the premiere viewing for the community.

When we look back on that first year, we are amazed that we dared tackle the student-led documentary again. But what we saw happen the night of the premiere and what we heard from the students and community members after the project was completed spurred us on to do another, and another, and another documentary.

Since that time, we've completed ten full-length documentaries with our students, including: The Great Depression, World War II, A Review of the Century, Vietnam, The Korean War, a compilation of Stories of the American Experience, North Dakota Heritage, and Vietnam Revisited.

Over this period, we've learned, grown, and changed.

Also, over this period, the technology has changed and we are now committed to the Apple iLife suite of digital content creation apps. These tools have improved the process and our efficiency due to their friendly format, which makes editing easier and allows for unlimited creativity with the ability to readily combine various media types. The technology involved with iLife is simple enough for the teacher and the student to focus on what's important—the story.

Gaining Support and Meeting Standards

Sometimes, gaining the support of the administration for such projects is difficult, especially when catch phrases and movements of the day (No Child Left Behind, proficiency, state standards, benchmarks, assessments) seem to cloud the educational process. But we've found that student-led documentaries match multiple standards of various disciplines. In social studies, for example, this project aligns with at least three of our state standards for grades 9-12: Students understand the nature and scope of history; Students use social studies

resources for a variety of purposes; Students understand the role of the citizen in society. And depending on the topic of the documentary, other standards could also be met. Our state English standards ask that students engage in the research, reading, writing, speaking, and listening process; standards also touch on understanding media and principles of language—all six standards are met through our documentary making.

Most disciplines involve the research process and honing communication skills, both obvious skills acquired when completing a documentary. While completing documentary work, students access both primary and secondary sources. This research is meaningful for students and the community and enhances existing curriculum.

In *Educational Leadership*, Elliot W. Eisner, a Stanford University education and art professor, wrote about how to move curriculum beyond “hoop-jumping” and into a process that is “genuinely meaningful to students, challenging them with problems and ideas that they find both interesting and intellectually demanding.” According to Eisner, curriculum should cultivate five major qualities: judgment, critical thinking, meaningful literacy, collaboration, and service—each of which can be addressed through a student-led documentary (*Educational Leadership*, “Preparing for Today and Tomorrow,” December 2003/January 2004, pages 6-10).

Throughout 12 years of working with student-led documentaries, the positive results have been apparent, as shown by the personal testimonies that demonstrate how these projects can change viewpoints and lives for administrators, teachers, students, and community members.

An Opportunity for Community-Service Learning

As part of the learning process, we also discovered community-service learning, an educational process and philosophy that recognizes that if students are to learn at full potential, they need to see a connection between curriculum and life, and, moreover, that they need to feel needed. These are fairly simple concepts but ones that needed to materialize in our classroom.

Community service learning has been defined in many ways, with most experts agreeing that this type of learning focuses on three major components:

- Creating a service experience for students that directly relates to academic subject matter
- Providing a beneficial service for the community, one that makes students see the relevance of what they are learning
- Securing opportunities to reflect on what students are doing, feeling, and learning

While no single process or reform will eradicate attitudes of apathy or isolation, we felt our students needed a chance to be needed, and that service learning is one way to bridge the gap between young people and adults, between the classroom and the world, and to provide a sense of worth for all people involved.

The more I studied service learning, the more my mind started turning—in what way could our students be of service to the larger community while learning what is already established in their curriculum? Student-led documentaries became our answer.

The Impact on Students and the Community

A different type of learning takes place with student-led documentaries—learning that is more difficult to measure, but that increases empathy and interest and creates stronger students. How can one measure pride, a sense of connection, an increased understanding, a feeling of self worth, changed lives?

"I can attest firsthand to the power of student-led documentaries, having witnessed at least six of the Century High School public viewings and presentations. Every time students introduce the teams' projects, they provide testimonials about the impact of the process on their lives. They always comment on the difference between reading a text and reliving history with its original participants. The power of this format could easily be included in music, physical education, science, or virtually any other topic. There is a depth these students reach that far exceeds traditional classroom learning."

—Rita Kelly, Principal at Century High School, Bismarck, ND

Our students, many of whom refer to this project in college essays as the highlight of their academic experience, express the benefits of the student-led documentaries best:

"I was fortunate enough to be a part of a project which profoundly affected many people, and made me think about my world outside the everyday environment of lockers and textbooks ... in the process learning more about myself than I ever thought possible inside the confines of a classroom."

—Dave Shireley, 2002 graduate

"I talked about how they had changed my life, how they had taught me, and how they had made history come alive for my classmates and me.... Our words touched these men; their own stories told through the eyes of generation X touched them.... I knew I would never be the same."

—Katie Durick, 2002 graduate

This project, often involving family members who had never talked about life-shaping events, such as war, has changed the way we teach and the way our students learn because the work is authentic, demanding communication skills (oral and written), understanding of history, working as a team, and meeting deadlines to produce a product that extends beyond these school walls. Jerry Feist, from our local Veterans' Center, has requested over 100 copies of our Vietnam documentary, using them as a therapeutic tool for his clients. Students have presented their work at Vietnam rallies, reunions, and retired businessmen and teachers' breakfast meetings; our local cable access television station has also aired our productions.

As far as evaluation of effectiveness, the community as well as the students have spoken to that:

"As a participant in the Vietnam documentary,... I have found my contribution—though small—helped create a historical tapestry that allows our community to better understand the Vietnam experience as seen through the eyes of the men and women directly affected by that particular war. This unique opportunity provides the viewer with a hands-on, often heart-wrenching, view of the personal conflict that invariably evolves from the tragedy of war. I firmly believe this sort of documentation should be cultivated and shared with our youth, community, and state to better understand the past in order to learn from the mistakes so they will not be repeated in the future."

—Tom Willard, State Coordinator North Dakota Veterans' History Project

"I'm so pleased that my son had the opportunity to participate in a project so unique as the veterans' documentary produced by students in Century High School's American Pageant class....The veterans' documentary enabled students to blend a variety of skills—planning, organizing, interviewing, writing, editing, and video production as well as the experiences of working individually and coordinating with a group to produce the best possible end product. Not only did the students learn, but left 'footprints' on the minds of many by presenting the documentary at various community forums...."

—Connie McBride, parent

"...Through their student-led documentary project, the class gave the student the opportunity to interact directly with the individual, get to know them, and gain their trust and respect. The work was fulfilling for both participants.... The video also provides a permanent record of the information, as well as the people and the interaction between them. I have also received comments from students who really enjoyed editing, producing the videotapes, and doing the technical work themselves. This demonstrated to me that it was a team effort and involved multiple levels of expertise and participation to produce the finished product...."

—Merl Paaverud, parent, former school board member,
and director of State Historical Society

"Century High School (CHS) students of Perry Lee and Mary Palmer have been submitting programs to Community Access Television (CATV) for the past four years.... There are primarily two types of comments we've received from the public regarding the CHS documentaries. One is of an appreciation of the teamwork and dedication of the students in their tremendous efforts in making the programs. The other comments involve an admiration and respect for the subjects, primarily war veterans, who are interviewed in the documentaries. CATV has a mission to bring quality, local programming to the people of Bismarck, North Dakota and the CHS documentaries help us to accomplish this mission. In addition, they provide a valuable means of connection between students and their elders by honoring their lives through a public video presentation."

—Mary Van Sickle, manager of CATV

What We've Learned

Following are some of the lessons we've learned along the way:

- Learning is about telling stories, regardless of the discipline. All subjects have material for powerful stories, whether it is telling the story of a summer science program for at-risk students, a local river and its water qualities, interesting laws, teenage drinking, local artists, or an engineering firm in the community.
- We learned not to be afraid of learning along with students and community members or of asking for help as we brainstormed together.
- As teachers, we found we needed to work and manage time in a way that varied from the traditional.
- If we had to do it again, we would start small. Before tackling a full-length documentary, like we did the first year, we would warm up with smaller projects so all students would have time to catch on to the process.
- We found that video projects appeal to all levels of students—from the high-level student to the struggling student who has not tasted much success in his or her educational career.
- Regardless of the discipline, these documentaries teach our students the vital skills of organization and communication.
- To make student-led documentaries work, we as teachers have to hold on to a strong vision for what this project can do for students, the community, and ourselves.
- While we can never truly keep up with technological advancements, we must embrace the constant changing of technology, but do so slowly and surely.
- We found that if a teacher believes in the worth of this project, that teacher needs to sell it to administration, colleagues, and the community, and try to make this experiential process contagious.
- We've learned never to underestimate the talent of students and the response of community members. Each year, we've been pleasantly surprised by something.

Getting Started and Setting Expectations

You're ready to begin to develop student-led documentaries with your class—what do you do first? This section discusses the process of getting started, including selecting a story, motivating students, defining and sharing expectations, and other beginning steps.

It's a good idea to work up to a full-length documentary instead of starting with one. First, experiment with a number of enjoyable, smaller projects to provide a base for students and for you as a teacher. After doing this, moving on to bigger projects will be less daunting.

Students can work individually or in small groups on almost any subject. For example, students working on a science experiment could film the different stages of the experiment, import those video clips into iMovie (the Apple iLife video editing app), edit the clips, and arrange them to tell the story of the experiment. They could add narration and match it up with the clips to explain the experiment. They could add music and text where appropriate, and then present their project to the class. This might be only a two- to three-minute movie, but it would involve most of the basic elements of completing a major documentary.

Another great way for students to become familiar with iMovie '11 is by making a trailer using the Documentary theme. To create a trailer, you drag clips to a storyboard and add relevant text, and iMovie trims the clips and add transitions and effects to produce the trailer.

To introduce filmmaking to our students, in October each year, we have the class complete a video poetry project in which students analyze the Romantic poets of American literature, pick a poem, and interpret it through video and sound. This gets them excited to work with the technology, while at the same time helping them learn to analyze poetry.

These first, smaller exercises are designed to familiarize students with the equipment, the software, and to stimulate creative thinking and group cooperation. Think about what existing lesson would be complemented by such a project. Now that the use of iLife in the classroom is so widespread, hundreds of examples and ideas exist. One resource for ideas is the [Apple Distinguished Educators on iTunes U site](#).

After you have completed the smaller projects, you're ready to pick a story for the major documentary project.

Finding a Story Worth Telling

In the process of finding what student-led documentary will work for a specific discipline, you should examine the curriculum for areas that can be connected to the world outside of school walls: What unit can be taught in a way that will enhance learning if documentary work is adopted and that might also be of service to the community?

Once you have some possibilities, student input becomes important—they need to be part of this process if they are to take ownership of the project. They might also have ideas that are newer and fresher than our own. The class brainstorming process should open up many possibilities.

Once you and the students have examined the curriculum, more than likely, a story worth telling will emerge.

Examples of story topics:

- Managing and operating recycling centers
- Influencing lawmakers to adopt laws that protect the environment
- Providing free preschool experiences for children while studying child development
- Advising city government on where a bicycle trail can be laid without disturbing the ecology
- Mapping and surveying for a team of archaeologists or a local game and fish department
- Teaching recreational skills to people with physical or mental disabilities
- Providing services to the elderly while studying various issues concerning geriatrics
- Cleaning up rivers and streams

This list touches on just a few possibilities for stories—the possibilities are limited only by our imagination and interest.

Motivating Students

Following are some tips for engaging students as you begin to implement a student-led documentary project.

Teacher Role

One of the beautiful, but scary, transformations that occurs while completing a student-led documentary is that the traditional role of teacher as lecturer and keeper of knowledge changes; it has to change if this is going to work. As part of motivating students to do a job well done, teachers become coaches.

Much like a coach of a sport, the students are first taught the fundamentals—how to use the equipment and how to go about the step-by-step process of creating a documentary. It then comes down to looking over their shoulders and helping them when they need help. Demonstrating how the process is done is critical so the students have a base, but the real learning comes from doing.

Selling Students on the Idea

Once a teacher believes in the power of student-led documentaries and has a couple of examples to show the class, motivating students becomes easier. To get everyone off to a good start means “selling” the project to the students. Show them how much you believe in the project and its subject. You must have a clear vision and pass that vision on to the students. The students must believe this is really going to work and be something special. Students cannot view this as just another assignment. They need to see how it can initiate change, elevate social issues, inform others about an important topic, or create connections in the community. Ultimately, the students need to know that their final product will be shared with a wide audience and that copies will be made for sharing, for keepsakes, for posterity, or for an agent of others’ education or as an agent of change.

Aiming High

Another motivating tool includes expectation. We firmly believe students rise to the level of expectation challenging them. With your students, study and model professionals—anything from Channel One, the History Channel, Discovery Channel, PBS, news programs, or local broadcasts. Study how they transition into a topic, how they set up quotes, how they set up cameras and lights. Call members of the local media and see if someone is willing to come in and talk to your students about how to conduct an interview. Not only can someone from the media help students in interviewing techniques, they can also provide pointers on lighting, camera angles, audio, editing, and selecting sound bites.

Promote the Service and Need

School administrators and the public love the idea of students making a connection with their community. Student-led documentaries provide a great way for students to get involved outside of their peer group. Countless stories exist out there, and they deserve to be told. This is a chance for the average person to keep these stories alive for posterity and beyond. This is a great way to incorporate service learning. Students learn from the project and from the people they interview. The interviewees learn from the students, and the generation gap is chipped away.

Technology Sells Itself

With the current push for the use of technology in the classroom, this process is perfect for hands-on technology incorporation. The bottom line is, you are using technology to create a documentary, not just doing an activity to use technology. Students will buy into a project much faster and with more vigor when it includes the use of technology. Technology is a big part of their generation, and they gravitate to it—it engages them so they spend more time on task and strive to provide high-quality work. The biggest bonus is that they have fun with it.

Clarifying Expectations and Assessing Student Work

Part of laying the foundation for this endeavor involves clarifying expectations, which also involves assessment. After studying professional work, students should know that quality work is the only work that will be accepted. But, they need to understand what constitutes quality.

This assignment, which is more than an assignment, is so important to us that we make it worth a large portion of a semester grade, approximately equivalent to four unit tests.

You can divide the assessment into five different categories:

- The raw interview or the A-roll (100 points)

This considers quality of image, lighting, and sound, as well as the questions asked and the quality of useable sound bites.

- The filler or supplemental shots or the B-roll (50 points)

This includes supplemental shots such as the interviewee showing a scrapbook of photos, letters, other memorabilia, photos that can be used over sound bites, scanned images, and so on.

- A log or transcription of video shot (50 points)

This category can be modified, depending on the project being completed. Students could complete a timed, verbatim script of everything that was asked and said during the interview or prepare a summary of the interview's key portions along with their timecodes. This log speeds up the process of outlining and searching for sound bites. The students can also be required to complete a transcript of the interview that can be used for other purposes. For example, a transcript could be used by other students or community members who want to do further research on a topic.

- The written script/story and storyboard (100 points)

Before students write the script, they learn about organizing the material, finding the essential elements of the story, transitioning into the next topic, as well as other writing skills. The storyboard then asks the students to match audio with video—what is being said to what is being seen.

- The overall effect of the completed story (100 points)

Sometimes, when you're working on 30 seconds of the story at a time, seeing the whole picture and feeling the overall effect is difficult. So this category views the completed story: Did it achieve a single effect? Did it make the audience feel and understand the intended message? Did all of the elements—the music, text, sound bites, language used in the script—flow together in a story that seemed effortless?

See [Appendix A, "Sample Assessment Tool,"](#) for an assessment document that you can hand out to your class.

Managing the Project

This section suggests methods of sharing the work among the students as well as other classroom management techniques. It also provides information on the necessary hardware and software.

Dividing the Roles

We've found that dividing the students into groups to do the project works well using two different forms: the Three-Role process and the All-Hats process. For most of our earlier projects, we used the Three-Role process. For more recent projects, we've moved to the All-Hats process so that each student has the full experience of creating a documentary.

Three-Role Process

This process divides the students into assigned roles that they keep throughout the project. These roles include:

Reporters: After all students have covered the topic of the project in class, the reporters do the grassroots work. They go out and do the interviews (usually in groups of three). This group listens to their recorded interview and logs it. Then they gather research information on the topic using various resources from the library to the Internet. This is also the group that finds photos, documents, and Internet video clips and images (B-roll), as well as music from the time period that can be used in the documentary, and logs each resource.

Screenwriters: This is a small group of strong writers. They take the recordings and the logs from the reporters, watch the videos looking for sound bites, and study the logs for guidance. This group writes the script and completes the storyboard for the documentary.

Producers: This group does the computer editing work. The producers put together the final product that will be the documentary. They get the script and storyboard from the screenwriters and match up the video clips and other images with the narration, music, and other audio. They do all the other work with the editing software to make a professional-looking documentary.

All-Hats Process

The other way we've established groups involves splitting students into groups of three to five students and requiring all groups to complete all of the aspects of the documentary process. This means each group member wears all hats. They create their own short story on one person or topic. Typically a three- to five-minute mini-documentary results. Each finished mini-documentary, or vignette, is then exported and blended together onto a video master copy to function as one documentary. This style of project work has not produced quite the level of professionalism as with the Three-Role process, but we've found that it's better for the students because they get the full experience.

Regardless of the method you choose, it's a good idea to have each student fill out an application that indicates their desired role, preferred partners, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. This has been extremely helpful and practical.

See [Appendix B, "Application for Documentary,"](#) for an application form that you can hand out to students.

Managing the Classroom Environment

Sometimes, when doing student-led documentaries, outsiders or observers might think that this project sounds or looks a bit chaotic. But there are methods that you can use to contain the madness! One of the most important things in classroom management is to clarify expectations, establish clear deadlines, and make students accountable for progress every day.

Team Teaching

Teams of teachers at our school started to form because of the focus on interdisciplinary teaching; two-hour block classes developed. We were fortunate enough to be part of this movement, combining English 11 and American History, and since that time our instruction has never been the same. Not only did this combination make sense because of the strong correlation of subject matter, this block class also allowed us to pursue major projects, such as student-led documentaries. As teachers, we're in the classroom at the same time for two hours with forty students, and we freely exchange and interject ideas and information regarding the topic being taught.

Classroom Management Using the Three-Role Process

If a teacher decides to split the class into three groups, the largest being reporters, and the two smaller groups being screenwriters and producers, classroom management is usually not an issue because much of the work is done outside of the classroom. The work of the reporters, mainly interviewing, transcribing or logging, and researching background information is primarily done on their own time. Once the reporters' work is done, we remove the screenwriters from the classroom so they can work on the script and the storyboard. Every school is set up differently, but we have an advantage in that we have an empty study room just a few feet from our classroom. When no empty room is available, our students have also worked in the hallway just outside our room. These students are also expected to treat this as homework, especially as deadlines approach. This freedom demands responsibility from these two smaller groups.

After the screenwriters complete the script and storyboard, the screenwriters hand their product to the small group of three to four producers who also work in the study room during class time and their own time. This often involves after-school time for us as well. They, too, are given deadlines and daily expectations, helping them stay on task.

The length of time these two groups spend outside of the classroom generally equates to one unit that we have covered, three to four weeks at the most. During this time, we exempt students from the particular unit we're covering, knowing they are learning about the documentary topic and about writing, organization, communication, and group skills on a deeper level than they would be otherwise.

Classroom Management Using the All-Hats Process

Allowing more students to learn on a deeper level is also part of the reason we changed our organizational strategy in the past couple of years. But splitting the class into more, but smaller groups that are responsible for all steps is a bit more challenging to manage; plus, the quality of the product varies more. But ultimately, more students feel their contribution was integral to the whole process. They work harder and feel proud of their segment. We've also found that this method consumes more class time and might call for a sacrifice of an existing unit—a sacrifice we believe is worth making.

With additional but smaller groups of three to four students, you'll need to spend more time on the writing instruction. We usually spend two to three hours talking about journalistic writing and studying professional examples, and then we spend more class time in our computer or library lab working on individual stories and scripts.

Once their stories are finalized (some members can begin this process during revisions), students begin adding video and photos, and recording narration, and adding sound-bites, and music.

Most of the time, because we have two sessions of forty students for two hours, we have ten groups of four students working on individual segments at one time—the two classes sharing the same ten computers (so we have two groups' projects on each computer).

Managing ten groups of students at this stage can be somewhat of a juggling act, but if they have been shown the basics of iLife and have worked on a smaller project earlier in the year, they are fired up and ready to get to work. We can't emphasize enough how important it is to establish deadlines and daily expectations. Students also need to learn how to be independent, patient, and to be explorers in their own search for answers when teachers cannot answer all questions as soon as they would like.

Setting up the classroom to accommodate multiple groups can be a challenge, but each teacher will find something that works within the blueprint of his or her school. We usually put three to four groups in a study room, three to four groups in our classroom, and the remaining groups in the hallway. Since we team teach, we're able to float around to these areas, making sure no one is left unattended for too long. Individual classroom teachers will have fewer groups but will still need to supervise five to six groups of filmmakers.

An ideal situation, an ideal classroom, would have a mobile lab of eight to twelve notebook computers. This would ease the hassle of equipment setup. Having more computers that are not shared with other teachers or departments would also make saving work easier.

Saving Student Projects

Our students save their work on their individual computers, so we haven't had to purchase external storage drives. If you have fewer computers, an external FireWire or USB drive works well to save student work in progress. If students work on their projects in a lab, they could save their projects to iCloud or a school server.

To publish your students' projects, you can put their final documentaries on your school or class website, burn them onto a CD or a DVD, or export them to iTunes for viewing on iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, or Apple TV. They can also be shared via Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo, or CNN iReport.

Determining Your Equipment Needs

To get the equipment you need to create classroom documentaries, you don't have to start big, and you can seek financial help from a wide variety of sources. We've had help from grants, but now, with most schools filling up with computers and other devices, access has become much easier. Following is the equipment you'll need to start creating documentaries with your students:

Computers

To create classroom documentaries, two devices would be the minimum for a class, but we recommend four. We've built up to six computers in our class and we usually borrow four more so that we have ten available for students for editing their documentaries.

We know that many teachers struggle with their district's philosophy or their technology department's views about technology platforms. We feel very fortunate that our district allows teachers and departments to choose their own technology tools based on personal preference as well as which format best meets the needs of their curriculum.

Software

Because of our years of experience with student-led documentaries, we receive a lot of requests for help from students, teachers, and community members who want to create documentaries of their own, asking what apps we recommend that they use. We've looked at other editing systems and tell them that none of these systems compare to Apple's iMovie. iMovie comes as part of iLife on every Mac and is available for iPad and iPod touch from the App Store. For ease of use, quality, and reliability you can't beat iMovie. There's nothing to set up or install.

For us, a big factor is getting large numbers of students working on editing quickly, and iMovie makes this easy for us. Because students catch on to iMovie so readily and because it's so reliable, it quickly builds student self esteem. In the end, all of our students learn to make a high-quality finished product with iMovie. Also, the quality of the digital video and audio are excellent.

Cameras

The next item you will need is a video camera. There are a wide range of digital camcorders and formats, including tape-based and tapeless camcorders that record to flash memory, hard drives, or other forms of media. If you're working with iPhone, iPad 2, or iPod touch, you can use their built-in cameras, which capture both photos and video.

Many of today's cameras let you choose whether to shoot in standard definition or high definition format. Both iMovie '11 for Mac and Final Cut Pro X work with most Mini-DV or HDV tape-based camcorders that require a FireWire or USB 2.0 cable to transfer data. Not all Mac computers include a FireWire port. Check your system configuration to ensure your camera will work before purchasing a camcorder.

If you are shooting with a tapeless camcorder, you should check the [Apple website](#) to see if the product you are using has been tested and will work with your system.

Microphones

Regardless of the digital video camera you use, using wireless microphones for conducting interviews is essential. When purchasing a camera, make sure it has an external microphone connection. We have ten pairs of wireless microphones that we've accumulated over the years. They're fairly inexpensive and well worth the cost. The wireless microphones have given our audio that professional TV station quality that we'd never again do without. If you don't use microphones, you must get very close—uncomfortably close—to the person being interviewed. The most common problem we've had has been with audio because people don't like to get this close. We tell our students to watch TV reporters. Even with microphones, they get right in their subject's face. We've had some great interviews that our students have done that were unusable in the documentary because of poor sound quality. A few of those times were heartbreaking, so now we never send a student out on an interview without microphones.

A USB desktop microphone will give your students higher-quality audio when recording their narration. You just plug the microphone into your Mac, and your students record their voice with the desktop microphone right into iMovie. Speakers are also useful so that students can clearly hear their movie's audio, and make adjustments.

Other Equipment

Tripods

Tripods are a necessity to ensure that students get clear and steady footage. Fluid head tripods are the best for a smooth, fluid movement, but any tripod is better than no tripod. Headphones are a good idea for the cameraperson to use to make it easier to check the quality of the audio while filming the interviews.

Still cameras

If you don't have iOS devices with cameras, you might want to have some digital still cameras available to the students so they can capture still images, such as photos of the interviewee, objects such as medals or trophies, or historical locations. With iMovie, you can add motion to your photos and pan and zoom in on specific parts of the photo, just like you see in PBS documentaries.

Scanner

A flatbed scanner is a good addition so the students can easily include images from books or items such as photographs or letters in their movies. They just scan the image, add it to iPhoto (the iLife app for organizing, editing, and sharing digital photos), adjust the color and brightness and crop out the parts they don't want, and then add it to their iMovie project.

Carrying bags are a good idea for protecting cameras and transporting other equipment, such as tripods and microphones.

The following is a basic checklist of equipment needs:

- _____ Mac computers with the included iLife apps (Two would be the minimum for a class, but four are recommended.)
- _____ Digital video cameras or iOS devices with cameras (You can start with one or two and have students check them out. Some students may have cameras at home they can use.)
- _____ iOS devices with cameras or digital still camera (to capture still images)
- _____ Wireless microphones (It's best to have the same number as cameras.)

- _____ Tripods (one for each camera)
- _____ A scanner
- _____ One or two USB desktop microphones for narration
- _____ A carrying bag (one per camera)
- _____ Extra DV tapes (if used)

Optional equipment:

- _____ Speakers (one set per computer)
- _____ An external storage device (such as a FireWire or USB drive)
- _____ Headphones (for ensuring good quality audio while filming)
- _____ Blank CD or DVD discs (if you're planning to publish the documentaries on a CD or DVD)

Managing the Production Process

Part of the production process is helping the students learn how to research the topic and gather resources and how to best use the equipment to film their interviews.

When you first introduce the video cameras to the class, point out that they need to remember two basic rules: First, treat the equipment as if you paid for it. Treat it with respect, and be gentle. Don't force anything together or apart. Second, if you don't know, ask.

Filming Techniques

A third and fourth rule could be added to those presented above: Practice, practice, practice, and be prepared for anything. Before filming an interview, students need to practice with the video cameras. Two main basics to practice involve placement and lighting.

Often interviews are conducted at homes. We encourage students to look for an interview spot that is comfortable for the person being interviewed. A real problem with this can be what is behind the subject being interviewed. Students need to visually troubleshoot and notice distractions that might show up behind their subject. Often the background is too busy or there are things that appear to be growing out of the subject's head. Students must be aware that these problems become much more evident on film than when they're filming. Students might have to move the subject or something from behind the subject. People are usually agreeable about this as long as the students explain what they're trying to do. We suggest that our students tell their subjects that their teachers are real picky. Blaming us makes it easier for the students to feel more at ease in moving their subject around. It's also nice if students can move their subject away from the wall to create a sense of space. This helps bring out the subject's face, creating a bit of a three-dimensional effect.

Rule of Thirds

Many of the techniques we teach are the same techniques any photographer would practice, such as the rule of thirds. The cameraperson should try to make sure that the person being interviewed isn't right in the middle of the screen. Again, have students watch interviews on TV and notice that the subject is always slightly off to the right or left. Whatever the side is, the subject should be looking into the other two-thirds of the shot to make it appear that he or she is looking into space or at a person, and not at a wall. The student conducting the interview should position himself or herself slightly to the side so that the subject is not looking directly into the camera. Using the rule of thirds should be subtle. If the subject moves around a lot, it's okay if he or she becomes centered.

A good shot can start with one to two inches of space above the subject's head, with the lower portion cut off at the waist. This gives the cameraperson a chance to pull slowly into the subject's face during the interview. The general problem we have found is students not pulling in tight enough. As the cameraperson zooms in, they should zoom in tighter on the top of the interviewee's head, rather than his or her chin. An effective technique is to zoom in even tighter on the face to bring out the eyes during an emotional part of the interview.

Lighting

Because we do not have professional studio equipment, such as special lighting, using existing lighting requires the student to make conscientious choices. They should move the tripod around and take the time to look at the subject through the camera and check for good lighting. Good light, but not direct light, should come in from a slight side angle, so that one third of the subject's face is in a subtle shadow. To get some variety, it's a good idea to film a few interviews outside. The best situation would be on a clear day in the morning or in the evening when the sunlight is warm and not too direct. Cloudy days also work because the direct sun has been naturally filtered. When interviewing, students need to be sure to avoid backlighting, which results from placing subjects in front of windows. We always tell the students that the key to a good-looking interview is to focus on the eyes—there should be points of light visible in the subject's eyes. If backlighting can't be avoided, more light should be placed in front of the interviewee's face to avoid shadows and dark, emotionless images.

Capturing the best footage requires practice, with a lot of trial and error, as well as remembering a few basic techniques, as described above.

Conducting Background Research

Students benefit from documentary work in a number of ways: Not only do they experience active learning, but it's active learning complemented by research and note taking. Before they conduct interviews, the students must have gathered sufficient background information about the topic. The point is, of course, that the students must demonstrate a basic knowledge of the topic in order to ask good questions and gain the trust and respect of the person being interviewed. Once the interviews are complete and the story writing stage begins, the students can gather additional statistics and research to help bring their subject's sound bites together and enrich the telling of the story.

During the research stage, students need to find what we call filler shots, supplemental material, or B-roll, which includes photos, letters, memorabilia, or film footage to complement the topic. Students can use a digital still camera to take photographs of the person they interviewed, historical sites, or of objects such as medals, trophies, and so on. They can use the same camera or a flat-bed scanner to capture images of items such as letters, pictures in books, or print photographs. You can add movement to still images in iMovie using what is called the "Ken Burns effect." This is a great tool, allowing students to do all the panning and zooming on the computer instead of manually.

As for locating film footage, a lot of film out there is now public domain—such as government and military footage. We also get help locating footage from our Community Access TV station, as well as our local TV and news stations. Your state congressperson's office and other community organizations are also good resources. Some of the footage you find will need to be converted to the digital format. If it's in VHS format, you just insert the tape in your VCR and connect your digital video camera to the video out connections. Switch the video camera to the VCR setting and record what you need. Now it's ready to import into iMovie. The fastest growing image library is the Internet, where you can find images and video that can be imported into iMovie. Make sure that the images you find are high resolution or they will look grainy in your movie.

You can use iPhoto (also part of iLife) to organize and edit your still images. You can organize your images into albums so it's easy to find the ones you want to use in your movie. You can also use iPhoto to edit your images to make them lighter or darker, adjust the color, eliminate red-eye, crop them to select only the part you want to keep, and more. The images in your iPhoto library are instantly available in iMovie.

Your students will also want to locate appropriate music to include in their movie. They can find royalty-free music on the Internet or import music directly from music CDs. They can also create their own music with GarageBand, another great tool from Apple that's part of iLife. Students can use the included loops to create their music or they can record their own music. They can also include other types of audio files in their movies, such as clips of relevant speeches that may be available on the Internet.

Once the students have the music they want to use, they can then use iTunes to organize their music files. (iTunes comes installed with every new Mac or can be downloaded for free from the Apple website.) You can use iTunes to create a special playlist of music just for your movie. Your iTunes music library is also instantly available in iMovie.

While completing these projects, many people will ask about copyright concerns. We defer to our local experts in that field, as well as to other resources, such as those available from [Tech & Learning](#).

Interviewing Skills

One of our favorite topics to talk about with the students involves the elements of a good interview because it is the interview that shapes the story, and it is the interview that builds trust, rapport, and the relationship. Mature communication skills make an interview work.

Preparing for the Interview

This communication starts from the moment students pick up the phone, knock on the door, or write the letter to contact their subject. Even though this step might seem basic to us as adults, students need to be reminded and even role-play how they are going to set up the interview. You might even want to give them a sample script: “Hello, Mr. Miller? My name is Mike Gillum, a student from Generic High School, and we’re working on a documentary that focuses on the effects of our nearby nuclear plant. I received your name from my mother who said you’ve been an advocate for more restrictions concerning emissions. I was wondering if we could conduct an interview with you to record your views.”

Students should cover the who, what, and why in their introduction. They should be confident in what they’re asking. The when, where, and how can be answered after the interview is granted. When establishing the when, where, and how, students should consider shooting on location or at the subject’s home, making sure the arrangements are convenient for the subject. This initial contact establishes credibility and that indelible first impression.

Conducting the Interview

When the student and the subject meet, the students are expected to act professionally. Students need to know what that expectation entails. At this point, you might want to call in a professional journalist or give students information you have from experience. At their face-to-face meeting, students should be instructed to reintroduce themselves and their mission. They should shake hands and provide an idea of what to expect, even information regarding the setup of the interview. While the equipment is being set up and checked, the interviewer can provide expectations or make small talk to make the subject feel more at ease. Being professional does not mean being stuffy. Once equipment is ready to go, getting the basic facts behind the story is important: the full name, title of person being interviewed, and the person’s involvement in the topic. This establishes the facts and the foundation of the story.

A sound story is a mix of facts and reactions to those facts. To get good, emotional reactions, the interviewer has to show concern, passion, and knowledge about the subject. The interviewer also needs to show their subject that they are interested in him or her as a person. Some of this interaction is difficult to instruct or predict, but since you’re not at the interviews, you need to trust these teenagers to be interested and educated listeners. We’ve had examples of students interviewing veterans and the veteran is getting emotional as he tells the story of losing a buddy to a bullet, and the next question the students asked (with

no pause in between) was, “So, how was the food?” So we need to remind students of what listening is all about. Remind students that listening is about silence.

As discussed in “Managing the Production Process,” students should also learn the background information they need before going out to interview. This background information stimulates questions they should ask, recognizing that they will need to veer from those questions as situations arise and as follow-up questions are needed. Having the class brainstorm questions together is also beneficial. The best questions to ask include open-ended questions rather than “yes” and “no” questions; questions that will elicit the essential Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? These questions should trigger emotion and produce powerful sound bites. Students need to create a list of interview questions and bring it with them to their interview.

When concluding the interview, students need to remember the power of a thank you and a handshake. Students should also inform their subject as to the “what next” question their interviewee might have, telling them what will happen with their interview and when they should expect to see themselves on film. We have our students send a thank you note and also an invitation to our open house showing of the documentary. This touch brings everything together.

You can use the following guidelines to review the interview protocol with students.

Interview Guidelines

- Set up the interview.
- Act and look professional, but be personable.
- Be prepared—do background research.
- Define and state the purpose of the interview.
- Ask the easy questions first.
- Be a good listener and be sensitive.
- Throughout the interview, take mental notes regarding nonverbal communication, which can reveal much about an interviewee’s feelings or attitudes.
- Don’t talk too much.
- Probe behind answers and ask follow-up questions.
- Ask for details—ask concrete questions.
- Save the tough questions for last.
- Ask about photos, public relations material, letters, awards to use as background material for B-roll, and then film or photograph these items and let the subject tell you about this material.
- Conclude the interview.

Once the students have left the interview, they should have a strong feeling as to what they want to do with this story—what sound bites they want to use, what direction to take the story, and what message they want to present based on the interview. Often, the day after the interview, students will want to discuss with the class how their interview went, sharing everything from disasters to success stories. This reflection is essential. Other students can learn from mistakes made and be motivated by great stories captured.

Logging the Interview

One of the less exciting but crucial steps regarding the documentary process involves logging or transcribing the interview. This step involves listening to the filmed interview and writing down the responses and the times.

Though time consuming, this step is important for at least two reasons: 1) It helps speed up the writing and editing process when students don't have to guess and spend time looking for those five sound bites they want to use in their story or the documentary. 2) If these interviews will be stored for posterity, the transcriptions would be beneficial for people doing research in the future.

We tell students that transcribing the interview will take at least one hour for every ten minutes of interview. While some information can be summarized or categorized, it's best to have either a verbatim transcript or a comprehensive listing of the best clips with their timecode for each key point.

See [Appendix C, "Sample Interview Transcript,"](#) that you can share with your students as an example of what their transcription could look like.

The Writing Process

Once the interviews and transcriptions are done, we ask students to develop the script for the documentary.

Writing the Script

You can use the following “Steps in the Writing Process” to discuss how to proceed with the class. After the script is completed, it’s used in a storyboard that combines the spoken and written words of the film with the specific clips, images, music, other audio, and other elements that will be used.

Steps in the Writing Process

1. As you begin to develop the script, decide on the major theme on which you want to focus. What is each interview subject’s story? What do you want the audience to think after viewing each subject’s story? After viewing your whole documentary or your portion of the class documentary?
2. Write a lead, or an introduction, for the whole documentary or your portion of the class documentary. A lead is a journalism term for the opening statement made in a story. It is meant to capture attention as well as capture the direction and mood of the story. The lead for the whole documentary should portray its purpose or mission.
3. What sound bites will you use to complement your lead/angle? Go through your transcription log and select potential sound bites by making notations on the log. Try to use at least one to two quotes from all interviewees. When you’re done, make a list of the sound bites, with the exact quote and time so importing quotes into iMovie is more efficient. As you review the interviews, keep notes on what reactions you’re lacking and those that you feel will be necessary to get from another source, such as another interview.
4. Look at the background information you accumulated during your research and determine any additional research that needs to be done. Divide the research among yourselves or solicit help.
5. Construct an outline for the script. Develop a clear outline. Where do you want to start? What flows together logically and chronologically? Where and how do you want to end? Consider a motif to tie it all together. Consider a title for your segment.
6. Write a rough draft for your documentary, complete with transitions, quotes, and a conclusion. Write the script in a journalistic style—one that is conversational, capturing a cadence. This script should be complete with facts, reaction, and emotion. A typical setup for documentaries and news stories is news, news, reaction to that news, news, reaction, news, reaction, news, news, reaction, and so on.
7. Edit and reedit your script.
8. Hand in your rough draft.

Determining the Theme

Explain to students that in the writing process, one of the most essential aspects is deciding on an angle, which is a theme or a message for the audience. Progressing without that direction is difficult and dangerous. If smaller groups are working on individual stories, they need to decide on the angle within their group. If a small group of screenwriters is responsible for writing the whole script, brainstorming as a class would work so everyone's input is heard. Like every other stage through which students progress, it's a good idea to study the examples of the professionals, such as Tom Brokaw's segment on *The Greatest Generation*.

Writing the Introduction

You can use the following suggestions as you discuss the process for writing an introduction (or lead) with students. If you're creating a class documentary made up of different groups' vignettes, each group writes an introduction for their portion. The introduction to the whole documentary can be written by a separate group of students, with input from the whole class.

- Within your introduction, focus on the goal of the documentary or your individual vignette—what emotion do you want to convey, what mood do you want to set, what lesson or purpose do you want your audience to grasp?
- The introduction should avoid overuse of adjectives and adverbs, but instead be packed with power words: specific, concrete nouns and vivid action verbs. For example, what words or phrases come to mind when thinking about Vietnam veterans and the Vietnam War? Protest, misunderstanding, political conflict, unanswered questions, jungle patrol missions, VC warfare, Agent Orange, burning villages, protest music, unresolved issues.
- The introduction to the whole class documentary should include a mix of still and video shots that complement the narration, as well as any sound bites that pack enough power to belong here. This segment should be no longer than 3-4 minutes, but no shorter than 45 seconds.

You might want to have your students study introductions used in television or other video stories. They should note how the introduction leads into sound bites, how the subjects are set up, and how the story works its way toward the title.

For an example of an introduction from one of our student-led documentaries, see [Appendix D, "Sample Documentary Introduction."](#)

Setting Up Sound Bites

Each time an interview is used in the documentary, students need to make sure it has a proper setup. Setting up a person's interview requires students to know these interviewees and their stories well. Here are some examples of such setups from our student-led documentaries:

- "Paul Bussel has written about what war was like, about his own combat experience."
- "As a W.W.II fighter pilot ace and recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, Joe Foss represents the American hero (leads into sound bite of Foss). In the squadron Foss led, half of the boys were right off the farm—they knew how to hunt and never give up." (This is followed by Foss's stories of boys who never gave up.)

Remember that the script should provide the facts and set up the sound bites, which provide the emotions and the stories.

Additional Script-Writing Tips

You can provide these additional suggestions to students as they develop their scripts:

- Don't forget about silence—don't feel as if you have to fill every second with talking. Sometimes images and music say more than words. Sometimes, silence can act as a transition.
- Break up sound bites with B-roll film or filler/supplemental shots.
- Focus on flow during the body of the documentary or your story, making sure all ideas transition together.
- You can place two interviews back-to-back, but make sure they don't repeat; instead, they should complement each other.
- A major challenge involves melding facts together with the emotion of the era or topic. For example: "GIs teach us again what we already know: how combat, killing, and seeing others killed is a brutal way to spend your youth, and that experience can haunt them years later."

Completing the Storyboard

When students have finished revising their scripts, they're ready to develop a storyboard for their documentary or their portion of the class documentary.

During the writing process, a mix of sound and sights should be coming together as the story develops. This matching of sound and sights comes together in the storyboard. Here is also where students need to become serious about weeding through what might be hours of information and narrowing those hours into minutes. Now is the time to choose precisely what elements they want to use: Full interviews (voice and visuals)? Voice interview? Photos? Existing footage? There's a trick to weaving these aspects together, and that trick involves conciseness and some sacrifice and editing, editing, editing, rewriting, rewriting, and rewriting.

Storyboards are divided into columns for the video and the audio, with a third column sometimes used for miscellaneous notes and reminders. The audio portion includes the script. As students complete the storyboard, they should keep track of shots still needed to complete the documentary.

For an example of a storyboard that you can share with your students, see [Appendix E, "Sample Storyboard."](#) Also, see [Appendix F, "Storyboard Template,"](#) that students can use to create their storyboards.

The storyboard greatly aids in the next step, which involves combining the words and images on the computer for the final product.

The Editing Process

In the editing process, our students use iMovie to import their video clips and to add narration, music, titles, transitions, and other elements.

Becoming Proficient with iMovie

Although iMovie is easy to learn, one way to get up to speed quickly is by using the [iMovie tutorials](#) available on the Apple website. Another helpful resource is the *Apple Training Series: iLife '11: iPhoto, iMovie, and GarageBand* book from Peachpit Press. If you want even more help, [Apple Professional Development](#) offers training for educators focused on filmmaking.

If you had your students complete a smaller video project earlier in the year, they'll be well prepared to start editing their documentary. If not, you can connect a Mac to a projector and show your students the basic iMovie techniques. You can do this in less than an hour. After that, students are ready to venture out on their own. From there, you can help groups individually as they need help. Most of the learning is really learning on the go.

Editing Steps and Tips

Following is the process we use for students to edit their final movie.

Creating a New iMovie Project

The starting point for using iMovie is to open the app and create a new project. iMovie includes a variety of themes that each offer a unified design for a movie, with animated titles and transitions. You can choose a theme when you first create the project or apply a theme later.

Importing Video

The next step is to import the video clips you want to use. With the new project started and the digital camcorder connected to your Mac with the appropriate cable, you can control your camera using the buttons in iMovie to select the video clips you want to import. The video you import is automatically organized by date into Events in the Event Library.

Projects created with iMovie on an iOS device can also be transferred to your Mac and edited there. You can learn more about this process on the [Apple Support website](#).

Adding Video Clips and Other Images to Your Project

With the video clips imported, the next step is to drag the video clips you want to use from the Event Library to the iMovie project area and add photos and other images from the Photos browser. You can rearrange the order of clips and images, stabilize shaky video, and use the Precision Editor to make precise cuts.

Recording Narration

For the narration portion of the script, the narrator can read right into the microphone built into their Mac using the Voiceover feature in iMovie. For higher-quality audio, you can connect a USB microphone to your Mac. Once you record your narration, it comes in as a separate audio track in iMovie, so you can move it around to align with clips as needed. We also cut or split a lot of our narration audio tracks, as well as many of our interview sound bites, so we have more flexibility in placing them in our movie.

Once you have recorded narration, you may need to adjust the timing of clips or still images to match the audio. One way to extend the time that photos are displayed is by using the Ken Burns effect, which adds a motion effect to still images.

Adding Music

Another aspect of sound that needs to be considered is music. Music can play a key role in setting the mood and enhancing your project. If you've previously added your music to iTunes, you can add it to your project right in iMovie. You can reposition it or shorten or lengthen its duration to better match your clips.

Adjusting Volume

The volume of the audio for your clips can be adjusted, or even turned off completely. For example, you can lower the volume of the background music or use ducking so that it doesn't interfere with someone speaking in your movie, or increase the volume of the person you interviewed so that they can be heard more clearly. You can also increase the volume of music in certain parts of the video for a dramatic effect.

You can extract audio from a clip and then use that audio over a photo or action scene.

Adding Titles

You can add text throughout your movie, such as a title screen, credits, citations, or even to add emphasis to powerful quotes. You have many options for how your text is displayed. You can have text presented over a black or colored background or on top of a clip, and even add animation to your text.

Using Maps

An easy and effective way to show locations being discussed in a documentary is with the animated maps that are included with iMovie. You enter the start and end locations—perhaps to show people's migration path—choose from 2D map and 3D globe styles, and iMovie adds an animated map to your movie.

Using Effects

iMovie comes with exciting effects that can be applied to your project. Black & White, Sepia, and Aged Film are effects our students have used frequently for a vintage look. Picture-in-picture and green screen effects, both available with the Advanced Tools in iMovie, can be particularly valuable in documentaries. With a picture-in-picture effect, you insert video that plays in a small window on top of another clip shown in the full screen; for example, an interview subject could be shown in the small picture with a clip of the event being discussed in the larger window. With a green screen effect, you record video in front of a green backdrop and then have iMovie "cut out" the subject and place that clip into another video clip. Students might want to do this to create a "you are there" effect, with a person talking in the location being discussed. Students may also want to use the slow motion, fast

forward, jump cut, or instant replay effects available in iMovie to enhance their content. We use effects sparingly. Make sure that effects are used appropriately and don't distract from the story.

Using Transitions

Transitions from one clip to another give your project a smooth and professional look. We mostly use the cross dissolve or overlap transitions. You can also adjust the speed of the transition. Cross dissolves steal a little of the clip from both sides and make your clip shorter. Overlap takes a little from the end of the clip, but does not affect the length of the clip. You should get the clips in and arrange them the way you want before applying transitions. Transitions should be one of the final steps of the project. Students need to be careful with effects and transitions so they aren't distracting.

If You Make a Mistake

At any point in the project, if you have done something you did not intend to do, you can always undo your last action. You cannot use this Undo feature once you've quit iMovie.

Putting It All Together

If you're creating a class documentary, each student group will now have a completed portion of the whole documentary. The next step is to combine these iMovie projects into one movie. You can do this by exporting each student's movie at full quality, importing those files into iMovie on one Mac, and then combining them all into a single project.

Sharing Your Documentaries

Once the whole movie is complete, you have several options for publishing it.

The final product can viewed in class with a projector connected to one of the computers. You can copy the finished movie onto CDs or DVDs. You can also send the movie to iTunes directly from iMovie and sync it to an iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, or Apple TV for sharing. A movie can also be shared via Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo, or CNN iReport.

Another option is to export your movie as a QuickTime movie and include it on a class or school website or on a different website, such as that of a community organization. This is another easy way to share your students' documentaries with a wide audience.

Celebrating and Reaping the Benefits

Over the past six years, we've learned that "almost finished" is a dangerous, infamous phrase. But once students are truly done, it's time to celebrate and reap the benefits of all the hard work.

One of our major celebrations involves a joint effort with the community—our open house, our premiere showing. Up until this point, even our students have not viewed the documentary in its entirety. Sometimes, we decorate our commons area for the occasion; sometimes, we serve cookies and coffee and have a guest book for community members to sign. This is a time when students greet their interviewees and their family and friends and other community members at the door; they shake hands, sometimes hug. Here, the breaking down of generational barriers is evident. Here, the pride of a job well done and the anticipation of the show surfaces.

After sending out invitations, pumping all the press possibilities—from radio to newspaper to all television stations—we're ready to show our efforts to an authentic audience. What happens during this time of sharing is always surprising.

Our first documentary focused on The Great Depression (we worked on that until 5:30 p.m. the day of the showing), and the turnout was "nice"—close family and friends of students and those being interviewed. We received good press and the word spread. Our second year, we advanced to World War II. This was truly a celebration. We premiered our documentary to a full house, an audience filled with World War II veterans in their colors. One of our students volunteered to play the National Anthem on her trumpet, and when her nerves got the best of her, it didn't matter—the crowd sang so loudly, with patriotic spirit, we hardly noticed. At this showing, we noticed several generations showing up, grandparents bringing their children and grandchildren to hear the story of the Greatest Generation. Here, we saw our students sitting by their veterans, proud to be part of a larger project.

Our Vietnam showing: what a contrast—not a celebration but a time of healing, and a time of tackling tough questions surrounding this war. Ten minutes before the showing, we worried about the turnout. Two minutes before, brigades of motorcycles were heard in the parking lot, and veterans and their companions filled the auditorium to see what we had done with their often-misunderstood story. We were nervous. The response was one of heartfelt and, sometimes, inexpressible gratitude for the seriousness with which these teenagers illustrated this era and answered those looming questions regarding Vietnam. Always surprising.

Since our first student-led documentary, the students' work has continually aired on our local community access television station. On Veterans' Day of 2003, they ran all three of our war documentaries. Since our first student-led documentary, we've had numerous and various requests to make copies for families and veterans' and historical organizations, to show segments at reunions, service organization meetings, workshops, and more. These documentary projects do not end when the grade is given; these projects create living history and stories that will endure for generations.

Every year, when this process is over, we make a non-binding vow to take next year off (the process of completing student-led documentaries can be consuming and tiring). But every year, shortly after we recover, or maybe before we recover, we discuss the possibilities for next year.

The student-led documentary has grown to become quite a paradox for us: It's the best part of what we do; it's the worst part. It's the most rewarding; it's the most punishing. It's the most exciting; it's the most frustrating. But once we weigh the good and the bad, we quickly realize that the bad, the difficult, and the frustrating aspects (and working through those times) are part of the euphoria of completing a project that has captured a story, has increased interest and learning for all involved, has fostered an understanding beyond facts, has made history come to life, has made someone cry, has changed a life.

These changes in learning, interest, and life are not metaphorical or exaggerated. We've seen it happen. And that's why we keep going back for more. And that's why we encourage more educators to investigate the possibilities of the power of the story within their content area. For remember, as for the telling of stories, there shall be no end.

Appendix A:

Sample Assessment Tool

Video Interview (100)

_____ Camera setup: angles, fill frame, lighting
_____ Sound: quality sound bites, working microphones
_____ Interview: questions, follow-up and timing, completeness of interview
_____ / 100

Log (50)

_____ Appropriate amount of verbatim transcription
_____ Accuracy of time and quotes
_____ Typed
_____ / 50

Filler or B-Roll (50)

_____ Amount: enough to complement the story
_____ Quality: steady camera, lighting, background
_____ / 50

Written Feature Story and Storyboard (100)

_____ Storytelling: strong lead, focus on an angle, development of story/depth, capturing the subject's personality and life event, letting him or her talk
_____ Flow: use of transitions, logical flow between facts and reaction quotes, consideration of pace
_____ Accuracy of historical and personal facts
_____ / 100

Final Product (100)

_____ Use of sound: natural sound, narration, choice of music
_____ Overall effect: match between audio and video, effects used
_____ Completion of story and meeting deadline
_____ / 100
Any deductions: missed deadlines _____

Total for the whole product _____ /400

Appendix B: Application for Documentary

1. What area of the process are you most interested in?

A. Interviewing

B. Writing the story

C. Editing the film on computer

D. Research

E. Editing the whole documentary

F. Other _____

2. Do you know someone you could interview on the documentary's topic?

_____ Yes _____ No

If you do, who is this person? _____

3. What strengths do you have that would contribute to a job well done?

4. What weaknesses do you have that might hinder your progress in this group project?

5. This project, and your contribution, will be completed in groups of 4-5 people. With whom would you most like to work? _____

** With whom would you least like to work? (Optional)

6. Rate yourself in the following categories (1 being weak, 10 being strong):

- _____ Organization
- _____ Responsibility
- _____ Commitment to a good job
- _____ Quality of your work
- _____ Listening skills and empathy
- _____ Team player/group worker, able to lead as well as compromise
- _____ Writing skills
- _____ Camera skills
- _____ iMovie knowledge
- _____ Creativity
- _____ Handling and acting on suggestions
- _____ Self-control

7. Provide an example of when you have shown positive leadership:

Recall a time when you have seen a project through, from beginning to end—a time when you have been proud of the outcome.

Do you promise to treat this project (the people and the equipment involved) with respect and dignity, focusing on what you can learn from others and what you can teach others? If yes, sign below.

(Signature)

Appendix C:

Sample Interview Transcript

The following is an example of a transcript of an interview conducted for one of our student-led documentaries. (Bold text indicates sound bites that have been highlighted as possible selections for the documentary.)

Mary K. Gorman

(Wife of Bill Gorman who died within one month of action in Korea)

In 1950, Mary, Bill and their seven-month-old daughter Kathy were living in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Bill, who had served in W.W.II, was not interested in serving during wartime again, but was a graduate of an ROTC program, enrolling to help him pay for his education at NDSU where he graduated with an engineering degree.

Regardless of his wish not to serve in another war, Bill was called up as an inactive reserve officer, and on May 8, 1951, he left for Korea, where, as far as Kathy was concerned, he was part of a police action.

May 28, 1951, Bill was killed in the line of duty.

:52—1:05 > Called up as an inactive reserve officer; he tried to get out because he did not want to go, naturally.

1:18—1:35 > Mary and Kathy followed Bill to Ft. Riley, Kansas and Ft. Benning, Georgia for six weeks of basic training.

1:38—1:48 > “He left on the eighth of May 1951 and he was killed on the 28th of May.”

1:58—2:30 > “I didn’t get the notice that he was dead until the 15th of June. It was really terrible the way I got this news: I got a telephone call, and the person on the other end said ‘Are you alone?’ I said, ‘No, my sister’s with me.’ Well, this is the (she stops and starts over).

2:53—3:28 > “I received a telephone call ... we have a message for you. ‘Can’t you tell me?’ ‘No’ ... about 10 minutes later, a little boy on a bicycle came up, tears streaming down his cheeks, and gave me this telegram telling me my husband had been killed in action in Korea.”

3:30—3:46 > “I had a baby. It was a very difficult time. I didn’t even know about the Korean War; I just thought it was a police action.”

3:46—4:08 > “I had one letter from him, and it was after he died that I got two more letters from him. It was just a very difficult time. I had to find a way to support my child and go on with my life.”

4:15—5:26 > (general info) Married Bill, NDSU grad, served in WWII, did not go overseas, served in Naval Air Corps, ROTC, would not go back in unless as an officer, stipend paid for education, married in Aug 1950, daughter Kathy, moved to Sioux Falls.

5:26—6:00 “We were these young kids, 24 or 25, when we got that letter that Bill had to go back in the service. Our lives were so disrupted. There were so many decisions ... I was lucky enough to go with him to basic for six months.”

6:00—7:00 > Living in a trailer, going back to work, lived with sister, notice on 15th of June = difficult

7:13—7:25 > “I knew so little about the war. ... I just didn’t know how I would cope, how I would handle it.”

7:30—8:00 > “When I received notice that Bill was killed, it was handled so poorly—that little boy standing there crying, handing me the telegram.”

8:12—8:20 > “18-17 days had gone by and I didn’t even know about it.”

8:50 > After getting over the initial shock, she moved to Minneapolis and lived with her sisters.

9:25 > Bill was buried in Korea, but correspondence relayed that he was to be returned to the US.

9:55—10:10+ > She was planning to go to the Mardi Gras when she was notified of Bill’s funeral at Ft. Snelling.

10:30—12:02 > A great story about the Christmas after Bill’s death—she received his personal effects, including his dog tags and his combat boots—her daughter was excited to play with these combat boots = “It was a brutal experience.”

11:35—12:02 > “I was really happy to have the dog tags because then I knew Bill was gone.”

12:20—13:20 > Welcoming us to read the letters Bill sent home—shows harsh conditions, shows that Bill was upbeat ...

13:28—13:43 > “From the information I received from the army, it appears he was killed the first time he went out on patrol, which was 20 days after he left the U.S.”

13:43—14:06 > “I always felt kinda that he had had about six months training to be leading patrols—I’ve always had kinda bad feelings about that.”

14:07—14:40 > “It’s been 50 years since Bill died, and to this day, I have never been to any war movies or documentaries. So you see, though you think you put them (memories) away, you never really do. I suppose I fought my own war in that political action called Korea.”

Appendix D: Sample Documentary Introduction

The following is an introduction from one of our student-led documentaries on Vietnam that you can share with your students to help them with writing their own introductions.

Our Search for Answers

"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

But can a country ask too much? Too much of its citizens? Too much of its young men?

In the early part of the 1960s, just one generation (20 years) after men returned from fighting against world dictatorships in Europe and the Pacific, just 10 years after men returned from fighting communism in Korea, young soldiers were called to duty again—this time in Vietnam.

This conflict lasted over 10 years, involved 2.6 million American troops and took close to 60,000 U.S. lives, mostly in their teens and early twenties—but this conflict is about more than numbers. The Vietnam war conjures up images of jungle patrol missions, VC warfare, Agent Orange, burning villages, protest music, fatalistic faces of the Vietnamese, but just as importantly, the Vietnam war conjures up unanswered questions:

- What was our goal, our mission?
- Why were we not allowed to win?
- How much of the war had to do with big business and money?
- Why weren't soldiers welcomed back as heroes?
- Did we ask too much? Was the expense too great?

Part of the lingering pain for Vietnam veterans involves these unresolved issues.

Hopefully, one question that can be answered is what can we learn from Vietnam?

The young men and women who fought in this often misunderstood battle are now in their 50s, entrenched in the demands of society, career, and family; most of them have moved beyond the horrors of the past. But we have asked them to recall those days of combat and conflict, of frustration and fear. We have asked them to share their stories, to relive their pain in Our Search For Answers.

Appendix E: Sample Storyboard

The following is an example of a storyboard from one of our video poetry projects that you can share with your students to help them with creating their own storyboards.

Audio	Video	Other
Slow, sad music	Black screen	
	Fade into teen girl's room Pictures and teddy bear Black and white Fade in title	
Music gets a little more powerful	Dad kneeling at grave	Sunset background?
Dad narrates "Tell me not, in mournful numbers, life is but an empty dream"	Dad looks at grave, holding teddy bear	Profile shot
"For the soul is dead that slumbers, and things are not what they seem"	Dad look at camera	Shot from behind the headstone
"Life is real! Life is earnest and the grave is not its goal"	Look back at grave Fade to color	Profile
"Dust thou art, to dust returnest was not spoken of the soul"	Dad gets up, puts his hand on headstone	
Justin narrates "Not enjoyment and not sorrow is our destined end or way"	Look at camera Takes off jacket Put on gloves	
"But to act that each tomorrow, find us farther than today"	Pan out to see cliff he's about to climb	
Start faster music Chelsey start narrating "Art is long, and Time is fleeting, and our hearts though stout and brave, Still like muffled drums are beating, funeral marches to the grave."	Justin starts climbing slowly, steadily. Justin slips and falls partway down	Get different angles of him climbing, esp. top
"In the world's broad field of battle, in the bivouac of Life"	Blurred picture	View from Justin's eyes

Audio	Video	Other
"Be not like dumb, driven cattle! Be a hero in the strife"	Picture comes clear, Justin slowly gets up and continues	View not from his eyes
Go to softer music Narrate very slowly "Trust no future however pleasant! Let the dead past bury its dead"	Dad going through his daughter's things	
"Act – act in the living present! Heart within and God overhead!"	Justin frantically climbing Pan out to see sun in background. Justin reaches the top	
"Lives of great men all remind us, we can make our lives sublime"	Justin leaning, hands on knees, panting	View from above
Pause narration, music very loud and passionate	Justin stands up tall	
"And departing leave behind us footprints of the sands of time"	See the footprints Justin made	
"Footprints that perhaps another, sailing over life's solemn main"	Dad walking down railroad tracks near the cliff	Faraway shot
"Seeing, shall take heart again." Let music play awhile	Dad looks at footprints, and steps onto Justin's path, following his prints.	
"Let us, then, be up and doing, with a heart for any fate"	Dad starts climbing	Falls in the same place Justin fell
"Still achieving, still pursuing, learn to labor and to wait"	Dad gets to the top and a hand reaches down to help him up	We never see whose hand it is.
Passionate music	Black screen See the words "Life that shall send a challenge to its end, and when it comes, say, 'Welcome, Friend.'" –Henry Wadsworth Longfellow	

Title of Project _____

[illegible]

