

# Digital Storytelling Project

## Case Study: Developing a Point of View

Educators who wish to help students develop perspective on a topic have to find a way to balance factual information with the highly charged emotional feelings that come with finding a point of view. As students mature through the years in school into adulthood, teachers struggle with finding relevant, “real world” issues that fit into curriculum areas. Teens, often apathetic to a cause, can become volatile, when presented with a story that doesn’t fit into the clearly defined world as they know it. Teaching the facts, respecting the issue and learning to control their emotions, without losing the importance of the situation, is a life-long lesson that some never master.

Digital storytelling projects can be the spark that ignites a future film maker. The ease of making digital movies combined with the natural interest in films creates an atmosphere in the classroom with future consequences unknown. Projects that connect students to community through family to have them teach and learn with each other are all around us.

The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) acclaimed twenty-one year old, documentary program series, “Point of View”, offers educators ideas for topics of relevance from today’s world through television film making. Students can then see how investigating a meaningful topic, charting and debating the issues and discussing the relevance to their future lives can provide material for their own digital stories.

Enter the New England DeWolf family’s discovery that their family, known to them as important community leaders, clergy, and teachers, had a deep ancestral secret. Katrina’s family never taught her about their beginnings in America and it wasn’t until her grandmother wrote a family history for her grandchildren, that Katrina discovered the chilling truth; her Rhode Island ancestors were the largest slave traders in United States history. This troubling secret sent her and several other family members on a journey of discovery to create a film and a book about their family inheritance. This “defining moment” of truth discovery can shake the foundations of people and community and provides an example of how teaching and learning are important to preparing students for life-long learning situations.

# Slave Trading in Rhode Island

## Introduction

Public awareness of the slave trade is often based on the presumption that the slaves brought to America from Africa was a problem only of the Deep South. The book “Inheriting the Trade”, by Thomas N. DeWolf, tells the story of the DeWolf family of Bristol, Rhode Island, the largest slave trading family in United States history. The impact of the knowledge their ancestors were responsible for bringing slaves on their ships through the Triangle Trade (from New England to the coast of Ghana to Cuba and back) sent them on an emotional journey of race relations, class oppression, sexism and religious intolerance. This is the story of how one family’s knowledge and perceptions of their ancestors could change over time from pride in prominent, wealthy community leaders and clergy to the shame of their involvement in the illegal business of the transportation of at least one hundred thousand human slaves.

As this topic is of a highly sensitive nature, students should be respectful of the thoughts, emotions and reactions of other students. Teachers need to give firm guidelines for debating the issues, so students have boundaries but still can develop a point of view.

## Learning Objectives

- Students will learn about the Triangle Trade and slavery in New England.
- Students will learn how perceiving the past can impact the world of today
- Student will explore the emotions of shame, honesty, anger, hatred and remorse
- Students will develop their own point-of-view through the medium of digital storytelling
- Students will debate the “rights” and “wrongs” of slavery from the perspective of the past and present
- Students will explore the disconnect between the sexes as to how they view topics of history
- Students will learn about the chocolate trade and present day slavery issues

## Guiding Questions

How important is your family history to the community in which you live?

What part does economics and culture play in the understanding of history?

What makes a person of good character and does their place in society cloud their judgment of right and wrong?

If someone in your family breaks the law or is accused of misconduct are you responsible for their behavior?

In our country, are the most powerful people, white, wealthy and descended from European Protestants?

Does “history soften over time” and have little to do with our lives today?

Will people examine us in a hundred years and see us in a “bad light” for the attitudes and lifestyles we live today?

## Lesson Materials

Inheriting the Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy as the Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty in U.S. History by Thomas N. DeWolf

(available in hardcover, paperback, Kindle book, nook book, Audible selection)

POV™ 2008: [Traces of the Trade](#) (a PBS Program) Sundance Film Festival Selection

check PBS.org for off air recording rights for education

(<http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2008/tracesofthetrade/preview.html>)

[White Privilege](#): Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh

(<http://www.nymbp.org/reference/WhitePrivilege.pdf>)

Sugar and Slavery: [Diagramming the Triangle Trade](#)

(<http://www.etc.net/tah/Reading%20Assignments/Sugar%20and%20Slavery--revised.pdf>)

Sugar and Slavery: [Molasses to Rum to Slaves](#)

(<http://www.fenwayhs.org/sites/fenwayhs.org/files/sugarandslavery.pdf>)

## ISTE Standards

Creativity and Innovation

- a. apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes

Communication and Collaboration

- b. develop cultural understanding and global awareness by engaging with learners of other cultures

Research and Information Fluency

- c. locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media

Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

- a. identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation

Digital Citizenship

- b. exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity

Technology Operations and Concepts

- d. transfer current knowledge to learning of new technologies

## Digital Storytelling: “Remember, Reflect and Respond”

*Step One: Study the issues*

- Using the film and teacher-selected sections of the book, have students learn about the slavery issues in the North and then--
  - Brainstorm with students the words “remember, reflect and respond”
  - Create a word wall for discussion, debate and digital storytelling with words and phrases
  - Compare and contrast other events in history where there has been injustice, racial issues and sexism to the slave trade. (Native Americans and the Pilgrims, Holocaust, Salem Witch Trials, September 11<sup>th</sup>, Workplace Sexual Harassment)

### *Step Two: Word Wall*

Family secrets, Juneteenth, proud, pushed-pulled, pride, not talk about unpleasant things, embrace the things/people you fear most, non-verbal expectations, accountability, apology for slavery, material greed, white privilege,

### *Step Three: Digital Story Project Creation*

#### **Student Reaction Interviews**

After viewing the film or reading the book, students should develop a list of phrases (based on the Word Wall) in order to develop questions. When the questions have been approved by the teacher, students can create video clip interviews with selected students' reactions to these questions.

#### **Photo Essay**

Have the students locate, evaluate and cite the photos from the [Library of Congress](#) to create a photo essay to promote visual literacy. Have students work with music and learn which type of music expresses the mood of their photo selection.

#### **Blog Posts**

Using these listed lessons titled Sugar and Slavery as a guide, have students create a story-blog about how the sugar trade economically impacted the lives of all of the people in this time.

#### **Slavery Today**

Have student develop a search term that will lead them to Web sites about the chocolate trade and slavery. Each Web site should be examined, evaluated and properly cited for accurate information and bias. Students can develop a digital story about what they learned and how they feel about this world situation. These stories should teach others about the countries where slavery exists and demonstrate their learning about life in our country as compared to those places.