

Swept Away



Left: Finished storyboard. Right: Pencil being filmed in front of the screen.

Tricia Fuglestad

Sometimes lecturing to my art students about picking up the art supplies off the floor and putting them away properly doesn't work. Often my reminders dissipate into the room unheeded and if I don't take the time to pick up the erasers, pencils, and paper scraps, the custodian will sweep them away at the end of the day.

This scenario occurred one too many times, so I finally asked a group of fourth-grade students to help make a movie that would inspire others to put art supplies away. My goal for this project was to work with the filmmakers on digital storytelling techniques including storyboarding, camera angles, shot composition, shot variety, video editing, audio editing, and green

screen special effects, while helping them create an entertaining story with an effective message.

Students decided that the most powerful way to tell the story would be from the point of view of the discarded art supplies. An art crew began designing costumes for a pencil, eraser, and paper scrap from large pieces of illustration board. Meanwhile, the rest of the class began brainstorming lyrics that would express the sad fate of these discarded items at the end of the day.

Students decided that the whole story could be told through song. I

pulled out my guitar, strummed three cords, and before we knew it, we had a sweet, yet tragic, song.

Auditioning

Auditions were held the following day for the three main roles: pencil, eraser, and paper. There was great enthusiasm among my

filmmakers for acting and singing, so I elected directors to sit as judges during auditions. Students took turns singing one of the verses to the directors while I accompanied them.

The talent was so impressive that the directors decided to create a chorus to give everyone an opportunity to sing.

I was very impressed with the collaboration, problem-solving, and artistic creativity this project provoked in these students.

Audio Recording

After many rehearsal sessions, the singers were ready to make their audio recording. I had already created a music track in GarageBand of my guitar set over a drum kit loop from the software. They took turns singing into the USB microphone while listening to the music with headphones. They were able to easily delete, trim, or enhance sound quality during the audio edit.

Storyboarding

Since this was to be a music video, the audio drove the visual, so the next step was to storyboard. We pulled out a six-foot sheet of banner paper and a few packs of sticky notes. Each student helped sketch and sequence camera shots based on the lyrics of the song.

After I explained the magic of green screen and video layering, the filmmakers worked on ideas to make the main characters of the movie look small enough to be an actual pencil, eraser, or a paper scrap. They decided

that the characters would be filmed before a green screen, then layered into a photo of their environment. One scene called for inanimate objects to move, so I demonstrated stop-motion animation with the digital still camera.

Movie Making

Filming took many sessions to complete because of the complexity of lip synching, green screening, and learning the equipment. The directors worked the camera, framed the shots, and kept track of their progress on the storyboard, while others were assigned jobs such as cueing the music, quieting the set, and readying the props. I was very impressed with the collaboration, problem-solving, and artistic creativity this project provoked in these students who could have been otherwise playing outside at recess.

The Premier

The finished movie premiered to an audience of family and friends on a "big screen" one evening in the

school's library media center. Student filmmakers introduced the movie and explained what role they each had in its production. After the movie, students fielded questions from the crowd. It was obvious that they had not only created an enormously successful little film, but they also had an impressive understanding and appreciation of the art of movie making.

I later entered this movie titled, *Swept Away*, into the International Shortie Awards in Washington, DC, where it won an honorable mention among more than 250 submissions 🎬

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WEB LINK

sweptaway.notlong.com.



Go to schoolartsonline.com to watch *Swept Away*.

Left: eraser being filmed in front of the screen.
Right: add caption

