

## CASE STUDIES: REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES OF HOW LIBRARIES ARE RE-ENVISIONING TEEN SERVICES

# Digital Storytelling

*Kate Pickett & Megan Mascorro-Jackson  
Johnson County Library (KS)*

### What Did You Want to Achieve?

We had several educational objectives. We focused on helping students to

- Explore telling their own stories using their own voice.
- Gain an understanding of the language used by Shakespeare. If you can gain command over language, you can do anything.
- Experience theater as a vehicle for social change, and learn to be agents for their own change.
- See connections in storytelling from Shakespeare to modern writing for stage and screen.
- Create digital stories to keep as evidence of skills learned.
- Write a monologue to keep as evidence of skills learned.
- Attend a play at a regional theater with an opportunity to provide feedback and ask questions of playwright and actors after the show.

### Overview of the Program/Project

In a partnership between Olathe School District, the Kansas City Repertory Theater, and the Johnson County Library, we offered a seven-week course for students at the Foundations juvenile detention center. The course gave students the chance to explore storytelling in multiple forms from the printed word to live theater production. Students explored Shakespeare, saw a performance of *Sticky Traps*—the most recent play by playwright Nathan Jackson—and investigated a variety of modern storytelling techniques. Participants learned to express themselves, understand the value of a story and words, and had the opportunity to become agents for change in their community.

### What Challenges Did You Face and How Did You Overcome Them?

Probably the biggest challenge was bringing technology into a secure facility. Luckily, we didn't have to fight much of the sometimes common battle related to the potential for metal laptops to be used as weapons. The school purchased laptops earlier in the year, so they were on site already. However, detention center staff were very concerned about students being able to access the Internet. We worked out a compromise where the laptops were locked down with as much security as possible. We also promised that library staff would be with the students and laptops at all times: at no time would we allow students to use the laptops unsupervised. Also, because of the fluctuating nature of their population, we needed to make each piece of the project easy to consume, so someone could easily jump in on the project and not feel like they couldn't catch up. We had 5–8 new students over the course of the seven-week unit.



## What Did You Learn?

We learned a lot. First, orchestrating a program with multiple partners is tough! If we thought managing a library schedule was difficult, try managing to work with theater staff, public school teachers, and corrections staff so as to achieve one goal—sometimes communication felt futile. But it all turned out well and ultimately brought a richer experience to the students.

We learned that we didn't know as much as we thought we did. We went in feeling pretty comfortable with podcasting and stop-motion animation, but ultimately, by giving students time to mess around and show us what they discovered, we learned more from them than we would ever have been able to teach.

And we learned that project-based, interest-driven learning takes a lot of time. We had to dedicate a lot of staff time to making the tools available to students (since as I mentioned before we couldn't leave the students alone with the laptops). For a public library that (like many others) is strapped for capacity, it was a big investment, but it really paid off.

## How Does This Work Connect to YALSA's Futures Report and Vision?

This project is connected to several components of the Futures Report. These include:

- A focus on multiple literacies. Students engaged with this project were able to improve skills in digital and print-based literacies.
- Giving students the opportunity to engage in real-life experiences through interaction with a playwright and actors.
- Developing relationships and partnerships with multiple community agencies. Through our work with a local school district, a juvenile detention center, and a theater, we were able to support the academic and personal interest needs of youth.