

## **Multimedia and Internet @ Schools**

Pipeline Column:

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### **Storyboarding: Comics, Graphic Novels and Engaging Learners**

*(Dave: You might want to choose a few screenshots from the sites if there's room.)*

by Stephen Abram

Snowboarding, skateboarding and storyboarding - as they say on Sesame Street, one of these things is not like the other; one of these things is not the same...

Storyboarding is one of the great skills to learn. Storyboarding is the graphic organization of your story's arc using pictures and/or illustrations. They are displayed visually in order to present the line of your story or the events you want to present. It's a powerful way to visualize and understand the ultimate experience of your story whether it ends up in print, comic, game or film format.

It is just made for learners of any age. You can use anything from stock pictures to stick people to beautifully drawn animation cells. You don't need to be a talented illustrator or artist.

It is also a great skill for the marketplace. Here are just a few of the many ways in which storyboards are used today:

- Film and motion picture production
- Documentaries
- Animation
- TV show production
- Video and computer games
- Planning ad campaigns and commercials
- Developing a proposal to bid on or propose new projects
- Website user experience development
- Analysis and planning of any interactive media – from ATM's and slot machines to gaming.
- Space planning for shopping malls, museums, art galleries and libraries.
- And more

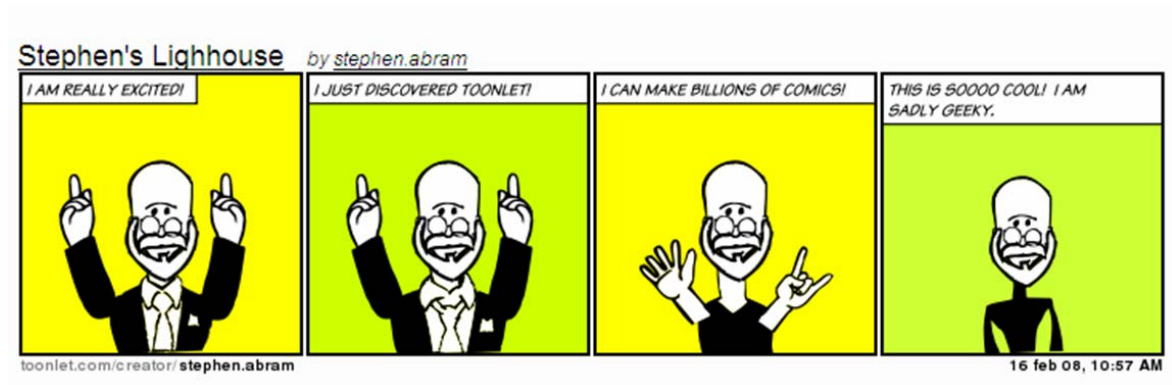
Clearly this is an area where there is a lot employment and a growing arena for the use of talent. It also uses the core skills we teach like creative writing and writing for purpose. It can allow visual learners to create and build skills that align with their own special talents. In this month's column I thought I would point

to some easy-to-use technologies that are inexpensive or free that can teach storyboarding in a way that:

1. engages learners,
2. allows them to share with peers and others,
3. Teaches a good skill and lays down a foundation for future learning,
4. allows them to publish good work as a class,
5. and is fun.

Storyboarding can be quite detailed and complicated when it gets into the professional worlds of media, advertising and business. However, it all starts with some simple concepts. A story can be told simply in four comic panels. Indeed, Hemingway once wrote a story in just six words ("For sale: baby shoes, never worn."). It's pretty good and conveys a strong emotion. A good comic strip can too. Indeed politicians can quake at the power of a single frame editorial cartoon or being targeted by Doonesbury. And learners will instantly see that they can have that power too. They could simply start by diagramming a popular joke.

And, OMG, this is so fun! You can start yourself and make your own comic with *Toonlet*. Here's mine:



That's my strip. I made it in less than 10 minutes. It's my title and that character is actually *me*. It's also the first avatar of me with my new beard, the first beard of my life necessitated by a bad case of shingles.

All you need to do to create comics for free is register and it's so easy to use. You create a set of characters. You can adjust their styles and moods. Then you write your strip. You literally have billions of options.

Imagine engaging learners of any age in creating a comic. They could invent their own. It could be humorous or they could create a scene out of a novel they're reading. They could make them on a theme such as school sports, play or library visits. It could also be made at the classroom level or be a whole school contest lead by the library / resource centre.

There is a ton of learning applications here. You can create a suite of characters – students, librarians, teachers, coaches, parents, neighbours, and more. Then you can put up a comic a week advertising the latest event, book, meeting, whatever. Anyway, I recommend that you play a while with *Toonlet* or one of the others on the list with this column. Follow along on the tour (oooooh - good idea - a library tour comic...!) and get started. Let your imaginations go wild. This is one of those simple things that can help learners learn and be a lot of fun too.

Here are a few mostly free comic creators.

Toonlet

<http://toonlet.com/>

Toondoo

<http://www.toondoo.com/Home.toon>

Pixton

<http://www.pixton.com/home>

MakeBeliefsComix

<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/>

Comiqs

<http://comiqs.com/>

Comic Life

<http://plasq.com/comiclife-win>

Of these different sites, some seem appropriate for different ages and stages. They also seem tailor-made for library events. How about these ideas:

1. Have a library user contest to make the best 4-panel comic to describe a visit to the library. (Humour welcome!)
2. Have teams create sets of real characters and write a comic book about a trip to the library for different grades to access and read before or after a library visit.
3. Tell a joke visually.
4. Write a fun storyboard about a library event - games night, teddy bear or wear-your-pajamas night, sleepovers, computer literacy training, and more.
5. Write a book review as a comic.
6. Storyboard a 60-90 second YouTube video, pre-production.
7. Promote your graphic novels, mystery or romance collection with a graphic representation of the staff and librarian.

Don't forget that there are many formats of 'comics':

- Single pane (editorial cartoons or Family Circus)
- 3-4 panels
- Sunday colour comics (long form)
- Classic comics (Archie, Richie Rich, X-Men, Batman, Spiderman)
- Graphic novels (Maus, Persepolis)
- Series graphic novels (Manga, Animé)
- Serials (or Soap Operas) like Mary Worth or Gasoline Alley
- Limited series (like a Christmas arc)

I am sure you have many other ideas. Hey! You don't need to know how to draw anymore! Start with a few friendly kids to workshop this and then build towards a class or school launch.

Now let's consider putting this whole effort on steroids! It's now possible to create wonderful, professionally done books though POD or Print on Demand services. This is maturing service on the web and is an opportunity for building talent in our students while having the ability to potentially raise funds without buying calorie-laden chocolate covered almonds.

Here's a list of some of the major POD players:

CreateSpace

<http://www.createspace.com>

Lulu

<http://www.lulu.com>

PrintonDemand

<http://www.printondemand.com>

AuthorHouse

<http://www.authorhouse.com>

iUniversere

<http://www.iuniversere.com>

Wordclay

<http://www.wordclay.com>

Borders Personal Publishing

[http://publish.bordersstores.com/publish\\_public.html](http://publish.bordersstores.com/publish_public.html)

CafePress

<http://www.cafepress.com>

## Blurb

<http://www.blurb.com/home/1/>

I wonder how many schools and libraries have taken advantage of these services? I could imagine:

- a. Publishing student poetry in a collaborative framework and distributing it for download or selling it to parents and grandparents.
- b. Publishing a short story collection.
- c. Publishing recipe collections from your community as a fundraiser
- d. Publishing and collecting local literature efforts from your community.
- e. Offering the ability to publish family genealogies as part of our family history lessons.
- f. Publishing student written like local histories or tours.

In the end, you'll have a wonderful collection of student work to display virtually or print.

Hey, now doesn't storyboarding sound like as much fun as snowboarding or skateboarding? Try it. (You can learn more about storyboarding at Wikipedia and through the usual search engines.) If you want to share I would love to see some.

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