Digital Storytelling (AMST 2699)

Slack: [digitalstoryt-dnv1440.slack.com](digitalstoryt-dnv1440.slack.com)

**Instructor:** Jim McGrath, PhD  
**Course Meeting Times:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30pm-4pm  
**Location:** Seminar Room, John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage (357 Benefit St.; 2nd floor, entrance in rear of building)  
**Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-2pm (or by appointment); my office is on the same floor as the Seminar Room in the JNBC  
**Email:** james_mcgrath@brown.edu

Official Course Description

This course surveys the current state of digital storytelling, examining topics ranging from digital curation to data journalism to social media activism (and beyond). We will consider the narrative conventions, multimodal dimensions, and mechanics of a wide range of digital stories, carefully examining both the tools available to creators and the theoretical perspectives that motivate their authors. Students will determine best practices for digital storytelling projects through their engagement with course readings, their participation in in-class workshop sessions where we experiment with particular tools and publishing platforms, and their implementation of a digital storytelling project.

“Digital Storytelling” is a broad topic to cover, so I’ve decided to focus on three particular kinds of digital storytelling: **Iterative and Interactive Storytelling**, **Audio Storytelling**, and **Data-Oriented Storytelling**. These areas are described in greater detail on our course site.

**Learning Goals**

Over the course of the semester, students will:

- learn more about the long history of digital storytelling by reviewing particular projects, tools, methodologies, and reception histories
-view digital storytelling within longer and larger conversations about aesthetics, audience, curation, materiality, and public humanities
-consider the relationship between best practices in digital storytelling and their own professional, personal, and creative aims and interests
-demonstrate their understanding of best practices through the creation and publication of digital storytelling projects

Course Requirements

Over 15 weeks, students will spend three hours per week in class (45 hours total). Engagement with course readings and research related to digital tools and projects will take approximately 4 1/2 hours per week (68 hours total). Completion of major course assignments is estimated to take 67 hours total (spread across the semester). **In total, time estimated to complete activities related to this class should take 180 hours to complete over the course of the semester** (on average, 12 hours per week). These estimates are in line with time estimates for typical Brown University courses. Please be in touch ASAP if you have questions about course completion expectations.

We may leave the classroom on a few occasions to complete course-related field research or workshopping: in those instances, you will receive sufficient advance notice and we’ll utilize our regular meeting time for these activities (in the event that you have other commitments before or after our course, we’ll talk and figure that out). If there are events or programming that seem of interest to the course but fall outside our regular meeting times, I will let you know about them, but your attendance is not required.

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu. Students in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact one of the deans in the Dean of the College office.

**Reliable web access**: Given the nature of this course, it’s essential that you be able to get on the web on a regular basis. Please see me if you have any questions about this requirement or if you’d like to talk about resources here at Brown.
**Classroom technology**: There may be days when we will require the use of laptops, tablets, and/or smartphones to view and complete course work. There may be particular days when a laptop is preferable to a tablet, given the need to work with a particular tool. I will let you know in advance should these needs arise if you require additional resources. You are not required to purchase or own laptops, tablets, and/or smart phones for this course (though you may find that bringing one or more of these devices to class is useful). Bringing a Wifi-enabled device you’re comfortable reading and writing on in class is recommended but not required.

**Slack**: The class will use Slack to share links related to our themes and readings and to check in on progress on major assignments. Slack also offers a chat feature allowing users to privately message one another, a feature that should be used for course-related conversations. Slack is free and accessible via a web address or the Slack application. We’ll discuss how we’re using Slack this semester during our first class. Please contact me ASAP if you have questions or concerns about use of Slack or particular messages you’ve seen or received on Slack.

**Course Materials and Readings**

Course reading are outlined in the semester calendar. Readings will generally be accessed in two ways: by direct links found on the course site (in some cases, you may need to be logged in to your Brown account to access materials under copyright) or via a private Dropbox folder. I’ll email you a link to the Dropbox folder after the first day of classes.

If you have trouble accessing a particular reading, or if you have questions or comments about the amount of reading for a particular day or week, please be in touch! I am also happy to talk about additional readings on a particular topic of your interest.

**Course Policies**

I expect that students will regularly attend class sessions, keep up with readings, and submit graded work on time. I also assume that students will participate in class discussions and be respectful of their peers in said discussions. Excessive absences or missing assignments / contributions to Slack can negatively impact your grade.

If you have concerns about your ability to meet particular course requirements or assignment due dates, please email me or talk to me after class.
Major Assignments and Grading Breakdown

Course Journal (5% of final grade): You are required to create and maintain a course “journal” throughout the semester. This journal can be digital or non-digital, public or private, or some combination of the two, depending on your own preferences (my own course journal will take on two forms: a notebook and a blog that publicly reflects on the course’s pedagogical dimensions and readings). You might buy your own notebook, keep a running Google Doc, or do something else. I find that my own research, thinking, and writing benefits from a less formal record of ongoing ideas and readings (with an eye towards opportunities to formalize and more publicly share particular thoughts), and I hope you all find this requirement preferable to more formal and polished pieces of short writing on a discussion board or Slack. I’ll check in with your journaling progress at a few points throughout the semester, and I encourage you to bring your journals to class meetings. You won’t be required to submit this document by the end of the semester: it’s meant to be your own personal record of the course, in the format of your choosing. This journal isn’t worth a lot of course percentage points, but I imagine that the writing and drafting you complete here will impact the rest of the work you complete this semester.

Short Digital Storytelling Exercises (5% of final grade): Throughout the semester, we’ll experiment with different forms of digital storytelling, efforts designed to get you thinking about your larger project and to the various factors informing approaches to storytelling in digital contexts. These exercises will take place in class or as part of weekly homework assignments: you’ll find additional information on our course calendar and you’ll be updated via Slack with more specific prompts. Evaluation will take the form of informal class discussion and reflection.

Digital Storytelling Keywords (15% of final grade): Each student will be asked to select a keyword related to ongoing class work (you are also free to suggest your own keywords: talk to me!) and will then be given 15-20 minutes of class time. Within reason, you can do whatever you’d like with this class time, so long as you can justify to me how you’re using this time in relation to the keyword in email correspondence (where you will be asked to briefly describe your idea and how you plan to use class time in some detail, with an eye towards time management and mechanics). You can do a more traditional lecture, presentation, or guided discussion, but you could also use the time in other, less traditional ways that are interactive, exploratory, speculative, immersive, etc. You can bring in whoever or whatever you’d like, keeping in mind your time and place constraints (though a quick, local field trip or use of an alternate venue could be interesting), as well as the needs of your peers. I’ll circulate the list of keywords
early in the semester and we’ll take things from there. After you’ve successfully filled your time, I’ll provide written feedback reviewing your use of class time. You should submit any materials used during your class time (presentation slides, handouts, prompts, etc.).

**Collaborative Audio Storytelling Project (25% of final grade):** Building on course readings and in-class work related to audio storytelling and augmented reality, students will collaborate to develop and create a short-form, place-based audio storytelling project intended for distribution and use on mobile devices. We’ll discuss particular aims, parameters, forms of labor and collaboration, and project outputs this semester. Ideally, we will end up with a public-facing project that students can reference in various academic and professional capacities. Work on this project will be ongoing throughout the semester.

**Digital Storytelling Project (50% of final grade):** Over the course of the semester, you’ll develop and create a public-facing digital storytelling project. The course is structured so that several project development benchmarks throughout the spring allow you to brainstorm, research, draft, and refine these efforts over time (rather than a structure where we began work in the second half or final third of the semester: based on previous experiences, this reduced timeline can be stressful for all parties). You will be required to articulate your project’s aims, audience(s), and metrics for success, though I will obviously help you determine these parameters. You are encouraged to find collaborators in and beyond the classroom, and you may also decide to work on a digital project that already exists. An extension of the Collaborative Audio Storytelling Project is also an option for interested students. A “prototype” or “proof of concept” approach may work for some projects, but these efforts will still have to circulate publicly in some form (and we’ll talk about what “public-facing” might look like in relation to your work). I’m hoping that these projects will be of value to you in future academic and professional contexts, but you are not required to explicitly align your project with your chosen major or current career track. We’ll talk more about project work throughout the semester. We’ll also discuss how and where to ideally disseminate your finished projects (locally at Brown and online).

If you ever have any questions about assignments, learning goals, or forms and measures of evaluation, please talk to me!
Schedule and Readings

**Students:** Please note that “Homework” is expected to be completed by the following class sessions (i.e. Homework listed under 1/24 will inform class work on 1/29). I'll provide instructions for access for any **starred materials** on the schedule.

**How to Read for This Class:** I tend to view course reading assignments as a way to document and cite the origins of my own lines of thought on particular topics; that being said, in some cases I may assign readings that are relatively new to me, or works that run counter to my own thoughts but are otherwise of interest. I have also assigned material that I hope will generally inform your thinking in relation to major course assignments. I will often explain my motivations for assigning particular readings in class, and I'll provide thoughts on how to approach upcoming texts, games, tools, etc. in terms of time management (I know we’re all very busy!). And I will explicitly cite and introduce particular ideas and phrases from these materials during our in-class discussions. You will never be quizzed on readings or be expected to memorize key selections: my hope is that notes taken in your course journals and ready access to digital readings (Ctrl or Cmd+F is your friend for finding particular passages!) will help improve our conversations. Suggested further readings are merely that: additional materials that may be of interest to students whose research or reading interests align with a particular cluster of discussion points.

*Note: the semester schedule will be finalized on 1/29/18. In the event of revisions, you will be directly informed by me and this page will be revised.*

**TH 1/24 First Day of Classes**

**T 1/29 Interactive / Iterative Digital Storytelling in the Twenty-First Century:**

*Bandersnatch* and Twine
Readings For Today

“Duck Amuck” (Chuck Jones et al, 1953)**

*Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (David Slade, Charlie Brooker, et al, 2018; exclusive to Netflix; please contact me if you don’t have access to this streaming service and we’ll figure that out)

*Depression Quest* (Zoe Quinn, Patrick Lindsey, and Isaac Schankler, 2013)

“Game Mechanics, Experience Design, and Affective Play” (Patrick Jagoda and Peter McDonald, *The Routledge Companion to Media Studies and Digital Humanities*, 2018)**

“Introduction” to *Videogames for Humans: Twine Authors in Conversation* (merritt k, 2015)**

Suggested further reading:


“*Black Mirror: Bandersnatch could become Netflix’s secret marketing weapon*” (Jesse Damiani; 2019)

“How the surprise new interactive *Black Mirror came together*” (Hendry, 2019; paywalled / 5 article per month limit, but it discusses the use of Twine on *Bandersnatch*; I’ll provide other access if interested and discuss relevant bits in class next week)

TH 1/31: Workshop (Making a Digital Story with Twine) Laptops strongly recommended!
**Colossal Cave Adventure** (Willie Crowther and Don Woods, 1975-77; we're using an emulator designed by AMC as a promotional tool for the TV show *Halt and Catch Fire*)

**Galatea** (Emily Short, 2000)

**Twine** (Chris Klimas et al, 2009-present)

Twine stories featured in *Videogames for Humans* and the [Interactive Fiction Database](https://www.the-interactive-fiction-database.org/)

Suggested further reading:

“*Somewhere Nearby is Colossal Cave: Examining Will Crowther’s ‘Adventure’ in Code and in Kentucky*” (Jerz, 2007)

**T 2/5: Iterative and Interactive Digital Storytelling: What We Can Learn From Comics**

*Readings for Today*

**Nancy** (Olivia Jaimes, 2018-present; read the comics via Twitter [here](https://twitter.com/yournancy))

- Excerpts from *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor* (Lynda Barry, 2014)**

“How to Read Nancy” (Mark Newgarden and Paul Karasik, 1988; later revised and expanded into *How To Read Nancy: The Elements of Comics in Three Easy Panels*, 2017)

"22 Panels That Always Work" (Wally Wood, 1980?)**

Suggested Further Reading:

"Animating an Archive: Repetition and Regeneration in Alison Bechdel’s Fun Home" (Hillary Chute, Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics, 2010)

“A Black and White World” (Neil Gaiman and Simon Bisley, Batman: Black and White, 1996; link to free edition that requires Amazon / Comixology login details)

"The Creator of Dinosaur Comics on How to Browse The Web Good" (Matthew Olsen and Ryan North, Digg, 2018)

"Olivia Jaimes, the Mysterious Cartoonist Behind Nancy, Gives Rare Interview" (Abraham Riseman, Vulture, 2018)

TH 2/7 Iterative and Interactive Digital Storytelling: What We Can Learn From Memes

Readings for Today

“Memes are Modern-Day Propaganda” and “Memes Counter Disinformation, Spread Awareness of Pollution in Beijing” (An Xiao Mina, excerpts from From Memes to Movements: How The World’s Most Viral Media is Changing Social Protest and Power, 2019)

”Memes and Misogynoir” (Laur M. Jackson, The Awl, 2014)

Suggested Further Reading:

”The Best Memes of 2018, According to The Verge Staff” (The Verge, 2018)

Know Your Meme
"Mini-Syllabus: Memes and Blackness" (Amber Officer-Narvasa, *Entropy*, 2016)

"The Political Life of Memes with An Xiao Mina” (Hrag Vartanian, *Hyperallergic*, 2019)

**T 2/12 Iterative and Interactive Storytelling: Networked Storytelling**

*Readings for Today*


*Suggested Further Reading*

“Is Twitter any Place for a [Black Academic] Lady?” (Marcia Chatelain, *Bodies of Information: Intersectional Feminism and Digital Humanities*, 2018)**

“#GirlsLikeUs: Trans advocacy and community building online” (Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles, *New Media and Society*, 2017)

How Kevin Kruse Became History’s Attack Dog” (Emma Pettit, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2018; access via Brown) and @KevinMKruse (Twitter)
TH 2/14 Iterative and Interactive Storytelling: Augmented Realities

Readings for Today

Excerpts from *Friending The Past: The Sense of History in the Digital Age* (Alan Liu, 2018)**


"The Genre of You” (Isabel Munson, *Real Life*, 2018)

Suggested Further Reading:

“What are the differences among virtual, augmented, and mixed reality?” (Eric Johnson, *Recode*, 2016)


T 2/19 LONG WEEKEND: NO CLASS
TH 2/21 Developing Digital Storytelling Projects

Readings for Today

“Before You Make A Thing” (Jentery Sayers, 2018)


T 2/26 Audio Storytelling: The Age of The Podcast


“Sound” (Josh Kun, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, 2007-present)


Suggested Further Reading

“History on the Download: Podcasting the Past” (Sadie Bergen, *Perspectives on History [AHA]*, 2016)
“Podcasting Historical Timeline and Milestones” (International Podcast Day, 2018)

“Podcasts in American Studies” (H-Net)

TH 2/28 Audio Storytelling: From Oral Histories to Multimodal Storytelling

Readings for Today

“Gateways to Newark” (Talking Eyes and DreamPlay Media, Newest Americans, 2016)


Public Secrets (Sharon Daniel and Erik Loyer, Vectors Journal, 2008)

The Roaring Twenties (Emily Thompson and Scott Mahoy, Vectors Journal, 2013)

Suggested Further Reading

Oral History in the Digital Age (Various Contributors, Michigan State University / IMLS, 2012)

“WBUR Oral History Project” (Various Contributors, Our Marathon: The Boston Bombing Digital Archive, 2013-14)

“Telling Stories: A Reflection on Oral History and New Media” (Steven High, Oral History, 2010)***

Putting Oral History on the Map” (Andrew Shaffer, OUPBlog, 2016)
T 3/5 Audio Storytelling Workshop

TH 3/7 Audio Storytelling: Hyperlocal Histories

Readings for Today

*Providence’s Chinatown* (Angela Feng and Julieanne Fontana. 2018)


“We Came and Stayed: Coyt Jones/Ras Baraka” (Ashley Gilbertson, Ed Kashi, Julie Winokur, *Newest Americans*, 2015)

*Hollow – An Interactive Documentary* (Elaine McMillion Sheldon, 2013)

Suggested Further Reading

“We Came and Stayed: Coyt Jones/Ras Baraka” (Beth McMurtrie, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2014)

T 3/12 Audio Storytelling and Providence

Readings for Today

- Excerpts from *Crimetown: Season One* (Marc Smerling and Zac Stuart-Pontier, Gimlet Media, 2016-17)
-Excerpts from *Rhode Tour* (Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, Rhode Island Historical Society, John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities)

-Excerpts from *Now Here This*

Suggested Further Reading

–*Rhode Latino Voices* (Marta Martínez et al, 2016)

–*Fox Point Oral History Project* (Anne Valk et al, John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities, 2008-; original project site here)

**TH 3/14 Audio Storytelling Workshop**

**T 3/19 Audio Storytelling: Sampling and other Found Sounds**

*Readings for Today*


“Planet Rock” from *The Grey Album: On The Blackness of Blackness* (Kevin Young, 2012)**

“‘Summoned By Aliens’: How the Beastie Boys, Pete Rock, Q-Tip, and Others Changed Rap Music with The Pause-Tape” (Gino Sorcinelli, *Micro-Chop*, 2016)


Suggested Further Reading
Lemonade (Beyoncé, 2016)

Shades of Blue (Madlib, 2003)

“Frontier Psychiatrist” (The Avalanches, 2000)

Endtroducing... (DJ Shadow, 1996) 3 Feet High and Rising (De La Soul, 1989)

“John Kannenberg on The Museum of Portable Sound” (Ruby Thiagarajan and John Kannenberg, Public Work, 2018)

TH 3/21 Audio Storytelling: Editing / Recording / Research Day

T 3/26 BROWN SPRING RECESS: NO CLASS

TH 3/28 BROWN SPRING RECESS: NO CLASS

T 4/2 Digital Storytelling and Archives (with Hannah Alpert-Abrams, Postdoctoral Fellow at the John Carter Brown Library)

Readings for Today

“The Transnational and the Text-Searchable: Digitized Sources and the Shadows They Cast” (Lara Putnam, The American Historical Review, 2016)**

The GAM Digital Archive Project

Suggested Further Reading

“Critical Digital Archives” (Hannah Alpert-Abrams and Kelly McDonough, Course Site, 2018)

“Seismic Shifts: On Archival Facts and Fictions” (Jarrett Drake, 2018)

“Preserving Social Media Records of Activism” (Bergis Jules, On Archivy, 2015)

“All My Blogs Are Dead” (Carter Maness, The Awl, 2015)

TH 4/4 “Activating Archives” (with Tim Raphael, Newest Americans; Rutgers-Newark)

Readings for Today

Excerpts from The Politics of Mass Digitization (Nanna Bonde Thylstrup, 2019)

Excerpts from Newest Americans


Suggested Further Reading

“What We Do Crosses over to Activism': The Politics and Practice of Community Archives” (Marika Cifor, Michelle Caswell, Alda Allina Migoni, Noah Geraci, The Public Historian, 2018)

Mukurtu

“Animating the Archive” (Jeffrey Schnapp, First Monday, 2008)
T 4/9 Data-Oriented Storytelling: Maps and Absences

Readings for Today

“Data” (Melissa Gregg and Dawn Nafus, *Keywords for Media Studies*, 2017)**

Excerpts from *Silencing The Past: Power and the Production of History* (Michel Rolph-Trouillot, 1997)


Excerpts from *Numbered Lives: Life and Death in Quantum Media* (Jacqueline Wernimont, 2019)**

Suggested Further Reading

“Comping White” (Laura McGrath, *LA Review of Books*, 2019)

*Apartheid Heritages: A Spatial History of South Africa’s Townships* (Angel David Nieves, 2006-present)


“On Rational, Scientific, Objective Viewpoints from Mythical, Imaginary, Impossible Standpoints” (Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein, *Data Feminism*, 2019 [Chapter Draft])
TH 4/11 Digital Project Check-In Day / Workshopping

T 4/16 Data-Oriented Storytelling Workshop

Readings for Today

*Documenting The Now*

Excerpts from *Dear Data* (Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec, 2016)

"Feminist Data Visualization" (Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein, 2016 IEEE VIS Conference)**

“‘facts and FACTS’: Abolitionists’ Database Innovations” (Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Raw Data” is an Oxymoron*, 2013)

Suggested Further Reading

“The Hermeneutics of Data and Historical Writing” (Fred Gibbs and Trevor Owens, *Writing History in the Digital Age*, 2013)

“Against Cleaning” (Katie Rawson and Trevor Muñoz, 2016)
TH 4/18 Data-Oriented Storytelling: Surveillance

Readings for Today


“Habits of Leaking: Of Sluts and Network Cards” (Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Sarah Friedland, differences, 2015)**

“All Eyes on The Border” (Shannon Mattern, Places, 2018)

Suggested Further Reading

Excerpts from We Are Data: Algorithms and the Making of Our Digital Selves (John Cheney-Lippold, 2017)

Quantifying Kissinger (Micki Kaufman, 2012-18)

T 4/23 Digital Project Development Check-In Day / Workshopping

TH 4/25 Digital Project Development Check-In-Day / Workshopping

T 4/30 Academic Forms of Digital Storytelling

Readings for Today

Excerpts from *Feminist in a Software Lab: Difference + Design* (Tara McPherson, 2018)**


*Torn Apart / Separados*

Suggested Further Readings

*Around DH in 80 Days*

*Debates in the Digital Humanities*

TH 5/2 Professional Contexts for Digital Storytelling

T 5/7 Digital Storytelling Project Presentations

TH 5/9 Digital Storytelling Project Presentations