How to Frame a Picture: A Digital Humanities Toolbox for Enhancing Visual Literacy Instruction

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PRESENTED AT:
STORYMAP JS

StoryMap (https://storymap.knightlab.com/) is a free, easy-to-use image annotation tool that allows you to tell a location-based story. It’s a great alternative to traditional research papers that allows librarians to embed visual literacy lessons within the scaffolded assignment. StoryMap was created by Northwestern University’s Knight Lab, and is very easy to use while producing stunning results.

Below is an example I created for an in-class demonstration of StoryMap. I picked a neighborhood in Nashville and mapped the city’s historic markers.

The StoryMap assignments are a little bit different from the others on this posters; they’re not designed to be individual workshops or events, but instead to be part of the same research paper-type assignment.

Work with a faculty member looking to refresh their traditional research paper assignment. I worked with a third year writing professor on this particular project, but I see lots of possibilities of this working well for any history, art, or first year experience type courses. You’ll, ideally, need two in-class library sessions for StoryMap.

For the first session, you’ll be working with Standard 1, helping students ‘determine the need for visual materials’.

Session: Map Practice

The first session should occur when they start working on their research assignment, and are ready to start thinking about creating their StoryMap. The goal of this lesson is familiarize students with StoryMap, and get them thinking about what images they should use in their own map. I do this by having the class work on a map together. I pick a topic for the class to work on together, and then demonstrate how to set up and get started with making the map. For each ‘stop’ on the map, have students help you define the need for and selecting a possible image to illustrate the stop. A worksheet detailing things to consider when selecting images could be helpful (file size and type, subject, purpose, etc.).
For the second session, students are ready to start ‘designing and creating meaningful images and visual media’.

Session: Map Critique

By the very nature of the assignment, students will be working with a lot of the core proficiencies of Standard 6. Instead of just having students work on their own, it can be helpful to borrow from a traditional art class technique: the critique. Have students work on a map to accompany their research paper. They should bring a draft to class during the session. Use the class time to group students into small groups. Each member of the group will present their draft, and discuss the choices they made in telling their story. The other group members will, in turn, offer constructive feedback and their thoughts. Are the concepts are narratives being communicated? What works and what doesn’t? Helping students answer these questions about their work (and their peers’) can help them design and create more thoughtful visual media choices.
JUXTAPOSE JS

Juxtapose JS (https://juxtapose.knightlab.com/) is another tool from Northwestern University's Knight Lab. It's free, easy to use (and to teach!), and creates very compelling image comparisons. Juxtapose images can be used in a variety of ways, including being embedded in websites and used in presentations.

Below is an example I created using 2 images from Google Maps to illustrate the catastrophic effect the May 2010 floods had on Nashville, Tennessee. Seeing the Opry Mills mall and Grand Ole Opry submerged in the waters from the swollen Cumberland River illustrates the extent of flood damage more effectively than words.

Additional examples can be here (links courtesy of Knight Lab).

  - This is a great example of how Juxtapose can be used to teach historical context.

  - This is a useful look at how Juxtapose can be used for image comparison.

**interpreting meanings of images**

**STANDARD 3 USAGE**

Juxtapose is an effective tool for illustrating the importance of "situating an image in its cultural, social, and historical contexts" (performance indicator 2 of ACRL visual literacy standard 3).

**Assignment: Then and Now**

You can use Juxtapose to help students situate images within historical context. Juxtapose, which allows students to show image two images by-side-by, can be used to show. Example: a faculty member wants their students to research the effects of gentrification on a certain part of a city. In addition to writing a paper on the topic, students could illustrate what gentrification looks like - then and now. The librarian could spend the class session discussing what context means, and how it can change the viewer’s perspective on something, before helping them research images for their own project.
For example: East Nashville, a historic Black neighborhood, is now one of the most desirable areas in the city. A student writing about the area and the effect gentrification has had on longtime residents by showing how one of the buildings in the neighborhood has changed over time. A Black church, for example, was recently converted into an upscale pizzeria. By using Juxtapose to ‘juxtapose’ these two images together, they allow the student to show the importance of historical context and how a place’s history should have an effect on how we view its modern day policies.

**using images effectively**

**Standard 5 usage**

Juxtapose can also be used to teach Standard 5, which covers how students students be able to use ‘images and visual media effectively’. This in-class demonstration will allow students to practice many of standard 5’s performance indicators, but it’s particularly suited for the fourth indicator (‘communicating effectively with and about images’).

**Demonstration: News Bias**

You can use Juxtapose in a single library instruction session since it’s so easy to use. It can be a helpful tool to get students talking about a concept that’s hard to illustrate and understand, such as bias in the news. Have students gather into small groups. Give each group a different current news topic to research, and have them select an image from relevant news article on that topic from two different news sites.

The students should then be given some guidelines on how to analyze their chosen images. Who is the intended audience? Why did the news source select this image? How does it make you feel? How are color, lines and other aesthetic qualities used in this image? What is the subject, and what is being emphasized here? After their images have been chosen, analyzed and Juxtaposed, have the groups present their findings to the rest of the class. This allows them to practice communicating not just with images (that they selected) but also about them (why the images do or don’t represent bias).
INTRODUCTION

Students are being asked to create use images more and more frequently. I’ve seen students create maps, design websites, and present posters. Despite this, visual literacy isn’t always a part of the bigger information literacy conversation. With the growing prominence of digital humanities in both libraries and higher education in general, there’s a new opportunity to teach students these vital skills.

With so many images being created, shared, edited and otherwise utilized almost exclusively in a digital environment, digital humanities tools are a natural fit for practical visual literacy instruction.

This 'toolbox' showcases how four different digital humanities (DH) tools can be used to teach one or more of the ACRL standards.

The ACRL Visual Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education are a series of 7 standards designed to help librarians teach college students how to navigate the use and evaluation of images. The standards are illustrated on the chart below, and more information can be found on ACRL's website here (http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/visualliteracy).
Some of my favorite teaching moments and most productive library instruction sessions have happened thanks in part to faculty collaboration, usually in the form of assignment design consultation. Many of the tools on the poster are intended to be used in assignments, and thus require some faculty-librarian collaboration.

However, promoting these tools to faculty and positioning the librarian as a helpful resource in their use is an ongoing conversation.

thanks for coming by!

Let's connect

I love talking about the value of images, visual literacy, digital humanities, and how they all intersect. I'm also a new librarian who would love to work on projects with other colleagues interested in these topics.

Please feel free to reach out to me! I am available at nicole.fox@belmont.edu.
I love using Wikipedia as a tool, and students, who’ve been told for years to not use the free encyclopedia, usually find it very compelling to work with as well. As a librarian, I also love helping students create on Wikipedia because it allows for information to be more accessible to others. While edit-a-thons and other projects have become more commonplace in the library, Wikipedia also has interesting uses for visual literacy instruction.

The image below is a screenshot from one of Wikipedia’s meetups: Images of Women in STEM edit-a-thon (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup/Images_of_women_in_STEM_edit-a-thon_-_ArtScienceGallery), which sparked the idea for the Picturing Your City event listed below.

Additionally, the monthly photo challenges on Wikimedia (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Commins:Photo_challenge#Challenges_open_for_submission) are another great way to participate in Wikipedia while integrating visual literacy instruction.

Wikipedia, and more specifically Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page), can be used to teach Standard 7, which discusses how students should “understand many of the ethical, legal, social, and economic issues surrounding the creation and use of images and visual media.”

Event: Picturing Your City

Picturing Your City is an event that would work well for a variety of instruction scenarios. You are the embedded librarian on a study abroad trip? Helping with a first year experience class? Collaborating with a faculty member who has a taste for digital humanities? Start off by having a discussion on copyright and the public domain.
Afterwards, students can put their new knowledge to work by photographing ‘missing’ places in your city. Does a local historic site not have any images? Now that student know why they simply can’t pull images off of the internet to fix this problem, they’ll be excited to participate. Not only are they practicing creating images, they’re learning about their rights as image creators.
Artstor (https://library.artstor.org/#/home), a popular database of over 2 million images, is the only tool in this toolbox that requires a subscription to access its complete content. If your institution doesn’t subscribe to Artstor, you can still use the database, but you’ll be limited to their collection of publicly available images. While I normally try to promote open-source alternatives, I find Artstor to be a particularly useful tool for visual literacy instruction.

Below is an animated gif of helpful Artstor tools used in the suggested instruction activities, including image groups, the image record itself, and the use of the advanced search features.

As a database, Artstor is a natural fit for Standard 2 instruction, which outlines how the visually literate student should be able to ‘find and access needed images and visual media’.

**Assignment: Topic Mind Map**

This workshop is designed to help students select and ‘focus down’ a research topic by searching for and selecting a variety of images. It can work for a variety of different classes, but it particularly suited for instruction in arts and humanities classes. The purpose of this assignment is to have students use image search skills to select and organize images into a ‘topic mind map’.

For example: an introductory art history course has a research paper assignment. The Topic Mind Map workshop would help students pick thoughtful, interesting topics for their upcoming paper. Ideally, this workshop would have one full classroom day devoted to it, along with a follow up assignment. The classroom visit day is designed to have students learn image search strategies and begin organizing them. After a brief video or demonstration of Artstor search strategies, students should be put into groups to explore a sample topic, such as Japanese art. Each group searches for a selects an image (or images) that fit the topic and answer some questions about it (such as: why did you select this image? What kinds of questions do you have about it?). Each group presents their image choice to the rest of the class. After each group has presented, students work together with the librarian to take their image choices and iterate them into a researchable topic thesis.

Then, students create their own mind maps as a follow-up assignment. They pick a topic they’re interested, find related images, and write down their thought process. Students could use Artstor Image Groups for this exercise, and easily share the group link with their instructor. The sidebar on the right of the image group could have the written justification for their image choices, and an initial
Many students don’t look to databases first (or even at all) when they’re searching for images. Artstor can be used to demonstrate the importance of standard 4, where students learn to ‘evaluate images and their sources.’

**Workshop: Comparison**

The Comparison workshop is an active-learning library session designed to get students thinking about how to evaluate images. It would work well for any classes that have students use images, and needs one in-class session.

Start off by distributing image evaluation criteria (line, color, etc.) and having students help you evaluate a predetermined image from a database like Artstor. Have them discuss how it makes them feel, where their eyes are drawn to, and examine the accompanying metadata. Does the textural information provide valuable context, or change how you think about the image?

Next, have students get into two groups, and have each group work together to find and evaluate images. Give each group a series of prompts, and a place to look for an appropriate image for that prompt. Have the groups work with the same prompts, but have them look in different places (while group a is searching in Artstor for a portrait of Queen Victoria, have group b search in google image search, for example). Once the groups have chosen their images, have the groups make presentations, making sure the students discuss their reasoning for selecting this image. After both groups have presented, have the class as a group make a judgement call on which image would they use in a presentation.
REFERENCES

