

Creating a Moving Image Essay

Creating a moving image essay is like compiling a written essay but instead of words, you use film clips and stills. These can be specially created or collected from found footage and other online resources. These can then be edited using a basic video editing package like Moviemaker or iMovie and output to file or DVD to be viewed in school or shown to parents.

This type of rich, cross-curricular activity can be carried out by the whole class, with different groups working on different sections of the same moving image essay (as is typically done in primary schools), or with groups or individuals working on their own moving image essays (which may be more appropriate at secondary level).

If you want your students to create moving image essays, here is some simple advice on how to organise the project.

- **Research**

Using the internet, research the chosen subject in the usual way. However, make sure you download assets (films, pictures, radio broadcasts and sounds) in the highest resolution possible and store them in clearly marked folders on the school computer.

- **Narrative**

Prepare a basic narrative that outlines which images you want to use, the types of things you want to say or discuss and the type of music you would like to use.

It often helps to organise these essays in sequences so that they raise and answer specific questions about the topic just as students would do using paragraphs in a traditional essay.

- **Visual rough-cut**

Lay out the clips and still images you want to use in the editing software along an approximate time line. This will tell you how many minutes long it is and how much narration and music you will need.

- **Narration**

Most students will probably want to write and record narration to introduce, accompany and expand upon the clips and images they have chosen to use. However, be aware that you can also add titles, inter-titles and text overlays as you would with a PowerPoint presentation.

The images and clips will give the viewer a great deal of information, so encourage the students to record narration that does more than simply describe the contents of the audio-visual material – narration that adds to the story is what to aim for.

After students have written the narration, practice reading it out to ensure that it says everything you want it to say, and to make sure that it is easy to read aloud. Suggest that students practice any difficult words or phrases before they start recording.

Plug in a microphone into the record jack of the PC. Record the narration through Moviemaker or iMovie and it will be automatically added to the timeline. Alternatively, you can record narration or interviews on a video camera, mobile phone or dictaphone and then import these media assets into Moviemaker and iMovie and add them to the essay this way.

Once students have the narration and interview footage in place, get them to trim the moving image clips and put camera movements over the stills as they think appropriate.

Students can also add zooms, pans and other special effects from the effects menu.

- **No narration**

Some students may want certain types of essays (e.g. Art and Design) to proceed on an associational level using purely image and music or image and sound effects (e.g. wind, train, traffic noises, etc). To do this they simply need to import the sounds or music into the editing software and then edit the pictures to the music as they would a music video.

- **Adding sounds**

Students can find many sounds, historical radio clips and sound effects on the internet to download and add to their moving image essays.

- **Adding Music**

Record and/or import the music into the editing software and drop it onto the timeline.

It may help to remind students that moving image essays can be cut in time with music to enhance meaning.

- **Reviewing essays**

Play the film to other members of the group or other groups and ask them to say what they understand, what they do not and to suggest improvements. Peer review is a powerful motivating force.

- **Fine-tuning**

Ask the students to fine-tune their clips lengths, cuts, transitions and sound levels until they are completely happy.

- **Publishing essays**

Output the Moving Image Essay to a video file or onto DVD and show it to the class.

NB. Students can still return to the project file and make improvements to the film narrative in line with comments from the class. They can then publish the finalised essay again.