Digital Storytelling Through Clay

Thomas J. Waters Elementary School
Susan Termini, Technology Coordinator
Renee Una, CAPE Artist
Our project, *Storytelling Through Claymation*, explored learning in several areas. The project paired students in 4th and 5th grades who receive special education services with 7th grade general education students. They worked in mixed teams to bring to life a story created by the younger students. The older students brought greater technical expertise and guidance, while the younger students wrote the story and learned the process of creating a clay animation movie from beginning to end. Assessment activities included student and teacher contributions to a blog dedicated to the project, which allowed students to express their feelings about what they were learning. They also were able to show their completed video to other students and explain the various components involved.

**Teachers:**
Susan Termini, Technology Instructor  
Deborah DelCampo, Intermediate Special Education Teacher  
Amy Vecchioni, Art Instructor  
Nadine Zelle, Music Instructor  
Renee Una, CAPE Artist

**Grades:** 4th, 5th, 7th  
**Length of unit:** 5 months
Waters School is a neighborhood school with an emphasis on fine arts, ecology and technology integration, serving students from Pre-kindergarten through 8th grade.

- 91% of our students receive free or reduced meals
- 73% of our students are Hispanic, 18% are Caucasian, 5% are African American and 4% are Asian.
- We have a strong relationship with the parents of our students, who are encouraged to be active in school life.
- Waters has been an active participant in CAPE programs for many years.

Principal: Tomas Revollo
Assistant Principal: Titia Kipp
Assistant Principal: Martin Surges

Waters’ school website can be found at:
http://collaboratory.nunet.net/waters/homepage.html
Can the integration of technology, fine art and language arts increase student motivation and self-esteem?
Introduction to Clay Animation

• As part of the classroom language arts curriculum, students created a “round robin” story, in which each student built on the creative writing of other students. The sentence starter was “My boot is stuck! What am I going to…” As a class, they edited the work to make it a cohesive story.

• The class came to the computer lab to view sample claymation videos and brainstorm ways to transfer their story to this new medium.
• Before we could begin to film the video, our story had to be broken down into small “chunks” of time and movement. To condense the action, students developed a storyboard to detail the important components. The students’ storyboards reflect the basic outline of the story in words and drawings.

• Students had to choose what part of the video production interested them the most. They ended up equally divided between creating the clay figures and working on the background displays.

Sample Storyboard

Setting up a scene – student discussion
•Our CAPE artist, Renee Una, came in to work with the clay figures. Putting clay over a metal armature, students were able to visualize how the characters would move.

Blog Entry:
So far, the part I like best about working on this project is the claymation because I like to work with the artist because she is cool. Also, I like to work with the 7th because I get to know more of the 7th graders. I think I am learning a lot of clay people and how to make the sun and how to make a tree.

GH
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- The second group of students worked with Ms. Vecchioni, our Art Instructor, to create the backdrops for the three different scenes.

- They had to determine the best size for the house, school and playground equipment so that it would match the size of the clay figures.

Blog Entry:
So far, the part I like best about working on this project is working on the backdrops. I think I am learning a lot about how to use different tools to make the backdrops.

AN
• Students took turns setting up the scenes, moving the figures and taking the photographs.

• They quickly learned that time and a lot of patience would be required.

• Downloading the photos into PhotoShop and iMovie helped students to see the results of their work.
• Adding a special flavor to the project, students worked with our Music Instructor to create an original song and other musical sound effects.

Danny’s Song (Chorus)
Oh Danny, Oh Danny,
His boot got stuck
His boot got stuck, his boot got stuck
Oh Danny, Oh Danny,
His boot got stuck
But his sister came
And gave him luck.
Students in grades 3 – 5 came to our culminating event - a presentation about the claymation project in which students described the process involved in creating the final video.

The student audience was able to see how the backdrops and clay figures were developed and view the final movie. A Question and Answer session was held to respond to questions about the project.
Before seeing the finished video, students were given an overview of the project by the students.

After viewing the movie, students asked questions about the claymation process.
### Web Resources

**Information and Tips for Creating Claymation**

- [Clay Animation Station](http://library.thinkquest.org/22316/home.html)
- [Clay Animation Made Easy](http://education.wichita.edu/claymation/resources.html)
- [How To Create Clay Animation In Five Easy Steps](http://www.sfsu.edu/%7Eteachers/workshops/clayanimation/)

**Clay Animation Samples**

- [GigaPalette](http://www.brigantine.atlnet.org/GigapaletteGALLERY/StudentGalleryMain.htm)
- [Animation Clips](http://www.kenscottphotography.com/prjcts/anim/clps02.html)
The physical tools we used for the creation of the video included:

- Digital Camera
- Apple iMac Computers
  - iPhoto
  - iMovie
- Wire Armatures
- Plasticene Clay

Material for backdrops:
- Cereal boxes
- Cotton
- Paint
- Pipe cleaners

- Musical Instruments
- Digital Audio Recorder
Documentation tools enabled us to determine whether the students were learning, developing problem solving techniques and leadership skills, teamwork, and technology skills.

Most of our documentation was done through observation of the students, photos of them working through the process of making the video and their blog entries, when they responded to questions about the project.

Blog Entry  
Claymation, after all, is not as easy as it seems. It took hard work and determination, but we did it and were able to finish it by working together.

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VR  
What I learned to do is to do work in a team and help a friend.

YC  
I learned how to be patient. And I learned how to listen to the opinions of others.

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**ILLOIS STANDARDS - FINE ARTS CONTENT**

ISBE State Goal 25 Standard A. Understand processes, traditional tools and modern technologies used in the arts.

ISBE State Goal 25 Standard B. Apple skills and knowledge necessary to create and perform in one or more of the arts.

**ILLOIS STANDARDS - ACADEMIC CONTENT**

ISBE State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes

ISBE State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

**NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS**

NETS Standard 2 Social, ethical and human issues. Students develop positive attitudes toward technology uses that support lifelong learning, collaboration, personal pursuits, and productivity.

NETS Standard 3 Technology Productivity Tools. Students use technology tools to enhance learning, increase productivity, and promote creativity.

Students use productivity tools to collaborate in constructing technology-enhanced models, preparing publications, and producing other creative works.
Working on the claymation project with room 204 and Susan Termini at Waters School has been a wonderful opportunity. I fell into the project after they lost their original collaborator, and Susan really helped me to get up to speed, and directed me appropriately and efficiently so that I could be the most effective for the students. The students were especially patient, attentive, and determined throughout a project that demanded nothing less of them. I could not have asked for a more enjoyable experience. I am thrilled for the students, they must be very proud of their accomplishment.

Renee Una, Artist
This CAPE opportunity has brought about many new and exciting experiences for both me and my students. The use of technology was an area the students loved getting their hands on. Being able to rely on each other to complete different parts of the claymation brought a sense of teamwork and pride. Allowing the students to put forth their ideas and thoughts about how to complete parts gave way to leadership. The opportunity to contribute their thoughts and ideas about the design and process of how to go about the components exhibited their desire to really leave a personal stamp on the project. The students’ energy and excitement when each Tuesday and Thursday claymation afternoon came around was contagious.

This gave me an occasion to step back and let the students teach and learn from each other. They were able to listen and respond in a courteous and constructive manner on a daily basis. Many times, a conversation about an aspect of the project would come up during the day and the students discussed it in a very adult-like way.

There are very few things I would change about the project. When I look back, I do feel that there were times when half the class was not doing a task, while the others were engrossed in an activity. I do feel we could have found/created a small task during those instances. I would also like to put more leadership in the hands of the 7th graders. They did a good job in assisting the younger students, but there were occasions when they didn’t seem as invested.

Overall, this experience has been such an enhancement to our curriculum. It has allowed the students to showcase their accomplishment and be praised for their hard work outside the classroom. I do hope that my classroom has the chance to be a part of CAPE in the years to come.

Debra Del Campo, Classroom Teacher
As I worked on this project with the students and teachers, I realized that my Essential Question was not what finally was evaluated. What I really had wanted was to see the students achieve a greater level of comfort with the use of different types of technology and discover how to create a work of art through combining various technology tools with art forms which included fine arts and music.

Before beginning this project, I had specific expectations of the skills the students were to achieve, with a major focus on the technology initiatives described in the National Education Technology Standards (NETS). I wanted to see growth in their use of technology, including word processing and using digital peripherals, such as the digital camera. The students surprised me by becoming comfortable and proficient in other areas as well.

One project goal was to develop a sense of community among the teachers and students at different grade levels. I observed the interaction among the students. As the project developed, they worked together fairly well; one of the seventh grade boys was especially engaged, and spread his enthusiasm and energy throughout the group. Our culminating event, in which the students presented the process involved in creating a claymation movie, was another way the students were able to interact and demonstrate their understanding and expertise to others. This event enabled the project participants to share their knowledge with others and enhance the group dynamic.

Having a professional artist work throughout the project with the students was a major aspect of its success. The fact that our artist, Renee, was proficient in both art and technology really brought the connection to life.

Susan Termini, Teacher