Songwriting in heritage languages

A Story Valley case study, presented as an example to support other settings to run the programme

Background information

This case study was submitted by Annette Chapman, the curriculum leader in creative industries degrees at Edinburgh College, Scotland.

She delivered Story Valley as over 15-20 sessions in the course of 25 weeks – across several terms of study.

Delivering Story Valley

This section will provide an example of how Story Valley can be delivered as a coherent project.

'Run Yer Ain Race' by Gerry Campbell

Story Valley Academy
12 subscribers
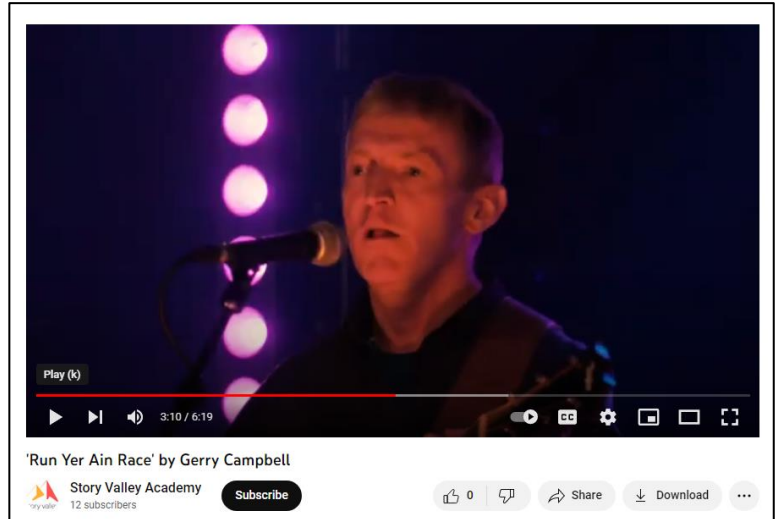
In particular, you may find this useful for the 'get creative' module – providing ideas of how to develop the stories shared in your initial sessions into a creative project.

How did you plan your first Story Valley session?
I considered the remit for the project and looked at how I delivered my songwriting classes with particular thoughts about lyric writing now, and saw how both could be amalgamated quite easily.

How did you engage students with finding and telling stories?
I set them a task of considering a theme based in the Scot's language "We're aw Jock Tamson's bairns" and asked them to discuss what that might mean to them. I then asked them to bring in an object that represented this.

What surprised or interested you about the stories that emerged as part of Story Valley?
I was surprised by the variety of objects and approaches to the task and how willing students were to share stories of their own experiences.

Can you provide some examples of creative projects students completed as part of Story Valley?

The projects in my class were all based around producing songs to be performed as part of the overall theme. We did a public concert which was filmed and edited. The students also were filmed in the recording studio recording their songs. We also showcased some of the songs at a multiplier event as part of the Burns and Beyond festival in Edinburgh Assembly Rooms.

Can you provide an example of how creative thinking and creative practice were developed by your students throughout the project?

Students began with the theme, they worked together to use lyric writing techniques established by Pat Pattison (Berkley College) to draw out ideas based on their chosen objects. Students used their own languages to explore words linked to the emerging ideas. Songs were written with elements of Scots, Italian, Spanish and more.

Describe one student or group whose work stood out to you during the project

One student who stood out was an older student who had never written a song before and was a Scots speaker who had, as many of us have, been pressured to "speak proper English" in work environments, not realising that Scots is a recognised language. He welcomed the chance to write in Scots and this culminated in him performing his song live at the aforementioned multiplier event.

What went well and what you would do differently in the future when running a Story Valley project?

The variety of ideas was good and the ability of students to share these also went well. I think I would encourage students to work more in pairs and groups. I'd link the activity up to their bands in their performance class. This would enable them to play to their individual strengths.

Can you summarise any formal or informal feedback you have received from students regarding their involvement in the project?

Feedback from students has been good overall. It is challenging to use Scots in their songwriting activities although they speak it. Many students from other countries want to write in English as this is where they want to improve.

Sharing creative work

The section will provide an example how students' work was shared – which might provide ideas for sharing your own group's project(s).

On what scale was students' work disseminated?
☒ Internally
☒ In your local area
☐ Nationally
☐ Internationally
☒ Other (please describe)

Social Media

Describe how students shared their work as part of your project
Live concerts, recordings and social media

Can you share any examples with us? (e.g. links, images, videos)
https://youtu.be/Iu86b4nmpd0 https://youtu.be/51b6rE7a01I https://youtu.be/dLRL1VUJZxw

Did students benefit from the process of sharing their work? If so, how?
They had a sense of achievement and were also able to use this work to promote themselves as artists and songwriters.

Integrating Story Valley with your curriculum

In this section, the Story Valley deliverer reflects on how they used Story Valley to meet wider goals and outcomes, which might prove useful in setting up or pitching a project in your own setting.

The deliverer also describes their formal and informal evaluation practice; providing ideas on how to explore and communicate the programme's impact in your community.

Are the students in your Story Valley project studying on a course or for a formal qualification?
☒ Yes – please specify which course and/or qualification SQA HND Music _____ ☐ No – please describe the nature of your Story Valley group

What was your main objective when you began the Story Valley project?
☒ To build students' literacy skills ☒ To connect students to stories and storytelling ☒ To build students' creativity and/or creative skills ☒ To connect students from different backgrounds ☒ To engage students with their learning ☐ Other – please explain

How did you embed Story Valley into your curriculum?
☒ Story Valley was delivered as part of students' curriculum course ☐ Story Valley was delivered separately – as an extra-curricular activity
How did the Story Valley project link to the objectives of your curriculum?

To produce a song with accepted songwriting techniques

Did you assess the impact of Story Valley on your students? If so, how did you approach assessment?
The songs were judged as part of an assessment for songwriting and also graded as part of their Graded Unit

How did Story Valley add value to your students' attainment and achievement?
This was an engaging and interesting way to get beginner songwriters engaged in the process. I used this with second years in the development year but I have used it with first years this time and this has helped their process.