

Old Stories and Modern Storytelling: Using Digital Video Projects to Depict Historical Narratives

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IN JUNE 2020, Major League Baseball celebrated the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Negro Leagues, an American professional baseball league established in part due to the prohibition of racial integration in Major League Baseball organizations. Even before the establishment of the Negro Leagues, African Americans had responded to their exclusion from Major League Baseball by establishing independent professional baseball clubs that existed in various American cities and barnstormed throughout the country. Historians have done much to bring this social, cultural, and political narrative to light, but a good amount of the history, especially local narratives, has yet to be unearthed and shared. Unlike Major League Baseball, which enjoys a relatively comprehensive record of its history through institutional archives and the mainstream press, black baseball's early days were devoid of such luxuries.¹ Nowadays, as we seek to piece together and share the narratives of black baseball and the many local histories that surround us, educators turn to digital video technology as a means of more effectively depicting these narratives to their audiences. The incorporation of digital video projects into the retelling of local narratives can facilitate

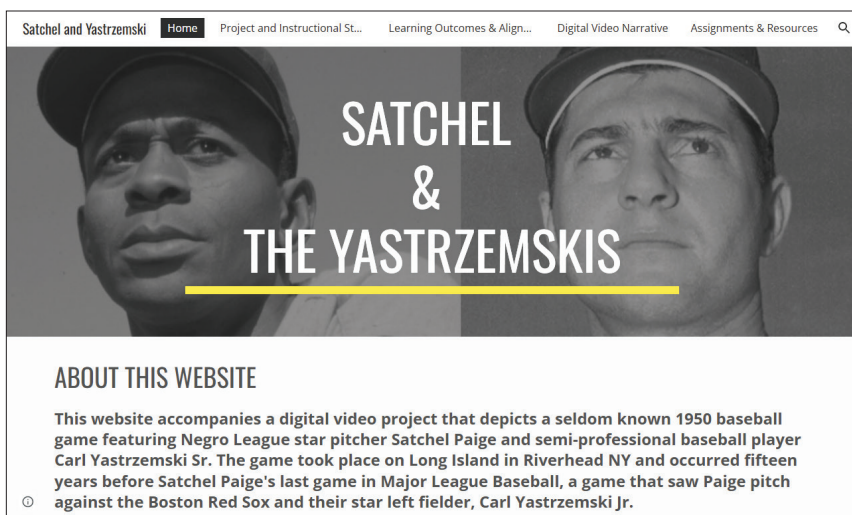


Figure 1: Screenshot from the website accompanying the *Satchel & the Yastrzemsis* digital video project, available at <<https://sites.google.com/view/satchelandyastrzemski/assignments-resources>>. The website features the full *Satchel & the Yastrzemsis* video, as well as information on the development of the project, instructional foundations, suggested assignments, and additional learning resources.

the learning of history by aiding those charged with presenting the narrative, as well as those who are open to receiving it. Although such projects can be effective, they can require intricate planning, production, and implementation.

To construct a comprehensive retelling of any particular national history, local (and often forgotten) narratives of that history must be considered and presented. The exclusion of local histories can leave learners of broader national histories at a disadvantage in their attempts to develop an association with the past. When discussing black baseball in America, for example, local narratives often represent the efforts of common, everyday black ballplayers and ballclubs in areas and situations that are familiar to learners. This sense of familiarity, or perhaps even empathy, can provide a sense of local proximity to the larger and more distant national history of the Negro Leagues and the Major Leagues. In addition, these untold microhistories, which often take place in small pockets of the country, can act as a highly effective introduction to the world

of local history research and the exploration of local archives, and they can also become the basis for historical instruction. With the creation of the *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* digital video project, I have made my own proud contribution to the telling of America's black baseball history and provided learners with the tools and encouragement they may need to discover their own local histories.²

During his visit to Long Island, Satchel Paige faced a local semi-professional baseball team that featured Carl Yastrzemski Sr., Boston Red Sox Hall of Famer and father of Carl Yastrzemski Jr. This locally publicized event drew the attention of Long Island residents in 1950, but it has yet to be shared with a larger, contemporary audience. This small but significant local narrative presented learners with a newly documented history that can be tied to a broader narrative and can encourage them to find their own motivation to pursue historical research studies.

Audience and Intent

Before I began development of *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis*, I identified the primary audience that I intended to reach. Digital video projects often appeal to multiple audiences—as was the case with *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis*, which was viewed at baseball conferences and history conferences, in university presentations, and on discussion forums—but I concluded that my target was primarily the academic classroom. The use of digital videos within education, including higher education, can be advantageous to the facilitation of teaching and learning,³ and it can serve to develop a more general awareness of African American history while promoting equity and inclusivity.⁴ In this regard, *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* is a valuable resource for the attainment of learning outcomes associated with historical comparison and critical thinking. Information processing theory was strongly applied in its creation through the utilization of digital imagery/videos to create long-term memory in the process of elaboration.⁵ The content in the digital video is closely related to types of information that my intended audience has a level of familiarity with. When presented with new information within the images and narration of my video, my intended audience can process this by connecting it with prior knowledge. In doing so, this new information can be stored in long-term memory. While videos can

act as an effective tool in the retrieval and processing of information within the mind, they have their limitations, and they must be created with this in consideration to ensure viable outcomes for education. Being mindful of cognitive load theory, I have created my video with due consideration of the quantity, quality, and structure of the content placed within it.⁶

Motivation and Curiosity

Having identified my intended audience in an academic classroom, I directed my attention toward stimulating motivation and curiosity, considering how this digital video project would address this element of learning. Specifically, the project required a focus on my audience's intrinsic motivations, developed further using multimedia technologies. The creation of intrinsic motivation, which is driven by internal satisfaction rather than by attaining rewards, can be promoted through a combination of curiosity and control. The curiosity of my intended audience is piqued by content that is not commonly encountered in the college classroom. In most higher education environments, Negro Leagues baseball is not often a topic of discussion for most curricula. Should a higher education instructor choose to address the topic, it is not likely that it will be granted a large, dedicated space within a course. Rather, it is often only briefly alluded to in a more general discussion of African American history and/or civil rights. This project utilizes the topic of Negro Leagues baseball as a precursor to enabling a more robust discussion of African American baseball and segregation, and proceeding to frame subsequent discussion of civil rights and equality around this topic. In addition, by presenting this topic through a digital medium, I seek to amplify the curiosity created by the content by "Presenting discrepant ideas—those that conflict with their prior knowledge or beliefs."⁷

Satchel & the Yastrzemskis is a supplemental resource for exposition in lectures and lays the foundation for critical thinking and class discussions, but the primary intent of this project is to introduce students to subjects of local historical research and create a foundation for their own ventures into this field. Rather than lay out a detailed and explicit research assignment, I have opted to enable my audience members to forge their own research paths. All of the

control obtained by my intended audience through their investigation of the project is provided after the presentation of *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* and allows them “to make meaningful choices in the learning process.”⁸ They use the information provided within the video as a launch pad to conduct their own subsequent research on the topic of African American baseball or to use the same parameters to guide themselves down their own desired research paths.

Technology and Production

Ensuring that *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* accurately presents a historical narrative while maintaining a level of engagement requires a certain degree of production value. This consideration also related to providing the motivation for my audience as they begin to pursue their own local historical narratives. Several technologies are assessed and utilized to meet my expectations of *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis*, and the use of a widely used educational platform (Google Sites) provides a simple means of hosting the digital video. Evaluation of all technologies and repositories were based on their suitability, degree of difficulty, and, most importantly, cost. I also incorporate further considerations related to my intended audience.

The Apple iMac computer and the iMovie program—two commonly favored technologies among non-professional video creators—were my preferred production tools. iMovie software served to add, configure, and edit the images and narration I required to construct my narrative. With the exception of a digital scanner to digitize historical images, no additional add-ons were needed to produce my desired content in iMovie. All of the required audio equipment (microphones and speakers) were pre-built into my iMac. For making *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis*, the capabilities and relative simplicity of iMovie and the processing speed of the iMac proved ideal. A smartphone was also used as a supplement due to its compact and mobile capabilities, but the use of small-screen devices proved to be problematic at times. While I ultimately chose to utilize an iMac and iMovie for the creation of the video, other alternatives that may be more viable and affordable may be found. If possible, a video creator should attempt to research and test several pieces of digital video technologies prior to making a selection.

Pedagogical Foundations

Knowledge of the use of the required video technology plays a necessary role in the creation of digital video content. However, several non-technological factors should also be considered when seeking to meet the needs of an intended audience. I wanted the video to integrate the cognitive learning aspects meant to engage individuals and facilitate learning. These cognitive aspects play specific roles in examining how learners process and create information and were indicators for the way that *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* was made.

The first cognitive aspect I chose to integrate into my digital project was schemas, which I incorporated as a type of building-block process that takes previous knowledge and adds it to existing knowledge to develop meaning.⁹ The progression of *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* and the way the content is presented allows for schemas to develop by accessing previous knowledge or understanding of segregation and racial inequality in America and attaching it to the new and relevant information regarding Negro Leagues baseball. Another cognitive aspect that proved influential was constructivist learning theory. Constructivism emphasizes the construction of knowledge over the passive reception of information.¹⁰ I have long been a strong advocate of constructivist learning and have incorporated it into my digital video project by supplementing it with communal discussion and smaller-scale group interpretations. In addition, I intend to assign a research-based project that involves the use of local digital newspaper repositories and is symbolic of the microhistorical narrative of the video. My intended audience will be prompted to browse these repositories individually and construct a research paper topic that gathers together their past understanding of American histories and the new information. Rather than relying solely on the static relay of the video content or the instructor's supplemental lectures, students can construct knowledge through social interactions, discussions, and interest-driven research. Schemas and constructivism strongly dictated how I built content within *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis*, and I also pondered the idea of cognitive dissonance¹¹ and how its effects could appear when the preconceived notions of the African American spirit during the period of segregation in America were challenged. This history often focuses on the oppression and unjust treatment of African Americans during this period and fails to highlight the

resiliency and perseverance of African Americans in both enduring and ending this tragic period. The story of African American baseball is, in part, a story of agency and the ability of African Americans to produce success and demonstrate equality within a system of oppression. Being mindful of cognitive dissonance allowed me to construct my digital video project as a focal point within a larger learning experience built around a specific curriculum.

Learning Outcomes

Building an appropriate curriculum around *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* required the use of a “backward design” model and the initial establishment of viable learning outcomes. In the backward design approach, intended learning outcomes dictate which tools (i.e., texts, lessons, and activities) are to be utilized to attain those outcomes.¹² Three learning outcomes (**Figure 2**) were the precursors to the creation of the digital video narrative and its supplemental content. The learning outcomes follow the progression of Bloom’s taxonomy, in which learning is conducted and measured through acts of comprehension, analysis, and evaluation. In addition, the creation of a standard learning object for this video project—namely, the video, discussion, and research paper—was also framed around Bloom’s taxonomy to ensure alignment and convergent purpose.¹³

The process of designing, creating, and implementing a digital video project and its corresponding instructional components can be an arduous and complicated endeavor. However, adhering to established instructional design processes can alleviate some of these difficulties. *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis*, for example, utilized the “ADDIE model” and user interface (UI) design, which provided me with the necessary guidelines and perspective to construct the most effective representation of this project both for me and for my learners. The ADDIE model for instructional design is a well-known and widely used tool for instructional designers, and it has greatly benefited the development of my digital video project. The ADDIE approach has been used with reference to both the technological and instructional aspects of this project, and a few best ideas and practices from successful online instructors who have utilized the ADDIE model have been applied to the project, as appropriate.¹⁴ By adhering to the sequential steps of the ADDIE model—Analyze,

Learning Outcome 1

Explain the co-existence of Major League Baseball and the Negro Leagues/Black Baseball.

Corresponding Activity

After viewing the video, students can engage in online or face-to-face discussion on the narrative presented in the video. This discussion can be used to assess students' understanding of the narrative and provide any needed clarification.

Learning Outcome 2

Compare the two leagues and examine the personal, social, and economic factors that led to their creation.

Corresponding Activity

Students will read two secondary-source articles pertaining to the history and formation of segregated professional baseball in America. Subsequently, in groups, students will be asked a series of questions to express their understanding of the history being studied.

Learning Outcome 3

Compose a research paper that examines and interprets a microhistory within black baseball that falls within the larger history of the Negro Leagues.

Corresponding Activity

Students will be given library instructions by an academic librarian that emphasize microhistories, local research, etc. After carrying out these instructions, students will reflect on the content of the digital video, their discussions, and their group work to create a research paper that focuses on a particular aspect of the larger history of segregated baseball.

Figure 2: Expected Learning Outcomes and Corresponding Activities

Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate—all digital aspects of this project were constructed to ensure accessibility and Universal Design Learning (UDL), as seen through the lens of the analytical, design, and development stages of this process. The initial implementation and evaluation stages were conducted with pilot audiences. More suitable and conclusive assessments were also obtained over time. Additionally, applying UI design to the creation of *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* allowed me to envision the technological needs and actions of my audience. UI, in essence, “focuses on anticipating what

users might need to do and ensuring that the interface has elements that are easy to access, understand, and use to facilitate those actions.”¹⁵ The digital video narrative and its accompanying website were also provided using familiar, simplistic interfaces (Google Sites and YouTube), and the use of color, texture, and typography were chosen to provide a sense of consistency and clarity.

Both ADDIE and UI were instrumental in developing this digital video project, and they will be just as important in future reviews. Such reviews can often lead to adjustments and changes to better serve the needs of the audience of the project digital video project’s audience. By applying the steps of the ADDIE model and the concepts of UI when implementing any adjustments and changes, I can maintain a consistently effective design.

Implementation

While it is not an overly long video (14 minutes, 25 seconds), *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* required a great amount of planning and construction. I dedicated an equal amount of time and consideration to the pedagogical aspects of the use of this endeavor. My initial idea of the project was that of a short video that could tell the story of a local moment in the history of baseball. However, creating a video that tells a story is vastly different from creating a video that can be used to teach from that story.

I was somewhat foolish to think that a historical narrative, regardless of how well it is told or how engaging it is, could, on its own, lead to the attainment of learning objectives. I needed to add further resources, scaffolding, and other ingredients that educators require for the overall learning process. My digital video project needed to be a spark for my audience to begin constructing their own knowledge. A re-evaluation of my audience’s needs and my project’s ability to provide for these needs led me to create a learning object that did not rely solely on the digital video narrative, but was centered around it. I developed a comprehensive understanding of what the project needed to be, and then the time had come to construct it. I had an array of digital tools and resources at my disposal, but I also had a set time frame.

From the very beginning, it was evident that time management and organization would be vital to the success of this project. To maintain my schedule and allotting time appropriately, I erred on the side of

overestimating rather than underestimating the work required at each step. This approach served me well at several points. I created weekly progress reports to assess where I stood and the progress I had made. This also served me well. The vision I had worked from early on in the process evolved numerous times over the course of the work, as is typical for projects of this type. I came to realize that changing my approach was beneficial to the end result, but not beneficial to my schedule. I walked away from this project thoroughly content with it as an outcome and with greater experience. From that experience, I share one particularly important piece of knowledge: educational projects will shift while you work, and they will grow and entail some setbacks. Please be sure to allow time in your project's development to account for all of these, and more.

Reflection

This digital video project was created with limited means and a moderate budget. Free viable software was given precedence over more costly options, and many of the tools and hardware utilized for this project were obtained through loans and/or the generosity of others. This approach can certainly produce results, and it can also diminish the potential value of the finished product. I gained a great deal of insight and knowledge from what I accomplished, but I genuinely believe that the project could have been improved and expanded through an infusion of funds and resources. I have already begun to consider the possibilities and opportunities that can arise from such an endeavor, and my preliminary research into obtaining the necessary assistance has produced encouraging results.

The *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* digital video project has reignited my passion for education and has shown me the potential for digital technology within this field. The time and effort that I have put into this project has been far outweighed by the results that it produced. I am keen on the possibility of creating additional, more advanced digital video projects with the benefit of possible grant funding, but prior to doing so I will gather further assessments of *Satchel & the Yastrzemskis* as it adjusts to its new purposes. When these assessments are complete, I am confident that they will produce agreeable results that will support my use of digital video technology as a powerful and varied educational resource.

Notes

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15. U.S. General Services Administration Technology Transformation Services, "User Interface Design Basics," Usability.gov, <<https://www.usability.gov/what-and-why/user-interface-design.html>>.



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