

Using *StoryMaker* to tell the tale of ‘The Hare and the Tortoise’

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Background

This is the second year running when I have set our Year 3 classes the task of producing a multimedia version of ‘The Hare and the Tortoise’ using SPA’s *StoryMaker*. Both years I have been delighted with the versatility of *StoryMaker* for the purpose. The challenges have come from the children and the nature of composing stories on computers.

The first attempt

Last year the children started by viewing the story on a commercially produced CD-ROM. They then went on to rewrite the story; much emphasis was given to suggesting appropriate adjectives to describe the characters of the braggart, loud-mouthed Hare and the modest but determined Tortoise before we started. Steps in the production of the talking stories included:

- Writing the story (5 one-hour sessions in the computer room);
- Drawing a hare and tortoise in *Paint*. Drawing a background in *Paint*. Pasting the hare and tortoise onto the background (3 one-hour sessions). Results of different ability children at this point can be seen on <http://www.cofton.bham.sch.uk/writing21.htm>;
- Copying pictures into the text pages (1 session);
- Copying and pasting text and pictures into *Storymaker*, adding backgrounds (2 sessions);
- Adding actions, noises etc. (2 sessions);
- Making a cover page; changing colours and fonts of text (2 sessions).

Yes, it really did take the better part of two terms! Approximately nine sessions were needed to

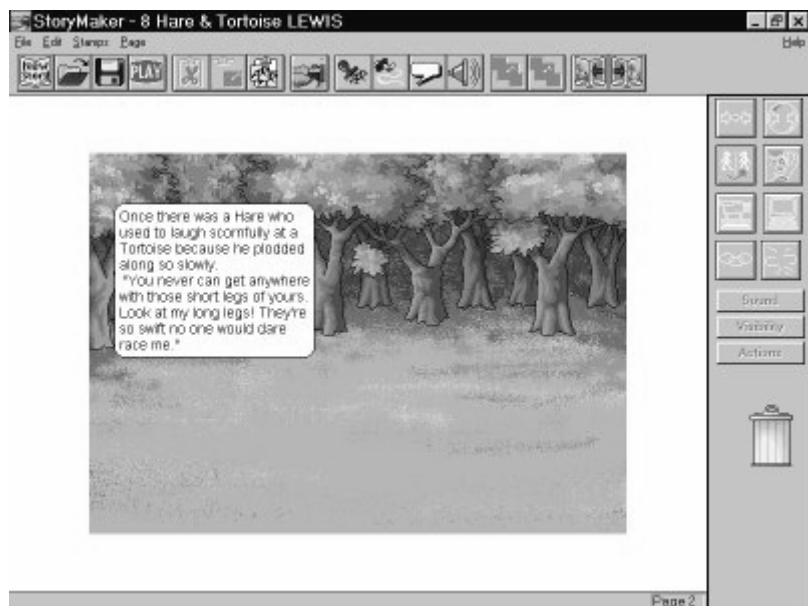
produce illustrated stories while another six went in transforming these into animated talking stories.

This year

This year I decided to concentrate more on using *Storymaker* and its multimedia tools to produce the final story. There was less emphasis on the story and picture composition. Accordingly we started with a version of ‘The Hare and the Tortoise’ which I copied from the Internet (<http://hosted.ukoln.ac.uk/stories/>); we used pictures of the hare and the tortoise produced by children last year.

My preparation

I made and saved a ‘Hare and Tortoise’ story template (write-protected) on the class home drive. On this template I pasted the story in suitable chunks in speech bubbles (pointer removed) on successive pages. I added suitable backgrounds to the pages. The resulting ‘story’ was 8 pages long.



The children's work

Making speech bubble dialogue

The children's task in our first session was to find direct speech in the story, copy it and paste them it on the screen (*Storymaker* automatically puts pasted text into speech bubbles). All the children did this, although some needed some help initially. For most children mouse control was more of an issue than recognizing direct speech in speech marks.

I also asked the children to change the colour and fonts used in the speech bubbles. Over-ambitiously I suggested they select a voice for the hare to use with all of his speech and, similarly, a different voice for all of the tortoise's speech bubbles. Far too much to ask!

Adding sprites

The second week the children selected and copied pictures of the hare and tortoise that they wanted from a number on a page in *PaintshopPro*. Then they pasted these onto the first page of their story. Later they copied and pasted them onto the other story pages as needed. Nearly all the children did this with little difficulty.

These were pictures drawn by last year's children in *Paint*. I selected six of the better ones and pasted them onto one page. (I then opened this file in *PaintshopPro*, reducing the number of colours to 256 before resaving it in *Paint*.) Unless the number of colours is reduced, an annoying white box surrounds the pictures selected and pasted into *StoryMaker*. (Reduce

the colours to less than 256 and you find you can no longer use the horizontal flip tool with them.)

Children were also encouraged to add other (ideally forest) animals to their scenes. This is easily done and only one group failed to remember do this. There was a problem here, however. Many of the children, being children, find the opportunity to add ghosts, dragons and spacemen irresistible. This 'creative' use of sprites can easily get out of hand and, while it keeps the children quietly happy for long periods of time, is unlikely to advance the lesson's learning objectives. Ground rules need to be set firmly at the start and adhered to with care.

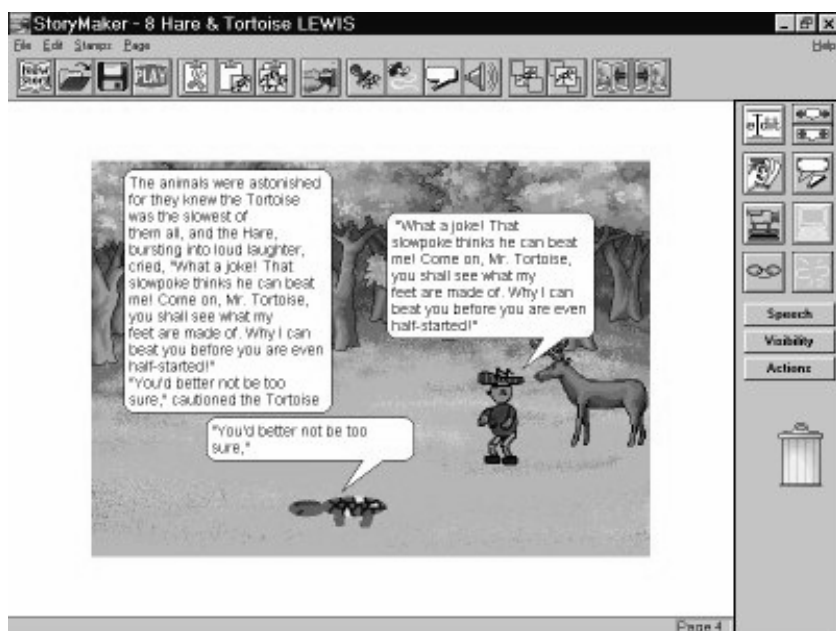
There are similar issues with backgrounds. I set the original story up with feasible backgrounds. To start I was happy for children to change to a slightly different background, but then found some hares and tortoises were racing through Egyptian tombs and churchyards by moonlight.

Last year I prepared tick lists of the skills (arranged by strand and level) which I expect children to develop over their primary years. In order to ensure that children are not left behind on these key skills on some selected lessons I have their tick sheets ready by their computers before the lesson starts, open to the skill objectives of that lesson. It is then reasonably easy to note acquired skills and areas where skills need more work. The process also emphasizes to the children that we really do want them to accomplish some set tasks in the course of the lesson! In the third week these were used to ensure the children had copied from *Paint* into *StoryMaker*

and could change font and colour in their writing (the latter not achieved by all). Seeing their boxes ticked is a remarkable incentive for some children to attempt and complete the work set!

Adding sound, movement and extra speech bubbles to Sprites

In *StoryMaker* moving sprites with the video camera cursor in the 'Make' mode cause the sprites to follow these paths when clicked on in the 'Play' mode. A hare can be made to rush across the screen and a turtle to lumber. The loud-speaker icon enables the user



Planning and assessment of the project

	Week 1 HM and Class teacher	Week 2 Teacher on own	Week 3 HM and Class teacher	Week 4 Teacher on own
Activities	Open story with text blocks on each page. Copy direct speech and paste into speech bubbles. Change colour, font and voice of speech.	If speech is copied, pupils should open Hare.bmp in <i>Paint</i> . They can then copy pictures of a hare and tortoise to add to their stories. Also add backgrounds, other sprites, sounds and motion.	SA & HM to assess children on copying and pasting pictures, changing font type, colour, adding motion and sound. More able to link actions. Children may add more speech as suitable.	Continue with adding more speech, motion and sound to Hare & Tortoise story. Change fonts and voices (click on speech bubble and then voice to do this). Add speech to extra animals.
Learning objectives	Copy and pasting text. Recognizing direct speech. Changing fonts and speech voices.	Copy and pasting pictures. Changing fonts and speech voices.	Copy and pasting pictures. Changing fonts and speech voices (level 3).	How to change fonts, voices, add motion and speech.
Comments made in Lesson Evaluations	Worked well but colours chosen were often not good for visibility.	Yr3 worked well (I helped show where pictures were etc.) but wish to continue next time.	Yr 3 OK but want to put too many extra objects etc. in pictures.	Looked at all work in detail: results summarized on graph. Decided to return to project and attempt to improve standards.

to select appropriate sounds and add them to the sprites. A running hare can make the sound of running steps while a 'slow walk' can be attached to the tortoise. Ducks can quack while animals rejoicing at the tortoise victory can clap and cheer.

From the second week on children were encouraged to animate and add sound to their animals.

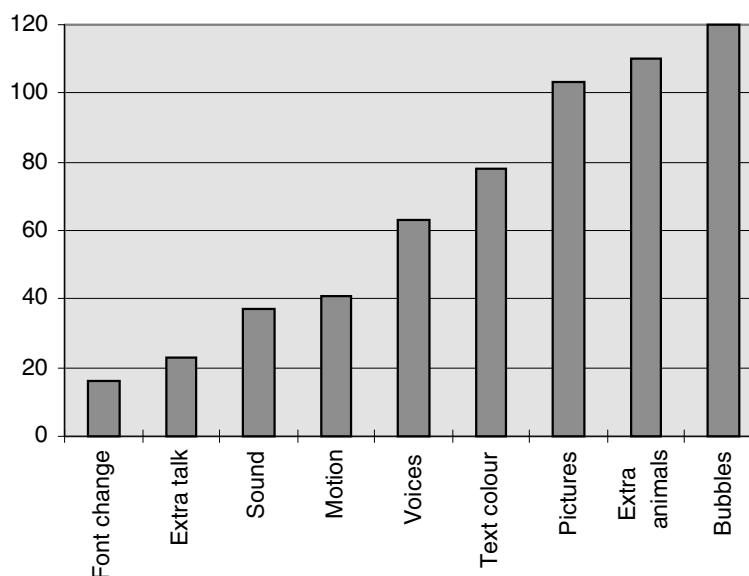
In retrospect it was premature to ask for animation and sound in the second week. It would have been better to ask for more speech on the added sprites if for no other reason than that you can glance over shoulders and see it is happening!

My planning over four weeks gives a good idea of the tasks the children were set. I work part-time in school with a timetable that allows me to work with each class and their teachers one week; alternate weeks the class teachers continue the work I have started. Accordingly, the planning for the second and fourth week tends to repeat the work set in the first and third weeks.

The class teacher led the final session and we moved on to some work with Logo in the following

week. When I had time to assess the final stories in over the mid-term holiday I found there were far more gaps than I had anticipated. A graph of the children's success reveals strong variations in how well they accomplished the tasks set.

Children succeeded well in those tasks which I and the class teacher monitored closely (adding direct speech to speech bubbles and selecting, copying and pasting in pictures of the hare and the tortoise from *Paint*). In the



children's presence we had ticked off their success on their ICT records. These items were easily assessed; a glance at the computer screens gave some indication of progress, although where two children were working together we needed to check that both children could manage the task.

We also assessed the children's ability to change the text (and speech bubble) colour and font. More than half changed the colours (often making the text difficult to read!) but only a small minority managed font changes. We encouraged them to select appropriate voices for the hare and tortoise and to apply them to all of their speech bubbles. Only spot checking was possible in class, but about half of the children made at least a start on this. It must be admitted that few had the stamina to change the voices on every bubble on all eight pages.

Children also succeeded well in adding pictures of extra animals – not surprising since this is easy and fun.

It was only in the last two weeks that we encouraged the children to give speech bubbles and speech to their additional animals. This, and the fact that it is more fun to add more sprites than it is to type in speech for them, probably accounts for the fact that few children achieved this. If I had had another box to tick on their ICT records (or even a smiley face to stick on their jerseys) when they had added, for example, another five (different) speech bubbles, results would doubtless have been better! Monitor and feed back constantly if you really want results!

It seemed worthwhile returning to the stories after the mid-term break to encourage children to do more with voices, motion sound and added speech. The children worked on the stories for a further two weeks (once with my help and once with the class teacher alone) to edit their work for improved quality, in particular added text, pictures, sound, and motion and changing fonts and voices appropriately.

Some end products

As is the nature with interactive multimedia publications, the stories can only be fully appreciated on a computer. Accordingly a few samples are available on the accompanying CD ROM. It should be noted that after the children finished with their stories I linked some of the actions and made moving sprites disappear when they reached the page edge. The children were not yet ready for this level of program-

ming.

The annotated prints of some of Lewis's story pages gives some idea (if rather inadequate) of the children's final products.

Another time...

One nice thing about teaching the in the same school next year is that one can try again. Next year I propose to link this project more closely with Year 3 Literacy (with the co-operation of the classroom teachers). It would be interesting to develop the children's ideas of character and location in the stories by using a cloze type exercise in *Word* with form field drop down menus. This text, when 'unlocked' could be copied and pasted onto their story pages and developed as appropriate.

The children might well find the story more interesting and inspiring if they changed the context, e.g. the hare and tortoise characters become children with similar characteristics.

If the lesson objectives are to be more literacy based but I am still expecting quite polished multimedia stories, more time will be needed. With less ambitious weekly planning and constant 'have you done this so I can tick your box' strategies, hopefully time will be used to the best effect. Indeed, it would probably be worth doing an assessment sheet for every child just for this project so that every task they need to do is clearly spelled out for them and carefully monitored by me.

I also now know that much effort can be saved if a child adds a sound (e.g. slow walking) to the tortoise on page one and makes it disappear at the end of walking across the page. This tortoise sprite, when copied, takes its sound and commands with it. They are replicated wherever the tortoise is pasted. What a pity I didn't learn this sooner!

