



**ROMEO
COMMUNITY
SCHOOLS**

GOOD NEWS ACROSS 'R' DISTRICT

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Isabella Clark narrates “The Three Little Fish and the Big Bad Shark,” an adaptation of the familiar tale of The Three Little Pigs.

The art of storytelling

Eighth graders in Brad Wenz’s media broadcast class are learning more than how to produce a video; they are mastering the art of storytelling.

With each assignment, Mr. Wenz layers in another element for the students to include as they hone their skills.

Their first project was to create a video that included four statements about themselves – three truths and one lie. Each video needed to include an intro with text and music, a visual representation of each statement, a transition from one statement to the next, and finally an outro, also with text and music.

The next project was “What’s Happening at Romeo Middle School?”

“We took that basic framework and brought it into the next project – intro, outro, music – and then we added in a couple new elements,” Mr. Wenz explained.

In the third project, Mr. Wenz introduced a new element: tone. The title of the project was “Where are you going?” Students could be heading from one class to another, from school to home, or from their bedroom to their kitchen. Wherever they traveled, be it literal or figurative, they needed to tell a story, including the “why” behind the journey.

Each student chose a card from a deck. Whether they selected a red or a black card dictated the nature of the tone of their movie. If they chose a red card, their movie needed to convey a happy, upbeat, optimistic tone. If they chose a black card, “they’re going to do something that is thrilling or builds anxiety,” Mr. Wenz said.

Additional elements introduced in this project included the importance of correct grammar, spelling and punctuation, and ensuring volume levels were appropriate. For example, it’s important that the background music doesn’t overpower the narration track, Mr. Wenz explained.

Mr. Wenz believes in giving his students the freedom to explore each project within these parameters, preparing them for the independence that will come if they pursue video production in high school.

“As long as you hit those elements, the story is yours,” he said.

The fourth assignment for the trimester added the element of narration. To prepare for the storybook project, Mr. Wenz emailed one of the librarians and asked her to load 80 children’s storybooks to the library van, which comes to RMS on Thursdays.

Each student checked out one of these storybooks. Their assignment was to use the cameras on their phones to capture an image of the cover and each of the pages of illustration and text, arrange these in sequential order, and record the voiceover. Whatever tools they used to enhance their movies, such as background music, sound effects or special video techniques, was up to them.

Once completed, Mr. Wenz exported the videos and shared them in a Google folder with elementary teachers so that their students could enjoy storybooks read to them by eighth graders. These video narrations include books for beginning readers, such as *Dinosaur vs. Bedtime*, by Bob Shea, in which narrator Nolan Kozlowski brings the story to life for his young readers through the use of sound effects, such as a roaring dinosaur.

➡ [Watch Nolan's video!](#)



Vivienne Vernier chose an early reader book for her narrated video. "Orange Pear Apple Bear," by Emily Gravett, contains only five words – the title words and the word "there."

The storybook video collection also includes selections for more advanced readers, such as the seasonally appropriate *Creepy Carrots!*, by Aaron Reynolds. Narrator Shelby Summers chose background music that complements the dark and suspenseful mood of the illustrations.

Recording and hearing their own voices "might be the most uncomfortable thing they've ever had to do," Mr. Wenz said, but it's also "a huge step" toward a later unit when they will have the opportunity to create the morning announcements, transitioning from recording a piece ahead of time to producing a live performance broadcast.

Mr. Wenz taught sixth, seventh and eighth grade math and science for 24 years at RMS before moving to seventh grade careers and personal finance and the media broadcast elective. This is his second year and he has embraced the new challenge.

"It's exciting for me because there's a creativity in this classroom that I didn't necessarily have in science and math," he said. "Switching to this 24 years in was the change I needed right when I needed it the most. It was the spark I needed."

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