



Iowa Narratives Project

Lesson Plans: Iowa Narratives Project

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Introduction

The Iowa Narratives Project (INP) combines the principles of composition with public engagement skills and digital technology. Working in groups, students seek out a story in the public sphere that deserves wider recognition. Students learn about the context of the story, including the space out of which it arises. Students also conduct research, including interviewing a person or multiple persons for whom the narrative is important. They then construct a digital record of their findings and compose a brief podcast essay accompanied by photographs. This assignment engages with the advocacy/informed persuasion unit of the Rhetoric curriculum by asking students to advocate for an under recognized narrative to receive more public attention.

Objectives

A great many teaching and learning objectives can be accomplished through the INP. Some of these include:

- Students encounter and consider course concepts in public contexts
- Students practice collaboration with peers and with community members
- Students learn and practice skills of multimodal composition, including revision, audio editing, and digital photography
- Students learn and practice principles of public speaking
- Students learn and practice the principles of multifaceted research and reporting the research.

The IDEAL team will help you articulate your own teaching and learning objectives and will facilitate your work with the INP.



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Technology Concerns

Audacity is a free and open source software that provides relatively strong audio mixing tools. Audacity tutorials are available at lynda.uiowa.edu.

Students can use laptops, smartphones, or other devices to record audio. IDEAL can also help students with access to high quality digital recording devices. Numbers are limited. **Students may check out audio and video recording devices through IDEAL. Details can be found at ideal.uiowa.edu/about-us.**

All instructors using this assignment should **contact IDEAL (ideal@uiowa.edu) as soon as possible to receive adequate technical and instructional support. IDEAL is available to assist instructors with each step of the assignment, including preparation and lesson planning, troubleshooting technology issues, and making student work public.*

Students' work in this project can be summarized as follows:

- **Write** a proposal and collaboration agreement with group members. This document identifies the project topic, outlines each group member's role, and establishes a plan for working collectively.
- **Conduct and record** interviews with people relevant to the project. These interviews should be scheduled as early as possible.
- **Write** a composition plan with group members. This document functions as a storyboard for the project's content as well as an outline including tasks to be completed by the group.
- **Compose and record** an audio podcast. This includes the following steps: a) writing the podcast narration script, which features each group member's voice; b) recording the narration; and c) combining recorded interviews and narration into a single composition/audio track as a compelling and cohesive story.
- **Workshop** both the narration script and the audio track drafts respectively.
- **Present** the podcast, with accompanying photographs, for the class and the public in the Library Learning Commons.
- **Write** a reflection and group participation evaluation

Suggestions for lesson plans and approaches follow. Adapt them to your course focus, your course's meeting times, and your students' interests and abilities.

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Lesson 1: Introduction

1. Introduce the assignment
 - a. As you introduce the INP, take a few minutes to query students whether or not they might be interested in continuing to research the same topic for the INP as they researched in the Rhetoric of Space project. Conversation can remain informal, but take the time to ask students why they either a) would be interested in pursuing the same topic/place (perhaps asking, why is it valuable to continue with the same topic? what would you gain?), or b) would find it frustrating to continue with the same topic/place. Encourage students that either decision is ok and that their decisions are part of the research process that writers and researchers go through all the time. For example, students considering pursuing the same topic may be driven by curiosity, a particularly interesting topic with lots of new leads, or perhaps, they just want to make the process easier on themselves. And students considering switching topics may realize that they've become bored with their topic, or perhaps they've exhausted many angles of inquiry, or they just want to explore something new. All of these are characteristics of the research process and the transition between the RoS and INP provide a wonderful teachable moment to have these authentic discussions.
2. Explore and discuss previous student INP projects on the [IDEAL website](#)
 - a. Instructors should establish clear expectations for finished projects
 - b. Instructors should emphasize the broad range of possible topics and encourage students to be creative and adventurous, and to review previously covered topics before selecting their own.
3. Explain the Project Log and encourage students to begin keeping track of their work now.
4. Walk students through the Project Proposal to be completed as homework.

Homework: Students compose a proposal that describes their narrative project. In about a page of typed text (one document per group), students describe:

1. The narrative they plan to feature
2. The questions that will guide their inquiry into the details of the narrative
3. A thesis statement that argues why this narrative deserves wider attention

Lesson 2: Organizing Voices Coggle

The Organizing Voices activity asks students to explore conversations and communities related to their chosen narrative by creating a visual map of their project information sources using [Coggle](#). Students build upon the previous Organizing Voices activity (lesson 2 of the Rhetoric of Space assignment) to not only map textual sources (e.g., online articles, local newspaper coverage) but also fieldwork sources (e.g., people interviewed) relevant to their project. They should share their Coggle with the instructor as a log of their research. *Students whose topics carry over from the Rhetoric of Space assignment might consider using the same Coggle and adding to it for this assignment/activity.

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1. Lead a class discussion on evaluating the authority of living people/interview subjects
 - a. Consider various sources of authority. For example: does authority come from one's title, position, education level, experiences, reputation, etc?
2. Divide students into their project groups
3. Choose an example narrative for the activity--this can be a topic that has been done before or a new idea.
4. Using a shared electronic device (tablet/laptop) students create a group Coggle mapping potential sources of information, including people to interview.
5. Each student group shares its Coggle with the class
 - a. Encourage students in the audience to write down the list of ideas and resources generated as students share their Coggles. Instructors may also want to write these resources on the whiteboard
 - b. Consider showing this [Coggle example](#)
6. Encourage students to use their Coggle to seek various points of view related to their narrative. Ask if there are missing points of view or sources of information.
 - a. For example, after mapping out their intended interview subjects, students might find that they are missing female voices or the perspective of senior community members.

Homework: In groups, students compose a document that describes the collaborative roles of of each group member. Students define their collaborative process. This should be written in the form of an agreement that describes how students want to work together to make decisions, when and where they will meet, how they will schedule meetings, when they will complete tasks, and how they will address concerns and disagreements. If students already have such an agreement, have them revise it as needed.

*Remind students to [download](#) and experiment with the Audacity software program before next week.

Lesson 3: Audacity Workshop

This workshop introduces students to the audio mixing software Audacity, which they will use to compose their narrative podcast. This workshop is best completed in a [TILE room](#), but can be done in any classroom as long as instructors and students are prepared. Instructors who feel uneasy about the technology component can arrange a consultation with IDEAL by emailing ideal@uiowa.edu. The Student Instructional Technology Assistants ([SITA](#)) are also available for walk-in consultation Monday-Friday 9:00am to 5:00pm as well as classroom instruction upon request. In addition to several free online resources, detailed Audacity tutorials are available at lynda.uiowa.edu.

*Instructors **and** students are strongly encouraged to [download](#) and experiment with Audacity *before* arriving to class. Both should bring at least one audio file (song or podcast) to use in class.

1. Introduce Audacity as an easy to learn program

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- a. Note: It may surprise you how quickly your students learn Audacity!
2. Students follow along on their own devices as the instructor *slowly* walks them through the basic functions of the program using this [Audacity Basic Training guide](#).
 - a. Be sure to pause for questions and repeat steps often.
 - b. Remember, students will learn fastest by using the software themselves.
3. Leave the last 8-10 minutes of class for students to explore and experiment with what they've learned
4. Remind students to schedule interviews as soon as possible

Homework: Students write a storyboard or outline (one per group) for their podcast that includes all of the important parts of the narrative. This will help them think about the structure of their narrative. Students compose a very detailed timeline for their group's work and list deadlines for tasks as well as descriptions of each task for each group member.

Lesson 4: Conducting Interviews

1. Discuss interviews as an information resource
 - a. Ask students: What is unique about the kind of information living people hold?
What can you learn from an interview that you can't from other sources?
2. In their project groups, students brainstorm potential interview questions to ask the specific people they plan to interview
3. Students share their questions with the class and instructors facilitate the exchange of ideas and suggestions amongst students
4. Share with students (on the whiteboard/projector and ICON/course blog) a list of interviewing tips
 - a. You may include some of the following in your list:
 - i. Be prepared--with questions and adequate technology
 1. Test the recording device beforehand
 2. Ensure adequate battery life and recording storage space
 - ii. Be thankful and polite before, during, and after the interview
 1. Contact interviewees well in advance to schedule a meeting
 2. Remember, this person is doing *you* a favor; thank them
 - iii. Find as quiet a space as possible to avoid unwanted background noise
 - iv. Make a few practice recordings *with the interviewee* before starting; listen to the audio using headphones to make sure that the recording quality is very good; if not, adjust the position of the microphone, move to a quieter place, or make other adjustments as needed
 - v. Organic conversation is far better than following a script
 1. Be willing to depart from prepared questions if something more relevant and interesting comes up
 - vi. Listen well

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1. Avoid interrupting the interviewee while they are speaking. This may be offensive to the interviewee and it will make that audio clip difficult to edit, if not entirely useless
- vii. Capture sounds from the interview location, and other relevant locations, to create the soundscape for the narrative
 1. E.g., If you're interviewing a farmer, the sound of their tractor engine could open the podcast audio by setting the scene
- viii. Remember the interviewee needs to sign a release form

Homework: Students complete a draft of the narration script that includes each group member's voice. Students rehearse a reading of the script draft to prepare the script draft workshop.

Lesson 5: Script Draft Workshop

Remind students to rehearse reading their script draft out loud, together as a group, before attending the workshop.

1. Students read their drafts out loud as they intend to record them
 - a. Highlight this rehearsal as an opportunity for students to practice delivery by focusing on speech clarity, tone, pace, and volume.
2. Encourage students to pay particular attention to the script's organization
 - a. Consider posing some of the following questions:
 - i. Does the introduction capture my attention?
 - ii. Is it clear this is a narrative that needs to be told?
 - iii. What voices are potentially missing from the narrative?
3. Classmates offer feedback on the script as a written document
 - a. Instructors should model appropriate feedback, offering praise before suggesting improvements
 - b. Students should be aware that their script could change significantly as interviews are completed

Homework: Students prepare a draft of their audio recording--including interview clips as well as scripted narration and/or ambient sounds--to be workshopped in class. Students will need at least 30 seconds of audio in order to benefit from the audio draft workshop that follows. However, instructors should not expect students to have completed more than 1-2 minutes of the audio at this point in the assignment.

Lesson 6: Audio Draft Workshop

*This workshop is best completed in a TILE classroom, which allows students to see each other's audio files (e.g., where and how edits have been made) in progress.

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1. Students discuss the discoveries and difficulties they encountered while composing the audio.
2. Students play their audio files for the class
3. Encourage students to pay attention to both the audio/technical qualities as well as the compositional qualities of the podcast being workshopped
 - a. How is the overall audio quality? Is each voice intelligible? Are there are unwanted background noises that should be removed?
 - b. Does the narration keep the listener's attention and interest? Does the organization make sense?
4. Classmates offer feedback
5. Instructors should leave class time to troubleshoot. Students who are having difficulties should work with peers who are equipped to help. Consider reviewing Audacity functions--for example, remind students how to seamlessly blend various voices using the fade effect.
 - a. Remind students that technical help is available through the instructor, IDEAL (email ideal@uiowa.edu), lynda.uiowa.edu, and other online tutorials
6. Review expectations for the final presentations, including how to export finished audio tracks.

Homework: Students submit their completed podcast and accompanying photos before the day of in-class presentations so instructors can listen and prepare audio files for presentation day. Consider providing a checklist of all assignment pieces to be turned in, including the completed audio file, research process log, and photos.

Lesson 7: Presentations

1. Students deliver presentations during class time. This will take more than one class meeting.
2. If at all possible, hold presentations in a public venue such as the Library Learning Commons. To reserve a space for presentations in the Learning Commons, write to the Learning Commons Coordinator, Brittney Thomas, at brittney-thomas@uiowa.edu. Let her know that you want to reserve an open area for class presentations. Give her the dates and times and number of students. Also describe any special considerations.
3. You may want to require students in the audience to pose questions or hold discussion following each presentation, or, if time is dear, you can limit discussion to one question as the next student presenter sets up.

Lesson 8: Reflection and Group Participation Evaluation

1. Explain the reflection and group participation evaluation
 - a. Remind students to avoid academic dishonesty--group evaluations should be accurate and specific about what each group member contributed.

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2. Students have the option of placing their projects on the IDEAL website, where they will be featured alongside other responses to the assignment. To encourage this, instructors should set aside class time for uploading content. Only students who have submitted release forms (for each student in the group and for each person interviewed in the podcast) to IDEAL will be able to upload.
 - a. Remind students to fill out IDEAL's release form. The form is linked on the IDEAL [Iowa Narratives Project page](#).
 - b. Walk students through the process of uploading projects. A student guide for uploading projects is posted on the IDEAL [Iowa Narratives Project page](#).
 - c. N.B.: you may not require or offer incentives (such as extra credit) for uploading projects to the IDEAL site. Students must opt in.
 - i. You may tell students that including their project on the website will allow them to easily share it with others, will create an impressive showcase for their hard work, and will give them an online publication.

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