

Telling Stories



**Story Machine**

Dan Lockton, Catherine Greene, Gail Ramster,  
Alan Outten and Lizzie Raby

## THE STORY MACHINE AT THE MILL



*A young visitor to The Mill uses the Story Wheel to interview Walthamstow artist Michelle Reader.*



At the Telling Stories launch evening, young people put on a puppet show, streamed wirelessly to the Story Chair projector.

Junior Reporter training using the Story Wheel.



The Mill  
\*People making things happen\*



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The Story Machine is a new digital tool developed to help us show the creative energy that is spent every day at The Mill, in activities, exhibitions, celebrations and workshops. It's the culmination of a year's collaboration between the RCA Helen Hamlyn Centre of Design and The Mill, as part of the research project The Creative Citizens. We are very grateful to them and also to artist Michelle Reader, who worked with the RCA to build the magical story booth from innovative ideas by young, creative citizens.

Using the 'story wheel' iPad, the public and volunteers can record the activities that take place in The Mill in the form of photos and videos, which will be automatically uploaded to our website so that we can share the action with you at home.

Check out some recent photos here:



**Our opening times**

Tues, Wed, Thur: 10am-7pm  
Fri/Sat: 10am-6pm  
Sun: 11am-2pm  
Tel: 020 85213211

**SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER**

Get news from **The Bridge**, The Mill's exciting new project in E10, or email them at [thebridgee10@gmail.com](mailto:thebridgee10@gmail.com)

**What's On @ The Mill**

Today + - Sunday, 24 August + -

**Sunday, 24 August**

MORE Soft

The Mill is Closed

Tuesday, 26 August

The Mill's website, automatically updated with the latest images from the Story Wheel.

# The Story Machine

*The Mill,  
Walthamstow,  
London.*

## **Contributors**

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**W** *themill-copper  
mill.org*

**T** *twitter.com/  
themille17*

**F** *facebook.com/  
the.mill.e17*

## **Digital Tools Used**

*Storify,  
If This Then That,  
Apple iPad,  
Apple TV,  
Flickr,  
WordPress,  
mini-projector,  
Twitter,  
Facebook.*

**The Story Machine is a mini-cinema/puppet booth/video camera which enables the community's stories to be told, seen and heard more widely and more easily, through a combination of digital technology and engaging 'low-tech' activities.**

## **About**

The Mill, a community centre in Walthamstow, east London, provides space and resources for local people to organise groups, events and activities for adults, children and families, ranging from art exhibitions to book clubs to language classes. There was a need for volunteers and participants to be able to share their stories of The Mill, and the activities they take part in—with the existing community, but also to help the centre engage with the wider community, and at the same time provide evidence of The Mill's impact on its local area.

Through a process of collaborative workshops involving volunteers and participants at The Mill, designers from the Royal College of Art, and local artist Michelle Reader, we arrived at the 'Story Machine', comprising the Story Chair (a mini-cinema and puppet booth) wirelessly connected to the Story Wheel (an iPad Mini built into a steering wheel).

People taking part in activities at The Mill can use the Story Wheel to film and photograph what they're doing—helping to show the creative energy that is spent every day, in exhibitions, celebrations and workshops. The videos and photos then upload automatically to the Story Chair, where they can be viewed and shared in the centre, and photos are also uploaded to The Mill's website, ensuring there is an ever-changing kaleidoscope of images of their activities. As The Mill's Ingrid Abreu Scherer puts it, the idea is to "use digital technology to add value to our activities and messages, not to replace them".

### **What is the impact of the project?**

The Story Machine was launched at an exhibition in February 2014, *Telling Stories*, which encouraged local people to contribute stories of Walthamstow and The Mill, via a postcard wall, and interviewing each other using the Story Wheel. The Story Machine has gradually been incorporated into activities, including a Junior Reporters' workshop (where young people learned interviewing and reporting skills through using the Story Machine) and use at a range of events, providing an ongoing record of everything that happens at The Mill.

### **How did digital tools make a difference?**

The digital tools we used were mostly existing platforms, linked together in new ways. One big obstacle was language (more than 100 languages are spoken within two miles of The Mill), and so visually engaging tools are important to remain accessible, informative and appealing. Equally, it was important not to lock people out by using technology that's outside their reach or competence. Think about the age, economic and language background of your audience.

### **What next?**

The Mill is currently working with two deaf groups in Walthamstow, and this has led to thinking about the implications and potential of tools such as the Story Machine for people with different abilities to access and contribute to digital content.

# What Others Can Learn

## Events

Organising events can be an important way of engaging people in trying out new technology for the first time. Events can link the physical and digital in ways which make the possibilities of digital technology more 'real', and give explicit focus to using it. We used events both to create the Story Machine, and to make use of it once built.

## People

Involving the right people is key. The co-creation workshops which led to the Story Machine involved families with children as well as other volunteers. This was fantastic for generating ideas and creativity, but it did mean that the project evolved into something with a strong focus on children's storytelling, which was different from the original aims.

## Adaptability

At the beginning we experienced several technical issues with the Story Machine where it did not work for several days. But people found surprisingly low-tech uses for it, e.g. as a theatre for shadow puppets. This meant it continued to be used. After seeing this we included these low-tech uses in its menu of uses and encouraged people to think of new ones too.

Extract from: Creative Citizens' Variety Pack: Inspiring digital ideas from community projects.

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