

BENEATH THE SURFACE OF **SKELETON CREEK**: TRANSLITERACY FOR TWEENS AND TEENS

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Skeleton Creek is author Patrick Carman's first work of transmedia – a project that uses multiple platforms to create one seamless story. In this case, the story is carried by the written word (in the book, **Skeleton Creek**) and video via a website (with passwords given throughout the book).

Since the mystery is focused on a haunted gold-mining dredge, it's a natural for this year's theme – Beneath the Surface. The scary theme and opportunity to use technology sell this program to the intended audience.

This title lends itself to the development of either a program that studies the way writing and videography have been used to create suspense, or one in which tweens and teens get a chance to also *create* a story using the same techniques as the author Carman and his video production team.

Here's how I worked with the book. First, I began reading the book and followed along on the website as each password was given. This was interrupted briefly, as my teenage daughter swiped the book and plowed through it with her laptop close at hand. (She screamed late at night after watching the scary, cliffhanger, final video!) Essentially, the book is teenage Ryan's journal that he is keeping after an accident at an abandoned dredge. The website component shows video messages and mysterious footage secretly sent by his friend Sarah. They are continuing their investigation of the haunted dredge, even though their parents have forbidden contact with one another and the property is off-limits. Since this book is part one, and ends in a cliffhanger – I'd advise you to stock the books that follow. To break the tension, I did show the first video from the sequel, **Ghost in the Machine**. (Password= leonardshelby)



You may want to include some instructions about accessing the website and using the passwords from the text – some discussion participants didn't figure it out on their own!

The website where readers are sent to view Sarah's video clips.

A search of the Internet revealed the following helpful resources as I developed my program. The publisher's website has discussion questions and suggested activities.

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/skeleton-creek-discussion-guide>



Another website that I found useful is a pathfinder created by an IUPUI SLIS student, Shawn Humphrey: <https://sites.google.com/site/mediagraphy621/home> There are many links here to explore while developing your program – tips on journal writing and spooky story writing are great if you don't have video equipment.

After reading the book and website and exploring the resources, I started preparing for my program idea by researching camera shots or angles used in making suspense films. I couldn't find one video on YouTube that showed what I wanted and was appropriate for my audience, so I created a visual dictionary of stills shot from the camera angles most often used to create suspense. You can use this dictionary in two ways. First, you can review Sarah's video footage online with your group, and ask them to point out which angles are used while filming the scenes (you may not find all of them). If you are going to have the group shoot their own scenes, the dictionary will be their shot list as well.

On the day of the program, I had six laptops with speakers and six FlipCams set up in the room. I had also recruited two teen volunteers with computer and videomaking skills to assist me. I showed them the equipment, and had them record and transfer footage to practice. When the tweens arrived, we viewed the next video, as I mentioned, and speculated about what would happen next. Some tweens had not watched the videos, so they viewed them as we gathered to begin. We discussed the characters, plot, author's technique, etc. Then we discussed how the videos and the techniques used to film them had made the work so suspenseful. I handed out the pamphlet of shot types and reviewed it with them. While I had their attention, and before handing out equipment, I discussed other techniques that the actors used to show fear. Setting and lighting contribute to the scare factor in Sarah's videos too, but we were less able to control these during our shooting. I formed groups, and discussed the need to give each person a chance to film and a chance to act. I allowed them time to think up short scenes they could capture. If you are able to plan a program with more than one session, you can spend more time developing a script and shot list. There were some simple scary stories in links from the pathfinder described above.

The EXCITING part: Shooting Footage

- Before handing out equipment, describe all buttons and features.
- After handing out equipment, describe all buttons and features again, giving each participant a chance to hold the camera, iPad, iPhone, what-have-you.
- Pre-trained volunteers are very handy for this and for downloading footage if you do not have time to make that part of your program.
- Take your groups out to your filming location and set boundaries.
- Cooperation between groups will be needed to share the available space.
- Remind them that the cameras record sound from the videographer while they are filming – zip those lips cameramen!
- Head back to your program room to transfer footage if necessary. Teen volunteers can do this, or you can instruct participants if time allows.
- Have groups show off their shots and tell others which camera angle they were using.

If you have ample program time, have participants edit some of the best scenes together. You could assemble a dictionary of suspenseful video clips even if you aren't able to formulate a complete story from the scenes filmed. Or, if you have skilled teen volunteers, have them perform the editing. Don't forget to credit the participants (after gathering releases from their parents). Show your video at your Summer Reading Program Finale Party and/or upload it to your library's website, if possible.

This program is very adaptable to your available time, equipment and skill. If you do not want to conduct a book discussion program, you could start with Carman's app: **3:15** which employs audio, text and video to convey a short horror story. There is also a book form of this work: **Things That Go Bump in the Night: 3:15, Season One**. As the tag line says on the cover, you can listen, read, and watch in 15 minutes or less. Learn more at <http://315stories.com/about/>. This would be another great source to get your transliteracy program started.

