

Words to Live By

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Starting and Imagining

Words to Live By emerged from a desire to bring digital skills education, community-building, and personal reflection together into a single project. Though we live in an era where it's easier than ever to share our individual voices through a variety of platforms, particularly social media, we also live in a time when a myriad of ideas and perspectives are constantly flowing through the individual and collective psyche. While this movement and exchange has great benefits for the potential of public discourse, it may make it challenging at times to feel like we all have the opportunity to tune in to our own voices, to check in with where we are in this moment, and to feel like our voices are being heard amidst the sea of information and experience that is right at our fingertips. How could technology become a gateway into introspection and creative expression? What role can technology play in empowering individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities, and lifting up their voices?

These ideas, questions, and inquiries gelled into an initial plan to teach a series of digital media creation workshops to adults, which would both teach participants how to create pieces of digital media and encourage them to create digital art centered around a thought-provoking, reflective prompt. The first part of the workshops would function as a space of education and empowerment through skill-building, while the second part would center around reflection and transformative creative expression. The art pieces that participants created in the workshops would then be displayed digitally for the community to view, ultimately creating a public forum to encourage listening, discussion, relationship, and, hopefully, change.

Accessibility was a key consideration as we were developing our project. One primary consideration in this area was in relation to the programs we were going to teach. We had narrowed down our media types to visual, written, and audio media, each of which can be crafted using a variety of programs. However, we wanted to ensure that the programs we taught were as accessible and affordable as possible, so we chose several web-based, free software programs to teach. Specifically, we landed on Google Docs for the written component of the project, Canva for the visual art component, and Audacity for the audio recording / editing section of the project. Of course, we acknowledge that there are additional barriers that make accessing even these programs a challenge, but we felt that choosing these programs was the best option, especially given the ways that our project later shifted.

We planned to collaborate with several community partners to host these workshops, including the New Foundations community at Project for Pride in Living and Episcopal Homes. We were in contact with both of these community partners in the late winter and had just started to more seriously discuss the project with them when COVID-19 began ramping up, and many in-person programs suddenly seemed out of the question.

COVID-19 presented us with a myriad of challenges, but, despite how much it felt like our project depended on in-person interaction, the pandemic presented us with a unique opportunity to shift the direction of our project and mold it to the shape of life in the COVID-19 era.

Shifting and Adapting

The main barrier that our group “Words to Live By” encountered was how to navigate our project through the Covid-19 global pandemic. We knew that holding our planned workshops in person would be dangerous to ourselves and the communities we were planning to work with. Instead, we decided that it would be beneficial to move the project online to be accessed remotely. Once we had agreed and communicated with our community partner, we then started the planning phase of how to move everything online and make it accessible to communities within the Twin Cities and to participants with limited digital experience.

Our original idea of having a community accessible Google Drive to share with the community would still be used and further added to. Each member of our group created a tutorial for each of the workshops we had originally planned, which aimed at teaching community members how to use free online media creation tools such as Google Docs, Canva and Audacity. We also created a How to Use Google Drive document to assist participants who have limited experience using Google Drive. Each tutorial was uploaded to our Google Drive account that was publically accessible.

Another barrier to moving our project online, was that we were unable to immediately assist participants if they needed help on a project. We decided to schedule two virtual meetups that participants could attend to ask questions about the project or how to use a specific digital tool. We created a flyer that had a short description of our project “Words to Live By”, the Google Drive link, and the link to the Zoom sessions with the password. We then reached out via email to local non-profit organizations to share the flyer with their communities.

Despite all the barriers we encountered we were still able to successfully finish our civic engagement project. Much like other civic engagement groups, we understood that the impact of Covid-19 was not in our control but this did give us an opportunity to

create new ways for communities to learn digital literacy skills and create meaningful art.

Creating and Accomplishing

Our project resulted in the creation of a public Google Drive entitled “Words to Live By”. This Drive included a few introductory files, along with two folders called “Workshop Curricula” and “Gallery”. Participants were to first begin by viewing a file entitled “START HERE - Welcome Document” that gave an introduction to the project and helped them in understanding the components of the drive. They could then view our “Navigating Google Drive Workshop” to get a grasp on how Google Drive works, so that they could successfully use it to complete the parts of the project. Also included as part of these introductory files were a document that included the prompts we created to guide the participants’ creations and also the flyer we made for the project.

The “Workshop Curricula” folder housed our three other workshops: Audio, Visual, and Written. All the instructions for the workshops existed on their own distinct Google Document. These workshops first started off with a bit of information about the impact of the medium that was going to be used and a video that delved more into it. For example, the Visual workshop began by stating the benefits of creating art and included a TEDx talk about the virtue of art therapy. The rest of the workshop contained the actual content of how to learn the workshop’s particular program. The programs used in these workshops were Audacity, Canva, and Google Docs. Instruction was given through a combination of written instruction, visuals like screenshots, and videos either by the instructor or found online.

Lastly, to build a sense of community even from doing these virtual workshops in isolation, we had a “Gallery” folder. Participants were encouraged to—if they were comfortable—submit their completed art pieces to an email we made for the project. We would then upload their completed pieces into this public folder, so that others could view them. The structure of our project allowed participants to complete as many of the workshops as they wanted in whatever order they preferred. As of the completion of our Civic Engagement Project presentation, we have not had any participants submit their completed projects to the Gallery folder. However, we did share this public Google Drive with our community partner, Project for Pride in Living’s New Foundations. This would allow them to share the workshops with their participants with the possibility of them completing them.

Overall, our group accomplished our goal of transforming our curriculum to a digital format. We were able to successfully take our original project idea and modify it to be accomplished remotely. So, instead of having participants complete workshops in

person with us leading them, we instead made it so that participants could access these workshops at any time and go at their own pace.

A goal that we were unable to achieve was working successfully with a community partner to find participants who could complete our workshops. This was tough to do as—just like our service sites—organizations around the Twin Cities were adapting their work to remote options. This meant that it was not guaranteed that we could find a select group of people who had access to computers and the internet and also the desire to improve their digital skills. A disadvantage to not being able to achieve this goal was that we weren't able to build as much community as we would have liked to.

Reflecting and Envisioning

Due to the fact that this project was in high swing during a pandemic, we had the opportunity to engage our community partners and participants in a much different way than in the prior year. Because of this the entire project had to take into account social distancing and observing safety for vulnerable community members. We opted to have the project completely online, from engaging with the community to participants submitting their art pieces online.

One of the things that we had to come to reality with is that doing it in this manner requires a lot more leg work and involvement in order to get participation. Potentially if we had reached out to individuals and guided them through the process of creating their artwork on a one to one basis, there could have been more pieces to show on this project. This project required a mid range knowledge of technology to navigate the Google Drive platform, work between Youtube videos and our Google Drive and then also learn a new application that they may be completely unfamiliar with. So we had a few hurdles to overcome in that respect.

However meeting up as a group virtually seemed easier than it had in the previous year. Zoom meetings allowed us to meet from the comfort of where we were located (usually home) and not have to travel to other locations and work out logistics.

If this were to become a continuing project for an upcoming service year, one of the things that would facilitate more engagement on the project would be having someone who is a mediator between participants and CTEP members. By this meaning someone that could assist with presenting the lesson videos and uploading the content to the Google Drive platform. That way it would cut down on the learning curve that is needed to accomplish the main task of completing the artwork.

While our primary goal with this project was to educate participants and provide them with digital skills, we ourselves learned quite a bit from putting this project together. One of our primary lessons was in relation to building partnerships with other

organizations. Prior to shifting our project to be entirely virtual, we had connected with the community at New Foundations, one of PPL's supportive housing buildings. They were a very willing and supportive partner, partially because one of the group members already had a relationship with the community. However, once we shifted our project to be virtual and attempted to share it with organizations that we didn't have a relationship with, we weren't so successful. This situation highlighted the importance of building relationships with community partners prior to working with / engaging them for a project, as this will help the partnership thrive and succeed more fully.

Another lesson came from the planning phases of the project. As we were putting the project together and envisioning what it would look like, we tried to remain conscious of what our role would be as outsiders to many of the communities we were working in. While we were aiming to provide a space for education and community-building, we wanted to ensure that we were not coming across as interventionists or as individuals who were trying to solve an individual or community's problems on their behalf. While we didn't have to engage with this concern very directly, due to the way in which our project shifted form, it was something that was beneficial for us to think about and learn from in the process of designing our project.

In conclusion, the project itself went well overall from a logistical standpoint. COVID provided unique hurdles that we found resources to overcome. If the future service year continues the project with the hope of having in-person lessons than it would see more participation and engagement.

Key Links:

- WTLB Visual video series:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3JQpYu4eznh1Mkq_xWSsgvBoYX5cegwA
- WTLB Audio video series:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3JQpYu4eznjh8FsQ2B3kqDHGVc9LVq9L>
- Link to the project: tinyurl.com/wtlb2020

WORDS TO LIVE BY

Community Art Project

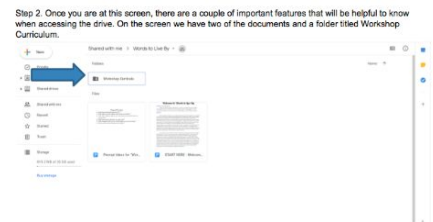
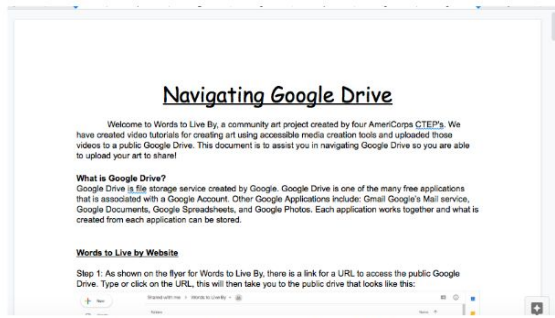
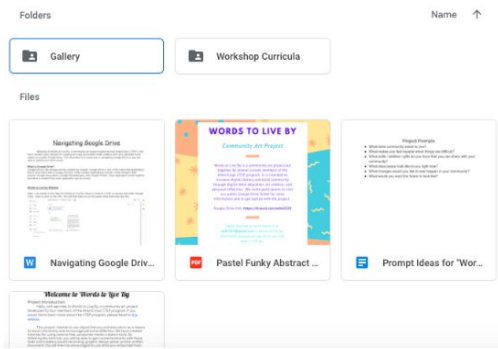
Words to Live By is a community art project put together by several current members of the AmeriCorps CTEP program. It is intended to increase digital literacy and build community through digital skills education, art creation, and personal reflection. We invite participants to visit our public Google Drive folder for more information and to get started with the project.

Google Drive link: <https://tinyurl.com/wtlb2020>

Please feel free to reach out to us at wtlb2020@gmail.com or attend one of our Information Sessions on July 1st or July 15th from 5-5:30 pm.

Information session Zoom ID & Password
Meeting ID: 871 890 7573
Password: 8C45Ea

Google Drive



The arrow is pointed to the workshop curriculum; in this folder you will find tutorials.

Visual Canva

Words to Live By: Visual Workshop

[Playlist to all videos](#)

The Power of Art

- "A picture is worth a thousand words"
- Creating art can have lots of benefits:
 - Self-discovery:** Creating art can help you acknowledge and recognize feelings that have been lurking in your subconscious.
 - Self-esteem:** The process will give you a feeling of self-achievement which can be very valuable to improve your self-appreciation and confidence.
 - Emotional release:** The greatest benefit of creating art is giving you a healthy outlet for expressing and letting go all your feelings and fears. Complex emotions such as sadness or anger sometimes cannot be expressed with words. When you are unable to express yourself, but you desire emotional release, making art may help you to do it.
 - Stress relief:** Fighting anxiety, depression or emotional trauma can be very stressful for you both mentally and physically. Creating art can be used to relieve stress and relax your mind and body.
- Art as Empowerment: The Virtue of Art Therapy video <https://youtu.be/PszGB9u0Y>

Assignment

- Create a visual piece of art using Canva that visually represents your response to your chosen prompt.
- A reminder that the prompts include:
 - What does community mean to you?
 - What makes you feel hopeful when things are difficult?
 - What skills / abilities / gifts do you have that you can share with your community?
 - What does peace look like to you right now?
 - What changes would you like to see happen in your community?
 - What would you want the future to look like?

Selecting an object

You must first select an object before you can do any action to it such as move it or resize it. To select an object, simply click on it. It is easiest to click the center of the object. You will know your object is selected if there is a blue square around the object that has a white circle in each corner of it.

Moving objects

To move an object, place your mouse in the middle of the object, click and hold down the left button of your mouse. Then physically move the mouse to move the object. Release the button once you have the object where you'd like it.

Words to Live By - Visual: Creating a Canva Account

Words to Live By - Visual: Overview of Canva

Words to Live By - Visual: Overview of Options

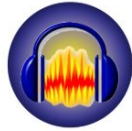
Words to Live By - Visual: Getting Started

Words to Live By - Visual: Working with text

Words to Live By - Visual: Changing colors of object

Words to Live By - Visual: Downloading your work

Audio



Recording and Editing with Audacity

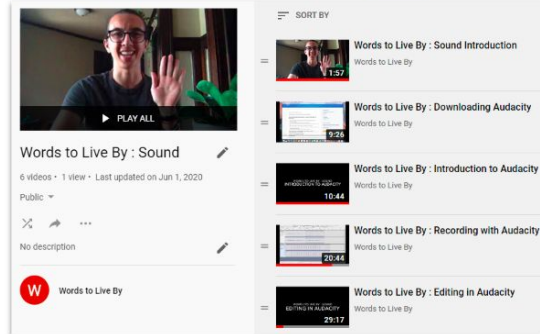
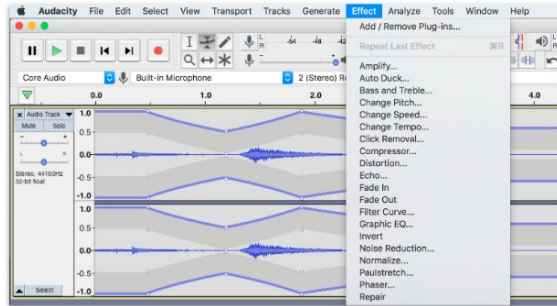
Downloading Audacity

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0JtFNSeYNE>

- Audacity is a free program that can be downloaded from online
 - To begin, open your internet browser (Firefox, Safari, Google Chrome, etc.) and search for "audacity" in the search bar at the top. Click the enter key on your keyboard to complete the search



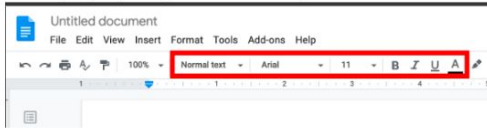
- One of the first options that shows up should say "Audacity" and have the url <https://audacityteam.org>. Click this option



Written



- Buttons at the top
 - We are going to primarily focus on formatting buttons



- **Style button:** By default set to normal text
 - Indicates how the wording is set, if its a title, subtitle, a heading, or normal
- **Font button:** By default set to Arial
 - the way that the letters look, there is generally a theme with each font style
- **Font size button:** By default set to 14
 - Indicates how large or small the wording will appear

Ideas:

- **Poem** - write a poem in any style - it doesn't have to rhyme

Prompt: What does peace look like to you right now?™

Peace is in pieces
 I wonder what real peace may be
 I dream about when I will be able to see
 Bring me the peace
 Along with the peace
 Here I will sit and project what I want from the world
 Because right now it seems so *heated and cold!*

- **Artistic use of words** - change the font styles for words to show impact

Prompt: What changes would you like to see happen in your community?

Inclusion Diversity Openness Respect
Truth Concern for others **Public**
Transparency Warmth Politics

- **Personal experience prose** - Write an essay or journal style entry

