



Seeing/Thinking/Feeling
Through Visual Representation

The power of images.

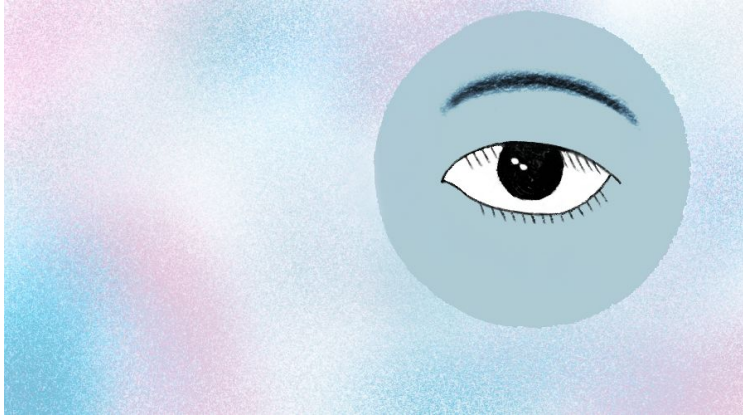


Illustration by Ki Chin, [Shameless Magazine](#)

What do **others** see when they look at me?

How would I **like to be seen** by others?

How do I see myself? How do I **want** to see myself?

What **stories** are told about me?

What part of my story has **not been told**?

Who is telling my story for me?

Our identities influence how we interpret images. Images also powerfully inform our identities: **they shape how we think about ourselves and others.**

While greatly influencing our perceptions, stories and images also have the power and potential to lead us to look at our own beliefs and responses. Why do I make generalizations about people I've never met? Why do I believe I won't be accepted as I am? Through stories and images, we can revision our lives, and open ourselves to new possibilities.

Wallpaper.

Nancy Mithlo, a professor of Art History and Native Studies, describes the proliferation of images of Indigenous people as “wallpaper” inside our brains.

A quick search on google images of the word “Indigenous” exemplifies the “wallpaper” set of images normally use to represent Indigenous peoples.

Mithlo encourages us to examine our wallpaper and how it got there.



These recurring pictures impact the way people think about other groups of people and the ways we think about ourselves. Images are very powerful because they create stereotypes that influence attitudes, beliefs, and social structures. As Mithlo put it, “These images create confusion when confronted with reality; these images create pain when they replace reality” (TED Talk, 2013).

(Excerpt courtesy of Carla Rice and John Hupfield from *nishnabek de'bwewin/telling our truths* presentation)

Wallpaper of identity.

Picture the inside of your mind as an empty room.

Now imagine the images associated with the communities you belong to or your identities as the room's "wallpaper".

What does that wallpaper look like?

How does it make you feel?

Does the wallpaper reinforce or challenge stereotypes or misconceptions?

Metaphor.

“Metaphors are a way to talk about one thing but describing something else, that may seem roundabout, but it is not” (Jane Hirshfield, ted talk)

What is another way to say:

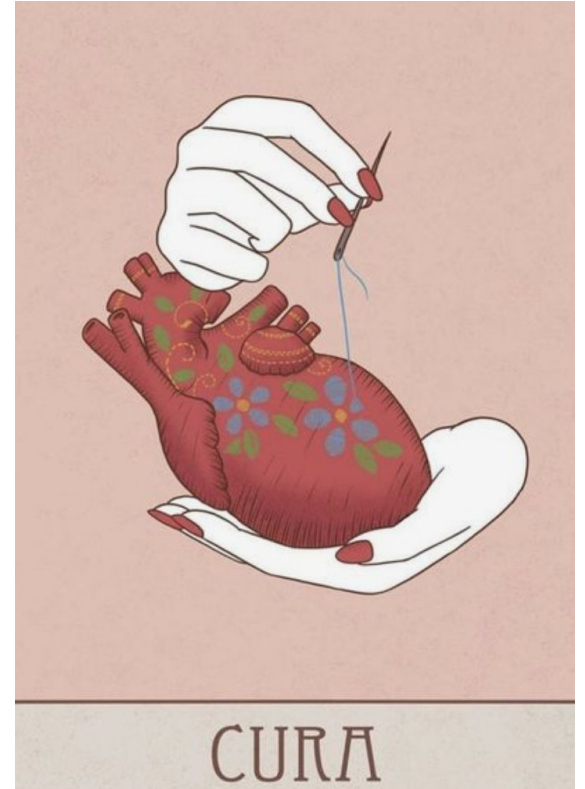
I have nothing to hide → I'm an open book

They are extremely kind → They have a heart of gold

I'm feeling sick → I'm under the weather

Metaphors are about making parallel between two things, and a visual metaphor is the representation of a person, place, idea, feeling, with an image that suggests similarity or some sort of association.

Using metaphors can help understand complicated ideas and emotions. But also, allow for creativity to flourish and the development of richer images.



Marica Zottino

A good exercise for practicing visual metaphors is to ask ourselves how the thing or idea relates to different senses:

If “joy” had a texture, what would it be? If you were touching “joy”, what would it feel like?

If “panic” were a color, what would it be?

What does “chaos” taste like? What kind of a sound would it be?

If “courage” was a movement, what would it look like?

Ideas for telling your story visually.

Thinking through your visual approach.

Drawing from your personal archives.

Your personal archive may include any found photographs, videos or objects. These visual elements can connect to our individual histories and the histories of our communities.

There can be a power in reclaiming these visual elements and telling a new story with them.

You can scan physical photographs, collect digital files, or photograph/film objects with any device you may have.

Things to consider:

Who is in these images and who do they belong to? Should you seek their permission to use these images?



A screenshot of a film by storytaker Simone where they use family photographs to explore their identity.

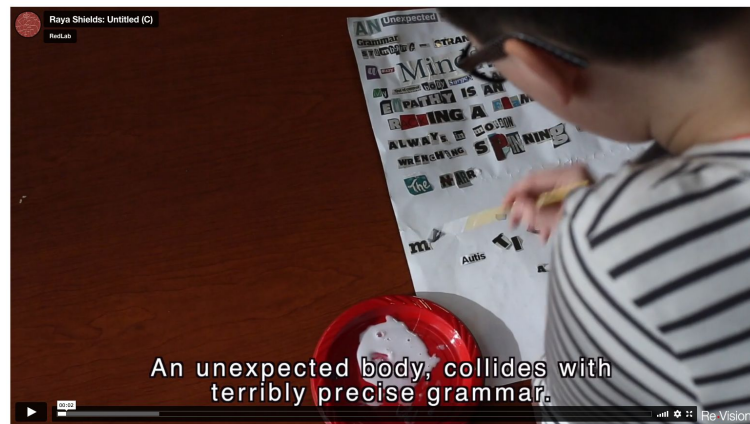
Collage, painting, or other artwork.

While we're mainly working digitally, you can create visuals for your story through more analogue creative techniques such as collage, painting, etc. Consider documenting the creation process of your artwork for your story, as well as documenting the final work.

Many of us feel as though we are not artistic or creative. We may feel shame around our “artistic abilities.” There is a power in reclaiming your artistic self and realizing that art does not need to look a certain way. We are all artists!

Things to consider:

What type of creative process or practice appeals to you? How does making art connect to your story? What elements of your artwork speak to your story? How can you document your process?



A screenshot of a film by storyteller Raya where they film themselves constructing a poem from letters cut out of magazines and newspapers.

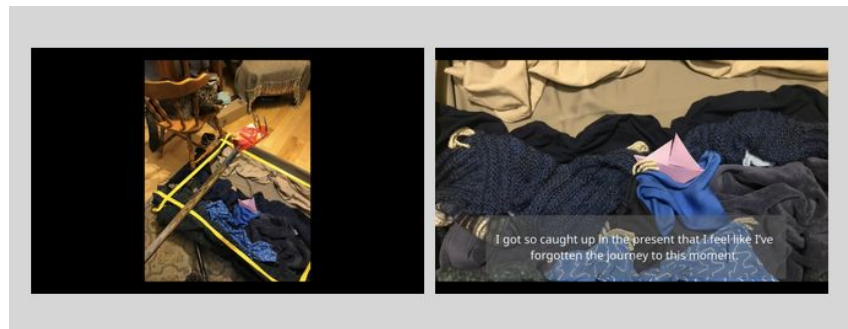
Stop-motion or animation.

You can use your phone, camera or mobile device to create a stop-motion animation using objects that you have around you. Or you could use a program such as Procreate to create a digital animation. Your facilitator can help you with constructing your animation.

Stop-motion and other types of animation can add a simplicity to your story, sometimes reminding us of books and images we have seen as children. Animation can also make seemingly impossible scenes or visuals a reality.

Things to consider:

What are some of the objects you could use or represent in your animation? Would storyboarding help you to organize your thoughts visually?



A behind-the-scenes image and a screenshot of a film by storyteller Andrea. They created a stop-motion animation from everyday objects.

Making your own photos and videos.

Using your phone, tablet, or camera, you can make your own visual elements for your story. Consider the places and feelings that connect to your story. If part of your story is about a journey or movement through time, you could film yourself (or have someone else film you) walking or moving. If part of your story feels messy or angry, consider filming a storm or a chaotic city intersection.

Making your own photos and videos allows you to explore elements like different angles, reflections, framing, etc.

Things to consider:

*How much of yourself would you like to be in the images or videos you create?
Do you have someone who can help with using your device or camera? Would
storyboarding help you to organize your thoughts visually?*



A screenshot of a film by storytaker Aly, where she films herself running while asking questions around revisioning fitness.

Working with stock materials.

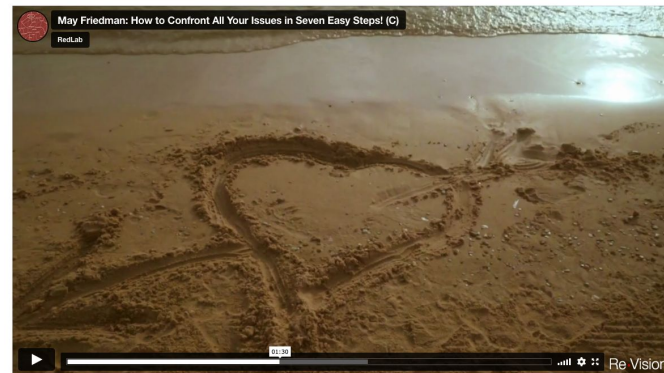
Working with stock images can make the online or remote digital storytelling process more accessible for storytellers without access or capacity to create or use their own visual materials. However, it is important to keep in mind how these stock materials can reinforce stereotypes or other taken-for-granted ideas about groups of people. Stock images can also flatten your story and create unintended similarities or sameness.

It's important to ask yourself if the stock images you are using **add** important elements to your digital story.

Things to consider:

Are you or is your story reflected in this stock photograph or video? Do you have permission to use it in your story? Where did this stock photograph or video come from and what is your relationship to it? How are you using images of people from communities and identities other than your own?

Particularly when using images or artwork of people, we want to encourage you to ensure that your images align with your social location and that your messages do not get hidden behind images of BIPOC folks if you are a white person, for example. A good practice is ask yourself, "Do I have a relationship with this person or their community?"



A screenshot of a film by storyteller May, made with stock footage from WeVideo.

Last thoughts.



Illustration by [Nicholas Solerieu](#)

There are a lot of editing techniques available to you through WeVideo - layering visuals, adding colour, animating images. These techniques offer many creative possibilities.

Visual elements do not need to illustrate or match an audio narrative. Your visual story could be separate or seemingly unrelated to your voiceover.

We often feel as though **every moment** of a digital story must be filled with sound and visual elements. Remember that there is power in moments of silence, both audible silences and visual silences.

If you don't know where to start, start simply! What do you want your story to feel like? Is there a colour or object that you associate with your story? Your facilitator can help you to articulate these thoughts visually.