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# PRODUCING VIDEO STORIES FOR CHILDREN

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Using the video for story-telling is one way to create and develop reading interest in children. When anyone talks about children's books, a brightly-coloured picture story comes to mind. When one talks about taped stories then one thinks of sound effects for added interest. Well, why not bring the two together in the form of video recordings?

The next question then is about the equipment we need. We have in mind only simple recordings using the small format video and by that we mean a video camera, a videotape recorder (VTR) and a TV monitor – equipment that is available in many schools. Teachers can work together in groups to produce these programmes. Producing programmes has its fun; it can bring out the creativeness in individuals.

Much has been said about books lacking local flavour. Well, recording stories on our own is one way in which this problem can be overcome. Scenes, visuals and illustrations can be prepared in the local setting to meet our needs.

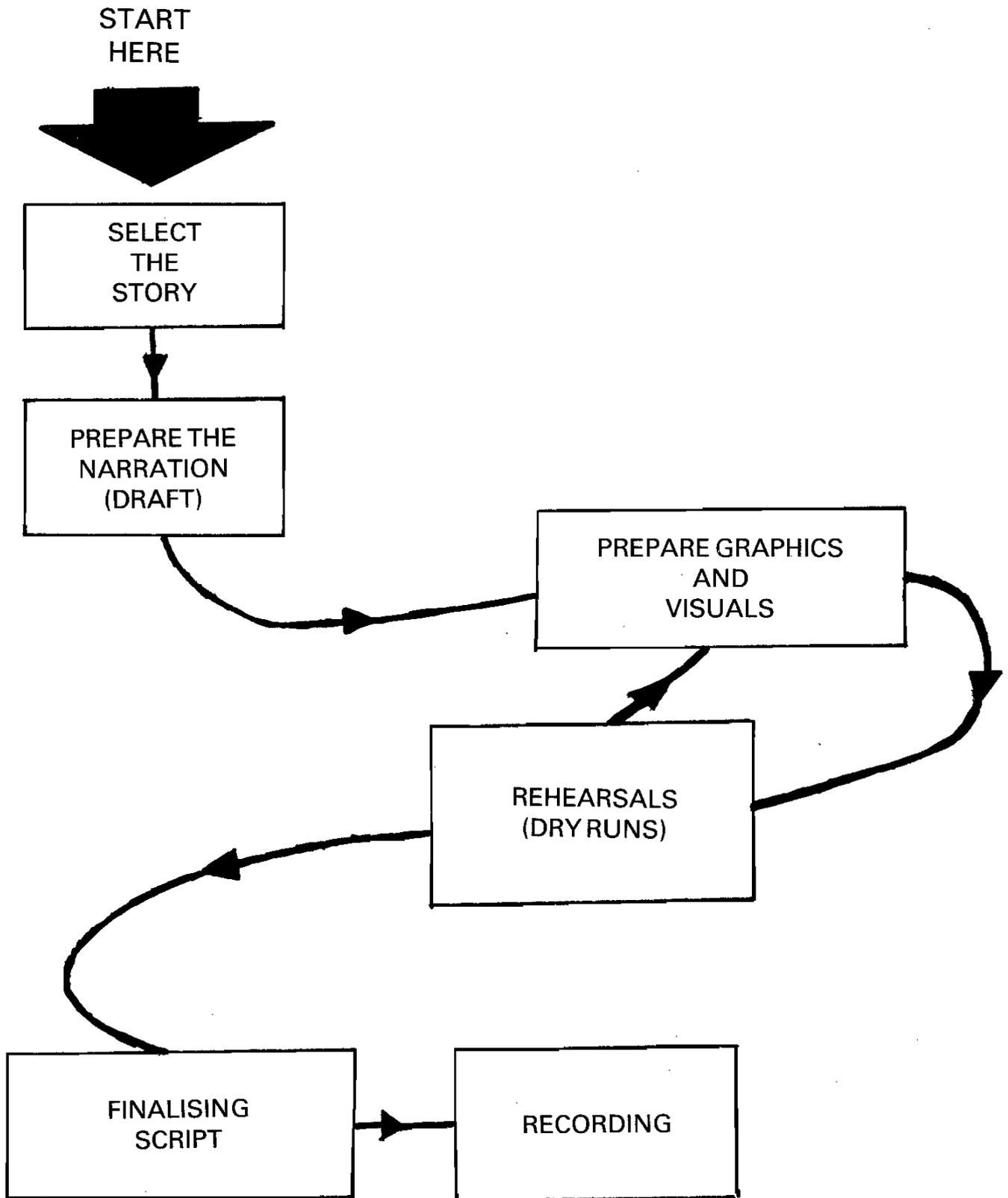
## **To Get Started**

In most cases, the difficulty is in getting started and in the steps involved in the pre-production stage. What do we have to do?

- 1 Select the story. Here we have to consider the entry level, the age range, the socio-economic and linguistic factors of our audience.
- 2 Prepare the narration or the script. This can be in the form of the story from the book itself or the story can be rewritten if changes are required. In most cases, the script is usually written in a two-column format, one column giving a description of the visuals and the other the narration.
- 3 The visuals and graphics are now prepared. Again, visuals

and graphics can be from the storybook itself if this is the source. Other visuals can be drawn or added in. Here a decision has to be made also on the type of graphic presentation that is going into the recording.

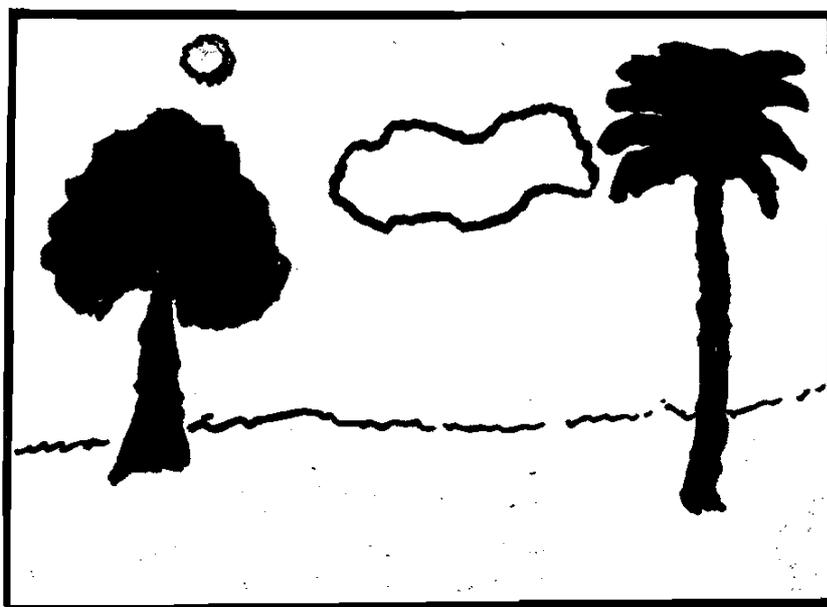
- 4 When the graphics and narration are ready, rehearsals are then made. During the rehearsals,
  - a) the type of shots, that is, the area seen by the camera, is then decided on and marked for each visual or scene.
  - b) if any visuals are missing the adding on of visuals can then be made.
  - c) Transition from one scene to another is also decided on. Transitions should be neat and smooth and this calls for creativity on the part of the people involved.
- 5 The script is finalised.
- 6 Recordings can then be made when everyone is happy and ready to start.

**STEPS IN PRODUCTION**

## Making Graphics Come Alive

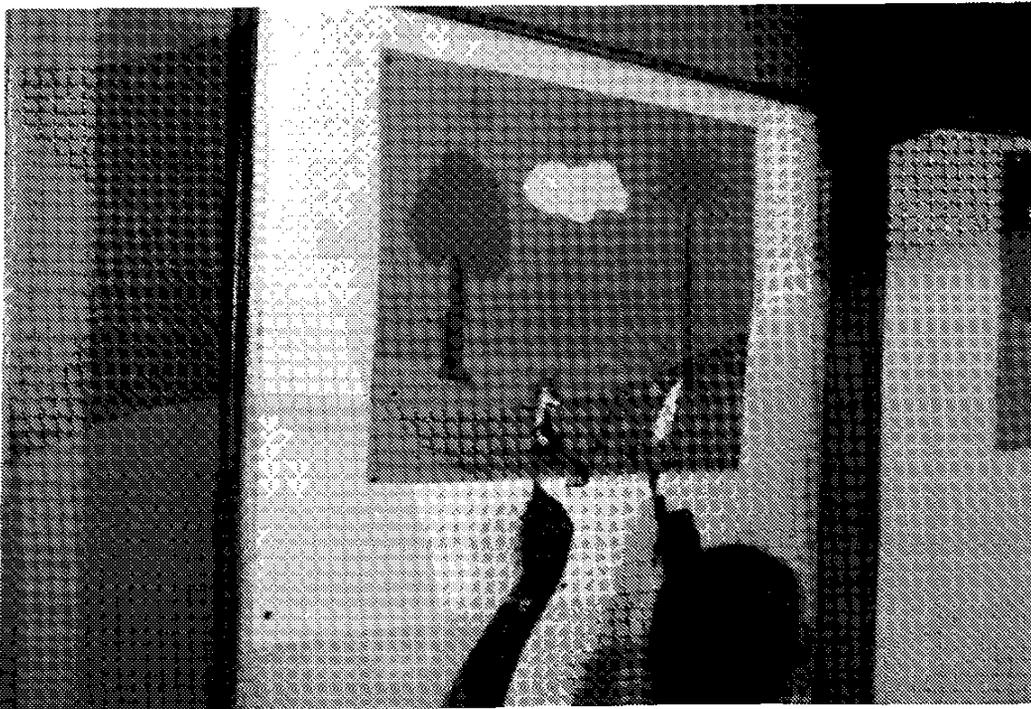
Creativity is the essence of making graphics come alive and ways must be found to make them look real and interesting. The simplest way would be to use visuals from the storybooks themselves if these are colourful enough. However, creativity should be the fun part of production; hence, ways and means must be found to make graphics and visuals come alive.

One way of doing this would be to place cut-outs over visuals (background scene). The background scene can be painted or simply torn from coloured paper and pasted on.



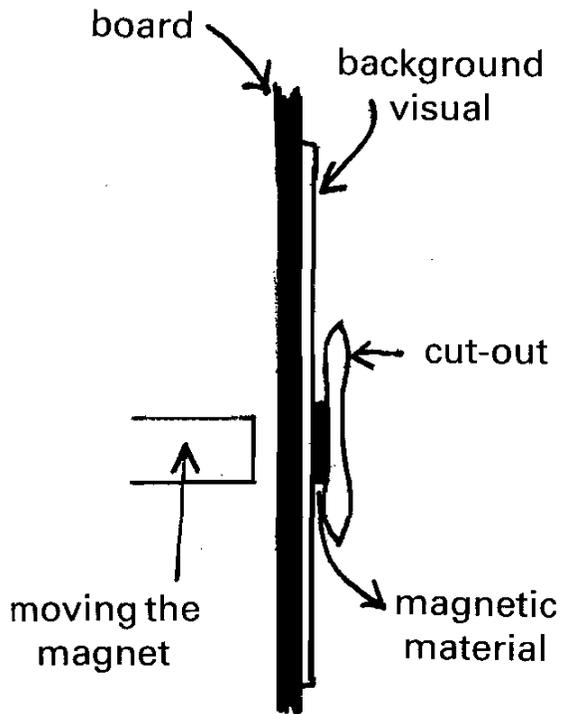
BACKGROUND SCENE – COLOURED PAPER  
TORN INTO SHAPES AND PASTED TOGETHER

The background scene is then pinned up to form the backdrop. Characters in the form of cut-outs can then be moved around, simulating animation. Contents are mounted on sticks (eg ice-cream sticks) and are manually handled. By careful manipulation of the camera the unwanted portions are not recorded.

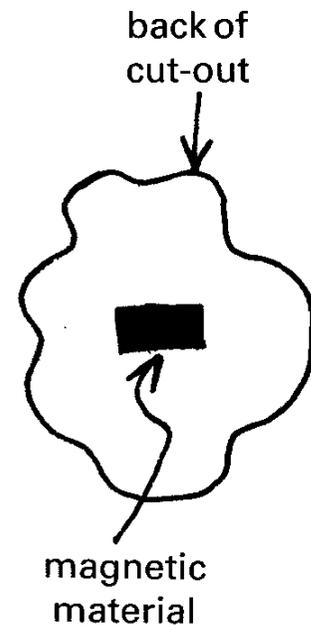


MANUAL MANIPULATION OF CUT-OUTS  
SIMULATING ANIMATION

Another way of making the cut-outs move is to attach small pieces of magnetic material at the back of these cut-outs, and using a magnet behind the board to move the cut-outs.



Moving cut-outs using magnets and magnetic material.



The back of a cut-out with a piece of magnetic material attached.

Puppets could also be used in productions and objects can be made to appear to move by using changes in lighting. The use of camera zooms, defocusing and the shutting of the iris can all help to create effects. Use creativity in creating visuals and scenes but stay within the boundary of the objectives of the production.

## Recording

Scenes and visuals now must be put together in sequence. Using a single camera limits you in the sense that you cannot jump or move from location to location. All shots must be made in sequence and this leaves you with very little room for mistakes. As stories are short, say, 10–15 minutes, this is possible. Rehearsals are therefore important and all members of the group must know exactly what is required of each of them.

Usually post-production editing requires the use of special and expensive editing equipment. Hence, for this purpose instead of editing later, the original is normally used as it is, in other words, just the way it comes off the portable VTR. This method is quick, simple and not bad but you get glitches.

## Pause mode editing

A scene is first shot, and at the end of the scene the camera trigger is pulled. This automatically switches the VTR to the *pause* mode. Then the next scene is prepared and when ready the camera trigger is again pulled, the *pause* mode is released and the scene recorded. It is usually during these stops and starts that glitches or blips appear. They make a streak across the visual or scene but usually last only for less than a second.

This is usually acceptable. In this form of editing, a thorough knowledge of the sequence of events is very important as pausing the recorder means that the recording head is spinning against the tape, this will cause both head and tape to wear out unnecessarily.

## Stopping the Recorder

In the event that the transition between scenes takes longer than a minute, stopping the recording is a safer method although not a better one. Glitches are more pronounced and are caused by the tape picking up to the right speed and the discontinuity of both the sync and the control track pulses. All these three things must be perfect and continuous for a tape to play smoothly.

## Recording all the Way

This means that the recorded tape will have no glitches but recording must be made all the way through non-stop. Hence, there is no room for mistakes, additions or deletions.

## Conclusion

It all sounds so complicated and difficult but like most ventures, the first time is not the best time. If you are thinking of going into production after this, then do so, as we are sure you would enjoy it. A word of advice for first timers – avoid a too ambitious attempt. Try a simple story with simple visuals and graphics.

When you are more familiar with production and equipment, then you can proudly show your creativity.

You might also think that it takes time. It does, but if you work in groups of four or five, programmes can be completed in an average of six hours. You might not find this advice convincing, but this was the time taken by some groups to produce and record their programmes – and they were first-timers.

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