Storytelling with Mapping: Knight Lab StoryMap

Taught by: Claire Lavarreda and Sara Morrell

GRMN 2102: Prof. Carolin Fuchs

Digital Integration Teaching Initiative

Fall 2025

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Workshop Agenda

- Best practices and questions to consider before creating your StoryMap.
- Learn about StoryMap as a mode of conveying data and content.
- Demonstrate steps for using Knight Lab's StoryMap.
- Start building!
- **All materials + slides for this module can be found here: https://bit.ly/fa25-fuchs-grmn2102-storymaps**

For more information, please see: https://bit.ly/handout-storymap

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Maps' different uses

Maps can convey all sorts of geospatial information that can facilitate different applications:

- Navigational/orientational maps
- Geological/topographical maps
- Political maps
- Thematic maps
- Artistic maps
- Narrative maps

Subway Map from MBTA

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

What are the limits?

- Maps reflect the intention of the map-maker and are **inherently limited**.
  - Maps produce **shared interpretations**, and are not expressions of objective spatial relations.
  - Boston is as much a human idea as a physical space, and thus maps both *represent* and *create* reality. See Quincy Langford's "[Maps Are a Tool to Understand the Past and Shape the Future](#)" to explore how maps can create, erase, and reshape.
- The **simplicity** and **clarity** of maps is deceiving, but **artificial clarity** is necessary for the map to be **useful**.

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Questions for critiquing maps

- What is its subject?
- Who is/are the map's audience(s)?
- What is its message, argument, or purpose?
- How and when was the map made?
- Who made this map? What choices did they make?

The True Size of Africa, Kai Krause

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

What is a StoryMap?

KnightLab's StoryMap tool allows users to tell narrative stories connected with specific geographic locations.
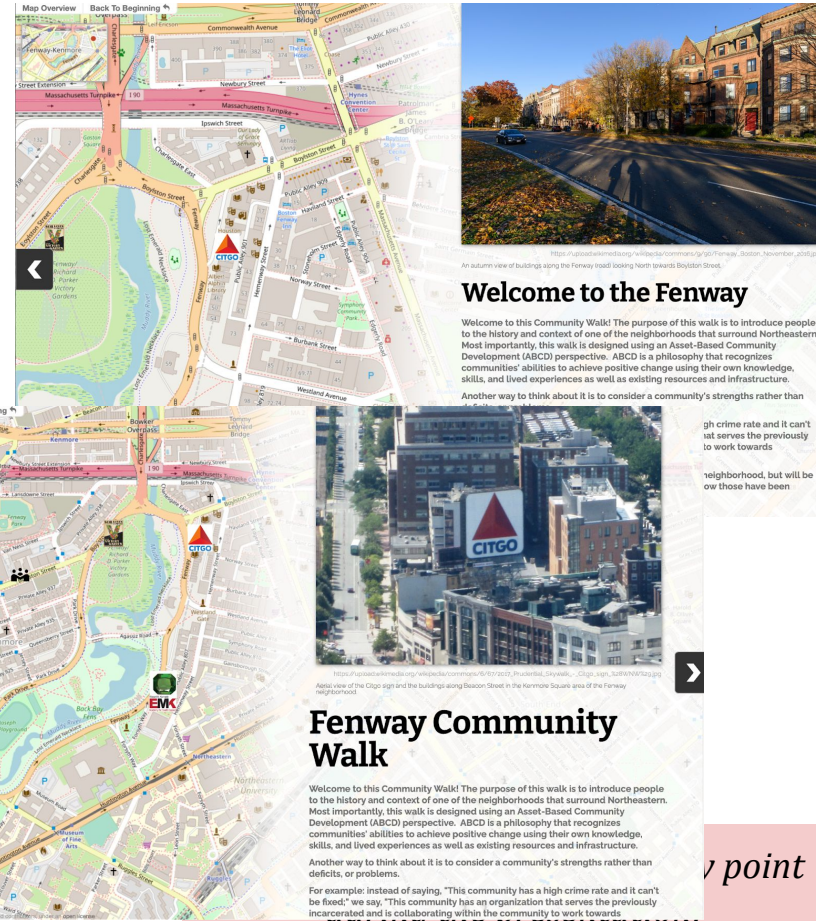
Why use a map to tell stories?

- StoryMaps help us **render visualized, spatialized, and contextual information about spaces** in the past or today.
  - StoryMaps can be about places you've never been to. The goal is to help users "see" the spaces/places/routes as accurately as possible, and to get a sense of the people and things in the environment.
- Think about StoryMaps as **giving directions**, relating not only direction and **distance** but also **sequence**.

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Example Projects Using Maps to Tell Stories

- "[The Black Jazz Heritage Trail of Boston](#)": uses a mix of textual, image, and student-researched location data to map historic Black jazz clubs.
- "[Mapping Shared Spaces: A Visual History of Boston's Black and Jewish Communities](#)": presents the story of migration of Boston religious communities by following the changing locations of places of worship.
- "[Contemporary Indigenous Spatiality](#)": created by Agléška Cohen-Rencountre (Lower Brule Sioux Tribe) to interrogate settler-colonial epistemologies about water-ways, as well as trace personal and community connections to Rapid Creek and the Mississippi River.

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Making a StoryMap

StoryMap Best Practices

- Think carefully about the **audience** you are trying to reach with your map. This will impact your language, the order of your points, and the media that you choose.
- Think also about the **tone** of the map: the default for StoryMap can be very upbeat and informal, and that may not match the content you are sharing.
- **Test your map** after you have created it, to make sure that all the narrative points flow and that the language is clear and concise.

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Optional: Spreadsheet Template

Make a copy of the StoryMap template below and use it to fill in the different sites you want to map, images you want to include, etc.

StoryMap Spreadsheet Template

Template based on the StoryMap Spreadsheet Template created by Molly Brown, Reference and Outreach Archivist, Northeastern University Library.

For more information about collecting and organizing data for StoryMap, please see:
https://bit.ly/handout-storymap-spreadsheet

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Data collection: Site

The slide number can serve as the order in which your sites appear on your map and the site name can be used to label sites on your map.

The site location is used to identify a point on your map where the site is physically located (address or coordinates).

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Data collection: Image

The image URL/File location is useful in keeping track of images of sites. Always credit your images to indicate their origin. Also include a caption describing your image.

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Data collection: Narrative and Sources

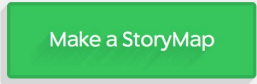|										
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
	Slide #	Site Name	Site Location	Image URL/File Location	Image Credit	Image Caption	Headline	Historical Profile/First Person Narrative	Citation(s)	Additional Media	Additional Media Caption & Credit
2	Title Slide	n/a	n/a	http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126	Freedom House Records, Courtesy of Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections	Back Bay Fens, Boston, Mass.	Walking the Emerald Necklace	This is an introduction to the project that will continue on.			
3	Site 1	Back Bay Fens Community Gardens	42.344888, -71.093221	http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20157723	Freedom House Records, Courtesy of Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections	Community garden in Back Bay Fens.	Back Bay Community Gardens	Two men tend community garden in the Back Bay Fens. A public water building can be seen on the left. The Back Bay Fens (also called The Fens, or Fens) is a freshwater marsh and lagoon area within Boston's larger Emerald Necklace park system.			
4											
5											
6											

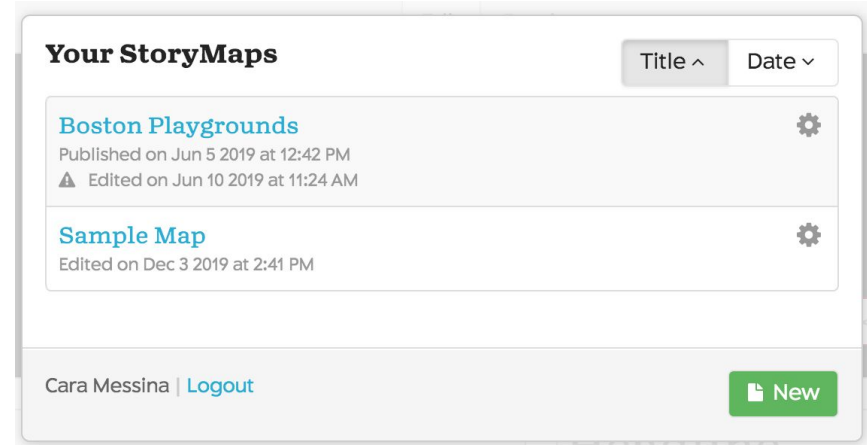fx | http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126

The headline can serve as the official title or label of your site. Including a narrative provides more context as to why your site is important.

Don't forget to cite your sources! Also, you may want to include additional media related to your site (e.g. newspaper clippings, additional photos, etc.).

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Create a StoryMap

- Go to https://storymap.knightlab.com/
- Click "Make a StoryMap." Make a StoryMap
- Either create a new account or sign in through Google.
- Once you're signed in,
  click "New Map" (once you have
  created your map, it will be there
  for you to work on).
- Name your project.

Your StoryMaps

Title ^   Date ⌄

Boston Playgrounds
Published on Jun 5 2019 at 12:42 PM
⚠ Edited on Jun 10 2019 at 11:24 AM

Sample Map
Edited on Dec 3 2019 at 2:41 PM

Cara Messina | Logout

📄 New

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Your StoryMap

SAVE
OFTEN!

Overall options (like changing map layout)

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!
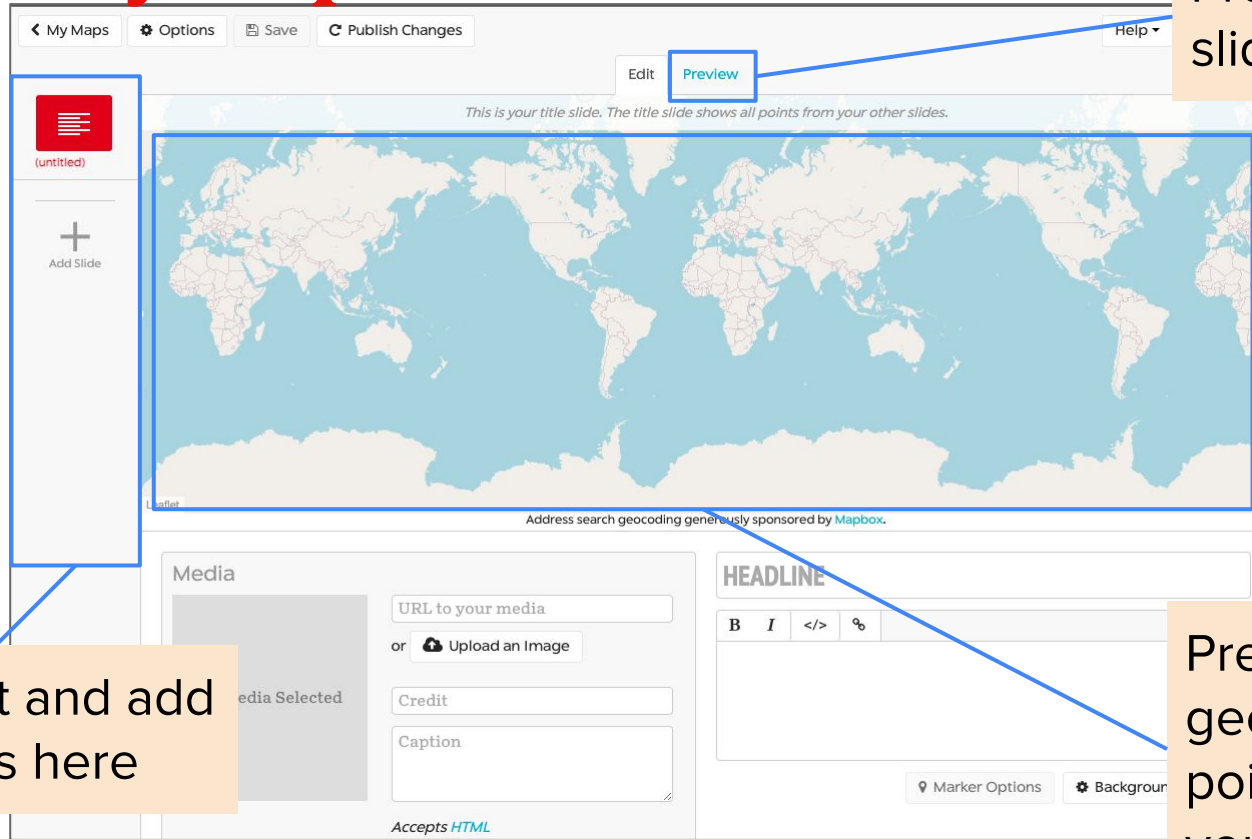
Your StoryMap: Slides

Preview your slides

Check out and add new slides here

Preview the geographic points in all of your slides

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions or any point during the presentation!

Your StoryMap: Media and Text Boxes

Uploading photos or other media! Document what you upload

Title and content of your text box

Color or image for text box background

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Options for designing your map

- The "Options" button in the top left allows you to change the design of your map.
- Customizable options include Language, Fonts, Call to Action, Map Type and more.

during the presentation!

Slides, or map markers

Each slide is a different marker point on your map. Each slide contains:

- Title and text. The text box reads basic HTML.
- A background image or color.
- A map marker, which can be placed by searching for Google Maps locations or by placing the marker manually.
- Media: images, videos, and sound files can be uploaded. Since only *one* media file can be uploaded per slide, you can use the text box's HTML to integrate additional images or other media types.

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Add A Location
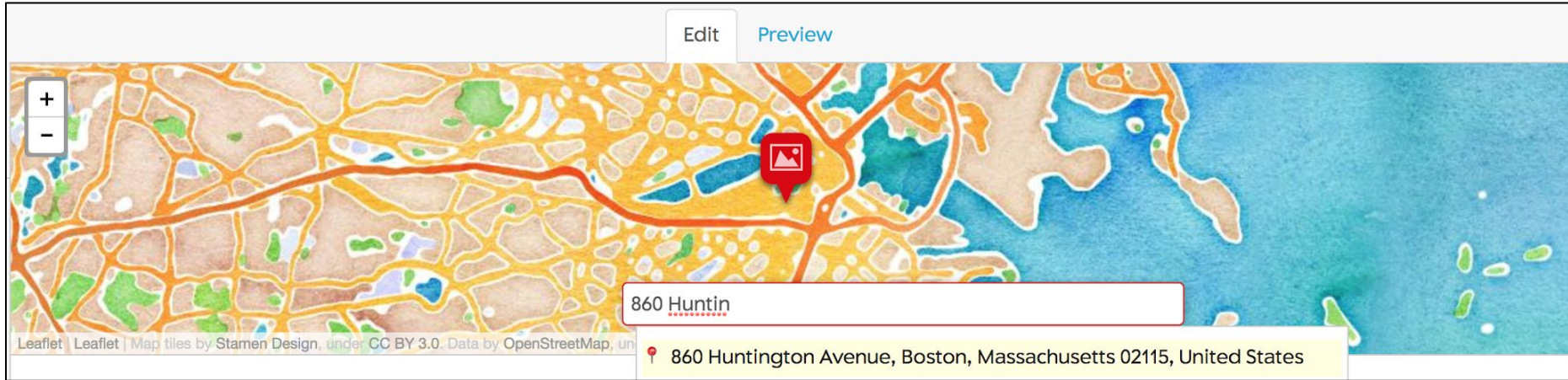
KnightLab StoryMap uses **Mapbox** to locate addresses

StoryMap, however, does **not** always recognize place names; you might need to know the **address** or location of particular structures

You can also **drag and drop the map markers** to the specific location

el free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Add Media and Images to a Slide: Upload or URL
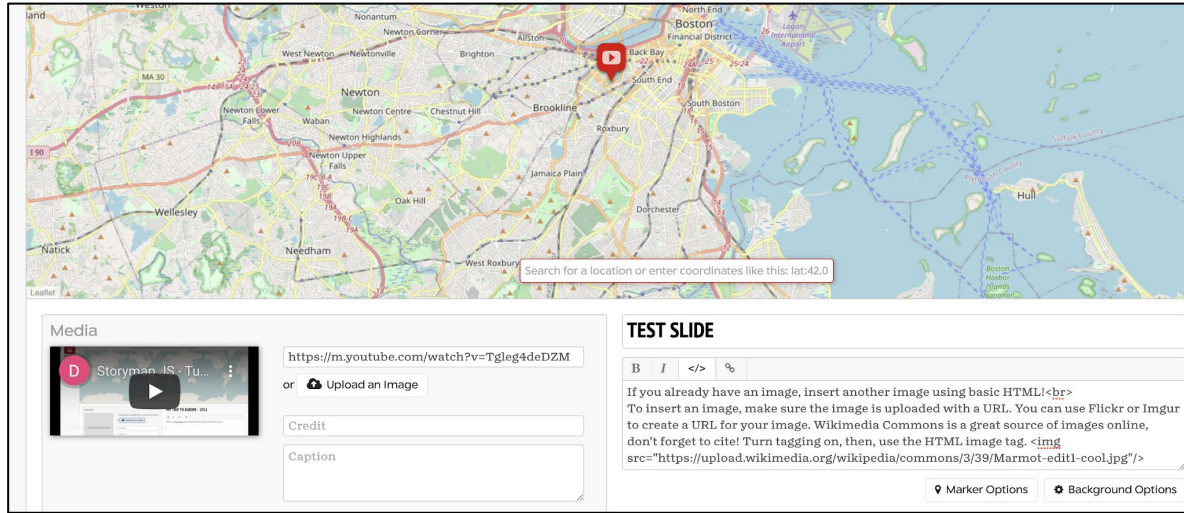
Use "media" to upload files. You can upload an image or put a **URL** of an image OR a video (like a YouTube video). If you want to include your own video, you will first have to upload it to YouTube or other online publisher and copy that link.

Add Media and Images to a Slide:HTML
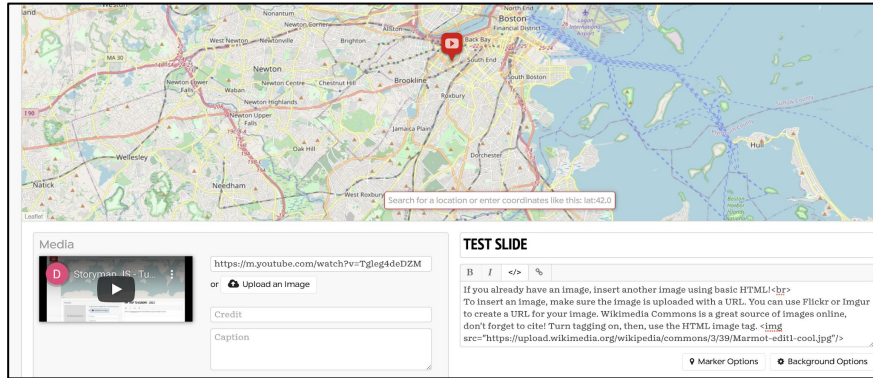
If you have an image or a video in the "media" section, but want to include an image **in the text**, you can! The text box reads basic HTML.

1. Click the </> button (turn on HTML)
2. Get a URL of your image. Use Wikimedia Commons to search images by content, and filter by license type and image size. Make sure to use the embed file code, and don't forget to cite the source!
3. Use the HTML tag to insert the image.
4. Check the "Preview" to see the image. Smaller image sizes may appear as a thumbnail, so stick to larger image sizes and preview your end result!

Embed codes and image files

If you are adding an image via its URL, make sure that you select the link with **the image file itself,** not just a page with the image on it.
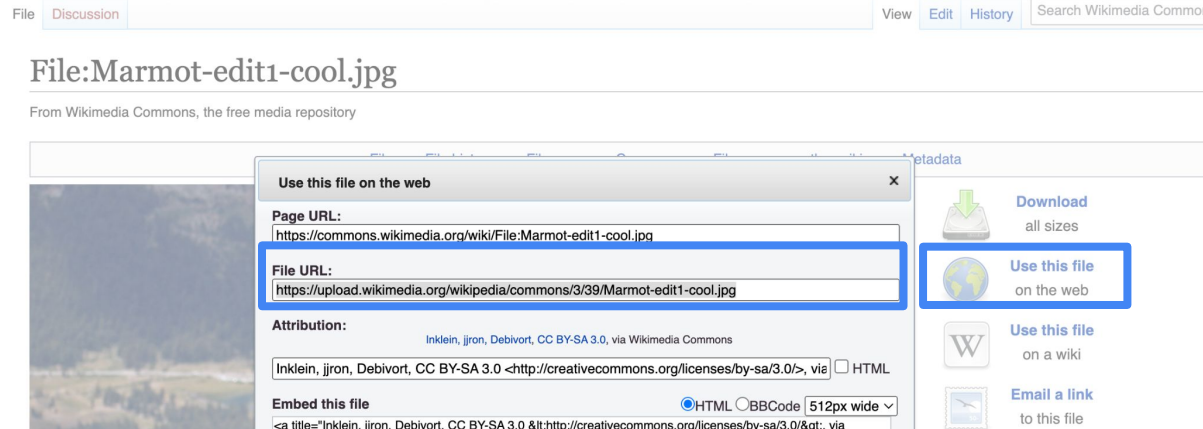
For example, to add an image from Wikimedia Commons, follow these steps:
1. Go to "More Details" and choose "Use this file on the web," or just choose "Use this file on the web" if you see that option.
2. Copy the "File URL."

Add Google Street View to a Slide

As with other media, you can insert a Google street view map into a slide by entering its **URL**.
- Click "Share or embed image" from the menu in Google Maps, and copy the **HTML** link from the "Embed a map" tab.
  - Make sure the link has the <iframe src:"URL"></iframe> code (it should automatically, but the map won't work without it!).
- Enter the URL into the "URL to your media" box.

...sk questions at any point during the presentation!
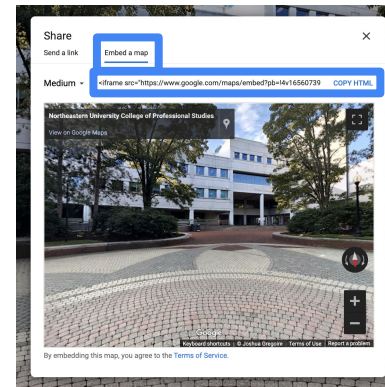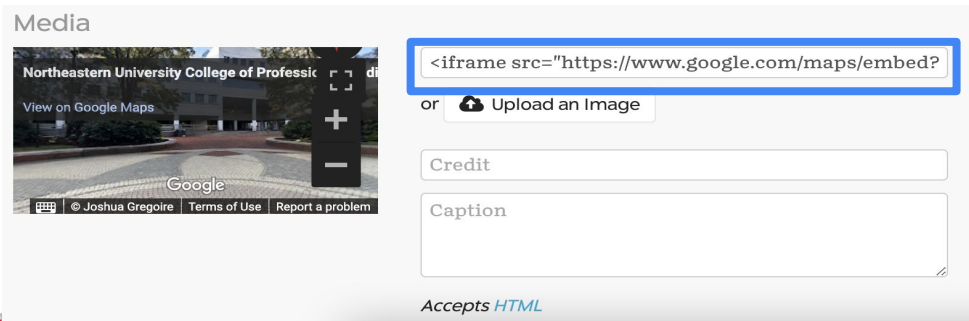
Publish and Share Your StoryMap

- Click the "Publish Changes" button on the top left side on the editing page.
- StoryMap's "Share" button is in the top right corner.
- You can add a description and feature image here before sharing your StoryMap widely.

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!
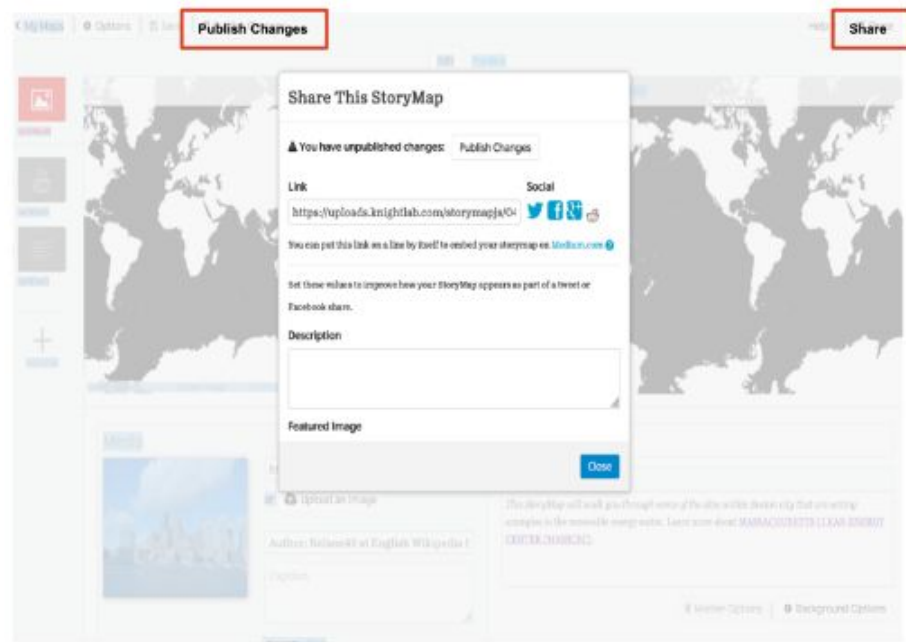
StoryMap Demo

- To see StoryMap in action, click on this [Sample Map Link](#)!
- Here you will be able to explore a map custom-made by DITI to highlight your options for creating maps.

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!
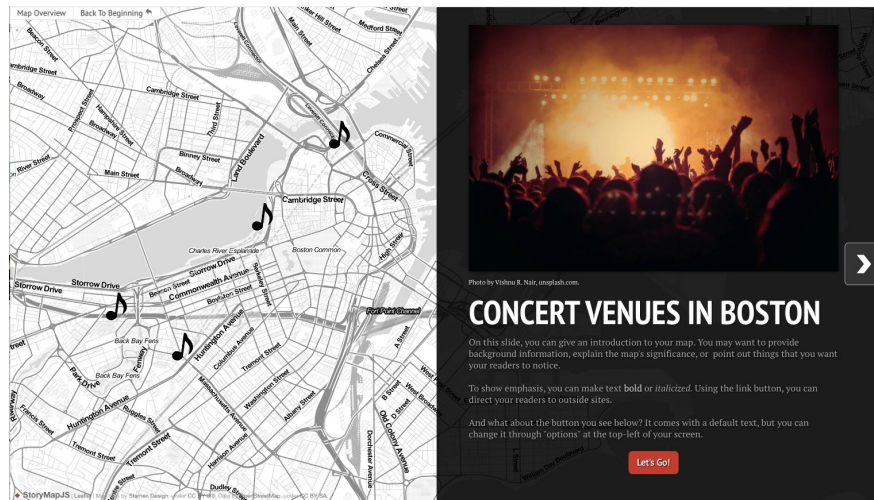
Best Practices and Advanced Options for StoryMap

Image sharing and permissions

- It is important to verify that you are allowed to use images before you put them in your StoryMap.
- Search for media that is public domain or shared with permissions that allow re-use.
  - DITI recommends [Wikimedia Commons](#) and DPLA ([Digital Public Library of America](#)).
- Ensure proper credit/attribution is given for all media

For more information on copyright and reuse, please see:

https://bit.ly/fair-use-handout

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Accessibility in StoryMap (1/3)

Alt-text is a description of a digital image attached to the image file. When you attach an image or video to your StoryMap, add descriptions of any images and videos in the image caption and text box. People that use screen readers are able to hear content you include in image captions and the text box.

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Accessibility in StoryMap (2/3)

Color contrast is one way to make StoryMap accessible. Choosing a higher color contrast palette will make the text more accessible. Avoid using red and green colors for differentiation. StoryMap allows users to customize text color using HTML and the slide background color.

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Accessibility in StoryMap (3/3)

If linking media in the text box of a slide on StoryMap, be sure to use a descriptive link name. Descriptive link names allows users to know the content and context of the link before they navigate it.

Instead of writing "For more information on accessibility in StoryMap, click here."

Write "For more information on accessibility in StoryMap, please see: **Handout: Accessibility in StoryMap**."

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Data Privacy

- It's important to pay attention to data privacy when using digital resources
- At its simplest, **data privacy** is a person's ability to control what of their personal information is shared and with whom.
- To help you make informed decisions about interacting with digital tools in ways that honor your boundaries with your data and/or personal information, The DITI has prepared a handout on **Data Privacy**

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Data Ethics

- Data can render certain communities and their qualities hyper-visible or invisible, as well as reinforce biases.
- It is important to consider what voices are missing from the data or from the archives. Data ethics provide a critical framework for challenging bias in big data, data visualizations, etc.
- To help you engage with and transform your data ethically, the DITI has prepared an handout on [Data Ethics](#).

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

A Note on HTML

- You can use HTML to have more control over the display and behavior of StoryMap. Look for the "Accepts HTML" language or this symbol: </>
- For more information on HTML, please see:
  https://bit.ly/handout-HTML

```
Helpful HTML Codes

#Change Text Color
<span style ="color:red">YOUR TEXT
HERE</span>

#Add Link in Caption/Credit
<a href="URL">text</a>

#Add Image/Media in Textbox
<img src="URL"/>

#Add Alternate Text to Image/Media
<img src="IMAGE URL" alt="IMAGE
DESCRIPTION"/>
```

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

A Note on Save States

StoryMap does not keep older versions of your project, so once you make and save changes, **you cannot retrieve a previous version**. You can also write over new content if you have your StoryMap open in multiple browser tabs or windows at once.

This is one reason why it is a good idea to plan out your StoryMap in a separate document: if you lose progress, you will have your content saved somewhere else.

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

A Note on Zoom Levels

StoryMap does not let you set how far zoomed in or out your slides will be. The zoom level is determined automatically according to the distance between your locations.

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks
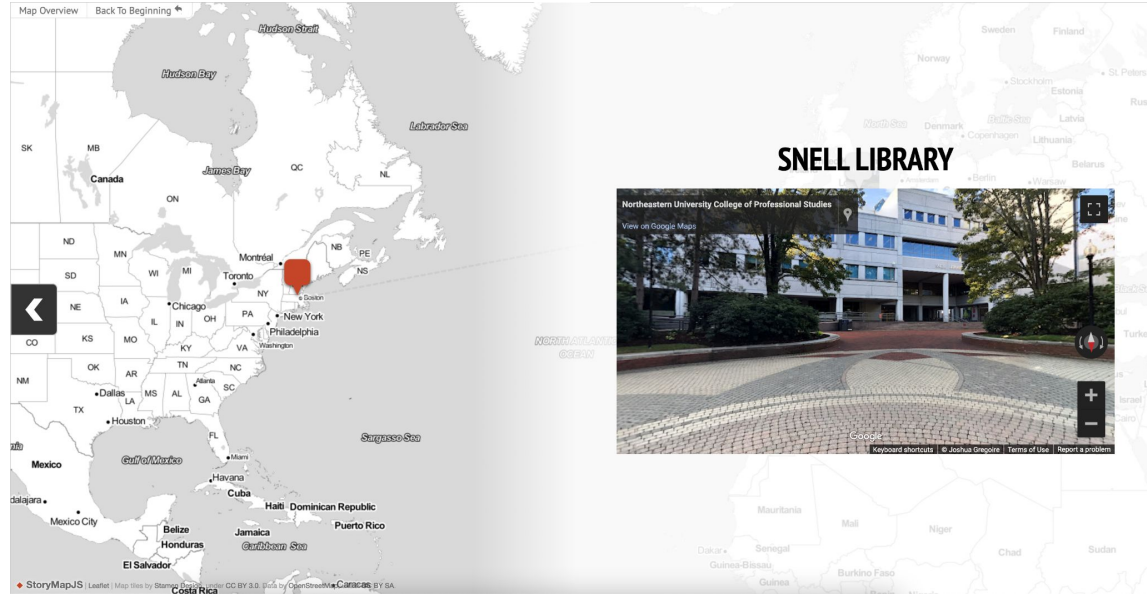
For Further Exploration

Here are all the links presented in these slides:

https://bit.ly/handout-storymap

https://bit.ly/handout-storymap-spreadsheet

https://bit.ly/fair-use-handout

https://bit.ly/storymap-accessibility-handout

https://bit.ly/handout-HTML

Northeastern University
NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!

Thank you!

—**Developed by** Ana Abraham, Chris McNulty, Benjamin Grey, Claire Lavarreda, and Shannon Peifer

—**Taught by** Claire Lavarreda and Sara Morrell

- For more information on DITI, please see: https://bit.ly/diti-about
- Schedule an appointment with us! https://bit.ly/diti-meeting
- If you have any questions, contact us at: nulab.info@gmail.com

Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!