

# Storytelling with Mapping: Knight Lab StoryMap

---

Taught By: Hunter Moskowitz and Emily Sullivan

ENGW3307: Advanced Writing in the Sciences

Dr. Philip Gilreath

Fall 2023



Northeastern University  
*NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks*

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

# 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!
- Follow along: <https://bit.ly/gilreathengw3307storymaos>

For more information, please see:

<https://bit.ly/storymap-handout>



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!*



# 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 Laura Herbert, "[Do Maps Create or Represent Reality?](#)"
- The **simplicity** and **clarity** of maps is deceiving, but **artificial clarity** is necessary for the map to be **useful**.



# Example Map: Boston Parks and Playgrounds

- “[Boston Parks and Playgrounds: Community Scan](#)”: uses a mix of textual, image, and geo-location data to tell a story about playgrounds in Boston’s neighborhoods.



# Discussion: Mapping Narratives

- What kinds of writing benefit from a **geographic/location-based** framing?
- How do you think you might need to restructure your own narratives when presenting them geographically?
- How can you use **maps** to guide your audience through your argument?



# 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?



[What arrondissement is this](#), by Laura J. Lawson

From "[Critiquing Maps II](#)", by Shannon Mattern



# What is a StoryMap?

KnightLab's StoryMap tool allows users to tell narrative stories connected with specific geographic locations.

The image displays a StoryMap interface for the Fenway Community Walk. On the left is a map of the Fenway area, highlighting landmarks like the Fenway Park baseball field (marked with a red A), the CITGO sign, and Northeastern University. The map includes a legend for 'Map Overview' and 'Back To Beginning'. On the right, there are two photographs: one showing a street view with autumn foliage and a person walking, and another showing an aerial view of the CITGO sign and surrounding buildings. Below the images is a welcome message and a detailed description of the walk's purpose and context.

**Welcome to the Fenway**

Welcome to this Community Walk! The purpose of this walk is to introduce people to the history and context of one of the neighborhoods that surround Northeastern. Most importantly, this walk is designed using an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) perspective. ABCD is a philosophy that recognizes communities' abilities to achieve positive change using their own knowledge, skills, and lived experiences as well as existing resources and infrastructure.

Another way to think about it is to consider a community's strengths rather than deficits, or problems.

For example, instead of saying, "This community has a high crime rate and it can't be fixed," we say, "This community has an organization that serves the previously incarcerated and is collaborating within the community to work towards neighborhood, but will be over those have been."

**Fenway Community Walk**

Welcome to this Community Walk! The purpose of this walk is to introduce people to the history and context of one of the neighborhoods that surround Northeastern. Most importantly, this walk is designed using an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) perspective. ABCD is a philosophy that recognizes communities' abilities to achieve positive change using their own knowledge, skills, and lived experiences as well as existing resources and infrastructure.

Another way to think about it is to consider a community's strengths rather than deficits, or problems.



# 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**.



# Example Projects Using Maps to Tell Stories

- “[Boston Parks and Playgrounds: Community Scan](#)”: uses a mix of textual, image, and geo-location data to tell a story about playgrounds in Boston’s neighborhoods.
- “[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.
- “[Commonwealth: A Offshore wind hub](#)”: uses textual, image, video and geo-location data to showcase key infrastructures of Massachusetts Clean Energy Center’s (MassCEC) Offshore Wind Energy Initiative.



# Making a StoryMap



Northeastern University  
*NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks*

# 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.



# 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/storymap-spreadsheet>



# Spreadsheet data collection

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	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	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126">http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20158126</a>	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.  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.			
3	Site 1	Back Bay Fens Community Gardens	42.344888, -71.093221	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20157723">http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20157723</a>	Freedom House Records, Courtesy of Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections	Community garden in Back Bay Fens.	Back Bay Community Gardens				
4											
5											
6											

1. 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.

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

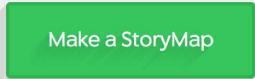
3. The image URL/File location is useful in keeping track of images of sites. Always credit your images to indicate their origin. Also include a caption describing your image.

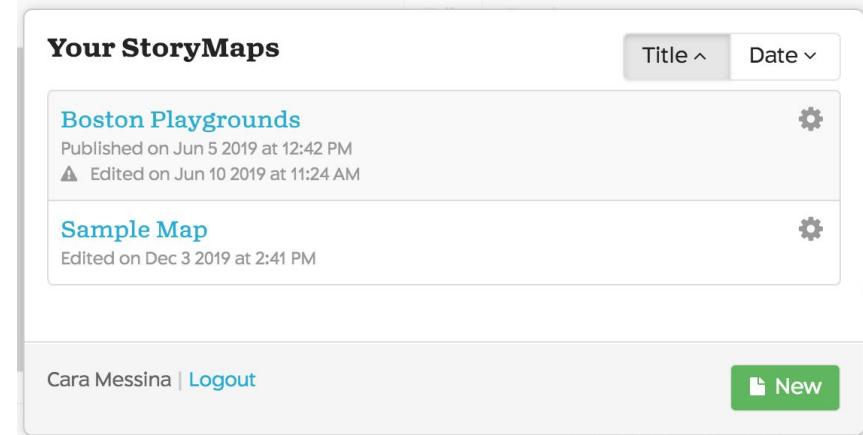
4. The headline can serve as the official title or label of your site. Including a narrative provides more context as to why each location is important for your narrative.

5. 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.).



# Create a StoryMap

- Go to <https://storymap.knightlab.com/>
- Click “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.



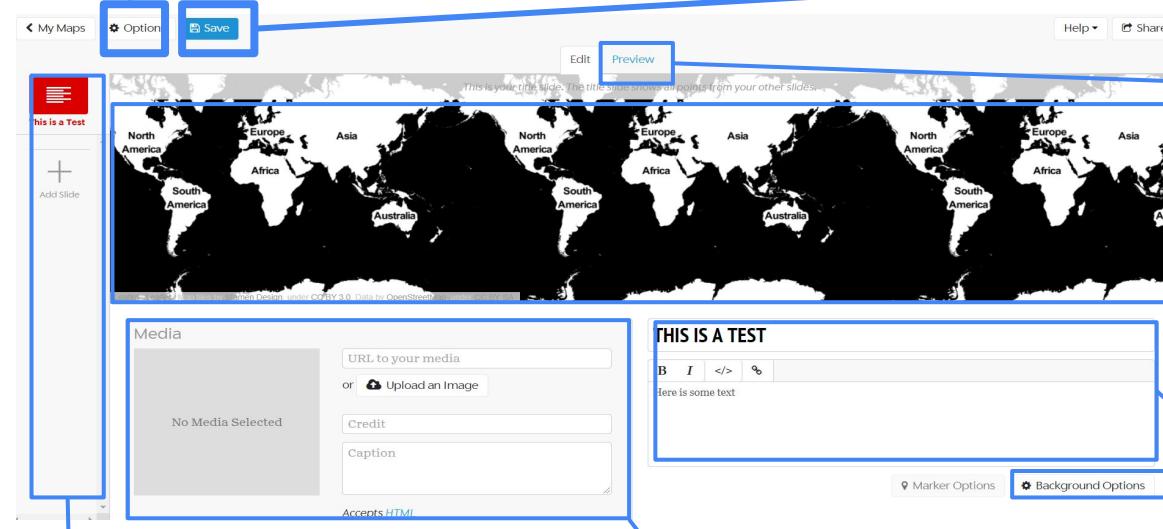
The screenshot shows the 'Your StoryMaps' dashboard. At the top, there are filters for 'Title ^' and 'Date ^'. Below the header, two maps are listed:

- 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

At the bottom left, it says 'Cara Messina | Logout'. On the bottom right, there is a green 'New' button with a document icon.



# Your StoryMap



Overall options  
(like changing map layout)

**SAVE OFTEN!**

Preview your slides

Preview the  
geographic points in all  
of your slides

Title and content of  
your text box

Check out and add new  
slides here

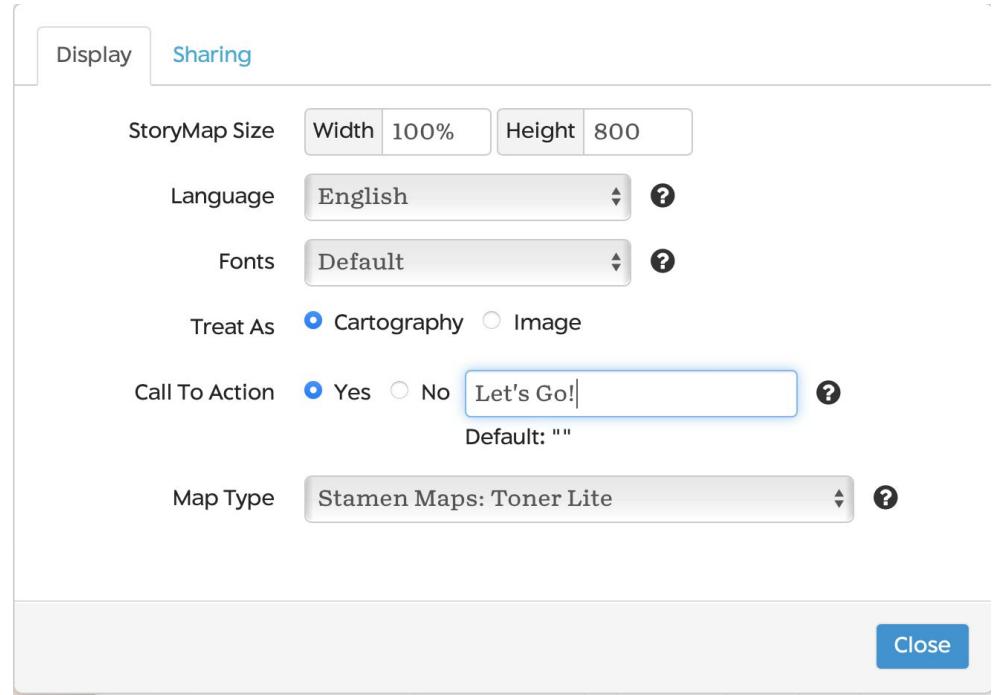
Uploading photos  
or other media!  
Document what  
you upload

Color or image for text box  
background



# 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.



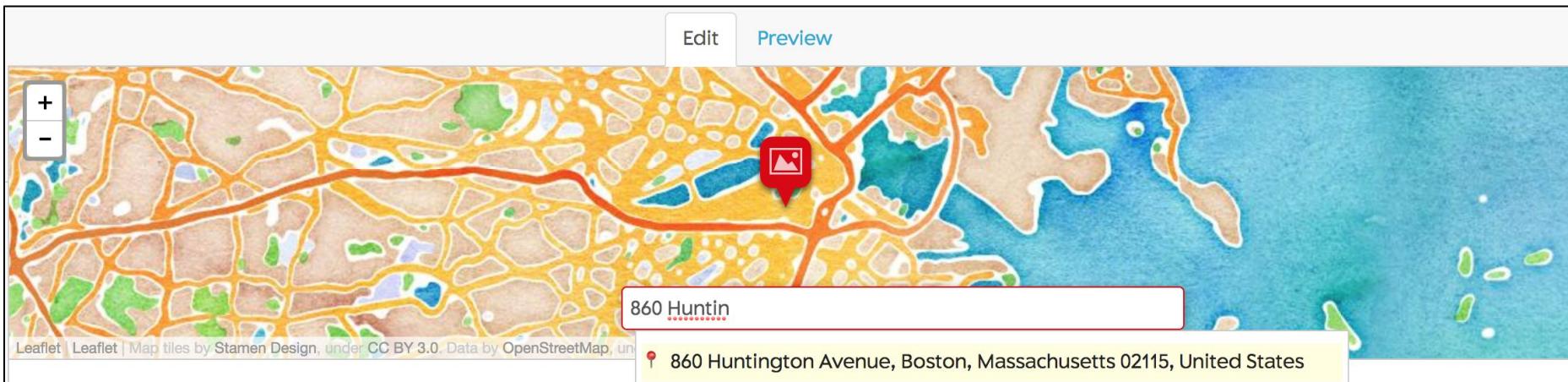
# Slides, or map markers

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.



# Add A Location



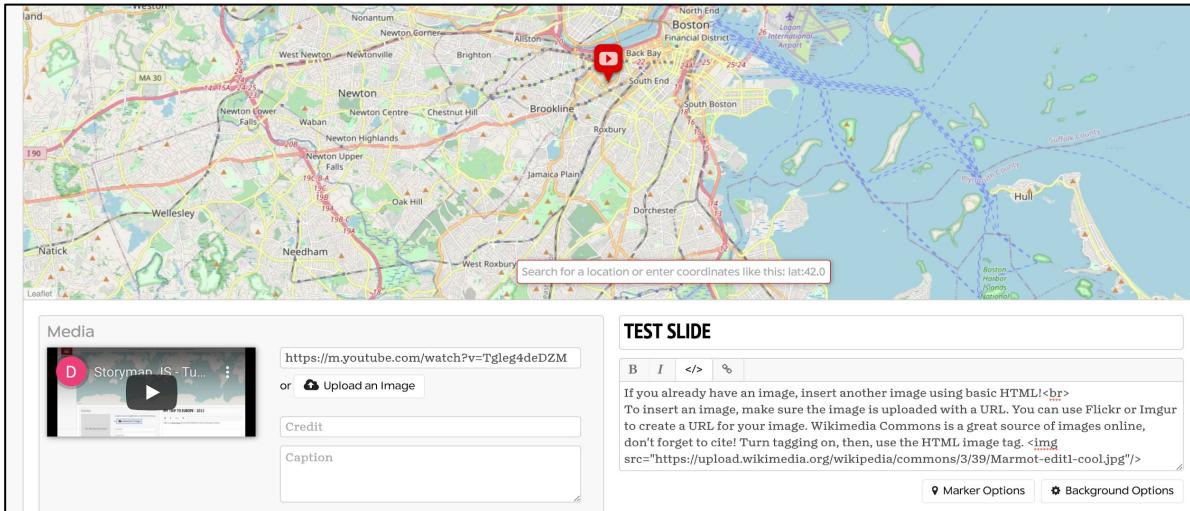
KnightLab StoryMap uses **Google Maps** to locate addresses

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



# Add Media and Images to a Slide



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.

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!

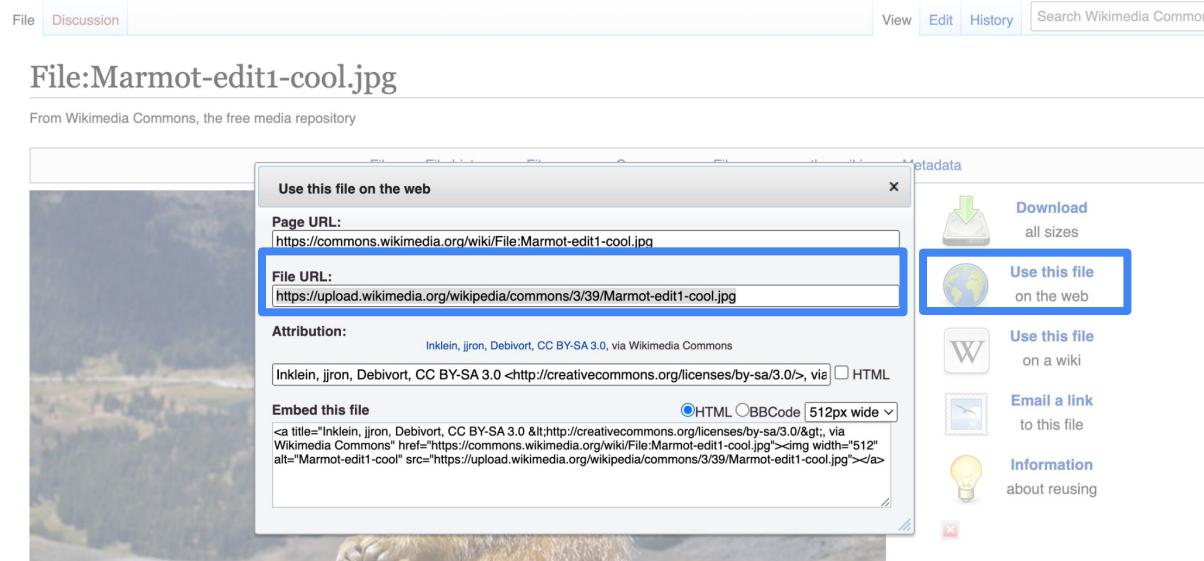


# Embed codes and image files

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."



# 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/diti-fair-use>

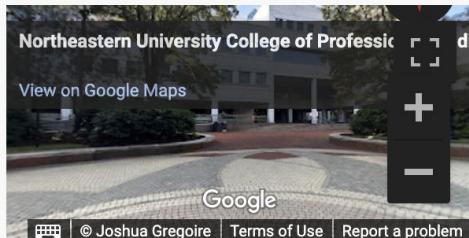


# Add Google Street View to a Slide

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.

## Media



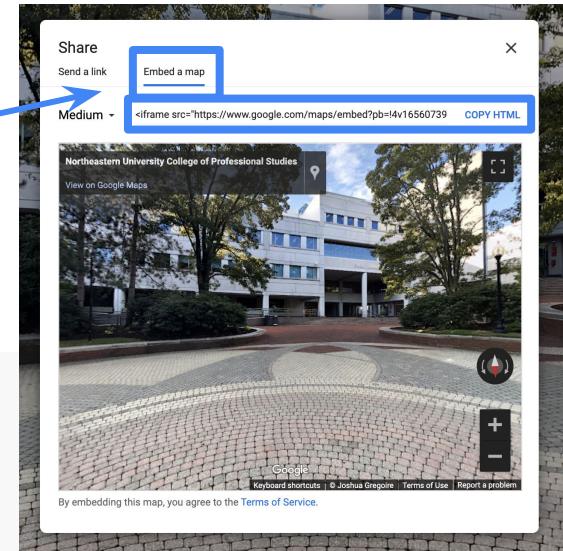
`<iframe src="https://www.google.com/maps/embed?`

or Upload an Image

Credit

Caption

Accepts [HTML](#)

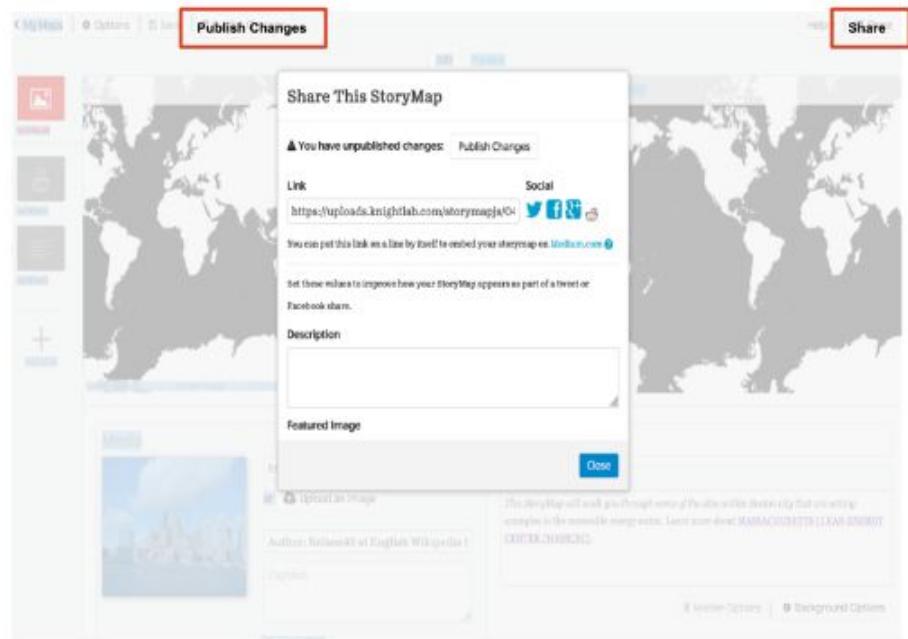


*Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!*



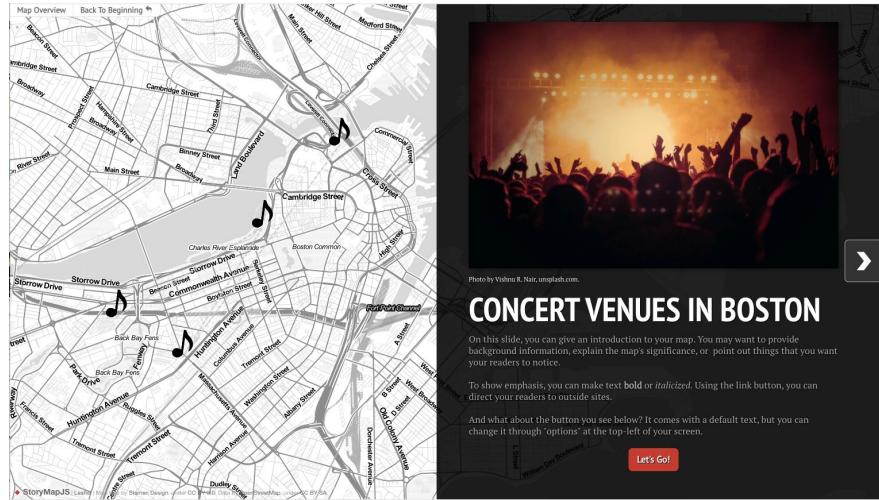
# Publish and Share Your StoryMap

- 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.



# 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.



# Best Practices for StoryMap



# Accessibility in StoryMap

Alt-text is a description of a digital image attached to the image file.  
People that use screen readers are able to hear content you include in:

- Image captions
- Text box (for embedded images and media)

If linking media, be sure to use a descriptive link name.

For more information on accessibility in StoryMap, please see:

<https://bit.ly/accessibility-storymap>



# 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/html-handout>

## 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

```

```

#Add Alternate Text to Image/Media

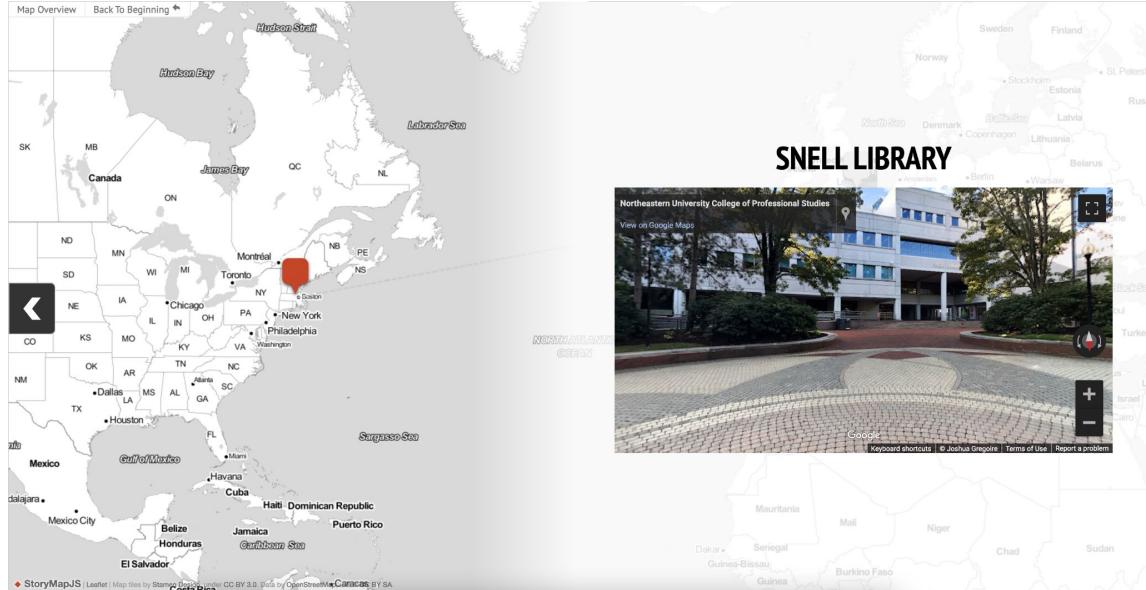
```

```



# 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.



# 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.



# For Further Exploration

Here are all the links presented in these slides:

<https://bit.ly/storymap-handout>

<https://bit.ly/storymap-spreadsheet>

<https://bit.ly/diti-fair-use>

<https://bit.ly/accessibility-storymap>

<https://bit.ly/html-handout>



# Thank you!

—Developed by Ana Abraham and Chris McNulty

- 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](mailto:nulab.info@gmail.com)
- Link to Online Materials:

<https://bit.ly/gilreathengw3307storymaos>

