

An Analysis of Digital Stories Prepared for Social Studies Course According to Reader-Response Theory

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to reveal students' responses to two different digital stories created for fifth grade middle school students according to reader response theory. In this study, we used a case study design, one of the qualitative research approaches. For this purpose, 42 middle school students selected from a public school in Ankara by convenience sampling method constituted the study group. The data were collected in the fall semester of the 2024-2025 academic year. Content analysis method was used to analyze the data obtained in the study. It was determined that middle school fifth grade students gave 'Audience-Centered Answers' to the first digital story at a rate of 75% and to the second digital story at a rate of 77%. The findings of the study showed that fifth grade students were able to give Audience-Centered written responses, to interact personally with digital stories, to want to participate in the events in the story, and to make connections between their own experiences and the story. Similar studies can be conducted not only with middle school students but also with appropriate digital story samples at preschool, primary, and secondary levels. In this way, how students' responses to digital stories are shaped in different age groups can be examined more comprehensively. In future research, students' responses to different types of digital stories can also be investigated.

Keywords: Social studies, digital story, reader, text, reader-response theory.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital Story

Storytelling is a traditional way of communicating ideas and images (Mello, 2001). Nowadays, there have been significant developments in the field of computer technology and storytelling can be recorded and shared digitally thanks to easily accessible hardware and software. Instead of traditional storytelling where the storyteller and the listener have to be in the same environment, recorded stories can be watched as many times as desired by listeners living in different places.

According to Küngerü (2016), digital story is a concept that emerged with developing media technologies. Although the concept of digital story is defined in different ways in the literature, it generally includes the idea of combining a story scenario with various digital multimedia elements such as pictures, audio, and video (Robin, 2006, 2008). As with traditional story, digital stories are centered around a specific theme and often offer a particular perspective. These stories are usually several minutes long and are used for different purposes (Robin, 2006).

Robin (2006) categorizes digital story types under three headings. These are personal (reflective) stories, stories about historical events, and informative/instructive stories. Personal (reflective) stories are stories about important events in a person's life. According to Robin (2006), the most common reason for creating digital stories is the sharing of personal stories. Such stories contribute to the individual's self-knowledge and creativity as they allow the individual to express his/her feelings and thoughts (Robin, 2006). Stories regarding historical events focus on researching and describing these events in various ways. Such digital stories use historical speeches and images. With this approach, students can use historical photographs, dialogues, newspaper articles, and other materials in the classroom to create a story that adds meaning and depth to the events of the past. Informational/instructional stories are primarily used to express educational material in different content areas.

The digital story process starts with brainstorming, topic selection, and drafting, similar to the traditional story writing process. After drafting, students should create a story flowchart of what their story will look like. Then, the story creation phase begins. This stage usually takes place in computer environments, using different digital programs, combining voice narration, visuals, and music. Today, this process can also be done using web-based tools. Finally, the created digital stories are shared and presented (Demirer, 2013). Today, with the increasing use of smartphones and tablet computers, low-cost, and free software has been developed to create digital stories (Karakoyun, 2014). With the development of digital communication tools and increased ease of use, there has been a significant increase in the number of digital stories. Moreover, with the development of network technologies and the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, stories produced by individuals have become more accessible (Küngerü, 2016).

The steps of digital story creation that some researchers have introduced to the literature are listed by Kocakaya (2022, p. 8) and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Steps of digital story creation (Kocakaya, 2022, p. 8)

Jakes & Brennan (2005)	Barret (2009)	Lasica (2010)	Arslan (2013)	Morra (2013)
Writing	Script Creation	Deciding on the Story	Starting Point of the Story	Starting with an Idea
Script Development	Sound Recording and Editing	Compiling Materials	Creating the Script	Research Exploring Learning
Story Board	Scanning and Editing Images	Script Creation	Selection of Audio and Visual Materials	Writing, Scenario Creation
Creating the Digital Story	Add Transitions and Effects	Digitizing Tools	Presentation of the Digital Story	Image, Audio and Video Creation
Sharing a Digital Story	Sharing a Digital Story	Voice Recording		Putting It All Together
		Add Music		Sharing
		Story Editing		Reflection and Feedback
		Sharing the Story		

When the stages developed by the researchers in Table 1 are examined, it can be said that the steps of digital story creation are similar to each other. The digital story creation process generally starts with the story scenario and ends with sharing the digital story (Kocakaya, 2022).

According to Robin (2008, p. 223), the seven basic elements that should be taken into consideration in the process of preparing digital stories are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Seven components of digital storytelling (Robin, 2008, p. 223)

Component	Description
1 Perspective	What is the main point of the story and the author's point of view?
2 A dramatic question	An intriguing question that will grab the listener's attention and be answered at the end of the story.
3 Emotional content	Providing emotional interaction between the story and the audience. Visualizing real issues and relating the story to the listener.
4 Voice-over capability	Animation and personalization through voice-over so that the listener can understand the story context well.
5 The power of story music	The effect of music and other sounds used to embellish, beautify, and support the plot of the story.
6 Simple content/savings	Providing enough content to tell the story, avoiding too much cognitive load.
7 Advance speed	The rhythm of the story, how slow or how fast it moves.

Digital story has gained importance as a significant instructional tool for both teachers and students as one of the approaches that encourage the effective use of technology in schools and the active participation of students in lessons (Robin, 2006, 2008). The most important aspect

of digital stories is that, unlike classical stories, they can be accessed repeatedly in a multiple environment and from multiple perspectives (Hess, 2014). The situations and opportunities related to the use of digital story in education and training are presented in Figure 1 (Kurudayıoğlu & Bal, 2014).

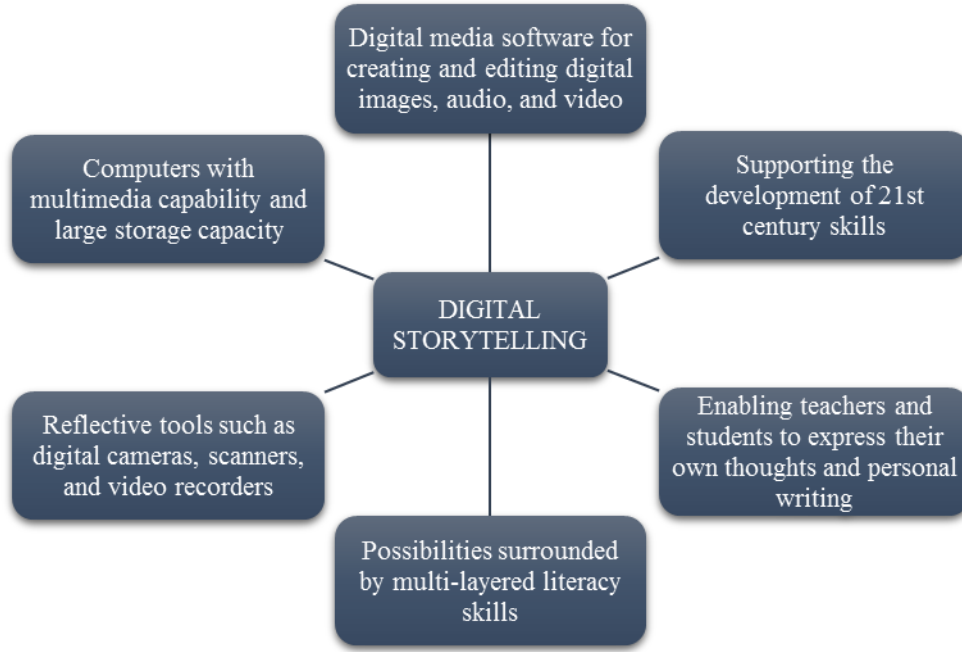


Figure 1 Digital storytelling in education (Kurudayıoğlu & Bal, 2014)

Digital stories, which have attracted attention in education in recent years, are addressed in various studies in the field of education. A review of the literature revealed that studies on digital stories have found a place in every field from pre-school education to higher education, from language education to special education. When the literature is reviewed, it is seen that the use of digital stories in the educational process has the following benefits:

1. The use of digital stories had a positive effect on class participation and motivation (Doğan & Robin, 2009).
2. The use of digital stories suitable for preschool education because it can be used not only as a means of teaching a subject to preschool children, but also as a method of creation through which teachers can develop creativity through learning (Theodosiadou, 2021).
3. Digital stories positively affect students' learning achievement, self-regulation skills, and sense of self-efficacy (Yan et al., 2024).
4. Digital stories can be used as an incentive tool to develop speaking skills (Davis & McGrail, 2009).
5. Digital stories can be used as an effective tool to develop preschool children's mathematics and computer literacy skills compared to traditional stories, making significant differences in terms of mathematics learning in children aged 6-7 years (Preradovic et al., 2016).
6. Digital stories improve students' 21st century skills (Turgut & Kışla, 2015).
7. Digital stories are effective in achieving the basic skills in the Turkish Language Teaching Program (Kurudayıoğlu & Bal, 2014).

8. Digital stories had a significant positive effect on listening skills in children with visual impairment (Bahşi & Sis, 2023).
9. The digital story method applied in eliminating the misconceptions identified in the science course had a positive effect and that this method also increased the academic achievement of the students positively (Köroğlu & Avcı, 2022).
10. Digital stories contributed to students' academic achievement, collaboration skills, and critical thinking skills (Sadik, 2008).

Social Studies Lesson and the Use of Digital Stories

When the 2024 Social Studies Curriculum (Ministry of National Education- MoNE, 2024) is examined, it is seen that in parallel with the acceleration of digitalization, many points are emphasized for the more frequent use of information technologies in educational environments. Especially in the 2024 curriculum, unlike previous curricula, it is seen that the title of 'Differentiation' is included. Under this heading, emphasis is placed on creating an individualized, inclusive educational environment according to the interests and needs of students. In addition, under this heading, detailed explanations about digital teaching tools are given. In the 2024 curriculum (MoNE, 2024, p.8), it is frequently stated that digital stories can be used to support the learning of students who differ from their peers. It was even suggested that students with higher order thinking skills should design the digital story production process themselves. In this way, it was explained that learning would be richer.

In many learning areas in the curriculum, it is frequently stated that “written, visual and digital resources” can be used in the teaching process. In the curriculum, although the types of digital resources are left to teachers' preferences, it is also possible to come across explanations that directly point to digital stories. The explanations regarding the digital story type in the curriculum, directly or indirectly, can be summarized as follows: When the 4th grade Living Together Learning Area is examined, it is seen that this learning area includes the topics of introducing the social studies course to students, social unity, and the importance of respect for individual differences. Students were asked to examine different types of case studies about the contributions of the social studies course to daily life. It was explained that these case studies could also be in the form of digital stories. Again, in this learning area, the following activity example related to digital stories was given under the title of differentiation: “Students can be asked to explain that having different individual characteristics is a richness by writing poems, song lyrics or digital stories.” (MoNE, 2024, p.16). When the 4th grade Economy in Our Lives Learning Area is examined, it is possible to see explanations about the use of digital stories. In this learning area, the topic of needs and natural resources was addressed. In the differentiation title of the learning area, it is stated that an educational tool such as a digital story can be used in the content of this subject with the statement “A digital content that explains the discrepancy between the level of use of natural resources and their reserve status can be shown.” (MoNE, 2024, p.32). The 6th grade Common Heritage Learning Area includes the first Turkish states, Islamic civilization, and the Turkification of Anatolia. In the differentiation title of the learning area, students can be asked to “prepare a digital cartoon novel or animation of Turkish cultural elements” (MoNE, 2024, p.75). In the 6th grade Living Democracy Learning Area, decision-making processes, fundamental rights and responsibilities, and the impact of digital technology on citizenship rights were included. An activity suggestion was made for students to create a digital product about their rights and responsibilities and present it in the classroom (MoNE, 2024, p.79). In addition, in the differentiation title of this learning area, suggestions were made for students to design cartoon novels about how developments in digital technology affect rights (MoNE, 2024, p.81). In the 6th grade Technology and Social Sciences Learning Area,

developments in transportation and communication technology were included. Under the heading of differentiation, there is an activity suggestion for students to write a digital cartoon novel that includes the positive and negative consequences of transportation and communication technology. It is also explained that digital content such as movies, educational videos, and animations (MoNE, 2024, p. 88) can be used to explain the effects of changes in transportation and communication technology on culture. In the 7th grade Our Home is the World Learning Area, the effects of globalization and global dimensional problems were included. Under the heading of differentiation, it is emphasized that students can develop digital products to reduce the effects of global problems. Again, in the continuation of the explanation, the following activity suggestions were made for the use of digital stories: “Students can be asked to design a digital cartoon novel based on the scenarios they have written on the subject” (MoNE, 2024, p. 96). In the 7th grade Common Heritage Learning Area, the Ottoman Empire is discussed from various perspectives. Under the heading of Differentiation, students were advised to examine the miniatures produced in the Ottoman Empire and create a digital story using the characters in the miniature (MoNE, 2024, p. 101). In the 7th grade Technology and Social Sciences Learning Area, the effects of scientific and technological developments on social life and their contributions to solving problems in social life were discussed. Again, under the heading of differentiation, it is explained that educational digital activities can be used for the effects of scientific and technological developments on social life. As stated in the 2024 Social Studies Curriculum, developments in the world make it necessary to use digital technologies in teaching processes. In this context, the use of educational digital content such as digital stories in the teaching process can both increase students' interest in the course and contribute to the development of various skills. From this point of view, it can be said that the use of digital stories is an important tool in teaching social studies course.

Reader-Response Theory

The reader's interaction with the text, in other words, the ability to analyze and interpret the written symbols in the text and to create meaning by interpreting them is an important condition for the realization of effective reading. Variables related to the reader and the text are important for the outcome of this process. For example, the reader's inability to read texts appropriate to his/her prior knowledge, interest in reading, reading speed, and comprehension level may cause the process to end inefficiently. The types of texts, their readability levels, the authors' ability to take into account the age and developmental characteristics of the target audience, and their ability to keep the interest active can also cause the reader's interaction with the text to be effective or ineffective (Ulusoy, 2016).

What the reader finds most important and worth focusing on in a text may not be the same as what the author or other readers emphasize. The perception, comprehension and interpretation of texts by readers are influenced by many factors; this has been analyzed by many literary theories. At this point, we come across the Reader-Response Theory developed by Rosenblatt (1978/1994; 1999). The reader-response theory was first conceptualized by I. A Richards in the 1920s and systematized by D.W. Harding and L. Rosenblatt in the 1930s (Kavalcı, 2017). Rosenblatt (1978/1994; 1999) thinks that the reading process occurs through the interaction between the reader and the text, and she uses the concept of 'interaction'. In the meaning-making process, habits, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs enable each reader to have a unique experience with the text (Yekeler & Ulusoy, 2017). In this context, the text is like a hidden treasure waiting to be discovered and the experience and knowledge of the reader is needed to reveal this implicit reality. The reader mobilizes his/her consciousness and sensitivity within the existing

intellectual structure. In this case, the reader's mental effort is at the heart of the reading process. In this respect, the reader is a dominant element in the effort to understand and interpret the nature of the text. As a tracer, he/she strips the text of mystery with his/her own contributions and carries the meaning to a personal level (Karagöz, 2018). Stanley Fish (1970), one of the important theorists of reader-oriented response theory, states that meaning resides in the essence of the reader rather than the text and explains meaning as a form of experience.

The environment and culture in which the reader lives can play a decisive role in their reactions by affecting their emotions, attitudes, and beliefs. In addition, changes in one of the elements of text, context or reader lead to differentiated reactions to the text (Ateş & Aktaş, 2020). The reading process is illuminated by the concepts of the transactional nature of language and selective attention. According to Rosenblatt (1978/1994; 1999), meaning is not found directly in the text or in the reader; it is created in the process of interaction during reading. The reading process is shaped by the stance taken by the reader. Two basic stances are distinguished here: “informational” and “aesthetic” (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; 1999). Rosenblatt stated that while the informational stance focuses on the information to be obtained after reading, the aesthetic stance focuses on the experience during reading. In informational reading, the reader obtains abstracted information and conclusions from the text. For example, reading an instruction or a textbook is informational reading. In aesthetic reading, the reader experiences elements such as the rhythm of language, images and emotions and participates in the artistic structure of the text. These distinctions reveal the importance of the attitude the reader takes and the elements on which he/she focuses his/her attention during the reading process. A literary or informational text acquires meaning according to the stance taken by the reader; thus, meaning emerges from the interaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1988). As Rosenblatt (1978/1994; 1999) indicated, it is possible for the reader to make different interpretations of the same text in different readings, because the reader's experiences, reading environment and perspective on life may change. Each reading offers the reader different associations from previous readings. Although the author and the reader meet on the same text, each reader may gain different gains from this text. This offers an alternative perspective to the idea that a literary work should have a single main idea: Readers can make sense of the text according to their own experiences. This approach emphasizes that students' individual interpretations should be valued rather than imposing on them the idea that there is a single main idea or main feeling in every text. Interpretation should be considered as an integral part of the comprehension process (Uysal & Ateş, 2020).

In order for an effective reading process to take place, it is accepted that the reader should interact with the text, analyze, and interpret it and thus create meaning (Ulusoy, 2016). However, it is observed that there are few studies on reader responses in the literature. It can be said that the theoretical and practical interest in reader responses has increased in recent years (Uysal & Ateş, 2020). For example, in his study, Ulusoy (2016) determined the responses of second grade primary school students towards two children's picture books. When the written responses were analyzed, it was found that both books had a high emotional impact on students and they were able to give reader-centered written responses. Yekeler and Ulusoy (2017) determined the responses of fourth grade primary school students towards children's picture books written in an informative style. In this study, it was found that the majority of the students participating in the research gave reader-centered answers, students intensively responded to the questions with their personal thoughts and feelings, and none of the students asked questions. Çevik and Müldür (2019) analyzed the text-centered and reader-centered written responses of fifth grade students and the distribution of these responses. Their results showed

that fifth grade students gave reader-centered responses. The authors found that students made a personal connection with the books, responded to events they identified with their own lives, and were influenced by events that evoked positive emotions.

Responses to Digital Stories

In the literature, studies investigating reader-response theory and digital stories together are quite limited. It can be said that there are deficiencies in the literature on “responses to digital stories”. Gürgil-Ulusoy and Ulusoy (2025) stated in their study that they did not come across any study examining retelling and response activities together. In this study, the authors investigated the effects of retelling, reading response, and activities combining these two methods on second grade students' reading attitudes and comprehension levels after watching digital stories. The results of the study revealed that comprehension scores increased significantly in all experimental groups compared to the control group. Ulusoy (2020) also aimed to obtain the opinions of primary school students on the digital stories created by pre-service teachers. The study revealed that the majority of pre-service teachers wrote original stories based on their personal experiences, made drawings, used their own voices in accordance with prosodic speech rules, and created original digital stories to convey didactic or informative messages to students. In Ulusoy's study, most of the primary school students gave audience/reader-centered verbal responses to digital stories. Leylek (2018) aimed to examine the effect of digital stories on the reading skills and reading attitudes of third grade primary school students. In the study, an experimental design was used to compare the Turkish lesson taught with digital stories and the Turkish lesson in which students produced their own digital stories. The quantitative data obtained showed that reading skills improved more significantly in the group where students produced their own digital stories. Leylek also found that female students had higher reading attitudes than male students.

A review of the literature revealed that there were no studies on the middle school students' responses to digital stories prepared for the social studies course. This study aimed to reveal the responses of middle school fifth grade students towards two digital stories named *Bir Küçük Bulut Hikâyesi* (A Little Cloud Story) and *Çevre Kahramanları* (Heroes of the Environment) (see appendix 1). For this purpose, research questions adapted from Ulusoy's (2016) study were used. These questions are as follows:

1. What are the text- and reader-oriented written responses of fifth grade middle school students?
2. What is the distribution of middle school fifth grade students' text- and reader-oriented responses?

METHOD

Research Model

This study was designed to evaluate the reactions of fifth grade middle school students towards the digital stories *A Little Cloud Story* and *Heroes of the Environment* prepared by the researchers. The study was conducted in accordance with the case study model, one of the qualitative research models. A case study is a research model that provides a detailed examination and description of a specific problem and aims to find answers to questions specific to a current situation (Merriam, 2013). In a case study, researchers examine a defined event in depth and seek answers to the questions of ‘how and why?’ (Yin, 2009). The question sought

in this study is how are the reactions of fifth grade students to the prepared digital stories according to Rosenblatt's (1978/1994; 1999) theory?

Study Group

The study group of the research consisted of a total of 42 students, 20 boys and 22 girls, studying at a public school in the central districts of Ankara province in the 2024-2025 academic year. Since the study was prepared in accordance with the learning outcomes and content of the fifth grade 'Our Home is the World' learning area, the study was completed with fifth grade students. The majority of the students in the school where this study was implemented came from middle socio-economic backgrounds. In the district where the school is located, there are mostly civil servants and tradesmen. The number of siblings of the students in the study group varies between one and three. Conveniently sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used in the study. In the selection of the sample, the convenience sampling method (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011) was preferred in order to conduct the research quickly and practically, to provide easy access and to use time efficiently. The students participating in the study were selected on the basis of voluntariness and willingness.

Data Collection

The data of the study were collected in the fall semester of the 2024-2025 academic year with a four-question semi-structured interview form adapted from Hancock and developed by Ulusoy (2016). In the study, two different digital stories created by the researchers were used in order to determine the students' responses to digital stories. These stories were created based on the social studies curriculum (MoNE, 2024). In the creation of these stories, children's age and developmental characteristics and the principles of suitability for children's reality were taken into consideration. Summaries of the digital stories created in this study are given below.

A Little Cloud Story: This digital story tells the story of Pofuduk, a little cloud, on his first day at work. This story provides information about the causes and processes of natural disasters and environmental problems; and the precautions that can be taken against disasters and environmental problems.

The Story of Environmental Heroes: In this story; the adventures of the hero named Ali Aslan regarding environmental problems are told in an entertaining manner. In the digital story, the attempts of Ali Aslan and his friends to protect the environment, based on a project assignment given by the teacher at school, are told in an entertaining language.

In order to determine the students' reactions to the digital stories, the following stages were followed: Both stories were implemented in different lessons. In the first stage, the digital stories were watched by the students. After the digital stories were watched, the students were asked to give verbal explanations about the story, thus determining how much they understood the subject and characters in the story. Following these stages, the students were asked to respond in writing to the interview form containing the questions developed by Hancock (2008, pp. 278-279) for each digital story. The questions are as follows:

1. How did this story make you feel? (aesthetic)
2. Does this story remind you of anything about your own life or someone you know? (experiential)
3. What messages or meanings does this story have for you? (interpretive)

4. If you were to be one of the characters in the story, which one would you choose and what would you want to do? (cognitive)

Analysis of Data

The content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data obtained in the study. In this context, the written answers of the students were analyzed based on the categories developed by Wollman-Bonilla and Werchadlo (1995) and adapted to Turkish language by Ulusoy (2016) by adding the sub-theme "main idea". The results were obtained by calculating the frequencies and percentages of the answers that fit these categories.

"Digital Story Centered Answers

1. Retelling the story
2. Understanding the characters
3. Asking questions
4. Predicting
5. Main idea

Audience-Centered Answers

1. Personal reaction (thoughts and feelings)
2. Making connections between the story and experiences
3. Willingness to participate in the events in the story" (Wollman-Bonilla & Werchadlo, 1995, p. 564-565).

During the data analysis phase, the responses given by the participants were examined and coded under appropriate categories. Then, the frequency values of these codes were calculated and presented in a table. During the analysis of the data, opinions were obtained from experts who had previously worked on this subject. In other words, we used researcher triangulation (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) to ensure accuracy in analyzing written responses. Finally, written examples representing the data related to each category were presented in the findings section.

Validity and Reliability

In the study, the completion of the applications, collection, analysis and interpretation of the data were carried out by the researchers in the role of the participants. Researcher triangulation was used to ensure the validity of the study. The same data set was analyzed independently by both researchers. In the study, purposive sampling methods were used in order to obtain accurate information about the research topic. In addition, an expert opinion was obtained on data collection tools and analysis processes. In addition to these, the whole process was explained in detail and examples of student reactions were presented with direct quotations.

For reliability, data collection, analysis processes and analysis criteria were explained in detail. For consistency and confirmability, examples of student responses were presented as direct quotations. In addition, an expert who has studies on both digital story and reader response theory was consulted. Finally, in the analysis of student responses, the agreement rate between the coding of both the first and second researcher was examined (Miles & Huberman, 1984). According to the formula, the agreement rate between the codings is 98%. Miles and Huberman

(1984, p. 64) state that an agreement rate of 90% and above is sufficient for agreement between coders.

Ethics Committee Approval

This research was conducted with the permission obtained by the decision of the Ethics Committee of Gazi University, dated 29/09/2024 and numbered E-77082166-604.01-1038473.

RESULTS

In the study, the answers given by the fifth grade students to determine their reactions to digital stories are analyzed and presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of students' responses to the digital story named

<i>A Little Cloud Story (Bir Küçük Bulut Hikâyesi)</i>			<i>Environmental Heroes (Çevre Kahramanları Hikâyesi)</i>		
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Digital Story Centered Answers	33	24.61	Digital Story Centered Answers	31	22.96
• Retelling the story	17	12.68	• Retelling the story	5	3.70
• Understanding the characters	2	1.49	• Understanding the characters	--	--
• Asking questions	--	--	• Asking questions	--	--
• Predicting	--	--	• Predicting	--	--
• Main idea	14	10.44	• Main idea	26	19.26
Audience-Centered Answers	101	75.36	Audience-Centered Answers	104	77.03
• Personal response (thoughts and feelings)	40	29.85	• Personal response (thoughts and feelings)	42	31.11
• Making connections between the story and experiences	28	20.89	• Making connections between the story and experiences	26	19.26
• Willingness to participate in the events in the story	33	24.62	• Willingness to participate in the events in the story	36	26.66
TOTAL	134	100	TOTAL	135	100

It is seen that the majority of the students who participated in the study (75.36%) gave audience-centered answers to the Little Cloud Story. The students answered the questions by adding their personal thoughts and feelings to the answers at the highest rate (29.85%). The desire to participate in the events in the story (24.62%) came in second place. When Table 3 is examined, it is determined that a very small percentage of the students gave answers aimed at understanding the characters, and none of them made predictions or asked questions.

In the digital story called Environmental Heroes, it is seen that the majority of the students (77.03%) gave audience-centered answers. It is seen that the digital story-centered answers remained at 22.96%. When the audience-centered answers are examined, it is determined that the answers that the students reflected their personal thoughts came first, followed by the answers in the category of desire to participate in the events in the story. It was determined that the students did not give answers in the categories of understanding the characters, asking questions, and making predictions in this digital story.

Sample Student Responses

A. Digital Story-Centered Responses

Retelling the Story

As a result of the analysis of written answers for the story A Little Cloud Story, it was determined that 17 students showed a tendency to retell the story in their answers to the questions. This situation can be interpreted as the students having difficulty expressing their own thoughts and feelings or extracting the messages in the digital story. Some examples of the answers given by the students are given below.

Question: What messages or meanings does this story have for you?

Example 1: “The formation of natural disasters.”

Example 2: “This story has a natural disaster message and an earthquake prevention message.”

Example 3: “It gave me knowledge about natural disasters.”

When student responses for the Environmental Heroes Story were analyzed, it was seen that five students attempted to retell the story in their responses to the questions. As seen in the examples given, students attempted to retell the events in the story rather than extracting a message or meaning from the digital story. This indicates that students understood the story at a basic level.

Question: What messages or meanings does this story have for you?

Example 4: “They were polluting the water, black smoke was coming out of the factory chimneys.”

Example 5: “Ali Aslan was sad because the ground was full of garbage and he had a beautiful dream.”

Understanding Characters

When the student answers for the story A Little Cloud Story were examined, it was seen that only two students gave answers aimed at understanding the characters. The digital story tells an adventure in which a cloud named Pofuduk learns about natural disasters. In this direction, the answers of the two students are similar and show that they understand the role of the main character well.

Question: If you wanted to be one of the characters in the story, which one would you choose and what would you like to do?

Example 6: “I would like to be a Pofuduk cloud and I would like to learn about natural disasters.”

Example 7: “Pamuk, I would also like to learn about natural disasters.”

Main Idea

When the answers given by the students in the story A Little Cloud Story were examined, it was determined that 14 students gave answers related to the main idea of the digital story in their written answers. The message given in the digital story is to take precautions against natural disasters and to minimize the damages of disasters with these precautions. It was seen that these 14 students gave similar answers.

Example 8: “When we take the necessary precautions against natural disasters, we can minimize the negative effects of the disaster.”

Example 9: “If we are prepared to prevent natural disasters, the loss of life will decrease.”

As a result of the analysis of the answers given to the Environmental Heroes story, it was seen that the majority of the students (f=26) responded to the question "What messages or meanings does this story contain for you?" with answers such as keeping the environment clean, protecting the environment, and not harming the environment. This shows that most of the students understood the message the story wanted to give and reached the main idea.

Question: What messages or meanings does this story have for you?

Example 10: "I understood protecting the environment, I understood being respectful to nature."

Example 11: "This story told me that we should not pollute or harm the environment."

B. Audience-Centered Responses

Personal Response

When the answers given by the students to the story A Little Cloud Story are examined, it is seen that they answered the questions by adding their personal thoughts and feelings at the highest rate (29.85%). When the examples below are examined, it is seen that the students felt both happy and good and bad and sad when they watched the same digital story. The students who felt bad said "I felt bad" by citing the fact that the main character, Pofuduk Cloud, did not know about natural disasters and they also stated that they felt "sad" by citing the natural disasters that occurred. Some students stated that the story made them feel happy and good without giving a reason. When Example 12 is examined, it is seen that the student retells the story and explains that the story made him feel good. This shows that the student understood the story and added his own thoughts.

Question: How did this story make you feel?

Example 12: "There are many natural disasters in this story, if it didn't rain, the trees in nature would be thirsty, so I felt very good."

Example 13: "I felt happy."

Example 14: "I felt bad. Because the cloud didn't know anything."

It was determined that all students gave personal reactions to the digital story in the Environmental Heroes story. Example 15 shows that the student listened to the given story carefully and interpreted it meaningfully. The student stated that his awareness of environmental pollution increased with the statement, "Our world is really dirty, we were not aware of it." He also expressed the effect of the story on him and the change of thought with a sincere language by saying, "I had never thought about it before watching this movie, I really liked the story." This reaction shows that the student has the ability to explain by adding his personal thoughts and feelings and can evaluate the impressive side of the story through his own life. It can be said that the story changed the student's perspective and increased his awareness of the environment.

Question: How did this story make you feel?

Example 15: "Our world is really dirty, we were not aware of it. I had never thought about it before watching this movie, I really liked the story. I thank the teachers who taught us this."

Making Connections between the Story and Their Own Experiences

It was observed that 28 students made connections between the story and their own experiences in the A Little Cloud Story. Although floods, landslides, earthquakes, and avalanches were

mentioned in the digital story, it was observed that the students' answers focused more on earthquakes and landslides.

For A Little Cloud Story: Does this story remind you of anything about your own life or someone you know?

Example 16: "I had an earthquake, one day my friend and I were playing a game and then we heard a sound, it was an emergency sound and then everyone started running away and suddenly a building started shaking, that's when I realized it was an earthquake."

Example 17: "My father's relatives' house is in a mountainous area. They immediately moved them out of that house because it was a landslide zone."

For the Environmental Heroes story, it was observed that 26 students made connections between the digital story and their own experiences, while the other students did not answer this question. It was determined that most of the students who answered the question gave answers about the books they read, the cartoons they watched, and the previous work they did with their teachers.

For the Environmental Heroes Story: Does this story remind you of anything about your own life or someone you know?

Example 18: We did a study like this in second grade and it was like this. Our teacher took us to the garden and said look around, it was very dirty. The teacher took a photo of the garden and said clean the garden so we cleaned it and took another photo and said look at the difference. He showed us the photo.

Desire to Participate in the Events in the Story

In the story A Little Cloud Story, most of the students stated that they wanted to be a part of the story. Most of the students stated that they wanted to be in the place of the main character Podufuk Cloud. Two students stated that they did not want to be a part of the story and did not want to be in the place of any character.

Question: If you were to be one of the characters in the story, which one would you choose and what would you like to do?

Example 19: "I would like to be a Pofuduk cloud and learn about natural disasters."

Example 20: "I would like to be a Pofuduk cloud and help people."

In the Environmental Heroes story, when asked, "If you wanted to be one of the characters in the story, which one would you choose and what would you like to do?" 36 students stated that they wanted to be included in the digital story. Six students stated that they did not want to be included in the story and did not want to be in the shoes of any of the characters. When the answers were examined, it was seen that 10 students answered the question one-sidedly by choosing only one character, while 26 students explained what they wanted to do in addition to choosing a character.

Question: If you wanted to be one of the characters in the story, which one would you choose and what would you want to do?

Example 21: I would want to be Ali Aslan and protect the environment and nature.

Example 22: I would choose Çağla and I would install a filter to block the smoke coming out of the factories.

Example 23: I would want to be Ali Aslan.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aims to examine the responses of fifth-grade middle school students to the digital stories they watched as part of their social studies course. In this study, it was found that the majority of the students gave audience-centered responses to the digital stories they watched, titled “A Little Cloud Story” and “Environmental Heroes.” These reactions were generally in the form of expressing personal thoughts and feelings. The research findings showed that the students gave personal responses to digital stories, associated their own experiences with the stories they watched, felt a desire to participate in the events, could determine the main idea, and understood the characters and identified with them.

The social studies course aims to raise individuals who find solutions to problems, think critically, and contribute to social life (MoNE, 2024). At the same time, social studies is one of the courses with the most comprehensive subject content thanks to its structure covering different social science disciplines. For this reason, different types of reading texts are frequently included in the course. On the other hand, different audio-visual tools are widely used in this course to facilitate teaching. Digital stories are one of the teaching tools suitable for students with different learning styles thanks to their visual and auditory elements. Digital stories are used to tell i) historical events, ii) personal stories, and iii) informative/educational content (Robin, 2006). Therefore, digital stories can be effective in teaching historical events in the social studies course, especially in establishing cause and effect relationships and developing chronology skills. Again, for the purpose of values education, personal stories of individuals from different fields (science, literature, politics, sports, etc.) can be used as role models for students. In addition, by presenting the same event with different personal stories, students can develop multiple perspectives and contribute to the development of students' critical thinking skills. In concretizing the concepts and contents of different social science disciplines such as law, economics, geography, etc., digital stories can be used to explain the relationship network. Students' ideas and perspectives can be analyzed with reader response theory activities to be implemented after each digital story. In this way, students' personal development can also be observed. Rosenblatt (1999) mentions two types of reading within the framework of reader response theory: informational and aesthetic reading. According to Rosenblatt, especially aesthetic texts are read for pleasure and are very effective in developing reading habits. Totten (1998) states that reader response theory contributes to the process of interpretation in genres such as poetry, which is difficult for students to make sense of. In summary, both types of texts (informative and aesthetic) can be used for students, especially in abstract, content-intensive, and complex subjects.

Rosenblatt (1999) emphasized that the low emotional impact of literary works reduces the quality of discussions about them. The majority of the students who watched the digital stories in this study gave audience-centered responses. The high percentage of audience-centered responses to the digital stories watched by the students in this study can be explained by the fact that these digital stories were perceived by the students as materials with a high level of aesthetic and emotional impact that they made connections with their own lives, cared about giving their opinions on, and wanted to personally participate in the events in them.

When the literature is reviewed, studies on reader response theory reveal various findings. For example, a review of the literature showed that there were many studies (e.g., Çevik & Müldür, 2019; Karagöz, 2018; Ulusoy, 2016; Yekeler & Ulusoy, 2017) that revealed the majority of elementary school students' responses to fictional and informative picturebooks were reader-

centered. To our knowledge, only one study was found in the literature in which the majority of the students gave text-centered responses. Serin (2023) examined the responses of middle school students to problem-oriented children's books and determined that 50.67% of their responses were text-centered and 49.32% were reader-centered. It can be said that many variables such as the literary, aesthetic, and artistic value of the material read, listened to and watched, the compatibility of this material with the readers' prior knowledge, and personal preferences can affect the percentages of reader or text-centered responses.

The data of this study is limited to the verbal and written responses of fifth grade students. Considering that there is no study in the national literature that reveals middle school students' responses to digital stories within the scope of social studies course, it can be said that this study meets an important research need in terms of revealing the classification of students' reader and text-centered responses to digital materials. In the social studies course, students intensively read and interact with narrative and informational texts and materials. As Rosenblatt (1999) mentions in her reader response theory, by capturing students' honest responses to these texts, we can better understand what these texts mean to students. In addition, students' responses to the texts can help authors to write friendly texts that are more meaningful for students and that appeal to their prior knowledge.

The following recommendations can be drawn from the results of the study:

1. Similar studies can be expanded to preschool, primary school, and secondary school levels. In this way, how responses to digital stories are shaped in different age groups of students can be examined more comprehensively.
2. Although the digital stories used in the study were created by the researchers, it is recommended that students be included in the preparation process of digital stories in future studies. This provides students with the opportunity to create their own stories by actively participating in the process and develops their creative thinking skills. At the same time, the story production process can reinforce students' content creation skills using digital tools.
3. In future research, students' responses to different types of digital stories (narrative or informative) can be investigated.
4. In order to improve the analysis, interpretation, critical thinking, and interactive reading skills of middle school students, training on reader response theory can be organized for social studies teachers.
5. In order for students to develop multiple perspectives on historical events and to concretize and make sense of concepts such as law, economics, and geography, teachers can include more narrative or informative activities in their lessons regarding reader response theory. In this way, they will have the chance to see how the materials are understood and interpreted by the students and will have the chance to eliminate the students' deficiencies in comprehension.
6. While preparing printed and digital materials for the social studies course by the Ministry of National Education, pilot studies should be conducted in which written and verbal responses of the students are received and corrections and improvements are made in line with these reactions, so that more effective and meaningful materials can be presented to the students.

7. Within the scope of social studies course, digital story activity examples based on reader response theory can be prepared by the General Directorate of Innovation and Educational Technologies affiliated to the Ministry of National Education and made available to teachers. In this way, teachers can have a general view on the application and a unity can be achieved in the application throughout the country.

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Appendix 1:



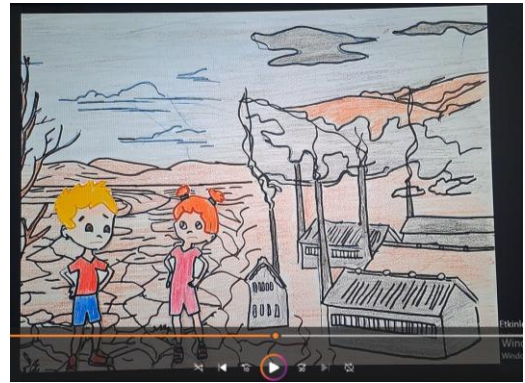
A Little Cloud Story



A Little Cloud Story



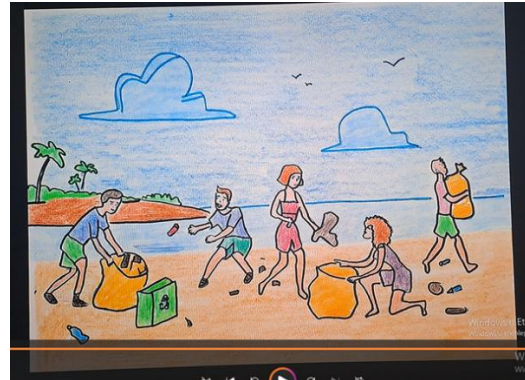
A Little Cloud Story



Environmental Heroes Story



Environmental Heroes Story



Environmental Heroes Story



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Ethics Committee	This research was conducted with the permission obtained by the decision of the Ethics Committee of Gazi University, dated 29/09/2024 and numbered E-77082166-604.01-1038473.
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