USING MEDIA, CULTURE, AND STORYTELLING TO ELEVATE YOUTH VOICES
Transmedia Story Lab

Ci3’s Transmedia Story Lab (TSL) makes multimedia stories with and for youth. Youth learn to narrate important events in their lives using a variety of media. They gain skills in self-expression, technology, and critical thinking. TSL works in urban communities around the world, engaging youth in storytelling. In TSL programs, youth collaborate with adult experts from a variety of fields. Together, they create media about the perspectives and lived-experiences of youth who are underrepresented and misrepresented in mainstream media.
The Transmedia Story Lab (TSL) works with youth helping them build skills and self-confidence as they practice creating stories. Through narrative methods, TSL:

• **Uses Storytelling to Focus on Youth**
  TSL facilitates nonfiction storytelling workshops to listen to youth who are often marginalized and unheard. By telling stories, youth reflect on their lives; examining and illuminating systemic factors that affect their wellbeing. Using stories and artefacts such as photos, voice recordings, and music from the workshops, TSL encourages youth to express themselves, communicate, and think critically about current issues.

• **Fosters Media Making**
  TSL uses digital platforms to create and disseminate stories that are not typically covered by mainstream media. From the depiction of personal experiences via multimedia storytelling to sharing their narratives, TSL exposes youth to hands-on technology, media-making skills, and gives them a platform on which to tell and share their stories.

• **Promotes Well-Rounded Narratives About the Lives of Youth**
  Traditional, mainstream media shape the narrative around current events; especially events occurring in communities of color. Uncovering the under-reported realities that impact the lives of youth within these spaces, TSL works with community members to develop narratives that counter those created by the mainstream media.

• **From Story to Scholarship**
  Storytelling is often used to produce and share knowledge. Similarly, there is an opportunity for narrative-based research. TSL focuses on narrative methods and outcomes of research about adolescents. Stories serve as both a starting point for research and as an intervention.
Gender discrimination and violence inhibit the healthy growth and development of adolescent girls. In Uttar Pradesh, India, gender inequality manifests as gender disparities in education, literacy, and employment. Women comprise only two-fifths of the literate adult population in Uttar Pradesh and less than one-fifth of employed adults. One third of girls are married before the age of 18, and a third of married women report unmet needs for contraception. With Kissa Kahani, Ci3 uses storytelling, art and drawing, and games as research tools to explore youth development, gender, sexuality, education, and family planning with some of the most vulnerable people in Uttar Pradesh: adolescent girls and boys. We are listening to youth, learning about their lives, and guiding them as they design solutions to the problems they identify in their community.

Kissa Kahani brings together many Ci3 entities including Ci3’s Transmedia Story Lab, Ci3’s Design Thinking Lab, and its research team. In addition, we are partnering with Operation Asha, a groundbreaking, India-based non-governmental organization that uses technology and incentives to eradicate tuberculosis and address some of the most important health problems affecting the poor. In these ways, we marry the universal human practices of storytelling and art with uniquely 21st century tools such as digital media and design.

In Kissa Kahani, the Transmedia Story Lab team is building a network of storytellers who are teaching youth the art of storytelling. Youth engage in workshops where they learn to describe their lives and portray it through video, photography, voice and music. The stories from Kissa Kahani have been featured in film festivals, used in educational curriculum, and won awards. Through storytelling, we are surfacing fundamental issues in adolescents’ lives. Ci3’s Design Thinking Lab then hosts workshops to help youth design interventions to address the problems they identify. Through Kissa Kahani, youth are redesigning their future.
Launched in Summer 2017, *Transmedia Collage: Histories of Violence and Futures of Health on Chicago’s South Side* is a historical project that will tell single stories through multiple forms of media to illustrate how systemic inequalities contribute to violence affecting the health and well-being of black adolescents on Chicago’s South Side. Chicago’s South Side is one of the largest African American urban communities in the U.S. Despite its vibrant history as a Black political and cultural center, this area is one of the most racially segregated and isolated communities in the country. Today, national, local, and even international media paint a picture of the area, and its youth, as criminal, dangerous, and disorderly. Youth from this project will create paper collages, produce digital stories, and record oral histories from adults who grew up and still reside in these neighborhoods. The finished products from the Transmedia Collage will challenge mainstream media-makers to focus their attention on systemic rather than interpersonal violence.

Designed to reframe narratives about the South Side of Chicago, Transmedia Collage is a collaboration between the University of Chicago’s Transmedia Story Lab and the University of Illinois at Chicago’s History Moves program. Faculty and staff from both programs will partner with black South Side adolescents and adults to create media assets that tell each of their stories. Through this project we will encourage a new body of research, policy, and public discourse about the area.
Culminating in the summer of 2014 with close to 30 digital stories from Chicago youth, South Side Stories was one of Ci3’s earliest storytelling projects. South Side Stories chronicles the challenges that youth face in an ever-changing social and political landscape. The goal of this project was to raise the voices of African American youth—male, female, and sexual minority—living on the South Side of Chicago. Working with educators, social workers and media professionals, youth created short videos that shared their unique experiences growing up in their community. The final products combined narratives, images, and music into short, first-person, multimedia videos. Engaging youth throughout the process to help them improve their research and communication skills, these stories generated new narratives about the lives of African American youth and were analyzed for academic writing, shared in lectures and exhibitions, and strategically communicated with advocacy and community partners.

South Side Stories laid the foundation for the launch of the Transmedia Story Lab and Ci3’s use of design, narrative, media, and digital storytelling programs. Transmedia Story Lab is now working that locally, nationally, and internationally.
Ci3: The Center for Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Innovation in Sexual and Reproductive Health

The Center for Interdisciplinary Inquiry and Innovation in Sexual and Reproductive Health (Ci3) at the University of Chicago is a dynamic center conducting research that draws from medicine, humanities, social science, art, and design to develop interventions that address the structures and systems that impact adolescent sexual and reproductive health at well-being. At Ci3 we envision a world in which all youth emerge into adulthood with agency over their bodies and futures. Our work emerges from the following three labs:

In our **Game Changer Chicago Design Lab** (GCC), we create and research games and digital media interventions. The GCC Design Lab develops games for social impact with and for youth to address issues in sexuality, health, social justice, and youth development. During GCC Design Lab programs, youth play and design games and develop skills for positive health behaviors.

In the **Transmedia Story Lab** (TSL), we study and make multimedia narratives. TSL uses storytelling to elevate the voices of young people and their insights about sexual and reproductive health and well-being. In this lab, we actively engage young people, researchers, and scholars in the exploration and expansion of emerging forms of narrative.

In the **Design Thinking Lab** (DTL) we engage youth in redesigning and solving problems they identify. DTL research and interventions are designed with and for youth. DTL works collaboratively across the entire organization to ensure that we start by listening to youth to understand how their daily experiences and aspirations should inform our work—whether we are creating a game, a mobile application, or initiating new research.