Monuments of Los Angeles

https://vimeo.com/142088565

La Dawna Minnis // ladawna.minnis@ucdenver.edu **// Fall 2015**

Overview

In 2014, Los Angeles County achieved a significant milestone. According to the California Department of Finance, Los Angeles County had an estimated population of over 10 million residents (cell F24). I have lived in Los Angeles County for the last 10 years, and have barely scratched the surface of exploring the diverse communities around me. My work with a local nonprofit, [We Are the Next](#), involves working in and with these communities. I chose to use this opportunity to create a project that would promote and celebrate the diverse cultural history of the area while contributing to my own learning and development.

In my pecha kucha presentation, I explored eight civic and social monuments in the greater Los Angeles area. I created this video not only for my own learning and development, but also to promote community engagement through exploration of cultural monuments. The video was featured as an introduction to a social media campaign for We Are the Next. Viewers were asked to participate in an ongoing social media campaign based around posting a photo of a different cultural monument each Monday. Beginning slides introduced the concept of a monument, and discussed the different meanings of the word monument, depending on the context. At the end of the presentation, I made the call to action for viewers

to share photos of monuments in their own communities. Participation was tracked through the use of the hash tag #monumentalmonday on Instagram and Twitter accounts for We Are the Next.

The intended audiences for this presentation are the community members that follow We Are the Next on social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The video may also be shown when visiting classrooms and conducting in-school workshops.

The learning objectives and intended outcomes of this pecha kucha are as follows:

- Promote awareness of cultural monuments in the greater Los Angeles area.
- Engage viewers in reflecting on their community's identity.
- Encourage civic engagement through a participatory activity on social media.

I took my own images, with the exception of a few that were licensed online. I recorded voice over audio using an application on my iPhone, and sourced the background music from a creative commons website. Final assembly of all media was done in Final Cut Pro X.

Design Decisions

I based my design decisions on five main ideas, ranging from big picture considerations to technical issues. To begin, I focused on simplicity to make the information clear and accessible to all. I encouraged viewers to make personal connections by featuring monuments from diverse communities. I primarily used my own images in the presentation to ensure I had high quality graphics. To keep my viewers interested, I differentiated the format of both the images and text. Finally, I chose to include specific details that were unique to each site rather than repeating the same set of information for each monument.

Design Decision #1

I chose to focus on simplicity in my design of both the content and graphic quality. In *Design Evolution*, author Timothy Samara (2008) said "if you can do it with less, do it" (p. 13). After conducting my initial research for each monument, I realized that I had an excess amount of information. I stripped each section down to the core of the history and any significant cultural or design movements that the monument related to. Garr Reynolds (2009), author of *Presentation Zen*, suggested to "go back and edit like crazy, eliminating parts that are not absolutely crucial to your overall point or purpose" (p. 107). I followed his guidance in my design and removed a bar

behind the text on my slides. I also included the nonprofit's logo only on the last slide rather than on every slide (Presentation Zen, p. 141).

Design Decision #2

I selected monuments from the Los Angeles area to encourage local viewers to make personal connections to the stories. In *Made to Stick*, Heath & Heath encouraged designers to appeal to the identities of viewers (p. 188). I told a story about the history of Los Angeles by exploring monuments from diverse communities in the area, and used a quote to prompt viewers to reflect on the value of conserving these structures and sites. Reynolds (2009) provided guidance on using quotes to tell a story and suggested "quotes can indeed add credibility..." and to "make sure they are short and legible" (Presentation Zen, p. 153).

Design Decision #3

I chose to take my own photos for this presentation, and supplemented with licensed photos to provide details that I was unable to access. Samara (2008) recommended to "make the images you need; don't scavenge" (Design Evolution, p. 14). Taking my own photos for this project allowed me to make the images a focus for the graphic design. Reynolds advised that designers "use high quality graphics" (Presentation Zen, p. 209). Following

this advice enabled me to place the informational text within the large

photos (Presentation Zen, p. 154).

Design Decision #4

I used the principle of differentiation in the framing of images and text

locations. According to Samara (2008), designers should **"**squish and

separate; create rhythms in density and openness" (Design Evolution, p.

14). I alternated wide framed photos with close ups of details. Reynolds

(2009) advised to use the same practice in differentiation of placement and

size of text to vary the graphic quality of the slide (Presentation Zen, p.

192).

Design Decision #5

I included important details about each monument to build viewer interest

and draw attention to the unique history and story behind each site. In *Made

to Stick*, Heath & Heath proposed that "details make (the story) seem more

real, more believable" (p. 129). History is made and told through stories,

and details help those stories come alive. For each monument, I sought out

any conflicts or interesting connections to give the space character. Reynolds

said "story is about an imbalance and opposing forces or a problem that

must be worked out" (p. 85). I chose to include any possible stories of conflict for the spaces, particularly threats of demolition.

Formative Evaluation Responses

Peer Review Question #1

What age and demographic do you feel would be most interested in this presentation? I asked this question because I wanted to make a video that was interesting and engaging for a wide audience.

> **Feedback #1:** Any
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> **Feedback #2:** I think this presentation would interest anyone from teenagers to the elderly. I thought the video was well done and could be shown in a museum or in an education setting. I have only been to L.A. once or twice but I still found myself interested in the monuments – even though I half expected to be seeing things related to the beach or the entertainment industry!

Based on this feedback, I reflected on how this video might be used in the classroom. Although Feedback #1 said that "any" audience would be interested, Feedback #2 suggested that pre-teens might not fit the design of the presentation. Rather than make changes to the video, I designed a worksheet to accompany the video for any in-classroom activities.

Peer Review Question #2

I may have done a bit too much "telling" and not enough "asking". How could I re-frame this information to be more engaging? After uploading the draft video, I went back and watched it through. I found myself a little bored midway though; perhaps this was due to my familiarity with the information, but I got worried that my video might be too boring for a younger audience. I chose to ask this question to get feedback on how I might revision the approach of the presentation and see if there was a more engaging alternative.

> **Feedback #1:** As I have never been to a Pecha Kechua event I guess I didn't envision it as a facilitated discussion. Six minutes forty seconds does not seem to allow for much engagement. However, depending on how Pecha Kechua eventa are run it may very well be. With that said, I viewed your piece as a presentation. Your question, are you ready to explore, engaged me. I will adopt your question in my presentations.

> **Feedback #2:** I didn't even notice this aspect until you brought it up. Since all of the monuments were new to me, I wonder if you could ask some "Did you know?" type questions as a lead in?

Based on the feedback received for Question #2, my decision to create a worksheet was strengthened. I also chose to add an image of historical buildings around Los Angeles to the "Are you ready to explore?" slide to

capture attention and give a preview of the types of structures that are featured.

Peer Review Question #3

Background audio was challenging on this project. I wanted something upbeat but not obnoxious, and it needs to be instrumental so it doesn't compete with the voice over. Could you recommend any particular tracks or sites to source audio from? I asked this question because I wanted to ensure the audio wasn't distracting for the viewer. It took me longer than it typically does to select audio for this project because I am using it for a social media promotion for the non-profit I work with. Licensing for educational use is easier than licensing for social media, so I hoped my peers could recommend additional audio resource sites to add to my repetoire.

> **Feedback #1:** YouTube is supposed to have free audio tracks. I have a membership with Audio Blocks. I think it was unlimited downloads for a year for $99. I would go for a mellow upbeat background. I will send you a track you might want to experiment with via wetransfer to your ucd email.

> **Feedback #2:** Unfortunately, I cannot recommend anything because I failed to include background music in my video at this point. I thought that the background music was fine and at the perfect volume. It was

loud enough to add to the presentation but quiet enough so as to not be distracting.

After receiving feedback about the background audio, I decided to keep it as is. The only change I made to the video following this feedback was adding the creator of the track's information at the end of the video.

Peer Review Question #4

I chose to alternate placement of text based on Presentation Zen's advice. How does the varying text placement impact your impression and interest? The initial advice in *Presentation Zen* to move around text on the screen was definitely outside of my comfort zone. I felt that it conflicted with CARP principles, and was different from what I was familiar with using. I asked this question to get my peer's interpretations of this contradiction.

> **Feedback #1:** I really did not notice until I read this question. Our eyes scan a page in the Z Format according to eye track research. The monument is the story and on the pages with the title in the upper left the titles seem distracting. I would keep titles to the bottom right.
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> **Feedback #2:** I liked the way the text was broken up and not overpowering. The pictures really told the story.

I received conflicting feedback for this question, which wasn't a surprise after feeling conflicted myself! While one peer said to keep the titles in the bottom right, the other said they enjoyed how the text moved around on the

slides. I decided to keep the text as is, and try something different from my previous practices for this project.

Peer Review Question #5

What other information about the monuments would you be interested in learning? I asked this question because I had difficulty narrowing my research for each monument down. Choosing what to include and what to leave out was challenging. I hoped to get feedback about what information most interesting from a viewer's perspective, fresh from the burden of the massive amount of knowledge I found during the research process.

> **Feedback #1:** I would be interested in learning more of the history behind those locations. I mentioned in a previous answer that my misguided stereotype of LA revolves around beaches and movie stars. This presentation opened my eyes to the rich cultural history of that part of the country.
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> **Feedback #2:** I would re-design the "What is a Monument" slide. You make three pertinent points that could be communicated better with the addition of some visual. I would probably do a bullet point build as you define monument. All readers may not relate the word monument with a house. I didn't. The picture that came to mind was the Washington Monument or some other statuesque image. Therefore, it

is important for the view to be clear on what a monument is before seeing the houses.

As a result of this feedback, I chose to re-design the "What is a Monument" slide to feature text to outline the three definitions of a monument. I was also pleased to get the feedback that the monuments featured were culturally rich, and plan on incorporating additional historic information on the worksheet for classroom use.

In addition the changes previously discussed, I also performed color correction on the images to make the text pop stand out more, and applied transformations and cropping techniques to create emphasis in images with distracting elements. I also reduced the fade-in on several audio clips after realizing that some transitions were hard to hear.

Lessons Learned

The most pertinent lesson I learned during this project is that you can fit a whole lot of information into a seven minute presentation! I realized after the video was complete that I could have done a full presentation on just one of these monuments. Each site has a rich history that I uncovered through the process of research. Choosing what to include and what to leave out was challenging. If I were to create the video again, I might choose a

more focused theme to give myself more restrictions during the research design processes.

Another important lesson has to do with how I treat the activities of creating, and what kind of meaning the processes can contribute. Making this video not only was a means to an end, but it also allowed me to make new connections with the new intern that started with We Are the Next. Taking the photos for this video was our first "field day", where we got out of the office and into the community. We spent a full day visiting the locations, all while getting to know each other and bonding over exploring the diverse communities of Los Angeles. In creating and design, we often rush to the finish line. This project taught me to slow down, and appreciate the process as well as the product.

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