# Digital Storytelling as a Means of Education and Formation of Spiritual and Ethical Values in Adolescence (on the Base of Classic Literature Material)

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The article presents the results of the study that identifies the possibilities of applying activity technologies in education to create digital stories for the purposes of formation of spiritual and ethical values in adolescents. The study took place in March, 2023, on the basis of MBOU SOSH school No. 4 in Kashira town, 38 schoolchildren of the 7th grade aged 13—14 years old took part in it. As part of the study, during three sessions 9 cartoons were created in the stop-motion animation technique, they were based on the literary material of A.P. Chekhov. The article presents an analysis of the production process of animation products creation, it also discusses the aspects of the formation of spiritual and moral values while creating cartoons. The article also focuses on the empirical data that demonstrate the peculiarities of the adolescents' perception of joint activities when working on cartoons and according to the degree of motivation for the activity. The study proves the effectiveness of the use of practices for creating digital stories by adolescents for establishing interpersonal communication, appropriating moral and prosocial behavior patterns, developing interest in classic literature, and creative self-realization.

***Keywords:*** drama; moral (value) education; digital storytelling; stop-motion animation; adolescents; classic literature; spiritual and moral education.

# Цифровой сторителлинг как средство воспитания и формирования духовно-нравственных ценностей в подростковом возрасте (на примере литературного материала)

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В статье представлены результаты исследования, посвященного изучению возможностей применения деятельностной технологии по созданию цифровых историй в целях духовно-нравственного воспитания подростков. Исследование проходило в марте 2023 г. на базе МБОУ СОШ № 4 г. Каширы, в нем приняли участие 38 школьников 7-х классов в возрасте 13—14 лет. В рамках исследования в течение трех занятий были созданы 9 мультфильмов в технике stop-motion анимации на основе литературного материала А.П. Чехова. В статье представлен анализ творческого процесса создания анимационных продуктов, рассмотрены особенности формирования духовно-нравственных ценностей в процессе создания мультфильмов. Также представлены эмпирические данные, демонстрирующие особенности восприятия совместной деятельности по работе над мультфильмами в зависимости от степени мотивации к деятельности. Доказана эффективность применения практик по созданию цифровых историй подростками для налаживания межличностной коммуникации, присвоения нравственных и просоциальных моделей поведения, развития интереса к классической литературе, творческой самореализации.

***Ключевые слова:*** цифровой сторителлинг; stop-motion анимация; подростки; классическая литература; духовно-нравственное воспитание.

## Digital storytelling in an educational aspect

Today, digital storytelling has become an integral educational practice in both higher education and schools [8]. In education, digital storytelling is seen as a pedagogical technology that involves delivering the content of education in the form of a story with its typical structure and components (introduction, development of events or con-

flicts, climax, resolution), but with a focus on digital visualization and the use of digital tools. Though digital stories can take forms of multimedia presentations, documentary films, animated videos, infographics, web publications, etc. The advantages of digital storytelling in education include its memorable narrative due to emotional impact, effective delivery of information, presentation of a large amount of material in a concise, dynamic, and visual form, stimulation of motivation for learning and individualization of education [5]. Digital storytelling is often used in school to develop ICT and communication skills, linguistic and intercultural competencies, critical and creative thinking, multimodal and functional literacy [17; 18].

Currently, it is passive storytelling that predominates in Russian pedagogical practice. It implies the teachers' use of digital stories to support and visualize their explanations, simplify communication with "digital natives" or teach online. According to this approach, teachers use technology to enhance their own speech, while students are supposed to be attentive viewers and listeners[1]. At the same time, it can be assumed that more effective practices involve active storytelling, when it is students themselves who become authors of stories, whereas the teacher's role is to articulate the initial event or a problem to develop in the plot as well as to control the process of creating a story and evaluate results. In this approach, the teacher imparts not only explicit knowledge but also "hidden" knowledge — skills that are difficult to assess or distinguish but the ones that encompass a range of acquired skills (communication skills, self-regulation, reflection, logical thinking, etc.). The most convenient form of implementing active digital storytelling is through project-based work [1]. Digital storytelling projects can ad-

dress one or several academic disciplines, establish interdisciplinary connections, bring together different groups, and contribute to the formation of prosocial behavior.

However, it should be noted that despite the growing interest in digital storytelling in the educational context, it is still rarely used by Russian educators as a tool for character education, particularly for the purposes of spiritual and moral values formation.

## Digital storytelling and classic literature

Spiritual and moral education in secondary school not only stands for students' integration into society, but also encompasses the formation of a communicative and empathetic personality, which is characterized by such qualities as *kindness, mindfulness, responsibility, respectfulness, empathy,* and *willingness to help*. Spiritual and moral education also aims at "realizing the moral and aesthetic value of literature". Classic literature serves as a "guide and manual" for shaping moral ideals and value orientations [3; 6; 13, p. 1321]. However, contemporary teenagers have shown a decline in interest in reading, partly due to a lack of understanding of moral ideals and orientations presented in classic literature [9, p. 253]. In addition, according to N.N. Kaznacheeva, today's youth is characterized by "the contradiction in the formation of value orientations that causes a slow internalization of values, which leads to the phenomenon of moral infantilism that results in social immaturity" [4, p. 20]. Among the reasons why teenagers refuse to read are: the trend towards simplification, the prevalence of visual culture, the preoccupation with social media and self-presentation, the preference in reading hypermedia texts rather than classic literature

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[1] Digital storytelling. Opportunity to develop skills in modern technologies, creativity and imagination URL: https://ug.ru/czifrovoj-storitelling/

*Поскакалова Т.А.* Цифровой сторителлинг как средство воспитания и формирования духовно-
нравственных ценностей в подростковом возрасте (на примере литературного материала)
Психологическая наука и образование. 2023. Т. 28. № 4

texts [10; 14; 15].

To address this situation, a systematic solution is required, such as expanding a variety of educational systems and pedagogical technologies[2]. *Digital storytelling* could be considered as a tool to help teenagers pay attention to classic literature, analyze it from a spiritual and moral perspective, form their own value orientations as a mature and cultural personalities.

It is worth to mention that in recent years digital storytelling has been actively developed for the purposes of school literature classes. Students are encouraged to prepare essays, writers' biographies reports, simulated interviews, virtual excursions, and book trailers (creative videos by students with reviews of the books they have read) in digital format [5]. To increase the range of active digital storytelling practices as well as to explore the ways of integrating ICT into the educational process for the spiritual and moral development of contemporary teenagers, a study was conducted as part of the project "Teenage Theater as an Activity Technology of Upbringing and the Formation of Spiritual and Moral Values". It was carried out on the basis of the Center for Interdisciplinary Research of Contemporary Childhood, MSUPE, the research objectives were:

• studying teenagers' perception of digital storytelling as a new creative practice and experience;

• assessing the educational potential of active digital storytelling and evaluating its role in the moral development in contemporary teenagers;

• examining the impact of digital storytelling on teamwork within project-based activities;

• assessing the acquisition of new digital competencies;

• evaluating readiness for artistic re-interpretation and presentation of spiritual aspects of classic literature in digital format;

• identifying difficulties in the process of learning digital storytelling.

## Research design

The research was conducted in March, 2023, on the basis of school № 4 in Kashira town, Moscow region; 38 teenagers aged from 13 to 14 years old took part in it. The teenagers were divided into two groups:

• *unmotivated teenagers* (17 students from the 7th "A" class, characterized by detachment, conflicts, weak academic achievements, lack of motivation for new types of activities);

• *motivated teenagers* (21 students from the 7th "V" class, distinguished by friendly relationships within the class, high performance and involvement in school life).

• During three sessions (1.5 hours each), the teenagers created 9 cartoons that were included in the final performance of the project — in the play "Who Are You, Mr. Chekhov?". After finishing the cartoons, the teenagers filled in:

• a questionnaire "How I created a cartoon", consisting of 10 mostly open-ended questions, aimed at revealing their roles in the creative process; self-assessing contribution to the teamwork, analyzing the difficulties of realization of ideas and implementation of plans; evaluating the value of the acquired experience;

• reflexive diaries, the purpose of which was to reveal the teenagers' emotional attitude to the activities on animation production, their reflexive observations of their own progress, changes in the teammates.

The results of the surveys were processed with the use of descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis.

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[2] Order of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 996-r from May 29, 2015 "On approval of the strategy of development of education in the Russian Federation for the period until 2025".

*Poskakalova T.A.* Digital Storytelling as a Means of Education and Formation of Spiritual
and Ethical Values in Adolescence (on the Base of Classic Literature Material)
Psychological Science and Education. 2023. Vol. 28, no. 4

## Stop-motion animation for upbringing and educational purposes

As a literary basis and reference for digital stories the teenagers chose short stories and words of wisdom (quotes) by A.P. Chekhov, since the educational potential of his texts has been noted by researchers [6; 16]. They created cartoons in the stop-motion technique, which presents frame-by-frame animation. Its production involves sequential shooting of photographs with further montage of these photographs into a video or animated story [12]. This technique was chosen due to its simplicity. For teenagers it is both easy to understand and use for artistic self-expression, also it allows to work in groups of 3—5 students and create creative products relatively quickly. The plan of work (stages) is shown in Fig. 1.

Pre-production stage – getting acquainted with the principles of stop-motion animation, development of a cartoon idea

1. Explanation of principles of animation creation (differences and technical aspects of taking photos due to the specific goals, shooting process, composition).

2. Acquaintance with techniques and software for editing an animated product (cartoon).

3. Setting or elaborating the rules for what should NOT be included in an animated product (scenes of violence, offensive language, swearing, etc.).

4. Setting the task, explaining the evaluation criteria for the assignment.

5. Brainstorming, developing a brief story script.

6. Creating storyboards, a script.

Production stage - preparation of the background, characters, and shooting.

I. Preparation of the background. Creating a background on a sheet of paper for the unfolding story (drawing, coloring or printing objects, cutting out, sticking or gluing them).

. II. Creation of characters

Creating characters or objects that will later be moved across the background. Body parts can be cut separately to move characters by bending their limbs according to the script. If possible, fasten them with brads or reusable adhesive materials (UHU PATAFIX PASTEL, office clay, etc.) to maintain the ability to "reassemble" the characters.

III. Shooting of photographic material

1. Setting up the lights, adjusting the filming equipment (smartphone, camera), testing it and shooting the first frame.

2. Moving characters and objects, subsequent frame-by-frame shooting the scenes.

Post-production stage - editing an animated product.

1. Uploading the photographic material to a computer/tablet, processing and editing the photos.

2. Importing the photos into editing software, selecting soundtracks from available options or recording own music or voice.

3. Editing the cartoon according to the storyboard or the script.

4. Presenting the cartoon to the audience or educator, project defense.

*Fig. 1.* Stages of cartoon creation process with the use of stop-motion animation technique

*Поскакалова Т.А.* Цифровой сторителлинг как средство воспитания и формирования духовно-
нравственных ценностей в подростковом возрасте (на примере литературного материала)
Психологическая наука и образование. 2023. Т. 28. № 4

Considering the specifics of the activities, the main criteria to assess the educational achievements and the results of formation of spiritual and moral values were figured out, they are [7]:

spiritual and moral interpretation of literary material;

established relationships between students and students as well as students and teachers, based on mutual understanding, respect and cooperation;

organization of students' independent work (interest, motivation, consciousness, self-assessment, reflection, self-realization, self-determination and etc.);

students' mutual assistance (willingness to help, patience, sensitivity, respect).

The sessions were conducted in accordance with the indicated goals, the content of the sessions is presented in the table 1.

While teaching the sessions, the educators created and implemented the personality-developing situations: teenagers had to organize their activities without adults' help, distribute equipment (tripods, lamps), share tools and craft materials, assign responsibilities for different types of activities and actions, formulate the moral "core" of their stories and critically assess achievements.

### Analysis of the cases on creating animation

From a pedagogical point of view, spiritual and moral education is a multi-stage work. Within the framework of the process of cartoons creation, these stages included [2]:

• *formation of ideas about values* — analysis and discussion of literary material, inventing a plot and characters, thinking over the moral foundations for characters, their motives and etc.;

• *consolidation of values in the structure of the personal value system and formation of readiness to act in accordance with them* — development of effective communication in teams, formation of responsibility for task fulfillment, acting independently from teachers (self-organization), expression of empathy, helping the "lagging behind";

• *practical activities based on previously formed values* — self-control of behavior, the spread of developed behavioral models to both school life and daily life.

According to the assessments by teachers, who worked with teenagers during the sessions, the project participants started experiencing difficulties already at the stage of analyzing the moral value of the literary material. Also, they couldn't interpret the essence of what they were reading. Thus, the most active teenage team took on the making a cartoon based on the short story "Enemies" by Chekhov. This story raises the question of a doctor's duty and responsibility. "Enemies" tells about the moral conflict between two characters, a doctor, whose only son has just died because of the illness, and his visitor, Mr. Abogin, a selfish and manipulative person. Mr. Abogin is of a higher social status; his fake grief turns out to be a farce and mortally insults the doctor as he is suffering from the real loss. Initially, the story was perceived by teenagers only as a certain sequence of events and characters' actions ("the external level of the story"), they justified Abogin's actions by the fact that any doctor, whose service is paid, has to obey and do his job, neglecting his own dignity, demands and feelings. During their work on the cartoon, teenagers not only repeatedly analyzed the text of the story, but also researched the writer's biography and letters, watched the film adaptation directed by Yu.P. Egorov (1960). As part of this work, the teenagers discussed and in collaboration interpreted such concepts as "humanity," "vulgarity," "offense," and "human cruelty," which were initially completely incomprehensible to them. The teenagers carefully worked on the story's characters, focusing attention on their motives and emotions. Such practice was useful for the teenagers as later they incorporated their experience in the final play of the project. They played themselves the episode with the doctor and his visitor on the school stage.

*Poskakalova T.A.* Digital Storytelling as a Means of Education and Formation of Spiritual
and Ethical Values in Adolescence (on the Base of Classic Literature Material)
Psychological Science and Education. 2023. Vol. 28, no. 4

Table 1

## Characteristics of digital storytelling sessions

| | Goals and tasks | Content of the activities | Formed values |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Session 1.** **Pre-production stage** | 1.1. Getting acquainted with stop-motion animation.<br>1.2. Formulating the plot or the main idea of the cartoon.<br>1.3. Visualizing the plot with the use of digital storytelling technique (including the selection of means of artistic expression to enhance the morality of the story).<br>1.4. Conflict-free teamwork, development of patience towards others' opinions. | 1.1. Self-organize into teams, choose literary material for digital story (for the unmotivated teenagers — Chekhov's quotes (words of wisdom) previously studied and discussed; for the motivated teenagers — one of the Chekhov's short stories — «Enemies», «The weakling», «The Rook», «Surgery»).<br>1.2. Learn how to convey the text/ verbal content through a visual image — formulate the idea of a cartoon, create a brief script and a storyboard.<br>1.3. Distribute responsibilities among the team members. | 1. Orientation on moral values and norms in situations of moral choice, with an evaluation of the characters' behavior and actions in literary works, readiness to assess one's own behavior and actions, as well as the behavior and actions of others from the standpoint of moral and legal norms, taking into account the awareness of the consequences of actions; active rejection of antisocial actions, freedom, and personal responsibility in the context of individual and social space[3].<br>2. Development of moral feelings (honesty, duty, justice, parliament and friendliness), development of empathy and maintaining a positive attitude towards people, supports positive life guidelines and planning[4]. |
| **Session 2.** **Production stage** | 2.1. Designing a situation of a moral choice for the cartoon character, the moment of his decision-making and analyzing its consequences.<br>2.2. Developing a critical view of the digital story, analyzing the integrity and logic cohesion of the statement.<br>2.3. Conflict-free teamwork, developing patience towards others' opinions. | 2.1. Draw preliminary sketches, backgrounds and characters, minding their movable body parts and elaborated ideas.<br>2.2. Shoot the first frames/ photos of the cartoon.<br>2.3. Redraw, correct or finish characters (puppets) and the backgrounds if there were misfortunes and mistakes during shooting.<br>2.4. Shoot photos in reversible technique according to the approved plot.<br>2.5. Try to montage the photo-material to assess the quality and correctness of it.<br>2.6. Re-shoot the photo-material if necessary. | |
| **Session 3.** **Post-production stage** | 3.1. Improving ICT competencies.<br>3.2. Increasing teenagers' unity, solidarity and social integration.<br>3.3. Developing the habit of completing what has been started, training for responsibility for work outcome. . | 3.1. Choose the necessary musical accompaniment or sounds.<br>3.2. Think up hashtags, a name of the cartoon, characters' lines, comments and subtitles.<br>3.3. Edit cartoons in the InShot application.<br>3.4. Critically assess the work done (whether moral content of the cartoon is clear).<br>3.5. Conclude and analyze the goal achievement. Discussion. | |

*Поскакалова Т.А.* Цифровой сторителлинг как средство воспитания и формирования духовно-
нравственных ценностей в подростковом возрасте (на примере литературного материала)
Психологическая наука и образование. 2023. Т. 28. № 4

Besides misunderstanding the charac-
ters' feelings and misinterpreting the essence
of the moral conflicts, the teenagers also
consider some moral statements (words of
wisdom) incomprehensible. For example,
the quote "An idle life cannot be pure" by
A.P. Chekhov confused the teenagers, as
they believed that the word "idle" does not
have a negative connotation. What is more,
the teenagers believed that if people were
resting 24/7 and enjoying pleasures, they
were truly happy, though such way of living
cannot be considered as meaningless or
lead to harmful consequences for both in-
dividual and society. One more example of
such mixing up the meanings is animated
interpretation of Chehov's quote "Life is like
a flower, growing luxuriantly in the field: a
goat comes, eats it and there is no flower".
Teenagers again saw it as an ability to live
a life joyfully and fully rather than the fragility
of life and brutality of actions that can take it
away in a moment. After some analysis and
discussions, the team of teenagers created a
cartoon, showing a person's foot stepping on
a flower, struggling to grow on the meadow
under the sun, and totally destroys it. This
plot, in their opinion, reveals carelessness to-
wards the surrounding world, including living
nature, though they reflected the idea of the
quote quite directly and failed to recognize
a metaphor. Interestingly, in the teenagers'
team, worked on this quote, there were two
competing leaders who could not agree with
each other . However, another girl later joined
them and since then all the team started
working productively and managed to com-
plete the cartoon. The situation suggests that
the teenagers themselves were able to cope
with instability themselves and emerge from
it, showing friendliness and determination.

One more case of two boys S. and D.,
who used to stay apart from their classmates
before the project, demonstrates the similar
positive impact of participation in cartoon-
making project on interpersonal communi-
cation. Their learned helplessness led to the
fact that in the first session they even did not
start working, as they had not had prepared
for it properly, though they could not even
ask for help or borrow craft materials from
the classmates. They also did not dare to
approach the teachers, it was difficult for
them to form a request. Had discussed the
problems in the second session, they finally
chose the quote to work on. It was "There is
no better reward than the peace paid with
work", which they initially interpreted as the
need to earn a lot of money to be able to re-
lax and chill out. As a result, the boys came
up with a plot about building a public bath/
sauna, where after hard work on its con-
struction not only the builder, but also other
people could have a rest. However, during
the work, it turned out that the boys did not
get along with drawing and cutting out op-
erations due to underdeveloped motor skills.
They were very ashamed of their inability.
With the teachers' help the boys explained
the problem and asked the girl A. to join the
team. Not only three of them completed the
work but also became friends and now sup-
port relationships in free-of-school time.

Among other plots on a moral choice of
cartoon characters in a problematic situa-
tion, the most striking one was the plot due
to which teenagers help a young mother
who does not have enough physical
strength to drag the stroller with a newborn
into the porch. This episode reflected the
quote "While young, strong and full of life,
do not stop doing good things". Another
cartoon showed a story in which a pedes-
trian indifferently watches as a hooligan
breaks a snowman, made by a child. As a
punishment for indifference to the observed
actions of bulling and injustice, the pedes-
trian turns into a huge black hole. The idea
arose on the basis of the quote "Indiffer-
ence is the paralysis of the soul and a pre-
mature death". Thus, *the analysis of some
animated plots confirms that the cartoon
project participants after discussions and
team work in the sessions demonstrated*

*Poskakalova T.A.* Digital Storytelling as a Means of Education and Formation of Spiritual
and Ethical Values in Adolescence (on the Base of Classic Literature Material)
Psychological Science and Education. 2023. Vol. 28, no. 4

*a tendency to create social advertising, reflect on their experience, develop their own pro-social behavior, which resulted in decrease in conflicts in their daily school life as a whole*. In addition, personal changes in the team members were noticed by both the project participants and even those teachers who did not take part in the project but continue teaching these teenagers. For instance, Mrs Hegai, a teacher of Russian Language and Literature, noted that "the teens, involved in the project, have become more confident in answering during her lessons, their motivation for learning and self-esteem increased as well".

### Adolescents' perception of digital storytelling as a form of collaborative activity

Despite the fact that, when working on cartoons, the majority of teenagers in both subsamples experienced difficulties in joint activities and communication, by the end of the sessions the greatest dynamics in establishing relationships were observed among unmotivated teenagers. In their reflective diaries not once they noted that they learned to "work in a new company", "communicate normally with classmates", "negotiate and come to an agreement with other guys."

These changes were also confirmed by the empirical data. *Unmotivated teenagers to a greater extent saw in the cartoon creation activities an opportunity to make friends with classmates and unite* (23% of the unmotivated teenagers and only 6% of motivated teenagers) (Fig. 2). In their turn*, motivated teenagers saw more opportunities for development and personal growth*. Thus, they largely noted that they were able to discover new talents and interests in themselves (35% and 47% of unmotivated and motivated teenagers accordingly) and get acquainted with new creative activities (29% and 41% of unmotivated and motivated teenagers accordingly). The largest number of teenagers in both samples mentioned that, thanks to digital storytelling sessions, they were able to become better acquainted with works by Anton Chekhov (35% and 58% of unmotivated and motivated teenagers accordingly). This means that during sessions the largest number of teenagers paid attention specifically to the literary and semantic aspect of the activities.

Reflecting on the question whether animation experience would be useful in the future, unmotivated teenagers mostly answered "I don't know" or "it will be useful at work," while motivated teenagers thought about more realistic prospects. They as-
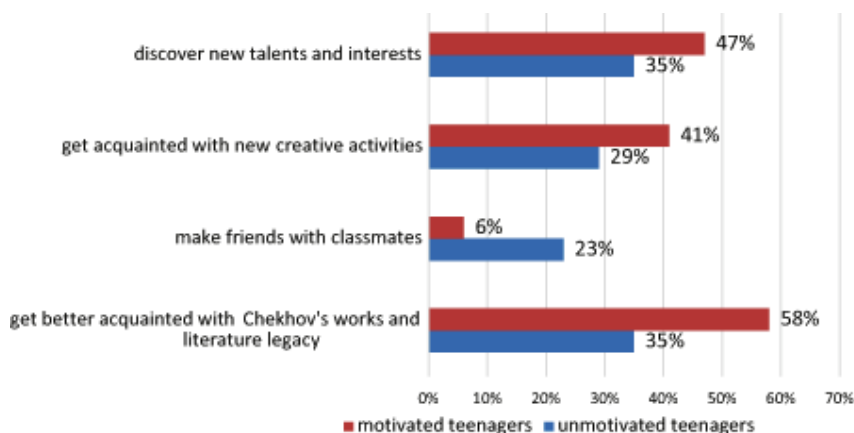


*Fig. 2.* The teenagers' assessment of the results and value of digital storytelling activities

*Поскакалова Т.А.* Цифровой сторителлинг как средство воспитания и формирования духовно-
нравственных ценностей в подростковом возрасте (на примере литературного материала)
Психологическая наука и образование. 2023. Т. 28. № 4

sumed that they would be able to imple-
ment their obtained knowledge "in creat-
ing projects at school", in such classes as
"Technology and Fine Arts", "in some other
creative activity", they would also be able to
"help children in the future", etc.

In both subsamples the empirical study
demonstrated a difference in teenagers' mo-
tives and in the assessment of their anima-
tion activities. A quarter of motivated teen-
agers noted that they achieved their goals
and completed assignments in class, but
not a single teenager from the subsample
of unmotivated teenagers noted that they
completed the work to the end. At the same
time, the majority of unmotivated teenagers
answered that they could produce cartoons
(45% of the subsample) or were ready to try
(22% of the subsample) (Fig. 3).

Interestingly, absolutely all motivated teen-
agers noted that they felt passionate while
working on cartoons (100%), among unmoti-
vated teenagers this number reached 71%. At
the same time, 22% of unmotivated teenagers
experienced frustration and dissatisfaction
with themselves, 7% of unmotivated teenag-
ers felt fear that they would not be able to cope
with working on cartoons, that they would not
succeed. Also, after digital storytelling ses-
sions, 43% of unmotivated teenagers expe-
rienced fatigue, while none of such students
were found among motivated ones. Also,
among motivated teenagers, a significantly
larger number of project participants perceived
animation activities positively and would like
to develop in this direction (75%), while only
36% of unmotivated teenagers would agree to
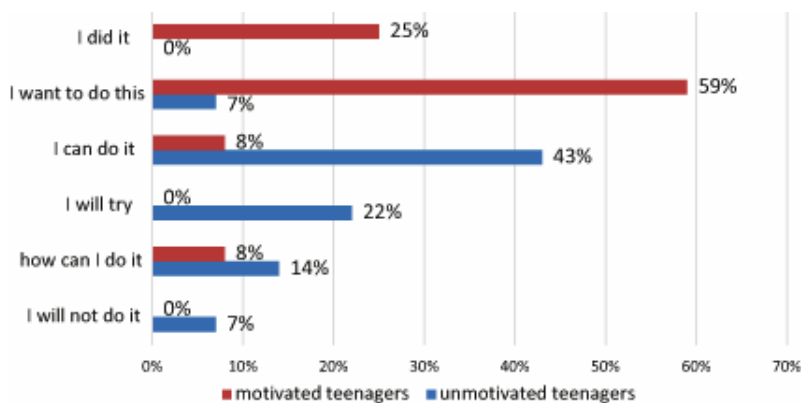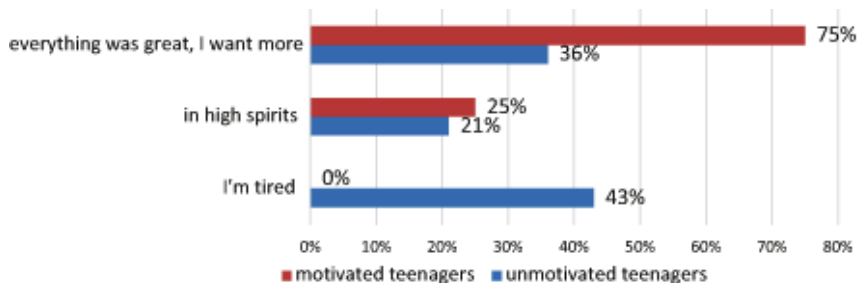continue producing cartoons (Fig. 4).



*Fig. 3.* Teenagers' attitudes towards digital storytelling classes



*Pic. 4.* Emotional perception of activity on digital storytelling production

*Poskakalova T.A.* Digital Storytelling as a Means of Education and Formation of Spiritual
and Ethical Values in Adolescence (on the Base of Classic Literature Material)
Psychological Science and Education. 2023. Vol. 28, no. 4

## Conclusions

The received data shows that digital storytelling as a practice-oriented pedagogical technology allows to solve a wide range of tasks from establishing interpersonal relations to creative development of teenagers. The mechanism of creating digital stories not only helps to develop digital competencies, understand the moral essence of classic literature, express one's opinion and attitude towards the studied problem, but also offers a range of opportunities to reduce conflicts among peers, instill moral traits in them and make teenagers confident in their abilities. While working on digital stories, based on literary material, regardless of team cohesion and motivation, such experience contributes to the formation of spiritual and moral standards of teenage behavior and the development of their pro-social active positions. Also cartoon creation activities increase discipline in a team as well as form such personal qualities as responsibility, goodwill, sociability and meaningfulness, etc. In addition, this pedagogical technology is perceived positively by teenagers, since teenagers promote its practical application in their school and extracurricular life, using skills of digital storytelling for personal purposes (for example, for promoting themselves and their products on the Internet, developing relationships with peers, etc.). Thus, digital storytelling meets the needs of the society (for the purpose of spiritual and moral education of youth), the state (as a new pedagogical technology), and teenagers themselves (as a way of socialization and solving psychological problems specific to their age and developmental stage).

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