Joanna Kłos, "Entry on: Extra History (Series): The History of Writing – Where the Story Begins / The History of Writing – The Alphabet by Extra Credits , Carrie Floyd, Daniel Floyd, Soraya Een Hajji, David Hueso, Joseph Maslov, James Portnow", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/792. Entry version as of October 10, 2026.

Extra Credits , Carrie Floyd , Daniel Floyd , Soraya Een Hajji , David Hueso , Joseph Maslov , James Portnow

Extra History (Series): The History of Writing – Where the Story Begins / The History of Writing – The Alphabet

Online (2016)

TAGS: Alphabet Egypt Greece Mesopotamia

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Extra History (Series): The History of Writing – Where the Story Begins / The History of Writing – The Alphabet
Country of the First Edition	Online
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2016
First Edition Details	*Extra History, The History of Writing – Where the Story Begin*s. James Portnow, Writer, Soraya Een Hajji, Script Supervisor, Daniel Floyd, Narrator, Producer, Carrie Floyd, Editor, David Hueso, Artist. June 4, 2016, 7 min 8 sec. / *Extra History, The History of Writing – The Alphabet.* James Portnow, Writer, Soraya Een Hajji, Script Supervisor, Daniel Floyd, Narrator, Producer, Carrie Floyd, Editor, Joseph Maslov, Artist. July 29, 2017, 6 min 12 sec.
Running time	7 min 8 / 6 min 12
Official Website	*Extra Credits* channel (accessed: June 18, 2019)
Available Onllne	*The History of Writing – Where the Story Begins* (accessed: June 18, 2019); *The History of Writing – The Alphabet* (accessed: June 18, 2019).

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Genre	Animated films, Instructional and educational works, Internet videos, Short films
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Joanna Kłos, University of Warsaw, joanna.klos@al.uw.edu.pl
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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Creators

Extra Credits

Extra Credits is a series of educational videos concerning mostly games. Created by animator Daniel Floyd in 2008, later, since 2010 with collaboration of games producer James Portnow and other artists; in a few years it became a highly popular online show with lessons about games as a medium, their topics, improvement, design, and other issues particular for gaming culture. At first connected to the online magazine The Escapist and then to Penny Arcade, in 2013 *Extra Credits* began to appear on their independent YouTube channel. So far, by the end of September 2017 *Extra Credits* acquired above 1.1 million subscribers.

In 2013 another cycle joined the channel: ***Extra History*** – videos on significant events and processes of world's history; usually these consist of animated shorts, and, occasionally, non-animated lectures, always enriched with some references to online editions of the sources or important Wikipedia entries in the description. A new episode of the series is published on YouTube every Saturday.

The episodes of both *Extra Credits* and *Extra History* are not animations in motion, but sequences of illustrations flipped quickly one after another with the narrator's voice sped up by 10 percent. All of this gives the show a very fast pace, making it easily accessible for modern viewers who tend to be easily bored by long speeches or texts and slowly moving audiovisuals – one must remain all the time focused in order to catch all of the information; moreover, the illustrations are prepared in a way that can be viewed as amusing and stimulating imagination, sometimes with the use of material such as photographs or Internet memes in order to represent past events and concepts in an unexpected manner.

Sources:

Wikipedia profile (accessed: June 18, 2019)

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List of *Extra Credits* episodes (accessed: June 18, 2019)

"The Show" & "Our Current Team" at the website of *Extra Credits* (accessed: June 18, 2019)

Prepared by Joanna Kłos, University of Warsaw, joanna.klos@al.uw.edu.pl

Carrie Floyd

Carrie Floyd is a video editor of *Extra Credits* and wife of Daniel Floyd. The only information about her available to date can be found on *Extra Credits*' website – a list of her favourite games: *Undertale*, *Minecraft*, *The Sims*.

Bio prepared by Joanna Kłos, University of Warsaw, joanna.klos@student.uw.edu.pl

Daniel Floyd (Animator)

Daniel Floyd is an animator who received professional education at Savannah College of Art and Design and at online animation school Animation Mentor. It was during his graduate studies that he prepared the very first videos for *Extra Credits*; he continued with the project later because he felt the need to present information about game design in a more accessible way than written texts. He still remains the animator of the series, and being also its narrator, he calls himself "the high-pitched talky guy." In 2010–2013 he was hired by Pixar in Canada: he worked on *Toy Story* and animated series *Cars*;

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since 2013 he works for Undead Labs games studio.

In his private life, Floyd is the husband of Carrie Floyd, video editor of *Extra Credits*.

Source:

LinkedIn profile (accessed: July 3, 2018).

JS*Media YouTube Channel, *Extra Credits: The Complete Testimonials* (accessed: June 18, 2019)

Bio prepared by Joanna Kłos, University of Warsaw, joanna.klos@student.uw.edu.pl

Soraya Een Hajji (Screenwriter, Scriptwriter)

Soraya Een Hajji holds a BA in Classics and History from Brown University. She worked previously in the field of marketing. Since 2012 she has been the media director of *Extra Credits*, and since 2013, the co-director of volunteering program at GaymerX, a yearly convention devoted to games concentrated on queer and LGBT-related topics.

Source:

LinkedIn profile (accessed: June 18, 2019)

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Bio prepared by Joanna Kłos, University of Warsaw, joanna.klos@al.uw.edu.pl

David Hueso (Artist)

David Hueso is an animator, illustrator and artist who worked, including for LEGO, Disney and Archaia Press comic and graphic novel imprint. Together with the writer Rufo Ayuso he is the author of the comic *Sons of the Forgotten*, published online in chapters.

As the rest of the *Extra Credits* crew, he is deeply interested in games, *Dark Souls*, *Overwatch*, *RPG* and survival games among his most favourite ones.

Source:

Profile at deviantart.com (accessed: June 18, 2019)

Bio prepared by Joanna Kłos, University of Warsaw, joanna.klos@al.uw.edu.pl

Joseph Maslov (Artist)

Joseph Maslov, a graduate from San Francisco School of the Arts (2009), illustrator, animator and storyboard artist, is a freelancer preparing graphics and videos for different corporate clients.

Sources:

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Instagram profile (accessed: June 18, 2019)

Twitter profile (accessed: June 18, 2019)

Bio prepared by Joanna Kłos, University of Warsaw, joanna.klos@al.uw.edu.pl

Retrieved from the profile of Vancouver Film School at flickr.com, licensed under CC BY 2.0 (accessed: December 30, 2021).

James Portnow (Director)

James Portnow has a BA in Classics from St. John's College in New Mexico and an MA in Entertainment Technology from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Largely inspired in his childhood by *Final Fantasy 1,* he became a designer, writer and consultant of games – now he is CEO of Rainmaker Games, and Interim Design Director for video games publisher Snow Cannon; among his most recognized projects are *Call of Duty* and *Farmville* games. He also teaches at DigiPen Institute of Technology.

Portnow considers games "the world's first interactive media," because games are not merely receivers, but also participants. He claims to be interested in RPG and strategy games, as their purpose is to stimulate the intellect, and considers that games industry should feel responsible for providing children with something more than time-consuming entertainment.

Sources:

Profile at the website of Snow Cannon Games company (accessed: June 26, 2018).

LinkedIn profile (accessed: June 26, 2018).

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Twitter profile (accessed: June 26, 2018).

The Many Roles of James Portnow, March 19, 2013 (accessible at news.digipen.edu/, accessed: June 18, 2019)

Jasper, Tyler, *Interview with James Portnow of Extra Credits*, Siskiyou. The Voice of SOU Students, June 2, 2013, accessible at siskiyou.sou.edu, accessed: June 18, 2019).

Bio prepared by Joanna Kłos, University of Warsaw, joanna.klos@student.uw.edu.pl

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Additional information

Summary

For the ***Extra Credits*** and ***Extra History*** series, see the entry on the Punic Wars in the same series.

The History of Writing – Where the Story Begins

From the brief introduction we find out that *Extra History* rarely deals in their videos with the history of ideas, so the team thought of preparing this animation as an experiment. The film's main topic is the history of the concept of the written word, which is as old as 5600 years. At first, basic functions of writing are enumerated: it is used "to give instructions, express ourselves, to communicate ideas"; it helps us in "understanding the universe, our understanding of each other and our understanding of ourselves".

Next, follows the narration about how writing was invented: in ancient Sumer, where the first cities in the world were founded, temples grew along with the cities. The temples also served as warehouses for the city's supplies. It was necessary to record and catalogue the resources of the temple – so the priests were drawing tally marks on small tablets. They also began to use symbols illustrating the goods. Those symbols after some time became simplified and more abstract. What is more, people realized that those symbols can refer not only to objects as such, but also to words denoting them – a symbol of cow can mean either the animal or its name. Obviously, the system representing exclusively the nouns wasn't sufficient. Yet thanks to, as the narrator calls it, "a happy accident for linguistics" – the Sumerian language consisted of short monosyllabic words, combined to create longer ones; thus, the symbols could mean also the sounds and this enabled people to express anything in writing.

Sumer was also the place where the convention of writing from left to right started – as clay tablets were soft and it was easy to erase the signs while writing from bottom to top. But for people reading from top to bottom was more comfortable, so the scribes decided to rotate the characters 90 degrees in order to make it possible to read the tablet from the top. Once rotated, the signs became once again more abstracted, and even more so, when the Akkadians and Elamites adapted their writing systems. This development resulted in "a system of writing that can give us things as abstract and lyrical as *The Epic of Gilgamesh* or the *Enuma Elish*". In the end the narrator states that

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writing is a gift that we owe to the Sumerian cities and points out that there were other places where writing developed independently: Mesoamerica, China; as for the Indus Valley and Egypt we can't be sure, yet *Extra History* favors the opinion that there the versions of the Sumerian concept were used.

History of Writing – The Alphabet

In many parts of the ancient world, we are told, the custom of writing faded away for a long time; it came back afterwards, but in different form: as alphabet.

Mesopotamian cuneiform writing system was syllabic and consisted of hundreds of characters which made it very hard to learn; thus, only a small group of people had time and abilities to become educated. Nevertheless, the syllabic system spread across the Mediterranean world – until the crisis leading to the disappearance of writing. Afterwards the story of alphabet, a writing system based on phonemes, began in Egypt where some of the hieroglyphs were symbols representing single sounds. Semites who migrated to Egypt took over these signs in order to write in their language.

In a later epoch Semites founded different states in the Levant – among them, Phoenicia, which became an important trading center. The trade supported the development of writing – but a new material became necessary, as clay was apt only to be used in stationary conditions, not during travel. The Phoenicians decided to write on papyrus. Three factors – a single phoneme writing system, a convenient material, papyrus, and a trading network – contributed to other cultures' adoption of the Phoenician writing. One such culture was Greece – as vowels in Semitic languages are rare, the Phoenician alphabet did not have the symbols for vowels, so Greeks had to reform the system in order to make it coherent with their language, full of vowels. Thanks to the Greeks the system spread to the West – first, Italy, and in time, the rest of Europe. This is also why the etymology of the word alphabet is Greek – it consists of the names of the first letters, *alpha* and *beta*.

Analysis

The two videos are concise retellings of material that appears in school textbooks or more advanced literature. But unlike textbooks,

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they are not focused on specific dates, but more on showing what exactly caused each episode in the history of writing. This way, they assist young people with learning basic information about the invention that shapes our lives. Despite being ancient and remains still necessary in digital era – the viewers can realize that the alphabet is necessary even for reading and writing YouTube comments about the films. This helps to preserve the classical world as a vivid and important topic for contemporary educational discourse.

Ancient Mediterranean societies are not presented in the video as flawless or as those which produced amazing people who today can serve as inspirations. From this particular narration, it appears that the great individuals were not responsible for the invention of writing, but that it was rather a joint creative effort of numerous societies.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Alphabet Egypt Greece Mesopotamia
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Communication History Knowledge Learning

Further Reading

GaymerX conventions' website (accessed: June 18, 2019).

Ayuso, Rufo and David Hueso, *Sons of the Forgotten*, online comic (accessed: May 14, 2018, currently not available).

De5ert Bus (Desert Bus for Hope YouTube Channel), *Interview: Daniel Floyd and James Portnow* (accessed: May 14, 2018, currently not available).

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