

Odd Collage: A Digital-Physical Collage Platform for Children

INFO 678: Final Project Report

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[Final prototype linked here](#)

Introduction

For my final project, I wanted to prototype a digital platform for kids because it's something I've never done before. In undergrad, I studied user experience research and design but pivoted away from designing tech because it didn't feel as creative as I wanted it to, however, when taking INFO 678 this past semester, I felt drawn to trying to design for kids because of the unique questions and opportunities it could afford. I originally wanted to design a workshop that invites kids to collage in real life and online, to reflect on how they present themselves digitally and in the real world. When I decided to pivot to creating a digital app, I wanted to stay on this thread of collage to create an art platform for kids to help them connect with their own emotions and with each other.

We did an activity in class called "Bag of Stuff" where I worked with two of our classmates, Margaret and Abby, to create a quick prototype for a product called "Odd Collage". The central idea of the product was a cute, kid-centric printer/scanner so kids could upload their physical art online or print digital art to remix with it in the real world. We wanted to create a product that allowed kids to easily switch between digital and physical making. We also wanted to include a social aspect to the product, so that kids could share their artwork with each other and remix and add to each other's pieces. I was feeling very inspired by memes, digital making, and appropriation when working on the product; I wanted the art platform to play to the strengths of digital image sharing where users are encouraged to build upon the work of others and make it their own, iterating on a similar theme or feeling. The idea of emotion also felt central to the platform, as memes and art can help kids express feelings that might not be easy to put into words. During this activity, we made a small paper prototype of what both the printer/scanner

and the online platform would look like. I loved this activity so much and it inspired me to take our idea a step further for my final project.



Summary: Odd Collage is a hybrid digital-physical art platform where children can upload, remix, print, and share collages in a playful, developmentally supportive environment. Designed for ages 6–13, the tool encourages emotional expression, creativity, and collaborative meaning-making through easy-to-use interfaces and a friendly companion scanner/printer. Odd Collage can be deployed in children’s libraries, after-school programs, or community arts spaces.

Audience: Odd Collage is designed for children ages 6–13, with flexible actions that support both emerging readers (ages 6–8) and more independent preteens (ages 9–13). Children in this

age range are developmentally ready to explore mixed-media creativity, develop emotional vocabulary, and begin experimenting with digital self-expression.

Location: This digital tool is designed for personal use, but could be found in a public library youth room, community arts space, or school media center. It can function as a drop-in activity on library computers or be facilitated as part of a structured arts program.

Duration and Timing: Odd Collage can be used as a 60–90 minute workshop or as an open-ended creative station available during library after-school hours.

When I started designing the digital platform for Odd Collage, I began by brainstorming the concept and layout. I nanny a 3 year old named Larry and I did a little informal user research while we were hanging out to see how he interacts with different digital tools. He uses both his parent's iPad and desktop computer, but there is a bit more ease of use with the iPad because of his age. I was originally thinking that Odd Collage would be for 10-13 year olds, but playing with Larry made me think that it would be nice to have different areas for different age groups because I do think kids of all ages would benefit from and enjoy using the platform. Larry and I worked on the platform Canva to make his own collage, and he really enjoyed getting to pick from the elements they already had, while still making the artwork his own and reappropriating materials in interesting or unexpected ways. In researching and designing the product, I was consistently referencing the conceptual framework of low floors, wide walls, and high ceilings (Resnick, 2007, based on Papert, 1993): I wanted to create a platform that was easy to intuitively navigate, that allowed for freedom and experimentation, and was forgiving to errors. Larry made a super fun collage that ended up in my final prototype:



“ABCDEFG” by Larry, 3

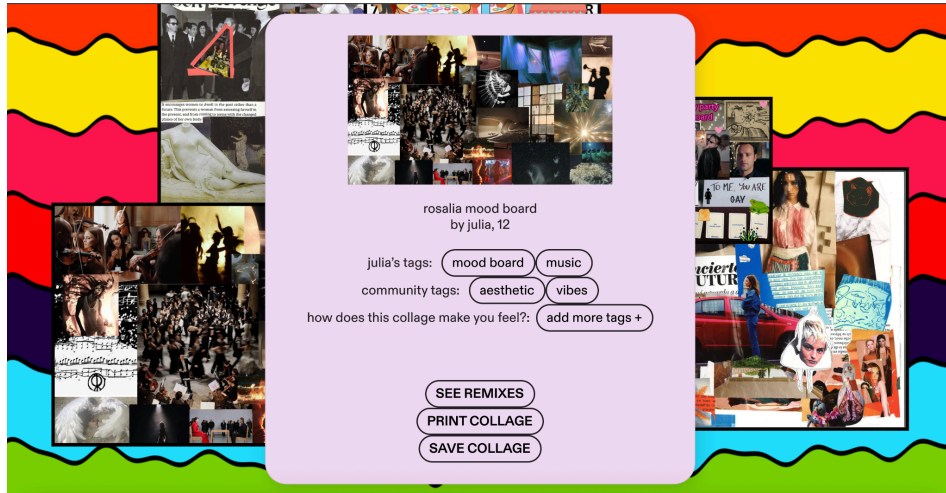
Next, I started planning the requirements, parameters, and information architecture:

Pages:

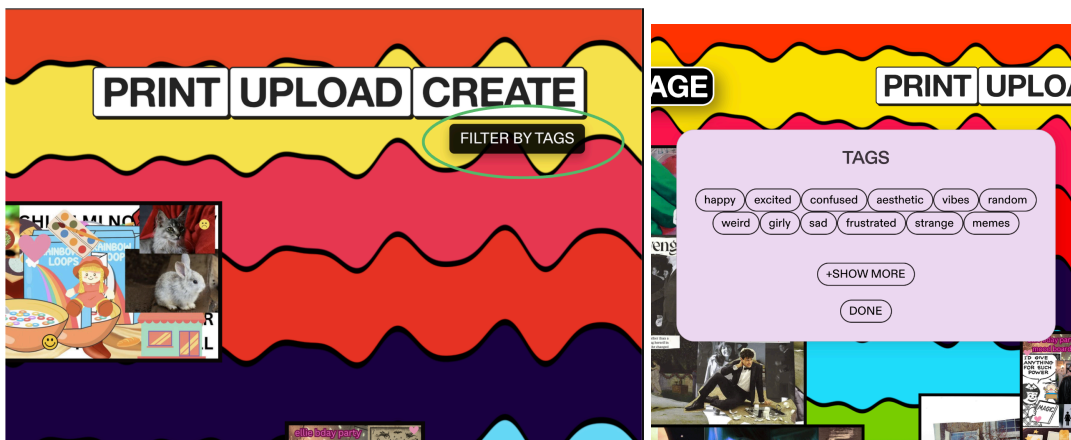
1. **Main gallery page** – this would be the homepage that kids would see upon entering the Odd Collage digital platform. The page would populate with all the recent art that other kids have uploaded. There would also be a daily prompt that encourages kids to create with their emotions front of mind.



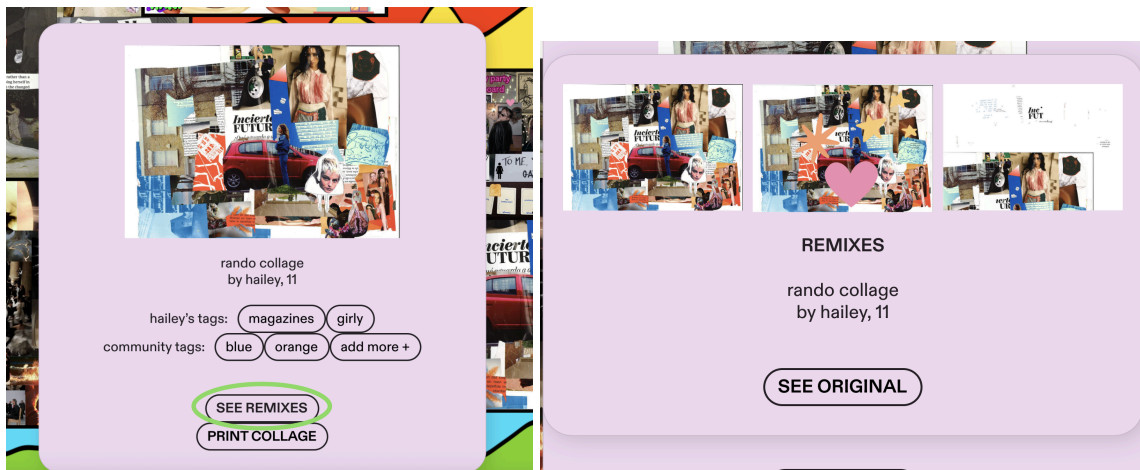
- a. Within the gallery page, kids should be able to click on each artwork. This would let them see the artwork closer up, along with the title and name of the artist (if artists choose to share this information – this is completely optional to share)



- i. **Tags** – each artwork would also have the tags that the artist wanted to include, as well as community generated tags. I didn't want to give kids the opportunity to like or comment on each other's artworks because I didn't want to replicate current social platforms which reinforce hierarchies. But, I still wanted to give them the opportunity to interact with each other's art, so I thought a tagging system would be a happy medium. Then, kids could also browse the gallery by tag.



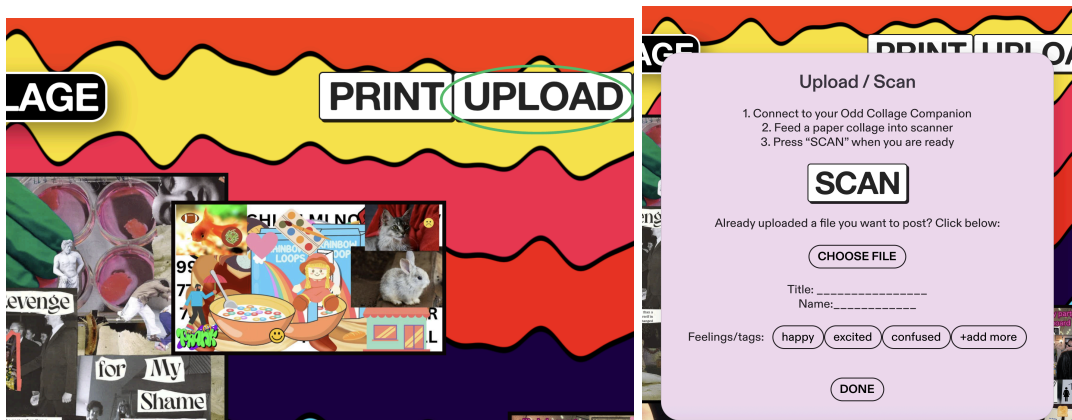
- ii. **Print** – each artwork would have a print button so that kids could print out other artworks and iterate on them. When reuploading artwork, detection software would be able to recognize if this was from an artwork within the site, and credit the original artwork.
- iii. **Save** – each artwork would have a save button so that kids could save the collages to their personal gallery. They could remix on these collages in the “Create” page (see point 4 below)
- iv. Artworks that were **remixed would all be linked together**. For each artwork, there would be the option to “see remixes”, and these remixes would all link back to the original artwork. I was thinking about Wikipedia and linked open data when working on this project as well, trying to create a linked website where you could trace artworks between each other.



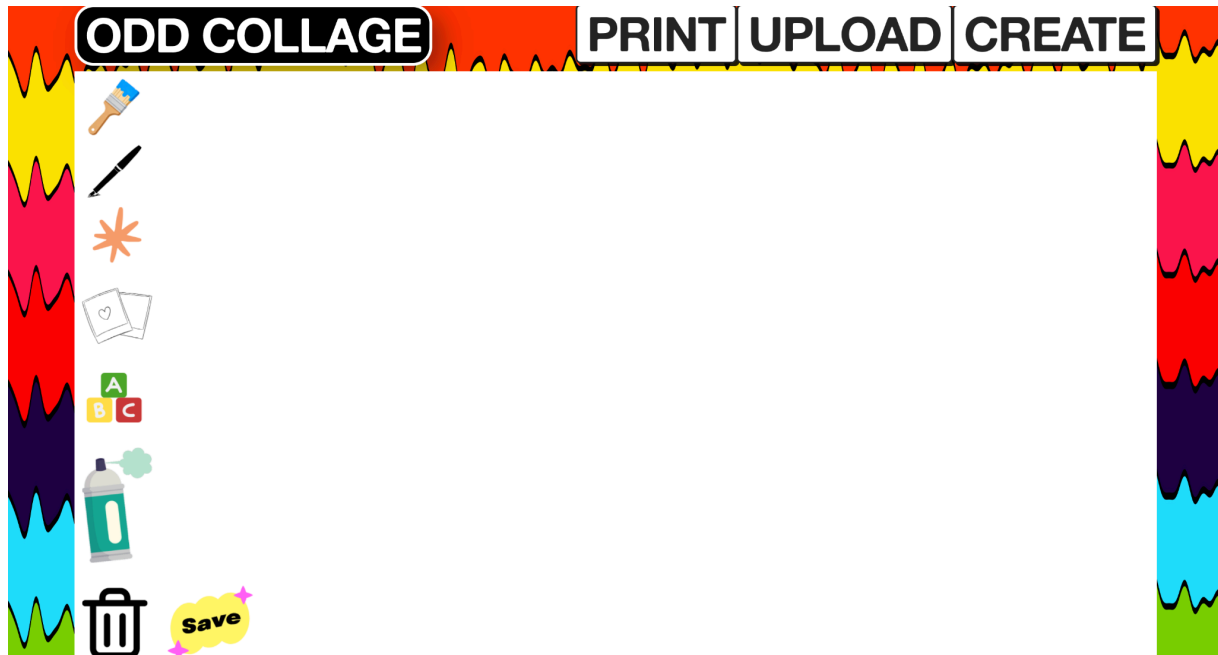
- 2. **Print button** – on the top nav, clicking on the “Print” button would just trigger a pop up that lets you know you can print any artwork by clicking on it on the gallery page.



3. **Upload button** – on the top nav, clicking on the “Upload” button would trigger a pop up where kids can either scan directly from their odd collage companion, or upload an already existing file. This gives them the option to title, author, and tag their artwork.



4. **Create page** – I wanted to add a page where kids could create digital collages directly from the interface. I was inspired by the creation applications of my childhood, like Kidpix and Microsoft Paint, as well as more contemporary platforms like Canva. On the nav bar, I gave options for paint, writing, text, uploading pictures, and using stickers. In this area, kids could import their friends' collages if they wanted to remix them. I made everything visual only to be as minimal, clear, and age diverse as possible.



Odd Collage Objectives:

1. Children will participate in both digital and physical art-making
2. Children will engage with their peers' artworks, remixing them and reflecting on them
3. Children will use description or emotion-based tags to label artworks, demonstrating introductory digital literacy and self-expression skills.

Why is Odd Collage good for youth?

Participation in Odd Collage will support children in building creative confidence, emotional vocabulary, and peer-connectedness. The platform intentionally avoids “like” counts or commenting systems, reducing hierarchical social pressures common in digital platforms. Instead, tagging systems and remix affordances promote collaborative creativity, flexible thinking, and positive identity exploration. Children leave with a sense of ownership, community, and empowerment in both digital and physical artmaking environments.

Research demonstrates that children need digital environments that support creativity, autonomy, and emotional exploration without the pressures of adult-oriented social media (Ito et

al., 2020). Additionally, collage, both digital and analog, supports emotional literacy by allowing children to express feelings symbolically when verbal articulation is difficult (Klorer, 2017).

Remixing artwork fosters perspective-taking and collaborative meaning-making, key components of socio-emotional development. By avoiding competitive metrics (likes, rankings), Odd Collage enacts principles from youth-centered digital well-being research, which highlights the importance of community-driven, non-hierarchical creative spaces (boyd, 2014). Odd Collage provides a developmentally appropriate, research-informed platform that addresses both creative and emotional needs of youth in digital spaces.

Conclusion

Designing Odd Collage allowed me to return to the parts of technology design that feel playful and community-driven. While this project began as a quick Bag of Stuff prototype, it evolved into a fully realized digital space that reflects my interests in collage, memes, children's media, and constructionist approaches to learning. Odd Collage sits at the intersection of digital literacy, emotional expression, and creative experimentation. It gives children permission to make something weird, iterate on each other's ideas, and move fluidly between the digital and physical worlds.

In the future, Odd Collage could expand to include safe accounts or a more fleshed out Create page. For now, the prototype stands as a proof of concept for a digital environment that honors children's creativity and offers a gentle alternative to mainstream social platforms. Ultimately, Odd Collage demonstrates how technology can support young people in developing creative confidence, emotional vocabulary, and a sense of belonging through shared artistic play.

References

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