Yo-Yo Proposal

For our group project for this semester, we have decided to present a piece of technology that will be familiar to everyone in the room, the yo-yo. The reasons for our choosing of this piece of technology are simple. Every single person in America knows what a yo-yo is. It is an incredibly common toy in this country even to this day.  We are certain the vast majority of people in this country have owned a yo-yo at some point during their childhood, and many of those people have fond memories of mastering the different tricks and techniques that can be done with the toy. With this in mind, we thought it would be interesting for the viewer to delve into the history and mechanics of this beloved piece of machinery. The tools we will be using to create this documentary are not vast or complicated at all. We will give our presentation using one or many different yo-yos (preferably of different varieties, wood, metal, plastic, etc.) and we will be using a small handheld tool to take apart the toys to demonstrate the inner workings of the mechanism. The structure for both our blog and our documentary will be as follows. We will start by presenting the history of the yo-yo, specifically it’s history in this country. Following this, we will discuss the yo-yo itself, including the mechanics that make it work.

The predecessor to the yo-yo was believed to have originated in ancient Greece as early as 500 B.C.(There is evidence that the toy has its origins in ancient China as well). Referred to as a Disk, these early toys were made out  of wood, metal, and terracotta. It was tradition for children during this time who came of age to offer their toys to the gods. Most of the Disks sacrificed were made out of Terracotta. Elsewhere in the world, during the 16th century in the Philippines, hunters would use a rock tied to a cord up to 20 feet in length to attack animals multiple times while hiding in trees. Examples such as these give further evidence to predecessors of the yo-yo originating from all over the world.  In 1928, a man named Pedro Flores emigrated from the Philippines to California and almost immediately founded the Yo-Yo Manufacturing Company. That same year, a businessman named Donald F. Duncan Sr. saw his first yo-yo in San Francisco while Pedro Flores was demonstrating the toy to a large crowd. Impressed by the toy, Duncan soon bought the company from Flores for more then $700,000 and renamed it to Duncan Company. Flores later said, “I am more interested in teaching children to use the yo-yos than I am manufacturing the yo-yos”. Duncan at this point had received the trademark for the word yo-yo in 1932, forcing his competitors to use other names for their own version of the toy. Examples include comeback, whirl-a-gig, returning top, and twirler. In 1946, Duncan moved to Luck, Wisconsin, now known today as the yo-yo capital of the world. This increased production to making 3,600 yo-yos per hour . In 1960, plastic yo-yos (that we still use to this day) began to be manufactured by Duncan Company. By 1962, the company sold a record 45 million yo yos in a country with only 40 million kids, and yet still could not keep up with the demands for their product. In later years, Duncan Company ran into legal troubles. In 1965, the Federal Court of Appeals ruled that the trademark that was held on the word “yo-yo” was no longer valid. This was due to the argument that the term yo-yo was so wide spread by this point in time that it no longer described the toy, it *was* the toy. That same year, Duncan Company was forced into bankruptcy, selling off all it’s equipment and assets, including it’s naming rights to Flambeau Plastics Company, who continue to manufacture yo-yos under the Duncan brand to this very day. There are eleven different models of Duncan yo-yos today, as well as countless other brands of the toy. The yo-yo has gone through many different phases throughout history, and continue to entertain millions of children today, not just in America, but all over the world as well, and hopefully will continue to do so for years to come.