

## Using Technology in the Elementary Classroom By Marilyn Western

### Using Technology to Get Kids Involved

Having spent more than a few years in the elementary classroom, I've watched educational trends appear with startling regularity (usually just as I'm almost feeling competent with the last 'wave' of educationally sound strategies). But I have found that the introduction of technology has caused the biggest shakeup in my teaching and learning. My lesson plan book no longer has neat listings of page numbers and worksheet notations. Instead, I have starting dates for numerous 'projects' with deadlines written on sticky notes (easier to move to next page in the plan book when I realize this project – as usually happens – will require more time) and file names of project requirements, resources, rubrics, etc. all neatly dated so I can figure out which is the most recent version of this project.

I have to admit that technology has freed my imagination and even given me the courage to present more open-ended projects for students to work on. This article will share a few of my favorite projects with you. Some things to point out first:

1. Many of my projects start out with comparisons and end with 'which would you choose and why'.
2. You'll find a nice mix of small group and individual projects. Kids need to learn to work both ways.
3. A lot of information can be found on the Internet, but also in current magazines, encyclopedias, books, and videos. The best projects have all available for students to use as needed.
4. I tend to limit students to web sites that I have previously chosen and previewed.
5. Project work is not silent. There is a steady blend of student voices conferring, videos being watched, and audio-enhanced web sites popping in and out. Project work is not for the faint of heart!

Some of my fav projects-

#### **How Do You...**

A great way to get kids involved in learning to sequence is to have them choose an activity that needs step by step directions. After listing the directions, they use a digital camera to take pictures illustrating each step (I introduce 6<sup>th</sup> graders to *screenshots* which help them illustrate the steps in various computer-related activities such as how to put a picture into a document, or how to copy and paste). The final product is a slideshow that includes a title + author slide, one slide for each step, and a last slide that shows the final 'product'. We print out these slides as handouts – 2 or 4 to a page, then cut them apart and bind as a book so students have a slideshow to present and a book to put into the class library until the end of the year when it goes home with the author.

#### **The State Report**

I can't recall how many stapled, handwritten state reports I've struggled to stay awake through over the years, but since I've revamped the whole idea to the 'compare and choose' strategy, I now get just as excited about the projects as students do! I've had several variations of this project (every year I tweak to make it a little better) but the main idea is to have students create a 10 day travel plan which includes a map, illustrated itinerary, and a series of required 'points of interest' presented in a manner of their choosing (a brochure, journal, photo album, etc). Their trip must start at the state capital, end at the state's largest city, and include museums, landmarks, bodies of water, a stop at a minimum of 2 sport stadiums and illustrations of the state bird, flag, rock, etc. By making this into a team effort, the work is split up and the project will take a shorter amount of class time than if the project was attempted by individuals.

#### **Variations on the State Report:**

**GeoGame** (<http://gsh.lightspan.com/GSH/project/gg/>) – From the GeoGame web site: "Students, with help from maps, atlases, and other reference materials, match the description of each location in the game with the name of the corresponding city." Get lots of resources for this one!

**The Planet Report** – Teams choose three planets to research. They choose the planet that they feel would be most conducive to humans setting up residence and design a home/space station based on the planet's particular gravity, atmosphere, day-length, etc.

**The Country Report** – Individuals or teams research and compare three countries - each from a different continent - and list 5 reasons for choosing one country of the three to live in.

**The Animal Report** – Teams choose three animals from a particular habitat, research and compare the animals, then give reasons for choosing one of the animals to live in their backyard.

**The Career Report** – Students take a pretest to determine their strengths at The Career Key <http://www.careerkey.org/english>. Based on their results, they choose and research three recommended careers at the Occupational Outlook Handbook found at <http://www.bls.gov/oco>. Their final report consists of which career they chose and why.

### **Simple Machines Exploration**

Partners check out a digital camera and explore the school, taking pictures of the six types of simple machines. These images are put into a slideshow, labeled, printed as handouts 4 to a page, cut apart and reassembled as a booklet.

### **Variations on digital camera projects:**

Look for examples of power sources, sequences, right angles, things that start with B, things that are 1”, magnets, liquids, cylinders, signs, opposites, one item from five different angles, etc.

### **Blogging**

There are many uses for classroom blogs, but my favorites are:

**Current Events** – Post a current event link (<http://www.kidsnewsroom.org>) and have students comment with their thoughts/reactions.

**Book Review** – Students post book reviews of their favorites

**Class discussion** – Students and teacher hold an online literature circle

**Quotes** – Post a quotation and let students figure out what it means and how it applies to themselves

**Writing Corner** – Students showcase their best creative writing efforts

### **Blog Resources:**

**BlogMeister** <http://epnweb.org/blogmeister/index.php>

**Blogger** <http://www.blogger.com>

As you can see, teaching has to match how students learn, and technology is a great way to inject interest, excitement, and higher level thinking!

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