

Using Technology in the Elementary Classroom By Marilyn Western

Kids Use Technology to Learn, Create, and Inspire to READ!

Have you come up with any new ideas for using your classroom technology to **learn** to read? Here are a few to get you started.

To review nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, play **Categories**. Create a simple table (four columns and at least ten rows) in a word processing document. The first row will be labels for columns. In cell A1 write the words *My name is*. Starting with cell A2, each student should write his or her first name – one letter in each cell of column A. If students have really short first names (like Joe) they can add their last names. In cell B1 write the word *Nouns*. In cell C1, write the word *Verbs*, and cell D1 can be labeled *Adjectives*. To ‘play’ the game, students need to fill in the remaining cells with a Noun (second column) that starts with each letter of their name. Each student will be reviewing what a noun, verb, and adjective is while coming up with examples of each. And students will be working with different required first letters if they each use their own name. Expand this exercise to other curriculum areas by changing the column headings (for example - social studies: cities and countries; science: plants and animals). Step by step directions can be found at <http://www.edzone.net/~mwestern/games/categories.pdf>

Expand vocabulary by creating a classroom **Glossary** for your next unit. Assign each student one vocabulary word. They are responsible for writing the word in large sized font (or use WordArt), locating (and putting into their own words) the definition and writing one sentence using that word. Let them loose on the Internet to locate a picture illustrating the word (make sure they cite their source) or they can draw an illustration using a paint program or they can draw by hand, scan, and insert into their page. Add a little oo la la by putting a border on the page. Print and arrange in alphabetical order. Assign a couple of those early finishers to create a nice cover for the glossary. Laminate the cover and bind the pages and you have a wonderful class book that should get plenty of use! We’ve made glossaries for space words, geography terms, math vocabulary, and computer terminology to name just a few.

Help younger students learn basic **Vocabulary** by getting them literally involved in the process. Take a digital picture of several students holding up 12” x 18” sheets of red construction paper. Make sure you can see their smiling faces! Insert that picture into a word document. Above the picture, write the word *Red* in a large font. Type in the students’ first names below the picture, then print in color. Continue with the rest of the color wheel – making sure all students are involved. Expand this project by taking the kids out on the playground and taking their pictures ON the swings, DOWN the slide, UNDER the monkey bars, etc. Create a bulletin board to read as a group once a week. A nice way to learn color and directional words as well as the names of students. Print a second round of these documents, laminate and bind for a classroom book that will be sure to be well-used. I tuck these treasures away in a file drawer and bring them out to disassemble and give to students in their Senior year. What happy memories!

If you haven’t visited the **Starfall** website at <http://www.starfall.com/> give it a try. Two levels – Level 1 aimed at K-1 and Level II for 1-2 – are perfect to use as a Reading Center. Starfall makes available “interactive books and rhyming word family games that teach phonemic awareness, comprehension, vocabulary building and spelling skills” for FREE!! If the Internet is not a smooth operation in your classroom, you can also print these books, worksheets, and writing journals for FREE or order them for a small charge. Or if you already have more Reading materials than you can handle during the day, consider using this website and/or print books as a home component to your current Reading program.

Help students learn more about their favorite authors by creating a hot list of **author web sites**. Many authors have their own sites with loads of information about themselves and their writings. You can find some awesome resources such as *The Children’s Literature Web Guide* <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/authors.html>, *The Seminole County Public Library* http://www.scpl.lib.fl.us/kids/kids_authors.html and *CanTeach* <http://www.canteach.ca/links/linkspecific.html> Do check out the author website in depth before you let kids loose. One way to give students directions to the site is to create a **hotlist** – either a word document that has embedded links or you can use a free online service such as *Filamentality* <http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/fil/> or *TrackStar* <http://trackstar.hprtec.org/> or *Web*

Worksheet Wizard <http://wizard.hprtec.org>. If you are concentrating on one author, try putting together a **Scavenger Hunt** for information about the writer. Students can work individually to fill in a worksheet, or in pairs to find the answer to single questions or as teams to locate specific information. You can collect more ways to use authors and literature in your classroom at *Children's Authors and Illustrators* <http://webtech.kennesaw.edu/jcheek3/authors.htm>

Your classroom technology can be a goldmine when students **create** reading. Have you tried any of these?

I had a five day K-1 **reading project** that I did on a weekly basis which didn't take too much effort on my part, individualized reading for each student, and delighted kids and parents. Day 1: Have students write one sentence in their own spelling. I found it helps to have a sentence starter such as "*I like to eat...*". Have them read it to you, pointing to each word (this may help you 'translate' later!). Before Day 2, type the sentences (large font) and cut each sentence into a long strip. Day 2: Distribute each sentence strip by reading each sentence aloud and have its owner raise his/her hand. Have them copy the sentence – noting correct spellings – under their original sentence. They should read aloud several times. Day 3: Students read their sentence strip aloud, then cut into individual words and scramble to use as 'flashcards'. Have them locate a word that has a long i sound, or one that has four letters, or one that shows an action, or put all words in alphabetical order, etc. After they've explored the words, they can glue their words on their paper in the correct sentence order. Day 4: Read their sentence aloud one more time and draw a picture to illustrate it. Day 5: Read all previous sentences (this part will get longer as the year goes on!).

Remember the Author web sites mentioned above? Using previewed websites, show students how to create an **author minibook**. You can find a template and directions for assembly at <http://www.edzone.net/~mwestern/tutorials/mini.doc>. These make great pocket books and require some thought and research by students. They are easy to share and take only one sheet of paper to make one eight-page book!

Students can show off what they know by creating slideshows to present to the class. How about assigning partners to create a **noun slideshow**? Each slide should name a noun category (common, pronoun, plural, etc.), have a definition, use it in a sentence and top it off with an illustration. Teach students how to bold nouns or use an arrow or circle or star autoshape to emphasize the noun in their sentence. These slideshows could also be printed out – two slides to a page, or 6 for a tiny book – cut apart and stapled as a pocket book. Apply the same idea to Verbs or compound words or homophones. The applications are endless!

A little creative thinking can **inspire** students to use technology to expand their reading skills.

Students can learn to expand their vocabulary by exploring the **thesaurus** tool in your word processor. Start out with a simple poem like *Mary Had a Little Lamb*. Have students use the thesaurus to replace the word *little* in the poem: *Mary had a petite lamb, diminutive lamb, tiny lamb. Mary had a miniature lamb; its fleece was white as snow*. Or use a few lines from a famous speech. *Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country* becomes *Inquire not what your country can achieve for you; ask what you can accomplish for your nation*. Does changing several words change the meaning of the work? Apply what they've learned to their own writings by selecting several words and replacing.

When students get tired of writing book reports (even though you've given them zillions of different options) inspire them to greater heights by having them create a **book review** for a book that doesn't exist! Turn a word document to landscape mode and create two columns. The left column should contain their book review which includes the name of the fictitious book, author, two or three sentences describing the plot and a couple of sentences rating the book (1-4 stars and the reason for that rating). Kids can get pretty creative with this! For example, one student reviewed a book called *My Secret Life as a Rabbit Herder By Bun E. Herenthere*. To really bring the book to life, use the second column to create a book cover for their creation. Include the title, author, illustration, and an Autoshape star with a special message such as *Now available in Australia!* What fun!

For a fun review, create (or have students create!) a **Jeopardy PowerPoint** slide show. You can find a free template created by teacher Mark Damon at <http://www.teachnet.com/lesson/misc/winnergame022500.html>. This template comes complete with everything you need to run your own classroom Jeopardy game. All you need to do is to figure out the six categories and five questions for each category ("I'll take Biographies for \$300"). Use genres, parts of speech, or story characters for categories and watch the fun!

All things considered, using the technology you have available can add some zip to your Reading curriculum. Just applying a little imagination to your curriculum will give your students something to look forward to as they learn, create, and inspire to greater knowledge!

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