

# Building Literacy with Technology in the Elementary Grades

New approaches to literacy  
through the use of creative  
technology tools



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# Making in English Language Arts

*Engage struggling readers by giving them authentic opportunities to practice, reading, writing, and illustrating.*



Technological innovations continue to make the world a smaller place, changing the nature of work and communication. In order to fully participate and thrive in a world steeped in information, students must be able to effectively locate and qualify information, apply it to solve problems, and effectively communicate ideas and solutions.

While today's classrooms may be full of digital natives, we still face the challenge of engaging those students who are not prepared for work at grade level and who are not interested in traditional activities.

The instructional response to at-risk students is often the application of more drilling, which further depletes their interest in school. Rote practice may seem like the fastest way to improve students'

reading scores, but this tactic does nothing to foster an essential lifelong love of learning.

Like all students, at-risk learners yearn to express themselves creatively, to do things in non-traditional ways, and to demonstrate successes. Students who are struggling with literacy are rarely asked to create literacy products, eliminating important opportunities for them to demonstrate their abilities and mastery.

Creative multimedia tools allow for multiple forms of representation, providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate understanding while practicing literacy skills through writing (text), reading (audio), and illustration (picture walks and visualization). "When students publish their own books, you tap into their innate desire for recognition as





they learn to connect to literature, play with language, and beam with pride at their accomplishments,” shares California educator Linda Oaks.

### Publish student-created eBooks

Younger students are often asked to retell stories. We can use the same strategy for struggling readers and writers. Instead of requiring students to complete a fistful of worksheets or to order the scenes of a story in a workbook, have students publish their retellings as electronic books. Once students are masters of basic comprehension, push them to develop storytelling and linguistic skills by creating new endings or developing completely different variations of the same story.

Students can use tools like Wixie to create their own version of books like *Mary Wore Her Red Dress* by Merle Peek. Such adaptations give students an opportunity to include themselves in the story as well as practice new vocabulary or descriptive writing. Publishing an eBook motivates them not only to work hard during the process, but encourages them to practice when they revisit their very own eBooks at home.

Combining visuals with text gives students an opportunity to demonstrate learning without struggling to tell their story solely using words. Recording student narration provides an opportunity for nonthreatening practice as they record, listen, record again, listen, and finally save. The recordings also provide performances you can use to assess fluency.

### Have students “flip” the classroom with their own how-to tutorials

In a flipped classroom, students explore a variety of resources such as videos, web sites, and simulations at home and return to class to address misconceptions and explore additional questions with their teacher. Having students create flipped class resource videos

helps them grapple with the content they are learning while providing an opportunity to for expository writing in a format they most likely have seen or used before, such as Khan Academy-style videos in school or how-to online videos about Minecraft or making rubber band bracelets.

Second-grade teacher Katy Hammack found that after innumerable worksheets and countless review activities, many of her Title I students still lacked mastery over grade-level grammar and language skills. After creating her own grammar tutorials for student review, she began to ask her students to create them instead. She immediately noticed her students more quickly internalize grammar concepts and found that they were also “so proud when they saw their work being used by other students!”

### Create as a response to literature

There are lots of ways to evaluate student comprehension beyond character trait charts, plot summary worksheets, and stereotypical book reports.

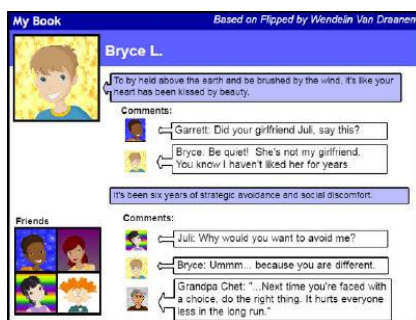
Students can show what they know by creating scrapbooks or developing social media-style profiles for characters they are reading about. These projects can

include plot summaries as well as direct quotes. Regardless of the exact format, students’ deliverables are intended to demonstrate their understanding of point-of-view in ways that go beyond a simple copy and paste.

You can also ask students to design covers for books they have read or

create book trailers to encourage other students to try a title in the school library. To connect to a potential reader, students need to understand the book and connect the story to their own experiences, helping them see how the content is relevant to them and the people who will view their projects.

The visual nature of these products allows students who struggle to read and write to demonstrate understanding by utilizing pictures and music as well as



text. As they learn to think about audience and utilize the tools of propaganda and methods of persuasion, they build powerful skills in argument and media literacy.

## **The Big Picture**

Regardless of the activities you choose to do with your students, keep the following ideas in mind.

### **Read and write in authentic ways**

Students need (and want) to practice reading and writing in real-world situations. Technology helps us make this connection by asking students to use tools to create the types of products they see in the world around them.

Try to make sure every day includes time to apply literacy skills in projects that also have value and meaning beyond a specific learning goal.

### **Publish for a real-world audience**

At the very least, make sure students are doing work that is similar to work done by people outside of the classroom or would have value to someone outside of the classroom. Even better, ask students to do work that will actually be seen by, evaluated by, and used by someone outside of the classroom.

All of these things indicate to students that their work has value and meaning. Technology makes it easy to share student work with a wider audience, whether

they are creating eBooks, comics, cartoons, or public service announcements.

### **Give students a voice**

Student work should reflect the creator, not the instructor. One student's final work should not look the same as another student's work. Sure, we can scaffold early work with templates, but too much structure focuses student work solely on "correct" content, not representation or meaning. If our projects assume there is only one right answer for content and delivery, we aren't asking the right questions.

Take some time with a process like Understanding by Design to ensure you are clear on the goals for student learning. Many district lesson plan templates include great questions like: What will students know as a result of completing this lesson? Also include questions like: What will students be able to do as a result of completing this project? Sometimes this is simply a matter of remembering to focus on process learning as well as content learning.

Asking open-ended questions and using open-ended and creative technologies can help you engage your students in important reading and writing practice as well as help them develop powerful literacies that will serve them in our rapidly changing world.

# Informational Text Projects That Build Thinking and Creativity

*Ideas for helping you move student work from ordinary knowledge to extraordinary thinking.*



New demands for literacy instruction require an emphasis on both literature and informational text. But student work with informational text doesn't have to be a dry regurgitation of facts. In fact, putting a creative spin on student performance tasks can turn informational text projects from ordinary into extraordinary.

You don't have to undertake a massive instructional shift to keep students from rote work and a simple copy and paste. Here are some ideas for unique and creative projects and products that get students thinking about the content they are reading.

## 1. Trading Cards

Trading cards are a form of

informational text that even young students are familiar with, even if they aren't baseball or Pokémon fans. Creating a classroom set of trading cards for historical figures, rainforest animals, or even elements on the periodic table, provides a fun way to learn, and review, information about a topic you are studying.

The first time a child gets a pack of trading cards, they may read each one top to bottom and right to left; but

once they start a collection, they learn to use the features of nonfiction texts to quickly find information. Asking them to create their own trading cards, builds their fluency in utilizing headings, labels, and images as they use informational texts in the future.

Hero - Ruby Bridges	
	<p><b>Going to school!</b></p> <p>In 1960, Ruby Bridges and her family decided she should go to an all-white elementary school.</p> <p>A judge ordered that schools in New Orleans must allow Blacks starting on November 14th. Only one teacher, Barbara Henry agreed to teach Ruby.</p> <p>The police had to escort her to school every day the first year.</p> <p>Ruby Bridges was very brave.</p>
Location: New Orleans, Louisiana      Year: 1960	

Because trading cards are small, students must also carefully choose which information they need to include for their user. As they work to summarize, students must evaluate information and determine its importance, improving their comprehension of the topic.

The process of creating a trading card, printing it out, and sharing it with classmates, also helps students connect the work they are doing in the classroom with their lives outside of it.

## 2. eBooks

Like trading cards, students are seeing more and more people outside the classroom reading electronic books and may even be using a digital textbook at school. Students are motivated to create and publish their own eBooks, and see their efforts as valuable; especially when the intention is to publish them for an audience outside of the classroom.

Emerging readers and writers may need to scaffold their research and writing with worksheets that outline what they should include, but older and more experienced learners may need to be pushed so that they don't simply copy and paste information directly from their research into their eBooks. You can avoid this problem by asking them to create books in ABC, Associative Letter, or even Fact or Fiction style.

### ABC Books

The content in an ABC book is organized around the letters of the Alphabet. For example, an ABC Book on the Desert of the American Southwest might include pages like: A is for Armadillo, B is for Bighorn Sheep, and C is for Coyote.

### Associative Letter

You might also try an associative letter project. In this format, all information is organized around a single letter. For example, an associative letter report on the

Revolutionary War might contain pages like: Militia, Massacre, and Midnight Ride.

### Fact or Fiction?

In this format, students craft individual statements about their topic followed by the words "fact or

fiction?" on a page. Then, they write the answer (fact or fiction) and provide evidence to support their conclusion.

## 3. Comics

Creating a comic strip is also a great way to get students thinking about the informational texts they are reading. Like trading cards, the limited amount of space in a comic's panels requires students to choose

the most significant points in a text or story. This summarizing, combined with the extensive use of nonlinguistic representations in comics, improves student comprehension.

Great writing combines all three forms of written communication expressed in the Common Core State Standards; narrative, informational, and argument writing. Creating comics based on informational texts helps students more easily connect this information as

they develop narratives to share information or arguments to raise awareness and change behavior. Sequencing and logic are crucial to good storytelling, and students quickly learn that they can't simply jump forward in time or around in space.

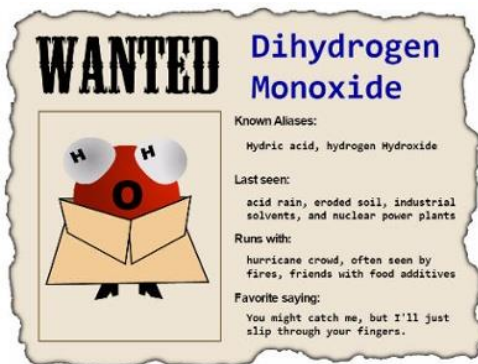
## 4. Wanted Posters

Creating a Wanted poster for a person, place, or thing is a highly engaging performance task that requires students to think but doesn't require a lot of technical expertise to create.

Students can begin Wanted posters with simple identifying physical features and then move further to include information about qualities that make an object or person unique and connect to its time and place in the world. For example, asking students to identify a



[View a sample student project](#)





“last seen” or “often found in” location provide an opportunity for them to demonstrate what features and characteristics look like in action.

## 5. Infographics

While infographics are popular in the media right now, they are more than just a passing fad. These visual representations of knowledge and information make complex ideas and large amounts of data easy to understand and have quickly become a powerful form of digital-age communication.

Crafting an infographic to help convey the important information and ideas is a great way to get students thinking more deeply about the information they are reading. To craft an effective infographic, students must identify:

- What is important?
- How can information be organized?
- Is there a hierarchy, sequence, or pattern?
- What ideas and information connect to other ideas and information?

Yes, infographics can be highly complex if they are based on large amounts of complex data. But infographics can also be clear statements of priority and action, like a Top Ten list.

## 6. Interviews

Science and social studies are filled with big ideas and concepts, not to mention remote time periods and locations. To help students make sense of some of these concepts, ask them to craft an interview with a connected object. For example, students could interview:

- The hydrogen atom that is part of the water molecule
- The Great Sphinx of Giza
- The life of a trafficked pangolin

- The feather in Paul Revere’s hat or even Paul Revere himself.

Crafting a fictitious interview can help bring abstract scientific concepts to life and make history more personal. It also helps students learn how to ask questions. Their formulation of the questions also helps

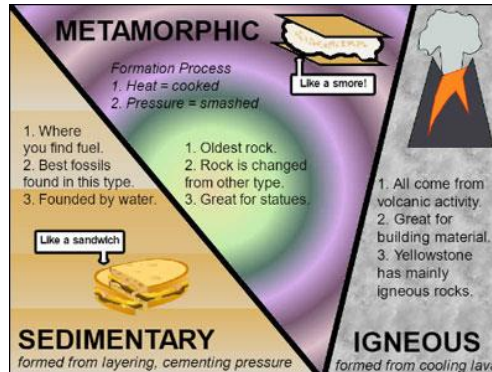
you better evaluate their comprehension of big ideas behind the facts they find.

Because they are written in first-person perspective, students must empathize with their subject and can’t simply copy and paste information or regurgitate facts. Interviewing helps students identify

the perspective of a historian or scientist as they personify the object with gender and other human characteristics.

## 7. News Broadcast

News broadcasts are much more sophisticated and time consuming but make for a great culminating task in the content classroom. Before an end of the year review, or even exam, ask teams of students to choose a topic you studied and share their knowledge in this engaging format.



[View a sample student project](#)

Like comics, writing a News Broadcast requires students to use narrative writing techniques to deliver information. Crafting a News Broadcast helps students think about techniques the media uses to attract viewers and keep them watching, building essential media literacies.

## 8. Public Service Announcements

Many important issues today, like climate change and health, can help you connect your students to the content they are learning in science and social studies. Asking students to craft a public service announcement



(PSA) to raise awareness or change behavior, lets them know their work and efforts are valuable and can have a real impact on the world around them.

Science, with its connection to issues that many students are passionate about, is a great place to ask students to develop public service announcements. Creating a PSA is also a powerful performance tasks for social studies and requires students to practice skills in all four dimensions of the C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards.

**Dimension 1.** Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries

**Dimension 2.** Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools

**Dimension 3.** Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence

**Dimension 4.** Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

Developing PSAs provides a great connection to skills learned in English Language Arts classes as well. Students must research deeply, identify fact versus opinion, develop claims and the evidence to back them to write an effective argument.

### Getting Started

Choose the product or performance task that you think will work best in your classroom with your students and which most effectively provides them with an opportunity to practice reading and writing in real-world situations, with a real-world audience. Creative performance tasks like these products not only lets students know their work has value and meaning it provides an opportunity for students to ask their own questions as they make sense of content and find meaning in the curriculum, not just provide a “correct” answer.

# Splat... Pow... Wow...

*Making learning fun with comics, cartoons, and graphic novels*



While comics, cartoons, and graphic novels have been around for years, recent movie blockbusters based on comics and graphic novels, including *Fantastic Four*, *Spider-Man*, *300*, and *Watchmen*, have fueled even more interest in the genre. Art Spiegelman's graphic novel memoir of the Holocaust, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, has also helped to elevate the graphic novel to a more respected genre.

As educators, we're always on the lookout for ways to use popular culture to engage our students. The creative application of comics, cartoons, and graphic novels provides an opportunity to connect our classrooms to the world outside, making learning relevant to students' lives.

Finding ways to motivate students to read is crucial in our quest to build student literacy. Integrating graphic novels into your reading program is a great way to reach out to reluctant readers and help them view reading as a pleasurable activity. Nearly every teacher can tell you a story about a student whose interest in

reading soared after being introduced to stories in comic or graphic novel form.

The comic book genre can help us engage students, improving literacy skills as they explore content in new ways. Kids think that comics are fun... so let's capitalize on that interest to promote learning and improve comprehension and thinking skills!

Brain-based teaching tells us that students learn by doing. Having them create their own comics as a form of expression and communication will provide additional opportunities for learning.

## **Increasing Achievement with Comics**

A comic book is a combination of pictures and text that tell a story through a series of panels. When developing their own comic books and graphic novels, students practice summarizing and creating non-linguistic representations—two of the instructional strategies proven to boost student achievement. (Marzano et al., 2001)

Creating nonlinguistic representations of knowledge requires students to organize and elaborate on the information. Marzano and team state, “the more we use both systems of representation – linguistic and non-linguistic – the better we are able to think about and recall knowledge.” Comics are a natural marriage of these two forms of representation.

Because comics require illustration, they validate the learning needs and strengths of visual learners who may need more than words to convey meaning. The illustrations required by the comic genre also support second-language learners in our classroom, allowing them to demonstrate knowledge even when they don’t know the words.

Summarizing involves deleting, substituting, and evaluating which information is most crucial for meaning, requiring students to engage in detailed analysis of the content. The limited amount of space in a comic’s panels requires students to choose the most significant points in a text or story. Their completed comic then provides a vehicle for assessing each student’s comprehension of the ideas in the content they are reading.

## Comic Themes

When you consider comics and graphic novels, you cannot help but imagine a superhero struggling against “the forces of evil.” Each of us has someone we admire and can call a hero. Using a heroes theme focuses student work with biographies, and provides a natural fit with studies during Black History Month and Women’s History Month.

Heroes, or heroic qualities, are also a useful vehicle for exploring the myths and legends of other cultures. We believe we can learn from a hero’s triumphs or mistakes, so a good myth or legend includes a heroic journey that we can relate to our own lives. Exploring

what makes a hero and defining the characteristics that make a person a hero supports character education. Developing myths and legends of their own can help students explore possibilities for overcoming challenges in their own lives.



## Characteristics and Composition

Students can learn a lot about effective communication as they study the characteristics of successful comic books and graphic novels. Telling stories in a limited space requires comic authors to carefully consider composition, viewpoint, and character expression. How these elements are combined into text and illustrations will determine how the reader interprets the story.

The pace of action in a comic is real-time—it happens as fast the reader progresses. Students need to determine how they want to structure their story within the panels so that it progresses at the pace they intend. Using many panels leads the reader to believe that the action is occurring at a rapid pace. A single, highly detailed panel slows the reader down while providing lots of information that can help set up a future scene.

Comics also provide an opportunity to explore tense. Since dialogue is viewed as present tense, students

need to be creative in demonstrating events that occur in the past. A simple caption may suffice, but age differences, dream sequences, and remote settings can also achieve this effect. As students brainstorm strategies for showing events in the past, they build stronger vocabularies and skills that will help them establish mood in their non-

comic writing.



When creating comics, students learn to guide their readers’ thoughts and feelings with pictures and dialogue, building more sophisticated communication skills that will help them as they work on debate and persuasive writing projects. The space between panels also requires a reader to infer or imagine what is



happening, requiring students to provide context and clues to help the reader make correct inferences.

Sequencing and logic are crucial to good storytelling, and students quickly learn that they can't simply jump forward in time or around in space. Grouping different scenes together leads to non sequiturs, confusing the reader. A series of events that do not include the important elements of plot can lead the viewer to the wrong conclusion.

Successful comic authors also employ point of view in both images and text. When developing their comics, students need to choose between first and third person. The first-person perspective helps them connect with the reader; the third-person perspective is often more versatile. Developing illustrations that show perspective helps students create a richer mental picture of "I felt..." or "I jumped at..." This gives them more information to draw on when adding descriptions and detail to other narratives.



As students learn skills and techniques to tell their stories, they will also start to realize how the media uses those same techniques to capture viewer interest and lead viewers to specific conclusions. As they learn to succeed as media producers, students also naturally become more savvy media consumers.

Having students showcase their ideas using comics and graphic novels is yet another tool you can add to your bag of tricks to make learning relevant and fun!

## References and Resources

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). Classroom instruction that works:

Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement. Alexandria, VA: ASCD

Westby, C. (2005, Sept. 27). Language, Culture, and Literacy. The ASHA Leader, pp. 16, 30.

# Lesson Plans

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The following lesson plans provide specific, detailed examples of the ways creative technology tools can be applied in the elementary literacy curriculum to engage students in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Each lesson includes:

- the **task** students will perform,
- ideas to **engage** students in the content,
- a description of what students will **create** with a technology tool,
- ways to **share** student work beyond the classroom walls, and
- tips for **assessing** student work.

# Design a Book Cover

*Students create a new cover design for a book they are reading to demonstrate comprehension and explore character, plot, setting, symbolism, and conflict.*



## Task

Students just aren't checking books out of the school library as often anymore. The librarian is hoping to remedy this situation by making the books that are in the library look more appealing!

After finding a book you enjoy, encourage other students to read it by creating a new cover design to entice other students to read it.

## Engage

Images can be powerful ways of communicating. People instinctively respond to images based on their personalities, associations, and previous experience. Graphic designers use this instinctive response to visually communicate ideas and information. They work with different tools and mediums to convey a message from a client to a particular audience.

As a class, look at the covers for several books you have read. Does the cover art reflect the content and mood of the book?

Share the librarian's dilemma and ask your students to create new cover jackets for some of their favorite books. Remind them that a book jacket includes:

- A clear title and author name
- A graphic design that reflects the book's themes
- A summary of the plot without giving away the ending
- A review (opinion) about the book

Have students choose a favorite book or one they have read recently.

To help students review what they learned about the book, have them complete a character sketch or character web about the main character. This will help them develop details about the main character, so they can communicate information about the character linguistically before trying to do so visually.

You may also find it useful for them to complete organizers that show characters, setting, and events in the beginning, middle, and end or even a more elaborate plot diagram.

Graphic designers need to think about the goal of the images they create. A book cover design should not only give the viewer an idea of the content and mood of the book, but should also be eye-catching to encourage students browsing in the library (like customers in a



bookstore) to pick up a book they may not be familiar with.

Have students think about the message they want to convey with their book cover and write a short proposal about what they hope their book cover will convey.

For example, in *Esperanza Rising*, a proposal might look like:

*Pam Munoz Ryan's Esperanza Rising is a story about a well-to-do Mexican girl who had to begin a new life in the farm fields of California. Despite all of her misfortune and hard work, Esperanza Rising is a story about hope for a bright future. The book cover for this story should show her background in Mexico and her hard work in the fields, but the mood should still be uplifting.*

Have students share their proposal with a partner who has read their book and discuss the merits of the idea.

- Do you agree with their summary of what should be included on the cover?
- Do you agree with the mood they have chosen?
- What images might they use?

Have students revise and submit their proposal for your review.

## Create

Once the students have their proposal written, they should begin looking for potential images they can use in their cover design. Using the descriptive words in their character sketch and cover design worksheets, have them use a digital camera to capture appropriate images and the Internet to explore and download copyright-friendly images from Pics4Learning.

You may also want to give them access to a paint program or art supplies, so they can also create original illustrations and artwork.

Once students have collected all of their image resources, have them use a creative tool like Wixie to combine the images and their textual information into a front cover design or entire book jacket.

## Share

When the cover designs are completed, have students work in small teams to evaluate them. Collect all of the evaluations and then distribute them to the cover designers.

Print the new cover designs and display them around school to promote reading. The librarian may choose to display them in the library to help visiting students connect with literature that interests them.

You could also ask local graphic designers to evaluate student work. Make sure the designers evaluate the work for both design skill and how well the design reflects the content of the book. In other words, bring in designers who love to read!

## Assessment

Use the character sketch to evaluate how well students understood the content of the book, as well as their skill at describing the characters and events in the text. Use their cover proposal to evaluate how well they can translate their content research into a design that shares this information visually.

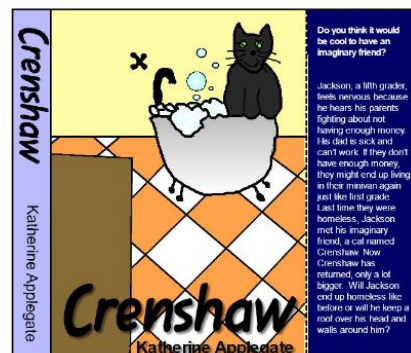
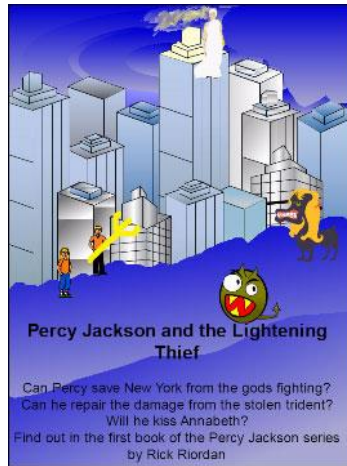
The cover design is a great summative assessment helping you

evaluate student's comprehension and skill communicating in a visual medium.

## Resources

Powers, Alan. (2003) **Children's Book Covers: Great Book Jacket And Cover Design**. Mitchell Beazley. ISBN: 1840006935

Poggenpohl, Sharon Helmer. (1994) **Graphic Design: A Career Guide and Education Directory**. Watson-Guptill Publications. ISBN: 082306298



[View a sample student project](#)

# Character Scrapbook

*Students will create a digital scrapbook that showcases the viewpoint of the main character of a novel.*



**Apps:** [Wixie®](#) or [Pixie®](#)

## Task

When we read novels, authors provide details about the main character through descriptive sentences, events that directly involve the character, and what other characters think and say about the main character. To show what you know about the main character in a novel you are reading, create a digital scrapbook for this person!

## Engage

Scrapbooking is becoming a popular pastime. Asking students to demonstrate knowledge in this format provides them with an opportunity to express individuality and creativity in an authentic, popular format. Inviting local community members who scrapbook or a local scrapbook company representative

to speak to the class regarding their creative techniques may help further inspire students.

Share examples of traditional and online scrapbooks with students. (You can find online examples in the resources section). As a class, discuss differences they see between a traditional scrapbook and a digital scrapbook. Ask students to consider the composition of images, and use of text, narration, and sound effects. Discuss how the use of multimedia elements can change the impact of a scrapbook.

Have students choose a novel they have recently read and focus their attention on the main character of the story. Have them reread the story and take notes in the form of a double entry journal that describes the main character and events that take place during the story, focusing on events that the main character is directly

involved in and what other characters in the novel say about them. You can also have students complete a character attribute map or graphic organizer to help them get a deeper understanding of the main character.

## Create

Ask students to share their preliminary ideas for the scrapbook. This is a great time to check for understanding. The more students understand the actions, behavior, and events the main character is involved in, the easier it will be for them to create a scrapbook from the main character's point of view.

Share your expectations for what their scrapbook will include. For example, you might spell out what you would like to see on each page.

### Page 1 – Cover

The cover should include the character's name, the title of the book, the author's name, and your name.

### Page 2 - Journal Entry #1

A summary from the main character's perspective.

### Page 3 - Pictures and Photographs

Images that reflect events important to the main character. Include a caption for each that explains why it was included.

### Page 4 – Letters

One letter from the main character to a secondary character about a problem in the story. A second letter for the secondary character's likely response.

### Page 5 - Souvenirs and Mementos

At least three objects that reflect events in the story or important aspects of the main character. Include an explanation for each.

### Page 6 - Journal Entry #2

An entry from the main character's diary that shows growth over time.

When you have approved their storyboard, students should begin gathering resources from the Internet, or the library and Pics4Learning. Then have them use the tools in Wixie or Share to add media elements to each page of the scrapbook and create navigation between the pages.

## Share

Have students present their finished scrapbooks to their classmates, working with a partner to explore and evaluate the media included.

You might also consider sharing the scrapbooks with the school librarian or media specialist or invite them in to help evaluate the final products. They may also be interested in posting student work to a station in your school's media center or library as a way to get other students interested in reading the book.

## Assessment

If you require the journal entry, letters, and diary entry to be written before the structure of the project is designed, you can assess the writing even before the scrapbook is complete. The double-entry journal and character attribute map will give insight into the direction students are heading with their project.

Assessing these items prior to any other written work can help ensure the successful completion of the project. The final scrapbook will help you assess their understanding of being able to analyze and depict the main character through multimedia elements.

## Resources

Davis, Lori J. **Picture Yourself Creating Digital Scrapbooks**. ISBN-10: 1598634887

Kress, Nancy. **Characters, Emotion & Viewpoint: Techniques and Exercises for Crafting Dynamic Characters and Effective Viewpoints**. ISBN-10: 1582973164

[Heritage Scrapbooks](#)

[Lewis Carroll Scrapbook Collection](#)



# Idiomatically Speaking

*Students will illustrate and translate the meaning of an idiom to help others learn these examples of figurative language.*



**Apps:** [Wixie®](#) or [Pixie®](#)

## Task

There is a new teacher at school who just loves to talk in idioms. The only problem is that most kids, and especially the English Language Learners, can't understand a word this new teacher says! The Principal has asked your class to illustrate and translate the meaning of phrases like, "Rick Riordan's latest series took second period by storm," and "Today's homework is going to be a piece of cake" so students can understand just what this teacher means. So "roll up your sleeves (get ready for a job) and put your noses to the grindstone (start working hard). It's time to get cracking (get started)!"

## Engage

Begin reading a book like Ted Arnold's **More Parts**, Loren Leedy's **There's a Frog in My Throat**, or Marvin

Terban's **In a Pickle**. Ask the students to describe what they are seeing as you are reading. Then, share the illustrations from the book. Discuss with your students.

Introduce the word idiom to your students as well as its definition. You might want to also explore the etymology from the Greek *idíōma*, which means 'peculiarity.' The idea is that the phrase is "one of a kind" or has a meaning different from the literal translation.

The English language includes over 15,000 idioms, but idioms are not unique to English, they are found in almost every language. For example, the English idiom a bull in a china shop is similar to the German *ein Elefant in einem Porzellangeschäft* (an elephant in a china shop). The English idiom make a mountain out of a molehill is similar to the French *la montagne accouche d'une souris* (the mountain gives birth to a mouse).

But similar combinations of words in different languages can also have very different meanings. For example, to be long in the tooth means to be old or out of date in English. But in French, *avoir les dents longues* (to have long teeth) means to be ambitious.

If your class or school includes students and teachers who speak languages other than English, ask them to share idioms they know in these languages!

## Create

Decide whether you want to address the problem as an entire class or work in small teams. Then, reintroduce the problem or task to your students.

The first step is to determine what the group wants to create. For example, you can make:

- storybooks similar to the ones you read?
- an illustrated idiom dictionary?
- School House Rock-style animated shorts?

This may work as a great opportunity to brainstorm products students could create as a class and then let individual teams decide which one they think will work best.

If you want individual students to follow the same process and complete the same steps, an illustrated dictionary should meet your needs. Then, you can assign idioms to each student who then contributes a single page you can combine into a class dictionary.

Have students explore the Scholastic Idiom Dictionary, or idiom web sites, like [Dave's ESL Cafe](#) to find the idiom, or idioms, they wish to address and illustrate.

Talk with students as they work to illustrate idiomatic language. Encourage them to add more details and create more complete and specific illustrations. This is a great time to catch misconceptions early and help

students learn to love language as they explore etymology, history, and visual play.



[View a student sample on YouTube](#)

## Share

If you are working together on one story, book, or dictionary, collect each student's page into one file and export to PDF or HTML to share with a wider audience. Print student work to share with classmates, families, and even language specialists at your school. Post the work to your classroom or school website or even iTunes channel!

Have each team present their product to the rest of the class or another class at your school. Depending on the products, you can hang posters around the school, share animations during morning announcements, or publish a book for the school media center.

## Assessment

Assess prior knowledge as you discuss the stories you have read and ask students to share idioms they already know. As they develop their diagrams and illustrations,

ask questions and engage in one-on-one dialog to catch misconceptions early and help them make connections between the concepts and ideas expressed through the idioms. The final products will help you evaluate how well students are able to translate what they have learned about idiomatic language into teaching materials to help others better understand them.



[View a student sample on YouTube](#)

## Resources

Arnold, Ted. **More Parts**. ISBN: 0142501492

Leedy, Loren. **There's a Frog in My Throat!** ISBN: 0823418197

Terban, Marvin. **In a Pickle: And Other Funny Idioms**. ISBN: 0618830014

Terban, Marvin. **Scholastic's Dictionary of Idioms**. ISBN: 0439770831

[ESL Idiom Page](#) at Dave's ESL Café

# Legends and Tall Tales

*After exploring local history and discussing the characteristics and traits of tall tales and legends, students write their own tales, then transform their tale into a script and create an illustrated or animated version.*



**Apps:** [Pixie®](#), [Wixie®](#), or [Frames™](#)

## Task

Legends and tall tales are stories filled with unbelievable events or exaggerations that explain a person's character or how something came to be. In this project, you will write and produce your own animated tall tale about a historical figure or location.

## Engage

Tall tales are filled with larger-than-life characters and places. Begin by sharing some familiar tall tales, such as John Henry, Johnny Appleseed, and Pecos Bill with your students. Your librarian or media specialist is a great resource for locating stories students at your level will love.

Share the historical, factual biographies of some of the characters in the tall tales you are reading. What differences are there between the historical information and the tall tale? Work together to compare the stories and record your findings on a Venn

diagram. Make a class list of characteristics that make up a tall tale, such as:

1. feats of daring, strength, or cunning
2. lots of exaggeration
3. use of humor
4. problems with people, nature, or progress
5. the hero has a helpful partner (may be an animal)

Reflect on what you already know about the history of your area and brainstorm a list of people and places in your region that have these qualities. Which ones might serve as the focal point of a local history tall tale? Why? What makes this person or place a candidate for a tall tale? What elements could be exaggerated to help build this into a legend or tall tale?

Work with your students to create a list of possible topics. You may also want to create a list ahead of time to get students started brainstorming.



Allow students to form teams of 3-5 around a topic that interests them. Have the teams begin research using a cluster-style diagram to write down facts and adjectives that describe this person or place. Student teams should then turn their initial cluster diagram into a larger web showing which characteristics, events, and actions they want to use in their story and explain how they might do so.

## Create

Discuss the structure of an effective tall tale with your students. The beginning of the story needs to draw interest and set the theme. The rest of the story needs to support the theme and must include carefully exaggerated points to qualify it as a tall tale or legend. The closing should wrap up the story and share why this topic is important to the history of your state.

Before they begin writing, ask each team to clearly define:

1. Characters and setting
2. Point of view
3. Order of events
4. Unifying theme

Creativity will be key in this writing experience, requiring students to choose which facts to exploit and exaggerate for the purpose of the tale. Have each team submit a rough draft for your review, or have teams swap their stories for peer review.

Next, have teams create a visual storyboard that divides the story into scenes. The storyboard should contain information about what will be said or read during each scene as well as what illustrations will support the story at that time.

As they begin production on the computer, teams should assign roles like director, illustrator, editor, and voice talent.

The director will need to keep the team on task to meet the deadline. The illustrator should work on developing images, while the voice talent practices the script and practices recording for fluency and intonation. The editor can add text to each page, collect illustrations, and work with the voice talent to record the audio.

The director and editor should also work together to decide if additional dialogue should be written or if the story needs to be adjusted for more effective communication as an electronic book or video.

Talk to teams about formats for export and sharing, collect URLs for projects, or have students export their projects as PDF, ePub, or video.

## Share

Present each team's illustrated/animated tall tale to the rest of the class or at a school assembly. What was memorable? What did they like best? Use of language? Humor? Hyperbole?

Create a page on your website to host the student tales as a collection and curate their work. Reach out to your local history society and your local library to join you for the presentations or even to host student work on-site using a kiosk or event.

## Assessment

Begin by evaluating your initial class discussion about tall tales and the characters and events you are learning about. Do they understand what makes a tall tale unique? Can they distinguish between fact and fiction?

You can use the teams' cluster and web diagrams, rough draft, final written story, storyboard, and finished movie as both checkpoints and performances to assess. You can assess writing for creativity, organization, and voice, and judge the final video for organization, effective visual communication, and voice.

Be sure to evaluate the project process for skills such as teamwork, time management, problem solving, and collaboration.

## Resources

Perry, Phyllis. **Ten Tall Tales**. ISBN: 1579500692

West, Tracy. **Teaching Tall Tales, Grades 3-5**. ISBN: 0590365118

[Tall Tales at American Folklore](#)



# Book Trailers

*Students will explore character, plot, and theme and learn to write persuasively as they develop a movie-style trailer for a book they have read.*



**Apps:** [Pixie®](#), [Wixie®](#), or [Frames™](#)

## Task

Between iPods, cell phones, portable game consoles, and TV, kids are spending less time reading than ever before. The local public library is looking for a way to promote reading to elementary students. They have asked you to create a short digital book talk – like a movie trailer for a book – that they can use in the children’s section of the library.

*Big Idea: How do I get a young reader hooked on a book?*

## Engage

Getting students to read isn’t always easy. Choose one of your favorite books and share it with your students in a way you think will get them excited about reading it. Then, tell why it was your favorite book.

Ask students what gets them excited about reading. Is it the characters? Is it the setting, an exciting plot,

interesting themes, or a personal connection with the story?

Let your students know they will create a booktalk in the form of a movie trailer to promote one of their favorite books.

First, have students determine which book they want to promote. Then, have them answer the following questions:

- Have I read another book by the same author?
- Did I like it as much as this book?
- What genre is this book?
- Is this a book part of a series?
- Do I have a personal connection to this book?

To better advertise their book, students need to be able to identify the theme. Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. They are BIG ideas, like friendship, love and courage. For example, when a character stands up for a friend in a

story, we can infer from their actions that friendship and courage are themes in the story.

Common themes your students can look for in their books include:

friendship	anger
courage	cooperation
loyalty	determination
love	being different

As a class, explore how authors use themes to guide their writing. Ask students to reread important parts of the book and take notes as they analyze the book's characters, setting, and plot to determine the theme. The actions of the main character are a great place to look for the theme.

To gather information students can use to develop their booktalk, use graphic organizers like thought webs and the 5 W's to show the central theme of the book as well as events in the story that relate to the theme.

## Create

Next, have students prepare a script for their booktalk. An exciting script should include:

- An interesting hook.
- A vivid description of an event that supports the theme.
- The title and name of the author at the conclusion.
- A call to action.

Remind students that showing the story is more effective than trying to retell the story. As they write the script, have them think of the booktalk as a movie trailer. Their goal is to leave the viewer with a compelling reason for checking out that book!

To transform the script into a video, it is helpful to have a storyboard or map of each student's vision. The storyboard should include information about which portion of the script each scene will include and what images and sound files will be used to support it. When

the storyboard is complete, have students begin gathering images, music, and sound effects to support their vision.

Have students use Wixie or Frames to build their booktalk. They can use images from [Pics4Learning](#), or illustrate using the paint tools to create their own images. They should record their script, add sound effects, or background music to match the tone and purpose of the booktalk.

## Share

Share the book trailers with the rest of the class or play them on the morning announcements to encourage others to read the books. The librarian may choose to show the trailers in the library as other classes come in for their scheduled library time. If your district or community has public access television, try to get your students' booktalks aired. This is a great way to encourage the entire community to read!

## Assessment

The final booktalk is a great summative assessment of student skill communicating in a visual medium. During the process, you can assess progress using students' notes and thought webs. Having students turn in their scripts and storyboards prior to creating the booktalk animation will help ensure that they are on the right track.

You may also want to look at time management strategies and help students develop a project calendar.

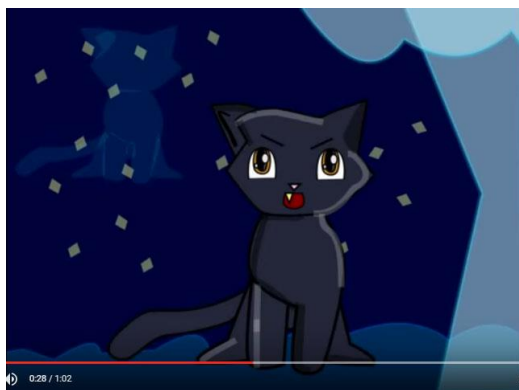
## Resources

Littlejohn, Carol. **Talk That Book: Booktalks to Promote Reading** ISBN: 0938865757

Cavanaugh, Terence W. and Keane, Nancy J. **The Tech-Savvy Booktalker: A Guide for 21st-Century Educators** ISBN: 1591586372

[Scholastic](#)

[Children and Student Book Reviews](#)



[View a student sample on YouTube](#)

# Persuasive and Presidential Writing

*Students will learn persuasive writing and presentation skills.*



**Apps:** [Wixie®](#) or [Pixie®](#)

## Task

Mt. Rushmore, sculpted between 1927 and 1941 by Gutzon Borglum with the assistance of over 400 local workers, is one of the most notable American treasures. But the mountain still has a bit more room! In this project, you will research a U.S. President and create a presentation to persuade the National Park Service to add another face to Mt. Rushmore.

## Engage

Discuss the history of Mt. Rushmore with your students. You might want to use online resources such as the [Oh, Ranger!](#) web page on the making of Mt. Rushmore.

As a class, discuss the qualities a president should possess to belong on Mt. Rushmore. You may want to begin with the qualities of the presidents who are already on the monument. Work together to develop a

list of these qualities. Discuss which ones students think are most important and rank the qualities in order of importance. This will help students craft a strong argument.

Discuss with the students that they will research a president they feel has these qualities and should be added to Mt. Rushmore. This research will be used to write a persuasive argument for the addition of this president to Mt. Rushmore.

Give students some time to think about the president they think should be added. You may want to assign a bit of research about several lesser-known presidents before having them choose, or ask them to survey family and friends for their opinions.

Have students choose the president they think should be added to Mt. Rushmore. You might have them complete a KWL worksheet to help them identify what



they already know about this president, as well as identify topics that they will need to research.

## Create

The goal of persuasive writing is to convince others to agree with our facts, share our values, accept our argument and conclusions, and adopt our way of thinking. Discuss the elements of persuasive writing with your students. Let each student know that when writing his or her argument, he or she should:

- **Establish facts** to support the argument for his or her president.
- **Clarify relevant values** for the audience. Why should this president be chosen? How has this president helped society? What are his accomplishments? This should include factual information about accomplishments while in office.
- **Provide examples** using pictures or other data.
- **Prioritize, edit, and sequence** the facts and values in importance to build the argument.
- **Form and state conclusions** to “persuade” the audience that their conclusions are based on agreed-upon facts and shared values.
- **Provide an emotional appeal** for the argument.
- **Logically communicate** the argument in the presentation.

Discuss the structure of the essay with your students.

Explain that the topic sentence should be a position statement, such as “The New Mt. Rushmore should include President\_\_\_\_\_ because...”.

The rest of the first paragraph should state the three main arguments. Each argument in the topic sentence should be clarified and supported in its own paragraph. The final paragraph should restate the position and include the most compelling parts of the argument.

Have each student use his or her research to write a persuasive essay about why his or her president should be carved alongside the four existing presidents on Mt. Rushmore. Have students share their rough drafts with another classmate before editing and submitting their finished written arguments.



Once the essay is complete, students are ready to craft a persuasive presentation. To assist students in organizing the project, have them complete storyboards, highlighting the main ideas on each page. For example:

1. Title Page
2. Description
3. Position Statement and Three Main arguments
4. Argument 1
5. Argument 2
6. Argument 3
7. Response to at Least One Counterargument
8. Picture of This President Added to Mt. Rushmore
9. Conclusion

Students can find [pictures of Mt. Rushmore](#) and each U.S. President in the Photos folder in the Library.

## Share

Have students share their persuasive presentations with the rest of the class. You might have one student record characteristics and qualities from each presentation so that as a class you can compare the presidents.

## Assessment

As you introduce this project to your students, the students will begin to brainstorm the qualities of a president who should be placed on Mt. Rushmore. You should be able to make an informal assessment on their knowledge about their ideas and realistic possibilities for additional choices for Mt. Rushmore.

As they work to translate their essay into a presentation, you can re-evaluate their writing skills, as well as assess creativity, design, and planning skills.

## Resources

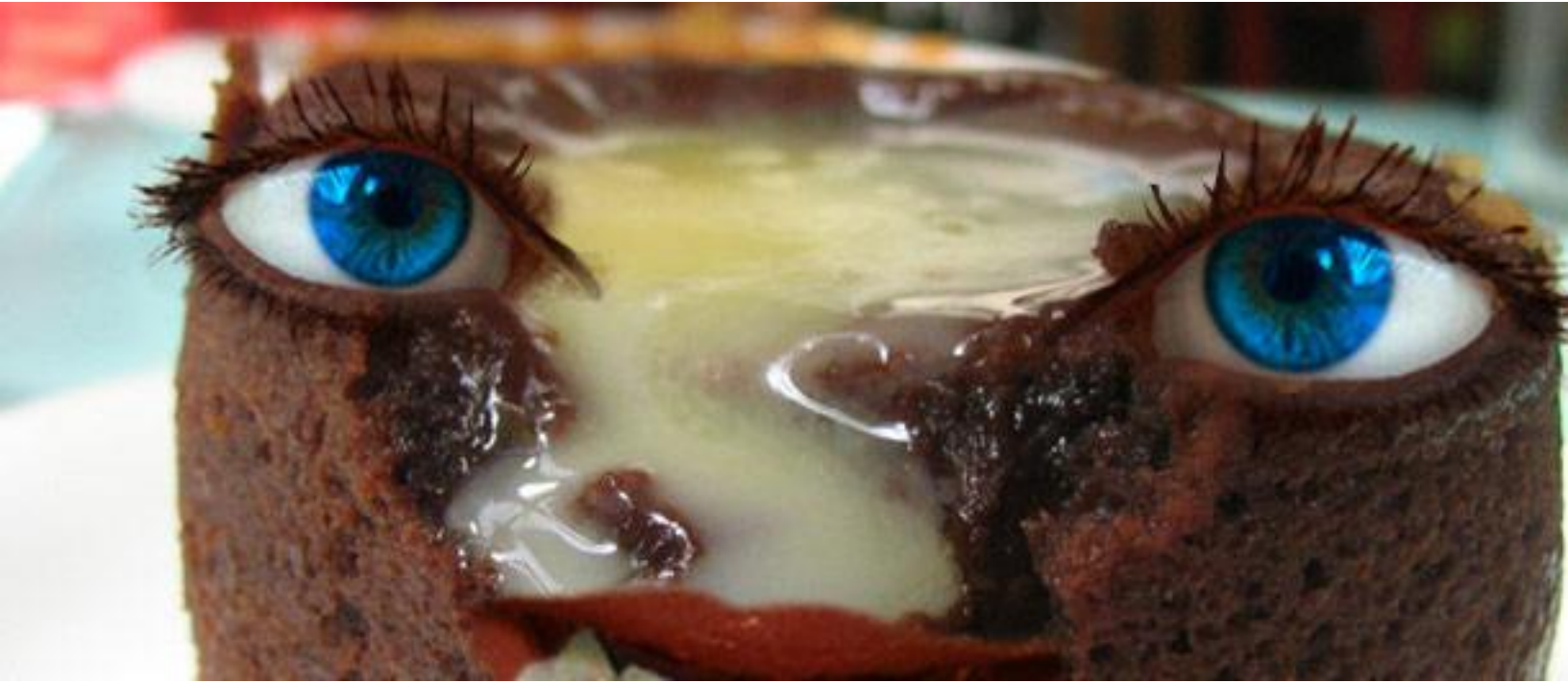
Bausum, Ann. **Our Country's Presidents**. ISBN: 0792293304.

St. George, Judith, & Small, David. **So You Want to Be President?** ISBN: 0399251529.

[Oh, Ranger! Mount Rushmore](#)

# Personification Stories

*Students will personify an object and write a story as part of an online book or animated adventure. The story will use conflict, experiences, and situations to help the viewer imagine what it might be like to be a particular object.*



**Apps:** [Pixie®](#), [Wixie®](#), or [Frames™](#)

## Task

Hey diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle...

Personification is a figure of speech in which human qualities are given to objects, animals, or ideas. For example: the fire breathed hot in our faces and its flames grabbed at our clothes, or the chocolate cake is calling my name. Personification can make your writing much more interesting.

In this project, you will personify an animal or object and develop your story into an online book or animated cartoon.

## Engage

Nursery rhymes, fairy tales, fables, and children's stories commonly personify animals. When you give human characteristics to animals, it is called

anthropomorphism. Your students have probably heard of the three bears that eat porridge and sleep in their beds or the fable of the Tortoise and the Hare. You may have even read *Fantastic Mr. Fox* by Roald Dahl.

Revisit these stories or others your students may be familiar with. You might also want to share the work of Lewis Carroll in his poem *The Walrus and the Carpenter* or *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*. Remember the white rabbit and Alice playing croquet with a deck of cards?

After exploring examples of personification, work with your students to personify an object in your classroom. Brainstorm human traits that can be applied to it. Start by identifying parts of it that are similar to human body parts. Then, brainstorm feelings it might have about

itself or how it is used. Ask students to become the object and answer these prompting questions:

- What/how do you see?
- What/how do you hear?
- Where do you live?
- What are you afraid of?
- What do you dream of?
- What are you good at?
- What do you hate to do?
- How do you feel about the people you meet?

## Create

Have individual students, or a small team, choose an object to personify. Ask students to brainstorm ways to personify the object. You might ask them to answer the same questions you did as a class.

Students should use the object's feelings or fears they have brainstormed to develop the conflict that will drive their story and begin writing. You may have them scaffold work or continue brainstorming by identifying character traits, determining setting, and codifying the plot diagram or at minimum beginning, middle, and end. Have students share their ideas and drafts with their peers for feedback and review and then work on their revisions.

Choose the type of product you want students to create, such as a printed book, interactive story, cartoon animation, claymation video, or better yet, allow them to choose the product they believe will most effectively convey their story.

Have students translate their written story into a visual map or project storyboard. This will help them determine how best to convey the story through individual pages or scenes. Have students create an illustration of the object or build a tangible character from modeling clay or other materials.

Students can capture still images for stopmotion, create pages that combine text, illustration, and narration, or take video to build their story.

## Share



Have the students present their story or animated short to the rest of the class. Share the stories and animations on your school web site, during morning announcements, or in your school/community library. You may also be able to share them on your local access television station as a celebration of student learning.

You could even turn this project into a parent night or community event by asking students to write personification stories along a conservation theme like Earth Day.

## Assessment

After you have read and shared examples of personification, you can begin assessing student understanding as the entire class works together to personify an object.

Use the brainstorm and written story to assess a student's ability to personify. You will also want to check in with individuals or listen to each group's

process to help you evaluate their skill at identifying character, setting, and plot, as well as how creativity they have personified the object.

The final stories and animation will help you evaluate how well students are able to translate their brainstormed traits and emotions into effectively personifying the object.



[View the student project](#)

## Resources

Lewis Carroll, *The Walrus and the Carpenter*

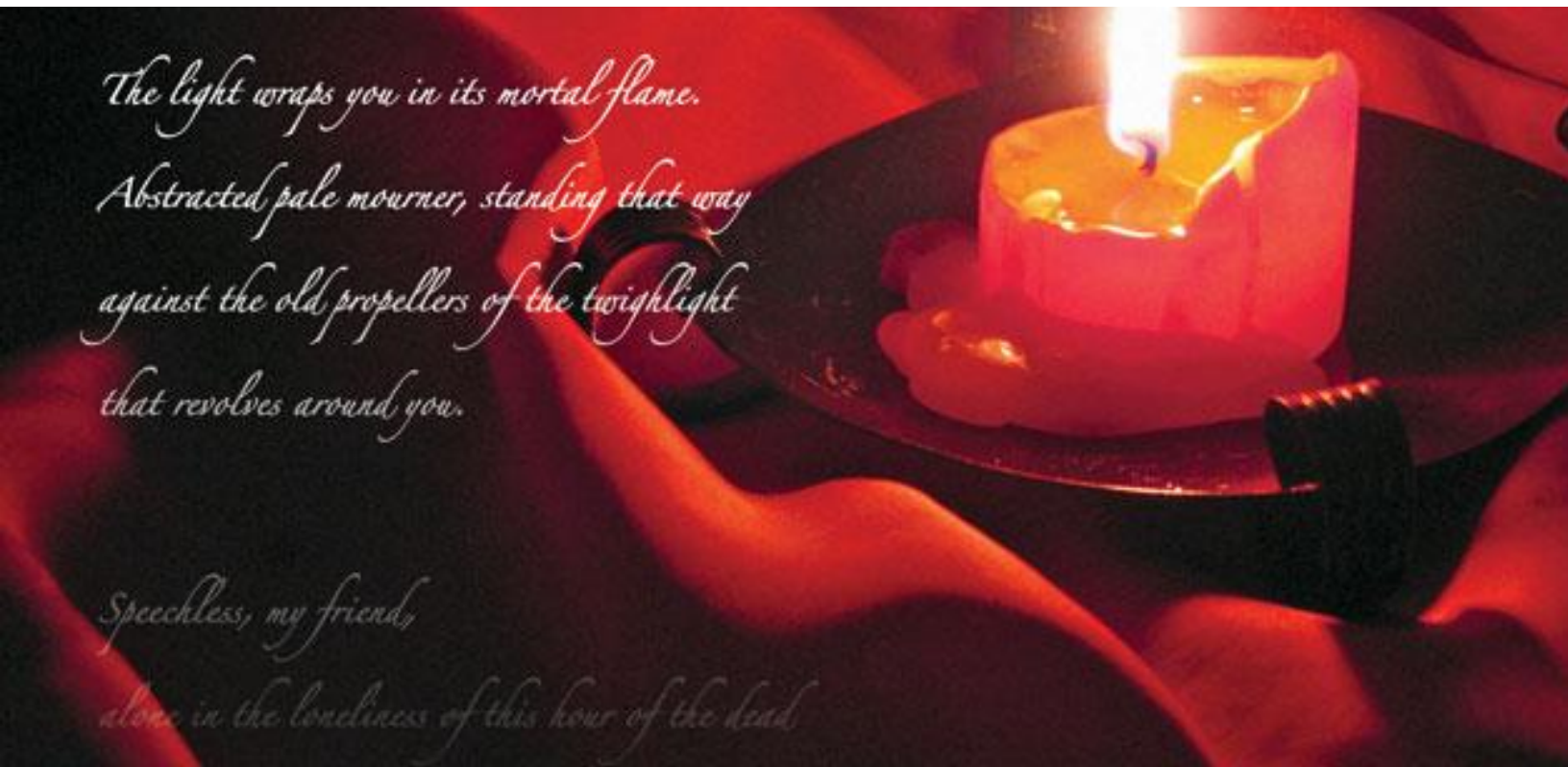
Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Emily Dickinson, *The Train*



# Create a Visual Poem

*Students will analyze verse and explore meaning by creating a visual poem.*



**Apps:** [Pixie®](#), [Wixie®](#), or [Frames™](#)

## Task

The National Poetry Council is looking for ways to promote interest in poetry. Since most homes have a television, they have decided to broadcast short poems set to music and pictures. They have asked for help to build their collection.

## Engage

Explore examples of visual poems online. Search SchoolTube or YouTube for your favorite poet or a poem your class has recently read and watch the [Getty Institutes how-to video](#).

Before having students work individually, or in small teams, develop a visual poem as a class.

Read the poem you wish to model to your class or distribute it to them to read individually.

What does the poem mean? Work together to identify specific words that help the reader visualize the meaning or feel a certain way and discuss the intent of the author in using these specific words.

Search an image site like [Pics4Learning.com](#) to find images that support the meaning of the text in each line or stanza. Use the words your class identified in the poem to help organize your search. Discuss how well the images that result match the mood and meaning of the poem.

Use a digital creativity tool like Wixie or Frames to combine the images and text. Have a student with strong fluency narrate the visual poem.

Discuss the mood of the poem and find music that is appropriate and add it as a background soundtrack.



## Create

Now that you have modeled the process, task students with creating their own. Group students into small teams and assign specific poems or create a collection for students to choose from.

Teams should begin by identifying key words in the poem and discussing the mood or feeling it is meant to evoke.

Using graphic organizers like t-charts and clusters can help students focus on key words and their meanings to determine mood and better comprehend the author's intent.

Have teams focus on individual lines or verses and locate images that help the viewer better comprehend the meaning and connect to the content. Encourage students to use digital cameras to capture original photos. Tools like Wixie and Frames also have tools students can use to create illustrations.

Teams should combine the images with text, voice narration, and background music to complete their visual poem.

## Share

Share students visual poems at a poetry festival or poetry event at your school. You can project the visual poems between students reciting poetry orally or showcase during a school-wide event.

To extend the learning and focus on really analyzing each poem, post them individually to your classroom web site, or on morning announcements.



[View the student project](#)

## Assessment

After you have read the poem as a class, you can begin assessing student understanding as they choose key words that evoke feelings or ideas. Evaluate each student's comprehension as they complete a cluster

graphic organizer sheet for their part of the poem. You will want to be available for questions and discussion as they work through their analysis.

You can also evaluate their choice of an image. Remember, the quality of the image reflects both their understanding and analysis of the poem, as well as their ability to

complete an effective internet search, visual ability to draw, and/or skill capturing an image with a digital camera.

As they make the movie, listen to the discussions between students. They will be making observations and comments and may even change their mind about their picture. If you are adding music to the background, the musical selection may also indicate student understanding of the poem.

## Resources

Janeczko, Paul B. (2000) **Teaching 10 Fabulous Forms of Poetry**. Teaching Resources. ISBN: 0439073464

Sweeney, Jacqueline. (1999) **Teaching Poetry: Yes You Can!** Scholastic. ISBN: 0590494198

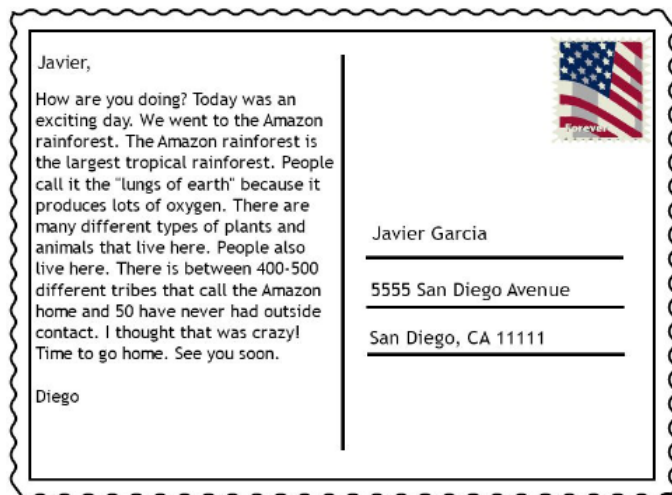
[Bartelby - Poetry](#)

[Project Gutenberg](#)

# Additional ideas from real student projects

*Click the project to see the sample.*

## Fictional Travel Postcard



Students create their own versions of your favorite books. Using stories with repeating patterns makes it easy to create a class book, with each student contributing a page.

## Wanted Poster



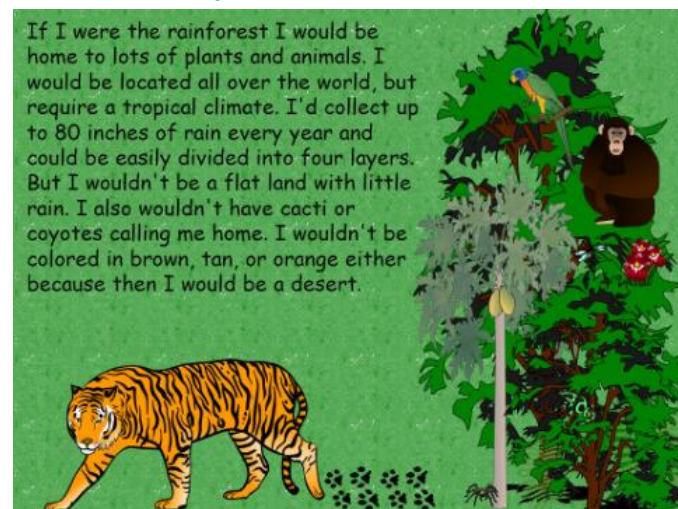
Students create a Wanted Poster to creatively show what they have learned and think about a character in a story they are reading or an object they are researching.

## Informational eBook



Students share what they know or have research about a topic and communicate that knowledge by creating and sharing an electronic book.

## If... But... Comparatives



Students use first person form to share their thinking after researching, learning, and analyzing topics like animals, people, places, or events.

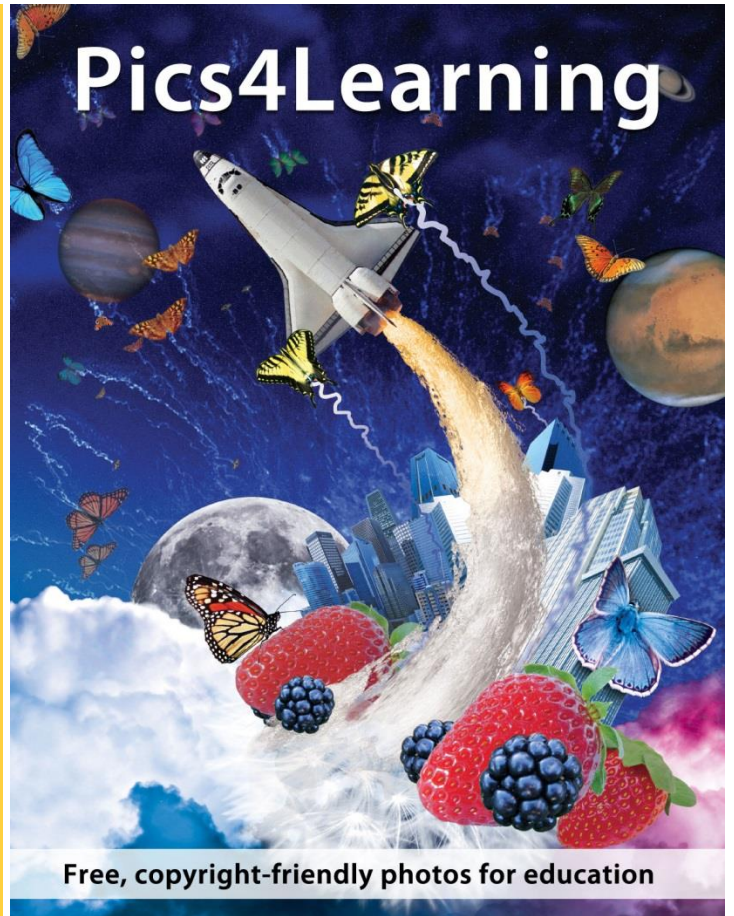
# Wixie

Wixie is an online publishing and creativity platform that lets students share what they know through **their writing, their voice, and their art.**



Give Wixie a Try

# Pics4Learning



Free, copyright-friendly photos for education