

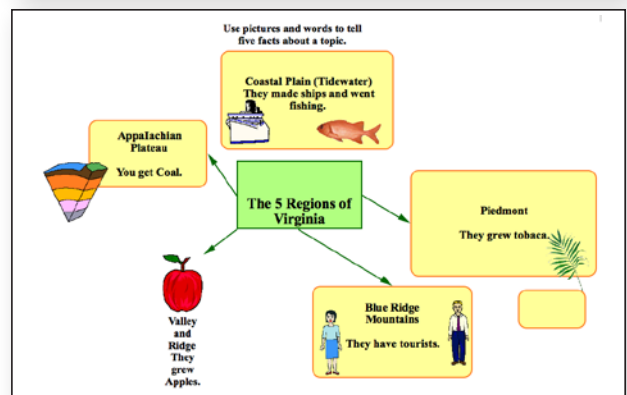
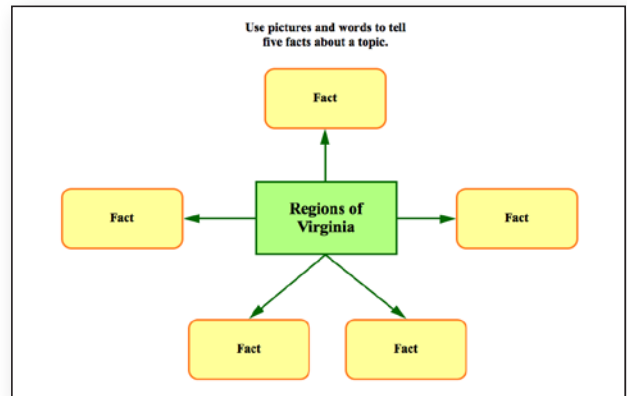
Young Virginia English Language Learners Build Literacy Skills, Prepare for State Assessments With Kidspiration

Few students in Melinda Leitner's classrooms share a common native language, as they come from countries around the globe, speaking a colorful array of languages—Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, Hindi, Russian and several others, including African dialects that do not have a written form. Leitner, an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, travels among three demographically different elementary schools in Henrico County Public Schools, located in suburban Richmond, Va., working with students in kindergarten through grade 5 with widely varying levels of English language proficiency. For the past six years, she's been relying on Kidspiration[®], the visual way to explore and understand words, numbers and concepts, from Inspiration[®] Software, Inc., to help her students build English language skills across the curriculum.

"My students learn English through the content, and Kidspiration makes it very visual and hands-on for them," said Leitner. "I might have a group of level-one students—beginning English speakers—with a kindergartner, a couple of third graders and a fifth grader. And even though everyone is learning different content, they are all on computers using Kidspiration, working side by side."

Designed specifically for early learners in kindergarten through fifth grade, Kidspiration develops thinking and literacy skills using proven visual learning principles. In reading and writing, Kidspiration strengthens word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension and written expression.

Henrico County's ESL students spend the majority of their days in class with native English speakers, and when Leitner works with them in ESL, she revisits much of the same content, to reinforce what they've learned. "Social English," which students use on the playground, comes quickly, but reading, writing and understanding "academic English" takes time, she explained. "Kidspiration allows students to learn the academic



During a geography lesson, Leitner's students used a template she created in Kidspiration to make written and visual notes about regions in Virginia.

English in a fun way. It's not a worksheet or a textbook, but rather something they can manipulate, print out and take home as their study guide."

As with all students in the state, ESL students must pass the state assessment, the Virginia Standards of Learning. And whether Leitner is teaching fourth graders about the regions of Virginia or second graders about famous Americans, she often uses Kidspiration. "They may not have the language skills to express it, but with Kidspiration, they can show that they understand the content. And when they go back to the classroom, they are better equipped to find the words to explain what they know."

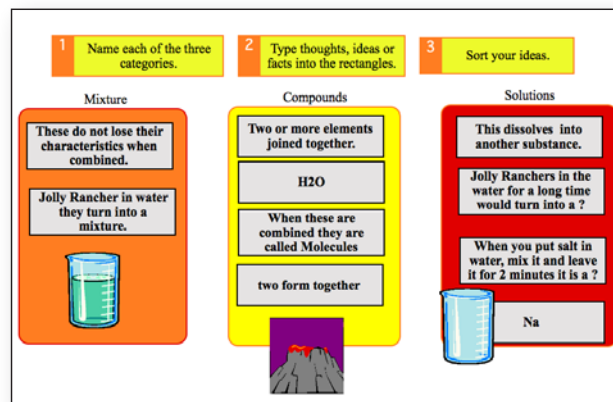
Leitner works with groups of up to five students at a time, in a setting where they feel comfortable speaking up—something many are hesitant to do among their native-English-speaking peers in the regular classroom. She encourages group discussions to develop language skills, and she uses Kidspiration for that, as well. “When they point at a picture on the screen, they’re able to show me what they’re thinking, and the words flow more easily,” she said. “They don’t clam up, because they have the visual to help convey what they mean.”

Whether she is pulling from Kidspiration’s vast selection of ready-to-use templates or creating her own, Leitner finds uses for Kidspiration every day—in social studies, science, math and language arts—from teaching basic skills to communicating complex concepts.

For students who haven’t mastered phonetic sounds, especially those who speak languages with no written representation, she has them do a letter sort on Kidspiration. And with Kidspiration’s Listen tool, students hear words read aloud, which strengthens word recognition and comprehension. “They enjoy the voice,” she said. For example, if a student is looking at a picture of the Statue of Liberty, he can slide the cursor over it and hear the words over and over while reading them, until he fully understands the three separate words that make up the monument’s name.

As Virginia “is a big history state,” Leitner has put Kidspiration to work teaching a wide variety of social studies topics. In science, she teaches the elements, plant and animal cells, closed- and open-circuit electricity, and weather patterns. She also uses Kidspiration to teach the language of math, including “equal to,” “less than” and “more than.”

Leitner appreciates the ease with which her students can build a diagram, add visual elements and then click to transform it into a written format. “It’s easy to add other elements to anything you create,” she said. “And my students are proud of what they make—they definitely enjoy taking home their finished work.”



Leitner’s students used this Kidspiration template to record, classify, and sort ideas and visual cues during a science lesson.

Students are particularly fond of Kidspiration’s well-stocked library of clip art, she said, as well as the ability to add their own images. “It’s colorful, and it captures their attention. What kid wouldn’t like learning this way?” she asked.

Sometimes words can only be learned through visuals because they’re nearly impossible to describe otherwise, and Kidspiration is the key to Leitner’s students’ understanding, she said. Eels or barnacles, for example, are strange words for ESL students to learn, because they’re not creatures they see very often, she explained. She has her students use Kidspiration to pull up pictures of them, write about them and create colorful diagrams. When other subjects, such as holidays, cause confusion, she has students create picture sentences about them, adding words under the pictures to explain the meaning.

Leitner considers Kidspiration a vital part of the learning process for her students and sees “an unlimited number of ways you can use it,” she said. “I use it to supplement what I teach, and we always have fun with it. With Kidspiration, my students take what they’re taught, and they reach.”