

Teachers Weave Technology Into Everyday Class Activities With Kidspiration® at Texas Elementary School

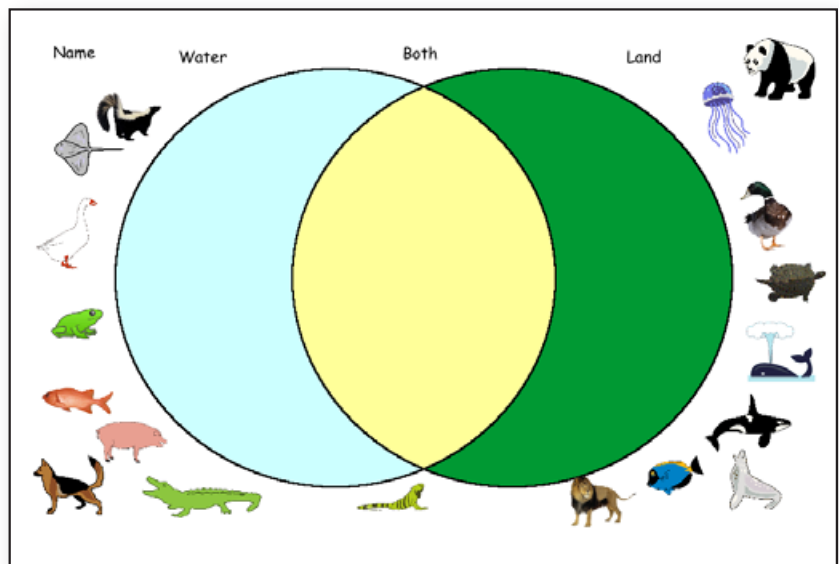
Living by the adage, “Good tools do not make a good teacher, but a good teacher makes good use of tools,” instructional technology specialist Elizabeth Benno spends her days integrating the best technology solutions into instruction at Puster Elementary School, part of Lovejoy Independent School District, located outside of Dallas. A hands-down favorite tool at her school is Kidspiration®, the visual way to explore and understand words, numbers and concepts, from Inspiration® Software, Inc.

Created specifically for K-5 learners, Kidspiration develops thinking, literacy and numeracy skills using proven visual learning principles. By combining pictures, words, and sounds, students strengthen word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension and written expression. With visual math tools, students build reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Last school year, Benno instituted a “Technology Week,” where she spent the entire week in one classroom, incorporating technology into instruction at every possible opportunity. Her goal was to give teachers the skills and confidence to make use of technology all year long. Sarah Pittenger, a kindergarten teacher, was the first to participate. “We sat down with my normal lesson plan and looked at how we could make it better with technology,” she explained.

They were off and running with numerous Kidspiration projects—both whole-class assignments illuminated on an interactive whiteboard and individual ones completed during stations on the five computers in the classroom. “It was so easy for everyone to visualize the lessons with Kidspiration,” said Pittenger. “Kidspiration was definitely a large part of our week.”

Describing herself as a “technology learner,” Pittenger



Students at Puster Elementary use this Venn diagram in Kidspiration to sort and learn about different animals.

said she volunteered to participate in Technology Week because she wanted to increase her technology knowledge and make a routine of using it more frequently. With a year of using Kidspiration previously under her belt, she was already accustomed to reaching for it, she said, but now she sees even more ways it can support instruction in her kindergarten classroom.

After Technology Week, Pittenger now integrates Kidspiration into nearly every science or social studies lesson she teaches, because she finds the visual connections help her students learn more effectively. “My students are very comfortable using Kidspiration. They just love it, and they’re building important skills with it,” she said.

Pittenger now uses Kidspiration extensively to teach her students about animals and their habitats, sorting animals that emerge in the day from those that come out at night, and studying animal body parts and how animals move. In addition, she says Kidspiration is great for sorting U.S. and Texas symbols, teaching the four seasons and the five senses, and showing the life cycle of a ladybug.

As part of a science lesson, Pittenger took her students to a neighboring preschool, where they learned about composting and saw how food scraps turn into a rich fertilizer. When they returned to their classroom, they made “webs” in Kidspiration to display what can and cannot go in a compost bin. “They were inspired to compost, and making the webs helped reinforce what they had learned,” she said. “One amusing thing they listed on the ‘cannot compost’ list was a cat, because they had seen a cat wandering around there.”

Pittenger plans to expand her use of Kidspiration with additional language arts lessons, adding more writing activities, dictionary lessons and word-family sorts. “Kidspiration always captures their attention; it makes sense to use it whenever I can,” she said.

As Puster Elementary ramps up its use of technology, Benno—the instructional technology specialist—works closely with teachers to build their skills. In the past, teachers would drop their students off in the computer lab, but now they stay, she said.

Benno frequently builds activity templates for teachers, but also points them to the ready-made templates that come with Kidspiration, as well as those created by other educators at their school and those on Inspiration Software’s Web site. “When I provide someone with a template, I often hear, ‘This is exactly what I needed,’” she said.

Benno finds that Kidspiration is the perfect tool for word sorting, matching words to pictures and sorting vowel patterns. She also finds it useful for young readers to learn the parts of speech and to map stories. One favorite project is using a Venn diagram to compare the original “Gingerbread Man” story with the contemporary “Gingerbread Baby.” She also employs the Venn diagram when fourth graders are studying explorers; students choose two from a bank of explorers and compare their lives.

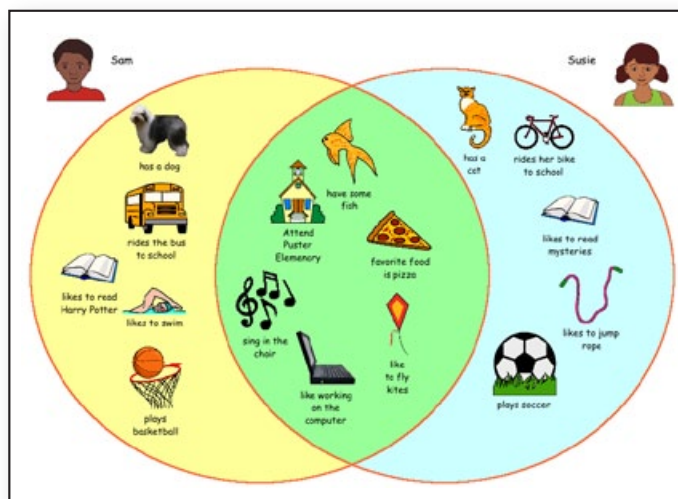
When second graders were learning the difference between rural, suburban and urban, Benno created a template to show themselves, their neighborhood and their city—an assignment they accomplished as a class. “One of the students said, ‘You forgot some,’ and the class took it further, adding their county, their state and so forth. It’s great to see the enthusiasm when they work with Kidspiration,” she said.

For the fifth graders, Benno uses Kidspiration to help them organize research projects, including one on biomes and another on regions in the United States. “It’s a wonderful research tool that helps guide their thinking,” she said.

With Kidspiration’s comprehensive symbol library, Benno said she is sometimes surprised by how much is available. When a third-grade teacher wanted her students to draw cartoon strips to include in a newspaper they were creating, Benno found a template, and the students were able to draw them with the symbol maker tool. “That was really fun,” she said.

From kindergartners to fifth graders, students gravitate toward Kidspiration, she said. At a recent open house, students were showing their families around the school, and nearly all of them who came into the computer lab wanted to demonstrate how they use Kidspiration. “They can’t wait to get on it,” she said. “It’s so easy and fun to use.”

With the support of a principal who encourages creativity and provides innovative technology tools, such as Kidspiration, Benno is excited to see how teaching and learning will evolve at Puster Elementary. “With Kidspiration, literally, you can do something in five to ten minutes that’s really beneficial,” she said. “It’s just a great, great tool, and we’re only scratching the surface of what we can do with it.”



With this “Getting to Know You” activity, Puster Elementary students work in pairs to compare and contrast their lives in this Kidspiration Venn diagram.