

“Old-School” Teacher Becomes “Technology Champion” With Kidspiration, Engaging Kindergartners in Learning, Prepping for Standardized Test

Excitement builds as kindergarten teacher Debi Stewart reaches into her “fairness cup” of popsicle sticks bearing her students’ names, to choose who will be next to take a turn using Kidspiration®, the visual way to explore and understand words, numbers and concepts, from Inspiration Software®. This time, they’re matching words that rhyme. With an easy motion, a student places “clock” and “block” and the accompanying graphics side by side. Stewart uses Kidspiration with an electronic whiteboard, so her students’ selections are displayed for all to see.

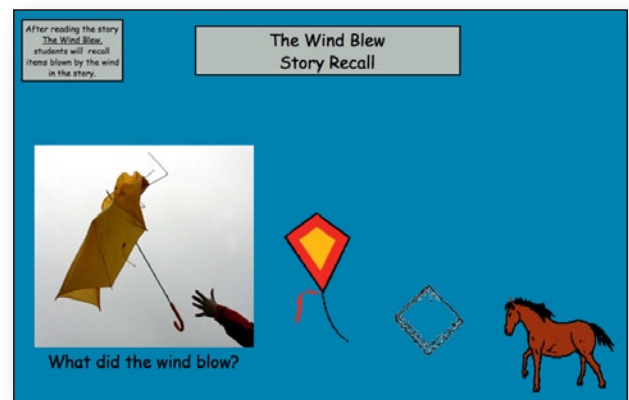
“When I turn on Kidspiration, they say, ‘Can we play now?’” said Stewart, who teaches at Genoa Elementary in Pasadena Independent School District, located near Houston. “They’re seeing, hearing and moving objects, which makes learning fun.”

Created for learners in kindergarten through fifth grade, Kidspiration develops thinking, literacy and numeracy skills using proven visual learning principles. In reading and writing, Kidspiration strengthens word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension and written expression. With Kidspiration’s visual math tools, students build reasoning and problem-solving skills.

With 20 years of teaching experience behind her, Stewart considered herself “old school,” acknowledging her long-standing affection for paper and pencil. Until recently, her computer knowledge was limited to word processing and a little email and Internet browsing. Lately, she’s moved in a new direction, since discovering the range of learning opportunities available with Kidspiration—for both independent and teacher-initiated activities. And she’s gained a reputation in her district as a champion of technology—and more specifically, as “the Kidspiration person,” she said.

“You really lose out if you don’t learn the technology. I have about 10 more years to teach, and I need to be able to teach this way, because that’s how the kids are learning,” she noted.

Since she first saw Kidspiration at a staff-development event, it’s become an indispensable part of her classroom—a tool she uses to support student learning in language arts, math, science and social studies.



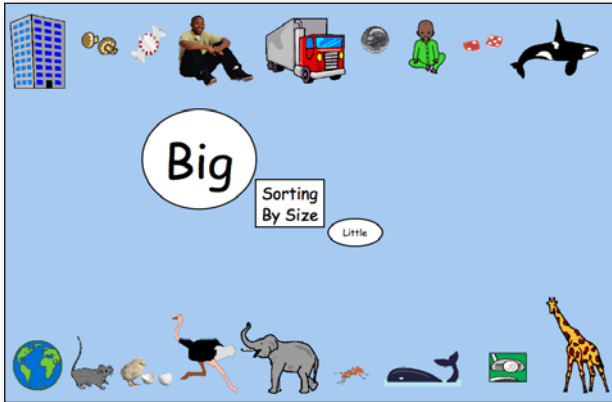
With the Kidspiration template “The Wind Blew,” Stewart taught her students about nouns and verbs.

“It hit me that I can apply Kidspiration throughout my day, to so many of my subjects,” she said. “I’ve really gotten into it, playing with it and making things.” She’s put some of her favorite worksheets in Kidspiration, which has “brought them to life.”

As a participant in Inspiration Software’s online *Inspired Learning Community*, Stewart has found and shared numerous lesson ideas with educators near and far. In the last six months, she has created nearly 150 Kidspiration templates “because I find it’s fun to make them from scratch,” she said. “My flash drive is almost overflowing with them.”

When her district’s curriculum doesn’t include resources for a lesson, she creates her own. “I’ve tried to fill in all the gaps, for my students and others in the district, and I’ve really enjoyed it so much,” she said.

For example, when she needed to teach her students the difference between living and nonliving things, she made a template and put her class to work on Kidspiration, moving pictures and words to the proper



This Kidspiration lesson helps students identify objects other than shapes, by size.

category. In the past, Stewart would create a poster or a bulletin board to teach such a concept. "Kidspiration is so much easier, and it really captures students' attention. These are not the students we had 20 years ago. They want to learn with technology, and when they do, they're so engaged in the learning," she said.

When her class read "The Wind Blew," she created a Kidspiration template to teach her students about nouns and verbs. Also in language arts, she made templates for reviewing letters and sight words and for learning compound words and ending sounds. In science, she's used Kidspiration to teach the anatomy of an apple, the five senses, things that fly and don't fly, and the hatching of an egg. In social studies, she's used it to teach land forms and presidents, and in math to teach shapes and dividing them in half, as well as graphs and sorting.

She's also taught analogies and relationships, real and make-believe, what belongs, and wants and needs, all using Kidspiration. When the holidays come, Stewart is prepared with templates for creating pumpkins, snowmen, presidents and valentines.

With countless Kidspiration successes behind her, Stewart has been spreading the word within her school and district. After creating file after file of lesson plans in Kidspiration, she burned a CD to share with her colleagues. "I said, 'This is so easy—go out and do this,' and everyone was excited."

Stewart has big plans for Kidspiration in the coming school year. In 2009, for the first time, the state of Texas required that kindergartners take the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. Stewart said her kindergartners showed a need for improvement in vocabulary—a challenge she plans to take on with Kidspiration, using categories, retelling of stories and flow charts. In addition, she'll develop a word list, and the students will locate pictures that relate to or describe the word, all with Kidspiration.

"Students will make sentences such as 'I see a dog.' We can expand that sentence by using more descriptive words. We can go from picture mode to writing mode and write, 'I see a large black dog in the yard.' Kidspiration has excellent clip art, which will allow the students to put a large black dog in a yard, in the picture mode, and then we will write about our picture," she said.

In addition, Stewart plans to have her students author their own projects in Kidspiration. "It will contribute to their higher level thinking when they are responsible for their own learning," she said.

"The kids have such a good time with Kidspiration, and it's amazing to see how much they can do with it," she said. "I just can't believe how cool it is—I get so much joy out of it."

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