

Virginia Students Build Love for Learning, Teachers Meet State Standards With Kidspiration 3

When kindergarten teacher Hollie Furr sets out to teach her young learners about nutrition, she starts by using Kidspiration® 3 from Inspiration Software®, to sort by food groups, labeling each food under its picture. Then the students take over, identifying foods such as rice, yogurt and apples and placing them in the proper nutritional groups.

“When the kids are finished, they know which foods fall in which groups. The best part is they don’t realize it’s work, which is every teacher’s dream,” said Furr, who teaches at Cub Run Elementary, part of Rockingham County Public Schools in central Virginia.

Obe Hostetter, an instructional technology resource teacher for this district of 11,400 students and 21 schools, has been busy putting Kidspiration 3 into the hands of teachers in the elementary schools he supports. “This software is one of the easiest to learn and teach,” he said. He recalls an in-service day when he demonstrated Kidspiration, and “the teachers were so excited that they ordered it for their classrooms that day.”

To help teachers make the best use of Kidspiration with their students, Hostetter has compiled an impressive collection of templates—some created by teachers in his district and many he found on the Internet—that align with the state of Virginia’s Standards of Learning (SOL). He organizes the templates by grade level, making it easy for teachers to find the lessons they need to meet the standards. And, in many cases, what they are learning not only aligns with state standards, but it also supports the 21st Century Skills Framework.

Whenever Hostetter sees a template he likes, he sends it to any teachers in his district who might be able to use it. “Some of the teachers have been very creative in making their own templates. People can change the templates and make them fit their own style, building

on someone else’s creativity, not reinventing the wheel,” he said.

Hostetter’s also been sharing his templates with other districts across the state, and adding their best templates to his collection. His goal is to arm teachers with the best tools to help students succeed. “I know where teachers are coming from. There’s a lot to keep track of to meet the standards. If you make it easy and it’s helpful, they’ll use it.”

Numerous teachers in Rockingham County have been looking for help meeting social studies and science standards, said Hostetter, and now templates to address those standards are just a click away. He said teachers appreciate being able to preview a lesson in Kidspiration 3 without clicking it

open. Another benefit is the ability to click on a word and hear it, which is especially helpful for younger students and English language learners. Kidspiration 3 also easily integrates with the district’s interactive whiteboards, “so they have fun using it,” he said.

In Furr’s classroom, lessons with Kidspiration have included make-believe versus real, money, upper- and lower-case letters of the alphabet, the weather, and dressing people with the right clothes for the season. With Kidspiration’s symbol library, teachers can type in the name of something, such as a frog, and it will immediately bring up a picture of it. “My favorite thing is how realistic the graphics are,” she said.



Hollie Furr uses Kidspiration to teach her kindergarten students upper- and lower-case letters of the alphabet.

Her students are always on task with Kidspiration, she said—even those who typically have difficulty focusing. “They don’t look around and try to talk to other students, because they’re enjoying the assignments—they’re like games to them,” she said. “I’ve actually had kids cry when we’ve run out of time to finish an assignment in Kidspiration.”

Furr’s colleague Carolyn Miller teaches second grade at Cub Run Elementary, and she, too, is making great use of Kidspiration in her classroom—and has been for about five years. She finds it very useful for teaching writing—starting with Kidspiration “webs” where students’ ideas are developed, and progressing from there. “In second grade, they’re learning to organize their thoughts on paper. Kidspiration is an instant success because it helps students break down the task. It’s very easy for them to learn—they make the web, add pictures and then click to writing, and they can see how their thoughts translate to paragraphs,” she said.

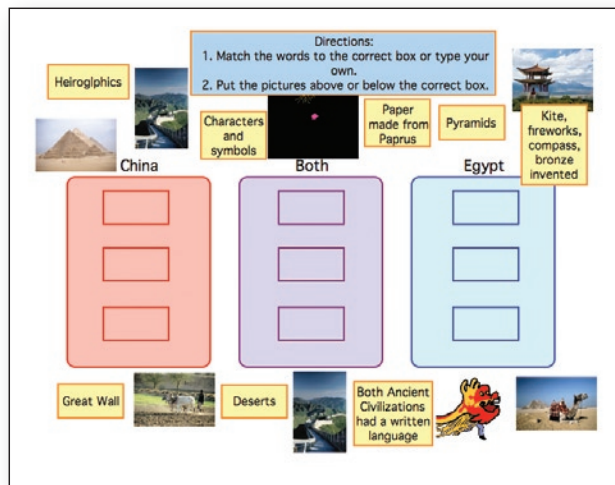
Miller said she’s been amazed at the detail of the webs her students have created. “It’s like you gave them a piece of paper and crayon,” she said. “The templates are colorful and bright and pertain to what we’re doing. The kids are always excited about using Kidspiration.”

Students feel a great sense of accomplishment, too, she said as they are making something that comes to fruition before their eyes.

A “big plus” that’s not available in other programs is the freedom to tailor the templates to meet the state standards, she said. “The basic templates and pictures are there, and we can put them together to create what we need.” She uses Kidspiration for lessons as well as reviews and tests. “It’s so much better than a worksheet,” she said.

For visual learners, Kidspiration is a real asset, said Miller, capturing their attention much better than reading alone. “For example, in learning about nouns and verbs, they’re seeing the visuals and manipulating them. They’re much more a part of the process.”

Kidspiration is also useful for differentiating instruction for her students, said Miller. “I have second graders reading at fifth- and sixth-grade levels, and others who are just learning to read. Everyone is able to do research and webbing and create some wonderful pieces of writing.”



Students in Sue Haley’s second-grade classroom use Kidspiration to compare the ancient civilizations of Egypt and China.

In Sue Haley’s second-grade classroom at Rockingham County’s Mountain View Elementary, she and her students enjoy using Kidspiration templates on their interactive whiteboard. A recent lesson involved comparing the ancient civilizations of Egypt and China with Kidspiration symbols. They flipped to writing view and wrote short descriptions of the important contributions of the civilizations. “It’s a very powerful learning tool with graphic organizers to represent children’s understanding of difficult SOL concepts,” said Haley.

She said Kidspiration has helped her students learn to organize, compare and contrast difficult materials and works well with English language learners, students with special needs and gifted learners. “My students enjoy Kidspiration,” she said. “It’s simple for them to work with, and they love to take home what they’ve created.”

Hostetter noted that he sees students playing on Kidspiration, just for fun, when they get a chance. “That says something,” he said.

Added Miller, “Kidspiration is exciting for the students and easy for the teachers. There’s a lot of flexibility—it’s all right there.”