

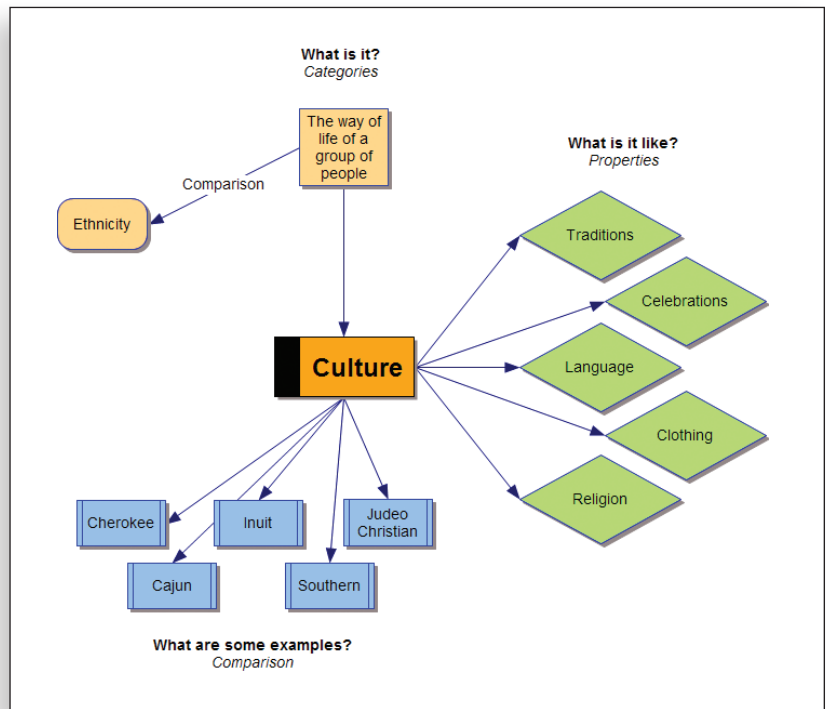
Texas educator combines visual learning with instructional strategies to foster school-wide success

“Graphic organizers aren’t just for English classes,” emphasizes Jennifer Blair, Instructional Technology Facilitator for West Memorial Junior High in Katy, Texas. “Students can and should use graphic organizers in any subject requiring reading.” A 2007 Inspired Teacher Scholarship recipient, Blair works with educators throughout her school to integrate Inspiration® and visual learning techniques with cross-curricular instructional strategies.

Inspiration builds thinking and learning skills across the curriculum

Blair, who has used Inspiration for almost ten years, taught in the classroom for several years. Having acquired an in-depth knowledge of instructional strategies, she helps other teachers learn how to integrate technology and visual learning into daily instruction. For example, note-taking is one area in particular where Blair believes technology and visual learning complement the learning process. She shows students and teachers how to use Inspiration to take notes in any area across the curriculum. Students begin in Diagram View where they create graphic organizers to organize their information and notes. Then they can switch to Outline View to add details and study their notes. “Many students grasp the information much easier when they can take notes using a graphic organizer rather than just answering questions from a textbook,” says Blair.

The district, which Blair describes as “strategy-driven,” advocates the use of CRISS (Creating Independence through Student-owned Strategies) to teach students how to learn. Project CRISS emphasizes a clear path to learning which involves reading for understanding, discussing and organizing main ideas, and reflecting



Jennifer Blair uses Inspiration® to help junior high students implement learning strategies, such as taking notes, summarizing and organizing information, and writing about their learning.

on or writing about the learning. (For more information about Project CRISS, see www.projectcriss.org.) Blair feels that Inspiration works seamlessly with these strategies as a way for students to take notes, organize information and, by switching to Outline View, prepare to write about the learning. New features in Inspiration 8, such as the variety of templates, more than 1 million symbols and the Word Guide—an integrated dictionary and thesaurus, help students more precisely organize and write. “I want students to develop the mental condition where they think about how they learn best and then use those strategies,” says Blair.

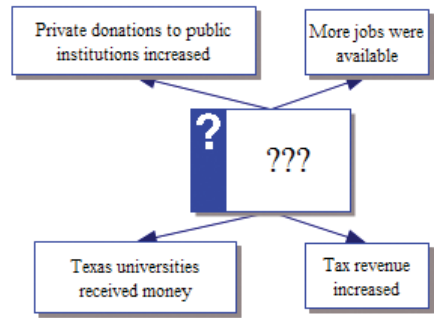
According to school Principal Patti Shafer, Blair’s efforts are paying off. “It is exhilarating to watch teachers and students get excited about the use of technology,” Shafer says. “Jennifer makes this happen through visual learning.”

Using Inspiration to meet curriculum requirements and prepare for state testing in social studies

As a member of the district's Social Studies Advanced Placement Vertical Team, Blair works closely with the social studies teachers to integrate Inspiration. She offers Inspiration training courses, works with teachers to demonstrate how visual learning matches up with objectives and standards, and creates lessons specifically designed to meet curriculum requirements.

This year, she is also training the teachers to create incomplete scenario questions in Inspiration, the type that are often found on the state tests. The comprehensive exam in social studies is administered for the first time at the end of the 8th grade year, so it is important for teachers to prepare students for the types of questions they might encounter.

2. What completes the diagram on the right?
A. Effects of education reform
B. Effects of James Hogg's administration
C. Effects of the oil boom
D. Effects of the progressive movement



This type of incomplete scenario question is often encountered on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), the exam given at the end of 8th grade. Inspiration helps teachers easily create these types of questions.

Blair looks forward to working more with teachers in the school to integrate Inspiration across the curriculum. She is proud that her school currently has the most Inspiration files on the district server, even though they are the smallest school. She plans to continue the school's success by providing additional Inspiration training that focuses on concrete examples to improve students' thinking and learning strategies. "When students use Inspiration they get excited about learning," concludes Blair. "Students need to develop the ability to create things on their own. Inspiration allows them to be self-sufficient."