

Kidspiration® boosts writing skills

Graphical organizing program supports New York education standards, helping students learn to organize and plan for writing

Fourth grade students in Leah Floriano's classroom at Iroquois Intermediate School in Elma, New York, use Kidspiration to build writing skills. Creative brainstorming and webbing activities help students visualize their ideas and get organized before they start the writing process. The result is better writing. Plus, Kidspiration helps Floriano align her curriculum to meet district and state standards.

Meeting standards with Kidspiration

Floriano was introduced to Kidspiration and Inspiration in a technology course as part of her master of education program. She immediately saw Kidspiration's value for her students. Standards in the Iroquois Central School District call for the use of graphical organizers to help students learn to process, analyze, and organize information. Before discovering Kidspiration, Floriano's students used paper and pencil to create webs and graphical organizers—a time-consuming and tedious process—but necessary to teach students about planning and organizing for writing.

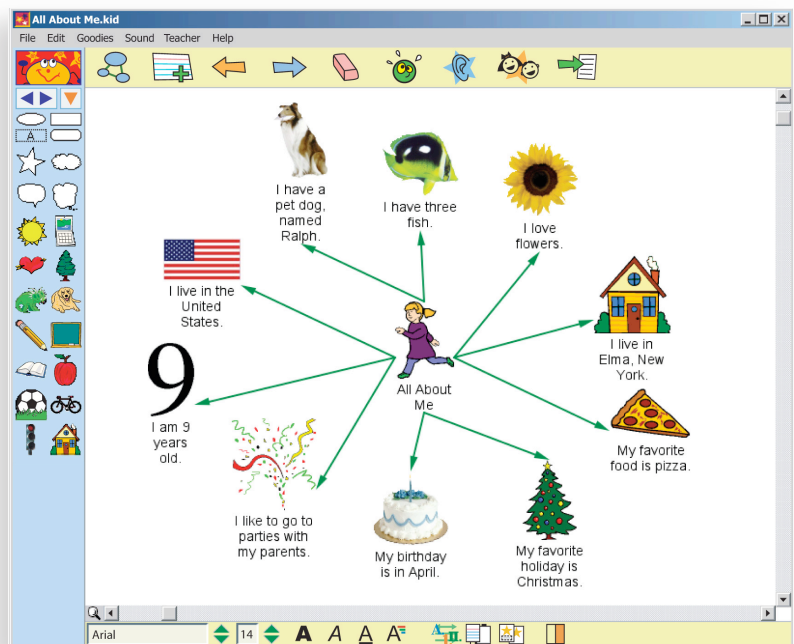
During a student's fourth grade year, the first round of state tests in language arts, math, and science are administered. Students are required to write essays for the English Language Arts (ELA) tests, which are partially evaluated on organization, clarity, and the presence of key story elements. "Pre-writing activities in Kidspiration are definitely a great preparation for the ELA test," says Floriano.

Students enter Floriano's classroom from third grade knowing how to write sentences and paragraphs, but they have not yet mastered the skills needed to

develop an entire story with a beginning, middle, and end. Floriano soon found that creating webs and other graphical organizers in Kidspiration helped students learn how to incorporate and organize all the elements of a story before they began their writing.

Taking a chance with Kidspiration

In her first year teaching fourth grade, Floriano was anxious to make a good impression with an upcoming lesson that her principal, Donna Eno, would observe. Although she had never used Kidspiration with her students, Floriano decided to put the visual learning program to the test during the observation.



Leah Floriano's fourth grade students create Kidspiration diagrams to brainstorm and organize their thoughts before they start to write.

In preparation for the class, Floriano created a Kidspiration web with an overview of a story the class had recently read. On the day of the observation, she read the story to the class, showed them the diagram, and explained how she created it in Kidspiration. Students gathered around the computer as Floriano demonstrated how to use Kidspiration and showed students some of the symbols

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in the library. To help them understand the steps of creating a graphical organizer, Floriano did a “talk-aloud,” talking the students through the thinking process of creating a diagram in Kidspiration. She solicited suggestions from the students, and the class worked together to create a new web with details from a story they had recently read.

After a break, students returned to the classroom to take turns working individually with Kidspiration on the classroom’s five computers. They created graphical organizers about themselves, illustrating their interests and describing their lives. Then students used the webs they had created to give them ideas for the introductory letters they were writing to their pen pals in Virginia. “Students love using the computer, but this was their first experience using it for anything other than educational games,” states Floriano. “They had a great time using Kidspiration, and thought of it as fun, not work.”



In the end, the students’ projects were a huge success. Not only had Floriano introduced her students to a new way of organizing their thoughts and ideas, but she had made a positive impression on Principal Eno during the process. “Floriano has done an excellent job of integrating technology into her instructional program,” says Eno. “She has aligned the curriculum to meet the New York State Standards with technology as an integral tool!”

Floriano recognizes the power of visual learning to help students who learn best visually. “I am a visual learner, and there must be visual learners in my classroom as well,” she says. “Kidspiration is a technology tool that children can use successfully and enjoy using at the same time. I can’t imagine teaching without it.”



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