

## Kidspiration<sup>®</sup> templates launch learning across the curriculum

### Kids catch on quickly with visual learning techniques

"I'm a visual person," says Patti Weeg, the Title 1 Computer Teacher at Delmar Elementary in Delmar, Maryland. She meets the needs of her students the same way she meets her own: by teaching to the visual learner in every student. Kidspiration, with its colors and pictures, grabbed her attention immediately as a program that her students would respond to, and she was right.

Weeg is directly responsible for her six computers in the Title I lab, but she's also nominally in charge of the 26 Pentiums in a computer lab nearby that serves 1,000 students in Pre-K through grade 5. She helps "next door" by making Kidspiration templates for other teachers to use in the lab with their students. Having a template in place allows the youngsters to get right to the lesson; their teacher has already done the set-up work in the classroom so students can dive right into using the computers and the software.

Initially, Weeg thought Kidspiration was only a writing tool because it was presented to her through story webs. But once she had the chance to really use the software, it became very clear that this was a tool suitable for nearly any subject.

For example, browsing Kidspiration's different symbol libraries revealed colorful sets tailored for geography, math, plants and animals, food and health, science, social studies, language arts, school days, and more. Weeg discovered

that teachers could build an earthscience activity, for example, in 10 minutes just by placing symbols for trees, water, air, wind, and soil into a Kidspiration diagram with a few labels and arrows. Students can then fill in the blanks, or drag arrows around to indicate how the cycle works. The options are endless.

Moreover, browsing the 75 activity templates included with the program demonstrated to her the many ways in which Kidspiration could be used for social studies, science, math, or reading and writing. Many of the activity templates also cross narrow subject boundaries and Weeg especially likes that approach. Her first forays with the program bear that out.

### Activities target early math and reading skills

One of Weeg's early Kidspiration lessons covered both math and pre-reading skills. She designed a click-and-drag alphabet activity for kindergartners in which they had to separate those letters made only of curves from letters made only of straight lines, from a third group of letters made of both. This incorporates the concepts of letter recognition, and introduces students to the idea of organizing sets and subsets as well. Plus, the students get a kick out of kinesthetically dragging letters around on screen.

In a similar activity, first graders work with money amounts; if the object costs eight cents, the student has to drag over a nickel and three pennies. This addresses the skills of addition, reading, and identifying monetary amounts. And unlike a paper worksheet, if

the lesson is not done exactly right the first time, with Kidspiration, students can easily start over and still print out a clean final copy.



One project that got everyone excited this year was a story web put together by the kindergartners. It was a simple "About Me" exercise (my hair is brown, my eyes are blue, etc.) that each student did. What made it extra special was including the students' own faces in their story webs. Weeg scanned in every child's photo, placing it in the middle of each student's story web. "When the little ones saw their own face on that screen, that was just precious," she recalls. "They were so excited."

Existing projects at Delmar Elementary have also gotten a lift from Kidspiration. For instance, via an Authors in Residence program, second and third graders traditionally build an original story. This year, the five-month project utilized Kidspiration to create story webs and outlines for these original tales which the young authors could then produce into a bound book.

#### **Value in "taking it one step further"**

To ensure she utilizes the full power of Kidspiration and doesn't depend solely on visual worksheets, Weeg is careful to incorporate a writing element into every template she creates. For example, in a cause-and-effect exercise, third graders were asked to drag causes into one group and

effects into another. They then had to create their own effect to explain a chosen cause, and type it into a Text Box.

This "taking it one step further" ability is, Weeg feels, one of many characteristics that Kidspiration has going for it. Ease of use is another significant plus. Teachers have found it very easy to use; and Weeg herself uses Kidspiration to make presentations for her professional colleagues outside of class.

Young students find Kidspiration "visually appealing," she says, so they want to build with it and explore in it. In fact, Weeg comments that students usually learn the program more quickly than their teachers do because "they are not afraid to explore."

**"Nowhere else in their school day are they in control. Here [using Kidspiration in the computer lab], the kids are in charge of their own learning."**

Her next step, says Weeg, is to motivate more teachers to build their own templates. Once they've learned the process of making and using a customized Kidspiration template, they'll gain confidence and find many creative and practical uses, she believes. It was how she learned the program herself, and it was "awfully easy." Confident of a great future, Weeg continues to discover new ideas in the software, and feels "sure there are many untapped resources [she] can provide for the teachers" through Kidspiration.

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