

## Inspiration® helps students prepare for New York State Regents Comprehensive Examination in English

### New York students are 'inspired' to write better essays

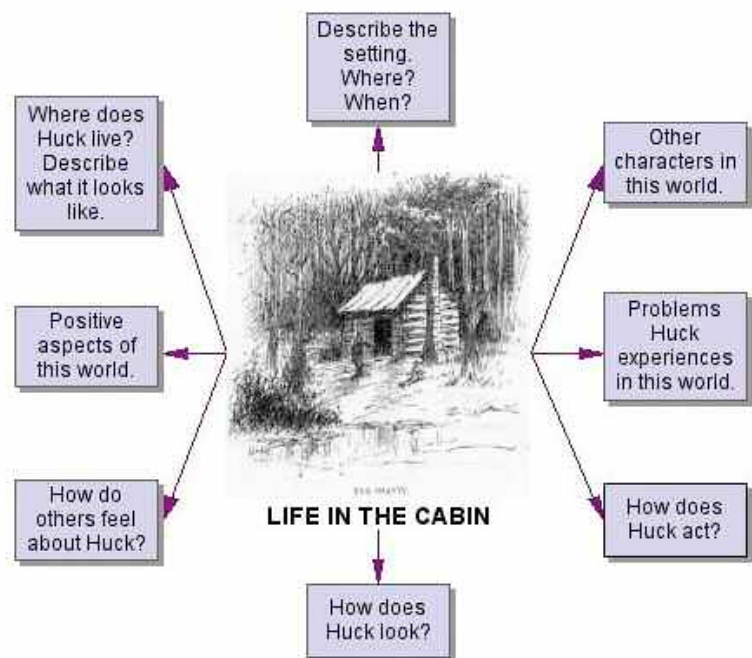
Students across the state of New York are finding that visual learning methods help them prepare for The New York State Regents Comprehensive Examination in English. Taken during a student's junior year, the exam (and a passing score!) is a requirement for high school graduation. Essays make up a significant portion of the test, and require students to analyze and interpret information and write clear, organized responses. Inspiration helps students prepare for the test because it helps them organize their thoughts clearly, in preparation for writing.

In Westchester County, at Walter Panas High School in Lakeland Central School District, Sue Erichsen's students use Inspiration to prepare for the Regents exam. She created a series of graphic organizers in Inspiration to help her eleventh-grade English students compare the literary elements in the various worlds or "civilizations" that Huck Finn experiences throughout Mark Twain's classic, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

### Learning literary elements with Inspiration

During a six-week unit, students read each chapter in the book and brainstorm about Huck's experiences. In small groups, they create a graphic organizer depicting each of Huck's worlds and then discuss them as a class. Linda Brandon, Lakeland CSD's technology training coordinator, observed Erichsen's students during one

of these discussions. "The students were in groups, huddled around their diagrams. They were very engaged in discussing the assignment." Using Inspiration to map out the literary elements helps Erichsen's students gain a deeper understanding of the novel. In fact, about 80 percent of the students will use *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as one of the two literary works for discussion in the fourth section of the Regents exam. "To be able to write rich essays, students must get a good handle on the works they've read and the various literary elements that make up the work," says Erichsen. "Creating maps of the literary elements helps the students effectively compare and contrast Huck's various worlds."



Erichsen uses E.W. Kemble's illustrations from the first edition of *Huckleberry Finn* in her diagrams.

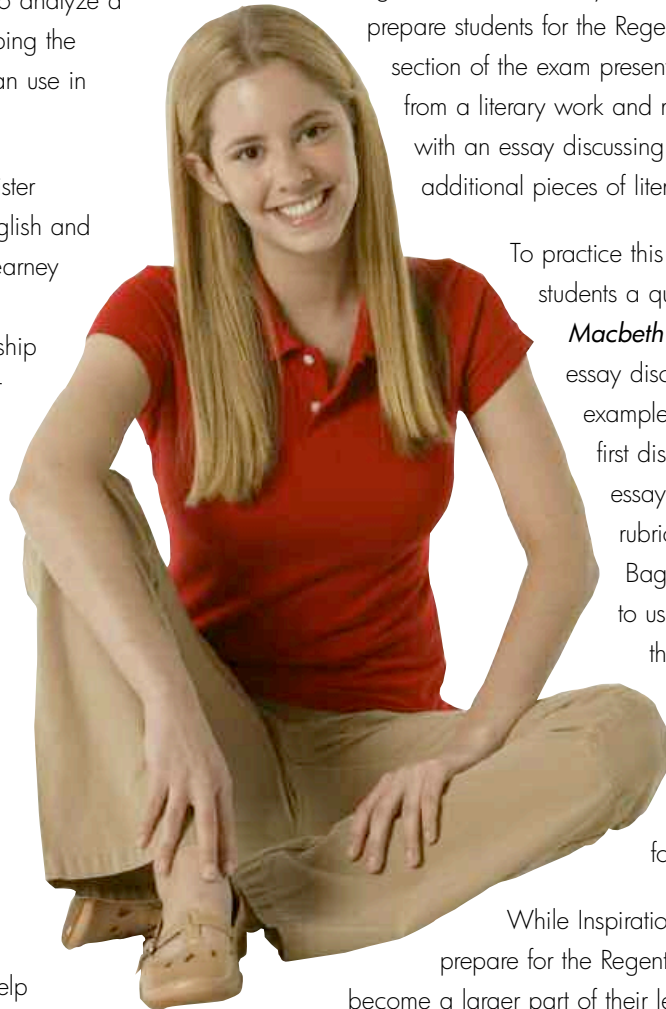
"The Shanty" by E.W. Kemble is used with permission from the University of Virginia library (<http://etext.virginia.edu>).

Erichsen uses Inspiration to help students prepare for the Regents exam, with the goal of helping them develop skills that will carry them well beyond their high school examinations. "My students will walk away from this activity, not only learning how to analyze a particular book, but also absorbing the process for learning that they can use in similar situations with success."

In another part of New York, Sister Rosemarie Baglivio, CSJ, an English and study skills teacher at Bishop Kearney High School in Brooklyn (and a 2002 Inspired Teacher Scholarship winner), has used Inspiration for the past two years with her ninth- and tenth-grade students. Like Sue Erichsen, Sister Baglivio uses the software to prepare students for the Regents English Exam.

### Organizing for writing

According to Baglivio, the biggest problems her students face in writing are poor organization and a lack of critical thinking skills. Beginning with her incoming freshman, Baglivio develops activities to help her students learn to organize and expand their thoughts. In one activity, Baglivio uses Inspiration with her ninth-grade students to analyze the characters in *The Necklace* and *The Jewels*, short stories by Guy de Maupassant. Baglivio's students create character webs in Inspiration to analyze the main characters in the



stories. After completing and discussing their character webs, students convert their webs to outlines, and expand on their ideas to write a character analysis essay.

Baglivio creates a variety of Inspiration activities to prepare students for the Regents exam. For example, one section of the exam presents students with a quote from a literary work and requires them to respond with an essay discussing the quote using two additional pieces of literature.

To practice this skill, Baglivio gives her students a quote from Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and asks them to write an essay discussing the quote, pulling in examples from the text. The class first discusses what makes a good essay response using the scoring rubric from the Regents exam. Baglivio then shows them how to use Inspiration to organize their essay. Her students use an Inspiration template she created to help them organize their work to develop a fuller, more focused written response.

While Inspiration helps Baglivio's students prepare for the Regents exam, visual learning has become a larger part of their learning experiences. "They really enjoy using Inspiration to organize for writing," says Baglivio. "Many of them have started to organize other papers in Inspiration—even when it is not required."

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