

## Students Inspiration® projects win top honors at Technology Expo

### Story webs impress judges and earn students a presentation on local television

Students coming in early to work on projects? Entering and winning competitions, and training other students to use software? No, it isn't a dream sequence in a movie. It is just another normal day at Queensbury Union Free School District in Queensbury, New York.

Inspiration fever is spreading fast here, fueled by the enthusiasm of Kyle Gannon's sixth grade language arts class. The students competed in the Student Technology Expo supported by Columbia University's North Hudson Electronic Education Empowerment Project (NHEEEP), where they won top honors for their age group by presenting story webs created with Inspiration.

### Inspiration makes story mapping a cinch

Gannon used to do semantic mapping with his students on a dry erase board. But the process was often cumbersome and frustrating. Students each had to read the same book and it was difficult to hold their attention. Even so, Gannon felt that mapping was necessary. "Writing is so important. You have to become a dominant writer to become a dominant student, but every teacher hears 'I don't know what to write' all the time. Mapping helps students get their creative energy flowing so they can begin the writing process."

Today, mapping and writing is easier for Gannon's students. Now they are each free to pick their own books and then do their own maps using Inspiration. "This

allows students to have some choice in what they are doing. It really helps them feel like the project is their own," says Gannon. "As they read their books, they are thinking about their maps. Oftentimes, they can tell me which symbols will be used for each topic before they sit down at a computer!"

After finishing their reading, the students set off to the computer lab. Here they begin to "web out" their stories using Inspiration. According to their teacher, "They like to type, so getting them to put their ideas down is easy. And they love to use Inspiration's brainstorming tool, RapidFire®. . . it's a chance to get all their great ideas out as quickly as possible."

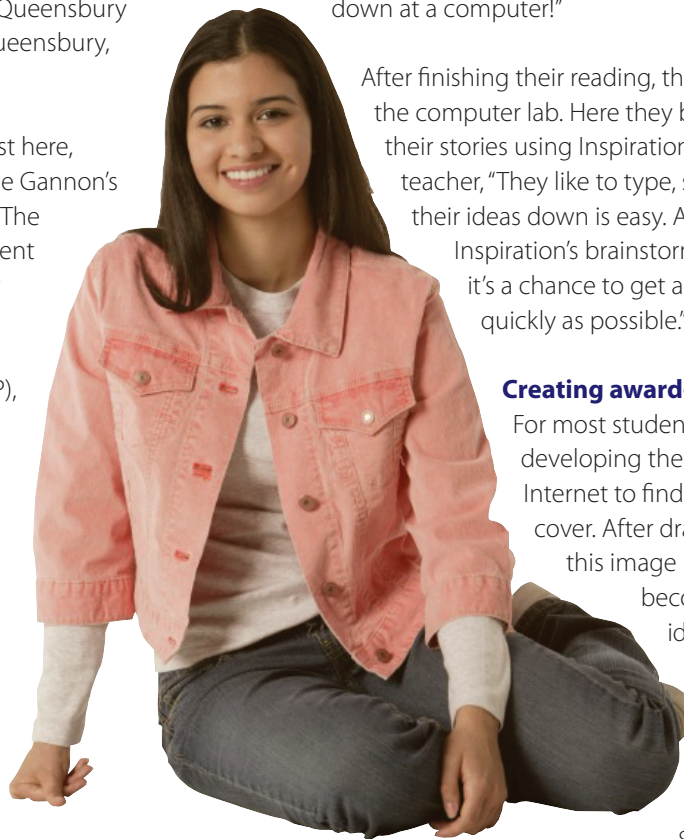
### Creating award-winning projects

For most students, the first step in developing their maps is to search the Internet to find a photo of the book cover. After dragging and dropping this image into their diagram, it becomes their new main idea. Before using the Internet though, students discuss plagiarism. "We have to be very careful about plagiarism. Students don't even

think about it until we talk about it.

But I tell them that they must try to get permission for everything they bring into Inspiration from the Internet."

Then it's time to flesh out their work with research. Gannon sends his students on an Internet search to find out more about the story and its author. For each site they discover, the students place a hyperlink into their diagrams. "They love to hyperlink to web pages. To click on a link and actually have it open a page with information that pertains to their topic is great."



After they have enough information on their books, students turn their diagrams into outlines and export them to a word processing program to begin their writing.

To compete in the NHEEEP expo, several of Gannon's students took their writing projects a step further. Gannon opened the computer lab before school for several days and students voluntarily (and excitedly) came in each morning to work on creatively customizing and enhancing their diagrams. They learned how to change the colors of symbols, make different types of links, and personalize their outlines by changing topic fonts and colors. They also expanded their web research and added hyperlinks to online author chats.

As his students' knowledge grew, so did their confidence. "Anytime there was a computer free, students were begging to use Inspiration. Many of them have now advanced beyond my capabilities with the program," says Gannon.

### **Story webs wow audience**

Finally, it was show time for the tech expo crew. Gannon loaded up the laptops, a monitor, and seven of his most

inspired students and off they went. As the students began showing their projects to a group of judges, the 'oohs' and 'aahs' they heard when they changed a diagram into an outline fueled their excitement.

Many of the other school districts at the expo were not familiar with Inspiration, but thanks to Gannon's students, everyone knew about the program by the time the day was over. Throughout the show, his students displayed diagrams on Harry Potter, Julie of the Wolves, and Treasure Island to teachers and students from about 30 other NHEEEP schools.

Enthusiasm generated by the presentation even caught the attention of a local television crew at the show, and the students were invited to present their projects on TV!

When the day ended, the group was awarded top honors for their age division and received a digital camera for their prize. According to their teacher, the students immediately saw an inspiring use for this new toy. "Now they can't wait to take pictures to include in their diagrams!"

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**— Kyle Gannon**

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