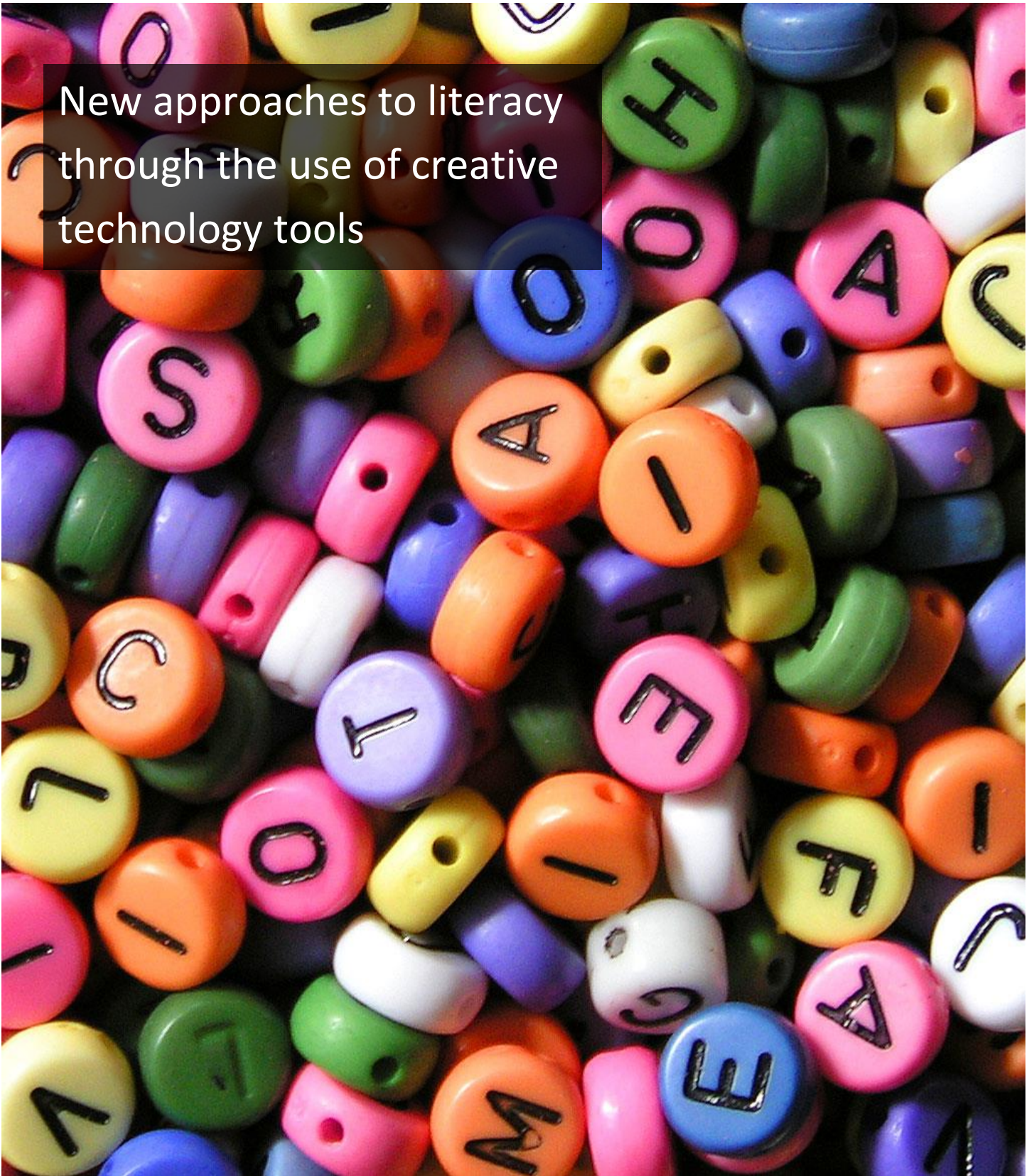


Building Elementary Literacy with Technology

New approaches to literacy through the use of creative technology tools



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Build Early Literacy Skills

Engage new readers and writers with creative technologies



In 2002, the National Early Literacy Panel's released a report on the Five Elements of a Successful Reading Program. These included phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. A combination of activities and open-ended project work in creative tools like Pixie and Wixie can help you assess basic literacy skills as well as engage students in the practice necessary to build these skills.

Alphabetic Principle

You can use a variety of activities to help readers learn that speech can be segmented into small sounds (phonemic awareness) and that the segmented units of speech can be represented by printed forms (phonics). Pixie and Wixie include an Alphabet Principle folder that includes activities like Initial Sounds, ABC Word Order, and Vowel Sounds which require



students to identify initial sounds in a word or categorize them by initial or medial sounds.

Activities are great for practice and assessing student understanding, but they aren't motivating for many students. You can give students more voice and choice in their work, even at this young stage, by developing alphabet projects that start from a blank screen.

Most students have seen and read a book with an ABC structure and are eager to be authors on their own. You students can add images to represents words that begin with this letter sound and then type the words and read them into a microphone.

You might decide to complete a project like this a number of ways. You could build each page as your class explores new letters (and letter sounds) using an interactive whiteboard for whole class discussion. You

might start a page at a center in your classroom and give students time to find and add images that begin with this letter and then complete as a class. Depending on your access to technology and the experience of your students, you could assign a different letter to each student based on their abilities.

Phonics

Strengthen these same skills for older students through writing projects that incorporate rhyming words or alliteration. Julie McCoy and Jan Tell of Grand Island, Nebraska had students write an alliterative sentence for each letter of the alphabet, use paint tools illustrate it, and then combined the pages into an animated class movie.



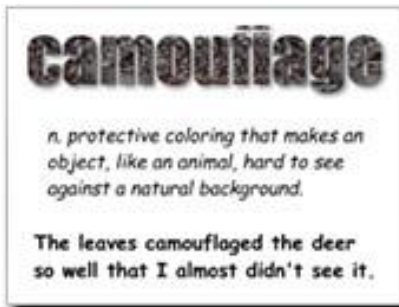
structure to develop understanding of new words. Use ABC-style books, like those mentioned above, not to address letter sounds, but new terminology within a particular topic such as transportation or biomes.

When a vocabulary word is associated with something you can visualize, it is easier to remember. Creating visual vocabulary words using the Cool Word feature helps students more quickly connect a word with its meaning. The

effectiveness of this approach is consistent with the findings of Robert Marzano and his team whose research shows that “the more we use both systems of representation – linguistic and nonlinguistic – the better we are able to think about and recall knowledge.”

Fluency

When students develop the ability to read text quickly and accurately, they can more rapidly comprehend what they are reading. Pre-record your voice reading a text selection in a Pixie or Wixie project so students can listen to a model of fluency. Then, have them practice reading the passage and create their own recording. Students can use playback features listen to what they have recorded, practice the passage again, and record a final version of the passage.



Great literature can also help you support vocabulary acquisition, especially if you have students develop their own versions after reading. After reading Judi Barrett’s Things That Are Most in the World, 2nd-grade students in Miss Alia’s class at Woodward Academy wanted to create their own book. As a class they brainstormed all of the superlatives they could think of. Then, each student chose their favorite and wrote a sentence that provided a context clue to the meaning of the word. They used Pixie to type the sentence, draw their own illustrations and record a reading. All student pages were then combined into one class book.

When students record text they have written in Pixie, they provide a demonstration of their current fluency ability. Recording, listening, and rerecording also provides an opportunity for practice without the worry about reading aloud in front of their peers, providing them with the unthreatening practice they need to become successful readers.

Vocabulary

Activities on topics like synonyms and antonyms or prefixes and suffixes provide structures opportunities to build vocabulary skills. Cloze Activities can help students learn to use word context clues sentence



Comprehension

Traditionally, educators often ask students to complete activity worksheets that ask students to identify key details like character, setting, and events, or describe a main character using a character traits organizer. These are great ways to begin the process and for you to evaluate student comprehension, but they aren’t exactly engaging for students or examples of authentic practice.

Rather than asking students to tell you what they know, ask them to show you what they know. This can be as simple as retelling a story, creating a condensed version that provides a textual summary of the beginning, middle, and end along with supporting illustrations. If students add a title page these summaries, creating a 4-page project, they can easily publish that work from Pixie or Wixie as a 4-panel comic or booklet they can fold and read. They could also combine analytical and creative thinking skills to design new book covers that demonstrate understanding of events and key details.

You can also make student work on comprehension skills more authentic by expanding the audience for their work. Rather than turning in a book report or summary that only the teacher sees, ask students to write a book review that will also be shared in the

school library to help other students find books they will enjoy reading.



A review should not only demonstrate understanding of character, setting, and events, but be written with the intent to inform and persuade others to read, important skills in the Common Core standards. Older students can also persuade through the creation of video trailers that persuade others to read in the style of the movie trailers they watch before heading to the theater.

Creative tools like Pixie and Wixie not only help you assess literacy skills, but provide a powerful platform for students to practice and apply these skills in ways that give them a voice and ownership of the learning process.

Help Every Student be an Author

Inspire young authors with creative tools



Can every student be an author? You bet! Whether they're just starting to write or are already accomplished writers, the motivation to write better and write more grows exponentially with the promise of a published product. Luckily, your students don't have to wait for a publishing house to come calling. They can use creative software tools like Pixie or Wixie to publish original works of literature.

As adults, we seem to shy away from things with blank pages, whether in a journal, a notebook, or on a computer screen. The blankness requires us to provide the input and our first response is "What do I do now?" Kids, on the other hand, view the blankness as an opportunity—no rules, no numbered sequences, just a vast area to explore, create, and show us what they really know and understand.

Your first decision when creating a book is whether the finished product will be a class book, where each member or group contributes a page or a section, or a book with individual authorship. Individual books can use the same rubric and instructions for each student. You can make desired content and length decisions based on your time and instructional requirements. Class books will necessitate a division of labor and topics, and more time for collaboration.

A-B-C Books

You can use an ABC book for learning and reinforcing the sounds of the alphabet, of course. Beyond that, alphabet books are a great way to reinforce vocabulary for any science or social studies concept and a great way to further explore a chapter book. For example, after studying the ocean and marine habitat, each student in my class created a letter page explaining one topic we had covered in the unit.

Adapt Your Favorite Book

If your class has a favorite book, especially those with a repeating pattern, challenge your students to come up with their own variations (Here are some great [literature titles for student adaptation](#)). You'll notice that some emphasize particular parts of speech or a particular rhythm.

As a class, students can generate lists of possibilities, so everyone has the opportunity to contribute to every page. It is also very important to credit the original author, which opens discussions about copyright, even at a young age.



[View the sample student project](#)

Life Isn't All Fiction

Your classroom books can also be the culmination of nonfiction studies. Your students' writing and illustrations will demonstrate the depth of their learning and show any gaps they may have in their knowledge. With very large topics, it will be necessary to split the content up between individuals or groups to ensure you cover all content standards for that topic.

21st-Century Publishing

Today's digital kids love publishing for an authentic audience. Publishing electronically gives the added dimension of sound. With tools like Pixie or Wixie, students can add music to set the mood, sound effects to provide suspense, and even record their own narration. Recording their own voices for their books is yet another way to motivate even the most reluctant learners. It also provides an excellent example of their reading fluency, perfect for a digital portfolio.

Let's Print!

Even with all of the digital options out there, my students still enjoy creating printed publications. When students have written more than four pages, we have

also cut the images out and placed them in 4 x 6 photo sleeves and bound them together into more formal books. To avoid using too much ink when their stories are really long, students print their stories as thumbnails—2 pictures to 1 printed page. Then, they cut out the pictures and share them in credit card sleeves and Altoid® tins!

The trading card format produces a size that will fit into the sleeves used for baseball-card collectors. These sleeves act as lamination, making the books durable, so they can be used again the next year with a new group of students. Other ways of binding includes stapling, brass fasteners, plastic sheet protectors and binders, duct tape, electrical tape, yarn, and

ribbon. More professional looking binding can be achieved with self-binding kits such as those available from [Lintor Publishing](#) or [Bare Books](#).

A Book of Words

Before and during units of study, we generate class lists of writing words to be used both for spelling and inspiration. The word list is printed, and students can place it in their own vocabulary folders. I share an ocean example as an introduction to guide words. My students need to place this page in the correct place in their folders, a good practice for the use of guide words. We also create single-page illustrations and definitions for new vocabulary words and then print them as trading cards.

By having your students write, illustrate, and publish their own books, you can tap into their innate desire for recognition as they learn to connect to literature, play with language, and beam with pride at their accomplishments.

Splat... Pow... Wow...

Making learning fun with comics, cartoons, and graphic novels



While comics, cartoons, and graphic novels have been around for years, recent movie blockbusters based on comics and graphic novels, including *Fantastic Four*, *Spider-Man*, *300*, and *Watchmen*, have fueled even more interest in the genre. Art Spiegelman's graphic novel memoir of the Holocaust, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, has also helped to elevate the graphic novel to a more respected genre.

As educators, we're always on the lookout for ways to use popular culture to engage our students. The creative application of comics, cartoons, and graphic novels provides an opportunity to connect our classrooms to the world outside, making learning relevant to students' lives.

Finding ways to motivate students to read is crucial in our quest to build student literacy. Integrating graphic novels into your reading program is a great way to reach out to reluctant readers and help them view reading as a pleasurable activity. Nearly every teacher can tell you a story about a student whose interest in

reading soared after being introduced to stories in comic or graphic novel form.

The comic book genre can help us engage students, improving literacy skills as they explore content in new ways. Kids think that comics are fun... so let's capitalize on that interest to promote learning and improve comprehension and thinking skills!

Brain-based teaching tells us that students learn by doing. Having them create their own comics as a form of expression and communication will provide additional opportunities for learning.

Increasing Achievement with Comics

A comic book is a combination of pictures and text that tell a story through a series of panels. When developing their own comic books and graphic novels, students practice summarizing and creating non-linguistic representations—two of the instructional strategies proven to boost student achievement. (Marzano et al., 2001)

Creating nonlinguistic representations of knowledge requires students to organize and elaborate on the information. Marzano and team state, “the more we use both systems of representation – linguistic and non-linguistic – the better we are able to think about and recall knowledge.” Comics are a natural marriage of these two forms of representation.

Because comics require illustration, they validate the learning needs and strengths of visual learners who may need more than words to convey meaning. The illustrations required by the comic genre also support second-language learners in our classroom, allowing them to demonstrate knowledge even when they don’t know the words.

Summarizing involves deleting, substituting, and evaluating which information is most crucial for meaning, requiring students to engage in detailed analysis of the content. The limited amount of space in a comic’s panels requires students to choose the most significant points in a text or story. Their completed comic then provides a vehicle for assessing each student’s comprehension of the ideas in the content they are reading.

Comic Themes

When you consider comics and graphic novels, you cannot help but imagine a superhero struggling against “the forces of evil.” Each of us has someone we admire and can call a hero. Using a heroes theme focuses student work with biographies, and provides a natural fit with studies during Black History Month and Women’s History Month.

Heroes, or heroic qualities, are also a useful vehicle for exploring the myths and legends of other cultures. We believe we can learn from a hero’s triumphs or mistakes, so a good myth or legend includes a heroic journey that we can relate to our own lives. Exploring what makes a hero and defining the characteristics that make a person a hero

supports character education. Developing myths and legends of their own can help students explore possibilities for overcoming challenges in their own lives.



Characteristics and Composition

Students can learn a lot about effective communication as they study the characteristics of successful comic books and graphic novels. Telling stories in a limited space requires comic authors to carefully consider composition, viewpoint, and character expression. How these elements are combined into text and illustrations will determine how the reader interprets the story.

The pace of action in a comic is real-time—it happens as fast the reader progresses. Students need to determine how they want to structure their story within the panels so that it progresses at the pace they intend. Using many panels leads the reader to believe that the action is occurring at a rapid pace. A single, highly detailed panel slows the reader down while providing lots of information that can help set up a future scene.

Comics also provide an opportunity to explore tense. Since dialogue is viewed as present tense, students need to be creative in demonstrating events that occur

in the past. A simple caption may suffice, but age differences, dream sequences, and remote settings can also achieve this effect. As students brainstorm strategies for showing events in the past, they build stronger vocabularies and skills that will help them establish mood in their non-comic writing.



When creating comics, students learn to guide their readers’ thoughts and feelings with pictures and dialogue, building more sophisticated communication skills that

will help them as they work on debate and persuasive writing projects. The space between panels also requires a reader to infer or imagine what is happening,

requiring students to provide context and clues to help the reader make correct inferences.

Sequencing and logic are crucial to good storytelling, and students quickly learn that they can't simply jump forward in time or around in space. Grouping different scenes together leads to non sequiturs, confusing the reader. A series of events that do not include the important elements of plot can lead the viewer to the wrong conclusion.

Successful comic authors also employ point of view in both images and text. When developing their comics, students need to choose between first and third person. The first-person perspective helps them connect with the reader; the third-person perspective is often more versatile. Developing illustrations that show perspective helps students create a richer mental picture of "I felt..." or "I jumped at..." This gives them more information to draw on when adding descriptions and detail to other narratives.

As students learn skills and techniques to tell their stories, they will also start to realize how the media uses those same techniques to capture viewer interest and lead viewers to specific conclusions. As they learn to succeed as media producers, students also naturally become more savvy media consumers.

Having students showcase their ideas using comics and graphic novels is yet another tool you can add to your bag of tricks to make learning relevant and fun!

References and Resources

- Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement. Alexandria, VA: ASCD
- Westby, C. (2005, Sept. 27). Language, Culture, and Literacy. The ASHA Leader, pp. 16, 30.

Lesson Plans

The following lesson plans provide specific, detailed examples of the ways creative technology tools can be applied in the elementary science curriculum to engage students and improve content knowledge and retention.

Each lesson includes:

- the **task** students will perform,
- ideas to **engage** students in the content,
- a description of what students will **create** with a technology tool,
- ways to **share** student work beyond the classroom walls, and
- tips for **assessing** student work.

It's ABC, As Easy As 1-2-3!

Students will explore initial sounds through the creation of a classroom ABC book.



Apps: [Wixie®](#) or [Pixie®](#)

Task

Now that you have been studying the alphabet and have become alphabet experts, it is time for you to help teach the alphabet to someone else. In this project, your class will create an electronic ABC book with letters, pictures, and sounds!

Engage

You have probably been sharing books on the alphabet like Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom and Dr. Seuss's ABC. These help make learning and using the alphabet fun and help students begin thinking about how letters associate with sounds and words.

Once students have developed some expertise with the alphabet, let them know that they will be creating a book to teach other students. Share the A to Z book in

the online resources and then read Chris Van Allsburg's book, "The Z was Zapped."

Explain to the class that to finish your Classroom ABC book, each student will be responsible for one letter of the alphabet (or more if your class size is small). Allow the students to choose their letter, or assign them based on student ability.

Create

Have students create a page in Wixie or Pixie and add images from the Stickers Library of additional objects that begin with this letter. Show students how to open different folders and how to add a sticker to their page. Save their letter file.

Have each student record a sentence about their letter and things that begin with the letter. Save their letter

file and have them Share Team Project from the Wixie button or the Projects button in Pixie.

Share

Once all of the files have been shared via the Projects button, you need to combine them together. Create a new project with a title page.

Use the Import Pages function to add in each student's file.

When all pages have been inserted you can click the storyboard view from the View options on the bottom left of Pixie. Here you can rearrange the pages to place in alphabetical order.

Share the Wixie project URL or export the file as a video or HTML from Pixie and share online.

Share the ABC book in its interactive form on a classroom web site or present it from a local computer. Have students discuss the page they created and share how they chose each sticker to match the letter.

Assessment

By the time you start this project, you will have already introduced each letter of the alphabet. Creating an

alphabet book will require students to apply what they know about a letter.

Your first opportunity to assess comprehension is with their choice of a picture for their cool letter. As students look for art and stickers with the same initial sound, ask them about their choices to help determine comprehension and identify misconceptions. Each student's voice narration about their choices will give you insight into oral proficiency and reading fluency.



[View a sample student project](#)

Resources

Seuss, Dr. **Dr. Seuss's ABC: An Amazing Alphabet Book!** ISBN-10: 0679882812

Martin, Jr., Bill and Archambault, John. **Chicka Chicka Boom Boom.** ISBN: 068983568X

Van Allsburg, Chris. **The Z was Zapped - A Play in 26 Acts.** ISBN: 0395446120

[Pics4Learning](#)

[Animated A to Z Book](#)

[Billy Bear's Alphabet Game](#)

Amazing Animal Alliterations

Students will learn to write using alliteration. Students learn to create illustrations that support and reflect their writing.



Apps: [Wixie®](#) or [Pixie®](#)

Task

Alliteration is a powerful way to attract and entertain a reader. In this project, your class will use their writing skills to create their own Amazing Animal Alliteration book.

Engage

Read **Marti and the Mango** to set the stage for recognizing and utilizing alliteration as a tool to entertain readers. As you read, identify alliteration and how it is used in the story. This will prepare students for how to use alliteration when they create their own original sentence.

Tongue twisters often use alliteration. Share a few tongue twisters with your students. You might try nursery rhyme favorites like Betty Botter Bought Some Butter or Peter Piper:

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.

A peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper picked.

*If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
Where's the peck of pickled peppers Peter Piper
picked?*

Before students work on creating their own pages, write a sentence together to practice. Choose a letter from the alphabet. Select a hard or an easy letter depending on the ability level of your class. Begin by brainstorming with the class all the animals that begin with this letter. For example, if you choose B, students will brainstorm examples such as bear, beaver, bunny, bobcat, bird, buffalo.

As a class, write an original sentence using alliteration. A great place to start is by creating a short sentence in the noun–verb–noun format, starting with the animal. As students suggest new verbs and nouns, write them on the board and then choose the ones you want to use. An example might be, “Birds build bubbles.”

Now, have the class brainstorm all of the adjectives and adverbs they can think of for this letter. For example, blue, bounce, bravely, build, break, big, and bubble. Then, see where you can add them into the sentence. For example, Blue birds build big bubbles.

Open Pixie and ask a student volunteer to draw a picture depicting the sentence. If you have an interactive whiteboard, work together as a class to take turns using the paint tools to illustrate the sentence. Have a strong reader read the sentence as you record it on the Pixie page.

Create

Have students draw a letter out of a bag or assign letters based on student academic ability. Each student should begin by brainstorming animals that begin with this letter. If students get stuck, head to <http://wiki.answers.com/> and search for “What animal begins with the letter _?”

Then, have students brainstorm all of the verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs they can think of that begin with their letter. If students are struggling, have them ask their classmates for help. You might also want to assign this project for homework to involve the entire family.

Have students follow the noun–verb–noun model to begin writing their sentences. Then, add in additional adjectives and adverbs.

Once students have written their alliterative sentences, have them think about how they might create an illustration that supports their writing. Have them look at the adjectives to develop details they will include in their drawings.

Next, have students use Pixie to write their sentences, illustrate the page using the paint tools, and record themselves reading the sentences. Have each student

save his or her page, naming it to indicate the letter and the author (e.g., “z_alicia”).

Share

Have all students Share their project by clicking on the Projects button. Create a new Pixie project and make a title page. Import each student page by clicking on the

Projects button and scrolling to Import Pages. Save the class book as an online storybook, or export it as a podcast or video. If students recorded their voices on each page, this will be included automatically. You can also use the Print features in Pixie to print the pages as a booklet, comic strip, or as trading cards.

Get your school together for a formal presentation of your class’s Amazing Animal

Alliterations book! You will also want to share electronic and print copies in your school’s media center.

Assessment

Even if they are unfamiliar with the term alliteration, as you read *Marti and the Mango* and several tongue twisters, you can begin to assess whether students understand how it can be used to make writing interesting and enjoyable. As you write an alliterative sentence as a class, you will be able to assess the vocabulary skills of your students and assign letters that match their ability levels. Their final alliteration pages will allow you to assess their ability to write with alliteration, their current reading fluency, and their ability to represent words and ideas visually.

Resources

Moreton, Daniel. **Marti and the Mango**. ISBN: 1556702647.

Artell, Mike. **Giggle Fit: Zany Tongue-Twisters**. ISBN: 1402727747.

Wiki Answers: [Ask “What animals begin with the letter _?”](#)

[Tongue Twisters](#)



[View a student sample on YouTube](#)

Idiomatically Speaking

Students will illustrate and translate the meaning of an idiom to help others learn these examples of figurative language.



Apps: [Wixie®](#) or [Pixie®](#)

Task

There is a new teacher at school who just loves to talk in idioms. The only problem is that most kids, and especially the English Language Learners, can't understand a word this new teacher says! The Principal has asked your class to illustrate and translate the meaning of phrases like, "Rick Riordan's latest series took second period by storm," and "Today's homework is going to be a piece of cake" so students can understand just what this teacher means. So ["roll up your sleeves \(get ready for a job\) and put your noses to the grindstone \(start working hard\). It's time to get cracking \(get started\)!"](#)

Engage

Begin reading a book like Ted Arnold's **More Parts**, Loren Leedy's **There's a Frog in My Throat**, or Marvin

Terban's **In a Pickle**. Ask the students to describe what they are seeing as you are reading. Then, share the illustrations from the book. Discuss with your students.

Introduce the word idiom to your students as well as its definition. You might want to also explore the etymology from the Greek *idíōma*, which means 'peculiarity.' The idea is that the phrase is "one of a kind" or has a meaning different from the literal translation.

The English language includes over 15,000 idioms, but idioms are not unique to English, they are found in almost every language. For example, the English idiom a bull in a china shop is similar to the German *ein Elefant in einem Porzellangeschäft* (an elephant in a china shop). The English idiom make a mountain out of a molehill is similar to the French *la montagne accouche d'une souris* (the mountain gives birth to a mouse).

But similar combinations of words in different languages can also have very different meanings. For example, to be long in the tooth means to be old or out of date in English. But in French, *avoir les dent longues* (to have long teeth) means to be ambitious.

If your class or school includes students and teachers who speak languages other than English, ask them to share idioms they know in these languages!

Create

Decide whether you want to address the problem as an entire class or work in small teams. Then, reintroduce the problem or task to your students.

The first step is to determine what the group wants to create. For example, you can make:

- storybooks similar to the ones you read?
- an illustrated idiom dictionary?
- School House Rock-style animated shorts?

This may work as a great opportunity to brainstorm products students could create as a class and then let individual teams decide which one they think will work best.

If you want individual students to follow the same process and complete the same steps, an illustrated dictionary should meet your needs. You can even create an animated book in Share. Then, you can assign idioms to each student who then contributes a single page you can combine into a class dictionary.

Have students explore the Scholastic Idiom Dictionary, or idiom web sites, like [Dave's ESL Cafe](#) to find the idiom, or idioms, they wish to address and illustrate.

Talk with students as they work to illustrate idiomatic language. Encourage them to add more details and create more complete and specific illustrations. This is a great time to catch misconceptions early and help

students learn to love language as they explore etymology, history, and visual play.



[View a student sample on YouTube](#)

Share

If you are working together on one story, book, or dictionary, collect each student's page into one file and export to PDF or HTML to share with a wider audience. Print student work to share with classmates, families, and even language specialists at your school. Post the work to your classroom or school website or even iTunes channel!

Have each team present their product to the rest of the class or another class at your school. Depending on the products, you can hang posters around the school, share animations during morning announcements, or publish a book for the school media center.

Assessment

Assess prior knowledge as you discuss the stories you have read and ask students to share idioms they already know. As they develop their diagrams and illustrations,

ask questions and engage in one-on-one dialog to catch misconceptions early and help them make connections between the concepts and ideas expresses through the idioms. The final products will help you evaluate how well students are able to translate what they have learned about idiomatic language into teaching materials to help others better understand them.



[View a student sample on YouTube](#)

Resources

Arnold, Ted. **More Parts**. ISBN: 0142501492

Leedy, Loren. **There's a Frog in My Throat!** ISBN: 0823418197

Terban, Marvin. **In a Pickle: And Other Funny Idioms**. ISBN: 0618830014

Terban, Marvin. **Scholastic's Dictionary of Idioms**. ISBN: 0439770831

[ESL Idiom Page](#) at Dave's ESL Café

Legends and Tall Tales

After exploring local history and discussing the characteristics and traits of tall tales and legends, students write their own tales, then transform their tale into a script and create an illustrated or animated version.



Apps: [Pixie®](#), [Wixie®](#), or [Frames™](#)

Task

Legends and tall tales are stories filled with unbelievable events or exaggerations that explain a person's character or how something came to be. In this project, you will write and produce your own animated tall tale about a historical figure or location.

Engage

Tall tales are filled with larger-than-life characters and places. Begin by sharing some familiar tall tales, such as John Henry, Johnny Appleseed, and Pecos Bill with your students. Your librarian or media specialist is a great resource for locating stories students at your level will love.

Share the historical, factual biographies of some of the characters in the tall tales you are reading. What differences are there between the historical information and the tall tale? Work together to compare the stories and record your findings on a Venn

diagram. Make a class list of characteristics that make up a tall tale, such as:

1. feats of daring, strength, or cunning
2. lots of exaggeration
3. use of humor
4. problems with people, nature, or progress
5. the hero has a helpful partner (may be an animal)

Reflect on what you already know about the history of your area and brainstorm a list of people and places in your region that have these qualities. Which ones might serve as the focal point of a local history tall tale? Why? What makes this person or place a candidate for a tall tale? What elements could be exaggerated to help build this into a legend or tall tale?

Work with your students to create a list of possible topics. You may also want to create a list ahead of time to get students started brainstorming.

Allow students to form teams of 3-5 around a topic that interests them. Have the teams begin research using a cluster-style diagram to write down facts and adjectives that describe this person or place. Student teams should then turn their initial cluster diagram into a larger web showing which characteristics, events, and actions they want to use in their story and explain how they might do so.

Create

Discuss the structure of an effective tall tale with your students. The beginning of the story needs to draw interest and set the theme. The rest of the story needs to support the theme and must include carefully exaggerated points to qualify it as a tall tale or legend. The closing should wrap up the story and share why this topic is important to the history of your state.

Before they begin writing, ask each team to clearly define:

1. Characters and setting
2. Point of view
3. Order of events
4. Unifying theme

Creativity will be key in this writing experience, requiring students to choose which facts to exploit and exaggerate for the purpose of the tale. Have each team submit a rough draft for your review, or have teams swap their stories for peer review.

Next, have teams create a visual storyboard that divides the story into scenes. The storyboard should contain information about what will be said or read during each scene as well as what illustrations will support the story at that time.

As they begin production on the computer, teams should assign roles like director, illustrator, editor, and voice talent.

The director will need to keep the team on task to meet the deadline. The illustrator should work on developing images, while the voice talent practices the script and practices recording for fluency and intonation. The editor can add text to each page, collect illustrations, and work with the voice talent to record the audio.

The director and editor should also work together to decide if additional dialogue should be written or if the story needs to be adjusted for more effective communication as an electronic book or video.

Talk to teams about formats for export and sharing, collect URLs for projects, or have students export their projects as PDF, ePub, or video.

Share

Present each team's illustrated/animated tall tale to the rest of the class or at a school assembly. What was memorable? What did they like best? Use of language? Humor? Hyperbole?

Create a page on your website to host the student tales as a collection and curate their work. Reach out to your local history society and your local library to join you for the presentations or even to host student work on-site using a kiosk or event.

Assessment

Begin by evaluating your initial class discussion about tall tales and the characters and events you are learning about. Do they understand what makes a tall tale unique? Can they distinguish between fact and fiction?

You can use the teams' cluster and web diagrams, rough draft, final written story, storyboard, and finished movie as both checkpoints and performances to assess. You can assess writing for creativity, organization, and voice, and judge the final video for organization, effective visual communication, and voice.

Be sure to evaluate the project process for skills such as teamwork, time management, problem solving, and collaboration.

Resources

Perry, Phyllis. **Ten Tall Tales**. ISBN: 1579500692

West, Tracy. **Teaching Tall Tales, Grades 3-5**. ISBN: 0590365118

[Tall Tales at American Folklore](#)



Book Trailers

Students will explore character, plot, and theme and learn to write persuasively as they develop a movie-style trailer for a book they have read.



Apps: [Pixie®](#), [Wixie®](#), or [Frames™](#)

Task

Between iPods, cell phones, portable game consoles, and TV, kids are spending less time reading than ever before. The local public library is looking for a way to promote reading to elementary students. They have asked you to create a short digital booktalk – like a movie trailer for a book – that they can use in the children’s section of the library.

Big Idea: How do I get a young reader hooked on a book?

Engage

Getting students to read isn’t always easy. Choose one of your favorite books and share it with your students in a way you think will get them excited about reading it. Then, tell why it was your favorite book.

Ask students what gets them excited about reading. Is it the characters? Is it the setting, an exciting plot,

interesting themes, or a personal connection with the story?

Let your students know they will be using Pixie or Frames to create a booktalk in the form of a movie trailer to promote one of their favorite books.

First, have students determine which book they want to promote. Then, have them answer the following questions:

- Have I read another book by the same author?
- Did I like it as much as this book?
- What genre is this book?
- Is this a book part of a series?
- Do I have a personal connection to this book?

To better advertise their book, students need to be able to identify the theme. Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. They are BIG ideas, like friendship, love and courage. For example, when a character stands up for a friend in a

story, we can infer from their actions that friendship and courage are themes in the story.

Common themes your students can look for in their books include:

friendship	anger
courage	cooperation
loyalty	determination
love	being different

As a class, explore how authors use themes to guide their writing. Ask students to reread important parts of the book and take notes as they analyze the book's characters, setting, and plot to determine the theme. The actions of the main character are a great place to look for the theme.

To gather information students can use to develop their booktalk, use graphic organizers like thought webs and the 5 W's to show the central theme of the book as well as events in the story that relate to the theme.

Create

Next, have students prepare a script for their booktalk. An exciting script should include:

- An interesting hook.
- A vivid description of an event that supports the theme.
- The title and name of the author at the conclusion.
- A call to action.

Remind students that showing the story is more effective than trying to retell the story. As they write the script, have them think of the booktalk as a movie trailer. Their goal is to leave the viewer with a compelling reason for checking out that book!

To transform the script into a video, it is helpful to have a storyboard or map of each student's vision. The storyboard should include information about which portion of the script each scene will include and what images and sound files will be used to support it. When the storyboard is complete, have students begin

gathering images, music, and sound effects to support their vision.

Have students use Pixie or Frames to build their booktalk. They can use images from [Pics4Learning](#), or illustrate using the paint tools to create their own images. They should record their script, add sound effects, or background music to match the tone and purpose of the booktalk.

Share

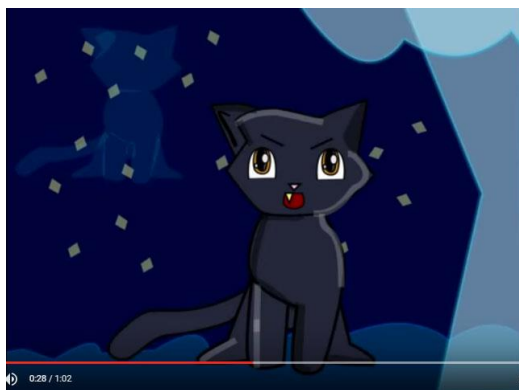
Share the book trailers with the rest of the class or play them on the morning announcements to encourage others to read the books. The librarian may choose to show the trailers in the library as other classes come in for their scheduled library time. If your district or community has public access television, try to get your students' booktalks aired. This is a great way to encourage the entire community to read!

Assessment

The final booktalk is a great summative assessment of

student skill communicating in a visual medium. During the process, you can assess progress using students' notes and thought webs. Having students turn in their scripts and storyboards prior to creating the booktalk animation will help ensure that they are on the right track.

You may also want to look at time management strategies and help students develop a project calendar.



[View a student sample on YouTube](#)

Resources

Littlejohn, Carol. **Talk That Book: Booktalks to Promote Reading** ISBN: 0938865757

Cavanaugh, Terence W. and Keane, Nancy J. **The Tech-Savvy Booktalker: A Guide for 21st-Century Educators** ISBN: 1591586372

[Scholastic](#)

[Children and Student Book Reviews](#)

[Mount Saint Vincent University Library](#)

Persuasive and Presidential Writing

Students will learn persuasive writing and presentation skills.



Apps: [Wixie®](#) or [Pixie®](#)

Task

Mt. Rushmore, sculpted between 1927 and 1941 by Gutzon Borglum with the assistance of over 400 local workers, is one of the most notable American treasures. But the mountain still has a bit more room! In this project, you will research a U.S. President and create a presentation to persuade the National Park Service to add another face to Mt. Rushmore.

Engage

Discuss the history of Mt. Rushmore with your students. You might want to use online resources such as the [Oh, Ranger!](#) web page on the making of Mt. Rushmore.

As a class, discuss the qualities a president should possess to belong on Mt. Rushmore. You may want to begin with the qualities of the presidents who are already on the monument. Work together to develop a

list of these qualities. Discuss which ones students think are most important and rank the qualities in order of importance. This will help students craft a strong argument.

Discuss with the students that they will research a president they feel has these qualities and should be added to Mt. Rushmore. This research will be used to write a persuasive argument for the addition of this president to Mt. Rushmore.

Give students some time to think about the president they think should be added. You may want to assign a bit of research about several lesser-known presidents before having them choose, or ask them to survey family and friends for their opinions.

Have students choose the president they think should be added to Mt. Rushmore. You might have them complete a KWL worksheet to help them identify what

they already know about this president, as well as identify topics that they will need to research.

Create

The goal of persuasive writing is to convince others to agree with our facts, share our values, accept our argument and conclusions, and adopt our way of thinking. Discuss the elements of persuasive writing with your students. Let each student know that when writing his or her argument, he or she should:

- **Establish facts** to support the argument for his or her president.
- **Clarify relevant values** for the audience. Why should this president be chosen? How has this president helped society? What are his accomplishments? This should include factual information about accomplishments while in office.
- **Provide examples** using pictures or other data.
- **Prioritize, edit, and sequence** the facts and values in importance to build the argument.
- **Form and state conclusions** to “persuade” the audience that their conclusions are based on agreed-upon facts and shared values.
- **Provide an emotional appeal** for the argument.
- **Logically communicate** the argument in the presentation.

Discuss the structure of the essay with your students.

Explain that the topic sentence should be a position statement, such as “The New Mt. Rushmore should include President_____ because...”. The rest of the first paragraph should state the three main arguments. Each of argument should be clarified in a supporting paragraph. The final paragraph should restate the position and include the most compelling parts of the argument.

Have each student use his or her research to write a persuasive essay about why his or her president should be carved alongside the four existing presidents on Mt. Rushmore. Have students share their rough drafts with another classmate before editing and submitting their finished written arguments.



Once the essay is complete, students are ready to craft a persuasive presentation. To assist students in organizing the project, have them complete storyboards, highlighting the main ideas on each page. For example:

1. Title Page
2. Description
3. Position Statement and Three Main arguments
4. Argument 1
5. Argument 2
6. Argument 3
7. Response to at Least One Counterargument
8. Picture of This President Added to Mt. Rushmore
9. Conclusion

Students can find [pictures of Mt. Rushmore](#) and each U.S. President in the Photos folder in the Library.

Share

Have students share their persuasive presentations with the rest of the class. You might have one student record characteristics and qualities from each presentation so that as a class you can compare the presidents.

Assessment

As you introduce this project to your students, the students will begin to brainstorm the qualities of a president who should be placed on Mt. Rushmore. You should be able to make an informal assessment on their knowledge about their ideas and realistic possibilities for additional choices for Mt. Rushmore.

During the Web-site-design portion of the lesson, you will evaluate their writing skills, creativity, design and planning skills, and more.

Resources

Bausum, Ann. **Our Country's Presidents**. ISBN: 0792293304.

St. George, Judith, & Small, David. **So You Want to Be President?** ISBN: 0399251529.

[Oh, Ranger! Mount Rushmore](#)

[American Presidents](#)

Modernize a Fairy Tale

Students learn about key elements of a fairy tale such as setting, characters, problems, and resolution as well as themes like magic, threes and sevens, fairies, forests, royalty, and castles as they retell and recreate a fairy tale in modern times.



Apps: [Pixie®](#), [Wixie®](#), or [Frames™](#)

Task

The land of fairy tales is filled with beasts and beauty. It is a land where a kiss from a princess can turn a frog into a prince. It is also a land where few dare to venture because of the fearsome challenges that lay ahead.

While younger children dream of being knights and princesses, older students no longer find fairy tales exciting. Your task is to modernize one of these stories so that it has meaning to today's students. You can even add yourself to the story!

Engage

Read a fairy tale to your students, like Hansel and Gretel. Discuss the key elements of the story, such as setting, characters, problems and solutions.

Ask students to share names of other fairy tales they have read. Most students will be familiar with stories like Cinderella, Rapunzel, and Sleeping Beauty. Have students work together to identify common elements between the stories. You might find commonalities like princes and princesses, forests or woods, threes and sevens, and magic.

Many of the most common fairy tales date from long ago. Talk with your students about the fairy tale you read to them. Create a Venn diagram or open one on your computer and project it for students to see. Label the circles Past and Present.

Brainstorm a list of objects or things in the story, like the location, homes, food, clothing, and other objects

and add them to the past circle. As they start to identify things specific to the past, ask them questions like:

- Would you want to live in this time period? Why or why not?
- How are the character's clothes different from clothes today?
- Do the characters have similar toys?

As a class, discuss how things are different now. For example, few students live deep in the woods, or are allowed to walk long distances by themselves. To prepare students to modernize their own story, ask them questions like:

- How is this time period different from modern times?
- How would the story be different if it were written today?

Create

Tell students that they are going to modernize a fairy tale. You may want to provide a list of examples and share print versions at a variety of reading levels.

Once students have chosen a fairy tale, have them read it and create a list of characters, setting, and plot. Have them complete their own Past and Present Venn Diagram, starting with a list of objects or things that are from the past, to help them come up with specific ideas for making their tale more modern. You might also want them to create a list of character traits for the main character and villain as well as complete a plot diagram.

Using the ideas on their Venn diagrams, have students sketch out the character, setting, and plot for their modern version. Have them share their ideas with a peer and make changes and additions. Then, have students work on writing the story. To simplify, ask students to write a single paragraph for beginning, middle, and end. To expand or extend the project, have students practice descriptive writing or add conversation to practice conversational grammar.

Have students translate their written story into a visual map or project storyboard. This will help them determine how best to convey the story using individual pages or scenes.

Students should add text and conversations to individual pages, or scenes, in their project. They can use paint tools and clip art to illustrate characters, setting, and action. They can use a web cam or even blue screen to capture their picture to add to the modernized version of the story. Have students practice reading the story and then record narration.

Share

Have the students present their stories to the rest of the class. You might also consider inviting the school librarian or media specialist to help evaluate the final products. They may be interested in posting student work to a station in the school's media center or eBook library.

Share the stories and animations on your school web site, during morning announcements, or in your school or community library. You may also be able to share them on your local access television station as a celebration of student learning. You could even turn this project into a parent night or community storytelling event!

Assessment

You can use the students' character/plot/setting, Venn diagrams, character traits, and/or plot diagrams to evaluate comprehension and help students work through misconceptions before the modern version is written. Their modern character/setting/plot and storyboard will help you determine if they are ready to convert their written story into a video or online story.

The final written fairy tale will help you assess their ability to analyze and compare. You can use their narration as a sample of reading fluency. The final illustrated and narrated fairy tale will help you assess their ability to tell a story using multimedia elements.

Resources

Mills, Alice. **The Random House Children's Treasury: Fairy Tales, Nursery Rhymes & Nonsense Verse**

Ponsot, Marie and Segur Adrienne. **The Golden Book of Fairy Tales**

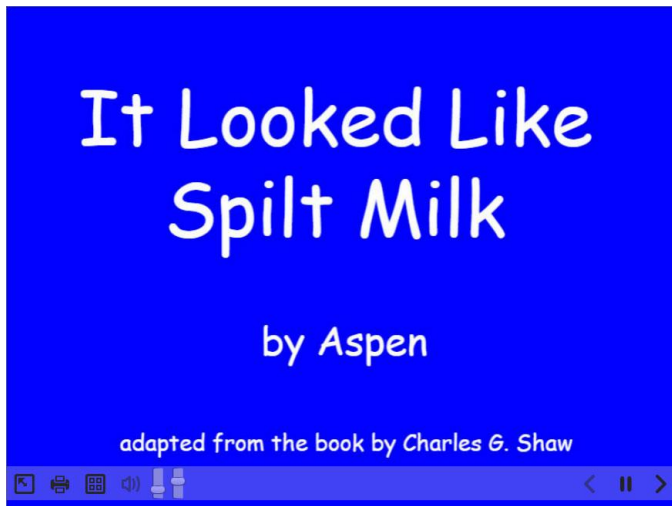
[Community Learning Network - Fairy Tale Resources](#)

[Collected Fairy Tales by Hans Christian Andersen](#)

Additional ideas from real student projects

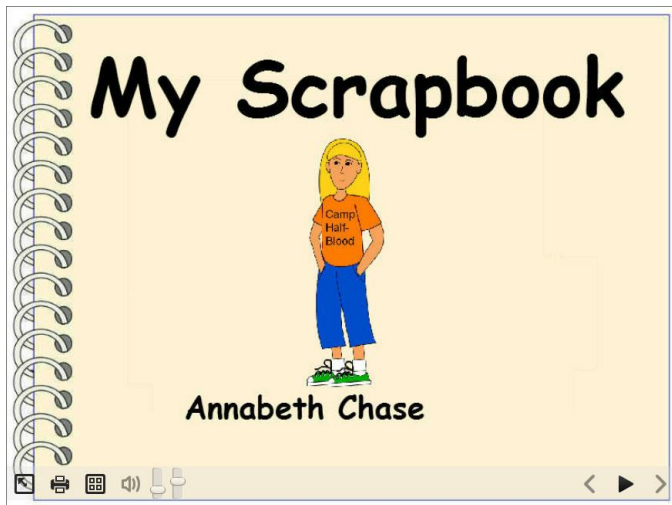
Click the project to see the sample.

Literary Adaptations



Students create their own versions of your favorite books. Using stories with repeating patterns makes it easy to create a class book, with each student contributing a page.

Character Scrapbook



Students create a digital scrapbook for a character in a book they are reading.

Design a Book Cover



Students share what they know about character, plot, setting, mood, and theme in a literary work by designing a new cover. A great way to assess comprehension.

Illustrated Poetry



Students create visual poetry by combining images that portray the meaning of text.

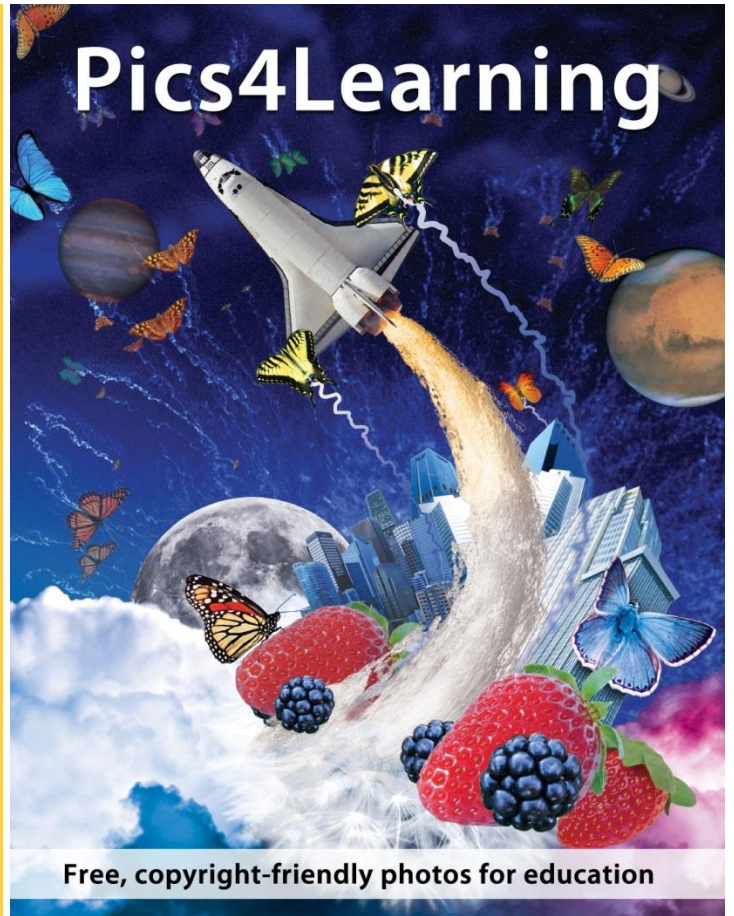
Wixie

Wixie is an online publishing and creativity platform that lets students share what they know through **their writing, their voice, and their art.**



Give Wixie a Try

Pics4Learning



Free, copyright-friendly photos for education