PowerPoint in the Classroom

This content assumes you’ve read the following:

- See Jane Read, See Johnny Write
- Multimedia Makes Its Mark

So What's Multimedia?

Multimedia means using more than one type of media. Multimedia applications such as PowerPoint have the ability to combine text, audio, animation, video, images, and graphics.

Why use Multimedia in the Classroom?

Through the use of multimedia, teachers can grab students' attention and motivate them in ways traditional methods can't. Remember Boring Bob and Scintillating Sarah beginning a lesson about earthquakes? Scintillating Sarah began her lesson with powerful images presented through PowerPoint (concrete) while Boring Bob merely talked (abstract).

Teachers can also have students use multimedia. For example, consider the traditional book report. Book reports are generally assigned with the intention of assessing reading comprehension and organized writing skills. This basically asks students to collect and gather facts or ideas about what they have read and write about it. With this type of exercise the intended audience is the teacher.

How would the assignment be different if, after writing the book report, students used PowerPoint to create a multimedia advertisement for the book which was published for all students, the school, or parents? Would this impact student motivation?

This project would provide students with a genuine audience beyond their teacher making the whole thing more real. It would also be fun! I know, you're thinking NOT THE F WORD! But this is the appropriate way to think about lessons being fun. The objectives come first: students interpret, explain, and demonstrate their understanding of
the book. But they do it using text, graphics, audio and animations and have fun while meeting those underlying instructional objectives.

So, teachers can use PowerPoint for instruction. Teachers can also allow students to demonstrate their knowledge through PowerPoint presentations. There are good and bad ways to do both these things. Let's see if we can learn to differentiate between the good, the bad, and the downright ugly.

**Teachers Using PowerPoint**

When used effectively, PowerPoint can enhance instruction. Think of trying to teach the fossils lesson, or your insects lesson, without any of the images. Not so good, huh? The images are an essential tool for both teaching the content of the lesson and maintaining student interest and engagement. A teacher might try to teach those lessons by holding up pictures from a book, but it just wouldn't work as well.

Clearly, PowerPoint's ability to incorporate images is one of its major strengths. Yet there are more effective and less effective ways of using images in PowerPoint, not to mention other ways PowerPoint should never be used. Open the video linked below to see some common errors teachers make using PowerPoint and how to avoid them.

**Effective PowerPoint Design**

Most people think of PowerPoint as a means for presenting information, but it can be used in many other ways in classrooms. For example, you can find PowerPoint templates online, which mirror TV game shows such as Jeopardy. After inserting your own questions and answers, the Jeopardy PowerPoint becomes an engaging way to review content, either individually or with the whole class. Here are links to a variety of such templates:

- [PowerPoint Games Templates](#) - Jefferson County Schools
- [Jeopardy Games and Template](#) - Hardin County Teachers, Elizabethtown, KY
- [Pete's PowerPoint Station](#) - Social Studies School Service and Phillip Martin
- [PowerPoint Games](#) - Jefferson County Schools
- [Jeopardy Links](#) - Links to free Jeopardy templates
- [Flash Classroom Jeopardy](#) - SmartBoard Jeopardy game from Super Teacher Tools

When you were a kid, did any of you ever transfer to a new school in the middle of the school year? Then you understand how tough that can be. But what if the teacher had welcomed you saying the class had created a PowerPoint to introduce you to the school and the classroom, then had a student from the class sit down to go through it with you? I bet that would've made you feel more welcomed!

- [Class Welcome PowerPoint](#)

You can also use PowerPoint to create your own practice or assessment. Here's an example: [Triangles Quiz](#). Both the Triangles Quiz and the game templates are non-linear, meaning they don't go through the slides in order, but instead, jump around. You may be familiar with the Choose Your Own Adventure books where readers create their
own unique plotline each time they read the story by picking different courses of action at the various decision points in the story. Here's an example: Mayan Jungle Adventure.

Sometimes teachers want students to work independently for a period of time. To keep kids on track I've heard teachers yelling out, Five more minutes! But what does that do to the concentration of the kids in the class? Pretty disruptive, don't you think? One way to avoid yelling out reminders uses PowerPoint. Here are one, five and ten minute timers:

- One Minute Timer
- Five Minute Timer
- Ten Minute Timer

Kids can simply glance up at the screen to see how much time is left, and the teacher can avoid disrupting the work students are engaged in (see sidebar).

You may not know how to do some of these things in PowerPoint, but we'll get to that soon. In the meantime, let's switch our focus to student uses of PowerPoint.

**Students Using PowerPoint**

Students love working with PowerPoint so teachers can use that as motivation: finish your work early or do an exceptional job on an assignment and you can create a PowerPoint showcasing your work. The problem arises when students have no guidelines. Let's look at a couple of examples to see what I mean.

The first represents a group report on the state fish of California, the Garibaldi. Play the file. As you go through it, make note of what things strike you as good, and what things strike you as problematic.

**Garibaldi**

What did you think of the image quality? Pretty poor? How about the quality of the information? What do you think, Hangs with his type, means? How about, Has everything a fish has? Are the students supposed to be demonstrating their knowledge of the characteristics of a fish? What do students mean when they talk about the Garibaldi having good relationships?

Obviously, there are several problems here. Teachers have to set guidelines for such things as image quality and content as well as provide support so students can meet those guidelines. But here's the bigger issue - the one that has many people feeling PowerPoint should be banned from the classroom. Many teachers allow students to replace writing with bulleted lists in PowerPoint. As a consequence, critics charge that students writing skills are never being developed.

We don't know how this PowerPoint was being used. Had these students written a report and the PowerPoint simply represented a presentation of their work? If so, the teacher's intentions were good and the problem was simply a lack of guidelines for creating a quality presentation. But if this PowerPoint took the place of writing a report using complete sentences, paragraphs and all the other writing skills students are supposed to master, then the teacher made a big mistake!
Let's look at another example where a middle school math teacher had his students create PowerPoint lessons to teach mathematical concepts. His thinking was that in creating the lessons to teach others, students would learn the concepts better themselves. Play the file, but be patient. After clicking the mouse, wait a bit before clicking it again or you might miss some of what Lili has in store for you.

**Exponents**

What did you think? Would you agree that Lili was so enamored of animations, sound effects and music, not to mention The Simpsons and other cartoon characters, that her focus on teaching exponents got a little lost? I'm sure Lili had fun creating this, but again, the teacher should have provided guidelines as to the appropriate use of PowerPoint's bells and whistles to keep Lili focused on what was really important: exponents.

If you show students how to animate objects and add sound effects, you have to give them time and opportunity to play with them. So give them some time to explore, try things out, and have fun. But then let students know when and how it's appropriate to include animations and sound effects in their graded assignments.

Now compare the Garibaldi and Exponents PowerPoints to this one on dolphins made by two 10 year old girls and see how you think they compare.

**Dolphins Multimedia PowerPoint**

Notice some differences? We've got full sentences, accurate and well organized content and better quality images. You saw animation and sound effects on the first slide - the girls had just learned how to do those things and were very excited to include them - but they were only allowed to use animation and sound on a single slide. Accordingly, the dolphins PowerPoint clearly shows evidence that expectations for both content and design were shared with students which, in turn, guided them to a much higher quality product.

For lots more ideas about using PowerPoint in classrooms, check out the links in the sidebar.

Now that you've got all kinds of ideas and are excited about the possibilities PowerPoint offers, it's time to turn our attention to learning some of those PowerPoint bells and whistles ourselves.