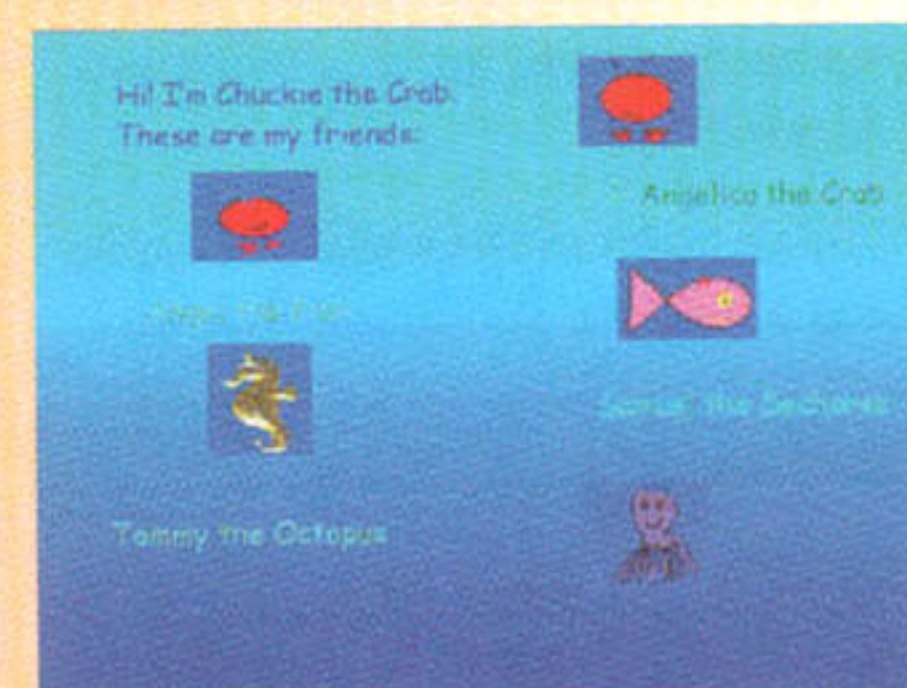
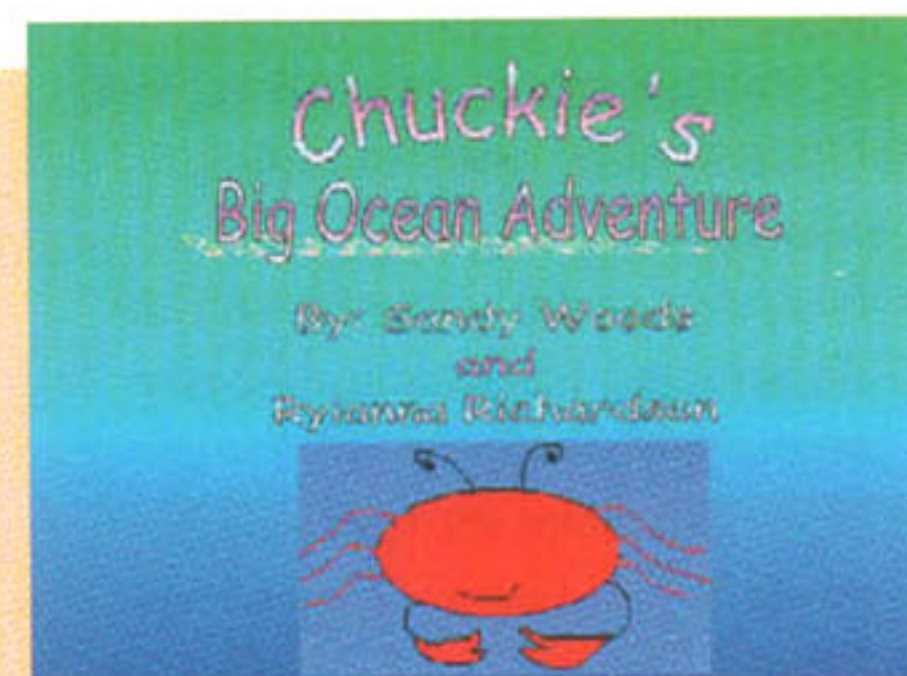


See Jane Read . . . See Johnny Write.



An electronic book project brings together elementary and high school students and helps the high schoolers learn to write for audience.

By Lyn C. Howell

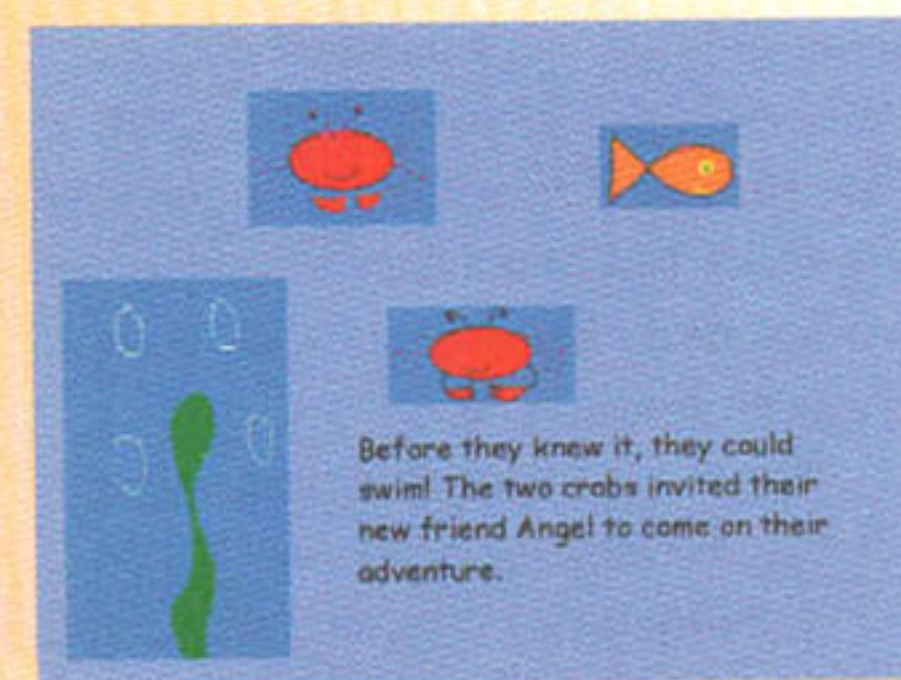
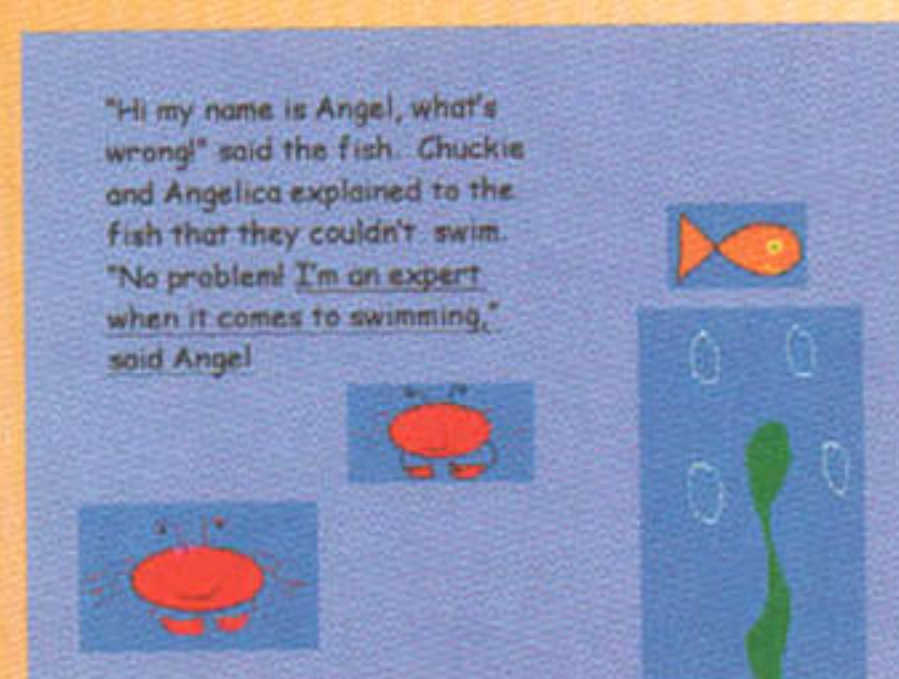
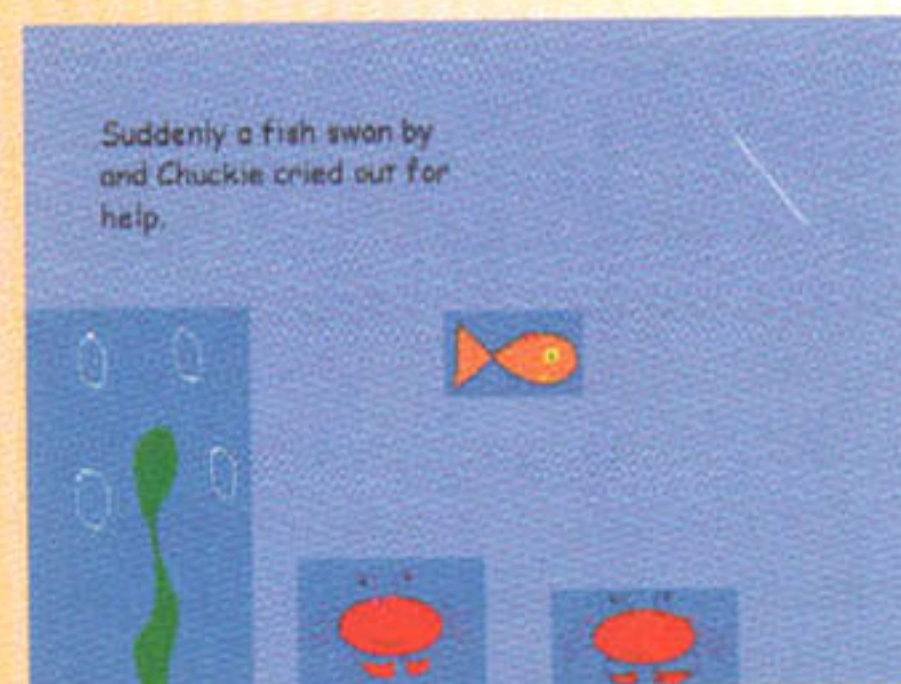
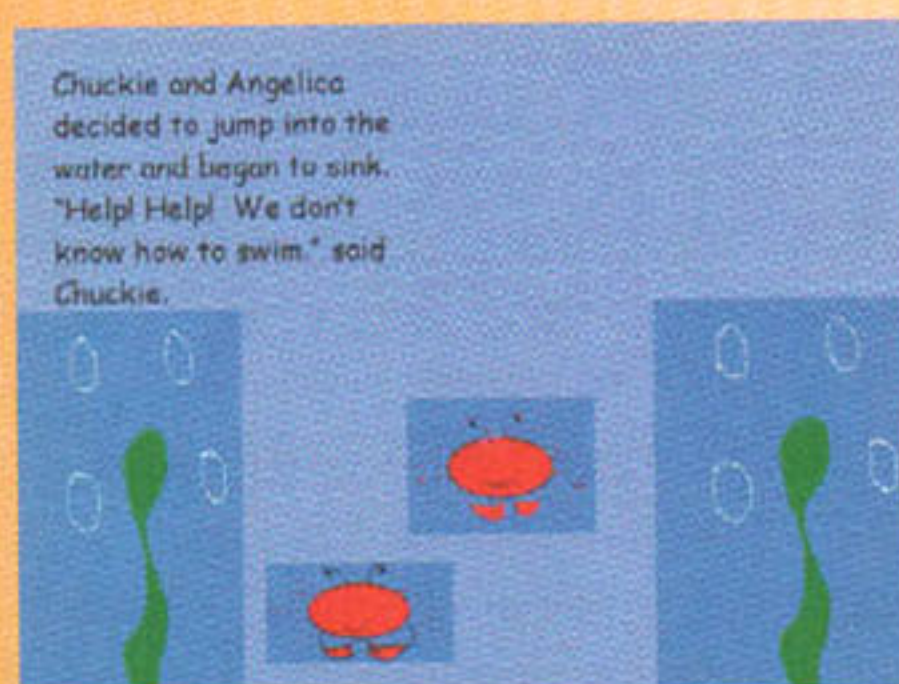
Subject: Writing, reading, cross-grade collaboration, service learning

Audience: Teachers, teacher educators

Grade Level: K-12

Technology: Word processing and presentation software, e-mail

Standards: NETS-S 3, 4; NETS-T 11 (<http://www.iste.org/standards>). ELA 1, 3-5, 8, 12 (<http://www.ncte.org/standards/standards.shtml>).



Children's books are fun: They're bright and colorful. They're short and easy to read. And, they are a perfect vehicle to teach students about writing for a particular audience.

While I was an English teacher in Alaska and New Mexico, I had my 10th- and 11th-grade communication skills students create children's books. But, over the years, the time and money involved made the project unwieldy. Technology seemed like a great way to make the process more smooth, add a new level of interest to the project, and I'd be able to teach technology skills within the curriculum.

Doing It the Old Fashioned Way

We start the book-making project by looking through a variety of children's books—some students even bring in their childhood favorites. Then we partner with my sister Margaret Dowdy's second-grade class at Fair Street Elementary School in Gainesville, Georgia. She and I set up the project through long distance phone calls, and the students corresponded by mail.

Other ways to find partner teachers (if you aren't lucky enough to have a sibling who also teaches) include:

- talking to people at conferences to find those teachers interested in a key pal type of exchange
- exploring schools' Web sites, which may list teachers' interests, current projects, and e-mail addresses
- visiting <http://www.teacherweb.com/>, where you can choose a state, select a school, and find the e-mail address of teachers who have Web pages linked from the site.

Once they got to know their partners, my students at La Cueva High School in Albuquerque, New Mexico, often personalized the stories. For example, a young boy who confessed that he is afraid of dogs might find himself the hero who helps a dog and is later rescued by that dog. A student whose family speaks Spanish at home might have received an autobiographical story written in Spanish about the author's experiences in coming to the United States. I always encouraged my students to include a biography and photo at the end of the book. The second graders liked being able to make a personal connection with "their" author.

Students came up with plots and made storyboards to help them decide how to divide their thoughts and how to illustrate them. Then, using a variety of materials—from construction paper to cardboard to felt—they created their books. After sharing with each other, they boxed their books up and sent them to their Fair Street pen pals.

Looking at the Drawbacks

This was a rewarding experience for both my high school students, who made the books, and the younger students, who received the books. My students got to be creative, learned to write for a specific audience, and felt good about participating in a service-learning project. The elementary students learned to write letters using the

correct format, check their spelling, and enjoy reading.

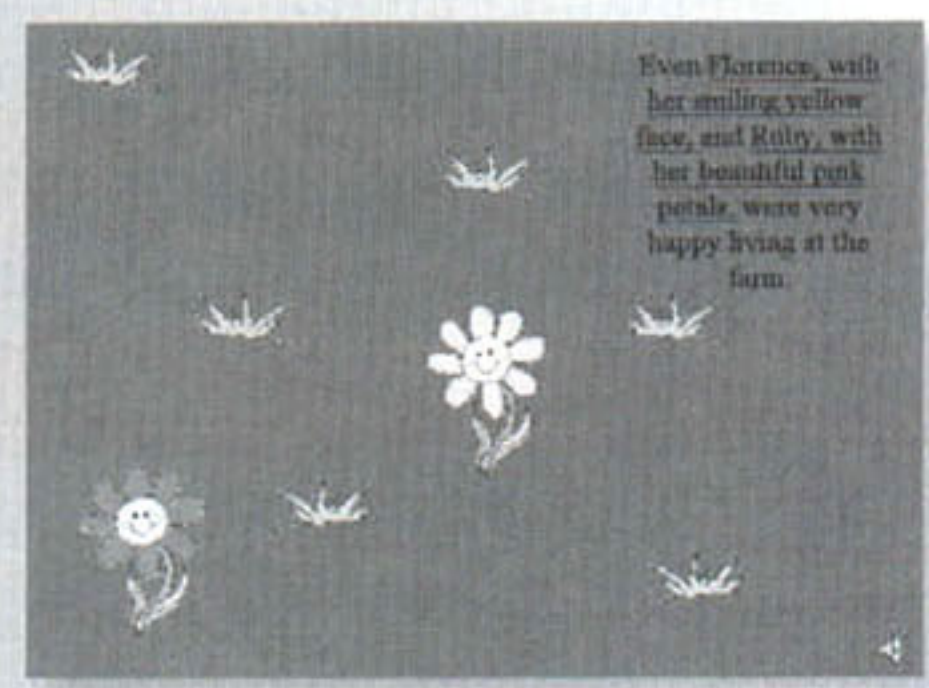
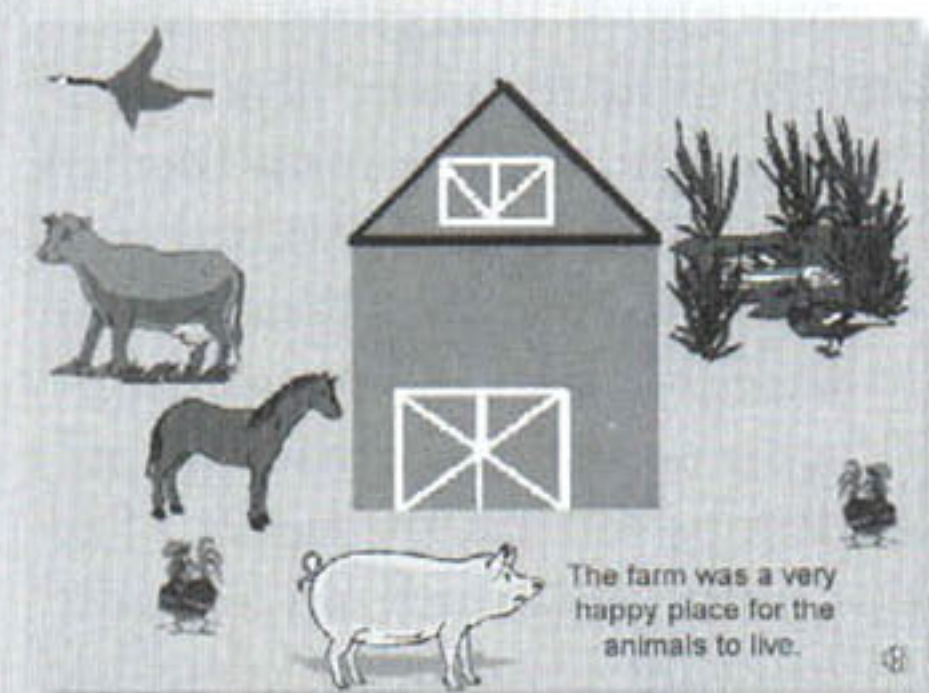
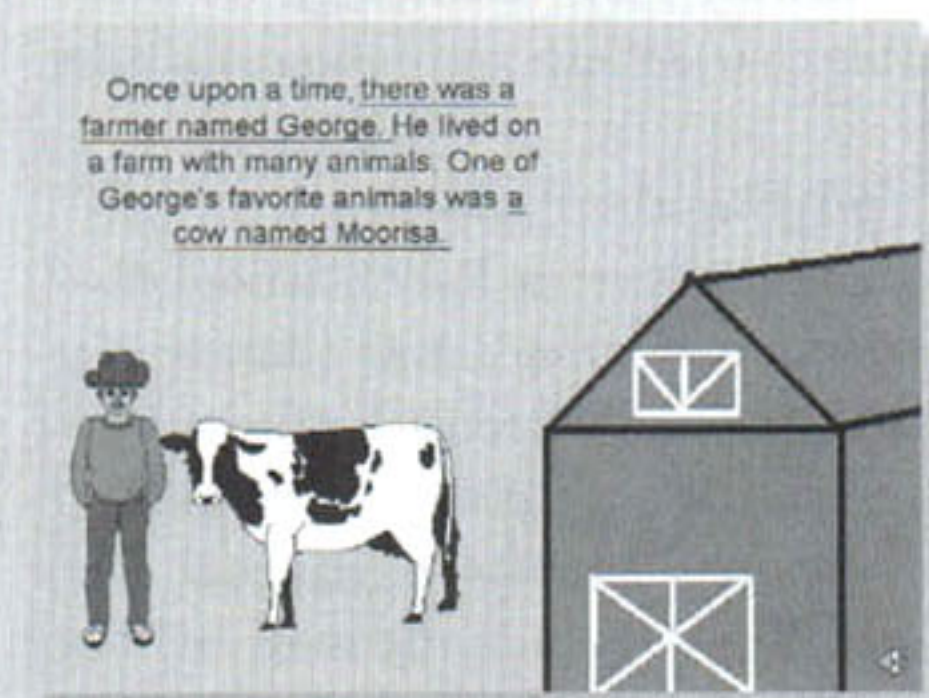
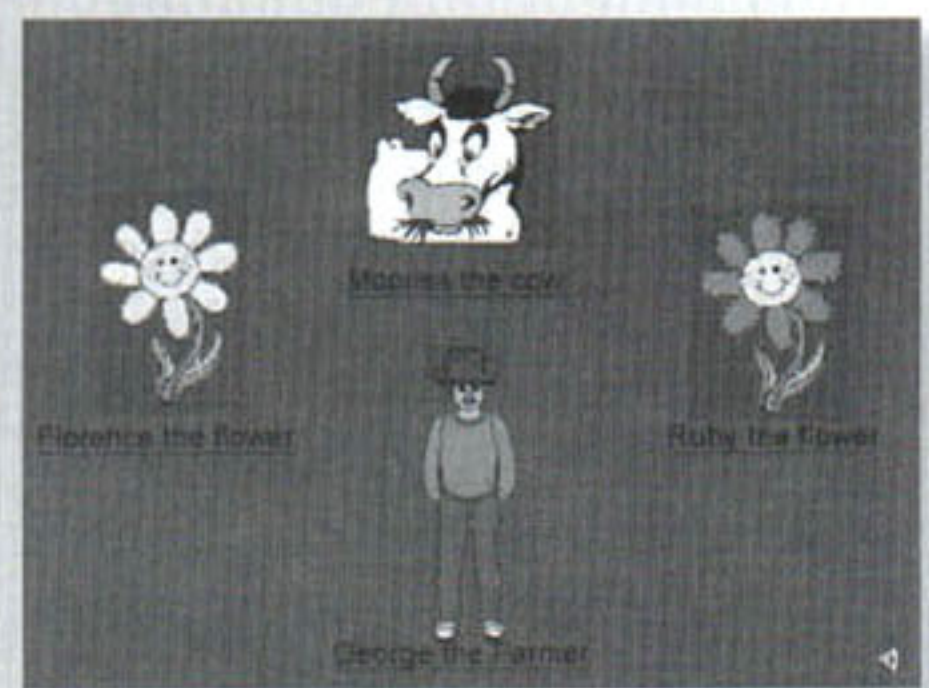
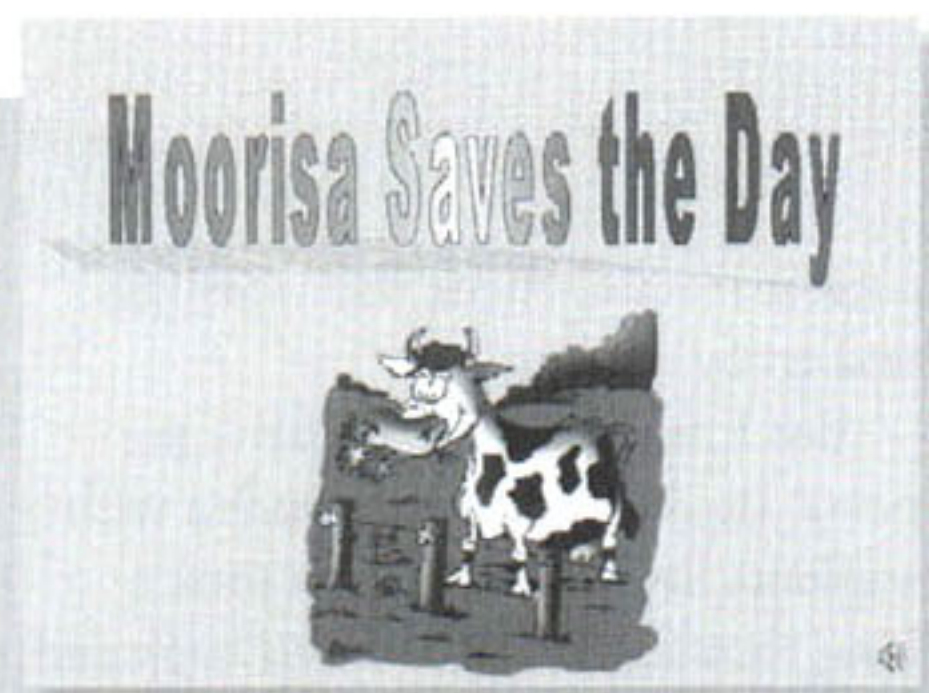
But I noticed some negative aspects. Because we corresponded with students in another state, it took a long time for letters to travel back and forth. The cost of shipping the completed books became almost prohibitive. My students often spent a lot of money on the materials to make their books, and, because of that, frequently kept their books rather than sending them to the elementary school.

Because the books are irreplaceable, the elementary students were not allowed to check them out, they could only read their books during school hours. By using technology, we were able to overcome all of these obstacles.

Updating the Project

The Albuquerque Public School district provides free e-mail addresses for students, so I asked each of my high school students to send an introductory e-mail message to Margaret, who distributed them to the students. They asked general questions of the second graders, such as what games or television shows students like, what their hobbies were, and how many brothers and sisters they had. The second graders responded by typing their answers in Word; Margaret copied and pasted those answers into an e-mail message she sent back. Thus, the process of exchanging letters, which had formerly taken almost a month, was completed in just more than a week.

Elementary students learned to use Word, were able to send and receive e-mail messages, and could use PowerPoint to read or listen to their books.



Elementary students learned correct letter format and were able to practice using Word. An added bonus was that the older students found it easier to read their younger pen pal's letters: no second-grade handwriting to decipher.

Instead of using paper and pencil to create a storyboard, I asked my students to turn to PowerPoint. They set up the required number of pages (slides) and listed a main point or idea for the story on each one. From the slide sorter view, students could easily see how the story flowed, rearranging, inserting, or deleting slides to make their story better.

After organizing their books, students wrote their stories. Before using PowerPoint, students had to either type the story and physically cut and paste it on to the paper or they had to carefully print the words, because second graders usually have difficulty reading cursive writing. With PowerPoint, students could type their story directly onto the page, enlarge the print to make it easier for second graders to read, and arrange (and rearrange) the lines of print in any way they chose. The spelling and grammar checkers helped ensure that words were spelled correctly and sentences were grammatically correct.

Once the stories were written, it was time to add color and graphics. Students began by using the clip art provided with PowerPoint. They learned to change the size and shape, recolor the graphics to meet their needs, and even rearrange elements in the graphics. They quickly moved to other forms of art as well. Some used the free graphics sites found on the Internet (remembering, of course, to cite the source in their Acknowledgments page); others used the Paint

program to create their own art; and a few even chose to take their own pictures, scan them, and insert them into the book. Since our first PowerPoint book project, La Cueva has purchased digital cameras, making it much easier to include photos. As students became proficient at working with graphics in one form or another, they often took on the role of teacher, helping classmates learn new techniques. For example, students helped each other find the perfect art or demonstrated drawing techniques.

Taking the Books Further

At this point, using the hard-copy technique, the book would be finished. However, using PowerPoint gave us additional options. Students added animation and sounds to their books: fish swam, people who collided made a crashing sound. These additions made the books more engaging to Margaret's students and allowed my students to be more creative. My students used the Set Up Show function to create an audio book. They read their book aloud and set the slides to change with the narration. This feature can help many young readers. It allows struggling readers to follow along, and it helps speakers of other languages with their pronunciation. They also added a page of questions at the end of the book. These questions were each hyperlinked to the page that contained the answer so the second graders could test their reading comprehension.

Instead of having to send their books to the elementary school, my students could save their work on disks and send an e-mail copy to the teacher for their second grade pen pals. Students still had the option of making a hard copy by printing their

Using PowerPoint to create children's books fulfilled all of the objectives of the lesson and taught students to use technology.

There were several unexpected bonuses. One was my students' increased motivation. Students who had never been on time to class were in the computer lab at their computers and working before the bell rang.

book on a color inkjet printer, and the elementary teacher could print as many copies as she wanted for her students. We were also able to put all of their books on a CD to keep a permanent record of the work the class completed. The school is just beginning to consider portfolios as part of the graduation requirement. The book could easily become a part of a print or electronic portfolio.

Examining the Results

Using PowerPoint to create children's books fulfilled all of the objectives of the lesson and taught students to use technology. Students learned to write for a specific audience when they created books for younger students to enjoy. They learned to organize their thoughts, use vivid words, and write description and/or dialogue, and they were able to practice creative writing. They also fulfilled the school's service-learning requirement by giving the books to the elementary school. In comparison to the hard-copy method, it was also quicker and less expensive, both in materials to create the books and in mailing costs. It also provided increased access to the finished product. Elementary students learned to use Word, were able to send and receive messages through e-mail, and could use PowerPoint to read or listen to their books. Margaret reported that, "Students love to get on the computer; they just like to click." This project is an easy way to incorporate technology into the elementary classroom. "Because it provides students

with a different media for reading, it also encourages literacy."

The cost of packing and mailing a large box of books and the time it took for the books to be shipped were both eliminated. All 30 books could be sent for no charge in a matter of minutes through e-mail. A bonus was that the elementary students now had access to all of the books, not just the one written for them, and they could take them home.

There were several unexpected bonuses. One was my students' increased motivation. Students who had never been on time to class were in the computer lab at their computers and working before the bell rang. Students who had never said a word in class were either actively seeking information or were demonstrating a technique to other students. In addition, my English language learners were able to participate fully, because they understood the icons and could write the books in their own language. Margaret's classroom was able to add more books in Spanish for its native Spanish speakers at no cost. Finally, the second graders who received the books could now share them at home with their parents or siblings. Incorporating technology into a good educational unit made it outstanding!



Lyn C. Howell is an assistant professor of education at Milligan College in Tennessee. She has taught in middle and high schools throughout the United States and currently works to help preservice teachers integrate technology into their curriculum.



Thank You!

ISTE members are wonderful and generous. The L&L staff would like to especially thank the members who volunteered time from their busy NECC 2003 schedules to meet with us. Look for members like this month's subject, Doug Becker in the new member profile section each issue on p. 62.

We'd also like to express our gratitude to ISTE 100 member Intel and its Innovation in Education program for providing Intel digital microscopes as gifts for the participants.



If you'd like to be the subject of a member profile next year, please contact us at letters@iste.org



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