Talking Books | Using Multimedia to Support Learning and Literacy

The case for using talking books is compelling. Instructionally, their visuals, animations, sound effects, and narration grab students' attention and increase motivation, making talking books ideally suited to introducing a unit or simply altering instructional styles. Animated talking books can also reinforce lesson content. For example, the concept of *over* can be reinforced by animation showing one object moving to a position above another. Talking books can be effective instructionally for other reasons. The combination of text and its accompanying narration can support multiple reading skills, including phonemic awareness, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and text comprehension. This can be especially helpful for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The joint visual and auditory content can also support learning through different modalities, which may be helpful for many children, including those with special needs. And once created, talking books may be used repeatedly in either whole-class or individual instruction. For example, students absent when the talking book is presented or ESL learners can view the talking book on their own as many times as needed to catch up or to master content.

Students, including reluctant readers or writers, appear motivated as they develop their talking books, all the while engaging in reading, writing, and multimedia authoring. Student products can be shared with other classes or in a class, grade level, or whole school electronic author's fair. Students' talking books can be posted to a class Web site or viewed during open house. Paper copies can be printed for students to read on their own, while a single book or an entire collection can be burned to a CD and placed in the school library or sent home.

By Jonathan Brinkerhoff and Susan Bowdoin

Getting Started

To support teachers in getting started creating talking books, we developed a Web site (http://www.talkingbooklibrary.net) that includes resource materials and a library of examples. The resources page has a link to directions for creating talking books in PowerPoint 97, 2000, and XP. These directions are comprehensive, proceeding step by step through the entire process of creating talking books.

The library currently contains sample instructional talking books arranged by grade level and subject area and each is annotated with a description of its content and instructional goal. For example, *Two Liners, Two Destinies* is intended for middle school social-studies students. The book provides extensive background information on the Titanic and Lusitania and poses the essential question: Is salvaging artifacts from these wrecks preserving history or is it grave desecration? Another example, intended for an elementary audience, is *Freddy the Friendliest Mouse,* which teaches comparative and superlative forms of adjectives.

When planning your own talking book, first decide on your purpose. Do you want to teach a concept, introduce a unit, or chronicle a class field trip? Do you want to make a creative writing class book through a language experience process where students suggest ideas and dictate prose that you record? Do you want your students to create their own talking books or create books for another class? Whatever type of talking book project you choose, consider the following to make the process run more smoothly.

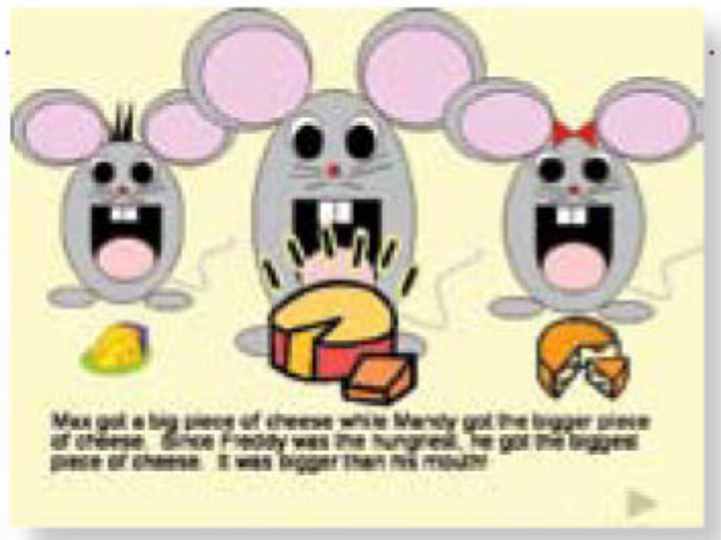
Teacher-Generated Books

- Create a storyboard showing the text, images, and possible animations for each page.
- Create images using PowerPoint Draw tools or find images online.
- When using images found online, be sure to save the full-size image files rather than the thumbnails that appear as the result of an image search, as the larger file images will look better when inserted in your talking book.
- Save the images with a meaningful name to a dedicated folder.
- Record image sources for a citation page at the end of your talking book.
- Use graphic design techniques such as creating a horizon line for outdoor scenes and lines at the junctions of walls and floors for indoor scenes. *Freddy the Friendliest Mouse* is a good example of the use of such lines, which keep objects from looking like they're floating in space.
- Back up your work frequently, saving the file with a new name such as talking book1, talking book2, etc.

Student-Generated Books

- Even if your goal is to have students create their own talking books, it can be helpful to share examples, then model the process by completing a talking book as a whole class first. This teaches students to brainstorm and storyboard the progression of the book before turning to the computer. It also demonstrates the need for high-quality graphics and citing sources.
- Clearly focus students on the learning goals connected to the talking book project. Is the purpose a creative story, documentation of a class project, or something else?
- Use rubrics and checklists geared toward each type of project to guide

Two Liners, Two Destinies



Freddy the Friendliest Mouse

student work and set clear expectations for elements that are, or are not, to be included. Consider including students in the creation of assessment tools to support engagement and ownership. A sample storyboard handout, checklist and rubric are available on the resources page of the Web site.

Final Thoughts

Our preservice students typically identify the talking book assignment as one of their most rewarding experiences during the semester. As instructors, we've found the project effective in getting students to consider state standards and the interests and reading levels of their intended audience while also raising their understanding of the instructional potential PowerPoint offers. Practicing teachers who have used their instructional talking books in class have reported positive student attitudes, engagement, and learning, while those who have had their students create individual talking books report that, while time consuming, the projects were well worth it. We hope this article encourages both teachers and teacher educators to use talking books in their own instructional settings and share their products by submitting them through the talking book Web site.

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