



Dear Colleagues,

With this issue we expand our very irregular newsletter to discuss some of the efforts Ken and I have been working on together.

Let's start with five easy-to-use applications.

Five easy apps!

First, it is important to understand that we do not advocate teaching with a tech-based strategy merely to teach with a tech-based strategy. Consider your learning goals. If a new Web-based application can create a richer environment for accomplishing those goals, or help you accomplish those goals more effectively or efficiently, then we give it a try. We are here to support you!

Ken and I have been experimenting (in most cases very successfully) with some of the following easy-to-use programs.

VoiceThread

(<http://voicethread.com>) Sarah Gibbs and Yamilla Kent both used this slideshow and sound tool to encourage storytelling, writing and fluency with their upper level Spanish learners.

iGoogle

(<http://google.com/ig>) has gotten even better. It includes more and more beautiful themes and gadgets. These tools (for students and teachers) are useful for organization and for pushing information to your desktop. Use it to create your own information portal. Pull together your gmail, calendar, to-do-list, calculator, quick reference, quotes of the day, timers, or a huge variety of news feeds for any subject area. Look below for iGoogle science and art examples.

Blabberize

(<http://blabberize.com>) This tool allows you to create talking mouths (ala the Conan O'Brian Show). While it may seem a bit frivolous, consider how it might enliven vocabulary across the content areas. Imagine creating a

monolog in a foreign language or portraying a character from a novel or play. Imagine using that llama in the margin to explain the concept of socialism.

ToonDoo

(<http://toondoo.com>) This cartoon strip generator can be used to create dialog among characters, create a scene from another culture (in another language), explain a scientific concept or historical event. Characters can be imported. Strips are saved as image files and can be grouped together as a longer work.

Deli.cio.us (<http://del.icio.us/>) is social bookmarking tool for web sites and database documents. Organize your own important links; share them with others if you choose.

I blab!
Do you?



PowerPoint Reform

PowerPoint has been in our classrooms for nearly ten years now. Many of us, teachers and students alike, would prefer not to suffer through another boring, bullet-ridden presentation from our students or our colleagues.

A couple of months back, we interviewed a group of students. And we discovered that for them, it was as bad. They dread each others' PowerPoints.

What happened?

Somehow, along the way, all the stuff we used to teach about effective public speaking got lost.

Slideshow presentation styles have changed. At conferences, and online you see effective examples that would serve as models to our students.

But breaking 10 years of bad habits will be a process. With PowerPoint so ingrained in our culture, it may be a fight.

Last semester we worked with Kevin Martin's Senior Seminar classes, some of Jeff MacFarland's classes, and Christine Settino's English class as they prepared presentations on *Ethan Frome*. (Next week, we plan to work with 8th grade ILA.)

What we shared:

- We suggested students aim for *no bullets*, just one word or phrase per slide.
- We told them to think of including just one powerful image on a slide. That image could be accompanied by minimal text or no text at all.
- Not all images are created equal. We banned clipart. (Well, we tried.) Why would anyone choose to use canned art in a landscape where the people of the world are generously sharing original media?
- We pointed students to our [Copyright Friendly Images pathfinder](#), our [Image Generator Pathfinder](#), and to [Flickr's Creative Commons Pool](#). We told them to search for images conceptually rather than literally. For interest, what images would photographers tag to represent the concepts "lonely" or "cold"? We also suggested students create their own images.
- If they needed to include a quote, students were to look for the *nugget* within the quote. To shorten it as much as possible. To discover its essence.
- We told students that slides were cheap. In fact, they are free. Use as many as you need. Run through some quickly. Stay on some a while. Consider the pace required by the thought. We eliminated requirements like: *include fifteen slides--one should be your introduction, five should include specific evidence, etc.* (Works cited or credit slides were, of course, required.)
- We told students to be creative in grabbing and maintaining attention. There was no formula for presentation. Think outside the box.
- We echoed the words of one student from a unit on presentations we piloted last year--"the slides are for the audience; they are not for me."



- We reminded students of rhetorical devices—repetition/refrain, provocative questions, humor, grabbers and clinchers, anecdotes, metaphors, hyperbole, etc. Jeff MacFarland showed students exemplars of good speaking techniques using [TED's](#) impressive archive of inspiring speeches.

What we discovered:

- On the whole, students who listened to us did better presentations. Their slides looked *way* better. They looked modern--without a *90s digital accent*. (With the exception of one dedicated WordArt fan.)
- Without their bullets, students were forced into storytelling and connecting with their audience.
- Those students who chose to ignore our advise and continued to use bullets, kept turning to look at their slides. When the audience saw a slide appear with five or ten bullets, you could almost see them sigh. The presenter also appeared tired when faced with the prospect of covering all those bullets.
- You could also hear quiet, superior snickers when a student chose to use clipart.

Issues:

- The *Ethan Frome* group whined incessantly during our first lesson. They simply could not believe we wanted them to lose the bullets. "How do you expect us to know what to say?" After a while, however, students involved themselves with the aesthetics of their slides. Many of their slides convincingly evoked the cold New England winter, or the loneliness of the Frome household.
- Students who weren't prepared appeared less prepared. If they didn't know their content, it was very clear.
- Some students are better storytellers than others. That was clear too.
- Some students got a little too involved in slide design and overlooked sharing a compelling thesis or their evidence.

Overall:

- The students learned about communication, about what makes an effective presentation. Presentations revealed both good and bad models and the student audience seemed to know the difference.
- Many students began to think outside the box. The spoke to their audience. They used humor. They used rhetorical devices--quotes, metaphors, repetition, questions, etc. We saw audience engagement and we suspect that some of the presentations inspired learning.
- Many students appeared truly pleased with their new and improved products.
- We know we have much more work to do.
- We know we need to work further with teachers on what to value. We may need some new rubrics.
- The lesson was sticky. We suspect some students will continue to use these new strategies.

Among the resources we used:

- [Death by PowerPoint: And how to fight it](#)
- [Presentation Zen \(Garr Reynolds\)](#)
- [PowerPoint Extreme Makeover \(Dean Shareski\)](#)
- [Cliff Atkinson: Beyond Bullets](#)
- [Tom Peters on Presentation Excellence](#)
- [Gettysburg Address PowerPoint \(What if Lincoln used PPT?\)](#)
- [Stop Your Presentation Before it Kills Again \(Kathy Sierra\)](#)



Database News

New for the spring semester is ***Annals of American History***. This primary source database is based on the huge set of red reference books used heavily by AP US History, but the online version should have application beyond Peggy's classes. It features speeches, essays, landmark court decisions, and more. Content reaches back to Columbus's first visit. Browse by major topic or by timeline. The online version includes photos and multimedia. Look for it on our Catalogs and Database page. An updated password list (for home use) is attached.

Video services

I don't really have a sense of how many staff members know how to use our streamed media services. But I often come across teachers who are surprised to discover these amazing resources.

Both Discovery Education Streaming and Safari Montage will instantly bring the videos you once borrowed directly into your classroom. These videos come packaged in neatly divided learning segments and offer teachers' guides, assessments, closed captioning, and other enhancements.

Both of these links to video databases are accessible from our Catalogs and Database page <http://www.sdst.org/shs/library/catalog>

Discovery Education Streaming (formerly United Streaming) <http://streaming.discoveryeducation.com>

Springfield's passcode for this service is:
XXXXXXXX

You will be prompted to set up your personal username and password.

Safari Montage <http://172.20.5.202/>

This video service is filled with curricular resources—all the Schlessinger series you used to still may borrow, as well as a growing archive of locally produced media.

Use your network login for this one. Remember—Safari Montage is a server-based system. That means you cannot use it from home.

For more streamed video resources, see our Streaming Media Pathfinder: <http://www.sdst.org/shs/library/video.html>

Turnitin.com

Over the last couple of months we've experienced a few plagiarism incidents.

A Turnitin.com account can help encourage academic integrity. To set one up for your classes or your projects, you will need the following:

XXXXXXXX

Please email or call if you need some help getting started.

Also consider reminding students of our Research Integrity Policy <http://www.sdst.org/shs/library/acadintegrity.html>



Hope to see you soon,

Joyce