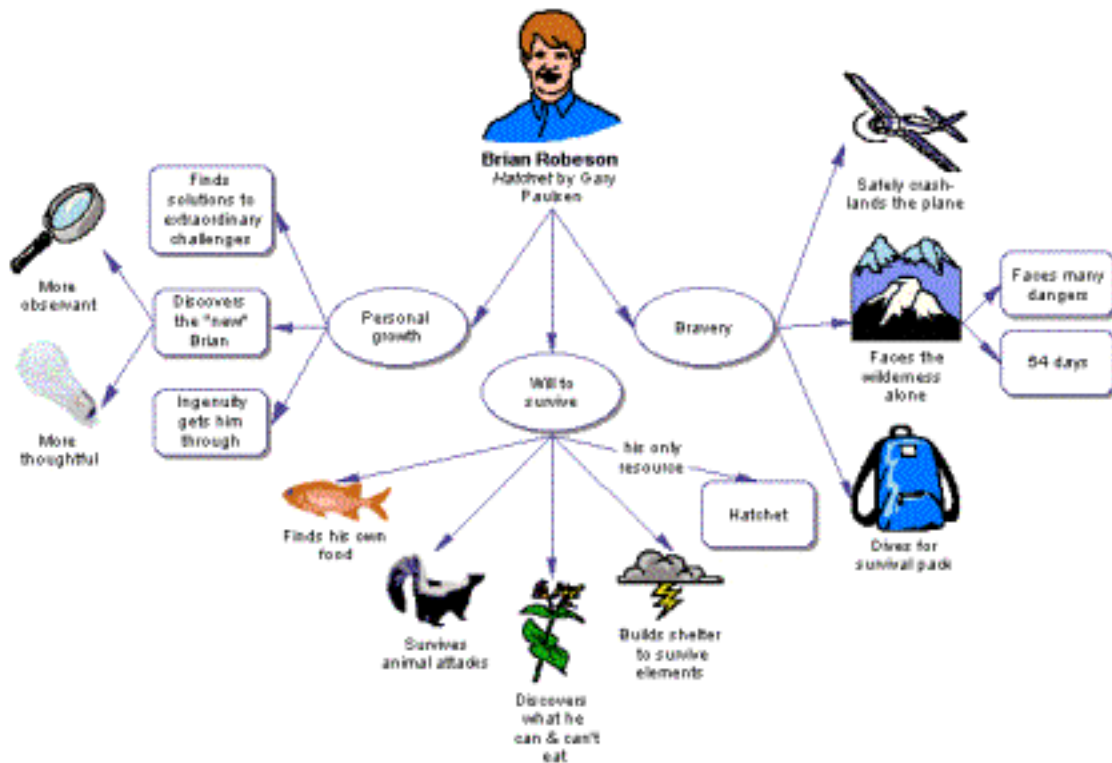


Inspiration Software:
An Essential Tool in Every Classroom
(Published in the TechEdge, Spring 2003)
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Instructional strategies in many classrooms today remain an inheritance of the industrial age, especially at the secondary and higher education levels. Content drawn largely from textbooks is presented to students in a lecture format, students are expected to take copious notes, prepare for written exams, and regurgitate on cue the essential lessons from the text emphasized by the teacher and the curriculum guide.

One problem with this traditional school model, however, is that many students do not learn as well when confined to Roman numeral outlines, five paragraph essays, and multiple choice exams. Theorists contend students not only have different learning styles, but varying levels of intelligence in different areas, including visual intelligence. As Roger Wagner has observed, we live in an increasingly 'mediacentric' society, where visual communication is both powerful and ubiquitous. Recognizing the limitations of traditional, text-only instructional methods as well as the need to address different learning styles, teachers at every level should celebrate that Inspiration software (www.inspiration.com) is available to help learners of all ages bridge the gap between visual and textual literacy, and aid in concept development in virtually every content area.



Sample literary diagram from www.inspiration.com

Graphic organizers have been used by teachers for years, but Inspiration software makes the creation, manipulation, and transformation of graphic organizers an intuitive exercise on the computer. Perhaps most importantly, with the option to view any created file in either Outline mode (traditional text / verbal structure) or Diagram mode (to include shapes, graphics, and connecting lines of relationship), Inspiration can serve as a conceptual bridge. Inspiration can serve as a tool both for the teacher in direct instruction and for the student in constructing their own meaning during a lesson. Inspiration is a tool limited only by the creativity of the student and the teacher. Whether teaching math, language arts, reading, PE, art, music, science or a foreign language, Inspiration can help learners document and understand the parts of a process or concept. It can be used to organize student writing, and to highlight relationships in a visually engaging format. This article will focus on Inspiration software (version 7,) recommended for students in grades 3 and up. Kidspiration software is also available for grades K-3, with similar functionality and a simpler interface for younger learners.

Classroom Brainstorming

One of the best ways to use Inspiration during direct instruction is to facilitate brainstorming. Break students into small groups, and provide a fixed amount of time (like 2 minutes) for groups to brainstorm on a given topic. Have one student serve as secretary for the group, recording (but not discussing or judging at this time) as many responses as possible to the provided topic.

After brainstorming time expires, ask group members to share their results. Rather than write these on an overhead projector, use a computer with Inspiration software installed on it and a LCD projector. Classroom televisions are better than computer monitors for showing students a computer screen's information, but even larger models are not big enough for this activity. The best option is to borrow a LCD projector for this lesson, and project on a screen or a blank wall the largest possible image of the computer screen.

To start using Inspiration as a brainstorming tool:

1. Open Inspiration.
2. Read and close the 'Tip of the Day.'
3. Start typing - you do not need to click the mouse - this will be your MAIN IDEA or TOPIC.
4. Click the RAPID FIRE button on the toolbar at the top of the screen.
5. Type a word or phrase related to the topic, then press ENTER. Each word or phrase will be spun off your main topic (created as a separate idea bubble connected to the original.)
6. Repeat as many times as desired.
7. When finished, either hold down SHIFT and press RETURN, or 'click away' from the diagram (in unused white space.)

After creating a web of ideas in Diagram mode, click the Outline mode button in the upper left corner of the screen to toggle into the Outline View. It can be easier to organize the results of brainstorming in the Outline view, especially if subcategories need to be created.

To organize ideas in Outline view:

1. Click and hold down the mouse button ON THE NUMBER OR LETTER of an idea you want to move. (Clicking on the text of the idea itself will let you edit, but not move the idea.)
2. Drag the NUMBER OR LETTER of the idea to the desired location. This can be at the same organizational level as other ideas (Roman numeral C, D, etc) or at a subtopic level (little 1, 2, etc under a letter.)
3. Instead of clicking and dragging to create subtopics, the RIGHT and LEFT arrows on the top toolbar can be used to indent and outdent ideas. This functionality is like MS Word, when creating a numbered or bulleted list.

After organizing and reordering ideas in the Outline view, switch back to the Diagram view and let Inspiration visually arrange the idea bubbles. Click on the Arrange icon in the top toolbar and choose the desired organizational method (left tree, right tree, web, etc.) Experiment with different methods. Then color code idea bubbles in different subcategories.

To change the color of idea bubbles in the Diagram view:

1. Click once on one of the idea bubbles you want to change.
2. Hold down the shift key and select others you want to change to the same color.
3. After selecting all desired ideas, release the shift key.
4. At the bottom of the screen on the toolbar, click the fill color icon (to the left of the font color button) and change the bubble color as desired.
5. Remember and remind students using Inspiration to use contrasting colors (dark font color / light background, or light font color / dark background.)

Student Lessons in 45 Minutes

A fundamental concept for successful technology integration is the idea of creating a 'template file.' A template is a partially created document

including different parts of the student assignment. Depending on the ability level of the students and available time on the computer, more or less structure can be provided within the template file for students. The reality of instruction at all levels is that time is a precious commodity, and many students would not complete a lesson in the available time if they had to start with a blank document. By even including internet hyperlinks within the Inspiration template file, teachers can minimize the amount of time wasted by students on the computer locating websites or making technical changes to their files. Instead, time on task focusing on the lesson of the day can be maximized.

After creating a student template file in Inspiration 7, one of the easiest ways to make it into a 'true template' is to make it a read only file. A true template allows multiple students to open the file at the same time over the network—without being shown an error that the file is already in use—and be provided with their own, unsaved version of the document. To quickly make a finalized Inspiration 7 document into a template file, right click (or control-click on a Macintosh) the unopened file and choose Properties / Get Information. Click the checkbox to make the file 'read only,' then close the properties window. Move the file into a directory/folder on the school network which students have at least READ access rights. To start the lesson, provide them with the PATH to the file on the network, and have each student open (and immediately save as appropriate) the file from the network.

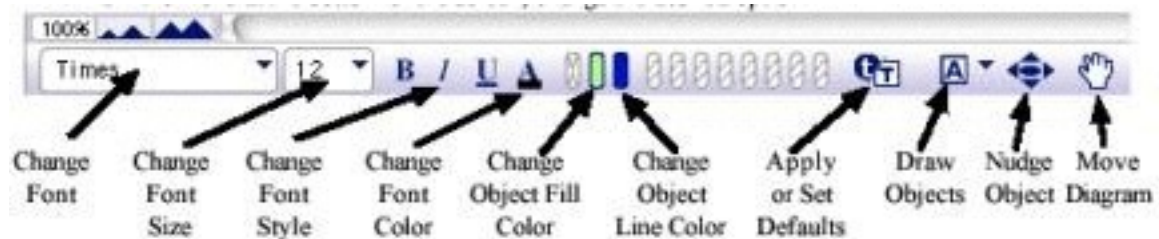
Included Template Files

One of the most welcome features of Inspiration for teachers is a large collection of provided template files, available from the FILE menu. These are organized by content area. Before creating your own template, take a look at several of the template files that are provided with Inspiration and determine if one can be readily modified for your instructional purpose.

Inspiration Quickstart

Inspiration is a remarkable program because of its power and intuitiveness. The toolbar in Inspiration 7 has been refined to include font

and text size tools, as well as 'the hand' (move diagram tool.) By selecting one or more objects as previously described, then selecting desired formatting using the lower toolbar, Inspiration users can readily customize the appearance of their ideas in both the Diagram and Outline views.



When any idea bubble in Inspiration is selected (clicked on ONCE), several 'handles' appear around the object. These have different functions. To resize an object, click and drag on the square, corner handles. To create a new line of relationship (link) between objects, click on the diamond handle in the middle of a selected object's side and drag to the object you want linked.



Just as idea bubbles can be selected and moved or edited, linking lines of relationship can also be selected and changed. Just as idea bubbles can be changed in their font, font size, or color, they can also be given different shapes or a graphic. Click on an object and then choose a graphic in the Inspiration symbol palette to make a graphic change. Pressing F8 will toggle the symbol palette on and off. During classwide instruction, it can be helpful to hide it. Internet graphics can also be copied and pasted directly onto Inspiration idea bubbles. When a graphic is used (instead of a shape,) labeling text for an idea bubble is displayed below instead of superimposed on top of the picture.

An official and thorough (36 pages) Inspiration Quickstart Tutorial is available on www.inspiration.com/download/pdf/insp7_quick_start.pdf. The Inspiration website also includes helpful, animated demonstrations of the software. A shorter Quickstart guide to Inspiration I have used this year with junior high teachers in Plainview, Texas, is also available on www.wtvi.com/plainview/inspiration_quickstart.pdf. Feel free to also

use a sample 'All About Me' Inspiration activity, perfect for teachers being introduced to Inspiration during a staff development training session, on www.wtvi.com/plainview/allaboutme-ins.zip.

Helpful Inspiration Tips

Navigate with the Mountains and the Hand: As Inspiration mind maps grow larger, it is possible to get lost and have difficulty navigating around in the diagram. Two key tools that can assist navigation are the 'mountains' (in the lower left corner of the bottom toolbar) and 'the hand.' The mountains allow users to zoom in and out, changing the viewable (but not actual) size of the diagram or outline. Click on the icon that looks like smaller mountains to zoom out and see a smaller version: click on the larger mountains to zoom in and obtain a closer view. Once zoomed in, click on the hand (position or move diagram tool) to literally grab the diagram and drag it up, down, left or right.

Content First, Then Bells and Whistles: Use a template file to focus student attention on the concepts of a lesson, and require them to complete textual / conceptual parts of the diagram first before getting preoccupied with changing fonts, colors, graphics, etc.

Use Embedded Hyperlinks: Another superb addition to Inspiration 7 is the Hyperlink tool, available on the top toolbar. After finding a website for student use in a lesson, use the hyperlink tool like its counterpart in Word or PowerPoint. An individual idea bubble can be hyperlinked to a website, or a text box of links can be created within the file.

To create an internet hotlist within an Inspiration file:

1. Locate a website you want to include in your hotlist with your web browser, and copy its website address to your computer's clipboard (Edit-Copy / Control or Command-C / Right-Click Copy)
2. Make sure the file is in Diagram view.
3. Click on the Draw Objects button in the lower toolbar and select text box.

4. Click and drag in a blank area to create an empty textbox.
5. Type and center a title for the hotlist.
6. Press return, and type the name you want to display for the first website. Example: Yahooligans Middle East Info
7. Highlight the text you just typed.
8. Click on the Hyperlink tool in the top toolbar.
9. Click in the link area and paste the internet address (Control or Command-V / Right-Click Paste.) Example: <http://dailynews.yahoo.com/fc3/yahooligans/middleeast>
10. Click OK to create the hyperlink.
11. Repeat for as many sites as desired.

Create Header for Student Names: Whenever students are going to print files in the classroom or computer lab, it is always advisable to have them put their names as a HEADER in their document. By using a Header, the student name will be on EVERY page that prints out, not just the first one. In Inspiration 7, the Header settings have been moved from the File menu (which was not very intuitive compared to MS Office) to the familiar View menu.

Segway to PowerPoint: If students use Inspiration to organize an essay they plan to write or present, a nice technique is exporting the Inspiration file (in Outline mode) as a rich text file, and then opening that file in PowerPoint. This will automatically create a new slide for every new subtopic off the main idea of the diagram, and include subpoints on each slide.

To export Inspiration and open it in Powerpoint:

1. Make sure Inspiration is in Outline mode.
2. Choose File - Export, Word RTF format.
3. Save the exported text file in the desired location.
4. Close Inspiration.
5. Open PowerPoint, choose Open File.

6. Navigate to the location where the exported Inspiration text file was saved.
7. Windows users may have to choose SHOW ALL FILES at the bottom of the file open dialog window, to show the .rtf file (which is not the usual extension for Powerpoint files.)
8. Click on the RTF file and open it.

Students can then save and modify the PowerPoint file as desired. This technique provides an excellent way to use the organizational and planning power of Inspiration and connect it with a familiar technology presentation tool.

Evaluate the process, not just the final product

Teachers can use rubrics to assess student planning documents, students' created Inspiration file, as well as their final draft or presentation during the course of a project. Rubistar is a free online tool that can help in the development of rubrics (<http://rubistar.4teachers.org>).

Obtaining the Software

Inspiration software is available for Windows as well as Macintosh computers, and a 30 day trial version is available for download (www.inspiration.com/freetrial/). Alternatively, trial CDs are available (800-877-4292). Multiple-licensing terms are available for schools and districts.

Technology Integration Today and Tomorrow

Prior to our current economic hard times, schools in the United States were spending over \$7 billion annually on educational technology. School administrators have traditionally been very good at spending money for hardware and software, but generally reticent to invest in technology training and HUMAN infrastructure to assist with technology integration, despite research consistently recommending such investment. The

information age is here to stay, and technology integration will continue to be a buzzword in educational circles as well as a moral responsibility in our digitally divided communities. Inspiration is a wonderful tool that can open windows of opportunity and understanding for students of all ages. Budgets may be strained, but software like Inspiration should be considered part of the 'standard software package' loaded on every computer in schools today.

Wesley Fryer is the Director of Distance Learning for the [College of Education at Texas Tech University](#). He provides technology integration training for K-16 educators nationwide, as well as training for school administrators interested in more effectively leading teachers to transparently integrate technology use within their classrooms.

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