New Media, New Tools ...
and a New Educational Resource

***EDUTOPIA* WANTS TO HELP** you make the most of the latest technologies and innovative ways to use them as we settle into the 2009–10 school year, so we've put together this brand-new resource for you containing ten of the best tips and resources on how to bring new media into the classroom.

Full of succinct and practical ways to prepare our students for 21st-century success, this guide will educate and inspire you to embrace the new-media frontier and embark on a new learning adventure. From "Breaking the Digital Ice" to "Working Better, Together" each tip provides succinct and practical ways to turn your classroom into an environment for learning with new media. And each tip includes a wealth of Web sites and additional resources to help you deliver the relevant and meaningful education all students deserve.

—Suzie Boss
Journalist and *Edutopia* blogger
edutopia.org/suzie-boss

visit **edutopia.org**

TIP LIST

#1
Break the Digital Ice

#2
Find Your Classroom Experts

#3
Get Off to a Good Start

#4
Think Globally

#5
Find What You Need

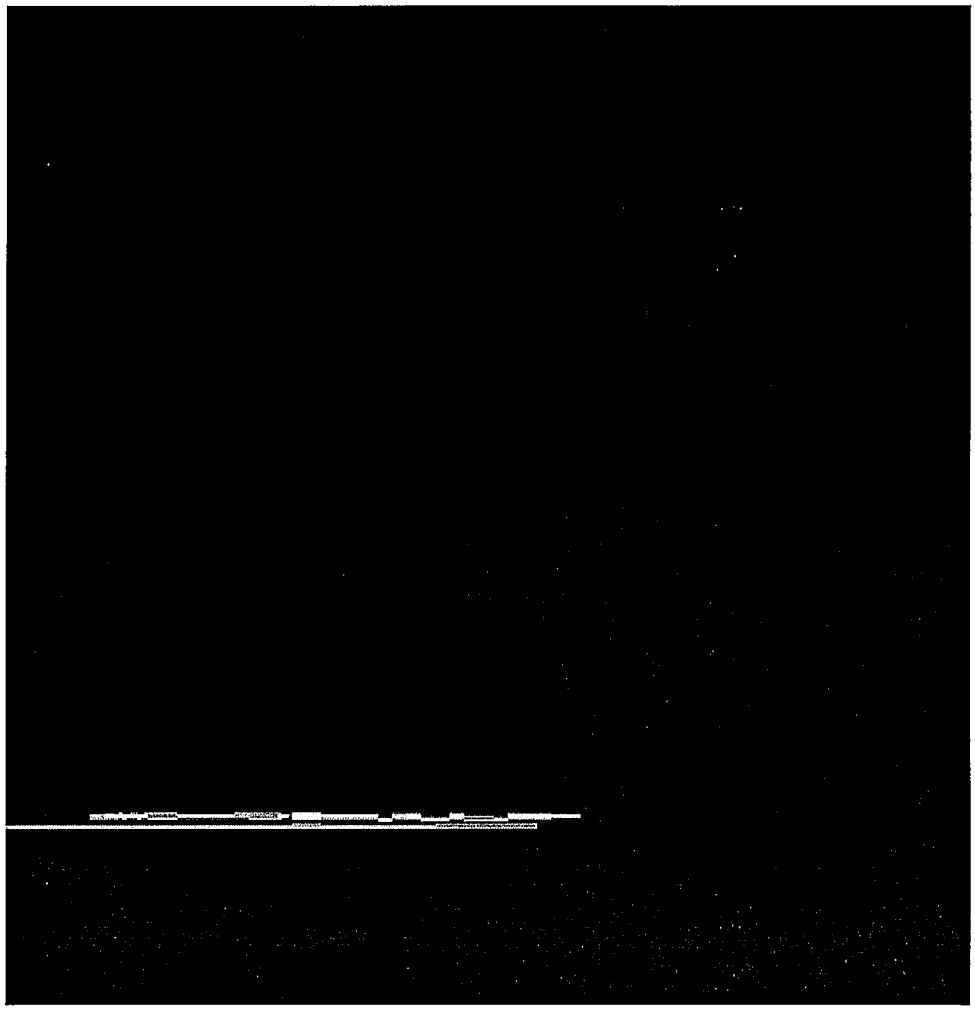
#6
Make Meaning from Word Clouds

#7
Work Better, Together

#8
Open a Back Channel

#9
Make It Visual

#10
Use the Buddy System



TIP #1
Break the Digital Ice

ICEBREAKERS ARE A TIME-HONORED TRADITION for starting the new school year. Scavenger hunts, name games, and other introductory activities help teachers and students get acquainted so they can start building a positive learning community. Give this important classroom tradition a 21st-century makeover by integrating digital tools.

VoiceThread **(voicethread.com)** is one example of an online resource that can help you and your students get better acquainted. VoiceThread allows users to combine photographs or other visuals with written or audio comments. This collaborative, Web-based tool is easy to use, which means students will be spending class time actively participating rather than awaiting instructions.

For elementary school students, introduce VoiceThread with a whole-class activity. Using a projector or an interactive whiteboard, share a short digital album to introduce yourself. Invite students to record their own audio comments in response to your prompts. Then expand the activity by adding photos of students. Invite them to add comments to help you learn more about them—and each other.

With secondary school students, consider using a VoiceThread prompt to encourage goal setting for the new school year. What do students look forward to doing in your class? What interests them about this subject? What image can they share that captures how they are feeling at the start of the new school year? Students' individual VoiceThreads can be useful artifacts for reflection later in the year. Add your own encouraging comments to their digital albums, modeling how to give positive feedback.

By introducing a collaborative tool like VoiceThread early in the year, you'll be letting students know that your classroom is a place for productive conversation where everyone's voice matters.

Related Resources:

→ "100 Ways to Use VoiceThread in Education" **(voicethread.com/#q.b26224.i145977)**, a teacher-created VoiceThread about VoiceThread.

→ "VoiceThread Extends the Classroom with Interactive Media Albums" **(edutopia.org/voicethread-interactive-multimedia-albums)**, from Edutopia.org.

→ VoiceThread for Educators **(voicethread.ning.com)**, a social-networking site for teachers, with more than 880 members.

→ In a short video **(secctv.org/video/?p=461)**, Gail Desler, a technology-integration specialist for the Elk Grove Unified School District, in Elk Grove, California, explains the power of using VoiceThread in a history classroom.

TTP #2

Find Your Classroom Experts

MANY OF TODAY'S DIGITAL KIDS spend their free time producing videos, posting to social-networking sites, and text messaging their friends. You can take advantage of their technical know-how in the classroom, too, if you know where to look for help.

Early in the school year, survey your students to find out about their digital smarts: Who are your classroom experts when it comes to graphic design, podcasting, or video editing? Who knows how to make animations? Any Teen Second Life experts in the group? Do students own any gear they would be willing to share for a special project?

Cast an even wider net for technical expertise by surveying parents. Even better, have your students survey their family members. Don't overlook other experts in your school community. After-school technology clubs, as well as instructional-technology staff, media specialists, and other tech-savvy colleagues, are all likely sources of expertise.

Online survey tools like Survey Monkey **(surveymonkey.com)** make information gathering quick and easy. Many online survey tools offer free basic accounts. Once you have gathered the raw data, create a spreadsheet so you can easily identify your classroom experts when the need for specialized help arises. Better yet, ask your resident spreadsheet gurus to help you.

Related Resources:

→ Online-survey tools besides Survey Monkey include Profiler PRO **(profilerpro.com)** and Zoomerang **(zoomerang.com)**. Most offer a free basic account.

→ Generation YES **(genyes.com)** is a program that encourages students to help teachers use technology in the classroom. Read about one school's successful program in the Edutopia.org article "California Kids Use—and Teach—Digital Storytelling" **(edutopia.org/economic-stimulus-education-technology-california)**.

TIP #3
Get Off to a Good Start

THE START OF A NEW SCHOOL YEAR is the perfect time to help your students get organized. Spend some time on self-management strategies now, and your investment will pay off all year long.

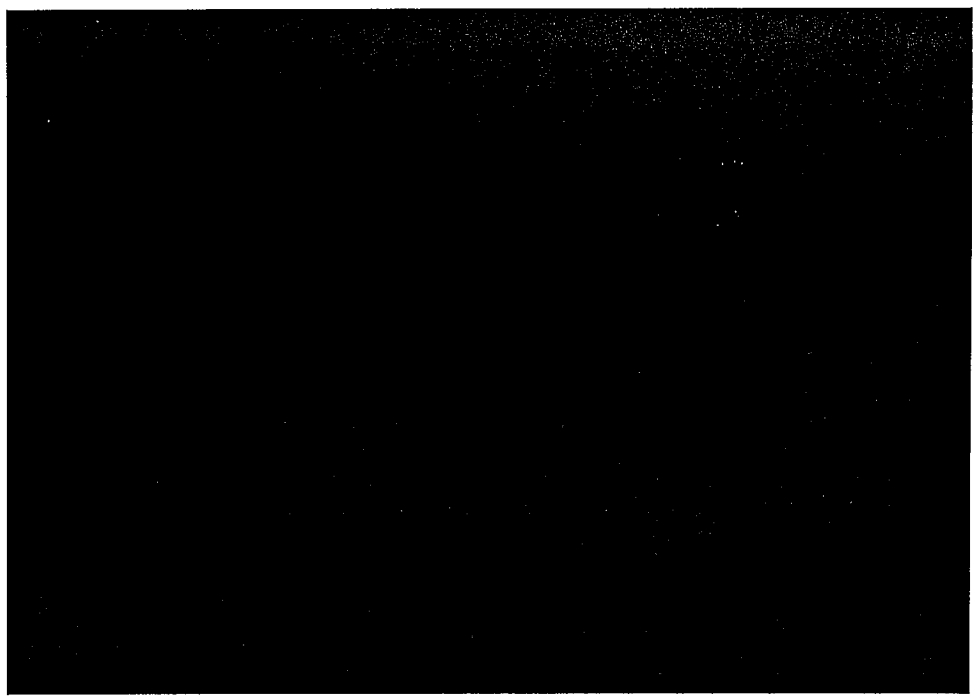
A wide array of Web tools can help students get better at managing their own learning. As you consider which ones will offer the most value for your students, think about the kinds of activities your students will take part in this year. Will they need to work with multimedia resources? Manage deadlines? Collaborate with team members on various projects? Dig into research? Help students manage these various activities with an online site that accomplishes multiple tasks.

The most basic online organizer, appropriate for all grade levels, is a public Web site that serves as a teacher-generated information hub. Use it to post resources, assignments, and messages for students—and to keep parents informed, too. Include a calendar for tracking upcoming milestones. Add a photo stream or embed a video to open a window into classroom activities or showcase student work.

If you use blogs or other interactive tools for learning, link to them from your public page (using password protection as needed for privacy concerns). Share your contact information so students or parents can get in touch with questions or comments. For an example of one teacher's online hub, check out the site managed by Georgia teacher Vicki Davis **(westwood.wikispaces.com)**.

To make management more individualized, encourage students to set up their own personalized pages. Start pages such as iGoogle **(google.com/ig)** can serve as their virtual desktops, keeping their digital tools in one handy place. Users can customize their start pages with the widgets they need, such as calendars, notepads, or news feeds. (You can preselect these add-ons if you want to narrow students' choices.) Students can access their personal start page anytime, from any connected computer—at home, at school, or in a library.

For a ready-made project-management site, check out the ThinkQuest **(thinkquest.org)** learning platform. Available at no charge to K–12 schools around the world, it features an online environment where teachers and students can collaborate.

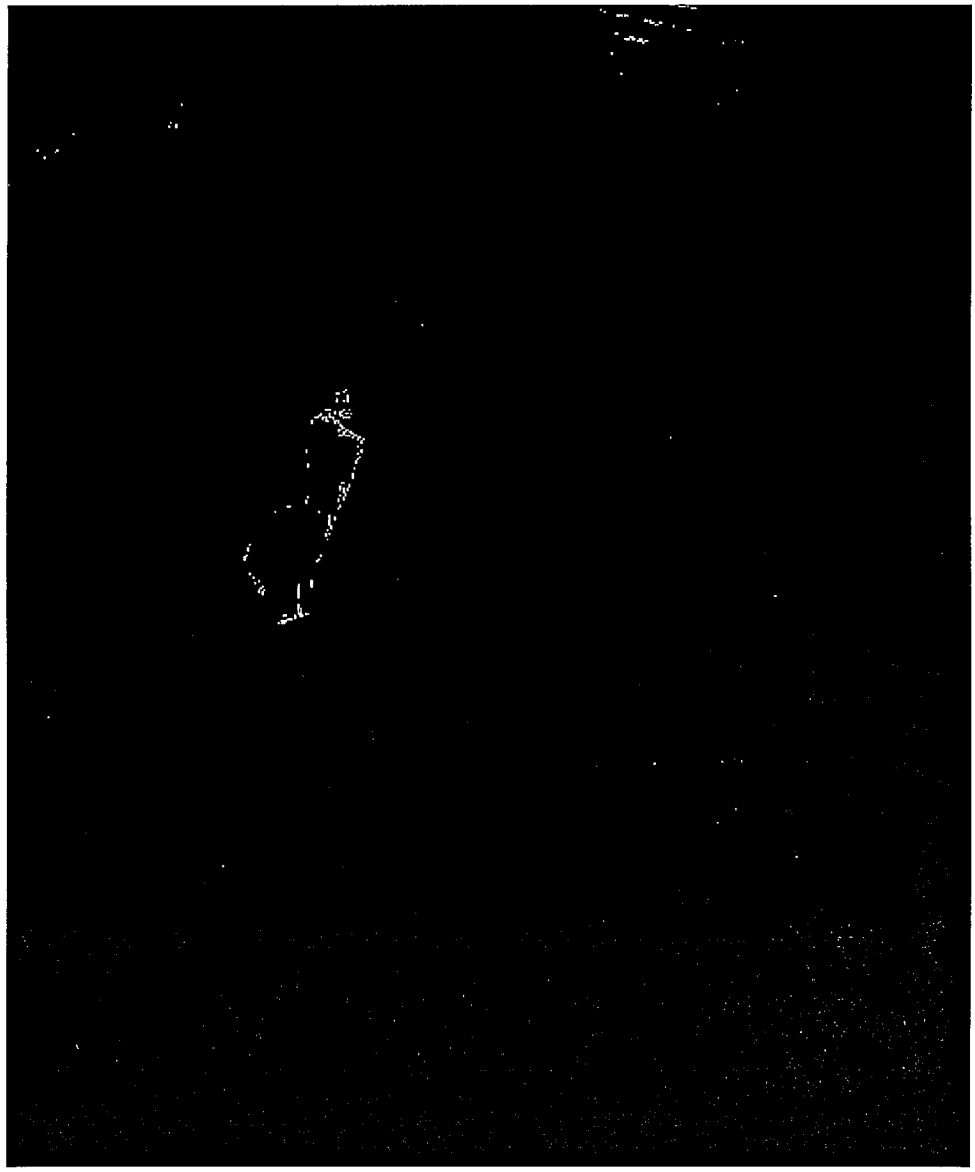


Related Resources:

→ Examples of personalized start pages besides iGoogle include Netvibes **(netvibes.com)**.

→ Photo-sharing sites include Flickr **(flickr.com)** and Picasa **(picasa.google.com)**.

→ ThinkQuest, sponsored by the Oracle Education Foundation, offers a project-management portal for organizing collaborative projects, and sponsors an international competition for students.



TIP #4
Think Globally

TURN YOUR CLASSROOM INTO A GATEWAY for learning about the world. By using online resources and new media tools for connecting, you will help your students see themselves as global citizens.

One of the fastest ways to expand your students' horizon is simply to connect your class with students who live somewhere else in the world. You can find willing partners on social-networking sites that cater to educators, such as Classroom 2.0 **(classroom20.com)** and the Global Education Collaborative **(globaleducation.ning.com)**.

Once you find a partner, host informal get-acquainted videoconferences between your classes using Skype **(skype.com)** and a webcam. Tools like Google Earth **(earth.google.com)** will give students a street-level look at each other's neighborhoods. With TagGalaxy **(taggalaxy.com)**, you can turn photos from your distant communities into a visual representation of the world you share.

Go deeper with global learning by taking part in a more formal international project. An organization called ePals **(epals.com)** offers a classroom-matching service along with an online language translator. Journey North **(learner.org/jnorth)** connects classrooms from the northern and southern hemispheres for inquiry-based projects that deal with seasonal migration. Rock Our World **(rockourworld.ning.com)** is an international project in which students on every continent collaborate to compose original music, make movies, and meet each other in live videoconferences.

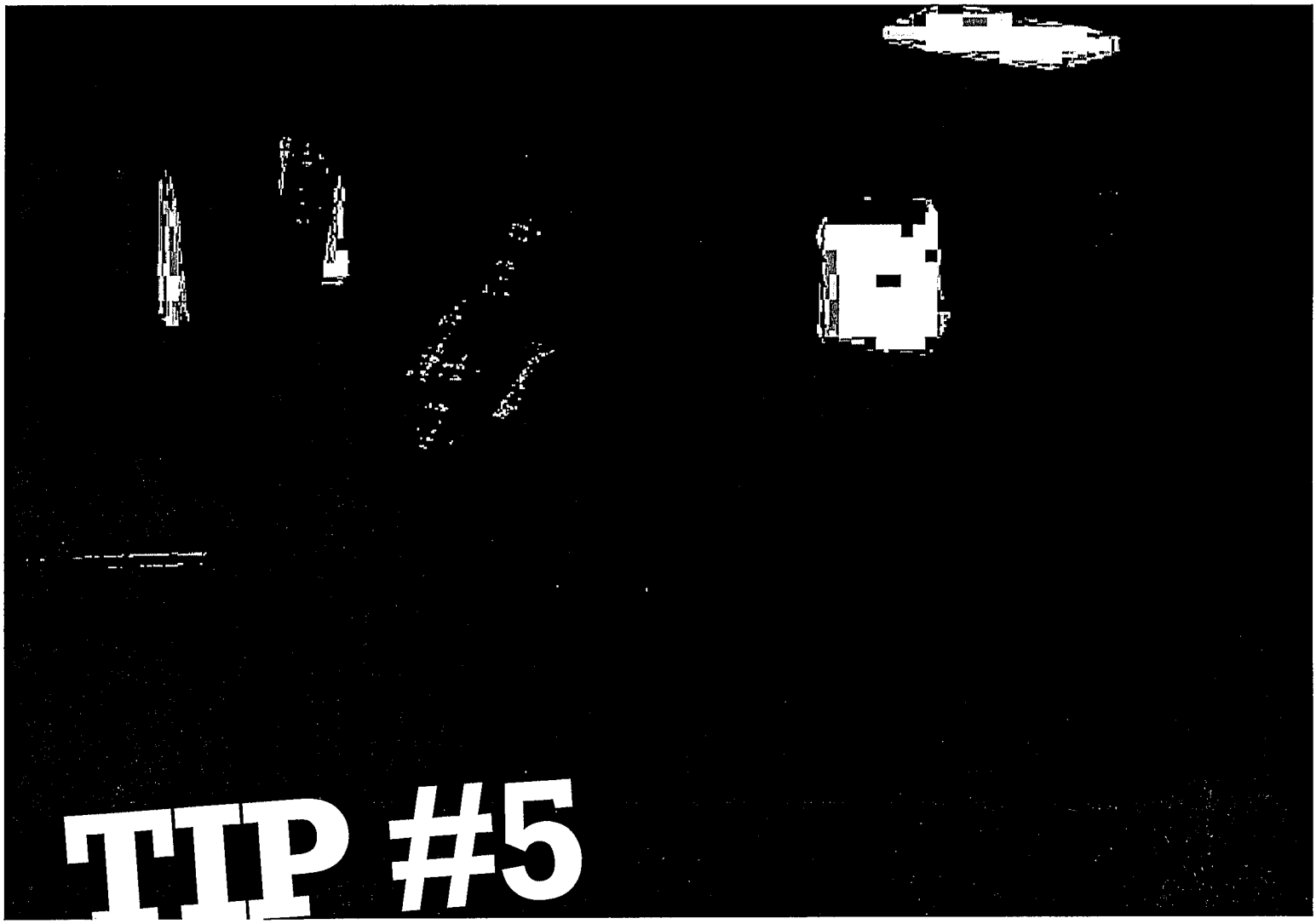
Collaborative tools can also help your students take advantage of distant experts. Through the Global Citizens Corps **(globalcitizenscorps.org)**, an initiative of the Mercy Corps **(mercycorps.org)**, students can connect with other youth who share their interest in tackling global poverty, or pose questions to field experts working in hot spots around the world.

Related Resources:

→ Cyberschoolbus **(cyberschoolbus.un.org)** is a global education project of the United Nations. Interactive games, WebQuests **(webquest.org)**, and other resources promote global citizenship.

→ The Center for Innovation in Engineering and Science Education **(ciese.org/collabprojs.html)** sponsors global, collaborative projects in which students act as citizen scientists. Projects involve gathering, analyzing, and contributing real data from around the world relating to everything from household water usage to schoolyard habitats.

→ "Global Education on a Dime: A Low-Cost Way to Connect" **(edutopia.org/global-education-international-exchange)**, from Edutopia.org, offers more ideas.



Find What You Need

MAKING YOUR CLASSROOM INTO AN INVITING SPACE for learning can be an expensive proposition. Teachers typically invest $500 or more each year on school supplies and furnishings. Instead of digging into your own wallet, take advantage of online tools and community resources to find what you need—for nothing.

One of the best-known programs is DonorsChoose.org **(donorschoose.org)**, a national initiative that has generated more than $36 million for 90,000-plus school projects since 2000. Here's how it works: Public school teachers post a specific request on the Web site. Citizen philanthropists choose which requests they want to fund. Kids follow up with thank-you notes. What gets funded? Everything from musical instruments to picture books to classroom technology.

If you need materials for a specific project, look locally for reusable goods that might otherwise wind up in the landfill. For example, SCRAP **(www.scrapaction.org)**—the School and Community Reuse Action Project—based in Portland, Oregon, keeps 50 tons of reusable materials out of the waste stream each year and provides a workshop space where teachers can share creative reuse ideas. Freecycle **(freecycle.org)** takes a similar approach. The Web site is your first stop for connecting to a Yahoo Group in your community where you can browse donation opportunities or post your own requests for free stuff.

Free classified ads offer another route for finding good stuff. Use your class Web site or newsletter, too, to let the community know what you need, too. No harm in asking, right?

Related Resources:

→ For more ideas about finding free supplies, check out "How to Get Complimentary Teaching Materials" **(edutopia.org/free-school-supplies-fundraising-donation)**, from Edutopia.org.

→ Programs besides DonorsChoose.org that match willing donors with teacher requests include Supply Our Schools **(supplyourschools.org)** and iLoveSchools.com **(iloveschools.com)**.

TIP #6
Make Meaning from Word Clouds

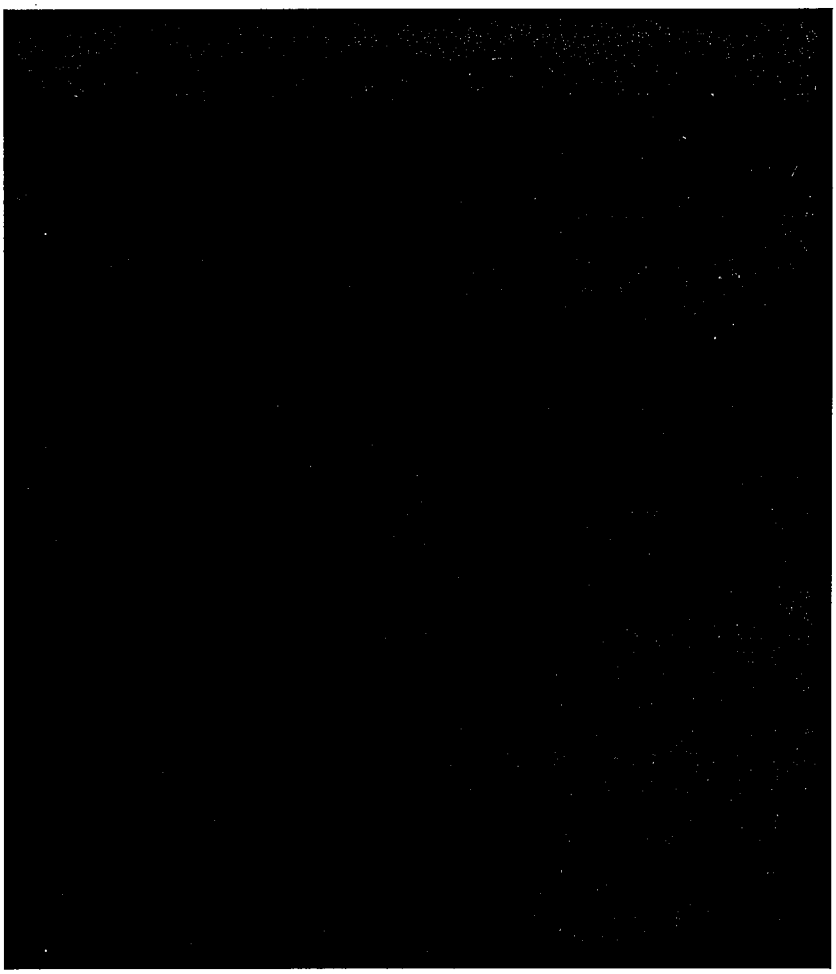
WHETHER THEY'RE MASTERING scientific vocabulary, writing poems, or analyzing presidential speeches, students are immersed in words. Encourage lively conversation about words with the help of tools that turn text into visual displays.

Wordle **(wordle.net)** is a free tool that turns a block of text, or simply a list of words, into a cloud pattern. Words that are used most frequently are displayed most prominently. You can play with layout, font, and colors to change the appearance or highlight certain vocabulary.

Teachers across subject areas and grade levels are finding good uses for this simple-to-use tool. For example, as a prereading activity, you might use Wordle to highlight key vocabulary. Are there unfamiliar words here that students will need to understand? Patterns to pay attention to while they are reading?

Students can create Wordle displays using their own writing, too. They will gain new insights into word choice. Are they using certain words too often? Or is their word repetition deliberate? This information can lead to more productive writing conferences and will help them as they move on to the revision stage.

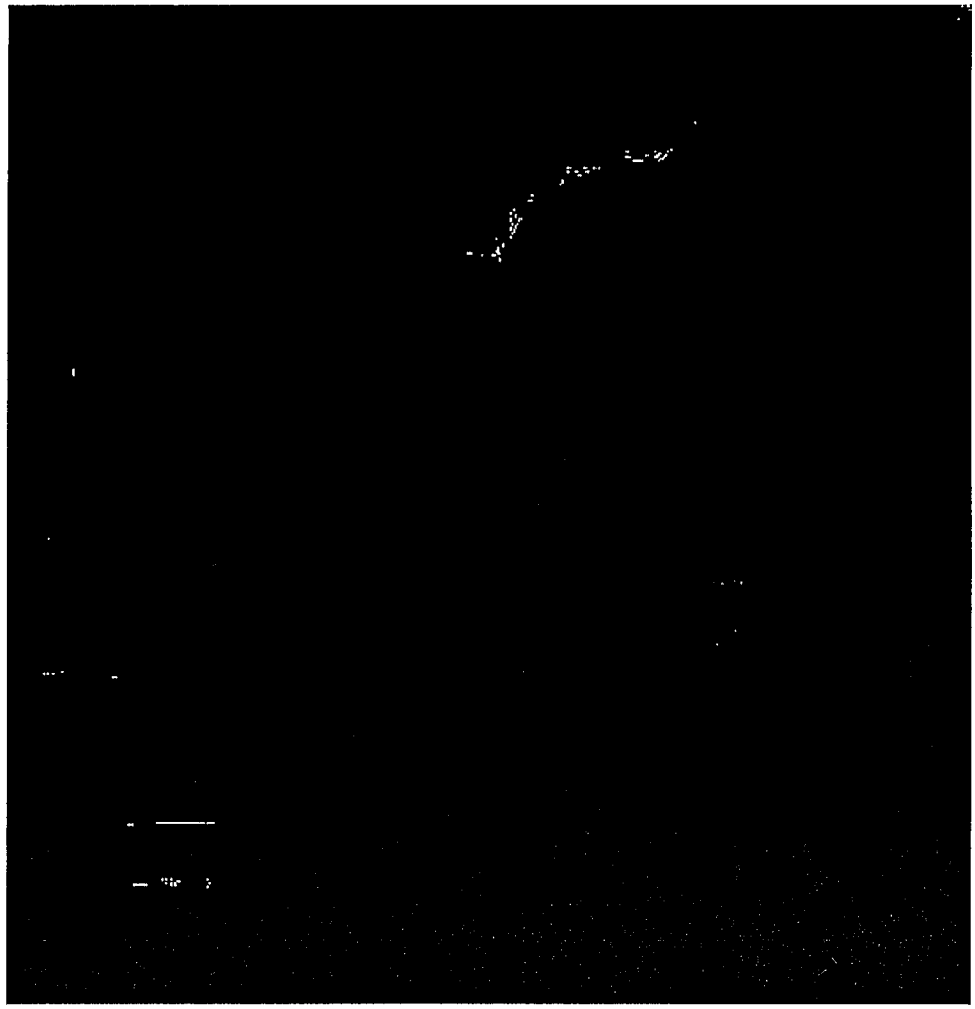
Some teachers recommend Wordle as a tool for reflection. By combining students' reflective entries into one Wordle display, you can see at a glance what students are thinking about. Their "hot topics" can be the jumping-off point for a lively classroom discussion.



Related Resources:

→ To hear how teacher Clarence Fischer uses Wordle for year-end reflection, read this post on his blog, Remote Access **(remoteaccess.typepad.com/remote_access/2008/06/ending-the-year-with-wordle.html)**.

→ Terry Freedman offers five good reasons for using Wordle in the classroom in this post on The Educational Technology Site: ICT in Education **(terry-freedman.org.uk/artman/publish/article_1511.php)**.



TIP #7
Work Better, Together

COLLABORATION IS A SKILL your students will need for the future. To help them work better together today, try using collaborative workspaces in the classroom.

Google Docs, part of the Google for Educators toolkit **(google.com/educators/tools.html)**, is one example of a secure, online place for managing work in progress. Once you help your students set up free accounts, they'll be able to access their spreadsheets, documents, and presentations anytime, from any connected computer.

That means no more misplaced assignments. It also means you can see what students are working on—and provide timely, formative feedback—while their projects are still under way. Students can use Google Docs to view and respond to one another's work in progress. That's useful for collaborative tasks like peer review, sharing notes, or developing a project presentation together.

Wikis offer similar benefits, with the added option of instant publishing. Team members can add content (including text, videos, or photos) or edit content that others have added. Changes are tracked automatically, which lets a teacher see at a glance who's contributing what. Discussion pages allow for more conversation and idea sharing. Privacy controls let you determine who has access.

Encourage your colleagues to use collaborative tools, too, and you can reap the benefits of teaming up for project planning and professional development.

Related Resources:

→ Read how one middle school in the Bronx increased collaboration—and raised student achievement—by incorporating Google Docs into learning and professional development **(sites.google.com/site/339dottodot/about-is-339).**

→ Teacher Louise Maine changed her teaching practice when she introduced students to the power of the wiki for creating and sharing content. Read more in the Edutopia.org article "Wiki Woman: How a Web Tool Saved My Career" **(edutopia.org/whats-next-2008-wiki-technology).**

→ Wetpaint Wikis in Education **(wikisineducation.wetpaint.com)** is a useful starting place for building a classroom wiki. The site includes examples of wikis for class projects, global collaborations, and peer professional development. Technical advice and classroom insights will help you make the most of this powerful tool for collaboration.

TTP #8

Open a Back Channel

THINK ABOUT HOW CONVERSATIONS play out in your classroom. Do all students take part, or do just a few voices dominate? And how do comments travel? Do they go primarily from teacher to student (and back), or do they ping around the room? Are there students who never seem to speak up during a whole-class discussion?

Creating a back channel is one strategy for inviting everyone into the conversation. Think of a back channel as a private chat room just for your classroom. Using an instant-messaging tool like iChat or Twitter for microblogging **(twitter.com)**, students can pose questions, make observations while watching a video or student presentation, or share a dissenting viewpoint. To spark conversation, you might pose a prompt that students respond to in the back channel. The archived chat offers a valuable artifact that can help you understand what your students are thinking.

A back channel for your classroom quickly disrupts the old model of teacher as expert. Of course, creating a collaborative learning environment takes more than technology. You'll want to set a high bar for expectations. Students used to text messaging with friends outside school will need to think about what's appropriate for in-class messages. Inappropriate comments in the back channel could quickly turn into a distraction (like old-fashioned note passing). But teachers who are using the back channel for valid academic purposes report that the benefits far outweigh the challenges.

Related Resources:

→ Tools for creating a secure back channel for the classroom include Chatzy **(chatzy.com)** and Edmodo **(edmodo.com)**, which is designed especially for educational use. CoveritLive **(coveritlive.com)** is a live blogging tool.

→ Veteran edublogger Jeff Utecht shares his thinking about back channels in this post on The Thinking Stick **(thethinkingstick.com/the-purpose-of-a-back-channel-necc09)**.

→ Longtime educator Peter Pappas uses a Hollywood movie to get teachers thinking about the information flow in their classrooms. Read his post on the Copy/Paste blog **(peterpappas.blogs.com/copy_paste/2009/06/classroom-discussion-techniques-that-work-try-this-hollywood-classroom-walkthrough.html)**.

TIP #9
Make It Visual

TOOLS FOR SHARING photos, video clips, and other illustrations with students have expanded in recent years. From document cameras to projectors to interactive whiteboards, these technologies make it easier than ever to use visuals to inspire curiosity, generate brainstorming, and engage diverse learners.

Across grade levels and subject areas, good visuals help students build background knowledge as they tackle new concepts. You can use images to set the stage for a story set in a remote place or a far-away time. Primary sources from the vast Library of Congress **(loc.gov/teachers)** archives, for instance, help students "see" the time period for a story set during World War I.

Visuals also show connections between math or science concepts and real life. As they watch a video clip that shows the mysterious optical phenomenon known as the green flash, for instance, students are primed for a conversation about light waves. Videos that show real-life examples of change over time illustrate that algebra really does exist outside the textbook. (For great examples, plus teacher discussions, check out, on creative teacher Dan Meyer's blog, his series of Graphing Stories **(blog.mrmeyer.com/?p=213)**.

Encourage students to be active viewers of the media you share. Tee up a short video clip with a prompt that encourages them to watch for key information. Foster critical thinking by asking students to consider whether an image has been manipulated by lighting or special effects. Stop videos at key points to encourage more discussion. These strategies will build students' media-literacy skills along with their understanding of the content.

Your visual library will grow as you keep an eye open for good illustrations.

Related Resources:

- → The SITE Screening Room, from the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education, provides teacher-created videos for specific content areas **(site.aace.org/sitevideo)**.
- → Teacher Tube **(teachertube.com)**, often described as YouTube for teachers, includes a growing collection of how-to videos.
- → The Futures Channel **(thefutureschannel.com)** offers a collection of videos designed to build a bridge between scientists and other visionaries and today's students.
- → Photo-sharing sites like Flickr **(flickr.com)** allow you to search through thousands of images. Using the Advanced Search tool, look for photos licensed under Creative Commons.
- → YouTube offers a vast and ever-growing collection of streamed videos. Save the clips you want—without potentially inappropriate comments—by using screen-capture software such as Keepvid.com **(keepvid.com/?url)** or a browser extension like Video DownloadHelper **(addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/3006)**.

TIP #10

Use the Buddy System

STUDENTS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES who benefit from collaboration and shared problem solving. Teachers can take advantage of a variety of communication tools to share ideas and strategies with colleagues.

Where do you turn first for brainstorming? The faculty room offers one spot for face-to-face conversation, but you can expand your options by joining social networks that meet your professional interests.

Classroom 2.0 **(www.classroom20.com)** appeals to both new users of Web 2.0 tools and more experienced practitioners. It's a good place to throw out a question and get some quick answers. Tapped In **(tappedin.org/tappedin)** is an online community of educators that sponsors regular online forums. Teachers Teaching Teachers **(teachersteachingteachers.org)** produces a weekly webcast, including a back channel discussion, that delivers exactly what the name promises. The popular microblogging tool Twitter **(twitter.com)** lets you stay up-to-date with your personal network from a mobile device or a connected computer.

If you are collaborating with colleagues to research a particular topic or develop a project together, social-bookmarking tools like Delicious **(delicious.com)** enable you to organize, comment on, and share noteworthy resources. You can see what others are bookmarking, too, and learn from the wisdom of the crowd. Diigo **(diigo.com)** offers additional tools for collaboration, such as sticky notes to make comments or highlighting to call attention to important passages. Diigo also allows users to set up groups, with additional features such as forums, to take conversations even deeper.

Related Resources:

→ Learn how your colleagues are using social-media tools in a set of short videos from Edutopia.org **(edutopia.org/digital-generation-new-media-classroom-tips).**

JOIN *EDUTOPIA*!

WHAT WORKS IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Become a member of *Edutopia* and join a movement of like-minded leaders who are working to promote change in their own schools and bring the best to the world of education. Plus, as a member, you'll receive valuable resources and benefits, including

*

a one-year subscription to *Edutopia* magazine.

*

access to our popular webinar series.

*

a copy of *The Best of* Edutopia*:*
Cool Schools: Project Learning.

*

a PDF of the *The Best of* Edutopia*:*
Heart & Soul: Social and Emotional Learning.

*

discounts from *Edutopia* partners.

To join *Edutopia*, simply go online at
edutopia.org/join