

Integrated Media Literacy Project

Ancient Civilizations Online (Intermediate to Secondary Grades)

Project Description

To enrich the learning process of a research project, the utilization of web tools such as Popplet (www.popplet.com) for brainstorming and Weebly (www.weebly.com) for posting research findings, students can learn about history while developing web 2.0 skills. In this project, students studied ancient civilizations in China, Egypt and Mesopotamia and created websites focused on these civilizations' innovations, myths, and governments. Popplet was used to compile research, pictures and video as well as store notes from library books, and Weebly was used to create the final presentation of the project. This process can educate students on proper web research and citation techniques, as well as provide experience with thorough website creation and design.

Before the Project

- Research and Learning: Students should pick their ancient civilization (ancient China, Mesopotamia, Egypt etc) and teachers should decide on the kinds of pages students should create (e.g. civilization overview, inventions, famous people, myths, and form of government).
- Technical and Media Setup:
 - Popplet only allows 5 brainstorm charts per account – students should either create their own account, or teachers should use a few emails (for example, Hotmail or Yahoo email addresses in a class set can be created) to make class accounts a set of students can use to login.
 - The Education version of Weebly (<http://education.weebly.com>) allows you to set up a class and have kids login at <http://students.weebly.com>; this should be done in advance. It limits you to 5 pages for each student website. The non-education version of Weebly does not limit pages.
 - Teachers should run through these very easy-to-use websites in advance, to become generally familiar with their capabilities and limitations.

First Online Session

- Teachers can start the first session by introducing the class to Popplet – students should be able to login and can immediately begin to explore the program.
- For younger students, reviewing Internet safety and online appropriateness is recommended; for older students, reviewing research techniques and proper citation strategies is important, emphasizing verification of found information. Once you have given students time to explore how Popplet works ask students to brainstorm on these topics; the teacher can chart the students responses on the projector for the class to see.
- Students should start by creating popples based on the areas of study laid out by the teacher. Information can be cut and pasted into connecting popples as students find it online. This is

Integrated Media Literacy Project

also an ideal time to discuss copyright – the students should add the link where they got the information. Introduce Easybib (<http://easybib.com/>) for advanced classes.

- Students can then start their ancient civilization research, using some of the following sites, among others:
 - National Geographic Kids <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/kids/>
 - History Channel <http://www.history.com/shows/classroom>
 - Social Studies for Kids
<http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/subjects/ancientcivilizations.htm>
 - Museum Box (to browse other people’s projects on their subjects)
<http://museumbox.e2bn.org/>
- Students can also browse Google images and the New York Public Library gallery for images, ensuring that they cite sources for any images saved.
- Both textual and image research materials can be added to ‘popples’ (small boxes within the mindmap). Students should save all their images into a folder on the hard drive first, and then click on the picture icon on each popple to upload from the computer.
- Students can also connect, drag and move boxes to organize their thoughts. Before the end of the visit, students can use the “organize” feature to organize their popples by areas of information.

Second Online Session

- The teacher can begin by asking students what some of their favorite informational websites are and why. Make sure to discuss:
 - Content – is the website content interesting, believable, relevant? How do you know the content is believable?
 - Color – how does the website use color to help the reader navigate content or direct their attention?
 - Font – what kinds of font are being used? Big or small? Easy to read? How many fonts are there?
 - Purpose – what is the purpose of the website? Fun, informational?
- This should prompt students to start thinking about the design of their own websites; encourage students to glean techniques from many sites rather than copying design approaches from specific sites.
- Students should login to their Popplets to reference their research.
- Students should then login to their Weebly student account at <http://students.weebly.com>, and begin to create their websites:
 - Start by picking a Design.
 - Then, using the Pages tab at the top of the website - create one homepage and four topic pages.

Integrated Media Literacy Project

- Go to each page and drag components from the top Elements tab in the order that you want them (you can reorder them at any time). Click and edit each section within each page, copying and pasting from the Popplet, and adding pictures from the desktop folder.
- Students can spend class time developing their websites, revising the order of pages and Elements and reading over the content as it comes together. This will take some time, and students should be encouraged to engage in self- and peer-review.

Third Online Session

- Students should log into Weebly and continue working on their websites.
- Encourage students to keep thinking about *how* their website works and the functionality of browsing it. Is the most important information at the top? Are the pictures and words relevant to each other? Though websites are not necessarily linear, many people view them from top to bottom and from left to right. Thus, considering this information is an important part of website design.
- Teach students to add video to their project from YouTube www.youtube.com or TeacherTube <http://www.teachertube.com/>. This is done by clicking the multimedia tab on the upper-left hand side, and selecting “YouTube video”. Give students an appropriate timeline to locate a relevant clip (for example, give students 30 minutes to search “national geographic” or “history channel” followed by their ancient civilization to find a clip) and then direct them back to designing the rest of their website.
- Before finishing the project, students should engage in peer feedback and review. Students can check each other’s spelling, grammar and coherence as well as suggest ideas for improvement.
- To follow up with reflexive discussion, ask the students:
 - How does Weebly/Popplet change how you organize information?
 - What problems did you come across in Weebly/Popplet? How did you solve them?
 - Was it easier to create a website than a poster or physical report? Why or why not?
 - How does using online information change the information you find for your project? Do you think the information would have been different if the project had been from a library book?

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