

# Hooray for the USA: Integrating technology into the curriculum

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**By Mary Ann McGinn and  
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The Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization (NSSEO) is a cooperative located in the northwest suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. NSSEO's Assistive Technology Program offers services to the approximately 6,000 students with disabilities in its eight member districts and NSSEO programs.

Since 1984, NSSEO has provided assistive technology services for students with disabilities. The improvement and increasing abundance of technology for these students has dramatically increased the need for ongoing training of staff. To address this need, NSSEO offers a variety of after school trainings in the Fall and Spring of each school year in an effort to assist staff with integrating technology into their curriculum.

NSSEO's Assistive Technology team is comprised of full time and part time staff. The team includes speech/language pathologists, a vision teacher, occupational therapist, special education teacher, administrator, and two assistants. Each member is an integral part of the team, and each person's individual expertise is utilized to provide the best possible support to our students.

In planning our staff development classes, we constantly struggle with providing a variety of activities and supports for students spanning elementary through high

school grades who additionally have diverse abilities. In planning this particular workshop we first looked at the Illinois State Learning Standards and goals in the area of social science. We also looked at the grade level outcomes in this area. We determined the tasks that would be required of the students to reach these goals. Our targeted students have severe learning disabilities or cognitive impairments. They are all struggling readers and writers.

We decided to focus on the following Illinois Learning Goals:

State Goal 14: "Understand political systems with an emphasis on the United States".

State Goal 16: "Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations".

These goals cross all grade levels and some of the activities behind these goals are identifying and understanding National Symbols, National Holidays, and US Famous Leaders. It also includes knowing information about our United States, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Hooray for the USA is a thematic unit that was offered to staff as one of our Fall after school classes. This particular class used BoardMaker, IntelliTools software, Microsoft PowerPoint, Kurzweil 3000, and Don Johnston software, as well as an anchor book to create materials to assist students from elementary

through high school age in learning about the United States. Activities created were in the curricular areas of reading, writing, and content learning. Games were created on computer as well as off computer.

For our younger students and those with more significant disabilities, we used an anchor book from Creative Teaching Press entitled Celebrating Patriotic Holidays to create a unit. We modified two formats of this book. One was a modified digital format created in IntelliPics Studio III from Classroom Suite. This allowed us to create digitized text, add background sounds and intellimation to make the story more interactive and provide a format for those that needed support in reading the book. We also modified the original book with symbols from Boardmaker, again providing support for the non-reader. Multiple copies of the original book were purchased so that every participant owned an original non-edited version.

To support this unit on American Holidays, we created writing activities at multiple levels using templates from IntelliTalk III in Classroom Suite, and counting, adding, and sorting activities using IntelliMathics III from Classroom Suite. Writing activities included the U.S., If I were president, and I am proud to honor American Holidays. In addition, an activity was created in Classroom Suite giving students information about the National

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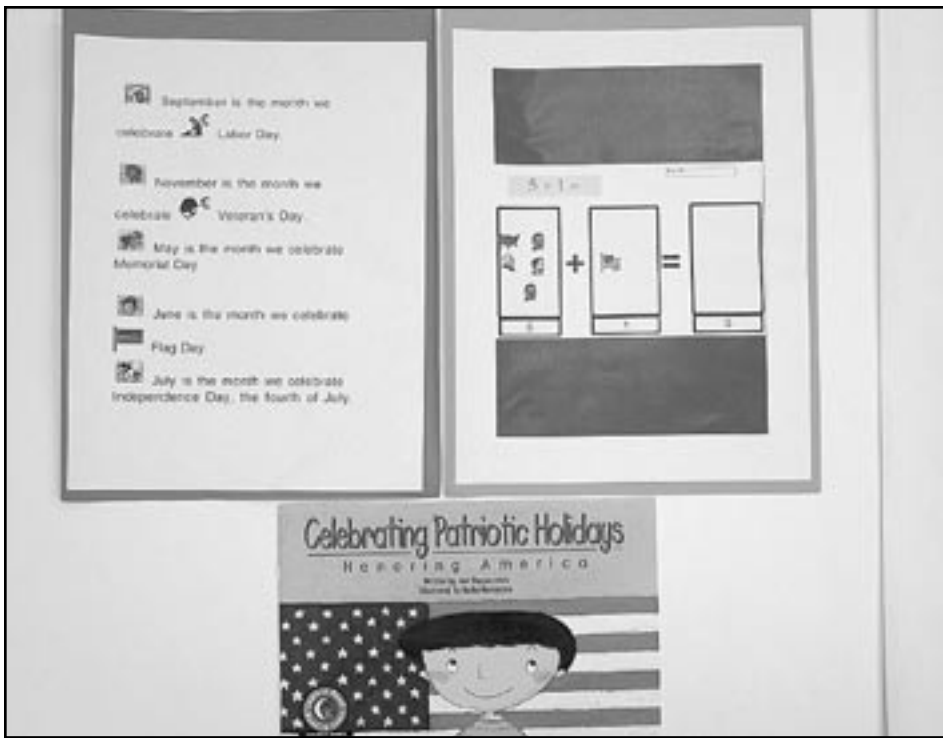
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*Celebrating Patriotic Holidays Book and Classroom Suite Activities*



*Classroom Suite using an IntelliTalk III activity on Abraham Lincoln*

Symbols. Buttons were created in IntelliPics Studio for six national symbols. When the buttons were clicked, this brought up pages from studio that gave a picture and general information about the symbols. National symbols included the Bald Eagle, Flag, Liberty Bell, White House, Capitol Building, and Statue of Liberty.

As students move up in grades, they are responsible for information and facts about

some of our founding fathers and national leaders both in history and current times. We used Classroom Suite by adapting the state report activity in IntelliTalk III. Information was provided on the following historical figures: Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Martin Luther King, Susan B. Anthony, Thomas Edison, and Abe Lincoln. The activity gave information about each person and then had a button that navigated to a quiz on

the information previously presented. The answer-checking feature allowed students to have immediate feedback. They could also go back to the report to look up information they needed to answer the questions.

Writing a state report is a common activity for our older elementary and middle school students. Writing can be slow and laborious for many of our struggling readers and writers. In order to assist them, we created Topic Dictionaries for CoWriter 4000. We believe the power in CoWriter 4000 is the topic dictionaries. A topic dictionary was created for each state with specific vocabulary for the state including its capital, motto, song, bird, important tourism sites, agriculture, natural resources and surrounding states. The topic dictionaries were created by going to the Web site <<http://www.ipl.org/div/kidspace/stateknow>>. Although the students were still responsible for gathering information, when it came time to write their reports they could be assured that the words they needed would be predicted. We also used the templates for the State Report in Draft:Builder and modified the template to provide the scaffolding that we believed individual students needed to be successful.

Learning the information in the Declaration of Independence and passing the Constitution test is difficult for all of our students, but we were able to make the task attainable by scanning the curriculum materials into Kurzweil 3000. This is the Scan and Read program that has been adopted by NSSEO and many of its member districts. By keeping consistent with a product throughout our schools, it allows us to share files and scanned materials with all of our programs. We scanned in the student materials from our curriculum on The United States Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. This material is written at a lower level and is easier to understand. By accessing it in Kurzweil 3000, students could have the information read to them. They could also have the worksheets and tests read to them and answer the questions using the computer. Our students simply use the highlighter tools to highlight multiple-choice answers. For students who have keyboarding skills, text boxes are easily created to answer fill in the blank questions. Another option for students is to “drag and drop” text from the document to answer questions.

To provide opportunities to receive additional practice of content material, we used Microsoft’s Power Point to create games, and flash cards. Many important facts were

incorporated into a Jeopardy game format to allow students to have repetitive exposures to information. Some teachers used the Jeopardy game as a way to test knowledge of the subject matter. Flash cards were created to allow practice of states and capitals. Teachers used this format to create team competitions.

Many of the materials for this particular workshop were created during a summer curriculum project. They are accessible to our staff in a variety of ways. In the fall, we have a curriculum fair highlighting projects completed during the summer. This is done at our first school board meeting. We also put the files on CDs to be distributed to staff members located in our district schools. Our NSSEO schools are able to access the materials via our server; a two-hour after school class is held to explain how to use the files. For participants taking this class, they receive a CD, all the hard copies of the materials, the adapted book, games, and an original copy of the book. Many of our Classroom Suite activities were sent to the Intellitools Activity Exchange at <www.intellitools.com>. The topic dictionaries were sent to Don Johnston Inc. at <www.donjohnston.com>. If our files contained scanned material, we do not distribute these unless we are assured that the user has the original text in their programs.

In summary, although creating a thematic unit that uses technology to support curriculum demands a tremendous amount of time to research and create activities, the benefits far outweigh the amount of work required. To provide supports that allow all students to learn is a goal of our Assistive Technology program, and the success of our students is our greatest reward!

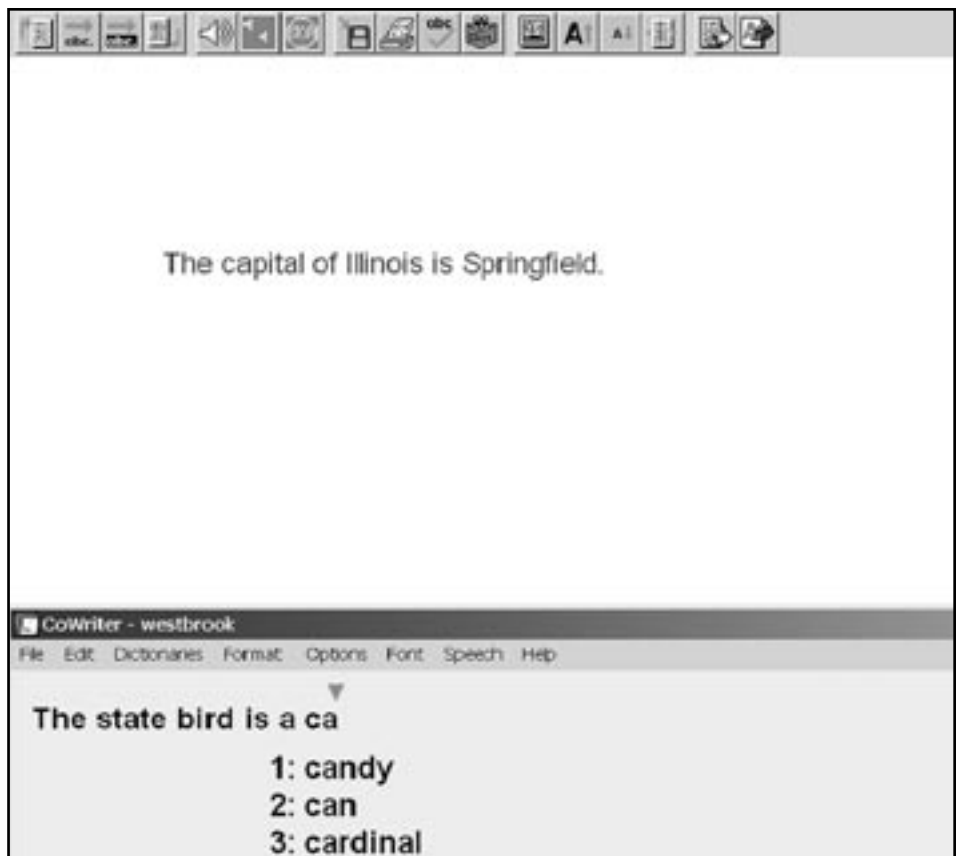
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Products discussed in this article include: Boardmaker by Mayer Johnson, P.O. Box 1579, Solana Beach, CA 92075; Phone: 800-588-4548 or 858-550-0084; Fax: 858-550-0449

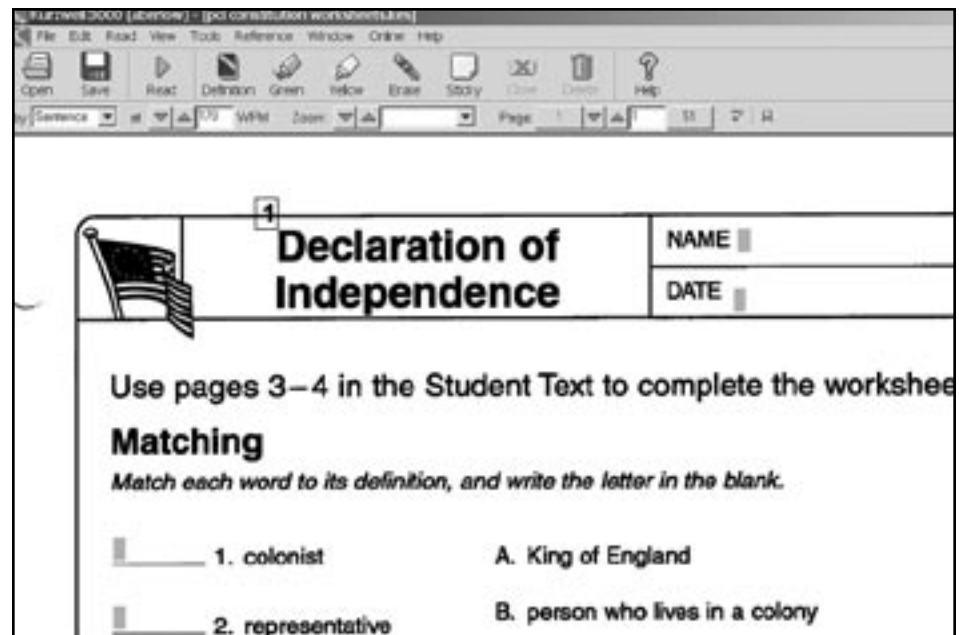
Classroom Suite by IntelliTools, 1720 Corporate Circle, Petaluma, CA 94954 ; Phone: 707-773-2000, Toll-Free: 800-899-6687; Fax: 707-773-2001

CoWriter 4000 and Draft:Builder by Don Johnston Inc., 26799 West Commerce Drive, Volo, IL 60073; Phone: 847-740-7326 or 800-999-4660; Fax: 847-740-7326

Celebrating Patriotic Holidays by Creative Teaching Press, 15342 Graham Street,



Write OutLoud and CoWriter 4000 using Topic Dictionaries for state capitals



Kurzweil 3000 with a scanned worksheet on the Declaration of Independence. Text notes have been added to the worksheet.

Huntington Beach, CA 92649; Phone: 800-287-8879; Fax: 800-229-9929

Kurzweil 3000 by Kurzweil Educational Systems, Inc., 14 Crosby Drive, Bedford,

MA 01730-1402; Phone: 800-894-5374; Fax: 781-276-0650

Microsoft Powerpoint by Microsoft