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WHAT IS MULTIMEDIA?

By now, everyone has heard the term *multimedia*. But what exactly does this word mean? We know it has something to do with computers, something to do with mixing various media together – text, images, video, sound etc. If you look at the literature available on the subject, and there is more and more every day, you will find that there is little consensus as to how to define multimedia exactly or how it can best be used.

The definition incorporated into this book is that multimedia combines two or more different forms of media that use technology to convey a message that is greater than that contained in any of those media individually. In addition, multimedia has introduced the notion of interactivity, in which the user is no longer passive but an active participant in the process.

Long before the advent of computers, artists began experimenting with combining various forms of media. This was often referred to as ‘mixed media’ or ‘performance art’. Pioneers, such as Laurie Anderson, combined text, images, music and theatre to achieve an impact impossible with any of these elements alone. Now, with computers, it is possible to take this to another level, creating works of art that reach broader audiences.

At its base, multimedia consists of various elements of traditional media. Each of these elements must first be created before they can be combined in the final project. As with all the books in the *Learning to Create!* series, we have taken more of a fine art approach to the subject at hand. We have devoted five of the six chapters in *Teaching Real Multimedia* to each of the different types of media most often associated with this new art form. Students must first learn the essentials of creative writing, illustration, animation, video and audio recording, and photography before they can combine these into truly original works of multimedia.

The materials of multimedia are primarily the same as those used in other mediums – camera, paper, pencil and paintbrush. Even the most involved multimedia project has its origin in the writer’s notebook and the artist’s sketchbook. Toward the end of the process, the elements are combined in the computer to create the finished product.

You may be surprised to learn that you already have many of the materials required to begin. What may begin as a low-tech, low-budget series of centres can easily grow with the help of the school, parents and community. There is no one correct way to do this and no must-have materials you need in order to begin exposing your students to multimedia. Do not worry if you do not have all the materials for all the centres. Use what you and your students can scavenge, and let your young multimedia artists help in the planning, setup and organisation of the centres. The experience will help them to feel more comfortable with the equipment, as well as help you with a task that seems more overwhelming than it need be. A section in this book defines the basics of some media centres that can help students as they work on the projects. Start collecting materials for them one at a time – and you will be surprised at how quickly the centres develop!

POLAROID PERMUTATION

Polaroid pictures are fun to take and sure to interest your students. What many people do not realise is that, for a short time after being developed, the coloured medium that composes the images is fluid and can be manipulated to make swirly and swooshy fun!



STUDIO

Bring a polaroid camera to class, or ask students to bring polaroid cameras. Have each student take at least one photograph. While the emulsion is still soft, use pencils, sculpting tools, forks or other instruments to manipulate the surface in an artistic way.

Encourage students to be creative with what they photograph and with how they alter their images. Challenge them to make unique images of things they find interesting and to consider the composition, colour and value of the images they see before clicking the shutter.

Materials

- polaroid camera and film
- wooden sculpting tools
- pencils and other utensils

CLASSROOM CAMERAS

Your class will be astonished to learn that they can make their own cameras. Though simple, this 'pin-hole' camera can teach students the basic principles of how a camera works.



STUDIO

To start, cut the flap off the end of the box, and make a light-proof lid to slide over the top with at least 5 cm of overlap. Line the overlap with black fabric (preferably velvet) to keep any excess light from entering.

Next, cut a small hole in the centre of the other end, and cover it with stretched aluminium foil. Poke a small hole through the foil, and cover it with a flap of cardboard, taped with black tape, to be the 'lens cap'. In a darkroom or some light-proof room with a red safety light, cut out and tape a piece of film to the inside of the lid, then put the lid back in place.

Place the cameras on a steady surface to 'shoot' your pictures, and remove the lens cap for two seconds. Develop the film in a darkroom, or place the film pieces in a black, light-proof envelope (while in a light-proof room), and send to a lab for processing. Because of the nature of this exercise, you may need to experiment with the timing of the shots depending on your film and how much light is available. Making a pin-hole camera is a memorable experience for any young artist and sure to be worth the effort.

Materials

- **small cardboard boxes (black or lined with black paper)**
- **scraps of black fabric**
- **scissors**
- **black tape**
- **aluminium foil**
- **high-speed film**
- **darkroom or interior room without any light except red safety bulb**
- **access to a lab that will develop special film orders**

SUPER SOUND EFFECTS

The art of creating sound effects is fascinating to explore. Sound effects can be created out of ordinary materials. Many sounds used commonly are created with surprising means. For this exercise, students create and record their own sounds, which they may use later for a radio play or computer project.

Students may not realise it, but they probably listen to sound effects every day. Sound effects specialists work hard to create and enhance sounds heard in radio, television, theatre and film. The amazing thing is how they create these sounds. On the following page is a partial list of some amazing ways sound effects were traditionally created. Have your students begin by trying these, and then let them experiment making their own.



STUDIO

Sometimes realistic sounds can be created with surprising means. Ask students to create and record as many different sounds as possible. Have them try using their voices to make other sounds, such as the pop of a cork from a bottle (finger placed in pursed mouth and them popped out against cheek) or whistling birds. Have students develop the sounds they need for their radio plays in the Radio Daze project discussed in this book.

Materials

- variety of found objects
- books on sound effects
- cassette recorder
- blank cassette tape