

Introduction

PowerPoint is an effective and engaging tool for communication, visualisation and graphic representation. But it is PowerPoint's special features that make it the tool of choice for primary and lower high school students. Students love to use the software: it engages their attention, and the visual tools stimulate creativity. They can easily master the technical skills required to produce professional-looking documents with pictures, backgrounds, animation and interactivity. This book helps teachers provide young writers with a way to express their ideas and to be effective writers and communicators.

As teachers, we can use PowerPoint to foster visual learning and to develop critical thinking skills. Visual tools change the nature of writing, providing students with colour, fonts, clip art and photographs that work together with the verbal components of communication. As a result, young writers are able to enhance their message. They can organise their writing in a nonlinear format using hierarchical structure to compose and to have main ideas and details visible simultaneously. Students might structure their ideas, for example, by inserting a diagram, organisational chart or table.

The lessons provided in *PowerPoint Magic* describe how year one through to year eight students can use this tool for writing, visualisation and graphic representation. Templates are provided for most lessons. Younger students use templates that contain some pre-created formatting and graphics so students can focus on the learning objectives without needing to master the software. Templates further help younger students by including step-by-step instructions on the slides or in the Notes pane. Relevant Internet links are given, providing a wealth of resources for young learners.

This book illustrates how, through using PowerPoint, students can become active producers rather than passive consumers of multimedia. In the exercises offered in this book, students are able to select, organise and integrate verbal and pictorial material to make sense of information and build understanding and knowledge. I encourage educators to embrace this powerful tool for learning.

A Powerful Tool for Learning

PowerPoint has many special features. In the following pages, we'll explore why these features make PowerPoint a valuable tool for younger students.

PowerPoint is one of the most commonly used applications (Keller, 2003), being used by more than 75 percent of schools (Hlynka, et al, 1998). Used by both teachers and students, the PowerPoint application is often already installed as part of the Microsoft Office Suite on most school computers. But even given its widespread use, myths about PowerPoint abound.

Let's take a look at some of the myths about PowerPoint and along the way explore its potential in student writing, communication and learning.

Myths about the Educational Usefulness of PowerPoint

Myth 1: PowerPoint software is used only for making slide shows and for giving oral presentations that often lack substantive, organised content. These types of presentations are ineffective when students focus on multimedia effects. Transitions, animations, sounds, colour, images and hyperlinks become distractions, and these tools hinder rather than enhance meaning and communication.

PowerPoint Magic demonstrates how teachers and students can use PowerPoint to write and present for an audience. Although this multimedia authoring program allows the user to add sounds and videoclips, the lessons in this book focus on learning, writing and communicating by emphasising thoughtfully arranged text and graphics in a variety of compelling ways. PowerPoint is much more than just a presentation tool.

Myth 2: PowerPoint limits creativity by providing boilerplate templates for students to use.

This book demonstrates how young writers can create slides from scratch or make use of creative templates designed by the classroom teacher.

Myth 3: PowerPoint requires information to be presented in bulleted lists.

You'll discover in *PowerPoint Magic* that students do not need to use bullets just because the slide layout automatically places a bullet on the slide. Indeed, many writing formats and options are available in PowerPoint.

Myth 4: Early primary students cannot use PowerPoint independently.

The magic of PowerPoint is that it allows teachers to adapt the use of the templates for mastery-appropriate levels. Young students are able to use the software if some of the tasks have been done for them. They master new skills one at a time and soon become proficient at using the program. Even year one students can move easily from slide to slide, enter text and insert and move clip art.

Collaborative Writing

PowerPoint offers students a professional-looking way to share their knowledge, understanding, vision or story. When they work as a group they have an opportunity to solve problems with their peers. Students can work on individual slides that can be inserted into a group slide show. This combined slide show can then be printed as a group book or booklet. As students engage in a collective project, the class becomes a learning community with common goals.

Communicating with PowerPoint

PowerPoint is used primarily as a tool for making presentations. When students use it for this purpose, they are encouraged not to write the words they will speak on the slides (and merely read the words to the audience); but to place main ideas on the slides and the details in Notes Page view. Students love to create with images, clip art, animation, sounds and special effects to capture their audience's attention.

PowerPoint is more than just a presentation device. The classroom-tested lessons in this book demonstrate how students use the software to help them communicate with verbal and visual cues; as they narrate stories, write descriptions, investigate and research, instruct their peers, persuade others, compose poetry, and visualise problems and concepts by making graphic representations.

Narrative Writing Lessons

Children often identify with the characters of a story. They empathise as characters feel excited, amused, happy, sad, stressed or relieved. Through storytelling, children explore different ways to behave, the consequences of actions and how to resolve problems. They also enter the world of fantasy. They learn to make up their own stories.

Whilst writing their narrative in PowerPoint, students have easy access to pictures; and this helps them link verbal and visual images. Beginning writers construct sentences with words that they are learning to spell. The easy use of clip art allows them to illustrate or to represent words they may not yet know how to write.

Young students begin to focus on the ordering of events and story elements as their stories become more complex, as we will see in the My First Stories lesson. Using PowerPoint they can add, delete and rearrange ideas and sentences. For them it is magic.

Being able to combine clip art, photographs and a young writer's own written text often stimulates creativity. In the suggested Halloween Stories lesson, year twos dress up as the characters in a class storybook about Halloween and then write using their own photographs for inspiration.

In the Digital Storytelling lesson, students re-read classic children's books and make a picture book for a prep "buddy". As these more mature writers focus on language mechanics, story structure, character development, setting and plot; they develop an awareness of story presentation in terms of illustrations and font used. More advanced students can make the story interactive by inserting buttons that lead to other slides for more information or a different ending.

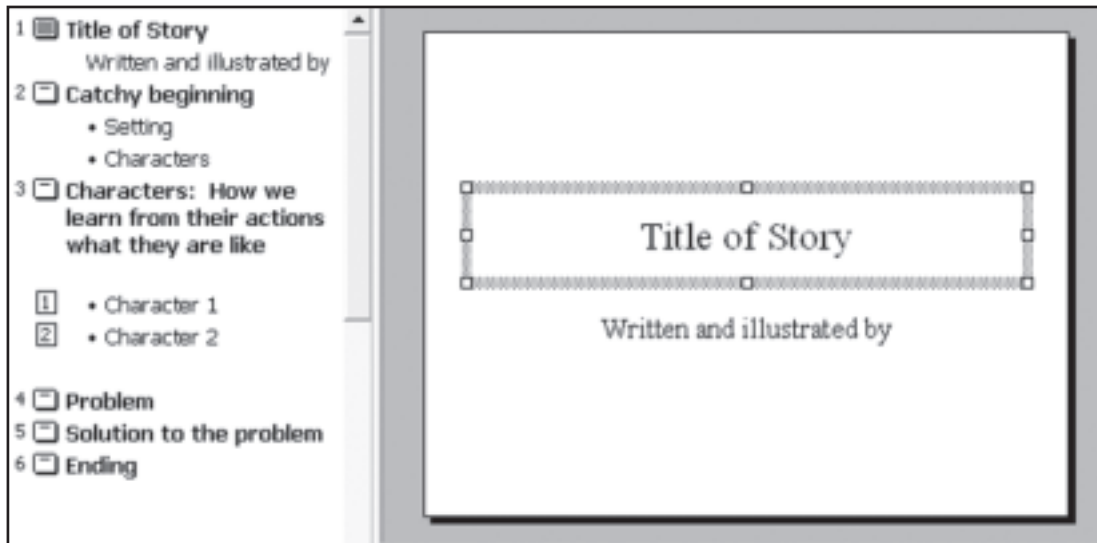


Figure 2.1 First page of the *Story Building* template.

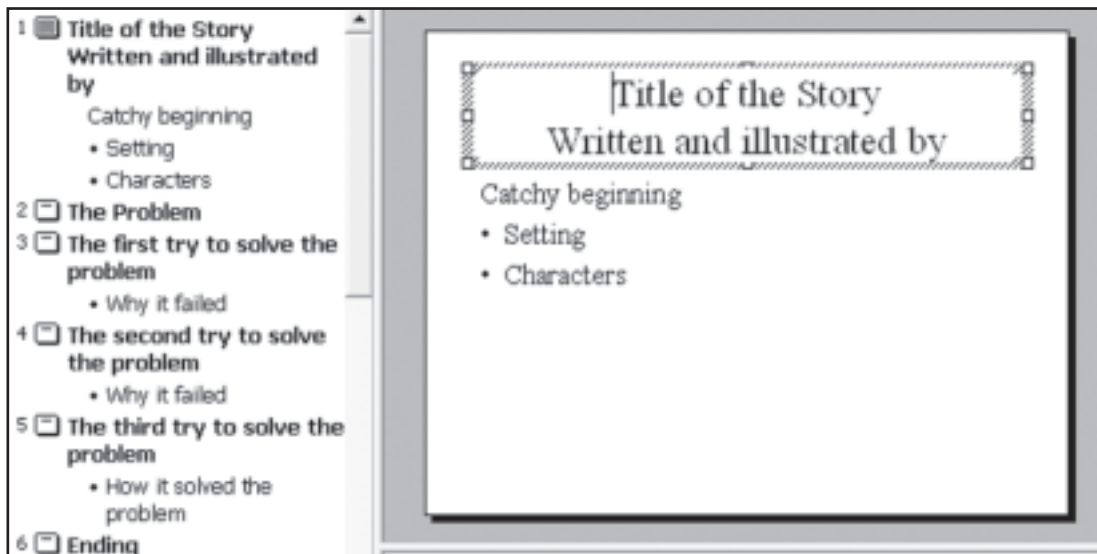


Figure 2.2 First page of the *Three Tries* template.

3. If the student wants to keep the existing words on the text box, they should make sure that nothing is highlighted. Instead, they put the cursor where they want the words to go, then enter the text. They can also use the arrow keys on the keyboard to move the cursor into position.

But the possibilities for this lesson don't end with manipulating images. Students can also include a quote from the story or chapter that they have selected to clearly show the author's intention. Students then finish off this project by making a slide that explains the lesson learned from their story, or a story chapter (Fig 5.2).

From this section of The Phantom Tollbooth we learned that jumping to conclusions wastes a lot of time and that the way to avoid it is to have knowledge.

Figure 5.2 Students explain what they learned from reading their story.

Assessment

Students use the *Retell a Story* checklist to check their own work. The checklist is provided on the CD as an Excel document that can be modified by the teacher.

Higher Order Thinking Skills	Computer Skills Practised	Subject Areas and Standards Addressed
<p>Analysing: Read text and explain with photographs and pictures; analyse text and infer the author's intention.</p> <p>Creating: Create a dramatisation of the text.</p>	<p>Take digital photographs, open and crop them in a paint program</p> <p>Insert clip art and photographs from a file</p> <p>Layer or order graphics</p> <p>Insert speech bubbles</p>	<p>NETS•S: 1.a, b; 2.a, b, d; 4.b; 6.b</p> <p>English</p>