

Shutterfly

Blairsville-Saltsburg Case Study
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Pennsylvania District Turns Students into Published Authors with Shutterfly Photo Story for Classrooms

Students from Blairsville-Saltsburg School District use iPad app to create meaningful books in diverse classroom settings

While Blairsville-Saltsburg School District may be small in size, its ideas are anything but.

For nearly a decade, the western Pennsylvania district with 1,600 students in Pre-K-12 has been dedicated to equipping students with the latest education technology tools. In a recent 1:1 initiative, every high school student receives an iPad, middle school students regularly use Chromebooks and iPads, and elementary students have access to iPads.

A dozen teachers from the district leveraged that technology lately by introducing Shutterfly Photo Story for Classrooms – and empowering their students to become self-published authors. The subjects and grade levels that used the iPad app varied: kindergarten through fourth grade, middle school reading and writing, art, Spanish, Algebra II, child development, and more.

Math in Disguise

Trisha Kaylor, a high school math teacher at Blairsville-Saltsburg School District, is no stranger to educational technology. She's been a pioneer in flipped classrooms and online learning since the district first implemented its 1:1 program. When she heard about Shutterfly Photo Story for Classrooms from the district's technology integration coach, Kaylor came up with an innovative idea: creating math storybooks.

"I tried to gear it away from sounding like math," Kaylor said. "I wanted it to be more like math in disguise – a story book that you could sit down to read, but with the text as word problems."

Over a span of two and a half months, Kaylor assigned a storybook project to her Advanced Algebra II class. The 16 students were tasked with selecting a common theme that interested them, such as golf, dance and pets, and creating word problems that incorporated semester-long concepts into a story. Akin to more traditional math books, in which answers to odd numbered problems are placed in the back of the book, the students placed answers to their questions in the back of their own book.

"It served as a final review of all the topics we had covered throughout the year," Kaylor said. "It helped the students review material and make broader connections between different types of problems."

In addition to helping Kaylor integrate math into the district's extensive literacy initiative, the app also turned the learning process on its head for students. Rather than passively answering questions, students were actively creating problems – demonstrating the depth of their knowledge along the way.

“A lot of the students talked about how it was a better way to measure their understanding, rather than just having quizzes and standard assessments,” Kaylor said. “And they were really excited to see the final product – that they had created something so professional looking.”

Students with Special Needs Enhance Vocab

Anyone who has published a book knows that it's a process, one that involves plenty of collaboration and deadlines. At Blairsville-Saltsburg School District, a group of students with special needs experienced that process firsthand with Shutterfly Photo Story for Classrooms.

Vicky Campbell, a middle school learning support teacher at the district, introduced the app to her seventh-graders to help them develop their vocabulary. She asked her students to create a storybook similar to the popular “Fancy Nancy” series, in which the protagonist flaunts the use of fancy words. Campbell had students describe the pictures they chose for their book while substituting synonyms for the words they typically use. For example, students were challenged to write a “vast” river instead of a “big” one. On the same page, the students defined the new word.

Campbell required the students to create at least 10 pages with at least 12 new vocabulary words.

“They all met the requirement easily,” Campbell said. “And we had a student with autism who went above and beyond preparing content and putting in pictures. He always looked forward to working on his book.”

With books taking two weeks to publish, and the end of the school year in sight, the students started working together to ensure everyone completed their books in time.

“They knew everybody's book had to be finished and proofread,” Campbell said. “They were all jumping up and helping each other meet the deadline.”

After submitting the books, it was simply a waiting game for the new authors.

“Once we finished and sent the books for printing, they were saying, ‘How many more days?’” Campbell said. “We had to mark the calendar because they were so excited to show off their books. It's a great tangible project for them take home and say, ‘This is mine. I made this.’”

Project-Based Learning Transcends Boundaries

Blairsville-Saltsburg School District's diverse implementation of Shutterfly Photo Story for Classrooms shows that the benefits of project-based learning aren't exclusive to certain grade levels or subjects. The innovative use of a single app allowed the district to merge math and English instruction, enhance students' vocabulary, and integrate project-based learning into 12 different classrooms. Whether a class is full of kindergarteners or graduating seniors, access to Shutterfly Photo Story for Classrooms can fuel their creativity and cultivate collaboration.