

Crabby's tips for high school teachers



Crabby Office Lady

In my final installation of columns for teachers, I talk to a high school teacher whose challenging end-of-the-year project makes good use of PowerPoint.

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If you've been spotting a trend here, with regard to my last two columns for teachers, you're right: These teachers use PowerPoint a lot and so do their students. And why not? It's a great teaching tool because it presents information visually and the kids can hop in there and learn to use it too.

This week's example is no different. Karen Grace, an Advanced Placement American History teacher at Roosevelt High School in Seattle, Washington, has her class team up with the Advanced Placement Chemistry class to create an integrated original project.

You know, when I think back on my high school years, some of my memories are fond, some are not that great, and some are downright scary. I had some great teachers at Thomas Jefferson High School in Denver, Colorado (Go Spartans!), some so-so teachers, and some whom I hope are not teaching any longer (and, in the words of Forrest Gump, "That's about all I have to say about that."). And while, yes, I did have a few AP classes, none of them came even close to doing what Karen does with her class. In fact, I'm not so sure I was even able, at that age, to understand some of the topics she covers in her class. (Oh, 20/20 hindsight. If only I'd applied myself, if only I'd concentrated more on the Tudor dynasty in my AP European History class instead of worrying about my feathered hair, if only...)

Yeah, well, the "if onlies" are gone, but at least I can illuminate the topic of what constitutes a great AP class.

Research and presentation: Students plug in to PowerPoint

When Karen started to talk to me about what she does as an AP American History teacher, I thought I would try and look interested and pray that my eyes wouldn't start to glaze over as we got deep into the Boston Tea Party and the Bill of Rights. Boy, was I wrong.

Last year, Karen's history class at Roosevelt High teamed up with and the AP Chemistry class to create several team-driven presentations about the neurobiology of addiction and the social and political aspects of substances and substance abuse. For example, one group looked at crack cocaine versus free-base cocaine, and then they looked at the social implications of both of these drugs — law enforcement, different uses by different social classes, drug policies, trafficking, and so on. A little chemistry, a bit of history, and you have some really interesting stuff going on here.

Students took on subjects related to the main topic and did in-depth research. They then presented their presentations (via PowerPoint, of course) to a panel of community members, such as other teachers, professors from the University of Washington, and my manager, Kevin (who just happens to be Karen's husband).

Now, although Karen's kids (as well as the AP Chem kids) tend to be on the bright and industrious side, she told me that she still had to teach some rudimentary PowerPoint etiquette skills to them. This part of her job entailed reminding her students that, yes, although there are many bells and whistles available in PowerPoint, that doesn't mean each and every one has to be in their slide shows. She had to drive the point home that it was the information being presented that counted — not the outfit it was wearing. In fact, Karen told me that she and the AP Chem teacher held the students accountable for knowledge about the chemistry side of things, the historical side of things...and the technological side of things. (That's a lot of sides.)

After your kids know how to make the most of the information they've so diligently searched for and found, share a few training courses that teach them to use some of the cool features in PowerPoint to their advantage:

- [Animations I: Preset and custom animation](#)
- [Animations II: Motion paths](#)
- [Animations III: Timing](#)
- [Playing sound](#)
- [Playing movies](#)

NOTE And don't forget about the course, [See what you can do with the Research service](#), which would come in mighty handy for a project such as this one.

I'd also like to point you toward some more resources for using PowerPoint in the classroom:

- [Enhancing your lessons with eye-catching presentations](#)
This Web site teaches *you*, the teacher, about working with master slides in PowerPoint, how to create a document outline, and how to liven up your classroom with presentations that will get those kids' heads off their desks and focused on you.
- [Helping students design great presentations](#)
I already mentioned the demo that shows you how to help your students design great presentations, but this Web site offers information from how to help your students develop a clear, well-organized presentation to a case study of how one middle school teacher helped her students create professional-quality science presentations after a semester-long ecology project.
- [Incorporating technology into lessons](#)
As teachers, you know that using technology efficiently in the classroom can be challenging. By using the tools of technology in lessons and projects that engage your students, you can increase classroom participation while your students develop better critical-thinking and comprehension skills, not to mention technological tools skills. And furthermore, they learn that "technology" isn't just about Web surfing and chat rooms.

Communication: With parents and students

Karen spends a good deal of time using Outlook with Exchange Server when communicating with her students and their parents. She says that it can be helpful to "talk" with parents via e-mail, that it encourages teacher-parent communication. But she also says that it can be challenging to communicate with parents or students this way, since it can somewhat depend on the comfort level of the student, not to mention the technological prowess of the parent.

However, Karen has no bones about sending a class assignment, all done up in Word, via e-mail to a student who's been out sick (or out of school for whatever reason).

I've taken the liberty of providing some more information about teacher-student or teacher-parent communication via e-mail.

- [Communicating with students through e-mail](#)

From creating distribution lists to learning how to be notified when a student has read your e-mail, this Web page is a great resource for all you teachers who like to incorporate e-mail as a communication tool.

Now we have an idea about how Karen uses Office in her classroom (along with some tips that I provided to keep you and Karen moving forward). But does Karen's Office prowess stop when school ends for the day? It does not...

A little more about Karen

I want to tell you about an incredible program that Karen takes part in. [Hands for a Bridge](#) is a cultural program that builds and connects learning communities in Seattle, South Africa, and Serbia. According to the Web site, the goal of Hands for a Bridge is to "provide high school youth with opportunities to explore issues surrounding social justice in their local, regional, and international communities. In collaboration with established partners, students engage in intensive artistic dialogue to build bridges of understanding across chasms of race, culture, wealth, and poverty. These student leaders will emerge as transformed global citizens with vision and resources to affect vital change in our world."

Earlier this year, Karen and Kevin hosted a group of students from Roosevelt High School on a trip to South Africa, where they met with their high school counterparts. Karen helps out with a lot of the fundraising for trips like this and, of course, uses Office to help do that. From sending out auction invitations using a Word template to keeping track of the procurement database using Excel, and from creating tickets to creating the Web site in Publisher, Karen and her students are breaking new ground when it comes to fostering relationships with students and their families across the globe.

Here are some templates that I thought might help you out for next year's Hands for a Bridge or other events you take part in:

For the fundraising

- [Silent auction fundraiser sign \(works with Avery 2708\)](#)
- [Pledge form](#)
- [Fundraising goal banner with thermometer \(works with Avery 2707, 2717\)](#)
- [Raffle ticket \(purple with stub, works with Avery 5371, 8371, 27871\)](#)
- [Streamlined expense estimates](#)

For the trip

- [Trip planning \(OneNote stationery\)](#)
- [Travel photo log](#)
- [Currency rate calculator](#)

Thanks for taking the time out of your summer to talk to me, Karen. If only I'd had you as my AP American History teacher, I might have a better idea about American history beyond the Civil War (which is as far as we got in my AP History class). If only...

"History is philosophy teaching by example, and also warning; its two eyes are geography and chronology." — James A. Garfield

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Was this information helpful?** tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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