

WebQuests: Authentic learning through technology

WebQuests are a great way for teachers to infuse technology into their teaching and foster higher-order thinking skills in their students.

A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that students interact with comes from **online resources**. The WebQuest poses a **challenging, real-world problem or task** that a student or group of students **must set out to tackle**. A WebQuest can be as short as a single class period or as long as a **month-long unit**. WebQuests often involve **group work**, in which different students **take on specific roles or perspectives**.

Students do their research online by visiting **websites pre-selected** by the teacher. Non-web resources can also be part of the mix. The goal is that students spend their time using information, **not looking for it**.

Unlike typical research reports in which students simply regurgitate their findings, WebQuests demand that students **synthesize information and demonstrate their understanding** by transforming what they find into a **personal perspective** about the topic.

Students can be asked to **publish their findings on a website or create a multimedia presentation** using software such as PowerPoint or Google Docs. When embarking on your first WebQuest, it's a good idea to show your students an example of a finished project, such as previous student work. That way the students have a better understanding of what they are trying to accomplish.

Defining the task is the most important part of a WebQuest. Topics that offer a choice of perspectives from current events work well. For example, you can ask a group of students to act as a team of advisers to the president on an issue in the news, such as global warming or health care reform. You could ask them to create an online brochure on the topic or use their findings to participate in a class debate. Or you could ask students to explain the process, benefits and liabilities of using stem cells as a treatment for diseases and then write a persuasive letter to a government representative to justify the position they take.

Bernie Dodge, the inventor of the first WebQuest along with Tom March, has created an online authoring and hosting system

for WebQuests that he calls QuestGarden at <http://questgarden.com>. It includes not only systematic guidance for the design and creation of your own WebQuest, but also access to more than 20,000 WebQuests created by other teachers that you can download and adjust to meet your specific needs. You can subscribe to QuestGarden for a free 30-day trial period. If you find it useful, you can get a **two-year subscription for \$20**.

Thirteen Ed Online's Concept to Classroom series at <http://bit.ly/358Lh> offers a start-to-finish guide to help teachers develop WebQuests. Among its helpful elements are tips for assessing interim student progress and for using rubrics to gauge the quality of the final product.

TeachersFirst also offers a thorough WebQuest tutorial called "WebQuest 101 — **Putting Discovery into the Classroom**." The **website contains many quality-reviewed WebQuests** (www.teachersfirst.com/tchr-quest.cfm), making it a good place to jump-start your first attempt at formulating a WebQuest for your students. Among the examples available are WebQuests based on the books "Holes" and "The Giver," as well as the conflict over wolves in Yellowstone National Park and a Medieval Times Reality Adventure.

Designing a WebQuest requires a lot of planning to create real-world tasks, pre-select websites, organize work groups and coordinate access to computers in the library or computer lab. However, good WebQuests provide students with opportunities to delve deeply into a subject and exercise higher-order thinking skills in an assignment that makes learning both challenging and authentic.

Additional resources

- "Creating a WebQuest: It's Easier than You Think" is on Education World's website at <http://bit.ly/saKf5>.
- TeAchnology has a short tutorial about WebQuests at www.teachnology.com/tutorials/web_quests.
- Zunal WebQuest Maker at www.zunal.com is free Web-based, template-driven software that helps you create online WebQuests.