

Terrific Ideas for a Smart Tool (AlphaSmart, that is)

By Maurene Stapel

1. Label each AlphaSmart and have students create lists that will then be imported into Inspiration for writing word banks. Writing can then be done on the AlphaSmarts, too.
 - Color (Each AlphaSmart can be a different color and students can list all the things they associate with that color either at as assigned AlphaSmart or by rotating to several machines. Final project can be a rainbow poem.)
 - Receptacle (Each AlphaSmart can be a different container such as pot, bucket, purse, paper bag, etc., and students can “fill” it with items that it could hold. Final project can be a list poem drafted on the AlphaSmart and printed/published and displayed in that container shape)
 - Career (Each AlphaSmart can be a particular career and students can enter activities done by that person or things they would say. Final project could be a riddle about the career.)
 - Ingredients (Each AlphaSmart can be an ingredient such as sugar, eggs, flour, salt, milk, etc., and students can enter food items/recipes that would contain that ingredient. Older students could work with contents such as sodium, chemicals, vitamins or other compounds in a science unit. Final project could be a paragraph about one of the topics that would include its usefulness and commonality.)
 - Objects (Each AlphaSmart can be an object with distinct parts such as car, human body, computer, tree/flower, volcano, book, etc., and students can list those parts. Once in inspiration they can order them in logical sequence. Another end result might be a diagram of the object with parts labeled.)
 - Place (Each AlphaSmart can be a place such as a pond, library, zoo, mall, theater, science lab, garage, fair, circus, farm, etc. Things found in that place will be entered into the AlphaSmart. In Inspiration the web can be continued with adjectives for each of the items, and finally a setting description can be drafted that will be the location of a story they will write.)
2. Book Talk: Gather a selection of novels with dialog passages and ask the students to select and type a quoted passage from a book, exchange books and enter another quoted passage, and continue until they have created a conversation.

Another variation might be to have each student type a given number of selected quoted passages from different novels and then partner with another student to read aloud as a two-way conversation.

3. Have students make a list of their favorite books, songs, and movies and use those as part of a story they draft on the AlphaSmart. The titles would be part of the regular text in the story and not refer to the actual book, etc.
4. What a Tale: Students will rotate from machine to machine for the first part of this activity. Ask them to enter a particular item each time they are switched.
 - a. Rotation One: a special number
 - b. Rotation Two: an animal
 - c. Rotation Three: their favorite food
 - d. Rotation Four: a type of building or structure (store, hut, bridge)
 - e. Rotation Five: the “name” of an animal like Duke or Rusty (pet or famous animal character for those without a pet)
 - f. Rotation Six: a color
 - g. Rotation Seven: a danger (natural disaster, something scary, a fantasy monster, etc.)
 - h. Rotation Eight: an object you would find at school

(Other ideas might be something that begins with a particular letter, a landform, a kind of weather, a season, a body part.)

Students will rotate one last time and write a story using the list of items typed into their AlphaSmart. Stories can be read aloud or printed for sharing.

5. Demonstrate something to the class without speaking and have students keep a list of sequenced steps on their AlphaSmart as they observe the visual clues.
6. Divide the class into two groups. Each group will have an AlphaSmart. One group will list as many words as they can that can be typed with only the right hand and space bar. The other group will list as many words as they can that can be typed with only the left hand and the space bar.

Now give each student an AlphaSmart and have the group leaders take turns calling out the words while the class members type them at their AlphaSmart.