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How To Use Picasa for Student Creativity

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Question: Is there anything better than free software?

Answer: Yes! That would be software that is not only free but is (a) incredibly powerful; (b) incredibly versatile; and (c) incredibly easy to use.

Does such a mind-blowing combination exist? Definitely! It's a marvelous piece of digital photo editing software called **Picasa**, available (it is now one of Google's offerings) as a no-cost, fully-featured download.

You owe it to yourself to learn about this program. Start by visiting [Picasa](#) for an overview of what it can do. Then click on the link to [download](#) the program (currently for Windows 2000/XP and Linux systems only).

Anyone who shoots digital photographs has to love this program. It will find all of the digital folders you've stored on your hard drive and allow them to be displayed as a full-screen slide show. Even better, it allows you to organize and re-organize your photos, to edit them, to create photo-CDs, and more. If you enjoy photography you will certainly enjoy the many features of this program.

And so will your students. Picasa is a wonderful tool for unleashing student creativity, as I will demonstrate below.

I started to develop uses for the Picasa software for students, especially for younger students. This program makes it *very easy* to show students how to edit images, whether they are taking clip art from the Web or from a digital camera. Students can then use the photographs to:

Create a slideshow

Our state's technology standards mandate that students learn how to develop a slideshow from scratch. This program instantly creates a slideshow, even adding a music background. For example, students may capture pictures of famous Americans, either from the Web or from a CD-Rom, place all of those pictures into a folder, and simply click the slideshow button to view a slideshow of all the picture files in that folder.



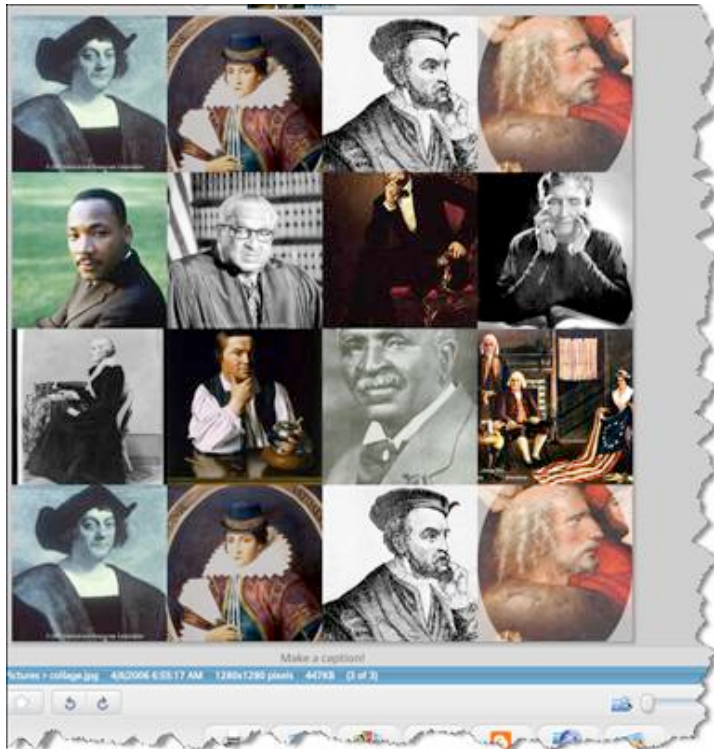
Create a timeline

Another Virginia state standard, even for the first grade, is to have students create and utilize a timeline. Picasa has a timeline feature, in which the user places photos into a folder, clicks the timeline button, and instantly creates a “ timeline” of those photos, based on their date of creation or modification. As a teacher I would show the students how to place the photos in date order into a folder so that when they create the timeline the photos appear in the correct order. Yes, there are any teachable moments here involving expressing (and sorting) dates by year, month, day, hour, minute, second, etc.

Create a picture collage

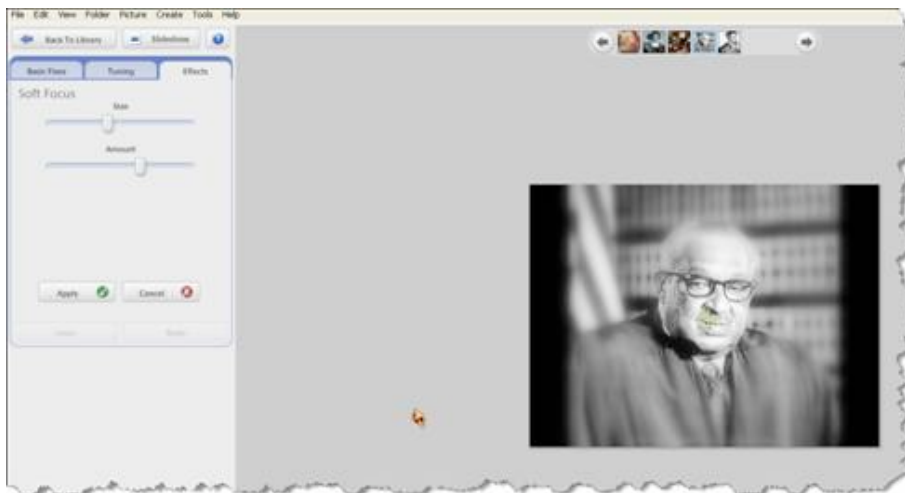
Unlike some more difficult photo imaging programs out there, with Picasa students can instantly create a picture collage of their photos. Students can choose from a picture grid format (shown below), a picture pile (it looks like a scrapbook page of photos), a contact sheet (multiple pictures laid out in a preview format), or a multi-exposure (slightly transparent pictures laid on top of each other).





Edit and add effects to photos

Students can edit individual pictures by straightening, sharpening, changing the colors, reducing the red eye, or adding a color overlay, for example. The example shown below had a soft focus added to bring out the face of a U.S. Supreme Court Justice, the late Thurgood Marshall.



Crop photos

Beginning student photographers may find their pictures have too much background and not enough subject. Picasa has a cropping feature that allows the students to select a portion of their photo, such as their subject, and then resize that portion to different sizes such as 4x6 inches, 5x7 inches, and 8x10 inches. In other words, instead of saying "This is a picture of our class trip to the beach; that little dot is

my best friend Joe,” the student can boast ‘This is a picture of my best friend Joe; that’s the beach in the background.’”



Make a Webpage

Students can create a Web page of their photos instantly; they have multiple page layouts to choose from, including a layout that creates thumbnail preview photos that can be clicked to bring up the full-sized photo.



This is just a brief overview of some of the great things Picasa can do. As a good educator, before you introduce it to your students you will definitely want to “check it out” and explore all its potential as well as become comfortable with it. Warning: if you are at all creative you will find yourself absolutely addicted to this great free program, the sort of ‘tech toy’ that can cause people to stay at their computer

for hours, usually with big grins on their faces.

But, please, share the fun with your students!

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