

# Welcome Back!

## Utah Middle Level Association (UMLA) Navigating for Change

Fall 2013

### From the Desk of the UMLA President:

Welcome Back Wonderful Middle Level Educators!



Hopefully the excitement swirling around in the crisp fall air has been contagious as we start a new school year! Excitement for new students, new lessons, new teams, and new adventures! As you take this time to get to know your students and fellow educators, remember these 3 important tips:

- 1) Build team and classroom spirit-everyone wants to feel like they belong. Creating team and classroom spirit will make your room a safe and welcome place to be. Have fun!
- 2) Set Goals- Set goals as an educator and also as a classroom. These goals can keep us moving throughout the year.
- 3) Celebrate the small things-Remembering a student's name or making it through Back to School Night. All of these "small" celebrations add up to one GREAT year!

One more thing to keep in mind is this school year's **2014's Utah Middle Level Conference**; the only conference in the state of Utah focused only on the Middle Level student and educator! This year we have Monte Selby coming, a leader in middle level philosophy and education. **MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR MARCH 1, 2014!**

As we begin this new school year, take a moment to reflect on why you teach and the potential that you and each one of your students possess to create a wonderful school year!

Make it a delightful year!

Holly Peterson  
President, Utah Middle Level Association

## Greet the Students

One of the most effective ways to get to know your students is to greet them at the door – every day, every period. Although that five-minute passing period offers precious time to write the warm-up on the board or gulp down a last sip of coffee, spending those minutes at the door as your students enter offers a significant return on your investment.

We learn who is grumpy, euphoric, and hungry. We show students that we notice (and care about) those who are members of our classroom communities. We overhear

gossip and drama that echoes through a middle level school hallway.

Everything we learn from greeting our students at the door, provides insights into our students' lives, minds, and emotions. This enables us to be more effective teachers. It also allows our students to get to know us better, which many young adolescents crave.

Greeting our students at the door makes us more approachable and shows them that we are interested in more than just our content. In turn, the students will often behave better.

--By Erika Daniels, Excerpt from "Creating Motivating Learning Environments; Teachers Matter", *Middle School Journal*, Nov. 2011.

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## Ten Back-to-School Tips for Teachers

The joys and jitters of back-to-school are in the hearts of all teachers. Whether you're in the classroom teaching already or you're not starting back until after Labor Day, take a few minutes and peruse this list of back-to-school tips. They may not all apply to your situation, but just as with teaching, take the ideas that work for you and make them your own. Enjoy!

1. Start the year with a firm hand (not a mean hand), you can ease off later.
2. Set your rules by creating a clear discipline plan, a method for carrying out the plan and the consequences for following and not following the rules.
3. Decide which routines and procedures you'll have in place. Model proper execution of the routines and procedures to your students. Next, practice, practice, practice the routines with the students frequently the first few weeks. Review them as needed. Middle school students will need reminders throughout the year.

4. Create or update a substitute folder. Include important information about your classroom like a seating chart, your discipline plan, and class bell schedule. Include a couple of emergency lesson plans.

5. Have your first week of lesson plans ready to go. Use the week to set your routines, rules, and expectations. Get to know your students with different activities—during class and within their homework.

6. Plan the first seating chart and have it available for students as soon as they walk into class. This is the first seating chart of the year, it can change quickly.

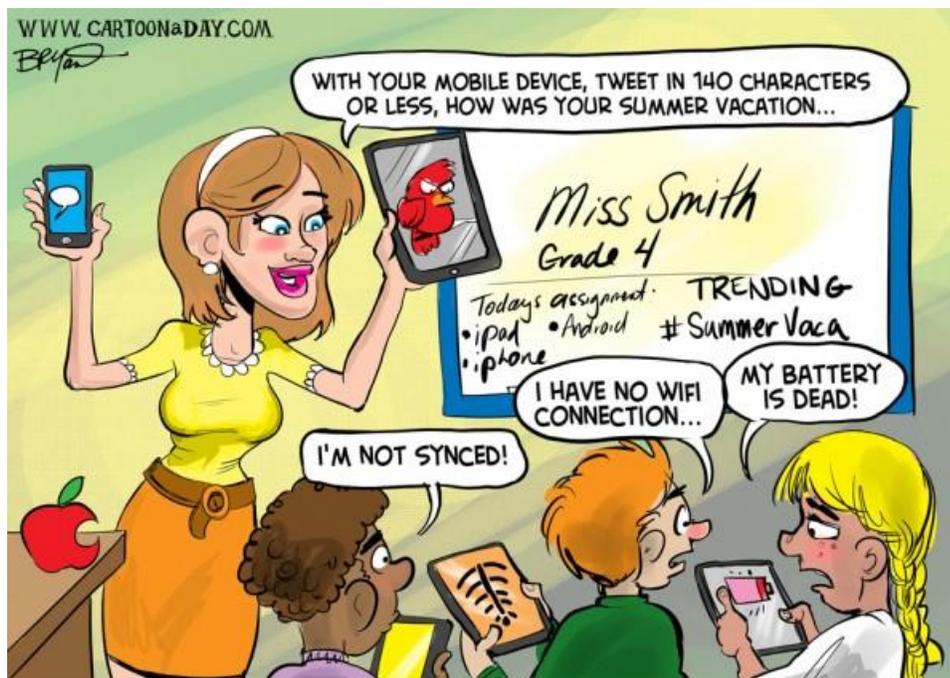
7. Set aside some time everyday to complete your grading. Etch it in stone so that you will remember to grade and to enter scores into your grade book. Around midterm and quarter end, you'll be glad that you did.

8. Start again – every day. Each day of school is a new day. Give yourself a fresh start daily. Most students are forgiving. When you have a hard day, remember, tomorrow is a new day.

9. Be humble – don't beat yourself up. We can all learn to be more effective in the classroom.

10. Smile – pretend like every student you meet is in need of a smile and a kind word. You'll be right most of the time.

Jill  
August 25, 2010, 04:06 PM



**SCHOOL RESUMES TODAY AROUND THE COUNTRY.  
TEACHERS TRANSITION CHILDREN SLOWLY.**

# Tech Tips For Teachers: Free, Easy and Useful Creation Tools

By RYAN R. GOBLE

New technologies are a powerful way for teachers to take their instruction to the next level. With so many choices, the trick is to locate user-friendly tools that allow you to craft differentiated learning experiences that engage students and help them develop [21st-century skills](#).

In that spirit, below are five ways to support student creation and “public displays of learning” using online technology tools.

If you’re a [Luddite](#), not to worry: these tools are easy to understand and easy to use, and they can make your classroom more interesting, interactive and student-centered. And if you don’t have computer access in school, you can still use many of them by making handouts or assigning the sites to be used at home.

## 1. Visualize Texts

Tech Tools: [Wordle](#), [Tagxedo](#) or [The New York Times Visualization Lab](#)

Wordle is a fun tool for playing with language and making meaning from texts. (And it’s [quite safe for classroom use](#).)

This self-described “toy” allows students to analyze word frequency in any text, from a poem to a science book chapter, by simply copying and pasting “a bunch of text” into the box on the top of [this page](#). Click on “go” and you’ll get a snapshot of the most common words in that text as shown by size. (The most frequently appearing words appear larger.)

For example, looking at a [word cloud for Act 1, Scene 5 of Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”](#) might illuminate the major characters, themes and issues of that part of the play, and/or the writer’s style and diction. And Wordle can be used for expository and nonfiction texts too (even [crossword puzzles!](#)).

Visualizations of New York Times articles can help highlight key vocabulary, content and concepts. For instance, students could create a Wordle using three [articles on the recession](#) to try to identify key terms they should learn more about.

Examining [word clouds](#) can not only provide new vantage points for literary and language scholars, but also help English-language learners, and others who have trouble with complex texts, to see patterns.

Students can play with the font and colors and make as well as save and reuse “Wordles” of their own, so the possibilities are endless. They can use their own writing to see what words they overuse, perhaps, or create Wordle versions of a famous poem, speech or song that visually reflects the way the text “feels” to them.

The Times has created some fascinating word clouds to help readers gain a visual understanding of current events. See, for example, the [word cloud from the 2008 presidential election](#) compares speeches made at the Republican and Democratic National Conventions, and the interactive [“word train”](#) that let people submit the words that best described their state of mind on Election Day.

The [New York Times Visualization Lab](#) – an offshoot of I.B.M.’s project [Many Eyes](#) – allows readers to explore visualize text, values, maps, data points and parts of a whole in any Times article as well as some public records, like the [Consumer Price Index](#).

More adventurous users might explore [Tagxedo](#), where you can create word clouds in the shape of an object.

## 2. Make Content Comic

Tech Tools: [ReadWriteThink’s Comic Creator](#), [Professor Garfield’s Comics Lab](#) or [MakeBeliefsComix](#)

On any of these sites, students can pick from a wide range of story elements – characters, expressions, actions, settings and dialogue boxes – to create unique visual narratives. They can use these tools to illustrate any concept or curricular content, such as a scientific process, historical event, personal narrative or literary text. Suddenly every student can access his or her inner artist, and you’ll have material for a great display of student work.

The Learning Network graphic organizers [Saying What’s Unsaid](#) (PDF) and [Telling a Times Story](#) (PDF) guide students in developing their ideas for graphic narratives. They’re “writable,” so they can be used not only as paper handouts but also on individual computers or an interactive whiteboard.

For example, students might use Telling a Times Story to show their understanding of [squirrel behavior](#) or what [happens when you lose your cool](#) after reading the Science Times articles on these topics.

Students can also create comic strips as part of the learning process, not just as products. Try printing and distributing hard copies of the [“Cartoon ‘Did You Read?’ Quiz”](#) (PDF) at Making Curriculum Pop. It’s a learning assessment in which kids “storyboard” the major ideas they noted in assigned reading.

### 3. Create Interactive Timelines

Tech Tools: [Xtimeline](#), [Time Glider](#) or [Timetoast](#)

Timelines, of course, organize information and events that have developed over time, often in historical eras, cultural movements or personal biographies. They display order and sequence as well as relationships and, sometimes, causality between events.

Why go online to create this traditional graphic organizer? Interactive versions are not only visually engaging, but also easily incorporate multimedia such as video and audio clips and link directly to source material.

There are several [free online timeline creators](#). [XTimeline](#), [Time Glider](#) and [Timetoast](#) are all multimedia-enabled, and they all do a nice job of creating interfaces that walk learners through steps as they build a chronology.

Students can build timelines using one or more Times articles. For example, they might use [Times Topics](#) to learn about a public figure like [Chief Justice John Roberts](#) and then create an interactive timeline about milestones and accomplishments in his life. Or they could make a timeline that illustrates the key moments in a sports event as reported in a “live blog,” such as [the Goal post on the World Cup match between Germany and Spain](#).

Students can also explore the numerous New York Times [interactive timelines](#), which chronicle biographies (like the life and career of [Senator Robert C. Byrd](#)), ongoing events (such as the [Gulf oil spill](#)) and political developments (such as [the road to health care reform](#)).

And for an interesting timeline-based alternative to an NYTimes.com site search, Time Glider has an online application called [The NYT Explorer](#), which automatically generates a timeline, with links to Times articles from 1981 and on, for any keyword.

### 4. Design Interactive Presentations

Tech Tools: [Glogster.edu](#) and [Museum Box](#)

[PowerPoint](#) is not the only tool students can use to present concepts and ideas visually. Two classroom mainstays – the poster presentation and the diorama – have digital counterparts that students can use for class projects (and that you can use to present course material in engaging ways).

With [Glogster.edu](#) students can create posters enhanced with multimedia. The interface walks you through the creation and gives students a wide range of scrapbook-inspired templates. The finished projects (such as [this one on the causes of the American Revolution](#)) can be presented with a projector or whiteboard, saved and/or printed. (Note: be sure you go to the .edu edition of Glogster. The regular site contains some content that is inappropriate for a classroom setting.)

[Museum Box](#) takes the old standbys – dioramas and presentation cubes – and kicks them up a notch by enabling the creation of 3-D dioramas with a series of interactive cubes.

You might want to give students one of [The Learning Network's graphic organizers](#) to help them plan their Museum Cubes or Glogster posters. For example, students could read a Times article or The Learning Network's [6 Q's About the News](#) feature and use [The 5 W's and an H](#) (PDF) to plan a Museum Box cube in which each side answers a question from the article. Or the [K/W/L Chart](#) (PDF) can be used as a brainstorming sheet for students before they create their own visual K/W/L posters on Glogster.

## 5. Map and Brainstorm Ideas

Tech Tools: [Bubbl.us](#), [CoSketch.com](#) and [Cacoo](#)

Mind Maps are idea-processing tools, made popular by the [British IQ specialist Tony Buzan](#) starting in the 1960s. Many schools have invested in popular mind-mapping software like Inspiration, but there are also many free online programs that help students develop colorful idea webs.

A basic program to start with is [Bubbl.us](#). The “start brainstorming” button will get you underway, and a click on the “help” menu on the left hand side of the interface gives you all the general instructions you need to start “pinning” bubbles into a mind map.

[CoSketch.com](#) and [Cacoo](#) are collaborative programs (CoSketch has a particularly easy interface) that allow people on different computers to work together in real time – even from different locations, so students could collaborate on maps on their personal computers for a homework assignment.

Kids can find lots of inspiration in The Times for generating ideas on virtually any topic or in any curricular subject, from [math](#) to [fine arts](#).

## UMLA Conference Sneak Peek

Monte Selby is the Keynote Speaker at the UMLA conference on March 1, 2014. You won't want to miss it.

His mission is to fully engage participants in a highly motivating, deeply inspirational, yet practical learning experience for the purpose of increasing personal and professional effectiveness and enjoyment.

He makes every presentation unique. He focuses on *the middle level* needs. You will have fun. He will seek feedback. He will provide more than expected. He will model the ideal. He will practice optimism, courage, and charity. For more information, visit his website at <http://www.monteselby.com/>.



## Ten Things All First Year Teachers Should Know ... From an Administrator's Perspective

1. **You were chosen.** Even with the dire teacher shortage we face, there are still many applicants for each teaching position, each with varying experiences, degrees, and qualifications. At some point, in some meaningful way, something you did or said caused you to stand out enough to be hired.
2. **You are not alone.** You are now part of a team of educators who support themselves, each other, and their students. You will have a support group of other educators with whom to share your triumphs and tragedies.
3. **You are not the students' buddy or best friend.** Students need you to be their mentor, role model, and facilitator of learning. You will make some tough, unpopular decisions at times. Prepare to be disliked. It's nothing personal. They will like you again tomorrow.
4. **Your emphasis will be on the whole child.** Middle school can be a tumultuous time for budding adolescents. Help your students be knowledgeable, capable, physically and emotionally healthy individuals who are well prepared to deal with their ever-changing world. Students are much more than the aggregate score of a single test.
5. **You are going to work hard.** Contrary to popular belief, teaching isn't easy. You are going to come in early, stay late, and take work home at night and over the weekend. You are going to be tired. You are going to be constantly on watch for new methods, lessons, or ideas that you can adapt to your own classroom. Teaching is that which defines you. And, you are probably going to love it!
6. **You are an adult learner.** You probably will learn more this year about education and students than you did in all the years you spent preparing to teach. The students will learn from you and you will learn from them. You also will learn from your colleagues and they will learn from you. Workshops, conferences, and professional development are all examples of learning exchanges. Teaching is a reciprocal experience.
7. **You are a representative of the school.** What you say, what you do, and even what you wear will be scrutinized by students, parents, and the community. Represent yourself and your school in a positive light.
8. **You will be teaching students, not a textbook.** Yes, there is a curriculum to follow, and yes you need to cover specific content during the year. But it's not a race to see how many things you can cover. What's more important is your students' learning and deep understanding of what you have taught. If they have not learned it, have you really taught it?
9. **You will be working with unique students.** All students go through developmental stages as they grow up. Middle school students value the opinions of their peers (probably much more than that of any adults). They have lots of energy but need lots of sleep. Most already have or shortly will be going through puberty. They can be moody, sensitive, and very interested in their appearance. They have strong opinions about what they perceive as fair and unfair. As a teacher, you will have a huge impact on their lives.
10. **You have to open yourself to knowing and caring about your students so you are better able to teach them.** There is an old axiom, "Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." It's true. You will be seeing students every day, five days per week over a period of nine months (multiplied by three years for most students). Once students know they can trust you, they will be more willing to work with you, for you, and for themselves. Building trust takes attention to being consistent, fair, and compassionate, having high expectations for all, and teaching more than your subject.

Have a great year and remember the most important word in the "10 Things" is YOU!

--By Linda M. Williams, *Middle Ground*, Vol 11, No. 1, Pg 32-33, August 2007.

# Sunset Ridge Middle School: Make Your Mark

Bullying is a growing societal concern that schools are scrambling to deal with. One school, Sunset Ridge Middle School in Jordan District has developed a character development program that empowers students to make a difference. Through student ambassadors, school plays, text lines, education, activities, and follow through this school is addressing the issue of bullying head on. Sunset Ridge's program known as Falcons Against Bullying (F.A.B.) has been recognized locally by various news outlets and nationally by the National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades and most recently by Disney Channel. Come learn what one school is doing to make a difference.

You can learn more about Sunset Ridge's anti-bullying campaign by attending the Intervention Convention on October 7th at Jordan School District's auxiliary building from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.



[SRMS: Make Your Mark Video](http://7ate9review.com/clientview/MYM/s2/MYM.CONN)  
<http://7ate9review.com/clientview/MYM/s2/MYM.CONN>  
[OR v3.mov](http://7ate9review.com/clientview/MYM/s2/MYM.CONN)

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## UMLA Board

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