For students of the digital generation, blogging can be an authentic and dynamic way to build literacy and community. In many HTHMA classrooms, teachers and students maintain free blogs that are personalized to reflect their unique personalities. They use these blogs to post work, respond to each other’s ideas, and display media resources relevant to their class.

**Teachers’ Reflections**

Blogging in my class has offered me a real-time connection with my students. We are all linked to each other’s blogs and we use software such as Google Reader to find out when someone creates a new post. This instant access gives me insight to their writing styles, their personalities, their likes and dislikes and the tragedies and successes of their daily lives.

Blogging also gives students a look into my world. I can share my thoughts on current events and what’s going on in my life. I can show students that I’ve traveled all over the world and that I’m a fan of the same computer games that they like. Topics like these don’t always come up in class. By opening up to the class on my blog, I’ve built closer relationships with my students.

Students’ responses to blogging have been overwhelmingly positive; they talk about enjoying writing, and feeling like their work has a real audience. They’ve also learned how to give each other supportive, useful feedback on their writing. One student recently admonished another for simply saying, “Nice post,” on a classmate’s recent submission, asking, “How do they know what was ‘nice’ unless you tell them specifically?” Indeed, Blogging is helping my students become not only better writers, but more constructive critics.

—Charlotte Morrissette

To learn more about blogging in the classroom, visit the HTH Digital Commons and Randy Scherer’s and Charlotte Morisette’s digital portfolios at [http://www.hightechhigh.org/](http://www.hightechhigh.org/) and [http://staff.hthma.hightechhigh.org/~cmorissette/](http://staff.hthma.hightechhigh.org/~cmorissette/) and [http://staff.hthma.hightechhigh.org/~rscherer/](http://staff.hthma.hightechhigh.org/~rscherer/)
I Am an Artist
Shani Higgins, Art, High Tech High North County

Students explored dimensions of their identity and created a double-sided canvas that visually expressed two sides of their selves. On the front of the canvas, they painted an acrylic self-portrait that represented their outer self—how they present themselves to others. On the back side of the canvas, students produced a collage that represented their personal vision and the things that make them unique.

Essential Questions
What do I want in life?
How can I represent who I am without using words?

Teacher Reflection
This project provided students with a way to express who they are and what is important to them, but also to learn about things like composition, color scheme, and how to use acrylic paints and mixed media. It was good for students to think about how to use color and facial expressions, not just words, to represent themselves.

I encouraged students to work in groups to display their works as one unified work of art. The challenge was to make sure that however and wherever the work was displayed, both sides of every piece could be seen by the audience.

—Shani Higgins

Student Reflections
It’s important for people of all ages to take art. Art allows people to express themselves and takes their minds off of stressful things like school or some problem they have elsewhere. It can stop people from expressing themselves in destructive ways. It’s like therapy. Students who have trouble in other subjects might excel in art, gaining a sense of self-confidence and worth.

—Anthony Arcaro, 9th grade, HTH North County

Art, in my opinion, is the most important class schools have to offer. Art is what makes the world diverse. It lets us express who we are and what sets us apart. We were all made with special gifts and talents, and art gives us a way to express those.

—Anthony Livingston, 9th grade, HTH North County

To learn more about this project and others, visit the HTH Digital Commons and Shani Higgins’ digital portfolios at http://www.hightechhigh.org/ and http://hthnc.hightechhigh.org/~shiggins/
Public Service Advertising Campaign
David Jean, Digital Imaging, High Tech High

Scenario
Groups are assigned to create an advertising campaign focusing on a social issue. Each group chooses an organization (e.g., D.A.R.E., Operation Smile, ONE) that offers support for those affected by their chosen issue. The campaign must answer one of these questions:

- What are the causes of this social issue?
- What are the direct effects?
- What is being done to aid those who are negatively impacted?

The groups are responsible to create the following:

1) Full color magazine ad (measuring 8 x 10 inches)
2) 30-second television commercial (digital video format)
3) 25-second radio spot

Students work together on research and concept development. Each group submits a minimum of 10 detailed thumbnails for the print advertisement to the teacher, who helps choose a concept for the entire campaign. Each group generates original content (headline and narrative) and imagery (photographs, illustrations). Students may not use images from print publications or the internet except for a high-resolution logo from their organization, as each visual piece (print and video) must include the organization’s logo.

Student Reflection
I had never really sat down and thought about how women were portrayed in the media, and this project made me do that. As I was flipping through magazines, pulling out ads for our backdrop, I started to see how women are used or looked at simply because of magazine ads, and how much the ads affect people who read them. I read many magazines and never have been affected by these ads, but after taking a second look, I can see why girls all over the world can be pressured by these. This project was a good way to get an important message out into the real world. Our ad was the most powerful out of the three things that we made, and it really shows how something as simple as a magazine ad can make a difference in a world that can be very difficult to live in.

—Rachel Liuzzi, 11th grade, High Tech High

To learn more about this project and others visit the HTH Digital Commons and David Jean’s digital portfolio
http://www.hightechhigh.org/ and http://staff.hightechhigh.org/~djean/
San Diego/Tijuana Crossed Gazes
Zoe Randall, Multimedia, High Tech Middle Media Arts
Dr. Norma Iglesias-Prieto, Chicana/Chicano Studies, San Diego State University

Twenty-two middle school children (12 in Tijuana and 10 in San Diego) learned and applied the technique of “model animation” to produce short animated films about the lives of children on “the other side of the border.” With the support and supervision of trained visual artists, graduate students, and educators, children of each city discussed the ways they think about and represent the “other side.”

HTMMA students worked under the guidance of two French experts, Sébastien Water and Guilles Coirier, from the independent film company L’Espace du Mounton à Plume. Roland Michon from the University of Rennes 2 in France, Zoe Randall from HTMMA, and Adriana Trujillo from YonkeArt in Tijuana also facilitated the workshops.

Teacher Reflection
This project connected our students to art and international issues. It was a pleasure to see my students engaged in dialogue about the U.S. and Mexico with SDSU grad students and Mexican and French visual artists, while creating a beautifully crafted animation film. The opportunity to learn animation from a French artist, translate French daily to my students, and interact with a diverse group of artists was a real dream. A documentary about their views of the border is being produced, and their animation films will be celebrated in France at international film festivals and used as pedagogical tools at SDSU and other venues. It has changed my life and my students’ lives forever to be a part of something so much bigger than ourselves.
—Zoe Randall

Student Reflection
I thought this film was just for fun, and I didn’t know French animators were coming. I thought it was only going to take a week, but it took a month, and a month went by very fast. The first time I crossed the border was when we saw the second premiere of our movie in Tijuana. I was kind of scared and nervous because I didn’t know what was going to happen. But once I got there and stayed awhile, I got comfortable and thought it was a good experience. I got to learn animation and meet new people like never before.
—Josiah Terronez, 6th grade, HTMMA

To learn more about this project and others visit the HTH Digital Commons and Zoe Randall’s digital portfolio
http://www.hightechhigh.org/ and http://staff.htmma.hightechhigh.org/~zrandall/
The goal of Science Friction was to help students understand that physics is all around us, even on the very ground we walk on. Movie theaters, which are notorious for having sticky floors, were the “sole” inspiration for this project.

Students began their exploration of friction by creating the stickiest surface possible—thereby maximizing the coefficient of friction—and performing a series of experiments. The project culminated with students creating software programs that calculated the coefficient of friction for a range of surfaces marketable to the theater industry.

**Teacher Reflection**

People often think of Excel software as simply a way to display data, but it also provides students with opportunities to quickly become software developers and graphic user interface (GUI) designers. After a one-hour training session, students were not only able to enter in functioning equations and data they derived from assignments and labs. They could also personalize the look and feel of the “software” they had developed.

Excel offers a good way to assess students’ math understanding in the context of project work. For example, when students enter formulas into Excel, they need to be careful about how they use parantheses or their formulas won’t work correctly. This compels students to check their work and revisit or rethink concepts like the order of operations. In addition, having students create software around a math topic—for example, unit conversions—motivates them to learn the content and provides them with a handy program they can use throughout the year.

—Al Solis

**Student Reflection**

In this project, I created a program used to calculate the coefficient of friction, angles, weight, and percentage increase of friction between two objects. You can insert different numbers such as angles or mass and see how the results changed. This is a useful program for those who don’t understand their homework or don’t have a calculator. You can even use this program if you don’t understand the terminology because it includes a glossary for those tricky words. Even though it may not look like it, I created this program by using Microsoft Excel.

—Molly Uyeda, 9th grade, High Tech High

To learn more about this project and others visit the HTH Digital Commons and Alfred Solis’ digital portfolio

http://www.hightechhigh.org/ and http://staff.hightechhigh.org/~asolis/
Through this multidisciplinary project, students at HTH North County will explore and address an issue of concern in their community: the prevalence of tagging and graffiti. Students will research the history and lasting influence of gangs in California, conduct an ethnographic study of tagging and graffiti in the city, maintain video blogs as a form of on-going reflection, and create photo essays of their experience. They will study the difference between tagging as vandalism and graffiti as an art form—putting their learning into service by painting over tags that have damaged property and by creating their own graffiti-style art for a gallery show at the Escondido Arts Partnership museum.

**Essential Questions**

What is the difference between graffiti and tagging?

How can we change the negative perception about graffiti in society?

**Student Reflection on the Transition from Tagger to Artist**

I have broken the law. Vandalism is the destruction or damage of property, and I used the aerosol can as my tool. I knew it was against the law to paint on private property, but this style of art was a way to express myself and a way to relieve the stress of my mind, ignoring everything but the adrenaline rush that came from being afraid of getting caught.

But then there was the canvas. I had never used a canvas before. My canvas had been the empty walls in the streets. Using a canvas and acrylic paint gave me another way to get out of this world and be set free into my own world. I never knew I was an artist until I had my first art teacher in high school. She has helped me turn my life around.

**Teacher Reflection**

I’m excited about this project because it’s a great integration of Language Arts, Social Studies, Technology and Fine Art. It allows students to get inside the lives of others—by reading Always Running by Luis Rodriguez and investigating the history of gangs and graffiti—and to connect those lives to their own through writing and art.

—Shani Higgins

To learn more about this project and others, visit the HTH Digital Commons and Shani Higgins’ and Jenny Pieratt’s digital portfolios at http://www.hightechhigh.org/