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I've yet to meet a third grader who didn't prefer a puzzle to a written exercise. All teachers exploit this preference at some point: to provide a break in the routine; to ease a stressful situation; ideally, to reinforce a concept or structure the students are expected to assimilate. Each of us builds up a stock of puzzles that, given the space and materials available to us, functions well in a given classroom. (After all, we enjoy them too!) One of the best puzzles we've ever had access to is the computer. How well we manage it to further our teaching goals depends largely on our imagination.

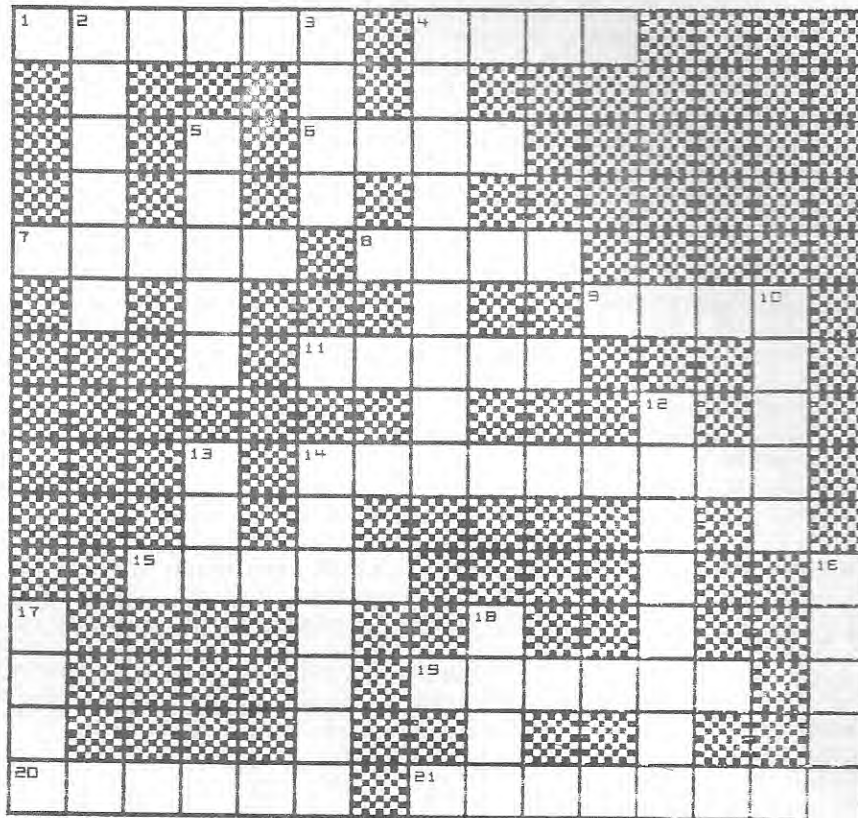
At the Nueva Primaria de México, my third graders visit the computer room as an extension of their English class. It is primarily a language experience, secondarily a computing class. Only English is spoken in the computer room and, with the expert assistance of Cunera Campos, Coordinadora de Computación of the Escuela Secundaria y Preparatoria de la Ciudad de México, the programs are correlated to reinforce and enhance our language program.

Crossword Magic, distributed by Scott, Foresman & Co., is a program that allows teacher and student to transform routine spelling, grammar, vocabulary and reading assignments into stimulating, enjoyable challenges. Any size puzzle up to 20 spaces, down or across, can be easily created simply by typing in selected words or numbers. Crossword Magic automatically arranges the words within the puzzle framework, storing words that do not fit until they can be inserted. Once the puzzle answers have been completed the clues are typed in and the crossword puzzle is ready to be played on the computer or printed for later use in the classroom. The puzzles can be easily edited. The program will automatically relocate or delete words and also allows for the insertion or deletion of letters in the Manual Mode. The ESC key will show options available from any point in the program, so learning to manage Crossword Magic is not difficult.

My class thoroughly enjoys Crossword Magic. Obviously, as an English teacher, I am trying to use the puzzles to reinforce specific language skills. Each teacher will, in turn, find different uses for the program. I won't presume to suggest ways in which the program can be used effectively, but there are several questions I think one does well to keep in mind when using this type of puzzle, particularly at the lower elementary grade levels:

1. Will the desired reinforcement be most effectively accomplished if students play a puzzle or create one?
2. Is the puzzle too complicated?
3. Will there be enough time?

Creating a puzzle, even from a very specific guideline provided by a teacher, often stimulates the desire to individualize a puzzle. Creativity, particularly that in which both teacher and student share the control of the learning experience, can be a definite bonus at times. If, however, what one had in mind was a quick review of the past tense of irregular verbs, it may be best to have students play a puzzle, not create one.



ACROSS CLUES

1. A place for teaching and learning.
4. A piece of metal money.
6. The opening you go through into a house.
7. A sweet substance made from sugar beets or sugar cane.
8. A material which makes suds in water.
9. An animal with horns and a beard.
11. A flat, sandy shore along an ocean, lake, or river.
14. The first meal of the day.
15. A large bird that eats other birds and animals.
19. An outdoor party with food.
20. A baby cat.
21. A person who lives next door or nearby.

DOWN CLUES

2. A show in which clowns, horses, and other animals, and acrobats perform.
3. A woman with fine manners.
4. A food made by grinding the seeds or beans of the cacao tree.
5. A fruit that grows in bunches on grapevines.
10. More than one tooth.
12. Two or more slices of bread with cheese, eggs, lettuce, jam or other food between them.
13. The ocean; a very large body of salt water.
14. A bag filled with heated air, or a gas lighter than air.
16. Large brook or stream.
17. A white liquid food produced by animal mothers to feed their young.
18. More than one mouse.

We all know that "more" is not always "better". Five problems may be challenging; ten can become sheer, unadulterated boredom. Crossword Magic makes it so easy to insert answers that I am always tempted to add more words than I really need, forgetting that every answer requires a corresponding clue. Sometimes, in my enthusiasm, my puzzles mushroom clear out of control and I have to redo them.

Clues can be quite long, which can be a distinct advantage for a teacher, but inserting them is time-consuming. When the students are creating a puzzle, it is at this point that they slow down and occasionally lose interest. Unless you are blessed with unlimited computer time, keep it simple.

Give rein to your imagination. Draw on your students' creativity. Let the Crossword Magic framework provide fun for everyone concerned.

WORD LIST: BOOKS- 3 & 4

BALLOON  
BEACH  
BREAKFAST  
CHOCOLATE  
CIRCUS  
COIN  
DOOR  
EAGLE

GOAT  
GRAPE  
KITTEN  
LADY  
MILK  
MICE  
NEIGHBOR  
PICNIC

RIVER  
SANDWICH  
SCHOOL  
SEA  
SOAP  
SUGAR  
TEETH

ANSWERS: BOOKS- 3 & 4

