

NOTE: This project was originally done in a one computer classroom, but it lends itself to computer labs as well. Students could create their own database, enter their own data, do their own word processing, etc., allowing for instruction and practice in all these areas. It might be fun for a middle or high school computer lab to create stories for an elementary class. They could spend a little time reading to the elementary students, getting the data, and returning with the finished product!

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## One Computer Classrooms

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### Database Jack

The mailmerge possibilities for the classroom which come with integrated word processing, database, plus programs such as Microsoft Works, ClarisWorks and others, are enormous. Aside from such teacher productivity tasks as reports, letters home, etc, language arts and other projects offer exciting writing and publishing projects. These can include data base and word processing instruction, depending on the age of the student and the intent of the project.

Basically, student input is placed in a database, which is then merged with a word processor document to produce individualized or humorous stories or prose. If the students are old enough (you be the judge) and/or if you're working with students in a lab set up, students could create the database and enter the information after asking the questions which generated it. Students who were good at word processing could type the story as well. Students could even create the story if you wished to attempt it. The possibilities can be tailored to your situation and the capabilities of your students. My goal here is outline the basic project and indicate the possibilities for expansion. The basic project is very popular with students.

I used this process in a project called Database Jack with second and third grade classrooms. I rewrote and illustrated (using comercial and public domain graphics) a popular fairy tale, in this case Jack and the Beanstalk, and selected words and phrases to leave blank. The next step was to write out a questionnaire to give to students to get responses which could be placed in the blanks.

The questions/directions for my project were

1. Who do you live with?
2. What is your favorite thing? (toy, pet, etc.)
3. Write down somebody's name.
4. Write down a good place in your house to hide.
5. Write down something you can put in a bag.
6. If hen's could lay anything besides an egg, what would it be?
7. Write a name that rhymes with sing.
8. What is your favorite monster? (My second graders were surprisingly uncreative with this question. A monster discussion may be in order.)
9. If you could buy one thing, what would it be?
10. Write one word that rhymes with "fum".
11. Write down something that smells.
12. Write one word that rhymes with "Bread"

The database was thought out and created before beginning the project with the students. The reason

for that was that using boys and girls names necessitated pronoun changes throughout the story to keep it grammatically correct. I made fields for name, first name, boy or girl, and the following pronouns: he/she, his/her, him/he, He/She (to begin sentences), and His/Her (to begin sentences). I also had a field for each question asked. I filled in the name and pronoun information in advance and saved a template to use with other, similar projects. I did save a little time by copying the names from my class database.

The next step was to read Jack and the Beanstalk to my students. I began this in the normal way with pre-reading questions and discussion to check background knowledge, I read it to them, they did partner reading, and then read it to me. (We went around the class with students volunteering to read a page.) Obviously, go through this reading process to any extent you want. Shorten, add to it, or modify it as your experience and preference dictates. I didn't use the paraphrased version of Jack because I didn't want to influence student answers to my questions. I've done this a few times giving the questionnaire before introducing the story. Answers seemed more spontaneous.

When I gave the students the questionnaire, I went over it orally with them to insure they understood what was required, spur imagination through discussion when it failed and to try to insure responses were in the grammatical form and case required. That may not be necessary with older students, but generates a nice discussion with younger ones. In writing the questions in the first place, you may prefer to give even fewer clues to what is required in hopes of getting more interesting answers and stories. For example, instead of asking for something to hide in or behind, you might ask for any noun found in your house. That worked best with the bag and chicken questions.

When I first began this project, I entered student responses into the database. However, later I found that even with second grade students, the concept of what a database is and how it could be used could be introduced on a simple basis at this point. Each student then took turns entering their answers. That worked nicely and fairly quickly in a one computer classroom and would be great in a lab. I did have to spend some time correcting spelling and clarifying the database before printing. the story.

The next step of course is to mailmerge the database into the story. Techniques for doing that vary with the programs being used, so I won't comment further. After receiving their printed copies, students read them to be sure there were no glaring errors. We bound and decorated them and students practiced reading their stories to each other before taking them home to read to parents, siblings and whoever would listen. Obviously again, add or take away whatever you want and make as big a production of it as you wish. For example, one year, we made a floor to ceiling beanstalk (in a corner, of paper) and decorated it with student drawings and another year, we made murals. Students read their stories to students in other classes once.

I've included my version of Database Jack and the database that went with it with names removed. I left the name of the database the same so as not to have to do the database over. These are in MS Works 2.0 format but could easily be imported into other databases. If you try this project, please send me a copy of your paraphrased story!

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