

## **What is a WebQuest? by Dr. Alice Christie**

A WebQuest is not much different from creating any kind of lesson. It requires getting your learners oriented, giving them an interesting and doable task, giving them the resources they need and guidance to complete the task, telling them how they'll be evaluated, and then summarizing and extending the lesson.

A WebQuest is an interactive learning exercise using a variety of internet resources. According to Bernie Dodge from San Diego State University there are two types of WebQuests: short-term and long-term. The short-term involves knowledge acquisition and integration, making sense of a large amount of information. It can be completed in one to three class periods. A longer-term WebQuest extends and refines knowledge. Students transform information and demonstrate what they've learned by developing a survey, discussion area, or response form. Long-term WebQuests can take from one to four weeks to complete.

Students participate in a WebQuest to maximize their learning in the most efficient way and are guided through steps to organize the learning process. Learners focus on a tangible, high-tech task with a WebQuest. Since there is an audience to create for, students are motivated by the possibility of getting feedback on their product.

Different forms of WebQuests include searchable databases, microworlds that can be navigated, interactive story or case study, forum-type documents that elicit analysis of a situation, and on-line interview simulation. Non-electronic resources that could be used are print materials from libraries and personal interviews to conduct an opinion survey.

### **Pedagogical principles that underpin WebQuests**

Pedagogical principles involve reflection, collaboration, cooperation, social skills such as consensus-building skills, open minded thinking, multiculturalism, critical thinking, problem-solving, and an interdisciplinary approach. The underlying principles of webquests are active involvement of students in the learning process and

structured ways for students to guide themselves through discovery of new material.

WebQuests lead students to use reasoning skills not learned through memorization of specific facts, but rather developed from engaging in a problem-based process and applying both past experience and a wide variety of Internet information to the WebQuest outcome. Critical thinking skills are utilized in a WebQuest to interpret, analyze, evaluate, and draw inferences from the information obtained from Internet resources. By thinking critically during a WebQuest, students are able to:

- Identify the similarities and differences among Internet resources as well as the bias, purpose, and point of view of different web sites.
- Assess the credibility of the information collected, decide what to believe about an issue, and evaluate the beliefs of others.
- Interpret the significance of the information collected and synthesize the information to generate hypotheses, form conclusions, and complete a specific task.

Cooperative learning is another essential aspect of WebQuests since WebQuests encourage students to take ownership of their learning and use a collaborative process of discovery to facilitate the learning that is taking place. Cooperative learning fosters a communal learning environment, allowing for constant comprehension checks and ample opportunities for exchange of ideas.

In addition, social skills are developed when students participate in WebQuests. Social skills such as listening, cooperating, affirming others, giving constructive criticism, and accepting differing view points are fine-tuned in the process of working with different personalities. While working together in small groups, students also learn to express opinions effectively and use language that will appeal to group members.

When participating in WebQuests, students are often exposed to multiple ways of viewing ideas or content. The need to see things from a variety of perspectives fosters open-minded thinking. Once students are accustomed to such thinking, they are more able to

understand and respect diversity and people from cultures different than their own. Participation in WebQuest can promote multiculturalism and diversity.

Reflection is another critical aspect of WebQuests. When students reflect, they analyze and evaluate their own thinking and problem-solving processes. Reflection is a careful, deliberate kind of thinking that helps students make sense of what they experienced and how they should proceed. The purpose of reflection is to shift emphasis from the product (or answer to a question) to the process of constructing knowledge.

WebQuests also foster an interdisciplinary approach to learning. When students make essential connections between and across content in the curriculum, they begin to relate their learning to their real-life experiences. Context which is embedded in realistic problem solving allows for deeper understanding and more meaningful learning.

When used fully, WebQuests can promote reflection, collaboration, cooperation, open minded thinking, multiculturalism, critical thinking, problem solving and an interdisciplinary approach.

## **Components of WebQuests**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the introduction section of a WebQuest is twofold: first, it's to orient the learner as to what is coming. Secondly, it should raise some interest in the learner through a variety of means. It is an introduction that sets the stage and provides some background information.

### **The Task**

The task in a WebQuest is a description of what the learner will accomplish during the exercise. It could be a product, like a HyperStudio stack or PowerPoint presentation, or it might be a verbal act, such as being able to explain a specific topic. The task should be doable and interesting.

### **The Process**

In the process phase of a WebQuest, the teacher suggests the steps that learners should go through in completing the task. It may include strategies for dividing the task into subtasks, descriptions of roles to be played or perspectives to be taken by each learner. The instructor can also use this place to provide learning advice and interpersonal process advice, such as how to conduct a brainstorming session.

## **Resources**

The resources in a WebQuest are a list of web pages which the instructor has located that will help the learner accomplish the task. They should be pre-selected so that learners can focus their attention on the topic rather than surfing aimlessly. Print resources may also be included.

## **Evaluation**

An evaluation rubric is called for. Check out this sample rubric. Since the learning we're looking for is at the loftier reaches of Bloom's Taxonomy, we can't gauge it with (readily) with a multiple-choice test. Click here for an example of chart outlining WebQuest activities that use each of Bloom's seven levels of thinking.

## **Conclusion**

A conclusion that brings closure to the quest, reminds the learners about what they've discovered, and perhaps encourages them to extend the experience into other domains. The Conclusion section of a WebQuest provides an opportunity to summarize the experience, to encourage reflection about the process, to extend and generalize what was learned, or some combination of these. It is a critically important piece, rounds out the document, and provides the learner with a sense of closure.

## **Reflection**

This activity encourages learners to reflect about which resources they found most helpful during the WebQuest. It also encourages learners to reflect on the collaboration process. Finally, learners should reflect on the validity and relevance of the resources they used.

## **Extension**

Extension activities provide opportunities for students to extend their learning beyond the WebQuest both in and outside the classroom. It might also provide opportunities for students to create their own WebQuests to share with their peers.

## **Notes to the Teacher**

This section includes the goals and objectives of the WebQuest, hints on managing a WebQuest, extensive resources for the teacher in planning and implementing the WebQuest, and other appropriate on- and off-line materials.