# edutopia

*presents*

# BACK-TO-SCHOOL GUIDE

## JUMP-START LEARNING WITH NEW MEDIA

UPDATED WITH NEW TOOLS AND RESOURCES *for* 2010-11

# More New Media
## Tools, Tips, and Resources

**A NEW SCHOOL YEAR IS ALL ABOUT POSSIBILITIES.**
To help you get off to a good start, *Edutopia* is bringing you this updated "Back-to-School Guide" that's brimming with new-media ideas and resources.

Whether you're brand-new to the profession or a classroom veteran, we hope you'll discover some fresh ideas in this collection of ten tips. Easy-to-use tools will help you build your classroom community, survey students to bring out their ideas, and make learning more collaborative. You'll find links to resources for incorporating everything from infographics to citizen science projects, too.

Students of all ages will benefit from getting acquainted and building a strong classroom culture (Tip #1: Break the Digital Ice). If you teach at the elementary level, you might want to start the year with tools that pack a lot of visual interest, such as VoiceThread or Glogster (Tip #9: Put Your Best Face Forward). Older students are likely to enjoy using social-media tools like Edmodo or Twitter (Tip #8: Make Learning Social). Even texting deserves a spot in your tech tool kit, if you harness it for a good cause (Tip #2: Survey Your Experts). And at all ages, kids will benefit from the chance to make a difference (Tip #3: Get Off to a Good Start).

We'd love to know how you put these ideas to work as well as your favorite suggestions for getting the new year off to a good start. Please join the ongoing conversation in the *Edutopia* community and connect with others who share your passion for improving education.

Here's to a great year!

**—Suzie Boss**
Edutopia.org blogger and author of
*Reinventing Project-Based Learning*

## TIP LIST

### #1
**Break the Digital Ice**

### #2
**Survey Your Experts**

### #3
**Get Off to a Good Start**

### #4
**Contribute to Science**

### #5
**Find What You Need**

### #6
**Make Meaning with Infographics**

### #7
**Work Better, Together**

### #8
**Make Learning Social**

### #9
**Put Your Best Face Forward**

### #10
**Use the Buddy System**

**visit edutopia.org**

# Break the Digital Ice

**ICEBREAKERS ARE** a time-honored tradition for starting the new school year. Scavenger hunts, name games, and other introductory activities help teachers and students get acquainted so they can start building a positive learning community. Give this important classroom tradition a makeover by integrating digital tools. Try a low-tech activity, as well, to build teamwork and unleash creativity right from the start.

Wallwisher **(wallwisher.com)** is an easy-to-use tool for brainstorming and gathering feedback. Once you set up a free account, you can quickly create a virtual wall. Name your wall and use the subhead field to add a prompt: What's the best book you read this summer? What's your number one goal for this school year? If you could take a field trip anywhere, where in the world would you choose? Note the URL for your page, and then send students to your wall. With a click, they'll create a new "sticky note" where they can post their response. Even students who may be reluctant to speak up during the first days of school will have a voice in this conversation.

AnswerGarden **(answergarden.ch)** is another online tool for gathering student responses in a flash, and you don't need to register to use it. To get started, just enter your question and click "Create." You can embed your AnswerGarden on a blog, website, or social network, or you can give students a link for posting their replies. The site displays their answers in a word cloud.

VoiceThread **(voicethread.com)** can help you and your students get better acquainted. The site allows users to combine photographs or other visuals with written or audio comments. You might introduce VoiceThread as a whole-class activity using a projector or interactive whiteboard. Share a digital album to introduce yourself, then invite students to record their own audio comments to help you learn more about them—and to help them learn about one another.

If you're planning projects that will involve teamwork, here's a low-tech, low-risk activity to build collaboration skills early in the year. The Marshmallow Challenge **(marshmallowchallenge.com)** asks teams to use 20 sticks of dry spaghetti, a yard of tape, and a yard of string to build the tallest freestanding structure they can devise that will support the weight of one marshmallow. Learn more about the power of this simple challenge by watching this TED Talk by innovation expert Tom Wujic: **ted.com/talks/lang/eng/tom_wujec_build_a_tower.html.**

**Related Resources:**

→ Educator and ed-tech guru Tom Barrett has created a slide show called "Twenty Two Interesting Ways to Use Wallwisher in the Classroom" as part of his Interesting Ways series: **edte.ch/blog/interesting-ways/**

→ "100 Ways to Use VoiceThread in Education" is a teacher-created VoiceThread about VoiceThread: **voicethread.com/#q.b26224.i145977**

→ You can explore this *Edutopia* article, "VoiceThread Extends the Classroom with Interactive Media Albums": **edutopia.org/voicethread-interactive-multimedia-albums**

→ Read this *Edutopia* blog post, "Marshmallows, Innovation, and Good Talk at ISTE," which is about bringing the Marshmallow Challenge to school: **edutopia.org/blog/iste-innovation-marshmallow-challenge**

# Survey Your Experts

**MANY OF TODAY'S DIGITAL KIDS** spend their free time producing videos, posting on social-networking sites, and text-messaging their friends. You can take advantage of their technical know-how in the classroom too. Locate your classroom experts with a survey that asks who has experience with graphic design, digital photography, podcasting, video editing, blogging, animation, or any other tech skills you may want to tap.

Poll Everywhere **(polleverywhere.com)** allows for free surveys for up to 30 participants. They can respond via cell phone, Twitter, or the Web, and responses appear instantly. Polldaddy **(polldaddy.com)** is another service that's free for up to 100 survey responses per month, and it even has a new app for the iPad.

You can also embed a Google form on your class website or blog to collect survey responses. Once you have gathered raw data, save your information as a spreadsheet so that you can easily identify your classroom experts when the need for specialized help arises. Or better yet, ask your resident spreadsheet experts to help you. Learn more about Google Apps for Education in "Google for Educators: The Best Features for Busy Teachers": **edutopia.org/google-educators.**

Cast an even wider net for technical expertise by surveying parents. Even better, have your students survey their family members. Don't overlook other experts in your school community. After-school technology clubs, instructional-technology staff, school-media specialists, and other tech-savvy colleagues are all likely sources of expertise.

**Related Resources:**

→ Other online survey tools include ProfilerPRO (**profilerpro.com**), Survey Monkey (**surveymonkey.com**), and Zoomerang (**zoomerang.com**). Many online survey tools offer free basic accounts.

→ Marie Bjerede, posting on the O'Reilly Radar blog, explores the use of mobile devices for classroom polling and other instructional uses: **radar.oreilly.com/2010/03/cell-phones-in-classrooms.html**

→ What do administrators think about using cell phones in class? Join the ongoing discussion about this topic in the *Edutopia* community: **edutopia.org/groups/administrators/26013**

→ "Teens, Cell Phones, and Texting," a new report from the Pew Research Center, shares the latest data about teens and their use of mobile devices: **pewresearch.org/pubs/1572/teens-cell-phones-text-messages**

# Get Off to a Good Start

**GET THE SCHOOL YEAR OFF** to a good start with a service-learning project that will benefit your students and help the community as well.

*Edutopia* blogger Heather Wolpert-Gawron describes the project she plans to use to launch the new school year at her not-so-green middle school: **edutopia.org/blog/project-based-learning-example-save-tree.** She's wisely focusing on a local issue that her students are apt to care about.

For more ideas about doing good, read how students in one rural community protect trout habitat near their campus and use math to design and build kid-sized garden benches: **edutopia.org/service-learning-fowler.** Or watch a video about Louisiana middle school students who have become award-winning wetlands watchers: **edutopia.org/wetland-watchers-service-learning-video.**

If your students are interested in looking beyond their local community to make a difference, introduce them to humanitarian Greg Mortenson, author of *"Three Cups of Tea"* and founder of a service-learning project called Pennies for Peace. He's featured in this *Edutopia* Big Thinkers video: **edutopia.org/greg-mortenson-community-education-video.** He also presented an *Edutopia* webinar earlier this year, "The Power of One," that's available for you to share with students and colleagues: **edutopia.org/webinar-april.**

Are you ready for more ideas about making the most of service learning? Check out the growing collection of multimedia resources at LIFT: Raising the Bar for Service-Learning Practice **(lift.nylc.org),** a site from the National Youth Leadership Council.

**Related Resources:**

➜ Join the conversation in the *Edutopia* community about Pennies for Peace: **edutopia.org/groups/project-learning/20979**

➜ Pennies for Peace offers a multimedia, standards-based curriculum for K-12: **penniesforpeace.org**

➜ Document and publicize students' good work with photo-sharing sites such as Flickr (**flickr.com**) and Picasa (**picasa. google.com**).

# Contribute to Science

**IN CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECTS,** people of all ages team up with professional scientists to gather needed research data. By involving your students in citizen science projects, you'll help them gain a deeper understanding of scientific inquiry. And because these are authentic projects, you can be sure students will never ask, "When will we ever need to know this?"

One of the best places to connect with citizen science projects is the Cornell Lab of Ornithology **(birds.cornell.edu).** You and your students can join projects that involve investigating everything from bird migrations to global climate change. This year, scientists need bird-migration data to help them track the effects of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill on bird populations across North America.

You can get started contributing your own data at eBird **(ebird.org).** It's also a gold mine of interactive maps, charts, and other real-time data outputs. (Click on the "View and Explore Data" tab to see more.)

Project NestWatch **(nestwatch.org)** recruits and trains volunteers to monitor nests and share data with researchers. Project BirdSleuth **(birdsleuth.net)** offers an inquiry-based, K-12 curriculum. Students can design their own investigations and even publish their research findings.

Want to bring bird observations right into your classroom? Nest cams are set up around the world to offer a bird's-eye view of various species: **watch.birds.cornell.edu/nestcams.**

**Related Resources:**

➔ Read the *Edutopia* article "Kids Count: Young Citizen-Scientists Learn Environmental Activism": **edutopia.org/service-learning-citizen-science**

➔ Journey North is a global study of wildlife migration and seasonal change. Registration is free, and online resources include connections with wildlife experts: **learner.org/jnorth**

➔ Explore a multimedia resource, "NatureMapping Takes Kids—and Technology—Outside and into Active Learning," which is about the nationwide project called NatureMapping. The article includes videos, downloadable lessons, and tips: **edutopia.org/naturemapping**

➔ The Center for Innovation in Engineering and Science Education sponsors global, collaborative projects in which students act as citizen scientists. Projects involve gathering, analyzing, and contributing real data from around the world relating to everything from household water usage to school-yard habitats: **ciese.org/collabprojs.html**

# Find What You Need

**MAKING YOUR CLASSROOM** into an inviting space for learning can be a spendy proposition; teachers typically invest $500 or more each year on school supplies and furnishings. How do educators feel about this situation? Check out the comments and suggestions in response to this *Edutopia* poll, and add your own: **edutopia.org/poll-teachers-buy-school-supplies.**

Instead of digging into your own wallet, you can take advantage of online tools and community resources to find what you need for free.

DonorsChoose.org **(donorschoose.org)** is a national initiative that has generated more than $36 million for 90,000-plus school projects since 2000. Here's how it works: Public school teachers post a specific request on the DonorsChoose.org website. Citizen philanthropists choose which requests they want to fund. Kids follow up with thank-you notes. What gets funded? Donors fund everything from musical instruments to picture books to classroom technology. The *Edutopia* article "Wish List: Donated School Supplies Are Just a Click Away" offers some tips for crafting a winning proposal: **edutopia.org/donorschoose-school-supplies-donation.**

Adopt-A-Classroom **(adoptaclassroom.org)** is a similar initiative. Donors are invited to partner with specific classrooms to offer financial help and encouragement.

If you need materials for a project, look locally for reusable goods that might otherwise wind up in the landfill. Freecycle **(freecycle.org)** connects you with Yahoo! Groups in your community where you can browse donation opportunities or post your own requests for free stuff. Trash for Teaching **(trashforteaching.org)** is a program in Southern California that diverts usable materials from the trash stream to schools as raw materials for creative projects. Similar programs exist in many communities.

Free classified ads offer another route for finding good stuff. Use your class website, Facebook page, or newsletter to let the community know what you need. There's no harm in asking, right?

**Related Resources:**

➔ For more ideas about finding free supplies, check out the *Edutopia* article "How to Get Complimentary Teaching Materials": **edutopia.org/free-school-supplies-fundraising-donation**

➔ Programs that match willing donors with teacher requests include DonorsChoose.org (**donorschoose.org**), Adopt-A-Classroom (**adoptaclassroom.org**), Supply Our Schools (**supplyourschools.org**), and iLoveSchools.com (**iloveschools.com**).

➔ Learn how to turn industrial waste into art materials by checking out this *Edutopia* article, "From Trash to Treasure: Reusing Industrial Materials for School Art Projects": **edutopia.org/recycle-trash-art-projects**

# Make Meaning with Infographics

**IN THE WORLD OF NEW MEDIA,** it's not enough to tell a story with text. Infographics combine statistics with graphic design, creating a visual representation of information. A graphic about childhood obesity rates, for instance, might use ice cream cones of varying sizes to represent weight-gain patterns over time. An infographic about housing might use a Monopoly-style game board to illustrate data about home-mortgage failures.

In the classroom, infographics offer an intriguing way to introduce a topic. They can inspire curiosity in a way that dry statistics might not. They make math meaningful by using numbers in the context of real-life events. Analyzing infographics also offers a good exercise in information literacy. You might ask students to consider the following: What's the source of data that the graphic displays? Is it reliable information? Does the clever design manipulate or influence how the reader interprets the data?

Infographics are regular features in most mainstream media. You can search the New York Times online **(nytimes.com),** for instance, to find infographics about current events such as the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. GOOD **(good.is/)** is another site that makes regular use of infographics—and also runs contests for submitting your own illustrations. (Check out a recent GOOD contest about childhood-obesity infographics: **good.is/post/project-create-an-infographic-about-childhood-obesity.**)

Maybe you'd like to have students design their own infographics to convey their understanding of a concept. Get them thinking about different ways to present text by introducing them to Wordle **(wordle.net),** a free tool that turns a block of text, or simply a list of words, into a cloud pattern. Words that are used most frequently are displayed most prominently. Teachers are finding multiple uses for this tool, from pre-reading activities to reflection exercises. Tagxedo **(tagxedo.com)** is similar to Wordle, but it allows you to create word clouds in custom shapes.

SimpleDiagrams **(simplediagrams.com)** is another easy-to-use tool for turning raw ideas into visuals.

**Related Resources:**

→ You can check out this article on the subject, "How Infographics Make Learning Interesting": **educationwebdesign.com/how-infographics-make-learning-interesting/**

→ FlowingData is a site devoted to exploring how designers, programmers, and statisticians are putting data to good use: **flowingdata.com/category/visualization/infographics**

→ Read the *Edutopia* article "Media Literacy Is Vital in the Age of the Image" to see how some are teaching visual literacy in the classroom: **edutopia.org/visually-speaking**

→ On his website, Educational Technology—ICT in Education, Terry Freedman offers "Five Reasons to Use Wordle in Education": **terry-freedman.org.uk/artman/publish/article_1511.php**

# Work Better, Together

**COLLABORATION IS A SKILL** your students will need for the future. To help them work better together, make collaborative tools part of your classroom practice.

Sync.in **(sync.in)** is a handy tool for collaborating on a document in real time. It's free and there's no registration required. One click opens a new page (with its own URL) where you'll see a chat window and space for word processing. Multiple authors can work simultaneously, and you'll see each other's edits and additions.

Google Docs, part of the Google for Educators tool kit **(google.com/educators/tools. html),** is another useful resource for managing collaborative work. After students set up free accounts, they'll be able to access their spreadsheets, documents, and presentations anytime, from any connected computer. Students can use Google Docs to view and respond to one another's work while it's in progress. That's helpful for collaborative tasks such as doing peer reviews, sharing notes, or developing a project presentation together.

If students are working together on videos or other projects that are heavy on graphics, they may need a solution for sharing large files. Drop.io **(drop.io)** and Dropbox **(dropbox.com)** are two examples of file-sharing sites. Some teachers also use these sites for collecting homework and other student assignments.

If you encourage your colleagues to use collaborative tools too, you can reap the benefits of teaming up for project planning and professional development.

## Related Resources:

→ Looking for a collaboration partner? Join the *Edutopia* community group called Collaborators Wanted: **edutopia.org/groups/collaborators-wanted**

→ Explore this *Edutopia* special report, "Collaboration Generation: Teaching and Learning for a New Age": **edutopia.org/collaboration-age-technology-networking**

→ Wondering about wikis? Watch a Common Craft video that explains them succinctly: **commoncraft.com/video-wikis-plain-english**

→ Vicki Davis, author of the Cool Cat Teacher Blog, shares teaching tips for using wikis in her collaborative classroom: **coolcatteacher.blogspot.com/2010/05/tips-for-teaching-wikis-how-i-explain.html**

# Make Learning Social

**FACEBOOK SHOWS NO SIGNS** of losing popularity, especially among teens. Yet many schools continue to keep social-networking sites off-limits. Social-networking tools designed for education may prove more palatable to your school community—while retaining some appeal for tech-savvy students.

Edmodo **(edmodo.com)** first became popular as a secure platform for classroom micro-blogging. A recent upgrade enables teachers to use this free site for organizing course work, sharing files, conducting polls, and communicating with students via mobile devices. The space looks and feels similar to mainstream social-media sites, which means students who regularly use Facebook or Twitter will be right at home.

Creating a classroom back channel is a new-media strategy for inviting everyone into the conversation. Think of a back channel as a private chat room just for your classroom. When students use an instant-messaging tool like iChat or Twitter **(twitter.com)** for micro-blogging, they can pose questions, make observations while watching a video or student presentation, or share a dissenting viewpoint. To spark conversation, you might pose a prompt that students respond to in the back channel. The archived chat offers a valuable artifact that can help you understand what your students are thinking.

Developing an effective learning environment that harnesses social media takes more than technology. You'll want to set a high bar for expectations. Students used to text-messaging with friends outside school will need to think about what's appropriate for in-class messages. Inappropriate comments in the back channel or social-media network can quickly turn into a distraction (like old-fashioned note passing). But teachers who are using these tools for valid academic purposes report that the benefits far outweigh the challenges.

**Related Resources:**

➜ Tools for creating a secure back channel for the classroom include Chatzy (**chatzy.com**) and Edmodo (**edmodo.com**). CoveritLive (**coveritlive.com**) is a live-blogging tool.

➜ EduDemic offers this related article, "Thirty Interesting Ways to Use Twitter in the Classroom": **edudemic.com/2010/07/the-30-newest-ways-to-use-twitter-in-the-classroom/**

➜ *Edutopia* Community Manager Betty Ray makes a case with her post "Making the Case for Social Media in Education": **edutopia.org/social-media-case-education-edchat-steve-johnson**

➜ Get tips on making the Internet safe for students with the *Edutopia* article "How to Talk About Life Online": **edutopia.org/digital-generation-social-networking-technology-project**

# Put Your Best Face Forward

**ONCE UPON A TIME,** being a good presenter meant polishing your public speaking skills. These days, students can choose from a variety of tech tools to help them craft a compelling presentation.

Glogster EDU **(edu.glogster.com/)** is a classroom-friendly (ad-free) version of a popular site for making multimedia posters. "Glogs" can incorporate text, graphics, images, links, audio, video, and more. Because digital content can go deep and be organized in layers in these online posters, Glogster offers a useful tool for documenting big projects. The site also includes a showcase of student work.

Prezi **(prezi.com)** is an online tool for producing dynamic digital presentations. There's no software needed, which means students can work on presentations from any computer that has Internet access. Free licenses for education became available earlier this year. Unlike other presentation tools that arrange slides in a linear order, Prezi starts with a blank page. You can move between elements however you choose—zooming in, changing directions, or creating new paths between features.

Imagine asking students to display their understanding of history, art, or a controversial current topic by selecting a few key artifacts and explaining their importance. Museum Box **(museumbox.e2bn.org/)** enables users to do just that. Inspired by abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, who carried a box of props to support his anti-slavery speeches, Museum Box is a good fit for projects that ask students to make arguments and defend their choices.

If students are working on complicated projects, they may need help staying organized. LiveBinders **(livebinders.com/)** allows users to create virtual three-ring binders and organize digital documents in one place. Students might create a single LiveBinder to present one project, or they can combine several projects into a digital portfolio.

**Related Resources:**

➔ Watch students in Maine present their projects to the community in this *Edutopia* Schools That Work video: **edutopia.org/maine-project-learning-schools-that-work**

➔ How do you assess student presentations? Download a sample rubric from the Buck Institute for Education: **bie.org/tools/useful_stuff/pbl_starter_kit_21st_century_skills_rubrics**

➔ *Edutopia* blogger Elena Aguilar takes a critical look at the qualities of final projects in her post "Do Your Final Projects Challenge and Motivate Students?": **edutopia.org/summative-assessments-motivate-challenge-students-aguilar**

# Use the Buddy System

**WHERE DO YOU TURN FIRST** for brainstorming with colleagues? The faculty room offers a spot for face-to-face conversation, but you can expand your options by joining social networks that meet your professional interests. Here are a few places to share ideas and strategies with colleagues.

The *Edutopia* community **(edutopia.org/groups)** is the place to go for online conversations about everything from STEM education to green schools to project-based learning. Scroll through the community descriptions and join as many groups as you'd like—or suggest a new one to match your interests. Then jump into the conversations.

Classroom 2.0 **(classroom20.com)** appeals to both new users of Web 2.0 tools and more experienced practitioners. Tapped In **(tappedin.org/tappedin)** is an online community of educators that sponsors regular online forums. Teachers Teaching Teachers **(teachersteachingteachers.org/)** produces a weekly webcast, which includes a back-channel discussion, and delivers exactly what the name promises.

Edchats are regularly scheduled, tightly focused, global conversations about education that take place on Twitter. Participants typically vote on the topic for each chat and then weigh in during an hour-long event. Comments typically fly by in Twitter, so you may find it easier to keep track with a tool like TweetDeck **(tweetdeck.com).** In addition to the original Edchat **(edchat.pbworks.com),** other regular events include Elemchat for elementary teachers **(elemchat.wikispaces.com),** Scichat for science educators **(teachingscience20.com/cichat),** and Mathchat for the math crowd **(mathschat.wikispaces.com/).**

## Related Resources:

→ Read about professional learning communities in "Teachers and Community Members Practice TLC with PLCs": **edutopia.org/ professional-learning-communities- collaboration**

→ Betty Ray blogs about good ways to use Twitter in her post "How to Use Twitter to Grow Your PLN": **edutopia.org/blog/twitter- expanding-pln**

→ TEDxNYED was an all-day conference that explored the role of new media in education. For a do-it-yourself professional experience, watch these videos with your colleagues and talk about the big ideas presented by speakers such as Dan Meyer ("Math Curriculum Makeover") and Chris Lehmann ("Creating the Schools We Need"): **tedxnyed.com**

# BACK-TO-SCHOOL GUIDE
## JUMP-START LEARNING WITH NEW MEDIA

**ABOUT *EDUTOPIA***

*Edutopia* is where The George Lucas Educational Foundation's vision to highlight what works in education comes to life. We are a nonprofit operating foundation dedicated to improving K-12 schools by using interactive media to document, disseminate, and advocate for innovative learning strategies that prepare students to thrive in their future education, careers, and adult lives.

Through our award-winning website, videos, and growing online community, *Edutopia* is supporting and empowering education reform by shining a spotlight on real-world solutions and providing proven strategies, tools, and resources that are successfully changing how our children learn.

To find and share solutions, visit Edutopia.org.

## SUPPORT *EDUTOPIA*!
### WHAT WORKS IN EDUCATION

Donate to *Edutopia* and join with others who care about changing education. Your support will help us continue to do the following:

✳

Identify the key attributes of successful learning environments

✳

Bridge the gap between those who are struggling and those who have solutions

✳

Improve online tools and resources for educators to collaborate and share with each other

✳

Highlight districts and schools that have impactful and replicable solutions

Please join us in ushering in a new, successful era in education.
To make your tax-deductible donation, go to
**edutopia.org/support.**

# visit us at edutopia.org