EdTech in ELT: Create Online Reading Lessons—Bring Texts to Life
by Christel Broady

Audience: For teachers of medium- and advanced-level ELLs

Spicing up English reading lessons with technology can be easy when using precreated lesson templates. In this article, three platforms to do this are introduced. Each one offers teachers ideas on how to present reading content to ELLs. One of the platforms also allows ways to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all users. Also, one includes a Spanish/English translation feature.

1. Kentucky PBS LearningMedia

Access Kentucky PBS LearningMedia and create a free account. With the account, you will not just gain access to the lesson-building tools, but you will also gain access to thousands of English language videos, images, lesson plans, and other resources for free.

Getting Started

Try your hands on one of the simple storyboard templates. It takes about 5 minutes to create a storyboard for prereading activities for a Harry Potter book for English and Spanish learners.

> **Tip:** By using Google translator, one can translate the instructions in any of the many languages featured. The example presents materials that allow learners to get to know the characters, places, and story before the reading begins, thus frontloading essential vocabulary and concepts.

In the example, resources are provided in English and Spanish so that all students are engaged and get the content to answer the questions. In general, many English language books have free online reading sites that can be linked to the readers. Also, most commonly used English language stories and books have free YouTube videos, audio files, and text sources in other languages, such as Spanish. Here is the Harry Potter example storyboard Figure 1):

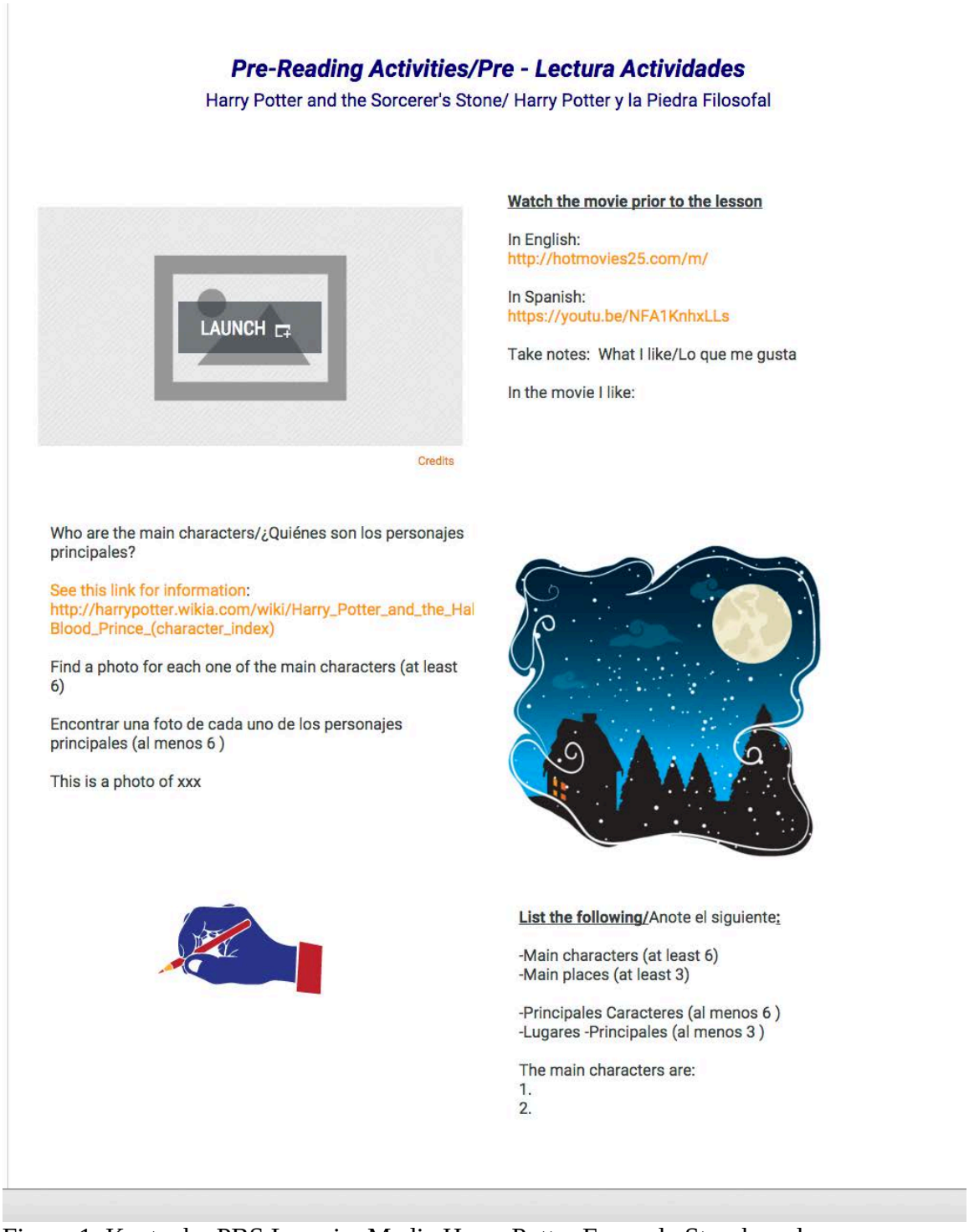

Figure 1. Kentucky PBS LearningMedia Harry Potter Example Storyboard

Follow-Up and Assessment

As a follow-up activity doubling up as a formative assessment, students can create a puzzle in the automated puzzle builder, which is super easy. Students just need to add a clue and the correct answer for the template to create a crossword puzzle.

Allowing students to create the assessments has many benefits: It shows mastery of content, boosts their motivation, and taps into their creativity.

For the actual lesson, users can utilize the Lesson Builder tool to state learning outcomes, create individual activities, and more to follow up with the central reading activity. The template looks like this (Figure 2):

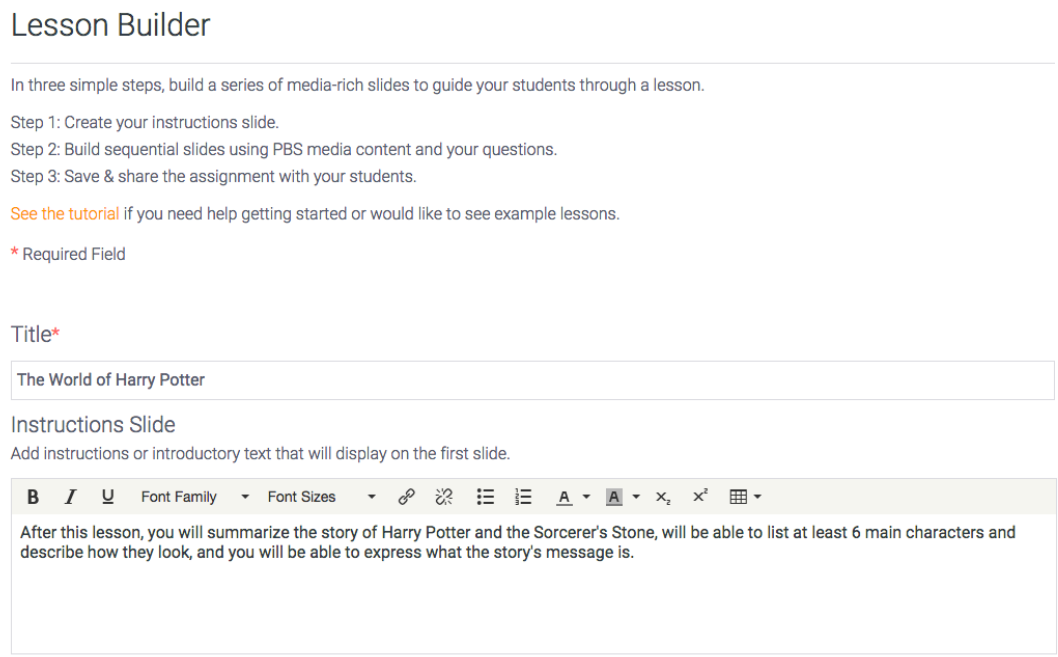

Figure 2. Kentucky PBS LearningMedia Lesson Builder

Last, follow up with your lesson assessment tool using the Quiz Maker. You can create multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, or short answer questions in three easy steps. The template will create an assessment code that can be shared with students so that they can access the quiz from outside the platform.

2. Discovery Education

The Discovery Education resource offers thousands of already created lesson plans for Grades K–12 and beyond, listed by grade levels, subjects, and themes. Teachers can access virtual field trips, worksheets, and more. (See Figure 3 for a screenshot.)

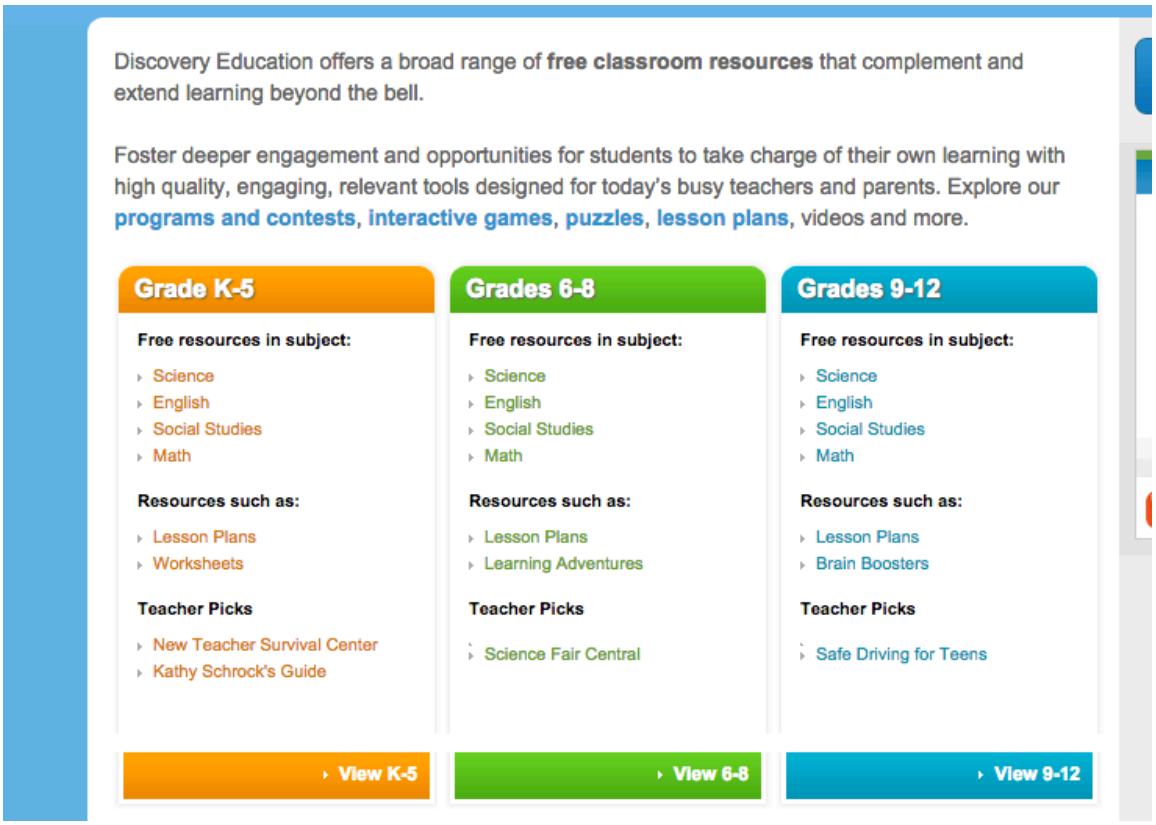

Figure 3. Discovery Education Screenshot

Instructors can build lessons and follow up with innovative assessments using the Puzzle Maker template on the Discovery site. The choices are great for language students building vocabulary:

1. Word Search
2. Criss-Cross
3. Double Puzzles
4. Fallen Phrases
5. Math Squares
6. Mazes
7. Letter Tiles
8. Cryptograms
9. Number Blocks
10. Hidden Messages

Like the PBS site, the Discovery templates are also super easy. Also, the site provides some premade examples in the Lesson Plan Library for teachers to see them in action.

CAST

Last, there is CAST, a platform that offers teachers thousands of recourses to create learning environments that allow all students to be successful no matter their abilities and accessibility

needs. It also features a built-in Spanish/English translation feature, which comes in handy for ESL classrooms.

Of particular usefulness for English classes are the sections UDL Studio and UDL Book Builder, both based on Universal Design for Learning principles.

UDL Studio

The studio offers teachers and learners the opportunity to either build content resources from scratch or to use simple templates. The reading template provides an example of reading for key ideas and details, essential reading skills. The templates offer examples that teachers can customize with their own materials and activities.

Like the PBS templates, the CAST ones also allow for the insertion of audio and video sources. Utilizing the full array of stimulation and exposure to content allows all learners to grasp the concepts.

UDL Book Builder

The Book Builder is another creative way to approach lesson planning for reading. After reading a piece of English literature, students can write books using this template, including the use of text, images, and audio clips. Another use of this platform is that instructors create books for students, specifically tailored for their needs and English abilities. This tool may be of special use in areas where resources are scarce and students don't have access to print materials.

Another feature useful for reading students is to access already marked-up texts that allow readers a multitude of tools for deep and rich interaction with texts. In addition, the Book Builder also offers an embedded Spanish/English dictionary. Figure 4 shows one of these texts for of the Gettysburg Address, which also features media such as photos. Resources like this in the CAST platform are also great for flipped classrooms and student interaction with their texts at home.

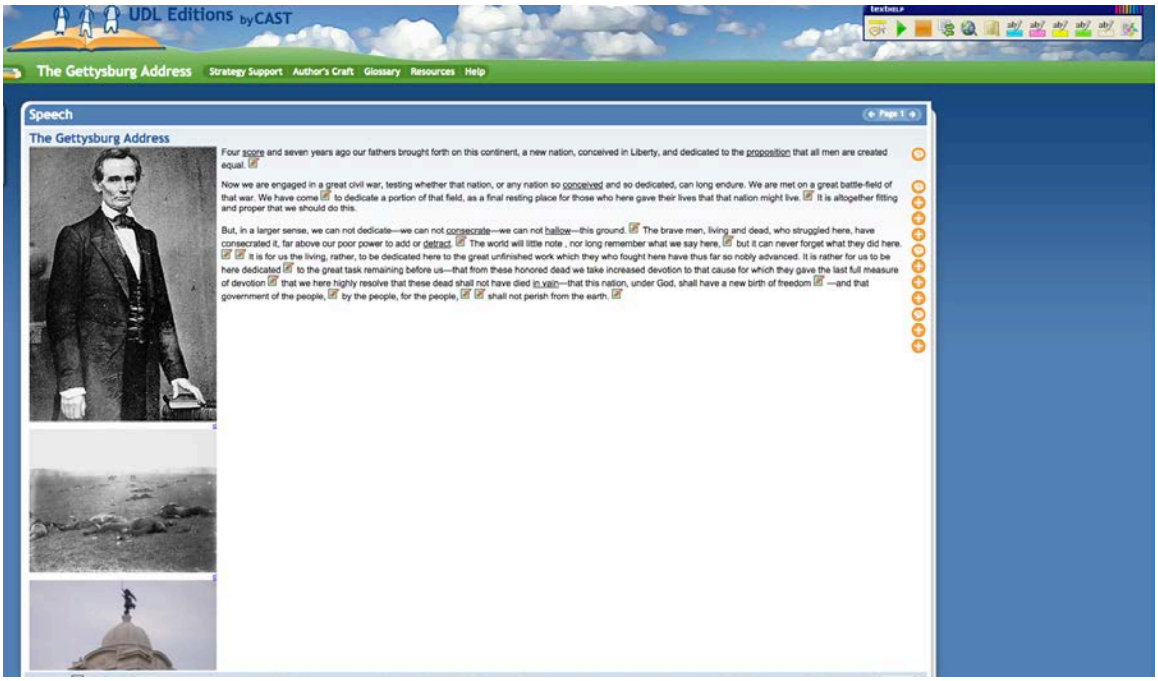

Figure 4. CAST UDL Book Builder Gettysburg Address Text

Conclusion

All of the above-introduced templates offer resources to present reading activities in new ways, allowing students to learn in different and varied ways. By effortlessly adding audio and video resources to the lessons and assessments, the text becomes more interactive and allows students a new access to the deeper meaning of their texts. The sites also offer practical tools to check for learning. I hope that you will try out the free platforms some time and ask your students how they like them.

Dr. Christel Broady *is a professor of graduate education and ESL teacher education at Georgetown College, past president of the Kentucky TESOL, former chair of the TESOL EEIS, and current VDMIS steering board member. Christel is a specialist for CALL, an NCATE program reviewer, she also represented TESOL at CAEP and on the national workgroup for the Seal of Bilinguality in K–12 schools. She is the manager of "Broadyesl," a worldwide ELT Community of Practice on Facebook, Wordpress (ESL and technology), LinkedIn, and Twitter.*