ED-U-BIT #17: Using Timelines to Gather & Present Information

Is it any wonder that the simple timeline has caught the attention of educators who are looking for contemporary tools to help learners manage the increasingly large amount of content that is covered in today's curriculum? You see them everywhere. Timelines are horizontal or vertical lists used to illustrate everything from the story behind an important piece of legislation to a pictorial chronology of changes in the look of a famous cartoon character. It's an increasingly visual world, where catchy graphics, headlines, and sound-bites, are the primary conveyance of how information is delivered. Though many timelines are prone to oversimplification, subject to selective use of facts, and have only vague reference to sources, they do communicate effectively to broad audiences. People like them.

Timelines represent or exhibit key events within a designated time frame. Typically they consist of illustrative visual material, with written captions or commentary. Most timelines are arranged chronologically, using standard time references. This ED-U-BIT examines using timelines to help students gather and present information.

Using Timelines to Gather Information

Timelines are everywhere, diverse in form and substance. Many of the newer textbooks and educational materials offer timelines of different types for use with students. There are numerous examples of online timelines at well known web sites such as the Library of Congress, Smithsonian, NASA, PBS, National Parks, and state & municipalities. Click finding timelines to see a list of topics and other sources for finding online timelines.

The Library of Congress web site uses timelines much as traditional texts use table of contents. They provide an overview of the content or topic, showing relevant sections or subtopics. Frequently links are provided for further elaboration or exploration of the content shown in the timeline. Representative images are sometimes included. A sampling of different timelines from the American Memory collections is available online, http://memory.loc.gov/learn/educators/workshop/discover/timeline.html.

Click here to see an example of a simple information gathering form which can be used as one of the research tools given to students to guide their review of selected materials. Using the timeline, *Alexander Graham Bell (1847 – 1922)* from the list just mentioned, you can see how this form has

been completed. This form is only an example, and should be adapted to the level and teaching goals as needed.

Students at both ends of the learning spectrum can appreciate timeline presentation of information. The naturally curious, value the breath and potential depth afforded by timelines that have attached links or reference information. The visual learner as well as the more academically challenged student will value the abundance of visual clues frequently found in many timelines.

Creating Timelines to Present Information
If the first wave of using timelines in the classroom is that of locating and using timelines for gathering information, then creating timelines as a form for communicating information might be called the second wave. It is probably best that students have some exposure to using finished timelines prior to being asked to make their own. As with gathering information from timelines, student learning can be enhanced as a result of using this platform for presenting selected knowledge elements.

Arranging facts and events in order of time can work for projects across the curriculum. There is a seemingly endless list of timeline topics and activities where the use of this sequential listing of words, images, or some combination can be used.

Depending on the level of independence of the students, the learning objectives, and the purpose of the timeline activity, there will be different strategies observed in lessons incorporating the creation of timelines. Directions for creating timelines are provided with this ED-U-Bit as examples. Though both lists are similar, the list for *Older Students*, assumes a stronger set of skills and student independence. The list for *Younger Students* is more concrete, and assumes more teacher demonstration and guidance. An educator may choose to have individuals or groups work through all or some part of these examples in the creation of a timeline for presenting some relevant information.

No matter how you choose to use timelines with your students, this should be the year to take it to a new level. Whether used for gathering or presenting information, timelines can and do communicate effectively. Students who learn how to gather information from timelines and how to use them for presenting information will be better prepared to survive in today's information rich society.