



Mont'Kiara International School Co. No. 83748-A

22, Jalan Kiara, 50480 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: (603) 2093-8604, (603) 2093-8624
Fax: (603) 2093-6045
E-mail: info@mkis.edu.my Web: <http://www.mkis.edu.my>

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Dear Families:

Students in Ms. Nash's class will be using personal weblogs to post various social studies assignments to the Internet. This project is part of the technology integration initiative in the middle school. Our class will be working closely with Ms. Moody, the middle school IT teacher, to utilize technology within the context of our social studies curriculum throughout the year.

Our first activity will be analyzing current events in order to become familiar with the blogging process. Although we are starting with current events, we will continue to use and expand our blogs throughout the course of the year. You can find Ms. Nash's blog at:
<http://ssit1.edublogs.org/>

A weblog, or blog as they are commonly called, is a special type of web page that can be created and easily updated using a web browser. Each new entry has its own date stamp. Each entry has a comments section where visitors to the blog may leave comments for the author.

How it Works

Each student will have their own blog on www.learnerblogs.org. This website is dedicated to educational use only and has been created specifically for student users.

Each class period, one student will be assigned to research and evaluate a current event in order to post an analysis on their blog. Each week a group of students will be responsible for individually posting one comment on one of their classmate's blogs. The emphasis is on the quality, not the quantity of what they write. Students will be given a detailed task sheet and rubric with expectations clearly outlined.

Students will need to work on their blog outside of class. All that is required is an Internet connection and a web browser. Students may also utilize the library and the computer labs before and after school. Students are able to save their work as drafts before publishing it to their blog.

Having a real audience is one of the key components to this program. In addition to receiving comments from their classmates, Ms. Nash's students will receive comments from other classes who visit their blogs. Parents are also invited to visit the blogs and respond. Potentially, anyone on the Internet could respond to our blogs, however, it is not likely that the world at large will stumble across them.

Security

As part of this blogging initiative students will learn how to effectively utilize this new medium. In addition they will be introduced to the advantages and disadvantages of interacting with global audiences. In order to increase security, the only personally identifying information included in the blog will be their first name. There will be no mention of our school name or our location. Students are allowed to post their interests and opinions, but not their age, email address, photographs of themselves, or other sensitive information.



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Assessment

The weekly blog assignments will be part of your child's homework and classwork grades in social studies this year. Students will receive a detailed task sheet and rubric with expectations clearly outlined. The rubric will include a section for the comments they leave on other students' blogs. All resources are available on Ms. Nash's blog. The blogging project meets the following Standards for Learning:

Social Studies Standards:

- Standard 1: Students will understand patterns of change and continuity, relationships between people and events through time, and various interpretations of those relationships. (Benchmark 1.3, 1.4, 1.6).
- Standard 2: Students will understand causes and effects of interaction among societies, including trade, systems of international exchange, war, and diplomacy. (Benchmark 2.1, 2.2, 2.5, 2.6).
- Standard 3: Students will understand the concepts of geography and demography and how geography and demography influence and are influenced by human history. (Benchmark 3.1, 3.2, 3.6).
- Standard 4: Students will understand cultural and intellectual developments and interactions among and within societies. (Benchmark 4.2, 4.5, 4.11).
- Standard 5: Students will understand social systems and structures and how they influence individuals. (Benchmark 5.2).
- Standard 6: Students will understand why societies create and adopt systems of governance and how these systems address human needs, rights, and citizen responsibilities. (Benchmarks 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.9).

Information Technology Standards:

- Standard 1: Demonstrate a sound understanding of basic operations and concepts of technology systems. (Benchmark 1.2, 1.3).
- Standard 2: Understand the social, ethical, and human issues related to technology (Benchmark 2.1, 2.2, 2.3).
- Standard 3: Demonstrate use of technology tools to enhance learning, increase productivity, and promote creativity (Benchmark 3.1, 3.2)
- Standard 4: Demonstrate competence in the use of technology communication tools (Benchmark 4.1, 4.2)
- Standard 5: Demonstrate competence in the use of technology research tools (Benchmark 5.1, 5.3)
- Standard 6: Demonstrate competence in the use of technology in problem-solving and decision-making (Benchmark 6.2).



Resources

Blogs created by Middle School teachers and students in the United States

- <http://mr-fisher.edublogs.org/>
- <http://hetherington.learnerblogs.org/>

News articles about blogging

- Gilbert, Alorie. "Blogging 101 – Web logs go to School" CNET News. 17 October 2004. <http://news.com.com/Blogging+101--Web+logs+go+to+school/2100-1032_3-5895779.html> (16 August 2006).
- Stach, Michael. "Introduction to Blogs and Blogging" TechLearning. 1 April 2004. <<http://www.techlearning.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=18400984>> (16 August 2004).

Permission

Before your child may start posting to their blog, we are asking for you and your child to discuss and sign the following form. Please return the form to Ms. Nash.

Blogging Terms and Conditions

1. Students using blogs are expected to act safely by keep personal information out of their posts. You agree to not post or give out your family name, password, user name, email address, home address, school name, city, country or other information that could help someone locate or contact you in person. You may share your interests, ideas and preferences.
2. Students using blogs agree to not share their user name or password with anyone besides their teachers and parents. You agree to never log in as another student.
3. Students using blogs are expected to treat blogspaces as classroom spaces. Speech that is inappropriate for class is not appropriate for your blog. While we encourage you to engage in debate and conversation with other bloggers, we also expect that you will conduct yourself in a manner reflective of a representative of this school.
4. Student blogs are to be a forum for student expression. However, they are first and foremost a tool for learning, and as such will sometimes be constrained by the various requirements and rules of classroom teachers. Students are welcome to post on any school-appropriate subject.
5. Students blogs are to be a vehicle for sharing student writing with real audiences. Most visitors to your blog who leave comments will leave respectful, helpful messages. If you receive a comment that makes you feel uncomfortable or is not respectful, tell your teacher right away. Do not respond to the comment.
6. Students using blogs take good care of the computers by not downloading or installing any software without permission, and not clicking on ads or competitions.
7. Students who do not abide by these terms and conditions may lose their opportunity to take part in this project.

I have read and understood these blogging terms and conditions. I agree to uphold them.

student's signature: _____ *date:* _____

parent's signature _____ *date:* _____

Adapted from the Blog Policy at <http://budtheteacher.jot.com/WikiHome/Blog%20Policy>



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