

Voicethread Tips for Teachers

There is no doubt that Voicethread has the potential to be one of the most motivating tools that you use to facilitate instruction in your classroom this year. Middle grades students are intrinsically drawn to conversations with peers, so structuring opportunities for collaborative dialogue around classroom content is a logical decision!

To make your Voicethread experiences the most meaningful, consider:

1. ***Allowing students to draft comments in groups of 2 or 3:*** After you introduce new Voicethread presentations, it is always helpful to give students time to work in small groups to brainstorm and draft initial comments together. This ensures that the first comments added to your thread will be well thought out and aligned with the directions you've given for the assignment. What's more, this ensures that all students will have a comment in a presentation to follow, increasing their interest!
2. ***Joining in the conversation:*** In the early stages of your work with Voicethread, it is important to join in the conversations with your students! By doing so, you'll be able to model the kinds of comments that are productive and valuable. Be sure to use proper grammar and spelling—and to elaborate on your thinking. Also, be sure to find ways to respond to other students and to ask lots of questions.

Those are the skills that make for high quality Voicethread presentations—but they won't come naturally to most middle schoolers. Seeing examples from you will help students to learn more about quality additions to digital conversations.

3. ***Highlighting comments in class:*** After starting a Voicethread presentation, it is important to revisit the conversation occasionally in class in order to keep the project in the forefront of your students' minds. Browsing and selecting "Spotlight Comments" a few times a week will provide students with examples of high quality work to model their own posts after.

Be sure to spotlight different kinds of comments to your students—especially those where students are reading and responding to one another. Middle graders can often be egocentric—which translates into Voicethread presentations where everyone is talking but nobody is listening or responding! By "Spotlighting" students that are interacting with one another, you'll begin to see more cross-conversations in your digital presentations.

Also, be sure to spotlight comments that don't add to conversations—while this obviously has to be done gently so as not to hurt the feelings of your students, it is important for classes to begin to recognize that "throw-away" comments are not valued in digital conversations.