

# What's in Your Pocket?

## A Decade of Interactive Online Tools for School Libraries

Annette Lamb

Remember Kerpoof, Dipity, SpringNote, and Stixy? They're just four of the many tools that have come and gone in the last decade. From web-based tools to collaborative project spaces, it's been more than 10 years since this column began sharing the possibilities of online tools for school libraries. First known as Web 2.0 technologies, these dynamic online resources opened up a new world of opportunities for teaching and learning in the 21st century. Let's explore a dozen web-based tools that have stood the test of time and remain in the pockets of technology-savvy school librarians. Each of these online tools has been around for at least 10 years and continues to provide basic service for free.

### TOOL 1: COLLABORATIVE PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS

From word processing and spreadsheets to presentation tools, **Google** continues to provide high-quality collaborative applications. Although the original **Google Docs** <<https://docs.google.com>> tools are still available, Google Drive <<https://drive.google.com>> now provides a seamless way to access a wide range of tools including maps, forms, and drawings.

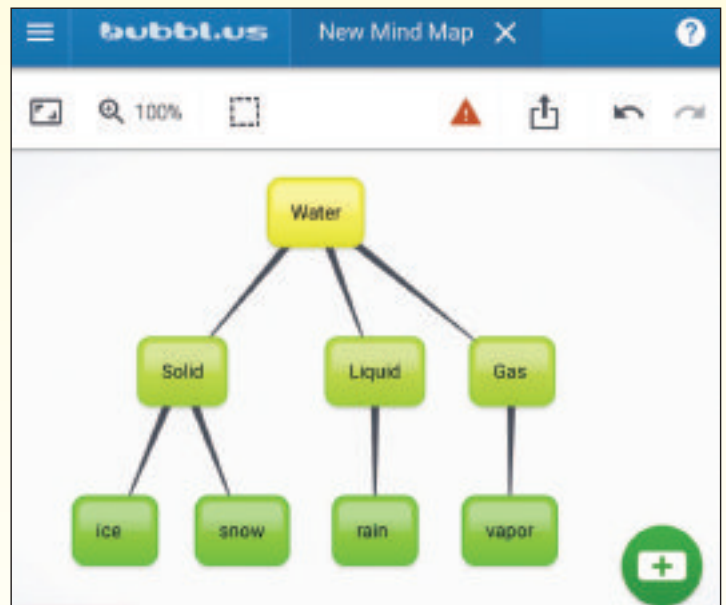
The ability to access collaborative tools is one of the hallmarks of the Web 2.0 movement. Whether working on a shared science lab spreadsheet, commenting on a short story written by a peer, or creating an historical newspaper as a team, cloud-based tools have made virtual collaboration a reality.



Collaborative Google word processing project

### TOOL 2: CONCEPT MAP MAKERS

**Bubbl** <<https://bubbl.us/>> is an easy-to-use concept-mapping tool. While students can create an account and save three mind maps, anyone can also create a mind map without an account. Many teachers use this simple tool to help students share the “big ideas” they learn in science activities. For instance, after watching the short video **Changing Water** <<https://youtu.be/tuE1LePDZ4Y>>, students can use the concept-mapping tool to share what they've learned in a visual way.



Bubbl concept-mapping tool

### TOOL 3: SURVEY BUILDERS

Whether polling students about their favorite book or surveying teens about their recycling practices, **SurveyMonkey** <<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>> continues to be the most popular tool for creating simple surveys. The free ver-

sion allows the creation of unlimited questionnaires of up to 10 questions, meeting the needs of most classroom activities.



SurveyMonkey recycling survey

### TOOL 4: COMIC CREATORS

Although many comic creators have come and gone, a few options remain free for the basic service. **Pixton** <<https://www.pixton.com/>> allows users to easily create high-quality comic strips with very little instruction. Because it's so popular, many schools have invested in a subscription that provides templates and lesson ideas across the curriculum.

Connect comic creation tools with informational reading experiences. For example, direct students to select a safety article to read from the dozens available at **KidsHealth** <<http://kidshealth.org/en/kids/watch/#cathouse>>. Then ask them to use Pixton to create a comic sharing what they learned about their safety topic.



Pixton safety comic

### TOOL 5: AVATAR MAKERS

From the basic photo profiles found in social networks to the animated residents of **Second Life** <<http://secondlife.com/>>, avatars were a new idea a decade ago.

**Voki** <<http://www.voki.com/>> introduced educators to an engaging way to incorporate audio into the classroom through the creation of easily customizable speaking avatars. Like many of the other services, the options and levels of sophistication have evolved over the years. Although the basic, free version remains available with limited characters, there are also a variety of subscription-based options to meet the diverse needs of today's users. In addition, a mobile app is also available.

Use Voki as a fun way for students to share short stories or biographies they've written, science reports, or information about themselves.



Voki project

### TOOL 6: PHOTO-SHARING COMMUNITIES

**Flickr** <<https://www.flickr.com/>> is a free photo-sharing community that allows users to access millions of photos from around the world. Because the website publishes a creative commons copyright notice with each entry, it's easy to see which visuals can be reused

or shared. Users can easily upload photos, create albums, and mark favorites. This shared work environment is particularly useful for collaborative projects. Consider creating Flickr albums containing useful photos for science projects or units focused on primary-source documents. For instance, young people enjoy seeking images of what life was like for children during specific time periods.



Public-domain historical photos on Flickr

### TOOL 7: VIDEO-SHARING COMMUNITIES

While many education-specific video sharing sites are still in use, **YouTube** <<https://www.youtube.com/>> has continued to be the most popular choice for educators. Although YouTube has provided tools to make school access easier, streaming media continues to be an issue in most schools. Over the past decade, YouTube has added basic video-editing features and other useful video development tools.

From book trailers and science skits to database tutorials, create a school library YouTube channel to share the



YouTube #Education channel



## JUNIOR FICTION

### IT'S A DOG'S LIFE

Buckingham, Will. **Lucy and the Rocket Dog**. Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2017. 160p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780399554322. Grades 4-6. Lucy loves science, especially astronomy, and explaining the theory of relativity and other scientific information to anyone who'll listen. When she builds a spaceship in her backyard and names it Prototype I, she doesn't really think it will work. After all, she's just a kid. However, she'll keep trying, like real scientists do. Meanwhile, Lucy's not-too-bright dog, Laika, only knows one thing: He loves Lucy. So, when he's left outside one evening, he goes searching for Lucy and ends up inside the ship, which accidentally launches.

In alternating chapters, Laika's and Lucy's lives continue, with Laika having an adventurous week, while Lucy grows up, becomes a famous scientist, wins the Nobel Prize, and retires, never forgetting Laika. Will time bring them together again?

Includes bits and pieces of scientific truth among the fantasy, plus an author note about the original Laika, who was shot into space in 1957, in Sputnik II.

Cameron, W. Bruce. **Molly's Story** [A Dog's Purpose Novel]. Starscape, 2017. 208p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780765394934. Grades 4-7. Told from the dog's POV, Molly is content with her mother and siblings until CJ's friend, Trent, brings CJ with him as he adopts a puppy. CJ and Molly bond immediately, and CJ's determined to take her home. She'll hide her in the basement and teach her to be quiet, so her mom, Gloria, won't find her!

But Molly knows her job is to protect CJ, so she doesn't cooperate, although she does like the service dog program CJ takes her to, where she learns to sniff out people with cancer. When Gloria finally discovers Molly, she takes her to the dog shelter as a stray, but Molly's microchip reunites her with CJ. After Molly protects CJ from several dangerous situations and sniffs out cancer in one of her friends, Gloria relents. Molly can stay. Includes an author's note about real cancer-sniffing dogs.

Ibbotson, Eva. **One Dog and His Boy**. Scholastic Press, 2012. 288p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780545351966. Grades 3-7. Ten-year-old Hal's wealthy parents neglect him, but buy him anything a boy could want, except for the one thing he wants most: a dog. His mom thinks dogs are too messy. His dad's never home. So, Hal's delighted when his dad takes him to Easy Pets Dog Agency, the day after his birthday, to pick out a dog. No one tells Hal that Easy Pets only rent their dogs, which means that despite their instant bonding, Fleck will only be Hal's for the weekend.

Unable to get his parents to understand he and Fleck belong together, he runs away with him, along with Pippa, a girl from the agency. Pippa brings the other dogs she's been caring for, and they head to Hal's grandparents' house, where he knows Fleck can stay. Parental angst and danger along the way don't matter. All he cares about is will he be allowed to keep Fleck?

Quinn, Spencer. **Arf** [A Bowser and Birdie Novel]. Scholastic Press, 2016. 304p. \$16.99. ISBN: 9780545064334. Grades 3-7. Bowser, a big handsome dog with sharp teeth, adores his eleven-year-old owner, Birdie Gaux, but he's not the brightest dog in the neighborhood. From his POV, life is full of confusing questions and strange situations, but as long as he's with Birdie, he's fine. When Birdie's widowed mom gets laid off, the Gaux house is broken into, strangers start coming around, and someone drowns in the campground pond and is discovered by Birdie herself. It's all Bowser can do to keep things straight in his mind.

What does all this have to do with the Guax family? And how does Birdie's dad, a policeman killed years ago in the line of duty, fit into all of it? Most confusing of all, why are Junior Tebbits and Rory Cannon both bringing Birdie flowers and glaring at each other? One thing's for sure, though – nobody better mess with Birdie. Bowser's on the job!

work of your students. Also, use your channel to build and share playlists related to specific units in the curriculum. **YouTube #Education** <<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3y-A8nDwraeOfnYfBWun83g>> is a good place to begin looking for quality educational content.

### TOOL 8: BLOGGING TOOLS

**Blogger** <<https://www.blogger.com>> remains a popular and easy-to-use tool for creating and sharing content with students, parents, and the world.

While some blogs are developed and maintained by school librarians, others focus on student-generated content. Blogs are particularly useful in situations where educators don't control the content of the school's website, because they provide a quick and easy way to share content outside the formal school pages.

To see what fellow librarians are doing, conduct a Google Search of bloggers, such as “site:blogger.com school library.” The **Pioneer Middle School Library** <<http://pioneermiddlelibrary.blogspot.com/>> website is an example of a blog moderated by a school librarian. It contains news and information about what's happening in the school.



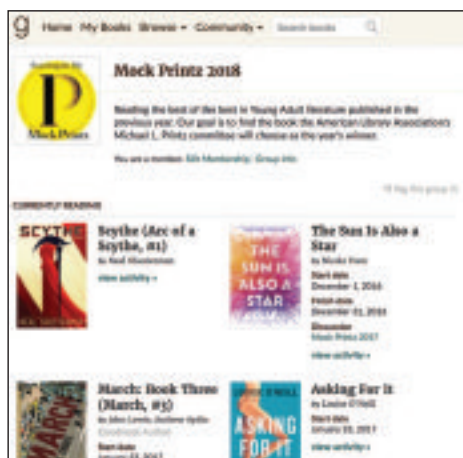
Pioneer Middle School Library happenings

### TOOL 9: SOCIAL CATALOGING

Social-cataloging websites like **LibraryThing** <<https://www.librarything.com>>



com> showed book lovers the value of social networking. **GoodReads** <<https://www.goodreads.com/>> went one step farther by making its interface appealing to users of all ages. Today, there are teens who have recorded every book they've ever read and regularly participate in online discussions such as the Mock Printz award group.



GoodReads discussion

## TOOL 10: WORD CLOUD TOOLS

Web 3.0 introduced the idea of tagging as a way to easily identify documents. Soon users began to think about word frequency and key words in new ways. Word clouds emerged as a way to visualize text data. **Wordle** <<http://www.wordle.net/>> continues to be a popular tool for creating these visual representations of text.

Connect Wordle with the text from primary sources for an insightful visual.



Word cloud of the Fugitive Slave Act

For instance, pasting the text from the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act provides a fascinating starting point for class discussions.

## TOOL 11: WEB DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

By removing the need for HTML skills, dynamic tools for creating web pages made web development quick and easy. While many found **Google Sites** <<https://sites.google.com/>> and wiki tools to be cumbersome, websites like **Weebly** <<https://www.weebly.com/>> provided a complete, template-driven platform for creating professional-looking websites. For lots of examples, search for “weebly.com school library.”



Brookline High School Weebly site

## TOOL 12: UTILITY TOOLS

The Web 2.0 technology provided the opportunity for developers to create many useful tools. For instance, URL shorteners may seem like small applications in the larger scope of things; however, they've made the work of educators much easier. Tools like **TinyURL** <<http://tinyurl.com/>> and **Bitly** <<https://bitly.com/>> help change long URLs into short, manageable links that can easily be shared. This is particularly useful when sharing links to subscription databases.



Bitly

Creating bibliographic citations has never been fun. However, it was made much easier with tools like **BibMe** <<http://www.bibme.org/>>. Users simply select a style, enter the information, and download the citation.

## HARD CHOICES FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Because many companies were trying out the feasibility of new applications, most of the first Web 2.0 applications were free. Over time, some companies shifted to subscription or ad-based services. As a result, school librarians must make decisions about what services are worth the cost.

**Advertising.** Some tools have lasted for a decade because of their use of advertising. For instance, **MakeBeliefComix** <<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/>> continues to be a popular tool despite its banner advertisements.

**Trials.** Some websites have eliminated their free version in favor of a trial. **Glogster** <<http://edu.glogster.com/>>, **GoAnimate** <<https://goanimate.com/>>, and **Animoto** <<https://animoto.com/>> are examples. While the trial approach can work for one-shot projects, students face the barrier of limited access and loss of work over time. Schools should consider the feasibility of shifting to the subscription service.

**Subscriptions.** Many libraries rely on paid services to provide quality tools and resources to students. Springshare's **LibGuides** <<https://>

[www.springshare.com/libguides/](http://www.springshare.com/libguides/) is an example. Rather than developing and housing their own websites from scratch, this subscription-based content curation tool makes developing and sharing pathfinders easy for school librarians.

Many web-based services that were originally free for educators, such as **VoiceThread** <<https://voicethread.com/>>, have become subscription based over the years. Although **Wikispaces** <<https://www.wikispaces.com/>> continues to provide one wiki for teacher use, a subscription is now needed for most classroom activities.

## THE EVOLUTION OF WEB 2.0

A lot has changed since the first Web 2.0 tools emerged a decade ago. New, streamlined tools are visually appealing and easier to use than their predecessors. For instance, the popular visual storytelling tool **Prezi** <<https://prezi.com/>> was introduced in 2009.

Who could have foreseen tools like **Pinterest** <<https://www.pinterest.com/>>, **Smore** <<https://www.smore.com/>>, or **PowToon** <<https://www.powtoon.com/>>? Or the many mash-ups of technology, like **HistoryPin** <<https://www.historypin.org/>>, that combine social networking, digital collections, and maps?

A few of these are making a lasting impression. For instance, infographics have become part of everyday visual communication, and **Piktochart** <<https://piktochart.com/>> has emerged as the tool of choice for many educators. However, despite the many new tools, it's always useful to have a pocket full of tried and true tools ready for students.

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**Reid Goldsborough:** Author of *Straight Talk about the Information Superhighway*. [reidgold@netaxs.com](mailto:reidgold@netaxs.com), <http://members.home.net/reidgold>.

**Sara Catherine Howard:** Adjunct instructor, Department of Library Science, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX. [lis\\_sch@shsu.edu](mailto:lis_sch@shsu.edu).

**Fran Kompar:** K-12 Coordinator for Library Media Services for Greenwich (CT) Public Schools. She serves as an Educational Consultant for the Fairfield County Regional Educational Service Center (R.E.S.C.), Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S.). She is the recipient of the Connecticut Association for School Librarians (CASL) Administrator of the Year Award (2007) and the 2015 Hilda and John Jay Award from CASL for significant contribution to the Library Media profession. Twitter: [@fkompar](https://twitter.com/fkompar); e-mail: [fkompar@gmail.com](mailto:fkompar@gmail.com).

**Debra Kachel:** Nationally recognized leader of library advocacy; instructor at Antioch University, Seattle; recipient of the 2014 AASL Distinguished Service Award. [dkachel@antioch.edu](mailto:dkachel@antioch.edu).

**Kristin Fontichiaro:** Teaches at the University of Michigan School of Information. She is the principal investigator of the Making in Michigan Libraries project (made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services RE-05-15-0021-15), serves as series editor for Cherry Lake Publishing's award-winning *Makers as Innovators* series, and is a judge for the U.S. Department of Education's 2016 CTE Makeover Challenge. [font@umich.edu](mailto:font@umich.edu).

**Annette Lamb:** Senior Lecturer, Department of Library and Information Science, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN.

**David Loertscher:** Former editor of *Teacher Librarian*; professor, School of Library and Information Science, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA; president of Hi Willow Research and Publishing; and past president of the American Association of School Librarians. [reader.david@gmail.com](mailto:reader.david@gmail.com).

**Kathleen Odean:** Librarian, speaker, and author of *Great Books for Girls* (revised 2002) and other guides. Rhode Island. [kathleenodean@hotmail.com](mailto:kathleenodean@hotmail.com), [www.kathleenodean.com](http://www.kathleenodean.com).

**Betty Winslow:** Media Center Director at Bowling Green Christian Academy, Bowling Green, OH.

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