

A PAPERLESS CLASSROOM REALIZED

A major goal of learning, be it 21st century or traditional, has always been to have students take responsibility for their own learning. A 21st century tool helps.

Think about how much time the following procedures can take up in a classroom:

1. Collecting student work on its due date
2. Passing back graded work
3. Photocopying, collating, and circulating handouts for the day's lesson
4. Balancing roll books, grade books, and communication logs
5. Writing the instructions for homework on the board
6. Making extra copies of materials for students who have lost theirs
7. Updating students about their academic progress in your class.

Now, imagine an education tool that eradicates the need for all of those teacher duties listed above. When a cohort from our school came back from the CUE conference almost three years ago, there was one major innovation they wanted to report on: the Haiku Learning Management System. (www.haikulearning.com/)

It sounded too good to be true. This online learning space allowed teachers to post any materials necessary for their class so students could access what they needed for their course from any computer with an Internet connection. Teachers could grade work, and return it with comments without leaving a physical paper trail, and students could revise and resubmit their work immediately. This online learning space would, in theory, allow us to extend our course content beyond the walls of our classroom. After discussion, it seemed clear that we needed to try this program in our middle school in order to see if it was as effective as it promised to be.

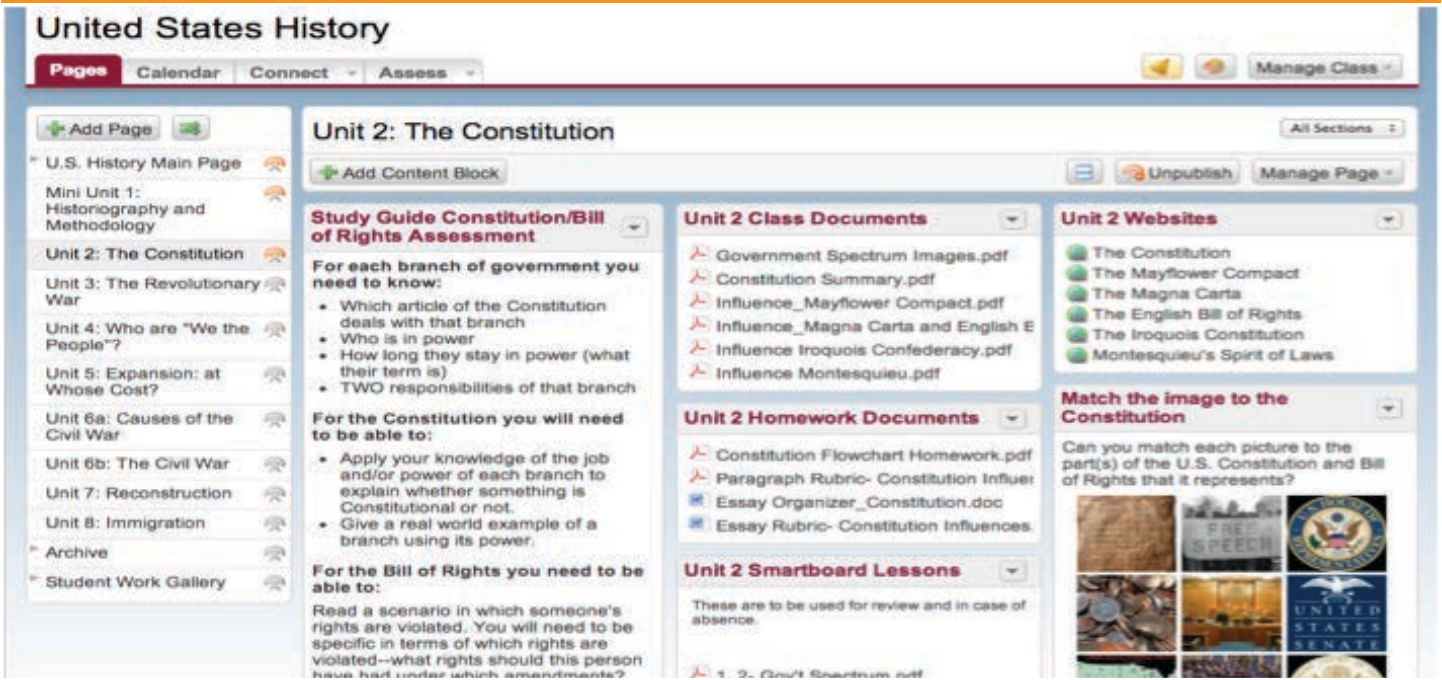
Overall, the transition was smooth. While some teachers found the switch from a paper to an online format challenging, others embraced it. Many were skeptical of using this kind of platform, and understandably so. After having had success with one mode of learning, a teacher may be reticent to try another. However, teachers can determine the degree to which this learning management system is blended into a classroom. A few paperless features can be chosen while sticking to the tried and true methods that have been proven effective, making sure that technology is not being employed for technology's sake. These are systems designed to improve teaching, not complicate it.



Jody (left) and Shara (right) in collaboration.

Another benefit of this learning management system is that it allows for increased collaboration between teachers. Teachers teaching different sections of the same class can share a page—with materials, assessments, assignments, and more—that both teachers can access at once. Teachers can work together to post announcements regarding the class, lesson content, and readings on a shared Haiku page. While each section of students will only be able to see the information that applies to them, a shared online learning space can help ensure continuity in content across sections taught by multiple teachers.

While Haiku is a beneficial tool to convey information to students, its real value is in application, and this became clear over time. Because students turn in assignments online from home as soon as the work is finished, teachers can check Haiku in the morning before class and assess whether or not their students understood the previous day's learning goal before they teach the next day's lesson. Additionally, students can re-submit corrections on a given assignment, with the teacher's blessing, until they are able to master the skill, writing idea, or concept. Thanks to Haiku's integrated gradebook, students can hold themselves accountable for missing or late work. Instead of needing to wait for their teacher to find time to send them a list of missing assignments, they can log into the learning management system, and check the gradebook themselves. One student said that she truly appreci-



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ated always knowing what her grade was in the class, articulating that it allowed her to pace herself, and to structure her time. She felt empowered by having this amount of access and autonomy.

When students are absent, it can be difficult to be able to convey missed content to students, especially when lessons are collaborative or experiential. To aid this, we started posting the Powerpoint files for our lessons online for students to view when absent. This does not replace a meeting with the teacher, but it allows students to at least preview missing content in order to catch up as quickly as possible. Instead of the teacher being solely the owner of the classroom's information, and the students' grades, the students have a greater responsibility to be aware and informed about their own progress in the class. Students can start taking responsibility for their own learning due to all of these ways made possible by this online repository.

As we know, just because students have been dubbed "digital natives" does not mean that they inherently know important etiquette rules for digital communication. One feature of Haiku is a graded discussion forum. This can be a platform not only for sharing ideas and views, but for modeling and teaching online etiquette. This year, following an in-class discussion about how to appropriately agree and disagree with others in a written forum, we assigned students to post and comment in a live-time online discussion forum about the presidential debates. This was an example of Haiku being utilized to its fullest potential; our U.S. history students were discussing course content outside of our classroom in an authentic manner while practicing the necessary skill of effective and civil written communication.

While the learning management system that our school uses is Haiku, this is by no means the only online learning man-

agement system available for schools' use. It is simply the one that our school chose. Also, no technological system is perfect, and there are glitches that come up every once-in-awhile. There are times that students report that the server has been non-responsive, or that they had challenges submitting their work. In the two years we have used this system, we have found these challenges to be only minor setbacks.

The changing world of information—and the way we access that information— is altering the face of education; that is certain. Many of us (and our students) carry smartphones in our pockets that grant us instantaneous access to whatever information we could want. Why not allow our students access to their education in the same manner? Haiku, and other learning management systems like it, do not change the content of the information we deliver to students, but instead take much of the "busy work" out of teaching, preventing us from getting lost under piles of papers, and allowing us to focus on the things about our jobs that really matter. It's tools like these that will allow education to remain current in this ever-shifting field.

Editor's Note: "Shara and Jody wrote a related article that appeared in Education Week Teacher, titled: "A New Era of Classroom Transparency."

JODY PASSANISI AND SHARA PETERS

6-8th grade teachers

Heschel Day School

jody.passanisi@heschel.com

shara.peters@heschel.com