
« **If you're new to the Mustard Seed Books site ...**

Welcome to Mustard Seed Books

BY ADMIN, ON MAY 26TH, 2010

The Problem:

As a specialist working with struggling readers, I often use a system of leveled texts (books of gradually increasing difficulty) to fine tune instruction to an individual child's reading level and interests. However, most of the books of this type are expensive, not related to urban settings and often contain language and content that cause unnecessary problems for struggling early readers.

The Solution:

Using publicly available pictures from the web, standard software and a basic printer, I created a template for easily designing, editing, printing and assembling, surprisingly nice looking books. Each one ends up costing about 75 cents to print and uses materials that can be obtained at any office supply store.

Expanding the Project:

This began as my own personal quest for books for two specific students, one who would only read books about "cool looking motor stuff" and a second Yemeni girl who simply didn't recognize most of the pictures in many of my books. After creating the system and seeing how well the first dozen books turned out, I realized how few of the kindergarteners in the school I worked at had books where they lived. This led to a trial run of summer book distribution, ideas for this website and the broader vision of Mustard Seed Books.

The vision of Mustard Seed Books

- * Create high quality, easily modifiable, culturally accessible, affordable texts.
- * Enable any K-2 classroom, tutoring center, pre-school/child care center or family to have access to a broad library of appropriate and interesting books.
- * Create a powerful application for existing classroom/site technology that is easy to use and emphasizes best practices in literacy instruction.
- * Foster a model of public domain book creation, refinement and distribution.

The Wikipedia Model Underlying Mustard Seed Books

Wikipedia is an amazing creation that allows for a world-wide community of resources to work together through the web to build a knowledge base that gets refined, improved and extended over time. People volunteer their time and expertise, much like what happens with open source software, the expert's exchange computer information forum and other web based resources. The Wikipedia/Open Source strategy is a model for this site and project in a number of ways.

1. First, the goal here is to create a similar venue where an extended community can pool resources to design and improve books for kids, systems for producing these books and strategies for using them. Authors,

photographers, illustrators, editors, educational researchers, teachers, printers, high school english classes — there are abundant resources for creating and fine tuning an impressive library of books to be made available on-line.

2. Second, Wikipedia and open source software are free — the goal is dissemination. This is especially important for this project given the financial state of most public schools, child development centers and the high correlation of families with struggling readers and limited income. Wikipedia and open source aren't about ownership of the final product, they are about creating high quality products and sharing them freely.

3. Last, Wikipedia brain surgery wouldn't make sense, Wikipedia car repair wouldn't work, but using this model to create and refine a library of books for children is exactly the type of project that fits this model. There is an extensive collection of little books available for starting ideas, web based public domain photos are widely available and the current state of digital photography turns just about anyone into a candidate for photographer.

The immediate goals are:

1. Continue distribution, field testing and refinement of existing books through the internet

- * Make books available for download in a variety of formats (PDF's & Publisher)
- * Offer strategies and models of book production: in-house, copy center and large quantity printing
- * Gather data on book use to refine the educational quality and production quality of books
- * Create an internet forum to discuss theory and data on book design/refinement

2. Develop working partners

- * Teachers/parents/educational programs where books are used for feedback/suggestions
- * Professional educators for design theory and usage strategies
- * Education schools, masters programs, to design/test/refine books as instructional activity
- * Photographers/artists/authors for material for new books
- * Technical help for book production, distribution strategies, web-site design/upkeep
- * Potential link to printing company for professional production at reduced price

3. Expand current collection of books

- * Extend adaptations of existing quality little book titles (i.e. copy good books 😊)
- * Generate story series of books to support contextual reading strategies
- * Generate science titles to support science learning and vocabulary development
- * Translation of existing titles into variety of languages
- * Model and foster the strategy of public domain book creation, testing and refinement

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