Kids Creating Stuff Online

INSPIRING THE INNOVATORS OF THE FUTURE
Kids Creating Stuff Online:

Inspiring the Innovators of the Future

By Kevin D. Hendricks
Foreword

The Internet is now so deeply woven into our daily lives—whether communicating with someone around the world via Skype, sharing our thoughts via Twitter or posting photos on Instagram of our travels all from our pocket computers aka smartphones—that we can’t imagine a day without it.

The web is indeed everywhere and it touches everything. The web is our world now. It is the most amazing communication channel ever created. And it has no equal.

Because of its impact and influence in our lives, some have even said “code is the new literacy.” Thus, we believe children should not just be digital natives ... they should be digital innovators. They are the next wave of digital pioneers who will dream and build the next evolution of the web and use it to change our world for the better. Our charge and stewardship is to inspire and equip them by passing down what we know to aid them in doing so.
We are delighted to commission this book, which was researched and written by Kevin D. Hendricks, a prolific writer, but also a father himself, to help do just that. Kevin took the task we gave him of offering a resource guide to parents, educators and others who want to teach and equip children and ran with it. More than just running with it, Kevin did it himself. Over the summer he wrote a book with his daughter, she illustrated it and they published it using Kickstarter and CreateSpace. *The Stephanies* is now available on Amazon.

Our goal was simple ... give broad resources to those seeking to help children create and express themselves online—whether that be as a blogger sharing stories, ideas and thoughts, or posting photographs and artwork, or as a web programmer helping build and expand the web as we know it.

There is so much opportunity, so much future to be built. And we know our children are the future.

We hope this book gets you started helping more and more children build a brighter, better digital future for us all.

—Cory Miller  
*Founder*  
iThemes  
http://iThemes.com
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Introduction: Kids Are Online, So Let’s Make the Most of It!

Let’s face it: everything is online, even our kids. The Internet is no longer something people figure out when they get old enough. While most people over 25 are immigrants in the online world, kids are natural-born citizens. They’re digital natives.

Many kids are growing up with laptops and tablets. They have cell phones that can do more than most computers of the past. For them, the Internet has always existed. Google has always been a verb.
Kids are definitely online. Consider these stats from the Pew Internet & American Life Project:

- 95% of adolescents ages 12-17 go online.
- 80% of adolescents ages 12-17 use social networking sites.
- 93% of online teens have a Facebook account.

**Opportunity or Danger?**

Many people wring their hands and bemoan the problems the web creates for kids. So many students are getting in trouble for what they post to Facebook and there's buzz about potential employers turning applicants down based solely on results from a Google search.

We all know the Internet clearly presents an opportunity for danger. But it also presents an opportunity for good. You can post things to Facebook that can get you suspended, or you can post things to Facebook that make someone’s day. If you can have Google results for your name that would get you fired, can’t you have Google results that would get you hired?

Kids need to take the opportunity to embrace the online world and create a positive digital footprint. Instead of freaking out—“Won’t someone think of the children?!”—we should see this as an opportunity. Kids and teens are interested in the Internet and the online world, so let’s make the most of it.
Potential to Learn

The web offers incredible potential for kids to learn as they explore and create online. Kids can learn practical skills that will help them land jobs (yes, even sooner than you might think!) and broader life lessons that will help them later in life. Plus, they can have fun—it’s a lot more interesting to be creating content online than simply consuming it.

From cardboard to code, the possibilities for online creation are limitless. Kids are learning code and building websites, programming games and coding apps. Other kids are getting creative with content, including animation, blogs, books, comics, designs, music, movies and more. Then a whole other set of kids is getting entrepreneurial and starting online businesses, sometimes incorporating coding and creativity, and sometimes just showing the tycoon spirit and reselling on eBay. Like the ever-expanding Internet, the options are as open as a child’s imagination.

A stat from 2009 reveals that 38% of teens are already creating and sharing content online (this includes artwork, photos, stories or videos), while only 30% of adults are doing the same thing. Since so many are already doing it, it’s up to parents, guardians and teachers to make sure kids are making the most of the opportunity.

And let’s face it: Kids can do some awesome stuff. Did you ever see Caine’s Arcade? A 9-year-old boy gets worldwide attention with his cardboard arcade. Awesome.
Cameron Cohen created the iPhone app iSketch as an 11-year-old while a hip-to-toe leg brace kept him away from sports for six months. While he already had a basic understanding of computer programming, he taught himself how to program for the iOS while recovering from surgery on a benign tumor on his leg. He eventually released his iSketch app and even donated $20,000 of the profits to the Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center where he received treatment, asking them to buy more interactive electronic devices for patients.

“I had great care in the hospital,” Cameron told ULCA Today. “But other kids in the hospital need things to help make them feel better, too.”

Cameron has a pretty incredible outlook, something that makes his parents very proud.

“This all started out as a hobby for him, a diversion,” said Cameron’s father, Jeffrey Cohen. “He was having a terrible year, but with this he was enjoying it. If we ever had any doubts about him before, we learned that we should never doubt him. When he sets his mind on something, he’ll do it.”
Let’s Get to Work

It’s inspiring and true. If kids set their mind on something, they can accomplish it. That’s just one of the many stories of kids creating stuff that we’ll share in this ebook. It’s time to create an incredible mashup of imaginative kids and the limitless Internet.

In this ebook, we’ll explore how you can encourage your kids to create online content. We’ll talk about why it’s important, how to do it and how to be smart and safe about it. We’ll also look at how educators can get involved and speak to a few folks who are in the trenches doing it. Oh, and don’t forget the resources. We’ve got plenty of sites and apps to help kids get started.

Ready? Let’s go.
What is Online Content Creation?

Before we dive into the why or the how of online content creation, we should define exactly what we’re talking about. With so-called “web 2.0”, the Internet became more interactive and user-friendly. Comments, likes and shares became the vernacular. It became possible to participate with media, not simply partake.

Sure, it’s still possible to sit back and be a passive consumer online. You can sit there and read articles, watch videos and look at pictures. But that kind of total passive approach is becoming rare, thanks to the web. With a simple click of the ‘like’ button, people are interacting with their content.

To understand this better, imagine a continuum between completely passive media consumption and totally active media creation. On one end is the guy sitting on the couch watching TV. On the other end is the people creating that television show—directors, writers, actors and more. With TV there’s not a lot in between—you either watch TV or you make it. But the online world has totally blurred the lines between creators and consumers of content. The web has offered a new platform for the distribution of content, so you don’t need a movie studio, producers, agents or publishers to make it happen.
The web has made it easy to cross the line between passive consumers and active creators. The continuum between media consumption and creation has gotten smaller because online users can comment, interact with their entertainment, even start contributing with their own posts, pictures and videos. It’s made it possible for people to become their own directors, writers, actors and more.

And we’re talking about all kinds of creative activity online: crafting code, shooting video, drafting blogs, snapping pictures, creating designs, writing stories, developing games, implementing ideas, tweeting tweets, drawing comics, reporting events, curating links, building worlds, recording interviews... creating stuff.

For example, take a look at these stats. The rate of content creation online is incredible. Every minute on the Internet:

- 48 hours of new video are uploaded to YouTube.
- 684,478 pieces of content are shared by Facebook users.
- 100,000 tweets are sent by Twitter users.
- 27,778 new blog posts go live on Tumblr.
- 571 new websites are created

If you think about it, this is a goldmine of opportunity. This is the sweet spot of content creation that can pay so many dividends because it’s an activity that will form connections in the brain and forge skills in real life.

It’s an interactive world, seeped in the wonder and joy of our own creations. And guess what? Your kids are already there.
Customizing MySpace layouts for friends turned into a million dollar business for Ashley Qualls. She started doing web design when she was just 9.

In 2004, at the age of 14, she created Whateverlife.com to showcase her design work. Ashley figured out how to customize MySpace pages and friends kept asking her to customize theirs. She started posting the layouts on her site and in 2005 traffic exploded.

“My mom still doesn’t understand how I do it,” Ashley told Fast Company. She turned the traffic into dollars when her hosting crashed and they suggested she try Google AdSense. Her first paycheck was over $2,500. She even turned down a $1.5 million offer to buy Whateverlife.com.
Why Get Kids Creating Online?

That's a good question. 'Why not' seems like a perfectly good answer. But OK, we'll play along.

For so many kids the web is just a place to hang out, but it can become more than that. It can become a tool for them to explore their world, learn, share and grow. This is an opportunity for kids to stretch, to do something amazing, to change their world.

Who would have thought ridiculous YouTube videos could have so many benefits?

Innovators of the Future

“We want to prepare kids to be the innovators of the future,” says video game designer Alex Peake in the *Mercury News*. “We don’t want to just prepare them to get a job.”

Those are the kind of benefits we’re talking about. These aren’t just on-the-job skills (though kids will pick those up as well), but major life skills that will enable kids to do incredible stuff. What kind of incredible stuff? We’ve got examples all along the way. Spoiler alert: One involves Hot Cheetos.
There are practical skills kids can develop by working online that will serve them down the road, as well as big picture benefits that will help them throughout life. The skills and benefits also vary greatly depending on what kids are actually creating. You pick up different skills when you code an iPhone app or write a novel. But there are some general skills that kids will develop when doing any kind of online content creation, from web design to movies to comics.

**Let's look at a few of the benefits of creating online:**

**Computer Skills**

If you haven’t noticed, the world is becoming more and more computer-focused. Everything is online, from paying bills to shopping to renewing your library books. To be a successful person in today’s world, you need to know how to deal with technology—not just computers, but smartphones, tablets and full-blown computers. Today’s kids need to get comfortable with new technology.

Now let’s be real—the operating systems and hardware kids learn today will be ancient history in a decade when kids are in the job market. Remember the systems you used growing up? Compuserve, BBS, DOS, Gopher? Knowing how to connect to a local BBS isn’t exactly a skill you need today (but isn't the noise of a connecting modem still music to your ears?).

By getting online and playing with current technology, kids will learn how to use technology. That’s right: they’re learning how to learn.
They’ll get comfortable with trying new things. They’ll lose that fear that keeps people from straying from their usual email checking routine. Instead of timid clickers afraid to try something new, they’ll become adventurous digital explorers willing to forge their own way.

Being natives to digital technology is a big plus, but actually creating things with technology will develop actual skills. It’s more than mere comfort with technology, it’s a willingness to explore, to create, to experiment. It’s the patience to figure it out. It’s the commitment to see a project through.

This is what happens when technology becomes a tool. Instead of being awed by the latest gizmo, we put that gizmo to work. As technology gets crazier and crazier, these are vital skills to have.

**Logic**

Nobody teaches logic anymore. Yet it’s a foundational skill in math, philosophy and computer science. It’s basic reasoning and enables consistent thought and action. If you want to see where a lack of logic is getting us, turn on the news; catch up on politics; watch a summer blockbuster. Yikes.

But web development, coding and gaming requires logic. As kids build websites or code apps or games, they learn the basic rules of logic. They solve problems and confirm solutions. Hey, it works! They begin to understand how consistent rules make everything work and give it shape. That’s logic!
Star Kid: Keith Peiris

It’s never too early to start. For Keith Peiris, his computer education began at 3 years old when his dad gave him a computer and taught him the basics. In 1999, at the age of 11, he founded the web development company Cyberteks Design.

Keith became the world’s youngest CEO and has landed big name clients such as the Atlanta Thrashers, McDonalds Restaurants of Canada and more. Today he works for Facebook on the team that rolled out the Facebook app for Android.
Plus, understanding logic opens up a world of Spock jokes. Star Trek references aside, logic will help kids in multiple subjects. That grasp of reasoning will come in handy when they’re writing term papers, solving complex equations and trying to understand historical movements. Logic undergirds all of it. So it’s a nice skill to have, whether you’re a Vulcan or not.

Communication Skills

Regardless of what type of project kids are creating, they’ll learn how to communicate. Kids will interact with people at some point and they’ll need to explain their project, whether to an eager audience or a team of co-workers. Nothing improves communication like practice.

Lots of people have pretty poor communication skills, unable to explain a problem or talk about why something isn’t working. They just muddle through. But wired kids have not only figured out how to make it work, they’ve figured out how to communicate those solutions.

Communication is the foundation that enables us to succeed. So that’s pretty cool.
In 2008 MaryMargaret O’Neil asked her dad to help her create a website. As a 9-year-old she wanted to help animals. But the result was much more than simply helping animals.

**Kids Are Heroes** was born, a nonprofit that highlights the efforts of kids to change their world. The site highlights more than 300 kids and their stories of doing good, from building homes in Haiti to supporting local humane societies. Kids Are Heroes was named one of five “must follow nonprofits” by *Mashable* in 2010.

Of course trumpeting the good deeds of others isn't enough. MaryMargaret herself has been featured on the site several times for her own charity efforts, including giving up her birthday for the Defenders of Wildlife, selling lemonade to buy Webkinz for kids afflicted with cancer, collecting cell phones for soldiers and more.

While Kids Are Heroes focuses on real world action, it’s primarily driven by the online presence. It’s a good example that you don’t need to code to create something powerful online.
Relational Skills

More than just communication skills, working on the web develops relational skills. It’s one thing to be able to communicate what you’re talking about, but it’s another thing to be able to develop effective relationships with others. Some people are skilled communicators, but they can’t form an effective relationship with other people.

Getting along with other people, working through disagreements, admitting mistakes, expressing gratitude—these are all basic relational skills.

Now hold on—you might be thinking that most plugged in kids are actually lacking in relational skills. And that can be true. At least for kids who are just consuming technology. Kids who are passively plugged in and never move on to actively create have no opportunity to develop relational skills. But kids who create usually have to interact with others. Even if they’re doing a solo project, they often need help with something and interaction with others happens along the way. Those interactions give them practice with people and the opportunity to develop basic people skills.

There’s a big difference between kids being glued to a screen and kids creating content for that screen. That difference creates relational skills.
Star Kids: Y.N. Rich Kids

A group of elementary and middle school kids from Minneapolis hit Internet viral status with their rap video “Hot Cheetos & Takis” released in 2012. In less than a month the video had scored more than 2 million views.

Known as Y.N. Rich Kids, they’re part of an after school program through the North Community YMCA called the Beats & Rhymes Program. The group benefited from some professional help, but mostly it’s a product of the kids: “They learn how to express themselves and work together and do the bulk of the work themselves, with the adults only acting as facilitators,” says Alicia Johnson, director of the North Community YMCA, in a Star Tribune article.

“Kids can make a lot with a little, and this video shows it,” says Toki Wright, whose daughter dances in the video.
Problem Solving

Any project a kid tackles online is going to be fraught with problems. They’re going to run into all kinds of roadblocks. They might lack the tools or skills to accomplish something. Or maybe it will be a simple problem with the computer they’re using. Whatever the obstacle, the beautiful thing is kids will find ways around it. They’ll learn what they need to learn, find videos or books to show them how to do it or ask someone else. They’ll find a way.

In the process they’ll learn how to problem solve. They’ll learn that there can be multiple solutions and they’ll find the solution that works best for them. It’s the difference between a mindless drone and a creative worker. A creative worker can think through the problem, weigh positives and negatives, see the issue from different perspectives, and ultimately find the best solution. A creative worker is going to excel, and the future workforce will highly value problem solving, innovation and creativity.

Creativity

High pressure testing has become the focus in many schools, where specific and basic tasks like reading, writing and arithmetic are all that matter. While schools rightly focus on reading, math and science, creativity is often forgotten in the shuffle. Classes that develop creativity, including art, music, theater and dance, are often the first to be cut. Creativity has become a lost art. Which is more detrimental than it seems, since creative thinking applies to more than just the creative arts.
“Nothing’s impossible if you don’t know it’s impossible,” John Voorhees told *Inc. Magazine*. His sons, Owen (11) and Finn (9), created an iPhone app called MathTime.

“These two kids are unusually young to have done that, but the development environment is so easy, novice programmers with good ideas can now develop something compelling,” said Matt Murphy, a venture capitalist who invests in iPhone app start-ups.

“I thought it would be cool,” said Owen. “It’s really cool to make something work, to make a little money, to do something like this and see it up [on the App Store].”

In just one day the 99-cent MathTime app was downloaded 141 times. “It started booming,” said Owen, “I woke up and I was like, I'm an entrepreneur now.”
Much of math is about coming up with creative solutions. The scientific method is based on considering all the possibilities and forming a hypothesis, which requires creative thought. Even reading requires imagination and creativity to picture scenes and effectively comprehend the words.

Creative activities exercise both sides of the brain and help kids in so many ways. Sometimes it’s as simple as a stress relieving activity. That kind of release can help kids buckle down and focus on thoroughly non-creative tasks.

OK, so creativity is good. What does it have to do with online content creation? Well, creating content is obviously a creative act. Singing a song, shooting a video, choreographing a dance or writing a story is valuable creative practice. It exercises those creative muscles and provides all the benefits we just talked about.

But even something seemingly anti-creative like writing computer code is a creative act. Coding a program is often an exercise in finding creative solutions. It involves using both sides of the brain, both thinking through the logical rules, but also looking for a creative solution that fits within the rules but maximizes efficiency.

**Confidence**

Online content creation is a guaranteed confidence builder. Kids create something substantial and they can look back and feel a sense of accomplishment. “I did that,” is a powerful injection of confidence.
Star Kid:
Martha Payne

If you want to build confidence in kids, how about giving them the opportunity to stand up for what they believe in while taking on a disinterested administration?

What started as a school writing project brought international attention and government censorship for 9-year-old Martha Payne from Scotland. She started the NeverSeconds blog with her father’s help to take pictures of her school lunches and write reviews. The blog garnered the attention of chef Jamie Oliver and was soon logging millions of hits. The negative attention prompted the local school council to shut her blog down.

After international outcry the decision was reversed and Martha was allowed to continue blogging about her school lunch. The school also made some changes to their lunch offerings, giving students more choices and healthier options. Martha’s blog continues today and she has frequent guest posts from children around the world sharing pictures of their lunches. Martha has also raised more than $180,000 for Mary’s Meals to build a kitchen at a school in Malawi. She visited the school with her family and wrote about the experience for The Telegraph. She’s also written her own book, Never Seconds: The Incredible Story of Martha Payne.

Don’t ever let anyone tell you that a blog can’t change anything. Just ask Martha.
Getting feedback and response from a global audience can also build that confidence. More than just doing something, kids can see the response it generates.

The next time they’re tackling something difficult, they’ll remember how they were able to overcome in previous projects. That confidence will carry them through.

Minnesota teacher Lisa Christens experienced this firsthand as her students were eager to improve after posting material online: “They now have a worldwide forum instead of an audience of one,” Christens said in an article on Good, noting that the students “see themselves as writers—real writers.”

Creative artists are notoriously lacking in confidence and self esteem. Helping kids build that confidence early is a major win.

**Project Management**

Kids crave structure. They’ll never admit it, but after the first week of summer vacation kids will often be adrift, bored and lonely. The structure and certainty of the scheduled school day is gone and kids find themselves lost.

But creating things online can be a way to build their own structure. As kids tackle projects they realize each project has its own structure. There’s a beginning, middle and end to each project, different tasks that need to be completed in order.
Star Kid: Lim Ding Wen

As a fourth grader, 9-year-old Lim Ding Wen of Singapore created his own painting app for the iPhone called Doodle Kids in 2009. He went on to create Invader War, a game he originally created for the Apple II GS. He started using the computer at the age of 2 and began programming at age 7. Ding Wen has mastered six programming languages.

“I wrote the program for my younger sisters, who like to draw,” says Ding Wen in a BBC article. “But I am happy that people like it.” His sisters are 3 and 5 and they’re getting in on the action as well. Lim Xing Quan did the graphic design for the Doodle War app as a 5 year old.

The children’s father, Lim Thye Chaen, is also a programmer with a soft spot for the Apple II GS. He’s modest about his son’s achievements: “Ding Wen is an above average boy with an interest in computers, especially Apple II GS and Macs, likes to do programming, and that’s it. Doodle Kids is an extremely simple program that can be done by anybody. Everybody can program—if Ding Wen can, so can you.”
Kids will start to create schedules for themselves, trying to finish their project in so many days, whether it’s a real or arbitrary deadline they set for themselves.

Suddenly those crazy kids have turned into project managers. We may scoff at the thought of pint-sized project managers, but being able to manage a project, either for yourself or a team, is a valuable skill. Bringing self-regulation, order and a schedule is crucial in any job. It’s yet another skill that separates the creative workers from the mindless drones.

**Commitment**

We’re commitment averse these days. The struggling economy doesn’t help, but how many college grads bounce from job to job? True, the days of a lifetime with a single employer are long gone, but not many people can commit to a single job for any length of time. They bounce around looking for better pay, better benefits or just something more fulfilling. When things get hard, instead of working harder, people move on.

That’s not an encouraging trend. And it’s not limited to current college grads. There are plenty of older people who bounce around from job to job or relationship to relationship, refusing to forge a lasting commitment.

Commitment means having to work through things that are hard. It means facing some pain for a long-term reward.
17-year-old Brittany Wegner won the grand prize at the 2012 Google Science Fair by coming up with a better way to diagnose breast cancer.

“I taught the computer how to diagnose breast cancer,” Brittany says in an NBC News article. For over two years she coded a custom neural network with Java to mimic the brain and then deployed it to the cloud to access more data sets. Not many people even understand what that means, but her results are better than what’s commercially available.

It all started in seventh grade: “I came across artificial intelligence and was just enthralled,” Brittany says. “I went home the next day and bought a programming book and decided that was what I was going to teach myself to do.”

Brittany told Scientific American about creating her first neural network around soccer: “I taught the computer when it should pass, when it should dribble; it was a mini soccer game, two on two.”

“Let your kid follow their passion,” Brittany says. “When you’re passionate about something you’ll be persistent and really enjoy it.”
That’s exactly the kind of skill kids develop when they stick through all the difficulties and create content online. They learn commitment. They learn not to give up. They see firsthand the benefits of putting up with a little discomfort. In many cases, they’ll embrace the discomfort, pulling long hours working code or adjusting video transitions so they can get to the pay off.

Sticking it out means they’ll be around long enough to learn other lessons as well. Commitment—it’s the skill that keeps on giving.

**Media Literacy**

We live in a world with a lot of opposing viewpoints and different ideas. Just about anybody can create media and get their position out there, whether it’s off the deep end or not.

As kids create, they begin to see the bias and prejudice that goes into their own creation and that of their friends. It’s a bit of inside baseball, so to speak, and as they turn to other media they can look with those same eyes and see the same biases and imperfections. Kids can learn to become savvy about the ways media is used and abused. They can spot the difference between opinion and news, between professional and amateur.
In 2005 Catherine Cook, then 15, and her brother David, 16, came up with the idea for MyYearbook.com. They had recently moved to a new school and didn’t know many people. The site attempted to digitize school yearbooks and has since shifted its focus to helping users meet new people (hence the name change to MeetMe.com in 2012).

When the site first started, Catherine and David turned to their older brother Geoff, already a successful web entrepreneur, for the first round of financing. He came through with $250,000 and they hired developers in India to make the site a reality, according to CNET.

The idea took off. In 2011, they were acquired by Quepasa, a social network for Latinos, for $100 million according to ABC News.
That kind of savvy can help kids deal with all kinds of things, whether it’s recognizing the bias in mainstream media or disregarding the ranting of extremist groups. It also helps them to understand how media works, how advertising undergirds much of mainstream media and how that can potentially influence the quality of the reporting. Kids who create content online are less likely to be hoodwinked and more likely to have a healthy dose of skepticism.

**Patience**

How do you not learn patience when you’re writing 35,000 lines of code, filming tedious establishing shots or writing a 50,000-word novel? Patience is part of the game. While it’s tempting to plow ahead with imagination and creative ideas, and that’s how these projects often start, there’s also a period of time where kids have to learn to put their heads down and do the hard work. They have to be patient and put in the work before they can see the results.

Few entrepreneurs would ever be successful if they didn’t have the patience to see their project through or wait until it was ready. Plenty of projects have crashed and burned because their creator didn’t have the patience to make sure it was good enough before rushing it to the market.

Sometimes kids just have to be patient while a slow computer crunches video edits or a connection speed slows to a crawl while they download a massive file.
“The more forms of communications children use the stronger their core literary skills,” says Jonathan Douglas, director of the National Literacy Trust, in a BBC article. The National Literacy Trust surveyed more than 3,000 children in the U.K. and found that kids who used blogs or social networking sites were more confident about their writing. Yep, it’s true—all the texting, blogging and Facebooking are actually improving reading and writing skills.

So much for bemoaning the text speak that teen cell phone users have developed. Turns out it’s helpful.

“It is a form of reading and writing. It might not be conventional but they are communicating, so there is a general gain,” says John Coe, general secretary of the National Association for Primary Education.

And kids who are creating content are doing more than just texting or chatting with their friends. So the benefits go even further. No matter a child’s future career path, writing skills are valuable. Even if their novel-length blog doesn’t turn them into an author, writing skills are used in virtually every field. Entrepreneurs rely on writing as they draft business plans and communicate with everyone from contractors to coworkers. Coders need writing when it comes time to make their creations decipherable to the masses. Even movie or music heads rely on writing to craft the descriptions that go with their videos and songs, helping them score search engine traffic.
Not every kid is going to be a Stephen King or a Charlotte Bronte (but some might!), but learning how to write gives them an edge no matter what they do for a living.

**Math**

Kids can also pick up some handy math skills while creating content online. A lot of coding and game science involves mathematics. In some cases it can be pretty complicated physics and geometry, depending on the game. Even design, video and music require basic math skills, which at the very least is good practice.

Kids can divide up screen widths for a design, calculate frames per second, work with ratios for screen size or figure out quarter beats and 4:4 time in music.

If kids are making any kind of income online, either from referral sources, advertising or direct sales, then there’s basic accounting. Any entrepreneur has to have these skills, so it’s a big boost for kids to develop them early.

Long live the mathletes!

**Fun**

Of course it’s not all serious job skills and future benefits. Kids like to have fun, too.
Aaron Zenz is an author and freelance illustrator. He writes the Bookie Woogie blog with his five kids. Together they review children’s books. The kids range in age from 4 to 13 and the reviews consist of a recorded family conversation that’s transcribed for the blog. The kids also draw pictures in the same style as the books to go along with the reviews.

The site features well over 100 reviews and more than a dozen interviews with authors, including big names like Tony DiTerlizzi (The Spiderwick Chronicles). The blog has gotten the attention of publishers, who send the family more books to review.

Aaron came up with the idea after hearing a podcast of two people chatting about books. He thought it’d be fun to do with the kids and realized there weren’t a lot of kid reviews out there. More than just a way to share their love of reading, the blog has encouraged their own creativity.

“Before, books were just a form of entertainment,” Aaron told the Grand Rapids Press. “Now, they think about how there’s an author behind it—somebody crafted it. And they think ‘Hey—I can craft stories, too.’”

“They’re learning how to be better thinkers,” says Aaron’s wife Amity.
“All kids love video games,” says Alex Handy, cofounder of the Museum of Art and Digital Entertainment in Oakland, Calif., in a Mercury News article. “If you ask any kids if they want to learn how to make video games, the answer is almost always yes.”

Fun doesn’t have to be sitting around passively consuming something, or even just playing a game someone else created. Kids always seem to have the most fun when they’re creating their own stuff. With technology, it’s easier than ever to get kids creating and having fun.

Disclaimer

Now let’s be real: a kid doesn’t automatically get all these skills just because they made some off-key Justin Bieber videos. But by participating in online content creation they have the opportunity to develop these skills. They may not develop them very far, building enough confidence to sing some Bieber into a camera, but still be petrified by a live audience. You have to be content with baby steps. Or they may flat out fail, refusing to learn how to relate to others or completely bypassing any math skills they could have picked up.

They can still succeed at creating something cool and miss out on some of these skills. That’s just the risk we have to take. But hopefully, ideally, some of this character-building goodness will rub off on them.

It’s not a guarantee, but an opportunity.
It sure beats the skill-building opportunity kids have while sitting on their butts consuming content. Which is, um, none.

**Failure?**

And what if kids fail? It happens. But lessons learned through failure can be just as valuable. Just ask Mark Bao. By 18 he’d started (and sold) multiple online ventures, including a social media site and a small business management tool. He’s even started two nonprofit foundations.

“When you’re young, don’t fear failing,” Mark told CNN. “Whether you succeed or fail, the things you learn will be incredibly valuable for your future endeavors.”

For Mark, those lessons started as a fifth grader when he created a homework management app and sold it on floppy disks for $5 to his fellow students.

**Now that we’ve talked about the why of getting kids to create content online, it’s time to get practical. How do we do it?**
How to Get Kids Creating Online

OK, so it’s good for kids to create stuff. How do they get started?

The Power of Doing

The fastest way to get your feet wet is to dive right in. That’s also the easiest way. Just start creating. People learn by doing, so set kids loose to start doing it.

Set up a blog and let them write. Hand over the laptop and let them code. Turn on the camera and let them sing.

Sometimes all we have to do is take that first scary step. The rest is easy.

“You can do amazing things if you just try,” Robert Nay told CNN. As a 14-year-old Robert developed the game Bubble Ball, which in January of 2011 knocked Angry Birds off the top spot in the free games category in the App Store.

The best learning happens on the job, so instead of telling an eager child to hit the books or take a class, tell them to get to work. Having a project where they can apply lessons will vastly boost their motivation and enthusiasm.
Foundations First

While it’s tempting to learn the cool things, it’s important to give kids a solid foundation. They have to learn how to walk before they can crawl. The same is true with learning new web skills.

In coding it’s especially obvious. Learning the basics of HTML makes learning everything else easier. You can’t just skip ahead to Ruby on Rails. You need to start with a solid foundation and build on that. Once you have that foundation, everything else gets easier.

It applies to other fields as well. It’s a lot easier to start with a short story or a 3-minute video instead of a novel or a feature-length film. It gives a child a chance to learn what works and what doesn’t, refine their skills before applying them to a bigger project.

Kids may be eager to jump ahead (the power of doing!), but it’s important to help them lay the foundation. If they do have a momentous project in mind, it might be good to help them break it down. Help them do something smaller first, and build up to their ideal project, learning valuable lessons and skills along the way.

Cheap is Good

There are a lot of ways to spend money learning how to create things. There are expensive creative arts summer camps and coding courses that will cost as much as a car.
In the end you’ll probably need to spend at least some money (simply submitting an app to Apple’s App Store requires paying $99), but there are a lot of low-budget ways to learn. Don’t feel like you need to spend buckets of cash to help kids learn.

For starters, there are a lot of online courses and summer camps that are reasonably priced. There are also plenty of books that are free at the library or comparatively cheap on Amazon. Another good way to learn is by finding a mentor. Find someone older who knows the ropes and can help a kid along the way. At the very least a mentor can point to other helpful resources.

Beware of anyone who asks for lots of money to help you share your content. This is especially true with writers. There are plenty of publishers who will happily take your money to publish a book. That’s usually good money wasted. With print-on-demand technology it’s possible to make your book available without spending a dime.

Remember that the content kids are creating is still content, and that comes with certain intellectual property rights. Don’t just give those away.

**WordPress**

One great way to get started is with WordPress. At heart, WordPress is a blogging platform, but it’s a great sandbox for learning how to code for the web. So, even if kids aren’t interested in HTML or CSS coding, WordPress is a good way to give them their own platform to start creating and sharing.
A few benefits to using WordPress:

- **It’s free.** OK, while the software itself is free, getting your own domain and hosting will cost you something, but cheap is good. Kids’ tastes can be fickle and you don’t want to heavily invest in something only to find their attention wander. Investing can be a good idea, but do it down the road when you know they’re committed. WordPress is a good, cheap way to get started that doesn’t require a costly investment.

- **Easy to get started.** It’s easy to get started on WordPress. It’s a pretty basic software that still has plenty of power and punch. That means kids can get started right away without any headaches, yet it’s still powerful enough to offer advanced features when they need it.

- **It’s a solid platform.** No matter what kids want to create they should have a homebase of operations online. Sure, an app developer’s work will end up in the App Store or Google Play and a video star is going to be on YouTube, but they should have a homebase of operations that they own and control. It’s a place to collect all the work they’ve done, regardless of where it appears, and start building an audience. The YouTubes of the world will come and go, but you can own your own site forever. It might be hard to get a kid to think long term, but that’s going to be huge.

- **Controlled environment.** WordPress offers a controlled environment where parents or educators can still be in charge. You can set up a child as an author and give parents the editor role, forcing any content to go through an adult. It’s a good way to keep things safe and smart for everybody.
Star Kid:
Oliver Bouler

Creating content online doesn’t have to be an entirely online affair. 11-year-old artist Olivia Bouler started her project by actually mailing a letter to the Audubon Society. She offered to draw pictures of birds to help raise money to clean up the 2010 Gulf oil spill. She raised $200,000 for the Audubon Society by drawing 500 pictures. She's also published the book *Olivia's Birds: Saving the Gulf*. She earned loads of accolades and honors, including being named a Champion of Change by the White House.

While she got her start offline, Olivia, now 13, has continued to spread the word about protecting the environment online. She has her own website, Twitter feed and Facebook page with more than 30,000 fans.

You want an example of how kids can use the Internet to pursue their passions and learn a few things along the way? Just look at Olivia.
• **Privacy.** Another great benefit of WordPress is the privacy features. You can lock down all or part of the site pretty easily. You can tell search engines to stay away. You have plenty of control with comments, including shutting them off entirely or only turning them on for certain posts.

• **Something for everyone.** Perhaps the best part of using WordPress is that it offers something for people of all levels, whether you’re creating a website or ready to code your first WordPress plugin. That’s what 10-year-old Jesse Friedman did after attending WordCamp Philly in 2011—he created the Dashboard Site Preview plugin.

**Understanding Copyright**

In your attempt to get kids creating, copying is sure to happen. It’s a normal stage in any creative development. Bands often do cover songs before writing their own material. Drawing inspiration from others is what fuels great art. As Pablo Picasso supposedly said, “Good artists copy, great artists steal.”

But Picasso didn’t mean that artists literally steal. He meant that they take something and make it their own, stealing ideas, images, words and more along the way to creating something of their own. There’s nothing truly original in the world—it’s all inspired by something else. And if something does look original, you just don’t know the source material.
15-year-old Jason Lin is turning electronic waste into a business. He launched iReTron, a website that pays cash for old electronics, then refurbishes and resells them.

“It's better for the environment because it’s one less cell phone in the dumps,” says Jason in a San Francisco Chronicle article. “By extending the lifetime of your electronics, it helps you and the other person, and it helps the environment.”

The site isn't profitable yet, but he did recently win the “Next Teen Tycoon” video contest and scored a trip to the 2012 TEDxTeen conference in New York.
It's important that kids develop a healthy understanding of copyright and intellectual property rights. They quickly understand that what they create is their own idea and no one should steal it and claim it as their own. That's a good first step, but next you need to make sure kids understand that they can't steal other people's work and claim it as their own. Just because you can find it on Google doesn't mean you can use it.

They need to understand what's fair use and what's copyright infringement. Using an image for a school book report might be considered fair use, but slapping that same image on your website might veer into copyright infringement.

Any content creation project is going to run into these questions. It might help to tackle them first. Remember that just because you need permission to use something doesn't mean you can't use anything. There are plenty of materials available with a Creative Commons license that you can use (though often attribution is needed and there are still some limitations—like you can't sell it).

This also brings up another issue—how are kids licensing what they create? In other words, can other kids use what your kids are creating? As part of their creative project they should assign some sort of ownership and licensing rules to their work, whether it's restrictive copyright that maintains their ownership and doesn't allow others to use it, or a more liberal Creative Commons license that encourages others to use their content.

The Edublogger has a good post on copyright that's tailored for educators but can be helpful for parents too.
Using Microsoft’s Kodu, 10-year-old Hannah Wyman created a game called Toxic that won the U.S. Kodu Cup. She was also invited to present her game at the White House Science Fair and met President Barack Obama. Not bad for a kid who wasn’t that excited about computers when she was younger.

“I was really frustrated by technology when I was younger,” says Hannah in a Daily Edventures article. “I didn’t understand why you had to double click instead of just clicking... so I didn’t really like computers.”

But spurred on by her brother and her science teacher, she explored computers more and found Kodu to be a helpful tool. But she’s not necessarily sold on a future as a game designer. President Obama asked her about being a game designer and she said maybe.

“Sometimes I think I want to be a dancer when I grow up,” says Hannah. “But sometimes I also think of being a game designer—maybe I will design games about dancing.”
Project Ideas

Most kids interested in creating stuff online are pretty self-motivated. They probably already have an idea and know exactly what they want to do. But other kids need a push. There are all kinds of projects they can take on and here are a few ideas to get them started:

- **Family History Timeline** – Create a timeline that pairs family history with world history, going as far back as you can. Sometimes it can cause a revelation, like the fact that Great-Grandma was a child during the Great Depression and could tell you what it was like.

- **Local Documentary** – Pick a local institution and create a video documentary. Maybe it’s the local park or a historic building.

- **Create a Website** – It’s a basic challenge, but a good place to start. Make a website. Maybe it’s a family site or a site devoted to your dog, but just build a basic site.

- **Sing-along-Blog** – Sometimes you need to get silly. It worked for Dr. Horrible, so why not create a musical?

- **Family Review Blog** – The Bookie Woogie blog got the whole family involved in reviewing books and creating content. A similar model could work for you, especially with younger kids.

- **Photo Time Capsule** – Spend an entire day taking pictures of mundane things and create a photo time capsule forever preserving that day.
• **Write a Silly Song** – Write the silliest song you can think of and then perform it with homemade instruments.

• **Family Social Media Mashup** – Create a site that pulls together all the social media channels of everyone in the family so it’s easy to catch up at a glance.

• **Build a Game** – Maybe it’s a simple quiz or dice game or maybe a complicated card game or board game. There are also plenty of tools out there to help create full-blown video games.

• **Photo of the Day** – Start a photo of the day blog and challenge a budding photographer to post a new photo every single day. The once-a-day approach can be ideal for any medium, just choose something that’s easily do-able in a single day. The real benefits are clear over time.

• **Journal** – Let’s get back to basics. Once upon a time the diary was a time-honored format. A video diary would be a good way to make this a multimedia endeavor.

• **Write a Children’s Book** – Maybe it’s a wacky fictional tale worthy of Dr. Seuss or a photo book recounting a recent trip to the zoo.

• **Create an App** – It’s a little harder to come up with off-the-shelf app ideas, but ask eager coders to create an app that solves a problem or keeps them entertained. Simple is good.
Sometimes it’s best to take on a project as a family or a class. It’s a good way to let eagerness rub off on those who need a push. It’s also a good way to lead kids forward in online learning, taking their cues but also pushing them in a productive direction. The foundational lessons they learn in family or class projects could provide the impetus to pursue the next project on their own.

As a bonus, group projects led or at least helped along by an adult are also a good way to ensure safety, especially with younger kids. We’ll talk more about parental involvement in the safe and smart chapter (see page 54).

**When?**

So when should kids get started? The sooner the better.

“The earlier they get into programming, the more successful they’ll be in all types of science and math in school,” video game designer Alex Peake told the *Mercury News*.

That’s true for programming but it’s also true for any creative act. It’s never too early (or too late!) to be creative.
Interview: Grant Griffiths

Headway is a premium WordPress theme that makes it easy to design and build custom sites without knowing code. But what’s more impressive? It was created by a 16-year-old.

Clay Griffiths co-founded Headway with his dad, Grant. He created the theme because he was tired of reinventing the wheel every time he built sites for clients. What started as an in-house tool became its own product.

We sat down with Grant to learn more about parenting a kid who codes. Grant led a professional service firm, helping attorneys figure out how to blog and creating websites for law firms. Those website gigs eventually led to Headway, which is Grant’s primary job these days. He also currently blogs at Blog For Profit.

Q. How did Clay get started in web development?

Grant: Clay started reading books on web development when he was 12, if I remember correctly. Instead of going to the kids’ section in a bookstore, he would head straight for the computer section. He would find a book on HTML, Javascript, PHP or some other language he was interested in learning and ask me to buy it for him. I would always ask him each time, “Are you going to read it?” And his answer was always yes. And he would. He would study the books, take examples in them and try them on his own.
When he was 14 he actually started building sites for my consulting clients. Needless to say, we did not advertise our web developer was only 14.

**Q. How did you encourage him to explore coding?**

**Grant:** He did that all on his own. I started blogging in 2005 and he saw me doing that. He was also influenced a lot by one of his cousins who was just getting started doing some coding himself.

**Q. Did you have limits or rules for his web use?**

**Grant:** Nothing official. That might sound bad, but I just never worried about Clay doing things online he wasn’t suppose to do. I would check things when he was not on the computer just to be sure like a lot of parents do. However, there was no need to.

**Q. Did you ever feel like you were in over your head as he started to learn more code?**

**Grant:** Me? Of course. I still do. People ask me if I code and I always tell them why would I, I have Clay. Clay’s brain just works different. He is now 19 and I am still amazed at what he can do. I remember when he would get angry because he thought he couldn’t figure something out. I would always tell him to just take a breath, relax and it will come to you. Usually he would come to my home office about 20 or 30 minutes later and tell me he figured it out.

**Q. What kind of educational tools worked the best for Clay?**

**Grant:** Clay has always been a “self-teacher.” He basically has taught himself so much by just having the desire to learn. I remember one
time we were at parent-teacher conferences and his math teacher said he has never had a student like Clay. He said Clay has the ability to figure out a problem in ways he had not seen. Even solving a problem in ways he had not seen.

Q. Since he started out as a high school coder, did you ever have concerns about quality? How did you know he was good enough to compete in the marketplace?

Grant: Funny thing is, I never had that concern. Clay has always been very picky and wants things perfect. This is both a good quality and a negative one. Sometimes he still drives himself nuts because he wants things perfect.

I knew Clay was good enough to compete in the marketplace after we went to Dallas in 2009 before we released Headway. Clay was only 16 at the time too. We attended an opening meetup for WordCamp Dallas. At the meetup, Clay was showing off Headway 1.0 to some people. When I watched the look on their faces as this kid was showing them this new product, I knew right then, he was good enough. And we both knew, this new product we were working on, was also good enough.

Q. How did you come to start Headway together?

Grant: Headway started out as an in-house tool we were using to set up the layout of sites we were building for my consulting clients. Clay wanted a tool he could use to quickly set up a site, lock that layout down so to speak and fine-tune it for the final design. This was early 2009.
I decided to show this to a few people. And the response I received was the same from each one. They all said, “You need to finish this and make it a product.” “This is too good to keep to yourselves.” “Finish it and sell it as a premium WordPress theme.” I told Clay and all he said was, “I can do that.” We started building Headway on April 26, 2009. I know the date as that is the first line of code Clay wrote for the official version one of Headway. We launched Headway 1.0 on July 31st, 2009 and have not looked back since. We are now on version 3.4 and it is just amazing how far Clay has come in his abilities and business sense from the time we started this.

Q. What’s your working relationship like? Is it difficult being a father/son team and business partners?

Grant: Our working relationship is very good. Clay does what he is best at and I do what I do. Is it always roses? Of course not. Like any business partnership, we have our disagreements. But, we always discuss them, sometimes with a bit of cussing. However, we always come to a decision and move on. And sometimes I win and sometimes I don’t.

I think the key is I have always stayed out of Clay’s way when it comes to the development of Headway. But we always discuss any new features or directions for Headway. And I think that is one of the keys too. Like any good business, communication is very important.
Be Safe & Smart

We can’t talk about kids being online without talking about safety. That wouldn’t be smart.

• 32% of teens have faced online harassment (Pew).

• 44% of online teens have lied about their age to access a website or sign up for an account (Pew).

• 30% of teens have shared a password with a friend or significant other (Pew).

• 51% of teens have given out personal information online to someone they didn’t know offline (Harris Interactive).

• 32% of teens say they don’t tell their parents what they are doing online and 31% would change their behavior if their parents were watching (McAfee, PDF).

These numbers show why it’s important for anyone helping kids get online to be safe. But in addition to being safe, kids also need to be smart. There are a lot of things you can do online that are perfectly safe, but they’re not so smart.

While the numbers are sobering, there is room for encouragement: 58% of teens say parents have the biggest influence on their online and cell phone behavior, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Friends come in a distant second at 18%. And the top two sources of online safety advice for teens? Parents at 86% and teachers at 70%.
Safe: Be Careful

Safety first. The Internet may be a virtual world, but there are plenty of real world consequences to online behavior.

While the Internet offers a wealth of possibilities, it offers those same possibilities to people with less than stellar character. Spam email has been clogging networks for decades. In 2010, 89% of all email was spam. Ouch.

That’s just the tip of the iceberg. There are all kinds of nefarious criminals out there using every manner of trick, deception and hoodwink to get what they want. Often they’re looking for money and they’ll do all sorts of things to get it, from simply getting you to buy something to nabbing personal information that can allow them to steal your identity and wrack up purchases on credit cards.

Losing a chunk of change is nothing compared to other scams out there, from sexual predators to kidnappers. You might be wondering why you’re on the Internet at all if such dangerous people are lying in wait at the next website. But it’s not that dire. You do need to be careful. You need to make sure kids are being careful. If you know what to watch for, if you’re naturally cautious and if you don’t believe everything you read you’ll be OK.
A Few Safety Tips

- **Never give any personal information online.** Don’t give your address, your phone number, your social security info, etc.

- **Be careful who you talk to.** It’s easy for scammers to hack into someone’s account and pose as them. If one of your friends is suddenly asking for money, be wary.

- **Be careful about revealing your physical location.** There are a lot of location-based services online and it can be fun to “check in” at your favorite coffee shop. But this also announces where you are to predators.

- **Don’t meet online people in the real world.** In general it’s a good idea not to meet at all, or if you do meet, make sure it’s public and make sure parents are involved. Sometimes it’s necessary (Craigslist transactions), but you still need to be smart about it.

- **Create good passwords and don’t share them.** Weak passwords shared between multiple sites are one of the easiest ways for the bad element to get into your account. It’s often a good idea to make sure parents can get access to a child’s accounts.
Smart: Can’t Take it Back

We’ve looked at a lot of examples of kids raking in big money by creating stuff online. But for every example of someone striking it rich or finding notoriety online, it’s also worth remembering the examples of someone getting the wrong kind of attention online. There are so many horror stories of embarrassment and mental implosion from the wrong kind of online attention. There are photos people wish they never took, videos they wish they deleted and statements they wish they could take back.

Ask Heather Armstrong. She was famously fired for blogging about her co-workers in 2002, sparking a fierce debate about privacy issues. Heather’s advice today: “Be ye not so stupid.”

In 2010, CNN fired Middle Eastern editor Octavia Nasr after she tweeted her admiration for a late Lebanese cleric linked to terrorists. Despite Octavia’s apologies, explanations and 20 years with the company, CNN let her go.

And it gets worse. We all have moments we wish we could take back, but sometimes those embarrassing or foolish moments are captured and posted by someone else. That’s so not cool. But it happens.

It happened to Ghyslain Raza, aka the Star Wars Kid. In 2002 he made a video of himself twirling a long stick like a Jedi, spinning and flipping with, well, not quite the grace you might expect from a Jedi Knight. Four of his classmates found the video and posted it online without Ghyslain’s permission. It’s estimated that the video has
been seen well over a billion times. The resulting ridicule pushed Ghyslain into depression, forcing him to take time off school to seek psychiatric care. His family ended up suing his classmates for $250,000 and they eventually settled out of court.

Yikes.

That’s a pretty extreme example. But it gives you an idea what can happen. As you help your children move into the online world, everybody needs to be aware of how the Internet works. Everything you say or post online is there forever. It can be seen by anyone, and it probably will be seen by exactly the person you don’t want to see it.

You can't take it back.

Even seemingly innocuous rants on Facebook can get you in trouble. Big trouble. Three students at Chapel Hill Middle School in Atlanta, two of them honor roll students, got revenge by saying their teacher was a pedophile, rapist and bipolar on Facebook. One was expelled and two were suspended for 10 days.

And that’s hardly an isolated incident. A quick Google search reveals cases like this all over the country of students being held accountable for what they post online. Sometimes students are lashing out at a teacher, other times they’re targeting fellow students. Often it's something done foolishly in the heat of the moment but it has serious repercussions.
In some cases these issues have gone to court and sometimes punishments have been overturned. The National Labor Relations Board, a federal agency, said that Facebook posts were protected free speech. But it’s tricky legal ground, shifting like sand as technology continues to change. Regardless of the eventual outcome of court cases, this kind of online behavior can cause all kinds of headaches. It’s easier to avoid the online venting in the first place.

So be careful what you say. Be careful what you post. And remember that it’s forever.

It can be hard for kids to think too far ahead in the future, but as a parent, guardian or teacher it’s your job to help them think about the consequences of what they’re posting. A rant they post now may come back to bite them when they’re applying for a job. Comments about a significant other may be significantly embarrassing when they’re trying to explain it to a potential spouse. Sending a racy photo to a boyfriend may seem like fun, but it won’t be fun when he’s an ex-boyfriend passing the pic around to his friends. The awkwardness (and worse) abounds!

**Smart: Be Nice**

Since you can’t take it back online, it’s worth being nice in the first place. And there’s not a lot of nice online. 88% of social media-using teens have seen someone be mean or cruel on a social networking site, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project. It’s worth pointing out that teens see more cruelty than adults.
She started her own fashion blog at the age of 11. By 13 she was famous, gracing the covers of magazines and appearing on Late Night With Jimmy Fallon and as a special guest at New York Fashion Week. She’s the editor-in-chief and founder of RookieMag.com, a site that broke one million page views within five days of launching and has featured celebrity contributors including Zooey Deschanel, Joss Whedon and Judd Apatow. She even turned down a chance to appear on The Oprah Winfrey Show.

Tavi’s blog was barely on her parents’ radar, at least until she asked for permission to appear in a New York magazine profile. When the article appeared, so did nasty and suspicious comments, questioning everything about Tavi from her age to her taste. “She slept in the bed with us that night to get back to sleep,” Tavi’s dad, Steve Gevinson said in a USA Today story. The next night, “She woke up, and again woke us up, and said, ‘I just woke up crying and I don’t even know why I’m crying.’”

Many adults aren’t prepared to handle the kind of attention Tavi received at just 13. That’s why parents, guardians and teachers need to be doing their best to help kids navigate these waters, being smart and safe. Tavi took a break from her blog for a while, but ultimately returned and went on to do much bigger things.

“I have a lot of confidence in her and in most kids, if not all kids, that they can figure it out if they have good guidance and caring people working with them,” says Tavi’s dad.
Nearly a third of adults (29%) report never seeing cruelty or meanness online. Only 11% of teens never see it.

While lots of kids see bullying or other mean behavior online, it impacts a smaller percentage. 69% of teens say their peers are mostly kind online, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Only 15% of teens report someone being mean or cruel to them on a social networking site. The fact is teens are more likely to be bullied in person than online.

It’s unfortunate, but it does happen. One way to avoid it, or at least minimize it, is to be nice in the first place. Sometimes all it takes is a snarky comment to set off an Internet troll.

Kids need to understand that even something as simple as their demeanor online can have big impacts, whether we’re talking about cyber bullies or future employers. If kids are rude or short or ill-tempered with people, that can be a problem. They can gain a reputation that’s hard to overcome, especially when it’s permanently available on the Internet.

It’s pretty easy for a kid to destroy their reputation online, but it’s just as easy to build a positive image. Be gracious. Be respectful. Be humble. Say please and thank you. Give credit where credit is due. Don’t be afraid to ask for help, and be willing to give help in return.

Just as there are all kinds of doors that can be closed due to negative behavior online, there are just as many that can be opened thanks to positive behavior. It used to be said that nice guys finish last in the business world. But that’s not necessarily true online. Social media is a meritocracy. Be nice to others and they’ll be nice to you. Nice guys can finish first.
Smart: Be Realistic

While it’s fun to catalog the online success stories and find inspiration from their journeys, it’s worth remembering how rare they are. Mark Zuckerberg’s meteoric rise with Facebook is not going to happen to everyone. Millions of people have fired up video cameras to capture funny moments, brilliant performances or embarrassing tell-alls, and they’re lucky to have a handful of views.

Getting picked out of the crowd is like finding a needle in the haystack. Or finding that proverbial needle in a thousand haystacks.

That’s not to say it’s impossible or that kids shouldn’t try. But it means kids (and the adults helping) need to have realistic expectations. You won’t get a million views just by posting something online. You have to hit on the magic recipe. You have to work at it. You have to create something worth seeing. There’s a lot that goes into it and it’s by no means a complete crapshoot. But there is a lot of luck, a lot of hard work and a lot of being in the right place at the right time that goes into it.

In other words, your motivation can’t be a big payday. There are inspiring examples, but if a kid sees the six figure numbers and that’s their only goal, there’s going to be trouble. They should do it because it’s a good experience. They should do it because of all the other benefits. They should do it because it’s fun. But don’t treat it like the lottery.
Safe: You Can’t Be Too Careful

Safety first and safety last. It’s worth a second reminder to be careful online. You can never be too careful.

Make sure kids understand how to be safe online. Check up on them and see what they’re posting, what they’re saying and who they’re interacting with. You don’t need to be paranoid, but you do need to be wary.

Here are a few resources that can help kids stay safe online:

- **ConnectSafely.org** - A nonprofit focused on social media safety, including tips and news.
- **CyberTipLine** - How to report child sexual exploitation.
- **Embrace Civility** - Helping kids become “cyber savvy” and finding positive ways to address online risk.
- **Family Online Safety Institute** - An international organization that tries to find innovative solutions for children's online safety.
- **GetNetWise** - A comprehensive collection of online safety information.
- **KidZui** - An Internet browser for kids that filters content and only gives kids access to content approved by an editorial staff, parents and teachers.
- **NetSmartz.org** - Information about online safety for kids, teens, parents, educators and more.
- **Snopes.com** - The ultimate resource to debunk those myths and scams.
“The best way to reach the kids is what they love to be on,” sixth grade math teacher Tyler Binkley told The Patriot News. “You gotta utilize whatever they’re using.”

For Tyler, that meant YouTube. He started creating math videos on YouTube, giving his students an extra resource to use at home and a new way to be engaged.

The online world is constantly changing and that can be a challenge for educators. It can be hard to incorporate online learning when things are changing so frequently. But giving kids an opportunity to create content online is a challenge that teachers need to take on. It can be a powerful way to enhance learning and prepare kids for the future.

All the benefits discussed in previous chapters apply just as well to the classroom setting. In Estonia, they've started teaching programming to students as young as 7. That’s first grade. Some first graders can’t even tie their own shoes. But they’re learning how to code? Awesome.

**Tips & Tricks**

There are a lot of ways to incorporate online content creation into the classroom. Sometimes it can be as simple as giving assignments
that utilize online tools, whether it’s creating a YouTube video instead of a term paper or using blog software to create a historical journal.

Use technology as a way to pique students’ interest. A research paper on the Civil War might sound dull, but creating a video game that captures the reality of war in the 1860s would require just as much research and might actually get kids excited. Give students the freedom to pick assignments that appeal to their interests.

A project that involves the entire class is another good way to introduce kids to creating content online. Since the whole class is involved, no one feels left out or left behind if they don’t see themselves as an online creator. It’s a good way to let the creativity of a few rub off on the rest.

Learn from your students. Let’s face it: You’ll have students who know more about this than you do. Instead of freaking out and clamping down, let them run with it. Follow along and learn yourself so you can help them avoid mistakes.

Role Models

One thing that really helps kids grasp the importance of technology is having role models. One such role model might be rapper, producer and musical extraordinaire Will.i.am of the Black Eyed Peas. He’s taken a special interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education, partnering with the Discovery Channel and recently having his song broadcast from Mars, the first ever such occurrence.
“I think people that make apps are artists,” Will.i.am told Mashable. “I think that people who write code for Facebook, that’s the new Rolling Stones. ... So Mark Zuckerberg, to me he ain’t nothing but freakin’ John Lennon. Jack Dorsey, he ain’t nothing but Mick Jagger.”

Seeing a rock star who understands the value of technology can be a powerful encouragement to kids. Especially when that rock star puts his money where his mouth is.

“Next year I’m going to take a computer science course to help prepare for the next 20 years of my life,” says Will.i.am. “I’m going back to school.”

Now there’s a ringing endorsement of the power of education.

“Power to the geeks,” says Will.i.am.

**Teachers & Safety**

We already covered online safety extensively, but it’s an important enough topic that we should give a special nod to teachers.

First and foremost, teachers doing anything online with students have a responsibility to teach online safety. Don’t just leave it up to parents (and parents, don’t just leave it up to teachers). Overlapping safety is a good thing. Teachers also shouldn’t rely on school policy or district guidelines alone. Make sure your students are being safe online. A little review never hurts.
Star Kid:
Thomas Suarez

As a 12 year old, Thomas Suarez has already published two apps, started his own company and delivered a TEDx talk that has garnered more than 2 million views. His first app was a simple fortune telling game called Earth Fortune. His second app was a Justin Beiber whack-a-mole game called Bustin Jieber.

“A lot of kids these days like to play games, but now they want to make them,” Thomas says in his TEDx talk. “And it’s difficult because not many kids know where to go to find out how to make a program. I mean, for soccer, you could go to a soccer team... But what if you want to make an app?”

Thomas has solved that problem by starting an app club at his school where kids can come and learn how to code.

“These days students usually know a little bit more than teachers about technology, so this is a resource to teachers,” says Thomas. “Educators should recognize this resource and make good use of it.”
In many ways school is practice for the real world, and that’s how The School at Columbia University teaches social media awareness to kids.

“We give them a walled garden to experiment in, since they’ll be using social networks for the rest of their life,” said Don Buckley, the school’s director of communications technology, in a *Forbes* article. The school created their own private social network and gives students a chance to experiment.

“Drama happens. But my goal is: If you’re going to make a mistake, make it here, before it’s public and permanent,” says Karen Blumberg, the school’s technology integrator.

It’s important that students learn what’s OK and what’s not as soon as possible, because it doesn’t take long for students to experiment and discover a new way to do something wrong. Just Google “Facebook expulsion” for a litany of stories about students making bad choices with technology.

Also, *Edudemic* has a helpful guide to keeping students safe online.

*Educators: Be sure to check out the iThemes Education Program. We offer free access to our Web Designer’s Toolkit for educators and a big discount to students and even bigger discounts for classrooms. Teaching WordPress just got easier with tools from iThemes and a training library from WebDesign.com.*
Interview: Wesley Fryer

Wesley Fryer is a digital learning consultant. What does that mean? “At my professional core I consider myself a teacher,” Wesley says, which makes it a bit simpler.

Wesley got his start in education as a fourth grade teacher just as schools were connecting to the Internet in the mid 1990s. His first year teaching he landed a grant for a phone line, modem and computer, making Wesley the first teacher in the school to be online.

He’s been all over the map since then, but always related to technology and education. He’s served as a computer lab teacher, webmaster and faculty support. He’s presented internationally in China, New Zealand and Qatar. Wesley also wrote the book Playing with Media: Simple Ideas for Powerful Sharing in 2011.

As you might guess, he’s full of ideas and enthusiasm for kids creating content online.

Q. Why do you think it’s important for young people to learn about web design?

Wesley: Web design is a vital skill today because communication skills are important and a huge quantity of communication today happens in digital spaces. As learners, the process of shifting
from being predominantly a “media consumer” to a “media producer” can be beneficial on multiple levels.

I’m a big fan of Neil Postman and his educational philosophy, which was highly influenced by people like Marshall McLuhan. I believe we need to continually work at becoming more critical thinkers, and not just remain passive consumers. This has implications for learning and school, but also governance and the ways we participate in our republican form of representative democracy. Web design is important for people to learn (not just young people) because:

• **Oral, Written and Visual Literacy:** We all need to develop our communication skills with media tools

• **Media Literacy:** We need to become more aware and savvy to the ways media is used all around us every day to try to influence what we think, believe and how we act

• **Digital Citizenship:** We each need to take charge of our online digital footprints by proactively publishing content which we “claim” online.

• **Informed Citizenship:** We need to live in communities filled with educated people who are well informed and also active in helping improve their surroundings.

We are living in the midst of a radical change in the ways information is created and distributed globally. Just as the invention of the printing press and the advent of books represented a tectonic challenge to existing power structures in the 1400s, the availability of the means of digital production as well as ubiquitous Internet access tools (like smartphones) is challenging to many entities of our modern status quo.
We need students to learn how to become constructive, responsible and active change agents in their spheres of life and how to effectively leverage social media tools. Web design and digital publishing is a critical part of the “communications toolbox” we need all students to understand and “own” as competent, digital content creators.

Q. What are some things parents can do to encourage their kids to learn about web design?

Wesley: Constant communication with children is one of the most important things we need to do in our families when it comes to all things digital. Things change fast and there are no “silver bullets” to keep everyone 100% safe all the time. Digital technologies, including web design environments, present multiple opportunities to make decisions and share the results of those decisions with a potentially wide audience. So it’s critical that open, regular communication be a cornerstone of our relationships with our kids.

One specific thing parents can do to encourage web design learning for their kids is to create a “family learning blog” and encourage children to post content there.

Just as it’s important to encourage and expect children to read, and provide them with wide latitude (including some boundaries) for reading, I think it’s important we expect our children to become effective multimedia communicators. A family learning blog is a positive, easy space to practice these skills while maintaining communication with family and friends.

We’ve had a family learning blog (Learning Signs) since October 2007. It’s been a great way for our kids to document things they are learning in and out of school, and obtain periodic feedback from
grandparents as well as others.

There are important reasons to be careful when it comes to “Internet safety” and the things we share online, but it’s also vital to not go over the top because of fears. Using a family learning blog to share things like art the kids have drawn, essays they’ve written, poems they’ve composed, and other things provides a great opportunity to both practice multimedia communication as well as digital citizenship.

These are lessons I can’t wait for teachers at school to provide my kids, because in 99% of cases they’re not doing it. My kids and kids everywhere need opportunities to regularly engage in conversations with caring adults about things that come up as we share content and ideas online.

My 12 year old got on Instagram this summer, so that has brought up different issues about privacy and propriety, which we’ve been able to discuss. My son is very into Minecraft as well as Lego minifigures, and constantly learns new things from other people he follows on YouTube, Flickr and other websites. Encouraging our kids to share what they are learning and write about them not only provides meaningful contexts for them to develop writing and communication skills, but also to discuss a host of other issues which come up when we work in digital spaces.

At some point I think each of us should create a “Googleable” digital footprint by claiming content we publish online with our full name. I think parents should help their children learn to navigate the issues present in online spaces by starting to publish small bits of content together.
• When you take a trip, create a slideshow. Learn how to narrate it.
• Use free smartphone tools to make audio recordings.
• Create some videos about cool places you've visited and share them.

It's very helpful to have an online space like a blog to share those media artifacts. If kids want to have and maintain their own blog, help and support them in that process. Having a shared blog using a WordPress.com or Blogger site is a great way to do this as a family and learn together about web design as well as multimedia publishing more generally. A family learning blog can be a great “sandbox” to play with media, which is definitely a subject I'm passionate about!

Q. How do parents keep up with their kids and make sure they're being safe online?

Wesley: Constant communication is the key, as I discussed above. Things change fast and the only way to stay on top of things is to ‘check in’ with our kids and our spouses regularly. That said, here are some other suggestions I have for parents when it comes to Internet safety.

Set up a basic content filter on your home network which blocks pornography and other types of offensive content. The definition of “offensive” may vary a bit by family and context, I certainly have seen lots of examples where I think parents have locked their own computers and Internet filtering too much for kids... to the point where kids can't even search for images on the network at all, and it renders a lot of the Internet useless. That said, I definitely think every home should at least have a basic level of content filtering in place, not because it will completely guarantee that objectionable
content isn’t found but because it can provide a basic “fence” of boundaries as well as accountability.

We’ve used OpenDNS for several years at our house and set this up at grandparents’ houses at (in one case) the request of one of our kids. The free parental controls which OpenDNS provides allow not only content filtering by category, but also some tracking which can be helpful. If your content filter is being tripped when someone is repeatedly trying to access blocked content, that is logged so you can see it and visit about it. I have found this very helpful as a parent and recommend it to others.

There are a lot of great resource websites to use for conversations about Internet safety and digital citizenship. I have an older wiki page with some of the collected links, which I’ve used for past presentations. One of my favorite sites to use in discussions about Internet safety is Common Sense Media. I have more links and ideas on my August 2010 post, “Internet Safety and Digital Citizenship Presentations for Students, Parents and Teachers.”

Q. What educational tools do you recommend for young web designers?

Wesley: Certainly when it comes to digital media, students need access to computers they can use and modify. This means they need admin rights to be able to install and change applications.

I visited with an Oklahoma Career Tech teacher this week who works in an Oklahoma City area district, and she has to teach WindowsXP basics to students on computers that don’t permit them to right click or use the Start menu. This is ridiculous and educational malpractice. Unfortunately, we don’t have parents and business people advocating for teachers and students in situations
like this and so environments like this are probably more common than many people would believe.

I think students need access to their own laptop computers so they can use a variety of different client-based programs (like Google Earth, Google SketchUp, SeaShore, and Scratch to name a few) in addition to web-based programs. I’m excited and love iPads as well as Chromebooks, but those devices are still very limited in important ways when it comes to creating and publishing multimedia content.

One of the big concerns I have presently in educational politics as well as educational technology is the push we’re seeing toward online testing and the goal of providing each student with a digital device just so s/he can take computer-based tests. This is absolutely the wrong reason to embrace one to one digital learning, and is yet another manifestation of why we need to change the “high stakes testing” push from our state legislature and the federal government that continues to have an extremely destructive effect on our schools, students and teachers.

In addition to equipping young people with their own laptop computers for creating and sharing digital content, we also need to provide them with relatively open, accountable Internet access. That is absolutely not provided in the vast majority of our Oklahoma schools today, in my experience. Most of our school districts are subject to draconian content filtering which would make any commercial web designer or graphic artist absolutely flip out or explode with frustration.

I started a project a few years ago, when I was working for AT&T in Oklahoma, called “Unmasking the Digital Truth.” I also gave a short “inspire model” presentation at OpenBeta here in Oklahoma City a
few years ago about this topic. We’ve got to find ways to promote more balanced content filtering in our schools. That’s why I registered balancedfiltering.org a few years ago and post there periodically. I hope in the months to come to help develop a tool for unmasking the content filtering policies in our schools and providing more transparency for them, to amplify the schools which are providing balanced filtering environments and shame those publicly who are not. So much of this is hidden from public view today, and it needs to be exposed so parents, students, teachers, administrators and other members of our communities can take action to change these situations.

I worked off and on all year last year, met directly with the Oklahoma City Schools superintendent, and talked twice directly to the OKCPS school board, in a vain attempt to get the district to unblock Gmail, Google Docs, Evernote and Edmodo. The district refused and provided erroneous, misleading and outright false information to justify their reasons for doing this. We have a lot of work to do in opening up our school networks to let students and teachers actually work online, balancing the requirements of the law with security, liability concerns, etc.

A big piece of what we need to do is better educate and equip the leaders in our schools (superintendents and principals) to be advocates for digital literacy and balanced content filtering. Unless these conversations and this education takes place on a broad scale, the “educational tools” our students need in our schools are going to remain out of reach for most. That’s not just unfortunate, it’s educational malpractice for 21st century schools and it has to change.
Q. How does learning about web design help young people, even if it’s unlikely they’d go into coding?

Wesley: One of the most important things people of all ages need to learn is “computational thinking.” This is something advocated by educators like Seymour Papert, who is the grandfather of all educational computing. Logo, which Papert developed, was a programming language designed to make math an activity, skill and process which students used naturally just like breathing. Scratch software is the grandchild of Logo. When students learn to code and design for the web, there are a host of important skills they learn, but effective problem solving and group collaboration rank high on this list.

Students also gain vital media literacy skills when they create digital content instead of just consuming it. I elaborated a bit on this earlier. The development of critical thinking skills is hugely important for our electorate and workforce. No matter what career path students follow, they can benefit from opportunities to learn some basics of web design, which help develop these skills.

Social media is now tied closely to web design, and it’s affecting all of our lives in countless ways today. Students are going to be members of organizations and groups in their lives who are going to want to effectively communicate messages with members as well as wider audiences. By learning web design skills, students can develop skills which will serve them and their peers well both professionally and personally. Whether they help a church group or nonprofit more effectively communicate with digital media, or end up becoming a professional web designer or graphic artist, young people can and do learn valuable skills when they learn web design.
We need to change the perception of “geek” in many of our schools today and help more kids understand how cool as well as instrumentally valuable technology skills are and can be. In addition, we need parents, teachers and legislators to understand this so we can insist on a greater focus on digital literacy within our schools and mandated courses/curriculum for students.
Sites & Tools for Helping Kids Create Online

General

**Evernote** - A good app for managing notes and research. They try to make it as easy as possible to store something in Evernote, with multiple apps and ways to store data.

**Kickstarter** - A great way to raise money for good ideas. But remember that it's not a quick way to get easy money. Good Kickstarter campaigns take a lot of work. Plus if you reach your goal you're legally obligated to follow through on your project, so don't go into it lightly.

**Pearltrees** - A site for organizing and collecting what you find online. It's a great way to collect ideas and logically gather your thoughts. Could be helpful for organizing all kinds of projects.

**Student Web Hosting** - A web hosting company for students and teachers.
**Coding**

**Alice** - A free software program that teaches coding in a 3D environment.

**Cargo-Bot** - Billing itself as “the first game programmed entirely on iPad,” Cargo-Bot doesn’t teach programming, but it teaches you how to think like a programmer.

**Codea** - An iPad app that lets you do touch-screen coding to create games and simulations (Cargo-Bot was coded with it).

**Codecademy** - A site that teaches code in a fun, interactive manner.

**Code Club** - A network of after school coding clubs for kids ages 9-11 in the U.K.

**Code Hero** - A game that teaches how to code games. It works like a first person shooter where you use a “code ray” to program games. It teaches Javascript with the Unity 3D game engine.

**Dot Diva** - An educational initiative to get girls into programming. They offer plenty of resources, stories and even a web series.

**FIRST** - It goes beyond coding into science and engineering, but who cares? It’s still cool! FIRST is Boy Scouts meets robots. What more could you want?

**Hackasaurus** - A slick little tool that lets kids see the code that generates a website and play around with it. They also offer tools for teachers and parents.

**Hacker School** - A free, three-month, full-time school in New York to help programmers become better programmers. Your kid might need to finish high school first, but it might be a good option for the post-high school crowd.
Khan Academy - An education site with more than 3,000 videos where you can “learn almost anything for free.” They have an entire section devoted to computer science.

Kids Ruby - A program that makes it easy and fun to learn Ruby programming.

Lego Mindstorms – An easy way to introduce kids to robotics. It’s all fun and games until the machines achieve consciousness.

Raspberry Pi – Hold on to your hats, this one is crazy: A cheap ($25-35), credit-card sized computer from a nonprofit that plugs into a TV and keyboard, designed to get kids into programming.

Scratch - A programming language developed by MIT that makes it easy to create interactive stories, animations, games, music and art and share them online. You can also check out the book *Super Scratch Programming Adventure*.

Scrunchup - A web magazine for young designers and developers.

Sharendipity - Lets anyone create web applications without programming knowledge.

*Think Like a Programmer by V. Anton Spraul* – A good introductory programming book to teach you how to code.

Treehouse - A site for learning how to design and develop for the web and iOS. Features over 500 training videos and badges you can unlock as you make progress learning.

Udacity - An education site where you can take online courses and do projects with university professors. Classes are primarily in math, science and technology fields.

WebDesign.com - A site for learning WordPress-focused design and development with over 450 hours of on-demand training.
Gaming

**GameMaker Studio** - Game development software that makes it easier and faster to create desktop, web and app games.

**Gamestar Mechanic** - A gaming site where you can design and build games. They also offer an online learning program where you can learn from pro game designers.

**Kodu** - Microsoft’s free Windows based program to create games without using code.

**MADE** - The Museum of Art and Digital Entertainment in Oakland, Calif., is a museum of video games that also offers programming classes for kids. Granted you need to be in Oakland to actually attend, but it might serve as a helpful model regardless of where you live.

**Roblox** - An online building and game site that lets you create objects and games without knowing how to code.

**PurposeGames** - Easily create your own quiz-type games.

**Sploder** - A site that makes it easy to create and share online video games.

**Stencyl** - Downloadable software that lets kids create their own iOS and Flash games without knowing code.
Video

**Animation Desk** - A drawing and animation app that makes it easy to storyboard, animate and create movies.

**Animoto** - An app to turn photos and video clips into a polished movie. Free movies are limited to 30 seconds.

**FlixTime** - Create videos with photos, video clips and music.

**JellyCam** - Downloadable software for creating stop-motion animation.

**Masher** - Create videos by mixing photos, music and video clips.

**Pixorial** - A web-based video editing platform.

**PowToon** - Designed to spice up business presentations, this tool lets you create simple animations and effects using drag and drop tools and provided cartoon imagery.

**Qwiki** - Create interactive video content without knowing how to do video.

**Xtra Normal** - Type text and create a video. It's an incredibly easy—and admittedly goofy—way to make animated videos.

**WeVideo** - A collaborative online video editor. You can do stuff on your own or co-create with others.

**Zimmer Twins** - A fun site to help kids create animated stories.
Website Creation

**Blogger** - A free, hosted blogging platform from Google.

**Tumblr** - A free service for sharing anything, Tumblr can be a quick way to get a site going. Downsides include limited flexibility and the fact that you don’t own your site.

**Weebly** - A website creation platform that makes it easy to build sites. There’s a free version and a pro version (currently $5/month) that offers more features.

**WordPress** - A free blogging and website building software that gives you the freedom to host and build your own site. The .com version offers hosted sites using WordPress as well as some premium upgrades.

Writing

**CreateSpace** - Amazon’s self-publishing platform that allows anyone to create and publish their own books.

**Google Docs** - If you need a simple but powerful writing program, you can’t go wrong with Google Docs. Working in the cloud also means kids can access work at home or at school.

**How to Help Your Child Set Up a Blog** - Advice from Mashable for how parents can help their kids start blogging.

**Kids Learn to Blog** - A site for kids, parents and teachers that focuses on how kids can do blogging.
Me Books – A picture book app for little kids that allows them to add their own narration. It’s a good way for young kids to get an early start on creating their own content.

National Novel Writing Month - The annual novel writing adventure has a Young Writers Program to focus on how kids can get involved in novel creation. Edutopia has a detailed article about kids taking part in NaNoWriMo.

PrimaryPad - A web-based word processor that lets you do real-time collaborative writing.

Scribble Press - An app that allows kids to write, illustrate and publish their own books.

Storify - A unique way to bring pieces from multiple social networking sites together to tell a story. It can be a fun way to collect multiple tweets, Instagram photos and YouTube videos from a single event and share them together.

Written By a Kid – More inspiration than tool, Written By a Kid is a series of videos where a child tells a story and the producers turn it into reality. It’s goofy fun and can serve to inspire kids to be storytellers. Though who needs adults to make the story a reality?!
Education

Best Practices in Web Development Instruction - Tips for teaching web development.

ePals.com - A social networking site for students and classrooms that allows for project-based learning and connection.

iThemes Education Program - Offers free and discounted access to the Web Designer’s Toolkit for teachers and students.

iThemes Education Blog - Tips for educators on teaching web design in the classroom.

Kidblog - A free blogging site for students and teachers.

Learnist - A social networking site for education that looks like Pinterest.

Lore - A social networking site for education that looks more like Facebook and enables all kinds of classroom interaction and learning.

School Coders - A programming resource for teachers and students.

Weebly - A website creation platform that lets teachers create class sites for free.
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