Teaching HTML

Below is a method I have developed for teaching HTML, which has proven to be highly effective and engaging, even for adults☺. This is meant to be used in conjunction with the material on visibledreams.

I begin by explaining, "You don't need fancy software to make a WebPage. All you need is a simple word processing program like simple text or notepad."

I have each child open notepad and then I have them locate the special characters they will need to use to write html <>/. I tell them that we are going to be writing a language called html (hypertext markup language), which we will use to talk to the computer. I explain the format of the commands (or tags) and also explain that we must not only tell the computer a command to begin, we must also tell it when to stop. I show them the difference between the two commands.

We follow basically the same steps that I have put on visibledreams, with these exceptions:

1. I do not introduce the hexadecimal system before we begin.

2. I create a common folder for them to store their pages in and I give the folder a name like "forest" or "meadow". Before class I write, on separate pieces of paper, the names of things that would be found in that place—like "fox", "mouse", "acorn", etc. These will be used later.

3. Before we begin, I have each child save the picture, they wish to use on their WebPage, in the "forest" folder.

We begin writing html. The first time the students view their WebPage is right after giving their page a title. Before we save, I hand each child a secret word (those slips of papers I mentioned above). The children save their WebPage as "the secret word.html". (For example: fox.html). I do this because later we use these names in creating hyperlinks that are "magic". I collect the "names".

When the children first view their new WebPage, I point out the title on the title bar. This immediately grabs their attention and they begin to become very interested in continuing. I explain, as I do on visibledreams, that we have not yet given our page a body and so it is blank.

Then we begin with the code for body and bgcolor. This is where I give them a brief lesson in the hexadecimal system. I ask them questions like "How would we make blue?" And "What would be the code for black?" Then I ask them a stumper: "Does anyone want to guess the code for yellow?" At this point, I have them type in a "magic code" after bgcolor–whatever they want and I remind them that the highest letter is F. I suggest that they might type in their birthdays (because the colors will look the same, though their birthdays are different, and they will want to know why). We then view the

WebPages and the “ooohs” and “aahhhs” are terrific. I tell them that they can go back now and change the code. They usually go back and forth several times, testing codes.

We continue adding text and pictures to our WebPage, just as you see on visibledreams. When it comes time to create our first hyperlink, I give each child one of the secret names—a name that belongs to someone else in the class—and we create our hyperlinks using those names. I have them use the word “next” as their hyperlink. They are so amazed, when we view the pages, to see that they are connected to someone else in the class. I have them test how far around the room they can go by clicking on “next”. This activity leads to a wonderful discussion on how hyperlinks work. If it works out that two children are connected to each other, and thus can only reach each other’s web, we talk about why that is. We can figure out how to fix the links, so that we can access all the WebPages in the room. Then we go and fix the codes.

For those of you who do not have the capability to save all of the pages in one folder: When creating our first hyperlink I ask the students to type in the address of their favorite website. They are always so happy to see that their page links to that site.

I hope you find these initial ideas helpful. I will soon have more available on the use of tables in web pages.