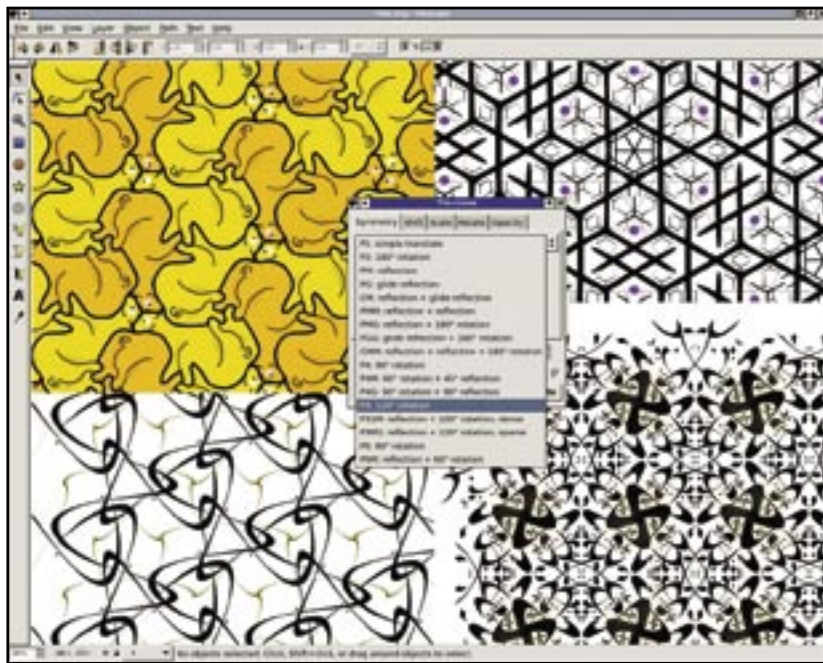


Open Source Software Is Geek-Speak for Free

Harold Olejarz



Inkscape: Tile clones

Schools are on tight budgets and teachers are always looking for ways to do more with less. Open source software is a great way to empower your students with great software at a great price—free.

What is open source software? Well, to get a more technical definition go to the Wikipedia. What is the Wikipedia? The Wikipedia, like open source software, is free. It is an online encyclopedia that is available in 200 different languages—so if you have a multilingual classroom it can be a great resource. You can find the Wikipedia at www.wikipedia.org and get a more technical definition if you like. But, for the average art teacher, when you hear

open source software, think free software developed by a community of people who donate their time and expertise to write the software code for the program.

Another great thing about open source software is that it is usually available for Windows, Mac, and Linux operating systems so if you have Macs at school and the kids have PCs at home or vice versa, everyone can still use the same program.

Available Graphics Programs

Many different kinds of open source software are available, but in this article, I will discuss three graphics programs that will be of particular interest to art educators. The first program is for older students and teachers. This graphics program,

similar to Photoshop®, is called the Gimp. Following is Tux Paint, a kids' draw and paint program recommended for children ages three and up that is similar to Kid Pix®. Finally, if you are searching for a program with capabilities similar to Illustrator®, Freehand®, and Corel-Draw®, then look no further than Inkscape.

The Gimp

www.gimp.org

Perhaps the most useful piece of open source software you will find is an image manipulation program called the Gimp. It is available for Mac, Windows, and Unix operating systems. If you go to the site, you find that the program is described as "the GNU Image Manipulation Program...a freely distributed piece of software for such tasks as photo retouching, image composition, and image authoring." The Gimp user manual is chock full of valuable information and even experienced Photoshop users may learn some new tricks about masks, layers, channels, and filters. Looking through the manual's contents will also convince any skeptic that the Gimp is a powerful piece of software that can tackle any of your digital imaging needs and/or class projects. If you are interested in learning more about using the Gimp, there is a Gimp Tutorials page at www.gimp.org/tutorials/. The Gimp Web site also lists several books that can help you learn to use the program.

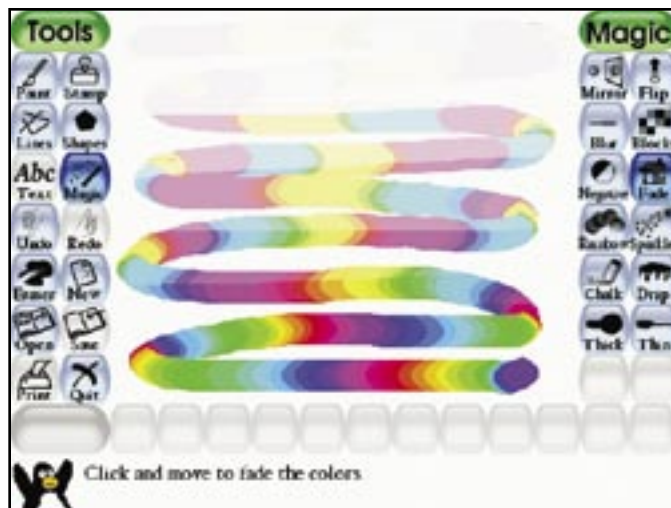
The Gimp and Photoshop are bit-map graphics programs. This means that they are pixel based and the images are composed of lots of little

dots—pixels—short for picture elements. Programs like Illustrator, Freehand, and Corel-Draw are vector graphics programs. Images created with these programs are images that are completely described using mathematical definitions. This means that vector graphics programs describe a circle, line, curve, or shape with mathematical formulas as opposed to the little dots of bitmap programs. Vector graphics programs are used to produce logos, design elements, or stylized, cartoon-like illustrations. Vector graphics may be printed at any size and will maintain their smooth fills and crisp, sharp lines.

Tux Paint

www.newbreedsoftware.com/tuxpaint

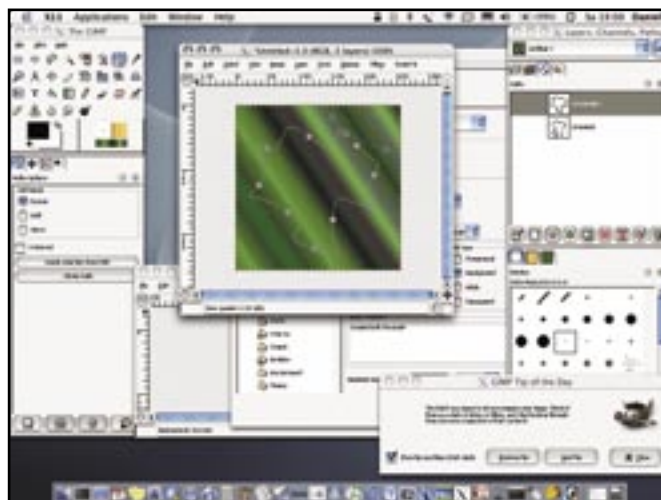
Tux Paint is billed as a draw and paint program that “has a simple, easy-to-use interface.” Its features include sound effects, which can be turned off, and a cartoon version of Tux the penguin at the bottom of the screen who gives tips, hints, and information. Tux Paint includes a rubber stamp tool, line tool, shape tool, and text tool. There is also a “Magic” tool that adds special effects. The Tux Paint Web site is very well organized. It offers lots of resources, links



Tux Paint: Magic tools



Inkscape: Map



The Gimp

and helpful information along with a user comments section. If you love Kid Pix, you will love Tux Paint. Tux Paint is available for Windows, Mac, and Linux operating systems and parts of the program have been translated into fifty different languages.

Inkscape

www.inkscape.org

Inkscape is an open source vector graphics program similar to Illustrator, Freehand, and CorelDraw. Inkscape is available for Mac, Windows, and Unix operating systems and their Web site has information on downloading, using, and learning the program. The documentation section of their Web site, www.inkscape.org/doc/index.php, contains tutorials that will help you learn the program and even give you some project ideas.

I hope that this brief introduction to open source software will help you find a way to include technology in your curriculum, even if you are working with a limited budget.



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