Details

How to Support Students as Graphic Designers with Tony Vincent - 285
In this episode, educational consultant Tony Vincent shares how educators can empower students as graphic designers. You'll hear plenty of EdTech tips and resources for helping student graphic designers grow as visual communicators by providing opportunities to share their learning with the use of illustrations, color, typography, and more!

Link to live show notes:

https://classtechtips.com/2024/09/17/Student-Graphic-Designers-285/
* *Student Graphic Designers*

Introduction

Hello there, and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech podcast. My name is Monica Burns, and I am so glad you're here to join me today. If you want to make the most of education technology, AKA EdTech, you are in the right place. My goal has always been to help make EdTech easier and give you ideas to try yourself, share with a colleague, or bookmark for later in the school year.

Every Tuesday on the Easy EdTech podcast, you'll hear stories from my time in the classroom, my work with schools and districts, and my travels to different EdTech events. Get ready for solo episodes where I share some quick tips, stories, and interviews full of practical ideas and stories from new guests each month. If we mention something you'd like to check out, make sure to click the link. You'll find it in the episode description or the summary area where you're listening to this podcast, or you can find every episode and all of the resources we mention by going to classtechtips.com/podcast or by going to classtechtips.com and just clicking on the Easy EdTech Podcast button at the top of the page.

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Today's Intro

This week's episode is titled: "How to Support Students as Graphic Designers with Tony Vincent." You might know Tony from his super popular blog Learning In Hand. I've known

Tony for a while now and always love chatting with him about creativity and EdTech. In today's episode Tony shares lots of tips for educators and we talk about the ShiftinEdu conference which we are both speaking at next month. Let's dive into the conversation.

Episode Transcript

Monica Burns:

Welcome to the podcast, Tony. I am so excited to have you on today to talk about how to support students as graphic designers. And before we jump into all of that, would love for listeners to hear a bit about your role in education. What does your day-to-day look like?

Tony Vincent:

Oh, my role's changed over the years. Currently I am a self-employed consultant, and I occasionally substitute teach, but I spend most of my time reaching educators, developing resources leading professional learning, and learning a lot myself.

Monica Burns:

And, you know, you and I have known each other for a while, and your resources are fantastic. Just so accessible for educators who are looking for great ideas, who want to boost creativity and their classroom. And this topic of supporting students as graphic designers is one I'm pretty pumped to chat with you about. 'cause I think of you as just being such an expert in this area. And for someone who is excited about creativity in the classroom too, but might not use the term graphic design kind of in their day-to-day conversations. What exactly does a graphic designer do?

Tony Vincent:

Graphic designers are visual communicators, so their goal is to prevent <laugh>. Their goal is to present information in clear and compelling ways. So that's the use of illustrations, color typography, and layout to create visuals. And if you think about that, all teachers and all students are graphic designers because we <laugh> present information in visual ways quite often.

Monica Burns:

And that's something where, you know, even this, this topic, we might not use that term, like you said, right, in all of our conversations day to day. But we are, we are doing this, right. We're trying to communicate ideas big and small in different content areas with visuals. So for teachers who are bringing this to their students, maybe they've done some different things that would fall into this category, but are looking to be a bit more intentional, right? This school year, seeing their students as graphic designers. What are some fundamental skills educators should focus on when teaching kids about graphic design?

Tony Vincent:

You know, so many teachers, when they're teaching literacy, they point out text features and text features. That's graphic design. And so for me recently, I, most recently I taught fifth grade in 2019. And we, I very purposely looked at all the text features from our textbooks, websites that we use, any kind of handouts, so that they noticed not just the content, but how it was presented so that they could then better understand the content. That's why we teach text features. But also they can apply that for when they're the graphic designers for when they're doing the communication, when, when they are showing and sharing their learning and their messages and, and their creativity. So with that, I, I like to show, you know, what the two big questions I love are, or what do you notice about what you see here? So it's very open-ended, and then, and what do you wonder? Why did they do that? Or how did they make that? I, I always encourage students and, and teachers and myself. I keep a file of inspirational designs. Things like, oh, that looks really cool. I wanna use that for inspiration for a future project. And just storing that away. Mine's all digital just in my Apple Notes app. But I like to refer back to that when I feel like I have a little creative block and say, oh, I do have that inspiration. I can, I can look off of,

Monica Burns:

I love that idea of having some almost like mentor texts, right? Like bringing it back to the EO classroom.

Tony Vincent:

Yeah. It's a good way to think of it. <Laugh>,

Monica Burns:

You know, something that, you know, we are looking at, we talk about what we notice, what we wonder, what we love or what we might not choose ourselves, right? If we are, are

designing this. And so having that sort of, you know, having kids on the lookout right. For things that, that speak to them, right. Creating that inspiration to folder, if you will. I love that. Just as a way to help them see themselves, almost like shifting in their role, right. As consumer and creator. So tell me us a little bit about what this might look like in terms of, of giving, you know, feedback on making sure things are ready for an audience. What are some things kids might consider there?

Tony Vincent:

Yeah, I think feedback is a really important piece to this, and not just from teacher, but, but peer feedback. Because, you know, some of, some of design is in the eye of the beholder. You might think it's beautiful, but if the person receiving it gets a different message or has difficulty reading it, then it's, it, it needs improvement. <Laugh> it's not, it's not a clear example of communication. So it not just in graphic design, but in, in all areas. When I taught fifth grade recently, we really focused on that peer feedback, giving feedback that's kind specific and helpful that they're looking for a goal and giving feedback directed toward that goal. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And so when you have that kind of community and that kind of attitude fostered in your classroom, then they can give feedback That's great when, you know, they've used an ugly gradient or a font that <laugh> that is awful, or they see something they think is great and they want to use it themselves. And we often celebrate our triumphs of, of visual design in the classroom. Yeah.

Monica Burns:

Yeah.

Tony Vincent:

And then there, there's just some websites. Sometimes I found some new ones lately. That's neat to see. But students have trouble with color combinations. Oftentimes. I mentioned gradient because my daughter is going into sixth grade, but she will come home and she'll, if somebody is an ugly gradient in a project, I am the first to hear about it when she <laugh> walks in the door home from school. She can't stand it when people use ugly gradients. And so there, there's some websites and even some AI ones, and maybe you can put them in, in the show notes that will, or even just do a Google search yourself for color palettes, inspiration, where students can see colors that go together and colors that. Don't you, one of the things that, that students sometimes have trouble with is they have some favorite colors, but you mix orange and background and, and yellow text.

Tony Vincent:

You might love those two colors, but you know, you're not gonna be able to read it. So having that idea of that you, you need to be able to, to see the, the text. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. There's even a website about color vibration, which seems to be something a lot of students suffer from in that they will pick a green background and and a yellow font. And then if you, but it, depending on the shades they choose, it might look like it's moving. Like the people who view that is like, it looks fuzzy. It looks almost animated sometimes because of what it does to our eyeballs, <laugh>,

Monica Burns:

And it's such a wild thing, even if we're talking about like a STEM connection, right? Of like, how do we respond to these different colors even physically. So I love that resource. I know, you know, I find myself sometimes if I'm, I usually stick with the same sort of fonts just for brand consistency, if you will. Right. But if I switch something up, I often am Googling what fonts go with this font Right. That I chose. Right. Or what is a nice pairing right. Of this font. Just so that like, I'm mindful if I don't know exactly, you know, a serif font a Sans serif I, I've got some vocab when it comes to this. Yeah. but not as, as robust Right. As might be useful. And now there's just so many more tools that are out there. So absolutely. We will link out to those. And, you know, can you share speaking of tools, right? Some effective tools or software or apps that are, are student friendly for graphic design? Or are there any that you love for beginners? Specifically?

Tony Vincent:

Yeah. Well, the first one that comes to mind is Canva. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> free for K 12 students and teachers. And that there's so many templates in there. So they already have the colors picked out, and if you don't like the colors, there's that little randomized button and it can switch it around for you and you can change the, the design so that, that gets students focused on the content. And it's also another opportunity to look critically at that template and see, you know, is this right for the message I'm trying to communicate are, are the colors appropriate? You know, if you are making a, a flyer or a, a, a, maybe a, a slideshow about the Civil War, you know, having bright, happy colors doesn't seem appropriate. <Laugh>. So, so even just picking out the template it is, is a piece of that. And then, and then learning how later, how to change that template if you're like, oh, I wanna swap out this or that. And, and then later on showing students, 'cause another place I love for design is really just Google Slides because you have this blank canvas and then you can layer shapes and text and images to make really anything.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And just that idea that, you know, you might be in a space already, like a Google Slides, maybe a Canva Right. That has templates, that has some support with helping choose colors and what you said there about, you know, the, the project type, right? We might have our favorite color palettes, or we might have a template that we love, but just because we love it or it's our favorite, it might not be the best <laugh> for that particular Yes. Topic or content Right. Or assignment. And I think it can be hard, right? Particularly for students who might feel drawn to a particular font that they love Right. To, and this I think is where that peer feedback piece can definitely come in, right? To step back and say, this is great. However, right. It doesn't connect to our primary goal here, right. Of communicating this mood or this tone. What can we shift, right. Even if it's not our favorite color, well, this color would do a good job, right. Of connecting back to that idea.

Tony Vincent:

Yes. And it, just because it's your favorite color doesn't mean you need to use it in your project. <Laugh>,

Monica Burns:

Right? <Laugh>, yeah.

Tony Vincent:

Or your favorite font, right? <Laugh>.

Monica Burns:

Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And that can be hard, right? That can be hard for someone who's, you know, enthusiastic and excited about it. But it's an important, I think, thing for kids to realize too, that's transferable for to a lot of the other things that they can do. Tell us about Shapegrams, which is another great resource for educators.

Tony Vincent:

Well, yeah. That's my passion project that I rolled out when I was teaching fifth grade, and it was really successful. So I make it available to, to any teacher who wants to, to give it a try. At

shapegrams.com, I have a set of graphic art challenges where it starts out simple and then they get harder as you progress through these challenges and lessons. But it just asks students to recreate a picture that they have on one side of the slide with shapes. So it gets them exploring that shapes menu, understanding, layering, and eventually some of the lessons tackle word art and how to stylize that. And from what I found with, with my own fifth graders, is even just by the, doing one of these a week by end of first quarter, they were like little graphic artists and designers, and they could make anything they were thinking of that they wanted to create, which was great for the kinds of projects we were doing because they they, they couldn't make those kind of text features that they have in their inspiration journal. They knew how to make them come to life because they had the skills and they knew the techniques to make that happen in Google Slides.

Monica Burns:

And that's, you know, something where, you know, we talk about the transfer of it all right. Now, they have this skill that they can bring into lots of different content areas. So would love to hear a bit about how, you know, how do you integrate graphic design lessons into different content areas. Do you have any examples of successful student projects that involve graphic design?

Tony Vincent:

Yeah. <Laugh>. Well, my favorite one was where I gave we graphic organizers to my students constantly, usually in, in Google Drawings. And we would have, for stories that we had, they were already part of our curriculum, but I would then put them into Google drawings, so it would be easy for them to, to fill in and then turn in through Google Classroom. Well, eventually, after doing Shapegrams for a few weeks, the students realized, well, we could make our own graphic organizers. I was the one having all the fun putting together my own Venn diagrams and adding the shapes and making the flow. And they're like, well, Mr. Vincent, can we make our own <laugh>? Like yeah, you can <laugh>. So we would then get to talk about, well, how are we going to organize this information and, and talk about the different kinds of graphic organizers and thinking maps that are out there. And then they would use shapes. They put their own colors and fonts into it, and then of course, their own content to get their, their thinking about whatever the, the topic that they were making the organizer about.

Monica Burns:

So I love that idea of them, again, like giving feedback, right. Seeing something all the time from you and then saying, I can do this too. Right? Or, or I can put right. These ideas into action.

Tony Vincent:

Yeah. That's, and that's the thing with, with Shapegrams too, we're almost cursed with looking at any kind of piece of graphic design. And you're like, oh, I see the shapes that are made outta that. Like, I know I could make that, I could make that in Google Slides, in fact, <laugh>

Monica Burns:

Or, but what a great, just like brain activity too, to be able to Right. Unpack something to see a, a complex shape, but understand, you know, all the parts right, that pulled it, pulled it together, and then find right, that ownership, right. To say, I can do this, or I could figure this out. I could exactly. I could problem solve. Right? And these are all skills that we're trying to bring into different content areas, whether we name it as a graphic design, skill skill or not. So, you know, I know you have a gender bias project that you've done with your students too. Would love to hear a bit about that.

Tony Vincent:

Yeah. For one of the, our taught at an IB school, and then later on I was a mentor for a group where they studied gender bias and they realized that they, based on their research, they needed to raise awareness about what gender bias is. And so they, the, this group of students brainstormed about how they wanted to get their message out, and they landed on, they wanted to create a series of stickers so they could hand out to the adults who are at school pickup. And then when they choose a sticker, they can tell them about the sticker and some of their research on gender bias. So, <laugh>, it was neat to see that they put their, their graphic design skills to work where they made these really cool stickers with like one that using different fonts and colors and, and images. And like, they had one that said, boys do cry with a inside of a big tear drop. They had one that had a tombstone that said, rip gender rolls <laugh>. And or another one that just had some like really tasty looking cinnamon rolls that said, cinnamon rolls, not gender rolls. Oh

Monica Burns:

My gosh. <Laugh>.

Tony Vincent:

And yeah, so they, they, they, they had all sorts of stickers like that, that, that gave them good talking points later. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And it was neat to see that the, the graphic design was just an essential part of how they were getting their message out.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. And just, you know, I love having something tangible too, especially when we have these conversations about things that are digital, right? Yes. Like how sure we can print stuff out and, and that's what, you know, an option in a lot of situations. But just being able to hold a sticker Right. That you've designed right. That you right. Have made and put all this effort into that there's a story behind, right. And you're prompting someone to have a conversation with you about this, and you're addressing a need in the community. I mean, there's like so many boxes to, to check off there in terms of what kids are able to accomplish Right. With a project like that one. And that's the kind of thing, you know, that sticks with them. I just, gosh, maybe like a week ago came across something from my high school just like a piece of paperwork from them.

Monica Burns:

I don't live in that, in that area anymore, but I came across this and the logo, I said, I was in art class with the person who designed this logo. I remember when we did this challenge. And, you know, that was 20 years ago and it's still the logo of the day. It's still there, <laugh>. Right. And it was just such an interesting thing to just say like, wow, like there are, you know, stories behind these graphics, right? These things have an impact. I'm not sure what that now woman is doing someplace, somewhere else who was in my class with me in high school right. When we did that project. But it is something that has a whole story behind it. So I love that idea of the community connection to the project. Like you mentioned, that also has to do with plenty of ELA skills in addition to, to civic engagement.

Tony Vincent:

Exactly.

Monica Burns:

And so, you know, as we're we're thinking about graphic design and sharing ideas for creativity in the classroom, I wanna chat with you about the ShiftinEdu conference. We've both attended an

Tony Vincent:

Oh, ShiftinEdu is awesome.

Monica Burns:

No, that might be the last time we saw each other in person. Yes. I'm thinking about it too. You know, sometimes those, the big conferences are, you know, we're running around in different directions, but one of the things I loved about ShiftinEdu I've been a couple times now, is just the, you know, how much more intimate it is. You really get to have great conversations. And what have you liked about this event in the past? We're both headed back there next month.

Tony Vincent:

Yeah. So ShiftinEdu isn't at a convention center or a hotel. It's on the campus of St. Stephen's Episcopal Day School in Coconut Grove, Miami. So it's in a beautiful place. This school is amazing. I mean, you'll go there, you'll be jealous of the building. Mm-Hmm. But you'll be happy that you're there, <laugh>, because the, the, the place is just awesome. You get, you're in a classroom, so you, you get to, I love snooping around classrooms to see what, what's on the walls and what's going on. You know, really it started as the St. Stephens School. They wanted to offer really great PD for their teachers. Instead of sending them off to a bunch of conferences, they invite featured speakers and, and attendees from all around the, the country to join them. And they know how to put on an event like this. I mean, even the, even the food which is catered by their, their own cafeteria staff is amazing <laugh>.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. I feel like I was just telling someone about the paella from that event <laugh> last year when we were there last October. That was just so tasty. And yeah, I mean, just like you mentioned, being in a space, you know, being in a beautiful school space, getting to see what other people are excited about in their classrooms, the energy is very different right. Than being in a convention center or a big hotel, you know, ballroom or anything like that. And it is really one of my favorite events or for all those reasons that you just mentioned. So, you know, what topics will you be covering in your, in your talks in ShiftinEdu this year? Is there anything that will make this year extra special?

Tony Vincent:

Well, I, I love my topics and I actually love my co-presenters this year. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So my twins, Connor and Ellie, they're going into sixth grade. They are my co-presenters. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And we've been working together this summer to create examples and to explore these topics and figuring out what we actually want to communicate to our audience. And so it's so exciting. I've presented with them once ever close by in Nebraska, and they couldn't wait to do it again. So our topics are I, I try to have some clever titles. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. So there's Prince Charming preparing printables with Canva. So, as you said, when you, graphic design is, is awesome and it's awesome in Canva, but then when it can be something tangible, when students see a printout or a sticker or in, in this session we're do zines and door hangers and just different creative ways that, different things that we can make inside of Canva, usually from a template. And then it goes out into the real world to show, to share learning to affect others. So we're excited about that one for sure.

Monica Burns:

I love that.

Tony Vincent:

Yeah. We've been exploring brain breaks, so we Mm-Hmm. Digital brain breaks. So we're calling those digital snacks and showing things that are, that are satisfying, satisfying videos websites that are quick that students can go to and kind of just take, take a quick, quick break to re reset before they continue learning.

Monica Burns:

I love it. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, any others? Give us a shout. Yeah,

Tony Vincent:

We got a couple AI ones. So mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> from prompts to pictures, we're gonna talk about creative illustrations with AI and why you'd want to make, when is a great time to make illustrations with AI, what is it good for? And so we, we've got there. And then one more ai artificial sweeteners, AI for teachers. And that's really just how to make your teaching and

learning more fun, more diverse and interesting for the teacher and for the students using the power of AI.

Monica Burns:

I love that. I love just the topics and the idea that you are having some really special co-presenters with you at the event this year. And of course, I'll link out to information so people can learn about ShiftinEdu and find out about the conference next month. So excited about it. And, you know, for someone who's listening here who, who may be attending ShiftinEdu this fall or have another professional learning event on their calendar, is there, you know, one big piece of advice you would give them so that they can make the most out of a professional learning event?

Tony Vincent:

Yeah. I, I kind of nerd out before I go to a conference and I study the program pretty heavily. <Laugh>. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. So I have first and second and maybe third choices. I, I look at the the presenters and the, the thing about shift in EDU is because it's a smaller event, the presenters are also attendees. So you'll see them in different sessions. I saw you in my session. Mm-Hmm. You saw me in yours. It's an opportunity to get to talk to them. So if I, even, even if I can't make it to a presenter session, if I like their topic, I will find them. And I know it's like embarrassing to go talk to somebody, but I know I, I love it when people come up to talk to me. You do too. Yes. Go to the presenters and strike up a conversation about what they were presenting, whether you were there in that session or you couldn't make it. Like I obviously happy to talk to you about any of the sessions or anything else that at that conference. And it, it's just that, that kind of event where you are encouraged to talk to everybody.

Monica Burns:

Yeah. I just, I love that part of, of this particular conference too, as you mentioned, the ability to sit in the back of a session where you don't always have time to do that. Like at a busy conference or big convention center where you can't find the room <laugh>, which is always my, like what's closest is how I typically have to schedule things for a big event like that. You know, this is so much more attainable in terms of reaching all of your goals. Right. For, for professional learning. So I'll make sure to link out to all sorts of things we talked about today, the resources. You mentioned Shapegrams info on ShiftinEdu, but for someone who's on the go right now and like making a mental bookmark where can they connect with you or can they learn more about your work?

Tony Vincent:

Yeah, all my work is really linked from my home on the web for the past 22 years, I think, at learninginhand.com. I recently, I know you've had a great newsletter for a long time, but I recently started my own. Nice. And that's right there learninginhand.com too. And all, all my socials are there as well, and a link to Shapegrams. But I really appreciate the time to get to talk to you, and I'm excited that I get to see you at ShiftinEDU again.

Monica Burns:

Yeah, likewise. Just a month away. So thank you so much Tony for, for taking some time to share all of these great tips and resources with listeners today.

Tony Vincent:

My pleasure.

So let's make this EdTech easy with some key points from the episode…

Graphic design skills help students communicate their ideas visually.

Peer feedback helps students refine their graphic design work.

Canva and Google Slides are great tools for student design projects.

Small conferences can offer big, meaningful connections with other educators.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode

including all of the ways to connect with Tony Vincent on classtechtips.com/podcast and

finding today's episode #285!

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understanding of how to design and deliver innovative learning experiences that prepare students for success. Learn more at: www.shiftinedu.com/

Outro

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Spotify will let you tap on the stars, and Apple Podcasts will let you tap on the stars and leave a one or two sentence review.

Thank you so much for taking this extra step, it helps other educators find episodes like this one when they are searching for EdTech tips.

Episode Resources

- Check out Tony Vincent's website, newsletter, & free Shape Grams resources
- Connect with Tony on Instagram, Facebook, X (Twitter), Threads,& TikTok
- ShiftinEdu Conference
- Canva for Education (Graphic design platform)
- Google Slides (Free online presentation tool)
- Google Drawings (Free graphic design tool)
- AI Colors (AI-powered color gradient generator)
- ColorSpace (AI-powered color gradient generator)
- Avoid color vibration
- How to Save Time with an Online Design Tool (Blog Post)
- Incorporating Creativity and Visuals in Tech-Friendly Projects with Al Thomas (Podcast Episode)
- How to Use Social Media for Lesson Inspiration (Podcast Episode)
- 7 Educator Tips for Going to a Conference (Blog Post)
- How Teachers Can Generate Images with AI (Blog Post)