No Smart Board? No Problem!
by Matt Bowers

Before teaching at my current school I didn't even know what a Smart Board was. I knew the term, and thought I knew what it was, but I was wrong. Knowing an answer to the question "What is a Smart Board?" didn't happen until my first day there. After setting up my desk, I went straight for the computer and Smart Board … I wanted to see what this thing was all about.

I jumped right in, and after reading a bit of the manual, watching a slew of YouTube tutorials, and experimenting on my own, I realized I wasn't learning the Smart Board … I was learning its software called Smart Notebook. That's when I knew I was going to be ok; I can learn the ins and outs of a piece of software. As it turns out, Smart Notebook isn't any harder than the commonly used Word or PowerPoint. In less than a day I had gone from "boy was I wrong about Smart Boards" to "I think I'll try it out with the kids." I also did a little digging around my new closet, and found several interactive resources that were simple as can be to implement. A couple of them have become staples in my music lessons, namely "Interactive NOW!" put out by the Lorenz Corporation.

Interactive NOW! currently has 10 volumes, the last 5 of which are compatible with all interactive whiteboards. What I like most about this series is the engaging, readymade lessons, games, and activities that are appropriate for all different age levels. I also love that it is entirely stand alone, meaning it doesn't require any software installs or downloads; you can run it straight from the CD or drag the contents of the CD to your computer and run it without the CD straight from your computer. Either way, it couldn't be easier to get started using.

For upper elementary grade students I have found an activity from Interactive NOW! Volume 6 that is very engaging for the entire class called Treble Match Up. It's a great way to review and practice naming notes on the musical staff, and essentially runs itself. I choose the first 'contestant' who comes up to the Smart Board and touches the letter name of the note being shown. Once they get it right, they pick the next contestant, and on and on they go. I usually try to give everyone in the class at least one turn, and even with almost 40 students in my class at any one time, they are all engaged in the activity through its completion.

Another great thing about Interactive NOW! is how the games, activities, and lessons are all separated by grade level appropriateness. One of my younger student favorites for rhythm practice is an activity called Old Mac's Barn Yard Band. It's great for rhythm practice and transferring rhythms to instruments. It can be used in a variety of ways, with a variety of instruments, including recorders or xylophones. The middle section is a 'virtual flashcard' with different rhythms that will change when you touch it. The button on the bottom right labeled 'Play Audio' plays a short tune (which the little kids all love) with 4 measures of drums only in-between repetitions of the tune. Students listen to the tune, and play the displayed rhythm 4 times during the drum only sections.

Although I was feeling pretty comfortable with Smart Notebook (the software), it took a while before I really understood the most effective way to use it in my classroom. During the summer in-between my first and second years at this school, I created an interactive music agenda utilizing the most basic of tools in Smart Notebook, which I've now been using ever since. I have a page for each grade level showing their daily agenda, a behavior chart for each

class, a scratch page or two I call 'flex pages', and a 'sing' page where I can play any of the many songs we like to sing in music class.

The agenda page is very basic; a few concepts we'll be focusing on for the day and what we'll be doing with them. I make each item a separate text box so I can make each one link to different page. Linking is an easy way to switch between screens quickly. I use the screen shade (a gray box) to cover up agenda items and reveal them as needed. Also on the agenda page is a link to behavior charts for each class (again made with a text box), so after summing up the agenda we'll take a quick look at our position on the chart and where we can get to by the end of class.

The behavior chart page is a large music staff I drew using the shape tools in Smart Notebook. Each class of the day is a note on the staff; classes start on the bottom of the chart and move up if they finish everything on the agenda. I have as many different behavior chart pages as I have days with different sets of classes, which happens to be 4. I made sure to set the notes to 'lock and allow move', so it won't allow anything besides moving happen to the note. Before locking, however, I linked each class note back to its own agenda. That way when we've finished looking at the chart we can go back to any class agenda quickly.

Flex pages I use in a variety of ways, depending on what discussion or activity we may be doing that day. To introduce concepts I'll use a fade in effect on each (use separate text boxes). In discussions I frequently use one of the many pens Smart Notebook offers, like Magic Pen. Sometimes I'll have something up on the page, and then color over it with the same color as the background. As I use the eraser on a seemingly blank page, things begin to appear.

Another fun trick I do with the eraser is when I'm finished and ready to clear the screen; I could just choose select all and delete. But instead, using the eraser tool, I'll draw a big circle around everything I want to erase, and then tap in the middle. If done right, whatever is inside the circle will vanish when the middle is tapped; the kids LOVE IT!

The sing page has become one of my favorites. When it's time to sing, I go to the sing page. When I first started using it I had titles of songs that when touched would play that song. It didn't take long to run out of room, plus all that text on the screen was very busy. Then, it struck me; pictures! Now I have a small picture that represents each song and when you tap a picture you'll hear its song. I'm able to fit more songs on there, and it's obviously great for kinder as they are just starting to read.

I can understand if some of the past two pages might seem a little foreign, or maybe flat out don't make sense. But if you're at all interested, I suggest downloading the free version of Smart Notebook, try a few tutorials from YouTube, and then come back and read this all again. At that point you'll have a pretty clear understanding of what I'm talking about. And what about the title of this article … "No Smart Board …"? Well, I'm about to get to that.

You may or may not have noticed, but throughout the article, I've used the words 'tap', 'touch', & 'click' interchangeably and equally. That's because just as you can tap and touch things on a Smart Board, you can click things with a mouse while at the computer, or better yet with a wireless mouse. I'm sure they won't like me saying this, but the Smart Board is optional! Having one is definitely fun and engaging for the students, but if you don't have one, I believe there is still a lot of benefit to be had in modifying Smart Board activities to be used on a screen

and projector. Be brave, give it a try, and if it doesn't work, keep at it. Eventually it will work,

and once it does your students will run with it!