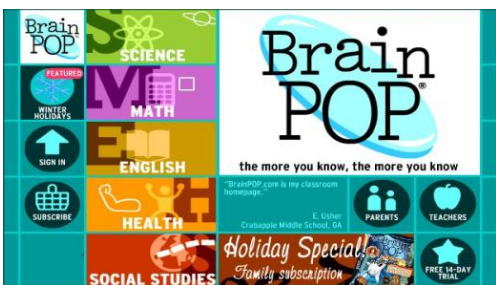




*The Reading Matrix* © 2010  
Volume 10, Number 1, April 2010

**Title:** BrainPOP 1999-2010 FW Media, Inc. [www.brainpop.com](http://www.brainpop.com)



**Producers:** Dr. Avraham Kadar, M.D

**Platform:** Web

**Minimum System Requirements:** Windows 95, Macintosh OS8, or Linux, Internet connection, 64 MB Ram, 200 MHz processor, Internet Explorer 4 or Netscape 4, Flash Player 4, Speakers, Adobe Reader

**Target Language:** English

**Target Audience:** Beginning readers in Preschool-2<sup>nd</sup> grade and English Language Learners

**Cost:** Free

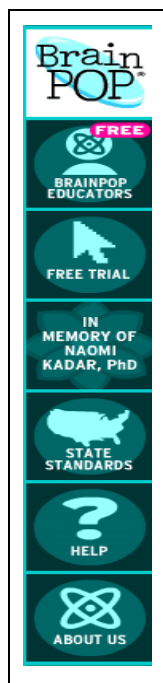
*Reviewed by Nicole Nichter*

State University of New York at Fredonia

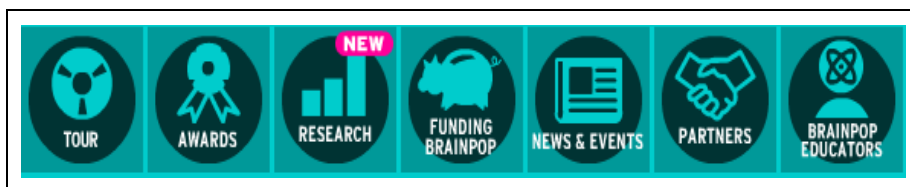
The website *BrainPOP* is a widely used website for content-based educational resources and supplements. This interactive website offers movies, quizzes, games, worksheets and more in the content areas of science, social studies, English, math, art, music, health, technology, and ESL support for grades K-12. It is completely download-free and works with any computer that has a flash player.

Over the past ten years *BrainPOP* has grown in popularity and with the advancement of technology in the classroom, teachers are able to bring *BrainPOP* to students on interactive white boards, television screens, and individual computers. These presentations provide meaningful, standard-driven instruction and assessment. From its humble beginnings in 1999, the original *BrainPOP* only offered a few classroom activities for grades 3-12. Now, it has sprouted sister sites such as *BrainPOP Jr.* for grades K-3, *BrainPOP Español*, and *BrainPOP ESL*. Due to the exceptional quality and high demand of this website in the United States, *BrainPOP*'s developers have created an international branch for fellow educational communities around the world. *BrainPOP UK*, *BrainPOP Latinoamérica*, and *BrainPOP Français* offer similar activities and are spoken in different dialects (of English) and languages (Spanish and French).

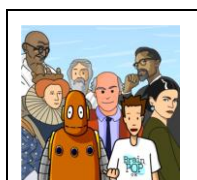
One of the best features that teachers like about *BrainPOP* is its ease of use. Its links to other areas on the website are provided by tool bars with bright blue icons that can either be found at the bottom or left of the page at all times. With the large amount of content *BrainPOP* offers, it seems as though it would



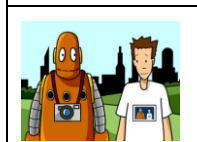
take hours to find relevant information. However, the layout, webinars, and free tutorials make navigating through the tremendous amount of information a cinch, requiring no expertise. The site offers lesson plans, curriculum calendars, recent research, classroom tools, and materials for professional development, all of which are completely free. The developers have added the State Standards Tool which allows educators to search their state standards in order to fit different activities with appropriate standards. This option shows the clear supporting relationship BrainPOP has with American educators.



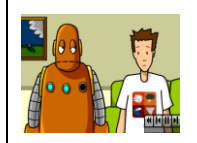
Students are greeted by *BrainPOPs* fun and supportive mascots Tim and his robot friend Moby each time they visit the site. These



interactive characters can be found in all curricular areas and their primary use is to help explain concepts, design experiments, and show students how to acquire a particular skill or use the information given. Using comprehensible input based on grade level and curriculum area, Tim and Moby have personalities of their own and are relatable, trustworthy friends to their viewers.



Teachers like to use the site in a bottom-up process (searching for specific items), whereas children can use top-down processing while using *BrainPOP*. This website is a free-for-all playground where students can learn about anything they are interested in. Also, the site allows students to teach themselves, self-correct, research, and play without boundaries.



*BrainPOP* is completely cohesive and comprehensive in regards to language acquisition and English as second language (ESL). It is no surprise that one of the more recent additions to *BrainPOP* is an ESL division. Currently, it only supports one level of ESL students, most likely for beginner

English language learners (ELLs). However, it is stated that there are more levels to come in the future. These levels contain approximately six units of ESL content ranging from pronoun recognition to conjugation of past tense verbs. Each unit provides interactive warm-ups, words to know, videos, writing activities, games, and listening activities. For teachers, it offers lists of vocabulary, lesson outlines, and important concepts from each unit.



When students are first introduced to *BrainPOP ESL*, they are greeted by Ben and Moby. Ben is like Tim from the original *BrainPOP*. However, he too, is an ELL. Ben speaks slowly in the videos in order to ensure listening comprehension and to give wait time. When interacting with Moby, the duo heavily rely on non-verbal communication such as beeps, physical gestures, and manipulation of objects.

*BrainPOP* uses several methods of ESL teaching consistently. Of the four language modalities—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—all *BrainPOP* versions and levels include the use of these modalities with the notable exception of speaking. Speaking is one of the most difficult skills to address while using a computer program or website. Nonetheless, it encourages students to speak during the lessons on public speaking, voice, and dialogue, all of which could easily be applied to classroom instruction. Students can listen to the videos on all *BrainPOP* sites, while words and pictures are

read aloud on *BrainPOP Jr.* and *BrainPOP ESL*. By reading words aloud, it helps to develop letter- and word-sound associations in a cohesive and grammatically correct language. Student reading is an implied skill on *BrainPOP*. Other than the content-based blurbs found to the left of each video, reading is for instruction. Instructional reading skills are employed in the quizzes, quiz reviews, vocabulary exercises, and graphic organizers. After reading and listening, written assessment is given by using printable worksheets and quizzes. The website also offers task-specific activities such as writing sequences, the writing process, descriptive writing, and many more. From simple tasks such as navigating around the websites to focused tasks, *BrainPOP* enforces literacy from all angles thereby bridging the gap between speaking and the other literacy skills.

*BrainPOP* is founded on the pedagogy of *present, practice, and assess*. First, the information being taught is presented on a video. Next, the students are able to take the information from the video and apply it to the activities provided. Finally, a short quiz is offered to assess student learning. The “activity” icon can be found directly beneath the video window. When clicked, a tabbed screen of activities, organized by style (graphic organizers, vocabulary, games, etc.) will be seen. For example, each content area has a tabbed page for vocabulary practice, graphic organizers for new information, and games such as word finds and crossword puzzles. All of the activities complement typical assessment or practice activities found in the classroom: DBQs are often found in social studies, graphing worksheets are used in math classes, and labeling the bones on a diagram of the human skeletal system are all typical, content-based knowledge a learner needs to know. The activities vary for content to content and can equally be expanded upon by the teacher.

In sum, *BrainPOP* is an organized way to teach children content areas by using technology. The site and its sister sites are all fundamentally based on educational pedagogy and curricula from around the world. Not only do teachers love to use *BrainPOP* because of its viability, organization, and convenience, but students love to use the site as well for much of the same reasons. It is a power house of rich information, suitable for children from grades K-12 and perhaps even beyond. Given its versatility and dynamic flow of change with the times, *BrainPOP* is sure to be seen, heard, talked about, and written about by our educational communities for a long time to come.

## REFERENCES

BrainPOP. (1999-2010). Retrieved from <http://www.brainpop.com/>

*Nicole Nichter is pursuing her master's in TESOL at SUNY Fredonia, Fredonia, NY. She works as a graduate assistant in the TESOL department at SUNY Fredonia, aiding in research and assisting in the editorial process of the international journal, The Reading Matrix. She has presented at the National TESOL conference and has represented New York State TESOL in a regional conference. Her areas of interest include assessment, special education, and ESL.*

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