

Creating Electronic Books with Word: It's Easy and Free

BY DEL SIEGLE



Since Johannes Gutenberg's invention of movable type and the printing press in the early 1400s (Bellis, n.d.), printed books have been the

standard for sharing ideas and transferring knowledge from one generation to the next. More recently, computers and the Internet ushered in a new age of information sharing. One of the more exciting developments in the last decade has been the marriage of computer technology and printed books into the electronic book, which is more commonly called the eBook.

In simple terms, an eBook "is an electronic (or digital) version of a book" (free

e-books, 2005, p. 5). Books that have been saved as text files, web pages, or portable document format (pdf) files are all considered electronic books. Recently, several companies have begun developing special formats and software to display electronic books. These software programs include sophisticated features that extend beyond merely displaying text. The purpose of this article is to describe free eBook reader and creation software that is available from Microsoft. Using these Microsoft products in Windows, reading and creating electronic books is easy and free. The programs are available for the Microsoft Windows® 98, NT4, SP6, 2000, XP, and Me operating platforms.

Free Books

Electronic books have gained popular-

ity for a number of reasons. First, they are frequently free. As books' copyrights have expired (for information on copyrights see <http://www.copyright.gov/circs/circ1.html#hlc>), they are often converted to an electronic format and available free on the Internet. Many of the classic titles that students still read (e.g., *Red Badge of Courage*, *Tom Sawyer*, *War of the Worlds*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*) fall into this category and can freely be downloaded from the Internet. The University of Virginia Electronic Text Center (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/ebooks/>) offers more than 2,000 free titles on its website. Differentiating reading content for gifted and talented students is much easier when teachers have access to a variety of free books that are of different reading levels and topics. Free eBooks in the public domain make this

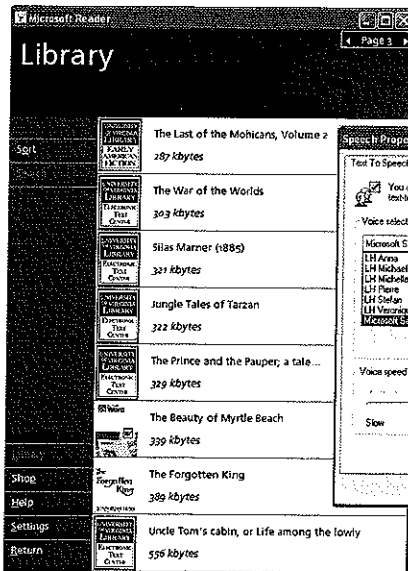


Figure 1

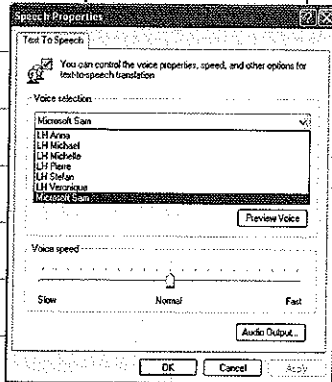


Figure 2

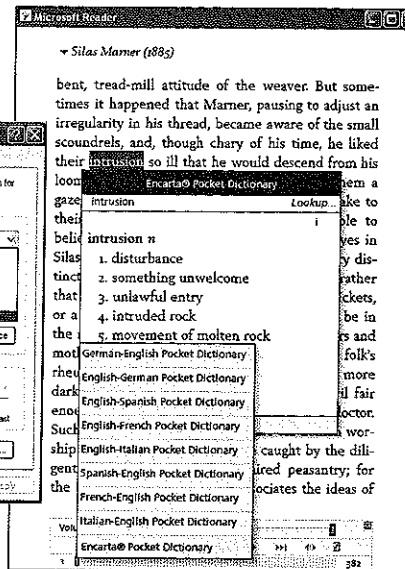


Figure 3

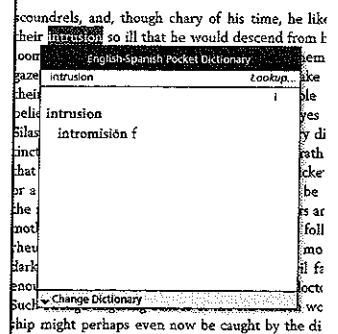
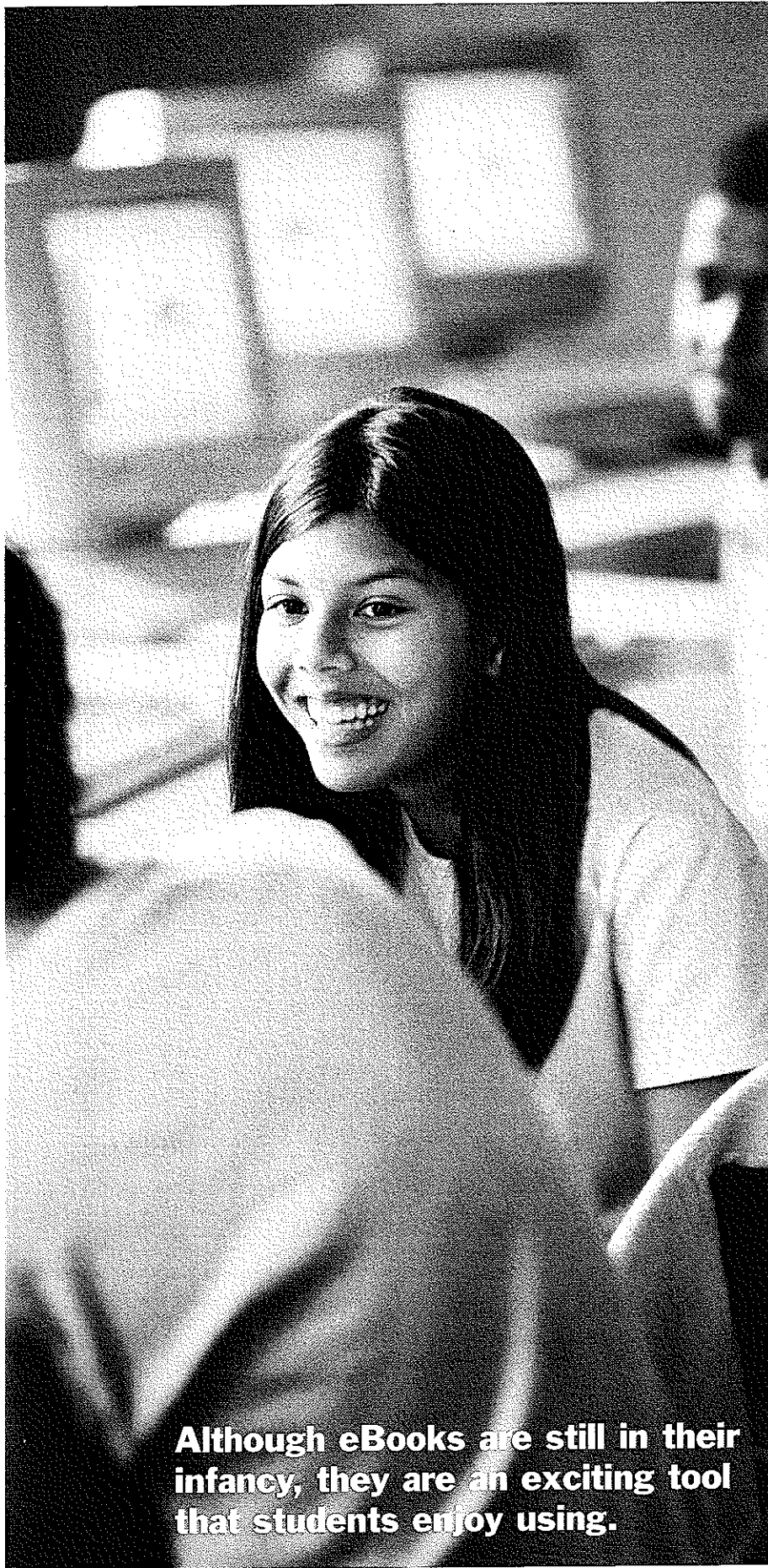


Figure 4

One of the more exciting developments has been the marriage of computer technology and printed books into the electronic book, commonly called the eBook.



Although eBooks are still in their infancy, they are an exciting tool that students enjoy using.

possible. Most modern books are also available in eBook format from online bookstores, although the cost of these eBooks is comparable to print versions.

Limited Storage Space

Because eBooks are electronic files, they can easily be saved and stored anywhere that electronic documents can be saved. They can be stored on a computer's main or auxiliary hard drive, burned onto CD ROMs or DVDs, or saved on flash memory cards/keys/drives. For example, a student could transport a library of a thousand books on a small SD memory card (about one square inch in area) that weighs one or two ounces. The days of lugging heavy backpacks back and forth to school may give way to memory cards hung around students' necks or files stored on easily accessible Internet servers. All eBooks are catalogued into an electronic library that is automatically displayed when an eBook Reader is opened (see Figure 1). Accessing an eBook is as simple as clicking on the book icon in the eBook library.

Free eBook Reader from Microsoft

The Microsoft Reader software, which can be downloaded free from <http://www.microsoft.com/reader/downloads/default.asp>, includes a cadre of impressive eBook features. These include:

- voice-to-text
- interactive dictionaries in multiple languages
- text highlighting and notes
- searchable text, and the option for students to self-publish eBooks

Each of these uses will be discussed further in the next sections.

Text-to-Voice

First, a synthesized voice can read the text of the eBook. Most Windows platforms include a default text-to-speech package. An additional English speaking female voice and male and female voices to read German and French can also be downloaded for free from <http://www.microsoft.com/reader/developers/downloads/tts.asp>. Once the text-to-voice packages are downloaded, different voices can be selected in the control panel. From the *Start* menu select

Control Panel -> Sounds, Speech, and Audio Devices -> Speech. A dialog box where different voices and reading speeds can be selected will appear (see Figure 2).

Since most gifted and talented students are excellent readers, the text-to-voice function may not initially appear useful. However, some gifted students with reading disabilities will find the function very helpful. It may allow them to consume sophisticated literature that more appropriately matches their intellectual understanding. Second, gifted and talented students who are studying French or German will also find the feature valuable. The appropriate combina-

default does not contain a dictionary, English, English-to-German, English-to-Spanish, English-to-French, English-to-Italian, German-to-English, Spanish-to-English, French-to-English, and Italian-to-English dictionaries are available for free download from <http://www.microsoft.com/reader/downloads/dictionaries.asp#english>.

Once the dictionaries are downloaded, Microsoft eBook users simply click on the word they wish to define, select the *Lookup...* option from the automatic menu that appears, and view the selected word's definition. As shown in Figure 3, a variety of dictionaries can

books upset librarians and other book lenders, these operations are encouraged with eBooks. Readers can alternate between six different highlighter colors. They can also insert notes throughout the text (see Figure 5). An index of these annotations is available within the eBook. The annotations can be sorted by type (bookmark, highlight, text note, or drawing), page number, date created, or last date modified (see Figure 6).

Other Features

In addition to the features just described, the eBook Readers include options to search for words within the

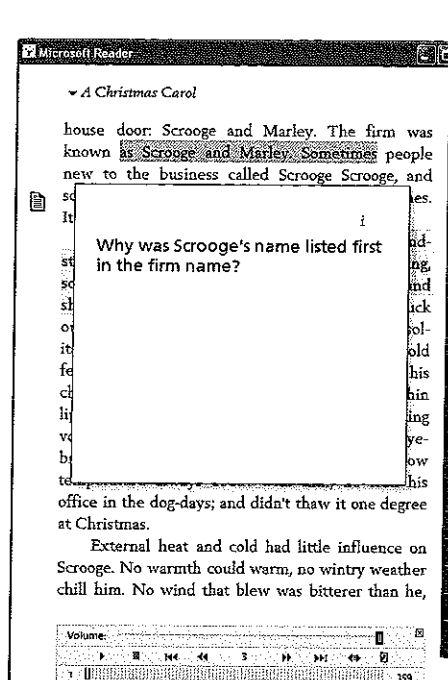


Figure 5

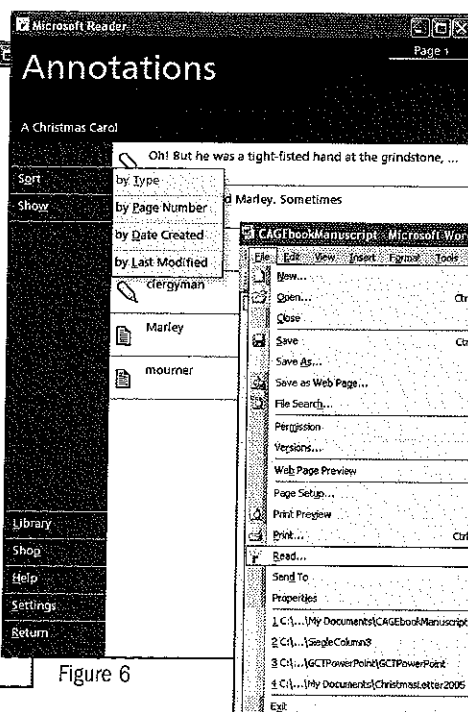


Figure 6

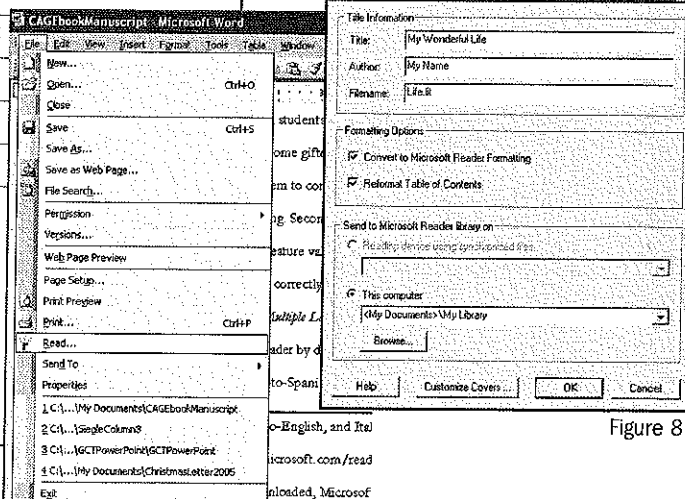


Figure 8

they wish to define, select the *Lookup...* option from the

When students...create authentic products they can share with a real audience, they are more motivated to work on the products.

tion of text-to-voice language and eBook text will correctly pronounce eBook content that is written in French or German. Remember, the pronunciation of French text will only be correct if users download and then select a French voice from the control panel.

Multiple Language Dictionaries

While the Microsoft eBook reader by

be used. If the English-to-Spanish dictionary is chosen, a Spanish translation for the selected word will be displayed (see Figure 4) .

Highlighting and Notes

Another advantage of electronic books is the option to highlight words and include page notes. While highlighted text and margin notes in traditional

text, change type faces and sizes (ideal for individuals with vision problems), modify the computer screen layout, track last pages read, and use table of contents. While text from an eBook can be copied and pasted into other documents, an entire eBook generally cannot be printed. Some eBook readers do allow a given number of pages to be printed each day. Most eBooks with current copyrights also

limit the amount of text that can be copied each day.

Creating eBooks

While using eBooks can be an enjoyable reading adventure, the creative possibility of writing and producing an eBook is more exciting. Renzulli (1982) has long been a proponent of providing talented students with opportunities to create authentic products for authentic audiences. Electronic books are one economical way to achieve this with young writers. Publishing paper books is expensive. Publishing eBooks is free. Stories that are created in Microsoft Word version 2002 or Microsoft Word version 2003 can be converted to Reader eBooks at the click of a mouse. The *Read in Microsoft Reader (RMR)* add-in for Microsoft Word enables users to convert any Word document into a Microsoft Reader format eBook in just a few simple steps (Microsoft, 2004). The add-in software can be downloaded free from <http://www.microsoft.com/reader/developers/downloads/rmr.asp>. Once the add-in is downloaded and installed, an icon of the letter "r" with three green leaves above it will appear on the Word menu bar. The icon and the word *Read...* also will appear under the *File* menu (see Figure 7).

First Steps

The first step in creating an eBook is to type the book content into Word. Since Word is a common word processing program, many students are probably already writing their stories in Word. If students wish, they can insert pictures to illustrate their stories. They may wish to insert pictures they have drawn and scanned. They can also create images on the computer, save these images, and insert them into their Word files. The document is saved as any other Word file is saved. Once the book is completed, it can be converted to an eBook. After saving the book as a Word file, convert it to an eBook by selecting the *Read...* option from the *File* menu (see Figure 7).

A dialog box will appear (see Figure 8) that will request a title for the book, the author's name, and a file name for the book. Microsoft eBooks have a *lit* file extension. The dialog box also shows

where the book will be saved. By default, the program will save the book within *My Documents in My Library*, although the eBook can be saved anywhere the user wishes. If a table of contents was created in Word, the software also can format an electronic table of contents that directly links readers to sections of the eBook.

Educators often miss the distinction between creating a book to be printed on paper and creating an eBook. Word processing (e.g., Microsoft Word, Corel WordPerfect) and desktop publishing (e.g., QuarkXPress, Microsoft Publisher, Adobe InDesign) software are excellent programs with which students can design and print books. If students wish to print their books, they should use these programs. Students should not expect to create and save an eBook and then print it, since eBooks generally cannot be printed. The purpose for creating an eBook is to produce an attractive electronic version of the work. Therefore, type sizes and fonts, indentation, and picture sizes may appear differently in an eBook format than they do in the Word document where they were created. If students wish to keep the format they created in Word, they can uncheck the *Convert to Microsoft Reader Formatting* box in the *Formatting Options* section (see Figure 8). This action should be exercised cautiously because some Word formatting may not be compatible with the eBook format and unexpected results may occur. Electronic book creators should experiment saving their eBooks with the *Convert to Microsoft Reader Formatting* box checked and unchecked.

Sharing eBooks

Student can share their eBooks with each other. Electronic book files are copied and moved like other files. Microsoft Reader eBooks that are downloaded from the Internet usually automatically appear in the eBook Reader Library. Books that are saved as eBooks from Word also automatically appear in the eBook Reader Library. Books that are copied or moved onto a computer sometimes do not automatically appear in the library; however this is easily remedied. Simply double clicking on the file will open it with the eBook Reader. Once a

book has been opened and viewed with the eBook Reader, it automatically appears in the library, regardless of where it actually is saved. Book files that are stored on computer accessories and in a variety of locations on the hard drive will all appear in the library after they have been viewed with the eBook Reader.

Although eBooks are still in their infancy, they are an exciting tool that students enjoy using. When students are given the opportunity to create authentic products that they can share with a real audience, they are more motivated to work on the products. They will put forth extra effort to create a quality product if they know others will be seeing and using it. Creating and sharing eBooks will excite students and increase their motivation to write and share their ideas.

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