What media can teachers and students legally use in creative works?

It is our job as educators to “serve with passion to ignite creativity, innovation and excellence”. We want our students to utilize technology to create original content using digital media available online. However, it is also our responsibility to make sure that they understand how to use that content legally. Understanding how copyright applies to teachers and students begins by understanding four key concepts...

1. **Copyright.**
   A work is copyrighted as soon as it is composed by the author. No special actions need to be taken by the author to ensure that a work is copyrighted. Thus, if a work (photo, music, poem, video, etc…) is to be reused, permission must always be granted by the author first.

2. **Public Domain.**
   Works in the public domain are freely available for authors to reuse. Often they are older works whose copyright protection has expired. The current term of copyright protection is the life of the author plus 70 or 95 years.

3. **Fair Use.**
   (The exception to the rule!)
   Copyrighted materials can be used without an author’s permission under certain circumstances. While educational purposes do not always fall under fair use, they sometimes do. Four factors that must be considered when claiming fair use are: purpose of use, amount to be used, nature of the work and the effect of the use on the market.

4. **Creative Commons.**
   Creative Commons works are content whose authors decided that they want anyone to be able to use their work without first securing permission. Creative Commons works have varying degrees of freedom regarding how they can be used and these stipulations are set by the original author. To find Creative Commons work that you can use, go to: http://search.creativecommons.org/