

JAVA-Based Heat Transfer Visualization Tools

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Abstract

Two JAVA-based applet programs have been developed for web-based instruction of transient conduction heat transfer within solid objects. One program allows students to enter key parameters and watch a “heat transfer movie” of their system. A second program is an improved, web version of the Heisler charts, which are commonly located within textbooks. The impact on learning and an example of how these tools can lead to increased student visualization and comprehension is given.

Keywords: heat transfer, visualization, computer methods, Heisler charts

Introduction

There have been large technological advances in computer technology applied to engineering education. One area that has yet to develop fully in this capacity is the use of the World Wide Web (WWW). In this manuscript, two particular JAVA applet programs are developed to simulate the classical problem of transient conduction/diffusion within a solid. A student who uses the tools can capture the basic principles of heat or mass transport by observing the dynamic phenomena and exploring the effect of changing problem parameters on the solution. The applets and sample problems are available at: <http://www.chem.mtu.edu/~jmkeith/webtools/>.

Description of JAVA applets

One dimensional unsteady-state heat conduction movie

Heat conduction is a key concept in transport phenomena because of the large number of heating and cooling problems occurring in industrial processes. It is also analogous to many cases of mass diffusion. The classic example presented in textbooks is unsteady-state heat conduction in various geometries; however, to estimate a local temperature a student must refer to a cumbersome analytical solution containing an infinite series or interpolate data from charts. Usually, the student fails to visualize the actual heat transfer process.

Consider unidirectional unsteady-state heat transfer in an object with constant material properties. The object is initially at a uniform temperature T_0 . At time $t = 0$ the object is exposed to an environment at temperature T_1 . If the object is a slab of thickness $2L$, the thermal energy conservation model balances the accumulation of thermal energy with heat conduction:

$$\rho C_p \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = k \frac{\partial^2 T}{\partial x^2} \quad (1)$$

subject to the following boundary and initial conditions:

$$\text{at } t = 0, \quad T = T_0 \quad (2)$$

$$\text{at } x = 0, \quad \frac{\partial T}{\partial x} = 0 \quad (3)$$

$$\text{at } x = L, \quad h(T - T_1) = -k \frac{\partial T}{\partial x} \quad (4)$$

Similar models can be developed for a long cylinder and for a sphere.

As figure 1 shows, this applet has an easy-to-follow graphical user interface (GUI) design. To use the applet, the student first chooses the geometry where heat

conduction occurs (slab, cylinder, or sphere), and enters a set of initial conditions and parameters. The software automatically computes the following quantities:

- Biot number ($Bi = hL/k$), the only dimensionless parameter in this system. This allows the user to determine if external convection or internal conduction is the dominating heat transfer process.
- the characteristic time for thermal diffusion, $t_c = L^2/(k/\rho C_p)$. This allows the user to estimate the time for the solid to reach thermal equilibrium with its environment.

The simulation can be started, paused, or stopped, by pressing the appropriate button. The most unique feature of this applet is that a colored bar represents the cross section of the slab, and a colored circle represents the cross section of a cylinder or a sphere. The color is graduated to represent temperatures between T_0 and T_1 . A red color ($R = 255$, $G = 0$, and $B = 0$) always represents the higher temperature between T_0 and T_1 , and blue ($R = 0$, $G = 0$, $B = 255$) always represents the lower temperature. Therefore, there are two instances for the color representing any temperature T between T_0 and T_1 . (It is noted that Figure 1 is shown in grayscale; the online applet has color.)

$$\text{if } T_0 > T_1, \quad R = 255 \times \frac{T_1 - T}{T_1 - T_0}, \quad G = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad B = 255 \times \left(1 - \frac{T_1 - T}{T_1 - T_0}\right) \quad (5)$$

$$\text{if } T_0 < T_1, \quad R = 255 \times \left(1 - \frac{T_1 - T}{T_1 - T_0}\right), \quad G = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad B = 255 \times \frac{T_1 - T}{T_1 - T_0} \quad (6)$$

To further strengthen the visual effect, the temperature profile is shown below the color bar. Another novel feature of this applet occurs when the simulation is paused,

when the cursor can be placed within the color bar or circle and the program outputs the dimensional distance (x), temperature (T), and time elapsed (t) as well as the corresponding dimensionless quantities ($x^* = x/L$, $T^* = (T_1 - T)/(T_1 - T_0)$, and $t^* = t/t_c$).

The input parameter interface allows the student to input different heat transfer coefficients, thermal conductivities and heat capacities. The user can also enter dimensionless parameters if they choose in one of two ways: enter values as length $L = 1$, thermal capacity $\rho C_p = 1$, thermal conductivity $k = 1$, and heat transfer coefficient $h = Bi$. The final time chosen would then be an increment of the characteristic thermal diffusion time t_c . Alternatively, the user can directly enter the Biot number and characteristic thermal diffusion time t_c . In either case, the dimensionless initial temperature $T_0 = 1$ and fluid temperature $T_1 = 0$ should be entered. The student can learn how these parameters affect the heat conduction by comparing simulation results. For example, the student can verify when the internal resistance is negligible ($Bi < 0.1$), which is the classical low Biot number approximation that students encounter in most undergraduate heat-transfer textbooks, sometimes without much justification. The student can also show that the temperature profile of a slab of width w at time t is identical to that for a slab of width $2w$ at time $4t$ when the Biot number is constant, which is the classical result showing the power of dimensionless groups.

Heisler charts for unsteady-state heat transfer [1]

Infinite series solutions are available for the heat conduction problem given by equations 1-4. These solutions are presented graphically in Heisler charts in textbooks [1], but an online implementation is easier to use due to the power of JAVA to

determine the exact coordinates on the graph.

Figure 2 shows the GUI of this applet. The user can choose a slab, cylinder, or sphere and also adjust the key parameters m (m is the inverse of the Biot number, $m = k/hL$) and n (a dimensionless distance, $n = x/L$). These parameters are also used in the charts in Geankoplis [1]. A user can directly enter the desired value of m or n in the text field or increase/decrease the value by pressing the buttons. Unlike the charts in the textbook that show many lines simultaneously, the JAVA chart shows only one line at one time. More importantly, the user does not need to interpolate between lines on the chart as is often the case in the textbook.

This applet also allows the student to move the graph by pressing the “Up”, “Down”, “Left”, and “Right” buttons. As figure 3 shows, double clicking the chart calls an axes properties dialog box. This allows the student to zoom in and out the graph. Another distinct advantage of this applet is that the student can obtain the values of the dimensionless time, $X = t/t_c$ and the dimensionless temperature, $Y = (T_1 - T)/(T_1 - T_0)$ from the X and Y text field simply by moving the cursor to the desired position on the line. This applet also can be used as a calculator. A relative value of X can be obtained by entering a value in the Y text field and pressing “Enter” and vice versa.

Impact on learning

The web based tools create possibilities for students to learn effectively. Felder [2] gives a good review of four learning style models (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Kolb’s Learning Style Model, Hermann Brain Dominance Instrument, and the

Felder-Silverman Learning Style Model). The Kolb Learning Style Model separates students as taking information in by either *concrete experience* or *abstract conceptualization* and internalizing information by *active experimentation* or *reflective observation* [3-6]. These two preferences give way to four learning types:

- concrete and reflective (answers the question “*Why?*”)
- abstract and reflective (answers the question, “*What?*”)
- abstract and active (answers the question, “*How?*”)
- concrete and active (answers the question, “*What if?*”)

Felder [2] states that traditional engineering instruction (lecturing on the basic information and methods associated with a particular topic) almost exclusively teaches to the abstract and reflective. Having access to web-based tools allows students to work on a problem and learn by trial-and-error without concern for failure (answering the question, “*How does this work?*”) and to discover things for themselves (answering the question, “*What if I change these parameters?*”). Thus, this tool expands beyond that contained within traditional instructional material.

Currently, the web-based tools are being used by J. Keith as auxiliary teaching tools in CM3120: Transport / Unit Operations 2 at Michigan Technological University. This chemical engineering course is required of all junior students and focuses on the fundamentals of heat and mass transfer. An in-class demonstration and homework assignment using these web-based tools are applied during the course. The JAVA applet website also contains example homework problems.

Conclusions

This paper demonstrates two web-based instructional tools for heat and mass transfer that are based on JAVA applets, which can be accessed for free at the following web address: <http://www.chem.mtu.edu/~jmkeith/webtools>. Educators can use these web-based tools in the classroom to instruct students and enhance their understanding. They were first used in the spring semester of 2003 at Michigan Technological University. Student feedback has been extremely positive, as they seemed to enjoy using the applets and better understand the concept of transient heat conduction, and also felt motivated to simulate some different problems by changing the parameters. Although the treatment presented here is limited to symmetrical, steady, boundary data, students that use the applets are now prepared to solve more complex problems (perhaps by writing a numerical finite difference method).

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Biographical Sketches

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Screenshot of the unsteady-state heat conduction applet

Figure 2. Screenshot of Heisler chart applet

Figure 3. Interpolating data from the JAVA Heisler chart

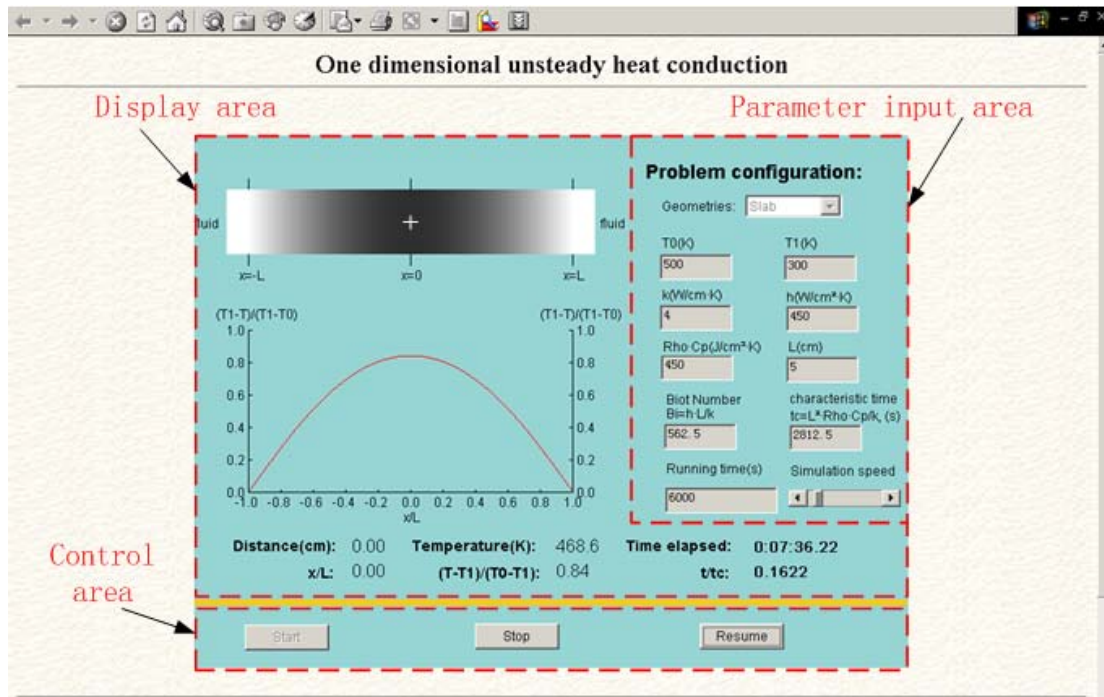


Figure 1. Screenshot of the unsteady-state heat conduction applet

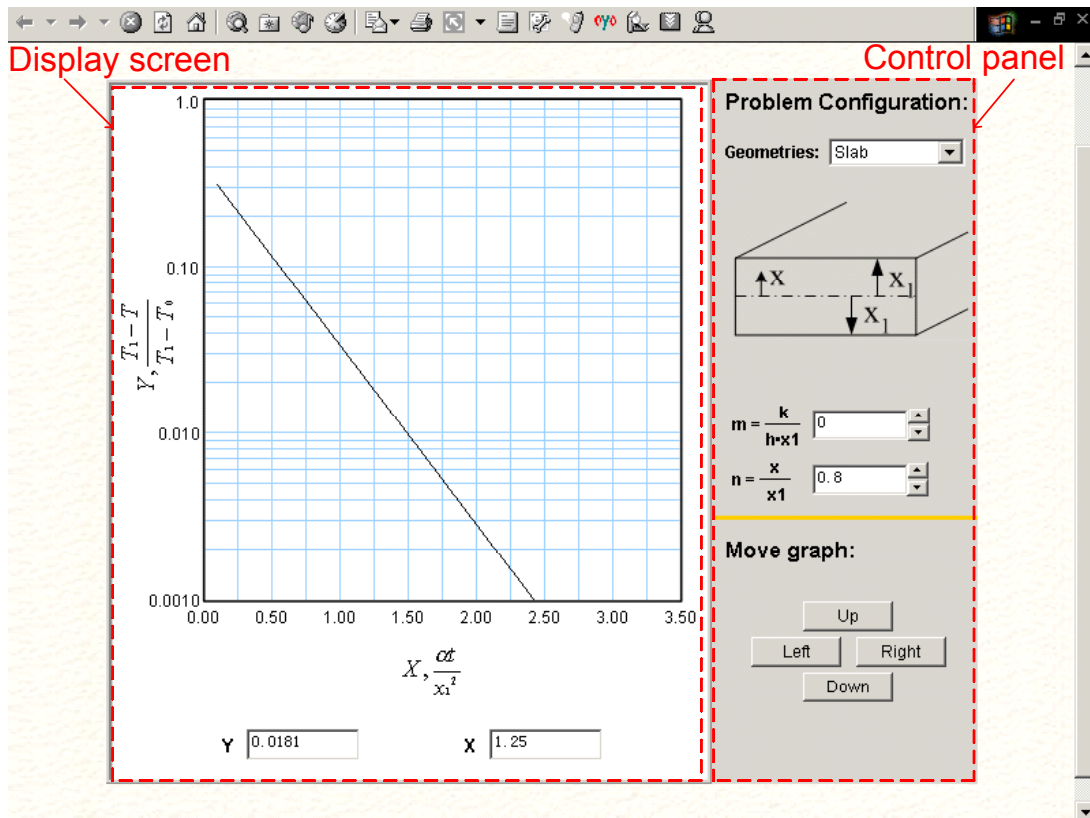


Figure 2. Screenshot of Heisler chart applet

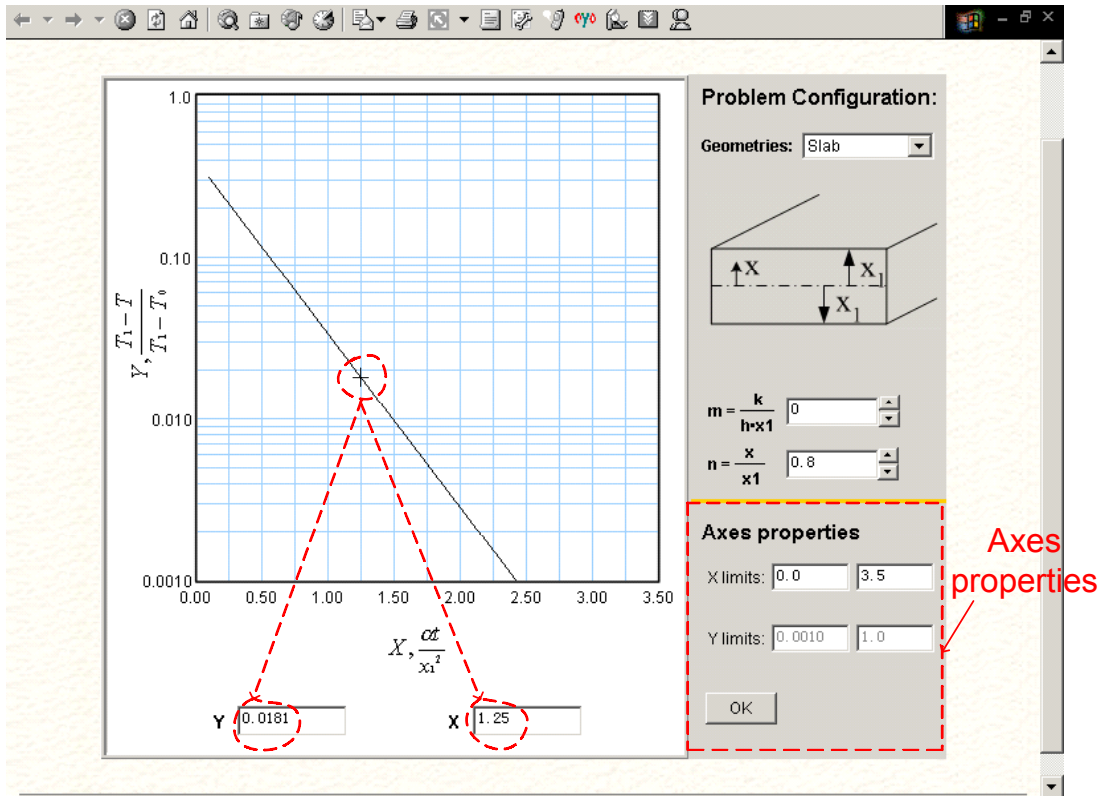


Figure 3. Interpolating data from the JAVA Heisler chart