



web sites for teachers and learners

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We all know that web sites are pages that have been developed and reside on computers around the world, and which are linked through the Internet. One excellent description of the Internet which I have come across and which should speak to all of us who deal with information - and especially the ordering of information in the form of libraries and catalogues - in very basic terms is this:

Take a book

Remove the cover

Remove the title page

Remove the table of contents

Remove the index

Cut the binding from the spine

Fling the loose pages that remain, so that they scatter about the room.

Now, find the information you needed from the book.

That is Internet!

Add to this concept, the fact that anyone anywhere with the slightest bit of computer know-how - including primary school children - can create a web page and, with not too much difficulty, have it posted and we are looking at a mine field - from our professional point of view.

What I would like to do is look at the concept of evaluating web sites and then, more particularly, look at the kind of web sites that appeal to teachers, librarians and learners - because I believe we all have very different needs and expectations.

The basic principles for evaluating the worth of a web site, is the same that should apply to any medium, namely:

- accuracy
- authority

- objectivity
- creativity
- currency
- scope.

Accuracy and authority are often closely linked. The question you need to ask is how authoritative is the web page?

Objectivity means looking at the site and determining what kind of site it is. Is it promoting a cause, selling something, providing information, offering news or is it purely personal?

Creativity is an important aspect of web sites - particularly in the world of education where learners are wanting instant gratification and interactivity in their learning. The look of a web site can be a total turnoff, even if the information provided on it is exceptional. Small details like having to scroll down, placement of buttons, et cetera, can be the key to the success or failure of a web site.

Currency is not always easy to determine when looking at web sites and for some this is not important, as the information contained is unchanging, for example, Shakespearean texts - but for others, up-to-date information is critical. However, even on those pages where the content is static, links become crucial. A web site with dead links is obviously not being maintained and can be very frustrating - particularly where the links look as if they have great potential for providing further information. It is always possible to check on how current the web page is by checking on the date on which it was last updated or to look under 'properties' which will indicate when a web page was created / modified.

Scope determines whether or not the web site is answering all your questions

adequately - or providing the links that will do so.

Let us look at each of our three constituencies - as they have different needs and therefore have different expectations when using web sites.

Please remember that my experience in this field is primary school and university - there is rather a void with regard to senior school learners. Although my current experience is with primary school learners, I sometimes think older learners still have the same approach to technology - only on a slightly deeper level - and pretty much the same approach to information.

Teachers

Teachers basically need a user-friendly web site with the most recent information appropriate to the search. Such a web site will have valuable activities which consolidate the learning required, links which are relevant and keep the learner focussed on the subject at hand.

The challenge, of course, is to find such web sites. There are two ways of doing this. Obviously to use a good search engine - such as Google - with the careful use of search terms and search strings. Remember that using 'quotation marks' will ask your search engine to search for the phrase, not just random words on the web page. You can also use the advanced search option.

Another way to develop a fund of excellent web sites is to sign up on an appropriate listserv.

There are many of these of varying value and only by experimenting you will determine whether it is of value to you and your educational needs.

Librarians

From my experience working in a primary school, I need to find web sites which will give me:

- recommended reading lists for appropriate ages
- book reviews
- author information
- book- and reading-related activities.

I have found many wonderful sites which are listed at the end of the article. I am sure there are many others which can also be recommended.





Learners

To be frank, using the web, learners generally want to do as little reading as possible, with as much interactivity as possible. Therefore, web sites where the information is concise, correct and current and where there are lots of relevant games, movie clips and other fun stuff - will hold their attention.

The challenge for teachers and librarians are to find sites that immediately attract the learners' attention, making them want to find out more and explore the site more; where the learning is dynamic and experienced through action and interaction rather than reading endless text. To this end, the web site must be well organised and systematic and the links must be focussed, not ones which send the learners off into other more exciting realms. If there are games to be played, rather than reading text, the learner will find it - thus any information transfer must almost be a subconscious matter.

Referencing and evaluating web sites

One of the biggest problems I have experienced is trying to explain to learners that Google is not a web site. They cannot reference in their bibliographies, www.Google - the actual site should be referenced.

Remember the following elements which should be given when referencing a web site:

- Uniform Resource Locator (URL) - including the <http://>. Browsers today (Explorer and Netscape) no longer require you to type in the <http://> but it is necessary to include it in the reference
- author or organisation - if you are able to establish one
- title of the web page - often this may duplicate the above
- date on which the site was created / modified - usually in [square brackets].

By insisting from an early age that learners always reference any web site they have

used, you are encouraging them to find out more about the provenance of that site. One hopes, that in so doing, they will then confirm its authority, accuracy and objectivity in their own minds.

When teaching learners how to reference their web sites, you can show them how to look for the authors - by reading the small print, by looking at the 'contact us' details, by going back to the original Google search and reading the extraction there. Likewise, to find the title, they may need to explore the page more fully and more critically than they would have done.

Useful web sites

List servers and discussion groups

- <http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/listserv.htm>
A listing of listservs / discussion and newsgroups on children's and young adult literature, language arts, English and school librarianship - a meta-site for K-12 educators and librarians.
- <http://www.theteachersguide.com/listservs.html>
This is a list of mailing lists, also known as 'listservs'. They are e-mail discussion groups dedicated to topics of interest to educators.
- CHILD_LIT List
<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/childlit/about.html>
For example, send an e-mail message to the list to subscribe:
From: Mary Lister <mary@mickle.wcape.school.za>
To: listserv@email.rutgers.edu
Subject:
Send reply to: Mary@mickle.wcape.school.za
Date sent: Mon, 26 Jan 2004 14:30:37+0200
SUBscribe child_lit mary lister
- LM-Select
How do I subscribe?
Send email to: el-announce-sub@elann.biglist.com from the e-mail account you wish to subscribe.
You will be asked to confirm your request to ensure the request is voluntary. Some lists require moderator approval of your request to join the list.
- LessonPlansPage.com Newsletter
You may also want to participate in our online educator discussion forums here: <http://www.LessonPlansPage.com/forums>
Through the forums, you can get your questions answered and also assist other educators!

- TeAchnology.com's - Weekly tips for teachers
<http://www.teachnology.com>
You can subscribe to the newsletter and receive their weekly tips.

Portals and Subject-Based Information Gateways (SBIGs)

- The best on the web for teachers
<http://teachers.teach-nology.com/index.html>
A web portal for educators.
- BUBL: Bulletin board for librarians
<http://bubl.ac.uk/>
More senior level.
- Yenza - Research in social sciences and humanities
<http://www.nrf.ac.za/yenza/>
South African web sites designed to help people with their research in the field of social sciences and humanities. Has excellent pages on evaluating of reference sources.
- Thutong - South African education portal
<http://www.thutong.org.za/>
This site was developed by people involved in teaching and who are familiar with the Internet. Sites were examined and analysed with the South African curriculum in mind. I was initially involved in finding sites but withdrew due to lack of time. When I tried to use it for this article, the registration process was not entirely satisfactory nor were some of the links. Try it for yourself!

Reading list sites

- <http://capitolchoices.communitypoint.org/>
Capitol choices - Noteworthy books for children.
Divided by age group.
- <http://www.carolhurst.com/titles/>
Carol Hurst's children's literature site.
Reviewed books.
Divided by age group.
- <http://nancykeane.com/lr/>
Nancy Keane - ATN - Book lists (suggested reading).
Lists are divided by genre - including, 'If you liked...', professional reading, readership, targeted lists, school subjects, values, et cetera.
- <http://nancykeane.com/links/>
Nancy J Keane's children's literature web page.
- <http://www.psla.org/grantsandawards/yn-grdrslist05-06.php3>

The Pennsylvania School Libraries Association (PSLA). Pennsylvania Young reader's Choice Award programme masterlist for 2005-2006.

Divided by age group. The purpose of the Pennsylvania Young Reader's Choice Award is to promote reading of quality books by young people in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to promote teacher and librarian involvement in children's literature, and to honour authors whose work has been recognised by the children of Pennsylvania.

- <http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au/cmis/evalfiction/whichbook/which2.htm>
Department of Education and Training, Government of Western Australia.

Online book lists

With links to all kinds of reading and book sites.

- <http://www.asla.nsw.edu.au/Booklists.htm>
Australian School Library Association. New South Wales (NSW). Booklists. Divided by age group and category or subject matter.
- <http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/childrensnotable/notablebooklist/currentnotable.htm>
American Library Association (ALA) notable children's books. Divided by age group.
- <http://als.lib.wi.us/MRList.html>
Compiled by Arrowhead Library System. 101 out-of-this-world books for kids, ages 8-13.
- <http://www.cbcbooks.org/readinglists/childrenschoices/>
The children's book council. Children's choices. Young adult's choices. Teacher's choices.
- <http://www.nea.org/readacross/resources/kidsbooks.html>
National Education Association (NEA). NEA's read across America: Kids' top 100 books. What American children love to read.
- <http://www.nea.org/readacross/resources/catalist.html>
NEA: NEA's read across America - Teachers' top 100 books for children.

Author web sites

- <http://www.cbcbooks.org/contacts/>
CBC Children's Book Council. Author and illustrator sites listed alphabetically.
- http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/reading_lists.htm
Hoagies' gifted education. Reading lists. Good books for good readers listed by category. Including books with gifted kids as a major character, and long books with sequels for kids who read too fast.
- <http://www.ukchildrensbooks.co.uk>
United Kingdom children's books. Your guide to the on-line world of children's books.
- <http://www.eduplace.com/kids/hmrl/mtail/index.html>
Houghton Mifflin reading. Authors and illustrators.
- <http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyill/biochild-home.htm>
Index to Internet sites: Children's and young adult's authors and illustrators.
- <http://www.andersenpress.co.uk/Biogs>
Andersen Press. Author biographies.

Award-winning books

- <http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/literaryawds/newberymedal/newberyhonors/newberymedal.htm>
ALA Newberry medal & honor books, 1922 - present.
- <http://www.literatureawards.com/kate-greenaway-medal.htm>
Kate Greenaway medal.

Guides to books and reviews

- <http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/cyberguide.html>
Schools of California Online Resources for Education (SCORE) Cyberguides: teachers guides and student activities guides. Guides to books divided by age.
- <http://www.lindalinkstoliterature.com/llll/>
Linda's links to literature
- <http://www.kidsreads.com/index.asp>
KidsReads.Com
- <http://richmond.k12.va.us/readamillion/literatureactivities.htm>
Literature/reading activities and lesson plans. Links to different sites with lesson plans and other reading activities.

Children friendly publishers' web sites

- <http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/index.pperl>
Links to Kids@Random, Teens@Random and Librarians@Random. Plus games and other activities which the learners love.

Individual author web sites worth visiting

- <http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/junieb/>
Junie B Jones
Lots of fun stuff for children to do on-line and off-line relating to Junie B Jones.
- <http://www.morrisgleitzman.com>
The Morris Gleitzman web site. Excellent web site with Morris Gleitzman reading the first chapter of each of his books.
- <http://www.peterrabbit.co.uk/>
World of Peter Rabbit.
A fun site with lots of activities for Beatrix Potter fans.
- <http://www.kevinhenkes.com/>
KevinHenkes.com
For those who love Lily and her friends - there are fun games to play and worksheets to print out.

Quotations on reading and libraries

- <http://www.ifla.org/ll/humour/subj.htm>
IFLA - Quotations on libraries and librarians.
- <http://www3.ns.sympatico.ca/allegrow/readq.htm>
Lynne's WEB - Favourite reading quotations.
- <http://www3.ns.sympatico.ca/allegrow/bookq.htm>
Lynne's WEB - Favourite book quotations.
- <http://www.asla.nsw.edu.au/quotes.htm>
Australian School Library Association (NSW) Inc. Library and literary quotes.
- <http://www.richmond.k12.va.us/readamillion/readingquotes.htm>
Reading quotes.