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# Finding Quality Internet Sites for Young People: A Primer for the Cyber-Challenged

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# Finding Quality Internet Sites for Young People:
## A Primer for the Cyber-Challenged

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*As of November 1, 1998, all URLs used in this article were correct. M.D.B.*

With hundreds of new web sites, ranging from disgusting to fantastic, appearing every week, a major concern of those of us who rear, teach, serve, direct, and inform young people is how to locate and recommend the best Internet sources for young audiences and how to do so in an effective and timely manner. There is help for cyber-challenged parents, teachers, theatre professionals, and librarians, who prefer to sleep between 2:00 and 5:00 a.m. instead of surfing the net for great finds.

In an electronic environment where violence, pornography, and crass commercialism are available at the press of the enter key, we should be prepared to help young people find useful, engaging, and informative web sites and to master basic skills in evaluating them. Thus, we must be able to locate and evaluate quality web sites. Where to start?

## Selection Criteria

The Children and Technology Committee of the Association of Library Services for Children has developed selection criteria for web site evaluation. To read the document, use the following URL: http://www.ala. parentspage/greatsites/criteria.html. The criteria include four areas: (1) Authorship/Sponsorship; (2) Purpose; (3) Design and Stability; and (4) Content. In the area of authorship/sponsorship, the criteria note that web sites should clearly state the name of the individual or group creating the site, cite sources for information when needed, and provide a means for users to comment or ask questions. "Sites that knowingly violate copyright statutes or other laws should not be linked, listed, or

recommended." Each of the other areas provide useful guidelines, including information that should be shared with young users. "A user should not need to pay a fee or type in personal information (such as his/her name or e-mail address) before using the site." This document is a quick lesson in web site evaluation.

## Web Guides for Youth-Serving Adults

With evaluation criteria mastered or at least somewhat defined, the next step is to approach two or three web guides, which are time-saving, organized, and often annotated lists of links to useful sites. Guides may be compiled by individuals, professional associations, government organizations, or commercial enterprises. Because one guide will almost always lead to another; this discussion will be limited to three guides that were created to help adults help young people navigate the Internet. As you browse the web guides, you may want to bookmark sites you particularly like. It is often easier to retrieve a bookmarked site than to retrace your steps though the web guides.

First, *700+ Great Sites for Parents, Caregivers, Teachers, and Others Who Care about Kids,* a colossal guide, includes sites not only for parents, caregivers, and teachers, but also home-schooling families, librarians, storytellers, puppeteers, and more. A second component of the guide lists sites for children categorized under Arts and Entertainment, Literature and Language, People Past and Present, Planet Earth and Beyond, and Science and Technology. *Great Sites* is compiled by the Children and Technology Committee of the Association of Library Services

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to Children, a division of the American Library Association. The URL is http://www.ala.org/ parentspage/greatsites/parent.html.

Second, *Kids Connect: Favorite Web Sites for K-12 Students* lists some 93 links to web sites that school library media specialists consider most helpful for their students. It is organized by 27 curriculum-related subject headings, such as astronomy, environment/ecology, history, holidays, social issues, and sports. *Kids Connect* is produced by the American Association of School Librarians, a division of the American Library Association. The URL is http://www. ala.org/ICONN/kcfavorites.html.

Third, *The Children's Literature Web Guide (CLWG)* is a top-notch guide for children's literature, providing links to lists of children's books awards, bestsellers, and recommended books; on-line stories; children's writing; resources for reader's theatre, teachers, parents, storytellers, writers, and illustrators; more than 170 authors' web pages; Internet book discussion groups, and children's literature organizations. A children's bibliophile could spend many happy hours discovering the plethora of exciting web sites to recommend and share with young readers. *CLWG* is maintained by David K. Brown, director of the Doucette Library of Teaching Resources at the University of Calgary. The URL is http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/index.html.

### Web Guides for Young People

With considerable controversy about the appropriateness of some web sites for young audiences and the acknowledgment that the Internet is an important educational resource, several web guides have been created to provide young people with a "safe surfing" environment. *Berit's Best Sites for Kids* is produced by Cochran Interactive's online librarian. Here children can find almost 900 web sites for crafts, games, holidays, animals, space, penpals, and more. The URL is http://db.cochran.com/li_toc:theoPage.db.

*Yahooligans! The Web Guide for Kids* not only lists web sites by topics but allows browsers to do subject searches, a real advantage if a young

person does not want to browse the lists of sites. The URL is http://www. yahooligans.com/.

### Wonderful Web Sites

My own browsing in the web guides has led me to several engaging sites that are personal favorites. For those perennial reports on the states, a site called *50 States and Capitols* contains a wealth of information, including state flower, song, bird, flag, highest geographical point, and maps at http://50states.com.

Teachers looking for reader's theatre materials must investigate *Aaron Shepard's RT Page* for everything from scripting and staging to performing. Twenty scripts from Shepard and others are available for educational and noncommercial use. The URL is http://www. aaronshep.com/rt/.

So many delightful authors' web sites exist that it is difficult to limit the selection to just two. Check out Jan Brett's web site, which has had almost 900,000 visitors. The design, activities, contests, teacher resources, and e-mail and snail mail addresses attract kids and adults alike. The URL is http://www.janbrett.com. Also visit with Cynthia Rylant at http://www.rylant.com/—take a look at her photo scrapbook and find out why David Pilkey is hotlinked to her site.

### Epilogue

There is much more out there electronically, but some good starting points have been identified in this article. So the next time you are awake at 2:00 a.m., you just might want to flip the light switch, turn on the computer, and surf the net. But watch out; great web sites can be addictive, and once you are hooked, the sun rises before you know it.