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From the Stacks

Peter Butts

Language Arts Resources on the Internet

Do you find yourself unwittingly in the midst of the battle between books and computers? Are you suspicious of the extravagant claims made by computer advocates? Welcome to the world of media specialists in the '90s. Across the country new schools are being built by architects and administrators who question whether schools even need library media centers. The Internet is the library of the future, right?

Wrong. While the Internet is a great source of current data and ephemeral information, it isn't built in any systematic way and there are no mechanisms in place for filtering out documents that are just plain erroneous, that are commercial propaganda, or that lack authority. And downloading and reading a novel on a laptop or my Newton MessagePad still is both slow and awkward.

Will the Internet kill the printed book? The Internet itself is the best argument against that claim. Literally thousands of literary and book-related sites prove that the book is alive and well, even in cyberspace. The Internet, and the point and click world wide web in particular, does three things better than traditional print:

- First, the 'net provides a dynamic professional network.
- Second, the 'net provides resources for literary criticism far beyond the capability of any library collection.
- Third, the 'net connects the classroom with the real world of publishing and scholarship. Incredible student publishing opportunities have only begun to be tapped.

English teachers will find five basic types of sites that should make it worth the effort to get connected and learn how to navigate the world wide web:

1. Teaching and Professional Resources

2. Literary Resources

- Authors
- Genres
- Reviews
- Individual bibliophiles' personal homepages

3. Electronic Books and Reference Books

4. Publishers and Bookstores

5. Online Teaching and Learning Projects.

Because sites change quickly, this article is available online at <http://www.macatawa.org/~ems/butts/mctef96.html>. Related links beyond the scope of this article will also be just a click away.

The National Council of Teachers of English (<http://www.ncte.org/>) site combines organizational information with pages of teaching ideas and resources, parent and community resources, and electronic copies of the English standards documents. While the NCTE site is relatively new, the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents' **ALAN Review** (<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/alan-review.html>) has been online for a number of years. Issues can be browsed on screen or searched by keyword.

A number of universities have resource pages for their English and education students; two of the most extensive and current are the University of Massachusetts' **Internet Resources for En-**

glish Teachers and Students (<http://www.umass.edu/english/resource.html>) and the University of Pennsylvania's **Literary Resources on the Net** (<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jlynch/Lit/>), which offers a valuable keyword search function. If you're looking for writing tools and tips, don't miss **Writing and Research Skills** (<http://www.execpc.com/~dboals/write.html>).

While general education research is beyond the space limitations of this column, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that our old standby, the ERIC Clearinghouse is available on the web. The **AskERIC** web site (<http://ericir.syr.edu/>) provides online searching of ERIC databases, keyword access to the archives of several major educational mailing lists, teaching tips and lesson plans. With **AskERIC**, a professional research librarian is just an e-mail message away.

Literary Criticism is rarely a top priority in secondary school media center collections. Fortunately a number of authoritative Internet sites can meet many of your needs. Dozens of authors have pages. Many are created by fans, some are the work of publishers, and a few are actually maintained by the authors themselves. A good place to get started is **Great Writers and Poets** (<http://www.xs4all.nl/~pwessel/writers.html>) a section of the Dutch online bookstore, **Book Lovers**, run by Dutch publisher Piet Wesselman. In addition to collecting dozens of the best author sites, Wesselman also includes valuable side bar comments on the web in general and how to evaluate author web sites. For more extensive author links, **LitWeb** (<http://www.umedial.com/shannon/litweb.html>) can be searched by author or by genre and appears to be very current.

For an example of what is possible, visit some of the Shakespeare sites. Two of the best are **Shakespeare Web** (<http://www.shakespeare.com/>) and a site created by PBS to complement its recent **Frontline** episode, **The Shakespeare Mystery** (<http://www2.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shakespeare/>). In addition to information about the program, PBS has set up an ongoing report of the Oxford-Stratford debate, a "Today in Shakespeare History" feature, and links to the other Shakespeare sites.

For a page created with the sanction of a contemporary author, try my favorite: **The Margaret Atwood Home Page** (<http://www.io.org/~toadaly/toc.htm>). Simple in design, I like the frequent author comments, Q & A section, and generous samples of recent publications and works in progress.

For links to the students' favorite authors, check out **Adolescent Literature Quick Author List** (<http://www.educ.kent.edu/personal/ted2/authors.html>).

Michigan boasts one of the Internet's very best sites, **The Internet Public Library** (<http://www.ipl.org/>). One of my favorite sections is Ask the Author, found in the Youth Division, which includes author interviews with people like Avi, Robert Cormier, Lois Lowry, and Jane Yolen. The **IPL Teen Section** also includes one of the best set of links to contemporary issues sites that could be used to spark opinion pieces or support debate research.

Demonstrating the global nature of the Internet, two of the best resources for the study of Children's and Young Adult Literature come from Canada: **Young Adult Reading** (<http://www.docker.com/~whiteheadm/yaread.html>) a labor of love from Manitoba language arts teacher Murray Whitehead, and one of my favorites—the "I wish I'd done that" site—the **Children's Literature Web Guide** (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/>). Neither site is fancy: lots of lists, feature sections on movie tie-ins, and other special bibliographies. If you need an annual list, whether it's from ALA, IRA, the various content-area associations like NSTA, NCTE, NCSS, **Publishers' Weekly**, or other book reviews, **Children's Literature Web Guide** is the best place to look. The site is the creation of librarian and children's literature professor at the University of Calgary, David K. Brown.

The Internet is well suited to newspaper and magazine publishing, so naturally you can expect to find book reviews. In addition to **The ALAN Review** mentioned earlier, look for the electronic version of the venerable **Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books** (<http://edfu.lis.uiuc.edu/puboff/bccb/>). Back issues are available for download in Adobe Acrobat format. A link has been created so you can download Acrobat from the

BCCB page. The issues are a couple of months back, so it's no substitute for a "real" subscription. Also there is no indexing available if you are looking for a particular review. More recently, the American Library Association has added an electronic version of its general book review, **Booklist** (<http://www.ala.org/booklist.html>). The site includes selected advance reviews and also a cumulative index of reviews in the print version. **Booklist** should be available in both your school media center and your local public library. **Publisher's Weekly** (<http://www.bookwire.com/pw/pw.html>) makes its cyber-home on **Book Wire** (<http://www.bookwire.com/>), an excellent place to look for book reviews from all over the Internet. Look for up-to-date bestsellers, book news, advanced feature articles, and selected back articles.

Despite the obvious technical and copyright limitations, there is a staggering amount of full-text available on the Internet. **Project Gutenberg** (<http://jg.cso.uiuc.edu/PG/>), the granddaddy of the electronic book depositories, contains hundreds of public domain documents. It's actually kind of a fun place. **The Gutenberg** motto says it all: "When you get something for free, you get what you pay for!!! That means if you don't use what you get for free, it won't do you any good. But sometimes it is nice to have a library your friends and family can use, even if they don't always use it." **Project Gutenberg** can be searched by author, title, subject, and date. Several mirror sites are available for those with the time and inclination to download a golden oldie. Also look into **Alex: a Catalog of Electronic Text on the Internet** (<http://www.lib.ncsu.edu/stacks/alex-index.html>), an index of other sites searchable by author, date, host, language, subject, or title. While downloading a novel can be daunting, this is a practical (and legal) way to get your hands on a copy of an obscure play or poem.

Long the private domain of research scientists and academics, commercial businesses have taken the 'net by storm. For the most part, the results have been positive. The ability for anyone, anywhere to have access to the best bookstores in the world and communicate directly with publishers in New York is exciting. Internet bookstores tend

to feature a lot of special search features, lots of reviews and sample chapters, and many host book "chats" and online programs. **Bookport** (<http://www.bookport.com/>) is a combination bookstore and clearinghouse for book-related information. The first page, The Internet Bookfair, combines links to publishers' web pages, to a wide range of literary mailing lists and newsgroups, to other bookstores, and to electronic books. The **Bookport** itself is great fun. Books can be sampled by catalog description, by review, or by sample chapters. Many titles are available for immediate purchase as an online "hyperbook." Instead of downloading the entire document, you purchase the right to access the work online.

For more insight and news from the book trade, don't miss **BookWeb** (<http://charlotte.spiders.com/bookweb/>), the official website of the American Booksellers Association (ABA). Here you'll find contests, press releases, and schedules for author tours. Would you secretly like to retire and open up a cozy little neighborhood bookstore? ABA has several how-to documents posted. Also check out the links to bookstores around the world; you can take a virtual trip to such famous bookstores as The Tattered Cover in Denver and A Clean Well Lighted Space for Books in San Francisco.

Two other online bookstores worth checking out are **Amazon Books** (<http://www.amazon.com/>) and the British **Internet Book Shop** (<http://www.bookshop.co.uk/>). **Amazon** currently claims bragging rights as "Earth's Biggest Bookstore" and does have enticing contests and special features. **Internet Book Shop** is notable for its comprehensive collection of links to international book awards.

Publishers have begun jumping on the Internet craze, but many sites seem to be either in constant flux or once uploaded, never seem to change. For children's literature, **Scholastic** (<http://www.scholastic.com/>) and **HarperCollins** (<http://www.harpercollins.com/kids/>) are must clicks. Scholastic does a nice job of tying into PBS' *Magic School Bus* series. **HarperCollins** Big Busy House features an online version of Aliki's *How a Book is Made*. In the world of YA publishing, the only standout is **HarperCollins' ya-zine** ([Fall 1996](http://</p>
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www.harpercollins.com/kids/yazine.htm). The first two months have super features on hot new young authors Francesca Lia Block and Chris Lynch.

Now that you've surfed the cyber-world of books are you ready to jump in? Publishing and networking projects abound. Try **Global School**

House (<http://www.gsh.org/>) for an up-to-date Internet Project Registry. But you can easily go it on your own. For ideas, check out Holland Public Schools' **Extraordinary People Magazine Online** (<http://www.macatawa.org/ems/extra.home.html>), based on a year-long, 6th grade, interdisciplinary Language Arts project.

See you in cyberspace!