



YOUR LIBRARY
GOES VIRTUAL:

Promoting Reading and Supporting Research

By Audrey Church

First grader Lisa wants to play a game with Clifford the Big Red Dog. Katie needs to cite the sources that she used to write her fifth grade science project on sea turtles. Eighth grader John just finished reading Rodman R. Philbrick's *Freak the Mighty* and wants to read another book "just like it." Alexis' World History teacher requires a minimum of five sources for her research paper on the War of the Roses. Scott, who is a senior, wants to compare three colleges he may apply to next year. Where does each of these students go for the needed information? If your response was "the library," you are partially correct—right on target if your response was "the virtual school library." Each of these information needs (and many more!) can be met by the sources and services provided on a quality school library Web page. Your challenge is to create one and to make it "the" information place for your students, the place they go first when they need information.

No one can dispute that we live in a digital environment. Students access information differently than they once did, and we must adapt our library sources and services to meet their needs. Your school library Web page is your library's presence outside of the physical library walls. It provides you a space and an opportunity to inform, guide, and instruct. It can be an advocacy tool, a visibility tool, and a public relations tool. Through it, you can provide for your students the scaffolding needed to promote reading and to support research. Promoting reading and supporting research have always been goals for school libraries: in today's digital environment, however, it is possible to achieve these goals in a virtual setting.

According to a November 2004 Pew Internet and American Life Project survey, “87% of those between the ages of 12 and 17 are online...and half of them say they go online every day” (*Teens Forge* 1). They prefer the Internet to traditional libraries because they consider the Internet to be easier to use, more convenient, open 24/7, and full of more up-to-date material (*Digital Disconnect* 8). Our challenge, therefore, is to offer them library sources and services via the Internet—the virtual school library/the school library Web page. As your library goes virtual, how can you use this virtual presence to promote reading and to support research?

Promoting Reading

There are numerous ways to use your library Web page to promote reading. Here we will explore 10 ways to promote reading among your students.

1. Online Catalog:

In a very basic way, you can use your online catalog on your library Web page to promote reading. With your catalog on the Web and linked from your library home page, you can facilitate book choice. From home, from the school computer lab, from any location with Internet access, students can search to find out if you have a particular book available by a favorite author or about a subject of interest. If you have included award information in your MARC records, students can search to find books that have won the Newbery Award, the Coretta Scott King Award, or the Michael L. Printz Award. An example of an online catalog linked from a library Web page can be found at the Paideia School in Atlanta, Georgia (www.paideiaschool.org/Library).

2. Links to Author Web Sites:

Students young and old want to know more about the author. On your library Web page, you should include links to authors' Web sites. Reading about Jan Brett (www.janbrett.com), Ben Mikelson (www.benmikaelsen.com/), Patricia Pollaco (www.patriciapollaco.com/), Sharon Creech (www.sharoncreech.com), and Walter Dean Myers (www.walterdeanmyersbooks.com) makes these authors come to life. With knowledge of the authors' life experiences, students

can better understand and enjoy their works.

3. E-Books:

From your library Web page, you should provide access to e-books. *The International Children's Digital Library* offers over 1000 free e-books in 35 languages for children ages three to 13. For the older students, link to free sites include *Project Gutenberg* (www.Gutenberg.org), *Bartleby.com* (bartleby.com), and the *University of Virginia Library's Electronic Text Center* (etext.virginia.edu/ebooks). You will also want to consider purchasing e-books such as those available from Follett (www.flr.follett.com). Picture e-books can be used for whole-class read alouds; children can go online from home to practice reading to their parents or siblings.



4. Online Games Based on Book:

Characters: For elementary age students, consider including links to online games which promote reading. HarperCollins Publishers provides numerous games and contests for various authors and series (www.harpercollinschildrens.com/HarperChildrens/Kids/GamesAndContests/). Scholastic Publishing offers children the opportunity to play games with Clifford the Big Red Dog (www.scholastic.com/Clifford/), while children visiting Random House's Seussville (www.seussville.com) can explore and learn with many of Dr. Seuss's characters. Capitalize on technology and the children's familiarity with favorite book characters not only to build skills but also to promote literature and reading.

5. Reading Lists:

On your library Web page, make available all suggested readings lists for your school. Possibilities are teacher or course reading lists, reading lists by grade level, summer reading lists, and state reading lists such as Virginia's Reader's Choice. The Joyce Kilmer Elementary School Media Center in Mahwah, New Jersey provides such lists for its students (www.mahwah.k12.nj.us/jk/mediacenter/index.htm).

6. Computerized Reading Program Test Lists:

If your school uses Renaissance Learning's *Accelerated Reader* or Scholastic's *Reading Counts* to promote reading, you should provide the list of books for which you have tests on the library Web page. Both students and parents can then check to see what tests are available and can search by reading level or by point value. This information is also helpful to local public librarians who share your students and want to provide reading advice for them. Chester Middle School, Chester, Virginia offers their AR List as a link from the library home page (chesterfield.k12.va.us/Schools/Chester_MS/Library/ARlist.html).

7. Book Recommendations:

To stimulate interest and promote reading, post student and teacher book reviews and recommendations on your Web page. Students love to read what



others have written about a particular book, what they liked about it, and why they recommend it, and they love to know what their teachers like to read. Capitalize on this interest to promote

reading virtually. Students have this opportunity at the *Reading Corner* from Western Albemarle High School, Crozet, Virginia (www.k12albemarle.org/westernalbemarle/library/Pages/reading.html) and in the *Virtual Reading Room* of the Greece Athena Media Center, Rochester, New York (www.greece.k12.ny.us/ath/library/reading_room/default.htm).



8. Book Blogs:

If your school district allows blogs, consider adding a book blog to your school library Web page. By using this latest technology, students can interact with each other to discuss a



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particular work. At Berkley High School, Berkley, Michigan students can comment on books at *Reading Rants and Raves, BookBreak! Berkley High School Book Blog* (www.bookbreak.blogspot.com). All readers are invited.

9. PR Concerning Reading Events:

Absolutely include public relations information concerning reading events. You want to publicize prior to the event: advertise your upcoming Book Fair; spotlight the local author who visits and reads from his own works; promote Children's Book Week, Teen Read Week, National Library Week, and the Battle of the Books contests. Once the event is over, post news summaries to keep your readers informed: how much did you raise from the Book Fair, and how will the funds be spent? Which classes heard the author read? What activities were held to promote those special reading weeks? If school district policy allows,

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post pictures taken at these happenings. Deep Run High School Library, Glen Allen, Virginia posts information regarding its book discussion group, the *Page Turners* (teachers.henrico.k12.va.us/deeprun/smith_c/Pageturners.html). Plano Independent School District, Plano, Texas offers information concerning National Library Week activities at the elementary, middle, and high school level (www.pisd.edu/news/archive/2005-06/library.week.shtml).

10. Subscription to What Should I Read Next or NoveList?

Consider a subscription to Thomson Gale's *What Should I Read Next?* which includes over 115,000 titles (www.gale.com/pdf/facts/wdirn.pdf) or EBSCO's *NoveList* which includes over 135,000 titles (www.epnet.com/uploads/thisTopic-dbTopic-484.pdf). These readers' advisory tools can assist students in choosing a book just right

for them to read next; when you are not physically present to assist them with this task.

Supporting Research

Certainly a major goal of libraries is to promote reading. Another important library goal is to support research. We do this on a daily basis in our school libraries. Next we explore 10 ways in which we can support research virtually via a quality school library Web page.

1. Subscription Databases:

On your library Web page link to the databases to which your school, your school division, and your state provide access. If you subscribe to EBSCO products, Gale products, Grolier Online, or ProQuest products provide links and basic descriptions for your students. Since posting user ids and passwords on the Web site would violate licensing agreements,

utilize other methods of making that information available to students: noted on handouts and bookmarks from the library, printed in the student agenda book, or listed in the school newsletter to parents. Jamie Chapman guides her students to subscription databases with the Agnor-Hurt Elementary School, Charlottesville, Virginia, Library Media Web page (schoolcenter.k12albemarle.org/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectiondetailid=31819&sc_id=1137527636).

2. Curriculum-Related Web Sites:

Provide access to top-notch, pre-evaluated curriculum-related Web sites, either with a subscription to a product such as *NetTrekker* (www.nettrekker.com/) or Gale's *Web Feet* (www.gale.com/webfeet/), both of which feature quality, educator-selected Web sites, or by providing links to curriculum-related Web sites which you have judged and pre-selected. The Paideia School, Atlanta,

Georgia, Library offers recommended Web sites arranged by Dewey category (www.paideiaschool.org/library/Recsites.htm#websites).

3. Pathfinders:

To support student research, collaboratively create pathfinders with classroom teachers and post them on the school library Web site. You bring information expertise to the document, while the classroom teacher brings content expertise; together you provide scaffolding for student research. Jeanne Barnes offers pathfinders for kindergarten through fifth grades on the John Newbery Elementary School, Wenatchee, Washington, Library Media Center Web site (nb.wsd.wednet.edu/lmc/pathfinders/pathfinder.htm). At the Springfield Township Pennsylvania High School Virtual Library, Joyce Valenza offers pathfinders for her students on topics as varied as art, human anatomy, nations and travel, and social issues (mciu.org/%7Espjvweb/pathmenu.html).



4. Information Literacy Skills:

Since it is not feasible or desirable to provide pathfinders for every research topic, use your library Web page to offer general information literacy skills instruction as well. *KidsClick! Worlds of Web Searching* (www.rcls.org/wows/) guides our younger students step-by-step through searching effectively on the Web. *21st Century Literacies* (www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/21stcent/gradelevel.html) offers information literacy skills lessons, arranged by grade level, from Brainstorming Research Questions for kindergarten through second grades to Online Search Techniques for sixth through twelfth grades.

5. Search Tools:

To research effectively and efficiently, students must choose an appropriate search tool and then use it effectively. You will want to guide them to develop these skills. At *Information Literacy Search Strategies: Choose the Best Search for Your Information Need* (www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/

information/5locate/adviceengine.html), Debbie Abilock offers a chart to assist students in choosing the appropriate search tool for a particular information need. Denise Woetzel explains the concepts involved in online searching in simple terms with excellent diagrams at the site, *Online Search Techniques*, M.W. Bell Library, Guilford Technical Community College, Jamestown, North Carolina (webster.gtcc.cc.nc.us/library/searchtechniques.html).

6. Critical Evaluation of Web Sites:

Once students locate Web sites via search tools, they must know how to evaluate what they have found. Since you may not be physically present to instruct them in this area, provide guidance on the library Web page. *QUICK: Quality Information Checklist* (www.quick.org.uk/menu.htm) presents eight interactive questions to help older elementary and middle school students to judge the quality of the information found. The Loogootee Elementary West, Loogootee, Indiana Web site (www.siec.k12.in.us/%7Ewest/online/eval.htm) offers evaluation rubrics for Web sites for primary, intermediate, and secondary students.

7. Guidance Through the Research Process:

Just as students need guidance in choosing and using a search tool and evaluating information found, they need step-by-step guidance through the research process. The Kentucky Virtual Library features a tutorial for younger students, *How To Do Research* (www.kyvl.org/html/tutorial/research/). Mark Brobosky guides his middle schoolers through the research process at Walter Reed Middle School Library, North Hollywood, California (www.lausd.k12.ca.us/Reed_MS/Library/research/research.html). At Thomas Dale High School, Chester, Virginia, Kathy Lehman and Lori Donovan offer students the *Road Map to Research* (chesterfield.k12.va.us/Schools/Dale_HS/library/Virtlib/media.htm). You should provide similar scaffolding for your students.

8. Citation Guidance:

To promote ethical use of information and good research practice, provide assistance for students in citing sources. Nauset Public Schools, Orleans,

Massachusetts (Nausetschools.org/research/works2.htm) presents citation guidance for students in grades one through six. For older students, the B. Davis Schwartz Memorial Library, Long Island University, New York presents *Citation Style for Research Papers* addressing APA, MLA, Turabian, and Chicago styles (www.liunet.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citation.htm).

9. Connections to Other Libraries:

To foster students' connections to the larger learning community and to connect them with additional resources, place links on your library Web page for local public libraries, nearby college and university libraries, and your state library. John Newbery Elementary School Library, Wenatchee, Washington provides a link to the North Central Regional Library (nb.wsd.wednet.edu/lmc/lmc_index.html).

10. Virtual Reference Service:

As a feature on your Web page, consider providing virtual reference assistance. Although your page may be excellent, students will still have questions for which they need you, the school library media specialist. You might offer email assistance such as the Greece Athena Media Center Librarians do with their *Ask A Librarian* site (www.greece.k12.ny.us/ath/library/askalibrarian/default.htm). You might even think about offering instant messaging reference assistance such as the Alexandrian Public Library, Mt. Vernon, Indiana does with their *IM A Librarian* site (www.apl.lib.in.us/im.html).

Your Virtual Library

Make your school library Web page your students' first stop for information. When they have an assignment, where should they go first? There should be no question, no hesitation! Your library Web page should be the place, not Google, not another search tool, but your library page as the portal and scaffold to support research and promote reading. It should provide the virtual library media specialist presence when you are not physically there.

To raise awareness, market and promote your page on paper, in person, and virtually. On paper: set a goal to put the URL for the library Web page on every

piece of paper that leaves the library—handouts, brochures, bookmarks. In person: share your library Web page with every group with which you meet or work—students in for instruction, teachers at a faculty meeting, parents at a Parent Teacher Organization meeting. Virtually: notify faculty of the Web page via email and provide the link. Lobby to have Library as a link from the school's home Web site: this not only makes your page and its resources easy to locate and retrieve but also makes a powerful statement as to the importance of the library program within your school.

Although teens report using the Internet at school (78% of teens, according to the July 2005 *Teens Forge Forward* study), 87% of teens access the Internet from home and 74% from friends and relatives' houses (2). We must meet these and younger students virtually, providing sources and services at the point of need—promoting reading and supporting research. Joan Lippincott in *Educating the Net Generation: Net Generation Students and Libraries*, urges library media specialists to “try to think of your library as an environment rather than a facility—a place of interaction, learning, and experiencing rather than a place for storage and equipment” (13.11). As she notes, “Libraries have been adjusting their collections, services, and environments to the digital world for at least 20 years” (13.1). We must continue to do so to provide virtual library service for our students. ■

Works Cited

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