

What Websites are on my Favorite List?

C. Frederick Risinger

I've been writing this column for several years now, and I am continually amazed at how much e-mail I receive from readers—recommending additional sites on that issue's topic, telling me how they used the sites in their classrooms, and asking questions about my selection criteria. Recently, I've received more than a few e-mails asking if I would send a list of the sites on my "Favorites" list. This column is scheduled for the annual technology issue; and, since most of the authors in the issue are far more technologically savvy than I, it seemed like a good time to write a more personal article—one that highlights websites that I think are interesting, well designed, and useful to classroom teachers, college-level methods instructors, and other social studies professionals. Mostly, I try to look at websites through the eyes of a classroom teacher. Does it have relevant, accurate information? Would it help me in my preparation for a topic? Could my students use information on the site? Is it suitable for group project work? Is it easy to navigate? These questions (and others) help determine what sites I select.

As far as my "Favorites" list, I'm going to restrict it to those websites that I would use as a classroom teacher, methods instructor, or social studies supervisor (and exclude the recipe and cooking websites or those on gardening, photography, and short-wave radio). I will include a few news/information sites not directly related to classroom teaching, because I believe strongly that social studies educators should be aware of national and international news. But before I start giving you a glimpse into my Favorites, I want to (1) recommend a book, especially for history teachers, and (2) highlight two relatively new websites of interest.

This column doesn't often deal with books, but I found one at my local library that I wish I had had when I was teaching U.S. history. Students of all ages love to hear interesting stories about people

and events, and this book would give any teacher a full catalog of such stories. The title is *History's Shocking Secrets* by Bill Coate. (He's also the author of *History's Mysteries Revealed*.) The book is filled with little-known tidbits and interesting side trips about historical figures and topics. I learned that the first fatal casualty of the Civil War was a "friendly fire" death. I learned that future President Zachary Taylor's son-in-law was Jefferson Davis—and about the premature death of Mrs. Knox Davis Taylor.

Second, here are two websites readers should know about.

Social Studies Classroom

www.socialstudiesclassroom.com/index.htm
This site is on my Favorites list now, and you will probably want to add it to your list if you haven't done so already.

The website description states: "Social Studies Classroom.com was founded in May of 2007 by a social studies teacher and supervisor with the mission to create a company, which would give social studies teachers the resources, tools, and collaboration needed to enhance their classrooms and benefit their students." The site has just about everything a teacher or supervisor might want. On the side of the page, there is a list of excellent websites on just about every topic in the social studies curriculum (many of which I have recommended in these columns). There is a search engine, powered by Google, of the entire site that you can use to find information and resources on just about any topic in the social studies curriculum. And there's a "Forum" section where viewers can read and post comments on relevant issues in the social studies field. There is a weekly "Director's column," and readers are free to post reactions or other comments. Additionally, there's a "Network" section where teachers and others are asked to make recommendations or comment on curriculum areas and resources in social studies. In order to participate in the Forum and Network, users have to register, but it's free. Teachers will want to check this site out. I have only one misgiving: This is exactly the type of site I've been thinking about since my retirement, but haven't had the skills or discipline to put together! Still, I congratulate

the founder and thank him for the time and effort that he must have put into the design, development, and maintenance of a site like this.

Free Rice

www.freerice.com

Sometimes neat things happen in your own backyard. My local newspaper ran a story about this site and its founder, John Breen, an independent software programmer who lives in Bloomington, Indiana. He's an anti-hunger activist who has developed a fun, interesting, creative and genuinely magnanimous website that, as of March 13, had contributed more than 22 billion (22, 478, 677, 910) grains of rice to feed impoverished people in Africa and Asia. That's enough to feed about a million people for a day. The neat thing for teachers is that it's a very well designed vocabulary game that is suitable for all grade and ability levels. When you click on "Free Rice," the first thing you see is a word with four possible definitions. For each correct definition, 20 grains of rice are donated ... five correct answers provide 100 grains. In one day—March 13, 2008—174,256,920 grains were donated. The rice is donated to the United Nations World Food Program and paid for by advertisers whose names are listed on the bottom of the screen. If viewers answer the question correctly, the next word will be a bit more difficult. The first time I played, I got the first eight words right, but missed the ninth. When you answer incorrectly, the difficulty diminishes. It's quite sophisticated. Users can also have the words pronounced. The website is a companion site to another excellent website, Poverty. Com (www.poverty.com). A 4th-5th grade teacher wrote, "My students absolutely love the free rice site. Almost daily, they earn several thousand grains of rice! You cannot imagine the joy in my heart when I look out and see 25 kids doing vocabulary work and enjoying it." My friend, Joseph, asserts that the site is addictive. *The Christian Science Monitor* wrote "Secretaries admit to playing it during boring business meetings." This is another must-see website. And you have

to admire Mr. Breen for his commitment to ending world hunger.

Now here's a peek at my Favorites list (at least the sites that meet the criteria I listed in the first paragraph and a couple that I look at on a daily basis).

The Drudge Report

www.drudgereport.com/

I don't like Matt Drudge's politics, but this site is usually my first site of the day (sometimes taking precedence over e-mail). Readers can learn more about the news of the day ... and usually earlier ... than any news site I know. Just recently, Drudge picked up a story in a little-known Australian paper about Britain's Prince Harry being on the front lines in Afghanistan, and in a few hours, it was first page news throughout the world. And, of course you know that the Drudge Report first broke the Monica Lewinsky story. But the Drudge Report is much more. In addition to the very latest news, both in the U.S. and throughout the world, the website has links to just about every syndicated columnist—from the far left to the most conservative—including David Broder, Ann Coulter, Rosie O'Donnell and Roger Ebert. Since my local paper doesn't carry all of my favorite columnists, this is a great way to read them. Moreover, there are links to newspapers throughout the world, from *The Christian Science Monitor* to *Pravda* to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. There are links to news in English from the Islamic Republic Wire (Iran), Xinhua (China), and Interfax (news from Russia and the nations of the former (USSR). Readers can even type in a zip code and get the news headlines from that area. But my primary reason for reading Drudge is that I think I'm ahead—sometimes by as much as a day or two—of the news that appears on television, radio, and in newspapers.

Public Broadcasting System and The PBS Online NewsHour Extra

www.pbs.org/teachers/

www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/

These are two separate websites with different features and teacher resources,

but both are part of the great Public Broadcasting System (PBS). (Editorial note: When you have some time, e-mail your representative or senator and tell him or her that you don't want to see funding cut for PBS or National Public Radio (NPR), two of the best uses of tax money that I know.) All you have to do is spend 10 minutes browsing either of the sites above to see how helpful they can be for teachers and for students. A companion website, PBS Kids, (<http://pbskids.org/>) has some wonderful games and activities that kids can enjoy without teacher direction, while the "PBS Parents" and "PBS Teachers" sites provide useful hints and additional resources. The PBS Teachers site offers outstanding lesson plans, many keyed to PBS programming, but others that are linked to national and state standards.

The Online NewsHour Extra is making a special effort to encourage classroom teachers to use their resources and was a prominent exhibitor at the recent NCSS convention in San Diego. I spent about two hours looking at the teacher (and student) resources available on this excellent site. The PBS Teachers site covers all grade levels, PreK-12, while the Online NewsHour Extra site focuses on secondary (7-12) students and teachers. Brian McLaughlin, the Teacher Center director, is seeking classroom teacher advice and comments on making the site even more helpful. There is a new blog on the site that gives teachers a chance to bring up topics, comment on issues that have already been raised, and communicate with other teachers across the country. These websites are certainly two of my favorites.

I'm nearing the end of my word limit for this column, so I'll briefly list some of the other favorites that I use often and think social studies educators should examine.

Education Week

www.edweek.org/ew/index.html

I used to subscribe to *Education Week* and found it to be very good as a review of the major issues and contemporary trends in both U.S. and international

education. Much of the online journal's content is now free. I also enjoy their free weekly and monthly newsletters.

American Memory (Library of Congress)

<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/>

This website provides some of best resources, and recommendations for usage, of any of the websites on my Favorites list.

Digital History

www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/

I wrote about this site last month. If you haven't tried it, please do so.

Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

www.mcrel.org/standards/

I think this is the best site related to national and state standards and has some wonderful research reports on effective teaching methods. I use it all the time.

Awesome Library

www.awesomelibrary.org/

This site provides 35,000 lesson plans and links to resources for all subject areas. The plans and resources have been carefully selected and represent the best in each field.

These are some of the sites that I view and recommend frequently. Send me some of the sites that you think should be on every teacher's Favorites list. I'll review them, and sometime in the future, I'll write a column featuring your recommendations. 📧

C. FREDERICK RISINGER retired as director of professional development and coordinator of social studies education after 31 years at Indiana University, Bloomington. He currently is working on two social studies writing projects, is developing a new website, and works two shifts a week as a bartender at a local microbrewery.

HISTORICAL THINKING *from page 143*

and the District of Columbia, more than half of the eighth graders tested failed to reach even the basic level on the NAEP. Only 35 percent of twelfth graders reached the proficient level, down from 40 percent in 1992. See nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/reading/ for complete data.

3. Robert B. Bain, "They Thought the World Was Flat?": Applying the Principles of How People Learn in Teaching High School History," in *How Students Learn: History, Mathematics, and Science in the Classroom*, eds. John Bransford and Suzanne Donovan (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2005), 179-213; Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 2001).
4. Primary investigators on historicalthinkingmatters.org/ are Professors Sam Wineburg at Stanford University and Roy Rosenzweig at George Mason University's Center for History and New Media. Thanks go to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for their support of this project and for additional support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Important contributions to the site's development and production were made by Brad Fogo, Daisy Martin, Chauncey Monte-Sano, Julie Park, and Avishag Reisman at Stanford University and Jeremy Boggs, Josh Greenberg, Stephanie Hurter, Sharon Leon, and Mike O'Malley at George Mason University.
5. Four of the best-selling textbooks are represented here as well as a fifth that is prepared primarily for the California market.
6. On the intermediate processes of historical reading, see Wineburg, 2001, especially Chapter 3.

DAISY MARTIN is the co-director of the National History Education Clearinghouse (teachinghistory.org/) and a post-doctoral scholar in the Stanford School of Education. She is a former high school history and civics teacher who now works with preservice and experienced teachers. Her research interests include teacher beliefs, practices, and constraints regarding the teaching of historical thinking. She can be reached at daisym@stanford.edu. **SAM WINEBURG** is chair, curriculum & teacher education, and professor of education and of history at Stanford University. He also directs Stanford's Ph.D. program in history education. He can be reached at wineburg@stanford.edu. **SHARON LEON** is director of Public Projects at the Center for History and New Media and research assistant professor in the Department of History and Art History at George Mason University. Her research and teaching is about religion and American culture in the twentieth century. She is the co-director of the U.S. Department of Education's National History Education Clearinghouse. She can be reached at sleon@gmu.edu.

We deeply mourn the death of our collaborator, Roy Rosenzweig.

See thanksroy.org/about.

USING A WIKI *from page 146*

In order to help develop good collaborative skills, groups are allowed to decide how they want to proceed with the analysis of sources and re-construction of the text (this may be more structured, based on individual classes). Some groups decide to split up the sources and then come back together as a group to do the synthesis, while others prefer to work together for the duration of the project. How students choose to proceed may be limited either by the number of computers that the group can access or by how the teacher chooses to structure the work. Ideally, each group would have access to a computer. If there is only one computer, groups could be rotated as part of a stations activity or collaborate on incorporating different sources into one common classroom textbook account.

As the groups read the sources, the teacher goes from group to group encouraging the students to contextualize the sources and to compare the differing accounts with one another and with the textbook account. It is also important to provide time reminders so that students do not become too enthralled in one particular source. These kinds of "soft scaffolding" are essential to the success of the exercise.¹⁴ The most powerful aspects of critical thinking and inquiry occur while students discuss the sources within their groups and compare them to the textbook account.

As students work their way through the sources, they need to decide what should be included in their revised text and often which sources should be trusted most. This kind of discussion within groups should be encouraged or introduced by the teacher since