

More Recommended Favorites/Bookmarks for Teaching Social Studies with the Internet

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Just about three years ago, I wrote a column titled “What Websites Are on My Favorites List.” I received a great deal of e-mail about my selections. While some readers criticized one or more of my selections, many more sent me recommendations for other websites they found helpful in their planning and instruction. I thought it was about time to re-visit this topic. Certainly, the overall number of educational websites has grown tremendously and the technological advances of Web 2.0-focused sites expand and enhance the ability of teachers and students to teach and learn social studies. I will focus primarily on websites that I haven’t recommended in the past, although a few might be mentioned again.

Usually, these columns focus on a single topic such as “Comparative Government,” or “The 2010 Midterm Election.” And such sites as the PBS News Hour have such excellent sources and lesson plans that they get mentioned frequently. I tried to find sites that would be useful for teachers and students at all grade levels. Many teachers provide a list of “Favorites” for each course they teach and make them available to students on a classroom website or simply on a list. I have heard from teachers who ask their students to do some “web surfing” on their own and find additional sites on a specific topic or assignment. Here are some websites that have made it onto my Favorites list in the past year or so.

Classroom 2.0

www.classroom20.com/

This is one that I’ve recommended before.

If you want to see how some social studies teachers are using the very latest Web 2.0 resources, this is the site you should look at first. It can put you in touch with these teachers or provide a forum on specific topics where teachers can ask questions and receive recommendations and help from their colleagues in the United States or around the world. The day that I looked at the social studies forum, there was a great exchange of information about using Skype to link classrooms around the world and another discussion about effective methods of teaching world history. Classroom 2.0 produces some outstanding “webinars,” most of which are free and well designed.

Thinkfinity

www.thinkfinity.org/

I’m always a bit dubious of anything linked to telecommunications and cell

phone providers. (My monthly Verizon bill is larger than my electric bill.) But the Verizon Foundation sponsors the Thinkfinity website and there are some amazing resources for classroom teachers, curriculum supervisors, and even students. They have a link right at the top of the home page to the state standards in every state, in every grade level, and in every subject area. When you make your choices, you get the standards plus a bunch of selected lesson plans and activities that are specifically related to the state standards and the grade. It’s a nifty site ... check it out.

Common Sense Media

www.common Sense Media.org/

Here’s another very interesting site that is one of Verizon’s partners. At first look, the home page seems like a movie website, but there’s a great deal more for educators here. Common Sense Media is a national nonprofit organization “dedicated to helping kids and families thrive in a world of media and technology.” They have a free “Digital Literacy and Citizenship” curriculum, including video-rich lessons on topics such as digital safety, cyberbullying and Internet privacy. They also have a “Today in History” calendar that is very

complete and interesting. I found out that, on the same day I was writing this, the Salem Witch Trials had begun, in 1692. There is a link to some very good lesson plans and their book reviews for children's literature—both fiction and non-fiction—are very complete. I think you'll want to add this site to your favorites.

Social Studies Central

www.socialstudiescentral.com/

Here's a website that makes me both admire and envy Glenn Weibe, the site's developer. He's a former social studies teacher at both the K-12 and college levels and now works with ESSDACK, the Educational Services and Staff Development Association of Central Kansas. He's put together a website that's similar to the one I've been working on—one that will provide resources for classroom teachers, college-level teacher educators, and curriculum specialists in the schools. Mr. Weibe has designed and presents a wide variety of workshops,

ranging from "Using Primary Sources in the Classroom" to "Engaging 21st Century Learners." Moreover, he puts his presentation handouts on his site, so that teachers and supervisors can download them. He also has a list of recommended social studies websites that contains many of the sites I've used in my column. I admire his work and envy his ability to get his website up and running.

Educational Freeware

www.educational-freeware.com/

Here's another website that will intrigue you. It was created and designed by Marianne Wartyoft of Uppsala, Sweden. She's been developing educational shareware and freeware for over a decade and has learned about some outstanding resources and programs that are free for teachers to download and use in their classrooms or use in their online version. On the home page, you can select grade level and subject matter. After choosing "social

studies," make sure you check both the "Downloads" and "Online" tabs. The first one I looked at—Mission-us.org—was very good. It's an online history game aimed at junior and senior students that places you in 1770 Boston, where Loyalists and Patriots are voicing their views. Another choice, Breathing Earth, is a Flash visualization of world population growth, births, deaths and carbon emissions. It's a great starting point for discussions with students about climate change.

Kid's Educational Websites

<http://kidsedwebsites.com/>

This is a great site for students, K-12. When you log onto the website, scroll down on the right to get to the social studies sites. I found links to the "Branches of Government Game," "Kids Construct a Roman Aqueduct," and, the very interesting, and fun, "Run for Congress" game. It's a simulation of a congressional race in which the individual student vies for a House seat. I played it. I think I'm a bit too liberal to win the race, but it would be great for the students in your classroom. It was fun. There are several more neat links to other social studies resources and activities on Kid's Educational Websites.

I had a list of more than 20 sites that I considered for this column. But there isn't enough space to include them all. Those that meet the content requirements of column topics in the future will be listed at that time. I had a great time going through the websites that I've considered this time. There are several websites that let you share Favorites with others. I'll set one up and include it in the next column. In the meantime, if you have websites you think are useful to you in your work as an educator, send them my way. Thanks. 🌐

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