

Kids Traveling Through Cyberspace: *It's a Family Affair*

by Trilby Meeks

The Internet, World Wide Web, Information Highway, and Cyberspace are all terms used to describe the most exciting learning tool of this century. Thanks to these new technologies, not only can children read about volcanoes, they can see one erupt as well. They can visit great museums and libraries around the world at the touch of the keyboard. The benefits of this new technology make it possible for families to:

- find educational resources
- get help with homework
- increase reading and cognitive skills
- improve technology and information skills
- connect with places around the world
- locate parenting information
- learn and have fun together

It is important for parents to educate themselves about this new technology and the opportunities for fun and learning that it offers. Just as you monitor and help your children make selections from the many cable channels, teaching them to make wise use of this new medium is one of the most important things a parent can do. Remember, it's not the technology but how it is used.

Working in Children's Services at the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, I have reviewed and evaluated appropriate Web sites for children for many years. The PLCMC does recommend interesting and useful sites and resources for children and families to explore. The library does not monitor and has no control over materials obtained on the Internet, however, and cannot be held responsible for its content. Therefore, children twelve years and under must be accompanied by a parent to access the Internet. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on this age group. The following are my recommendations of "Twenty-plus Great Cybersites" for children age three to twelve years old and their families.

For Children 3-5 Years Old

The Animal Alphabet

<<http://www.mrtc.org/~twright/animals/english/alphabet.htm>>

When you click on a picture, you will learn more about the animal while learning the alphabet.

Barney

<<http://barneyonline.com>>

Preschool children and their care giver can join Barney's fan club, visit the green and purple fun page, sing-a-long songs, and do counting activities.

The Berenstain Bears Page

<<http://www.berenstainbears.com>>

Create your own coloring book, read an interactive book, dress up the Berenstain bears, plus seasonal fun activities.

Carlos' Coloring Book

<<http://www.coloring.com/>>

Carlos' coloring page lets your preschooler become a computer artist.

Random House for Kids (includes Arthur and Friends and Seussville)

<www.randomhouse.com/kids/arthur>

This site contains games, books, and activities related to Marc Brown's popular character Arthur, plus games, information, and fun from the publisher of Dr. Seuss books.

The Sesame Street Web Site

<<http://www.sesamestreet.com>>

Explore your child's favorite street as you visit the preschool playground, and learn the Alphabet at Sesame Street Central. Parents improve their skills at the Parent Toolbox.

For Children 6-9

Ask Dr. Math

<<http://forum.swarthmore.edu/dr.math/>>

Ask Dr. Math will help when you're stumped by math problems. Good math history resource, too.

Flags of the World

<<http://155.187.10.12/flags/nation-flags.html>>
Color pictures of flags of most of the countries of the world.

The History Channel

<<http://www.historychannel.com/today>>
This site looks at the many interesting events happening on a specific day of the year in history.

The Magic School Bus Page

<<http://scholastic.com/magicschoolbus>>
This site encourages activities related to many of the Magic School Bus adventures.

The San Diego Zoo

<<http://www.sandiegozoo.org/Zoo/zoo.html>>
Take a tour of the San Diego zoo, send postcards, and play games.

The White House for Kids

<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/kids/html/home.html>>
Socks, the Clinton family cat, takes kids on a tour of the White House.

For Children 10-12

African American Cyber Gateway

<<http://www.aawc.com/aawc.html>>
Links to information about all parts of African American culture.

American Girl Series

<<http://www.americangirl.com/ag/ag.cgi>>
This site expands on the stories in the series and has a club for fans of American Girl.

The ASL Dictionary

<<http://www.deafworldweb.org/asl>>
Using American Sign Language, learn to count, learn the alphabet, and learn to tell a story.

B. J. Pinchbeck's Homework Helper

<<http://tristate.pgh.net/~pinch13>>
History, math, science biographies and more.

Bill Nye the Science Guy

<<http://nyelabs.kcts.org>>
This is the online lab for the popular TV show.

Cells Alive

<<http://www.cellsalive.com>>
All the facts on cells, including pictures.

Countries of the World

<<http://www.tradeport.org/ts/countries/>>
Information and maps can be found about the countries of the world.

The Franklin Institute of Science Museum

<<http://sln.fi.edu/tfi/welcome.html>>
Education and museum tours available from this Philadelphia museum.

The Nine Planets

<<http://www.seds.org/billa/tnp/>>
An overview of the history, mythology, and current scientific knowledge of the planets and their moons. Most provide references to additional information.

Virtual Visits

<<http://iti.dpi.state.nc.us/virtualvisits>>
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Project that provides virtual tours of government buildings and landmarks in North Carolina.

Volcano World Museum

<<http://volcano.und.nodak.edu>>
Great satellite and aerial images and interactive experiments that supplement other volcano information resources.

For All Ages

Bonus for Kids

<<http://www.bonus.com>>
A virtual playground and educational resource for children of all ages.

The vast majority of Internet sites are perfectly safe. But like the real world, the virtual world contains some sites that may not be appropriate for children. Different families have different standards; therefore, it is important to establish clear guidelines for your child's Internet use. The best way to ensure your child's safety on the Internet is to be there. Of course, that is not always possible. Just as you teach your child rules about dealing with strangers outside the home, you must provide rules for communicating online. Spending time with your child online is one of the best ways to learn and teach them responsibility, good conduct, and values that are important to you. Ask them to share their favorite Web sites and what they like about them. Help them discover Web sites that can help them with their homework, hobbies, and other special interests.

Happy traveling through cyberspace ... "and may the force be with you!"

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