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LIBR 260A-01

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**Assignment #1: Reference and Readers’ Advisory**

***Children’s Reference Websites:***

1. **A+ Click**

*Free Website*

http://www.aplusclick.com/

This website was discovered through the ALA/ALSC Great Websites for Kids, a complied database of useful websites for children organized by themes and subject matter that include descriptions about different websites, a user-based ratings system, and suggest appropriate audience levels for websites. This particular site was discovered under the “Mathematics & Computers” section.

A+ Click is directed for children from grades 1-12, and describes itself as “Math and Logic Problems to develop logical reasoning and creative thinking.” The website is run by the A+ Click team, which has contributors from all across the world, from over 12 countries. There was no specific information on what fields these individual contributors are from, if there is outside funding by a parent organization, why the website was created, and who originally created the website. The closest idea about who is the author of the website is if you click on the “eBooks” link under the “About” section of the website and you are brought to a list of A+ click free eBooks authored by Igor Kokcharov, who may be the creator of the A+ website.

The design of the website is clean yet formal, and easy to navigate without clutter or an overwhelming amount of information. The site is free to use, and there are no distracting advertisements anywhere on the site. The site is populated with large clear type, colorful pictures, and easy to navigate clickable icons and drop down menus that will appeal to graphically inclined children. The site offers multiple ways to access different logic and math problems which are presented as quizzes. The first option given on the main page is through two “Quick Start” drop-down menus. The first menu offers a choice of different grade levels, the second menu offers a choice of different topic areas, including arithmetic, algebra, geometry, analysis, logic and applied mathematics. You can choose any combination from the two drop down menus, click the “Go” button next to them and you will be brought two a new page with a quiz that reflects your choices. The second way to access the problems is to select by grade (grades 1-12), each different grade is given a graphical icon with a little picture, presented in a very clear and orderly way. When you click on a certain grade level’s icon, you are directed to another page which lists each of the different problems available. Each quiz is represented in a grid, where each square contains the information: the grade level and topic area at the header, the first question of the quiz (or part of it, if it is long), and a picture that has to do with first question. In order to access the quiz, you just click on its square, and it will open in the same browser window. The last way to access quizzes is by subject, and again these are divided into different boxes, each with the subject title (i.e. Arithmetic, Algebra, etc.) and a picture that represents that subject. When you select a subject area, you are presented with all of the different quizzes from each grade level that has to do with that subject.

Once you are in a quiz window the left hand side consists of a menu that reflects the grade level choice and the suggested age of this level, and the number of the current question you are on in the quiz (which is also a link, with which you can navigate to already completed question). On the right hand side will be the logic/math problem/puzzle. Each question of the quiz will show the question at the top, with 4 clickable answer choices below. If you answer the question correctly, it will tell you that your answer is correct, it will mark the link on the left hand side green (to indicate it is correct), and then you have the option of moving onto the next question, or selecting your own question from any of the available choices in the grade level you are working on. If you get the answer incorrect, it will tell inform you that your choice was incorrect and it will provide the correct answer. Incorrect answers are either marked in red (to represent a totally incorrect answer), or yellow (to represent an answer that is partially correct, but still wrong). As you progress through the quiz, your score in the form of percentages correct is reflected in the left hand menu in the box with the information. The quizzes also function to challenge users who may have mastered their selected level; if questions are answered correctly 5 consecutive answers in a row, you are asked if you would like to move up to the next level, where you can proceed with slightly more difficult questions (or you can also select to remain on the same level).

In conclusion, while the origins and intent behind the website are a bit unknown, A+ click provides many options for children to answer math and logic questions in a fun, illustrated way, which provides immediate feedback, and offers many self-selectable options on what kind of questions to answer. The layout of the website is extremely clear, does not contain extraneous ads, wording, or clutter that could confuse and distract children. The use of clear visual images for each problem in the quizzes will attract children, and can create a fun, approachable way to work out math and logic problems at an appropriate level. While the site doesn’t have the ability to provide answers to students pressing math homework questions, it is a great supplement to classroom lessons and homework and will get kid’s minds working in novel ways that will contribute to their overall learning. The site also awards the achievement of users by acknowledging a top 10 hall of fame at the bottom of the home page, which includes the names of the “best performers of the last 10 days.”

2. **Fact Monster**

*Free Website*

www.factmonster.com

This site was discovered through the website, Common Sense Media, which compiles several lists of best websites, including a best websites for kids list. These website lists are divided into different topics, such a “Kids’ Hobbies Websites”, “Homework Help Websites”, “Social Networking for Kids” and can be sorted by targeted age ranges. Common Sense Media also provides a detailed review of the site, it’s recommended age level, it’s “learning” level represented by how many books it has colored in (maximum 3 books), it’s level of both good and bad content factors (such as positive messages, consumerism, violence, privacy & safety), and an overall starred review (out of 5 stars). The site also allows for reviews, and these are spilt into helpful parent and kid sections. This is a helpful and informative website that I will utilize in the future when looking for good in-depth information about websites for children.

Common Sense Media rates Fact Monster appropriate for children around 9 years old, and rates it 2 out of 3 books for learning, and rates it 4 stars overall. Fact Monster is sponsored and run by the online education provider, the Family Education Network. Fact Monster is a free website that does not require registration and offers lots of different types of information about history, people, sports, science, math, and links to informational sources such as almanacs, atlases, dictionaries, and encyclopedias. They also offer games, quizzes, “cool stuff”, and a homework center.

The website is appropriately titled “monster”, because there is an incredible amount of text based information available to children on the site. The site itself is designed in a modern way that is appealing due to its colorful and graphical nature that will appeal to children. Though the site is nicely designed and laid out, there is a ton of information available on it that can make it feel almost overwhelming at times. The biggest downside of the website is the distracting advertisements at the very top of the website and on the right hand side, these really draw overwhelm the clean look of the website and take away from the pleasant experience of it, but on a free website this is not unusual.

When you click away from the first page, you are usually brought to another page filled with text and lists, which is a lot less visually appealing than the first page. The nice thing about the design of the site is that whenever you navigate away from the front page, you are always given a clear menu bar on the left-hand side of the browser window that has links to the different sections of the website, that can help you from getting too lost, in addition to list of “Fact Monster Favorites” which include links to relevant and timely topics. For example, the topics presented were extremely relevant to this month and included links to Black History Month, Chinese New Year, Women’s History Month, and President’s Day.

The site also offers a “Homework Center”, which provides information on different subjects such as geography, history, language arts, math, science, and social studies, in addition to pages on homework skills such studying, research and writing. In the different homework subject areas both relevant information about the subject is given in addition to games and flashcard quizzes on the subject. The “Homework Center” is mainly a way for students to look up relevant information to complete homework on their own, but doesn’t provide one-on-one individualized help to students who have a particular question.

In addition to all of the information that is organized by different topics on the site, there is also a search box available if a child is interested in finding information more directly without having to browse. There is also a Fact Monster function that can be downloaded and installed directly onto your browser. The search box will mostly be helpful to students who have decent spelling and good search techniques, because the search function doesn’t really offer many suggestions to misspelled words (I tried a few incorrect variations on Amelia Earhart, and unless it was spelled correctly I did not get relevant hits). When a search is spelled correctly, many relevant links from the site are provided (a correctly spelled search of Amelia Earhart resulted in 10 pages of results).

In conclusion, Fact Monster is a good source of text based information for children. The front page of the site if visually appealing, and is information is organized in a clear way. The loud advertisements on the site detract from the overall clean feel of the website. The reliance on mostly text based information, might start to become both overwhelming and boring to children after a while, and could be a turn off to younger children whose reading skills are still developing. The site does offer a bevy of information, across many subjects, and presents it in multiple interesting ways. The games offered on the site may be a bit boring to today’s tech savvy kids, but overall the site is a great reference resource for children looking for a 1-stop site to answer many of their questions, and to discover interesting information.

3. **TryScience**

*Free Website*

http://www.tryscience.org/

This website was discovered though the ALA/ALSC Great Websites for Kids, and was found under the sciences section. Science projects are a mainstay for elementary school children because they provide a great hands-on way for children to learn about scientific concepts using everyday materials. Children often come to the library to look for books, information and resources about ideas for science projects, and TryScience is a great website to aid curious minds both on and off line.

TryScience is a site for children that provide science experiments, field trip ideas, and adventures (computer based games). TryScience describes itself as a “gateway to experience the excitement of contemporary science and technology through on and offline interactivity with science and technology centers worldwide.” TryScience is the product of a partnership between IBM, the New York Hall of Science (NYHOS), the Association of Science-Technology Centers (ASTC), and “science centers worldwide.” Though TryScience is aimed at children, it also provides links to pages for parents, teachers, and scientists & engineers.

The front page of TryScience is graphically well designed in a colorful, illustrated, and clean way that is not overly cluttered and is free from distracting advertisements. The front page is divided into two parts, the left hand side resembles a file folder with three different sections that can be toggled- experiments, field trips, and adventures. The right hand side resembles an oval shaped solar system, with links almost like planets placed along the outer ring- now in focus, live cams, citizens for planet, curious about, in addition to two square links- find a science center, and search.

The file folder portion of the site begins with experiments. These are represented graphically with illustrated rectangles, which denote different experiments. Visitors can toggle between pages of experiments, each of which contain 5 different experiment rectangles. These 5 rectangles also switch around every 15 seconds, which is a visually eye catching effect. There is also a link to “view all experiments”, which directs visitors to another page. This page is divided by topics, and compiled graphically in a way similar to the periodic table. For example topic 2, Earth Sciences, is contained in a rectangular box, with a 2 at the top, an “Es” in the middle and below that at the bottom, “Earth Sciences” in smaller letters. Experiments related to the different topics are displayed on the right hand side in alphabetical order, and are clickable links that bring you to the page with how to conduct the experiment.

There are two ways to try experiments, both online and offline. Online experiments entail use of flash based interactive animation. Each experiment offers a unique online experience. There is also a link to try experiments offline. These offline experiments are written out in different sections that include, objectives, what you need, to do, what’s going on, parent/teacher tips, and cool links related to that experiment. A last great inclusion on each experiment page is a link to “kids comments” where visitors can comment on their experience with the particular experiment. Many of the experiments have lots of great comments from kids who say how fun and cool the experiments were for them. This is great feedback for other visitors and for the site creators to have.

The folder section of the website also offers “Field Trips” which are interactive, flash animations, which provide text and visual information and allow visitors to the site to virtually learn and explore science centers and scientific topics from all across the world from their home computer. The last section of the folder portion of the website offers “Adventures” which are scientific, educational games that children can play. Both of the sections are designed similarly to the “Experiments” portion of the website.

The second portion of the website offers many great opportunities to learn about different scientific topics. There is a link to a “live cams” section where you can view webcams from all across the country, which are educational and scientific in nature. There is a “curious about…” link which provides quizzes on various topics, and you can view your results in comparison to other visitors on the site and learn more about the topic. Lastly, there is a section where you can learn more about “Citizens for Planet Earth” which is an educational outreach campaign for the series, *Journey to Planet Earth*, created by PBS.

Lastly, the website offers a unique feature that I have not seen yet on any of the other reviewed websites. At the top of the website is a drop-down menu that toggles between different language names, written in that language. When you select another language, the page reloads from English, and the *entire* website is displayed with that language. There are 9 different languages to choose from- English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, French, Italian, and Arabic. This makes the informative and fun content on the website available to a much larger audience. This also is helpful for individuals in our country who are learning English as a Second language to be given an opportunity to share in the wonders of science.

In conclusion, TryScience, is not only one of the best designed websites for children that I have ever come across, but the content provides opportunities and encouragement to children around the world to explore, investigate, interact, and learn more about science and the world we live in. The website is designed with many interactive graphic features that will be sure to capture the interest of children, but also provides its content in a distraction free and clear format. The content of the website varies in scientific related topics and gives multiple choices and ideas on how to explore these topics, both interactively through the website but also out in the real world. I cannot praise this website enough, and I can’t wait to recommend this website for use to children, parents, and educators.

4. **42eXplore**

*Free Website*

http://42explore.com/index.htm

This website was discovered though the ALA/ALSC Great Websites for Kids, and was found under the reference desk section. 42eXplore describes itself as “thematic pathfinders for all ages.” The website is created and maintained by Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson, former educators and the founders of another website, eduScapes. EduScapes is a website that provides information and links to educational resources aimed towards life-long learners, teachers, parents, students, and librarians.

The layout and design of the website is clear, uncluttered, advertising-free, and uses bright colorful images that are appealing and easy to navigate. The website serves as a pathfinder, which breaks down different topics in different themes. On the home page of the website, there are 8 different graphical links for these different themes- general themes, social studies, science, mathematics, English & language arts, health & fitness, fine arts, and applied arts. When you click on one of these topics you are brought to another page, which lists many different topics in a long alphabetical ordered list. Each of the items on the list receives its own line, and is a clickable link. The layout is very clear, presented very simply on a white background, without graphics, and in a clear bold font.

When you click on one of the topics from a themed list you are brought to a new page that presents a lot of information about that topic. Each topic starts with, “The Basics” which lists an “easier” and “harder” definition or general explanation about the topic. Harder usually doesn’t mean harder to understand, just a longer and more in depth review of the topic that covers a bit more ground than the easier definition, which is usually only a sentence long.

The next section of the topic page is headed, 42eXplore. This section presents links to other websites, in alphabetical order, that provide information related to the topic. After each link there are lists of “related websites” given to provide more information related to the link. After testing a few links from the topic page, Terrorism, many of the links did not work or linked pages had changed. Because of the nature of the ever-changing World Wide Web, this is not surprising but I was dismayed that most of the links did not work.

The next section of the topic page is, “Be An Explorer”, that provides a list of suggested activities to try related to the topic. This area is highlighted in bright yellow, for reasons unknown, but makes it stand out on the topic page. The nice thing about this section is that there are not many links used, so there is a lesser possibility that these will become outdated and unusable to visitors.

The next section, “More 2 eXplore”, provides many links to other outside websites related to the topic. These websites are broken up into different areas, such as: “Websites By Kids For Kids”, “Websites for Parents”, and “Websites for Teachers.” Each is also accompanied by a short description about the content of the linked site, and how it is beneficial and related to the topic. Again, I tested out some links from this section, and many of them did not work, indicating that not much upkeep is done on these.

The last section of the topic page is, “Words 2 eXplore”, which is a grid of terms related to the topic. Words that also have their own topic pages are linked. Since there is no search function anywhere on the website, I’m not sure how helpful the non-linked words can be.

In conclusion, 42eXplore, is a website with an interesting concept that may work better in theory than in practice. While there are many topics covered in each of the different theme areas, there are many that are not included, and this may have something to do with the fact that topics are only created and decided upon by the two website creators. Additionally, the idea of a site that provides many links to websites is a good one, but in practice 42eXplore has not kept up with the maintenance that is required to keep up with the ever-changing and evolving Internet. 42eXplore does provide good overviews about many topics, and with a few improvements (such as more staff, more upkeep, a search function, and user input about new topics to cover) could be extremely useful. The website creators may have stretched themselves too thin with trying to maintain this website, eduScapes, and the numerous other websites they have created. Students may be able to still get some good ideas from the website, but this site is not enough to provide a one-stop destination for information, since many of the linked websites it relies on to inform visitors do not work.

5. **Mr. Young’s Bouncy “A”**

*Free Website*

http://www.covenantworks.com/Bouncy-A/index.htm

This website was discovered though the ALA/ALSC Great Websites for Kids, and was found under the “Reference Desk” section. I was not able to find out much information about Mr. Young, presumably the creator of the website, except that he is an educator. I’m not even really sure what Bouncy “A” is in reference to, but this is a visually graphic website, that offers much information and many resources for children.

Mr. Young’s Bouncy “A” is a site that functions similarly to 42eXplore, in that it serves as a pathway to many topics through the use of links from more general themes to specific topics under those themes. The different themes covered on the first page are: science, computer, math, social studies, spelling, art, music, reading, language, games, and miscellaneous. The site seems to be offered to both children and educators. The top portion of the website provides graphic icons that represent each different theme, and all of the content in this area is for children. The bottom portion of the website is titled, “Technology Integration Depot”, with links that are similar in their usage of graphic icons but they seem to be geared toward educators. These links lead to another site, Teachers pay Teachers, where Mr. Young is selling digital products to educators. While this isn’t the type of advertising that I experienced on other websites, it is still advertising in a more general sense. Since the advertising comes from Mr. Young himself, it fits into the overall aesthetic of the website and is not very distracting from the rest of the content.

When you select any of the themes presented on the home page of the website, you are brought to another page that breaks down the topic into various topics. Each of these topics is represented by a clear square icon that consists of a picture and words and is outlined with a yellow border. At this point, some of the icons will link to other websites, and some will link to another page on the website that again, breaks down the topic further. The interesting thing about Mr. Young’s Bouncy “A”, is that all of the content is mapped in this way, through a series of links that ultimately lead to another website. In this way it is similar to 42eXplore, except besides the custom made icons, and the website itself there is no actual content created by this site. I tried out many of the links that lead to outside sources, and though there were a few that did not work, the majority of them did, which was very impressive. There is also a clearly marked back button on every page, that way you can always find your way back to where you started without getting too lost.

In conclusion, the concept of Mr. Young’s Bouncy ‘A’ relies on simplicity that also makes it easy to navigate and explore. While the content of the website ultimately relies on linking to content from outside websites, it breaks down many general themes and topic areas into more manageable parts. The website also uses simple graphical icons to represent each different topic and theme with a minimal amount of reading, making it a good resource for younger children who are still developing their reading skills who can still navigate the site using the visual clues of the icons. There isn’t much information on the website about Mr. Young himself, and though there is some hidden advertising on the site, these facts do not detract from the overall mission and layout of the website. This website will be helpful for children who want to explore different topic and theme areas, but probably will be less useful for those who are trying to obtain information on a topic.

***Children’s Readers’ Advisory Websites***:

1. **BookHive**

*Free Website*

http://www.cmlibrary.org/bookhive/

This website was discovered though the ALA/ALSC Great Websites for Kids, and was found under the “Reference Desk” section. BookHive is part of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library System (North Carolina) website, but it is free to use by anyone who is not a member of the library.

BookHive is described as “your guide to Children’s Literature and Books” (Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, 2013). The home page of the BookHive is illustrated in a graphically pleasing way, which really draws visitors into the website. Zinger the Bee, the mascot of the BookHive, is located in the different sections of the front page from, Zinger recommends, find a book, bee an author, Zinger tales, and Zinger’s choice.

The Zinger recommends portion highlights a relevant topic or theme, complied as a booklist. When I visited the BookHive, the books recommended were related to Black History Month. When you click on the link to the view the booklist, you are given a lot of information about the different books- you get the title, a picture of the cover, the authors, the length of the book, the audience level, the category of the book, a short book review, and a list of similar books. These booklists created by the staff of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library offer two unique options that you don’t have to be a member of the library to use. First, you can add comments about a book, using a form, and the comments will be posted under the book review. Second, you can create booklists, and save any of the reviewed books to your booklists to access later. You can also search for book titles, using any of the information included in the book reviews, but only titles that have been reviewed will be searched.

Zinger’s choice features the cover of a book along with the words, “(readers name), age \_\_, from \_\_\_\_, liked this book. You may like it too!”, and a link to the review of the book. The information from the readers given on the front page is taken from the user comments area under a book. Bee an author allows visitors to create their own 6-page story about Zinger. In order to use this function of the site you have to create a user name and password, but the process is quick, instant, and doesn’t require an e-mail address. Different pictures of Zinger the Bee can be selected for each page of the story, and then you can write up to 750 for each page of the book. On the front page of the website, upon every refresh, a different story created by site visitors is featured. Upon my visit to the website, I noted many stories created by children from all across the country, which speaks to wide use of the website and it’s helpfulness to many. Zinger’s tales provides links both to audio and video of stories told by various storytellers. The stories in audio form are a bit harder to access, because you have to download a file to your computer to hear them. The video stories are embedded video files that you don’t need any special software or downloads to run. This portion of the website also provides links to related books to each of the different stories told.

The last portion of the website is its main feature, find a book. In this section, there are many different lists of books divided by topic area. Some of these topics include newer books, award books, books for certain ages (i.e. Books & Babies), specific book genres (i.e. Fantasy), and books by type (i.e. non-fiction). These lists only contain books that have been reviewed, so some lists may not have as many books in them as others. This section of the website also highlights two areas, meet the author, which features links to learn more about a children’s author, and reader’s choice, which highlights a book from a reader (who has left comments on the website.) I clicked on the link for the topic of graphic novels and was presented with 30 different book reviews. The site allows you to narrow results by book audience (all, babies, toddlers, preschool, primary (k-3), intermediate (4-6), and adult/parent). To narrow the list I selected books for an intermediate age range. The list wasn’t narrowed too much, as I still was presented with 26 results. The first few books recommended were *Avatar, the Last Airbender: The Promise, Part One* by Gene Luen Yang, *Madeleine L’Engle’s A Wrinkle in Time: The Graphic Novel* by Hope Larson, and *The Girl Who Owned a City* by Dan Jolley. These few suggestions seem to vary much in intended age range, so it is possible audience age ranges 4-6 may be too broad, and could be narrowed to provide tighter results.

In conclusion, BookHive is a great resource for those looking for their next great read. There is a large amount of information on the site, mostly in the form of book reviews written by the staff of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. The site also allows visitors to experience stories in many ways from writing your own story, listening to others tell a story, and sharing your experience different books. Since most of the book recommendations are only based on the books that have reviews written about them, not every book written is going to be covered. There are extensive topics and theme lists provided that is sure to meet the needs of most readers. The site is also visually appealing, keeping with the theme of the BookHive and featuring the adorable Zinger the Bee.

2. **Book Adventure- Book Finder**

*Free Website*

http://www.bookadventure.com/book\_finder.aspx

I discovered this website, Book Adventure, from the website All Safe Sites, which is a website on the ALA/ALSC Great Websites for Kids. All Safe Sites is a search engine that provides results that are safe and educational for children. All Safe Sites also complies lists of appropriate sites for children in different areas such as educational, games, and entertainment, and the Book Adventure website was discovered in the educational section of the website.

Book Adventure is a website created by the company Sylvan Learning, which provides tutoring services for children in the fields of reading, math, writing, homework help, study skills, standardized testing preparation for all grades and skill levels. Book Adventure is a site where students can take quizzes on the books they have read to earn prizes. Upon browsing the site, I discovered that Book Adventure also offers booklists and a book finder.

According to Book Adventure, there are 8,000 books in their database. You can do a standard search with the title of the book, the author’s last name, or by ISBN or you can do an advanced search to browse for a book. The first choice you must make on the drop-down menu is your grade level (grade levels range from K-12). The second menu you choose from, is level or difficulty, the options for this menu include, books at my grade level, easier book, books that are a challenge, and books at any grade level. The last drop down menu is a choice between fiction or non-fiction books. After this you can go ahead and search based on your choices, or you have the option of selecting different subject areas that are listed out. There are a 38 different topics to choose from. I did a few sample searches to see what kind of books would be recommended. For my first search, I wanted to see if two subjects were selected would books with both of those subjects be included in the results. I searched as grade 5, books at any grade level, with the subjects, “animals” and “literary collections” selected. There were 283 results, and all books with classified as animals, literary collections, or both. This meant that books with both of these subjects together would not only be shown, which limits the possibility of concise results pages with multiple subjects without having to scan hundreds of titles. In an attempt to create a search with less results I tried a search of grade 5, books at my grade level, fiction, with the subject of animals selected. While the results were slightly less, there were still over 150 results. Some of the titles recommended were, *Old Yeller* by Fred Gipson, *Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, and *Charlotte’s Web* by E.B. White, all good titles within the subject and grade range. The results pages include the title of the book, the author, ISBN, reading level, and the subjects/categories of the book (many books had multiple subjects), and a link to take the quiz on the book. Some of the book titles have short descriptions (about a sentence or two long), and these are accessed when you click on them in the results list.

In conclusion, the book finder on Book Adventure is a very useful tool to help find books. Though the site is sponsored by Sylvan Learning, it is completely free to use, kids are rewarded for reading books, and I felt as information on the site was unbiased. The database includes many titles to search from, but the search function itself could be improved on. The ability to include two or more subjects should be added, so that results lists are shorter and more focused on the interests of the searcher. While there are many subjects to choose from, which provide many choices for searchers, the terminology of some of these subjects are not very clear (i.e. Ethnic Studies, Lifestyles, and Literary Collections) and no definitions are given. Since the database is so large, results pages often end up with hundreds of relevant titles, which can be overwhelming to a reader searching for their next read. Adding more descriptions to all of the book titles in the database would be helpful information for searchers to narrow their choices.

3. **AR BookFinder**

*Free Website*

http://www.arbookfind.com/

This website was discovered though a library guide on homework help for kids, created by librarians from the Contra Costa County Library system. I browsed around this library site, because I live in Contra Costa County, and thought I could get some good suggestions on kid appropriate sites. The homework help guide includes many links to resources for children for research and information.

AR BookFinder is a site created by Renaissance Learning, Inc., which is a “technology-based educational company with a primary focus on accelerating K12 learning” (Renaissance Learning, 2012). I noticed some fine print at the bottom of the main page which essentially states that Renaissance Learning is a partner with Amazon, meaning that they make advertising money from Amazon by posting links to Amazon. It is good that the site is forthcoming about this, though the average browser or child may not read or understand the statement. The AR of AR BookFinder refers to the Accelerated Reader Enterprise, a reading program created by Renaissance Learning. The AR BookFinder website is free to use by anyone.

There are three different options for searching for books, quick search, advanced search, and collections.

In quick search you are presented with a single search bar, and you can search by authors, topics, or titles of books. I searched for the word, “Trucks”, which is a popular book subject at the library I work at. I was presented with a results page with over 900 different books titles. For each result on the list, a lot of information is presented. You are given the book title, author, language, if the book is fiction/nonfiction, and a brief (one sentence) book description. There is also other information given such as interest level (i.e. lower grades), ATOS book level, AR points, AR quiz number, and a starred rating. Unless students are specifically looking for AR books to use for the program, most of this information is not very helpful to a general searcher. More information about a title can be obtained by clicking on the tile of the book, which opens a detailed page of book information. In this page, the topic and subtopics of the book are revealed, along with word count, information about who publishes the book LCCN, ISBN, publication year, and page count.

In the advanced search window you are given many different search functions including the standards like title, author, and ISBN, in addition to the ability to search in categories such as interest level, ATOS book level, topics, subtopics, fiction/nonfiction, and language (English or Spanish). In the interest level category, there are four different categories to choose from- lower grades K-3, middle 4-8, middle grades 6 and up, upper grades 9-12. There are 75 different topics to choose from in a drop-down menu, with a varying number of subtopics for each of these. Too retry my first search I tried looking for truck books again. This time I choose the transportation/vehicles topic, and the car/trucks subtopic, and this time the list was much shorter with 38 results. Because I didn’t specify between non-fiction and fiction titles, some of the books recommended were *The 10 Hottest Hollywood Cars* by Glen Downey, *The Adventures of Taxi Dog* by Debra Barracca, *American Cars of the 1970s* by Craig Cheetham. The books were also a mix between different recommended grade levels, mostly between lower and middle grades.

The last way to look for books it through collections, which are essentially booklists complied by AR BookFinder on different topics but organized using the AR rubric. The four main collection topics are awards, state lists, librarians’ picks, and what kids are reading. In the last category, what kids are reading, there are subcategories, such as 100 most read fiction, 100 most read nonfiction, etc. These categories are then broken down into ATOS book levels. With each of these different ways to search for books there are ways to further limit and sort results, this functionality being especially helpful when results lists are long. A menu bar on the left hand side of the results pages includes ways to refine results including limits on interest level, topic, language, and fiction/nonfiction. Additionally, books result lists can be sorted by title, author, interest level, book level, and rating (rating is done by student who have read and rated the titles through the AR program.)

In conclusion, the AR BookFinder is a helpful way to search for books from a large database. While much of the information on the website is related to the Accelerated Reading program, and related tests and products the information on the website seems unbiased and can be helpful to those outside of the program. The ability to search through many topics and subtopics ensure that books can be found in specific interest areas. The clumping of multiple grades together in interest level is going to be less helpful to outside users, because these span too many very different grades, only giving a general sense of what age and grade levels books are appropriate for. The booklist collections provide a great way to discover award winning book titles, and popular books that children are reading now. Many of these collections are also organized using information related to the AR book reading program, but there are enough collections that don’t that can still be useful to the general user. Throughout my visit and searches on the website, I was never linked to Amazon, despite the disclaimer from the company that runs AR Book Finder. I never felt like I was being sold anything and this would make me more likely to recommend it for use by my patrons.

4. **Book Wizard by Scholastic**

*Free Website*

http://www.scholastic.com/bookwizard/

Book Wizard was discovered while I was browsing another portion of the Scholastic site, Celebrate Hispanic Heritage, after I came across it on Great Websites for Kids by the ALA/ALSC. Book Wizard is under the Books & Authors section of the Scholastic website. In addition to the Book Wizard, which is a way to search for Scholastic titles, there are other sections featured on this part of the Scholastic website such as E-Reading Resources, featured video, featured authors, new books, and book lists. Though Scholastic is a for-profit publishing company, the Book Wizard is free to use, and there are minimal advertisements on the site.

There are three main search capabilities on the Book Wizard, search for all books, search for similar books, and search by reading level.

In search for all books, you are given one search box with the ability to search by title, author, or keyword. Additionally, you can select to have one of the following options displayed with on the results page- grade level equivalent, guided reading, DRA, or lexile measure. Since I am not familiar with any of these, I conducted a search with the default option chosen, DRA. I conducted a search for the keyword, “turtles” and was presented with a results page with over 200 results. On the left hand side of the results page is a menu, with which the results pages can be further narrows. The options given are interest level (grades k-12), reading level, theme/subject, genre, and series. With the use of these options I was able to narrow down results to three by selecting books for grades 1-2 and selecting the theme/subject animals. The three results were *All About Turtles* by Jim Arnosky, *Pandas and Other Endangered Species* by Mary Pope Osborne and Natalie Pope Boyce, and *All About Reptiles and Amphibians* by Dee Phillips. Each result also provides a book alike button, which helps find similar books. I clicked on the button for my first result, *All About Turtles*, and was recommended 511 books, a few of the top results including, *Giant Pandas* by Gail Gibbons, and *Lonesome George Finds His Friends* by Victoria Kosara. The reading level can also be adjusted in the similar books results page with the use of a sliding scale from easier to harder books in relation to the original book.

The second way to search for books is to search for similar books, again using the book alike functionality. Last week while at work, I overheard a young girl ask her father what books were like the book *Old Yeller* by Fred Gipson, so I did a similar book search for this title. The book alike system gives you the reading level, interest level, themes and genre of the book you search for and presents books that have similar characteristics. The first three books suggested as similar to *Old Yeller* were, *Wringer* by Jerry Spinelli, *Charlie’s Raven* by Jean Craighead George, and *The Cybil War* by Betsy Cromer Byars. The last way to search for books is to search by reading level, which includes grade level, guided reading, DRA, and lexile measure. Because I am not familiar with these reading levels, I did not conduct any searches using these different measures.

In conclusion, the Book Wizard by Scholastic is a great way to not only find books published by the company, but also a very useful way to find reading suggestions. I was most impressed by the similar book search functionality, because a key way to provide readers’ advisory to patrons is to ask them about books they have enjoyed reading in the past, and the bookalike provides a good way to recommend similar books without actually having to know every book in the library. I was also impressed by how many titles the Book Wizard has in its database, which includes over 50,000 titles, and will ensure that it will be able to produce good lists of results. Though I wasn’t aware of the different reading levels mentioned in the different searches, I believe this information will be very useful to students and parents who need to find books within these parameters for school homework and assignments. Though this website is maintained by a for-profit company, the level of advertisements on the website was not distracting, the information presented appeared unbiased, and I did not feel like they were pushing me to purchase the books that came up in results pages. The Book Wizard is a solid readers’ advisory site, and I will be keeping it mind next time I am presented with a book recommendation request.

5. Database of Award Winning Children’s Literature

*Free Website*

http://www.dawcl.com/

This website was discovered though the ALA/ALSC Great Websites for Kids, and was found under the “Reference Desk” section. Database of Award Winning Children’s Literature (DAWCL) was created by California State University, San Bernardino reference librarian, Lisa Bartle. Bartle came up with the idea for DAWCL as a MLIS student at UCLA. The stated purpose of the website is to “create a tailored reading list of quality children’s literature or to find out if a book has one of the indexed awards” (Bartle, 2012). The website’s intended audiences include librarians, teachers, parents, young adults, and children.

DAWCL contains “over 9,600 records from 106 awards across six English-speaking countries (United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, English, and Ireland)” (Bartle, 2012). Prior to visiting this site I was not aware that so many awards existed! There is a listing of all of the different awards on the site, in addition to information about the award such as country of origin, frequency of awards, and how awarded books are chosen. Books are categorized and indexed by Bartle, and there is a long informational page that breaks what the categories mean. The different categories include age of reader, author/illustrator/translator/, awards, ethnicity, format, gender, genre, historical period, keyword, languages, multicultural, point of view, publication year, and setting. The instructions page is very useful because as I experienced on most of the other readers’ advisory websites reviewed in this paper, many of the ways that they broke down information were not intuitive and needed explanations. Since this site is created by a librarian, I have to say that I am not surprised by this level of detail. Of course there will be some who don’t read the instructions page and may be confused by some of the categories. For example, all books are divided into four different formats: picture books, chapter books, easy readers, and stories without words. According to the website “picture books does not necessarily mean the book is meant for young children” (Bartle, 2012). This deviates from the common understanding of what picture books usually are, and this division could be confusing to parents and other users of the site. The instructions page also gives a great list of all of the genre types that books are classified into, in addition to a brief (one sentence) explanation of what the genres mean in plain terms.

To search the DAWCL, there is only one page on the website available to do this with and many options and parameters to choose from. The parameters that use a drop down menus are: suggested age, setting, historical period, ethnicity/nationality of protagonist or tale, included languages other than English, format, genre, gender of protagonist, and awards. The parameters that can be filled in with data from a searcher are: keyword or phrase, author/illustrator/translator, and publication year (must be between two years). The level of options and detail that included for the search are impressive, I have not seen as many different categories on the other similar websites. These different parameters ensure that those who are looking for titles to suit their tastes will surely be able to limit what they are looking for to best find what they need. I’m not aware of many awards, so I choose a few different ones from the long menu to see what kind of books were represented by them and to see what a results page looked like. For my first choice, I choose to see all books from the Aurealis Awards. According to the list of awards on the website, the Aurealis Awards are from Australia, and cover a large array of children’s fiction works, and are published by Australian citizens. With my search I was presented with a simple results page with about 50 results. All results were listed in order by title, but results could also be sorted by author, illustrator, and publication year. All information about the records was presented in the results page, that is to say clicking the title of one of the results did not open a page with more detailed information. Results pages also only include the following information for each book: author, title, award, award year, brief description (if available), and format. In order to limit searches, you have to return back to the search page to alter the parameters and there is no way to alter the results page once presented with it. Since my results page had so many results, I went back and added the parameter, suggested age of reader to 5-8. Doing this noticeably increased the time it took search the database, but my list was reduced to 2 books, *How to Live Forever* by Colin Thompson and *The True Story of Mary Who Wanted to Stand on Her Head* by Jane Godwin.

In conclusion, DAWCL is an extremely useful database with a large array of award winning titles to search from. As the site was conceived and created by a librarian, the level of detail about the different categories and parameters that books are broken down into are numerous. Another key aspect that is found on this site is an explanation of these different categories and parameters, and what exactly they mean in easy to understand terms. Despite all of these positive and helpful aspects of the website, there is some room for improvement. The first issue I noticed was that it hadn’t been updated since March of 2012. The second issue is that the only included award winning books are from English speaking countries; it would be nice if the database were expanded to include more awards, to create a more diverse database that will be benefit more users. The third issue is that the number of instructions and included search parameters are numerous, which can make them difficult for most people to understand and can be confusing. Also searching for multiple parameters can make the search go very slowly. Though there are so many search parameters, most of these are not included in the results page. It would be helpful that books in the results pages be listed with this, which would allow searchers conducting multiple searches to be reminded what they have searched for previously. For example, when you search for genre, or age range of reader, these are not included in the records. Including this information can also be useful for searchers who are may have not searched for certain parameters, but may still use the information (if it were included) to narrow down choices for themselves. Lastly, it would be helpful to be able to work with the results list after the search is completed. Searches that result in many titles could be altered to more manageable and relevant numbers, without having to redo searches each time. As a product of the work of one librarian, the site is impressive for what it has accomplished. Having one comprehensive site to quickly view titles of award-winning children’s literature will be immensely helpful to users, and with a few tweaks to the site, it could be even better.

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