

# Website Potpourri

C. Frederick Risinger

**I received much e-mail as a result** of the last column, “Promising Practices in Using the Internet to Teach Social Studies.” Several suggested other websites designed by teachers and social studies programs. So, I’m featuring a couple of those in this column, and will use others in the future. This column is a collection of sites that do not conform to a single theme; they are useful and interesting and may lead teachers or students to some good classroom activities and student projects. This “potpourri” approach requires a departure from the column’s usual design. Instead of one paragraph that describes the theme, followed by a collection of websites, this one will have a short introductory sentence or two followed by one or two websites. If you have suggestions for future column themes or recommendations for other websites, please send them along. My e-mail address is at the end of the column.

Rebecca Blood, who teaches civics to adult learners in Arlington, Virginia, wrote to ask about simulations of “Congress-related activities.” She wanted her students to take on the role of a particular Congressperson who copes with representing constituents and doing what is best for the country. This is a good time to try this approach, when a new Congress has just begun. Here is one site that can help:

## **CongressLink**

[www.congresslink.org](http://www.congresslink.org)

This outstanding website, managed by the Dirksen Congressional Center, is especially directed to government and civics teachers, but has lesson plans and other resources for teachers at all grade levels. In addition to its own exemplary lessons on Congress and Congressional history, CongressLink also has selected other lessons from many other websites. One simulation, developed by political scientist Jeffrey Bernstein, provides students with an understanding of what

determines who wins and who loses an election. Links to other websites lead to a simulation where students learn how a bill goes through the steps to become a law. The “House Floor Debate Simulation” can be modified for upper-elementary, middle school, high school, and college level classes.

Cynthia Thomas, a U.S. history and government teacher at J. P. Taravella High School in Broward County, Florida, wrote to say that she believes the HistoryTeacher.net website is the “BEST ever” for teachers. I have used that website several times in previous columns and agree that the site does contain just about every web resource that history teachers might want to use.

## **HistoryTeacher.net**

[www.historyteacher.net](http://www.historyteacher.net)

This site displays the work of Susan Pojer, the “webmistress” and a teacher at Horace Greely High School in Chappaqua, New York. One outstanding section is the “PowerPoint Palooza,” a collection

of more than 130 PowerPoint presentations developed by Pojer. They include presentations for regular and AP U.S. history, AP world history, and global studies. She also includes more than 20 PowerPoint presentations designed by her students. As I’ve said before, this is a wonderful website for teachers. If you teach history, or just enjoy history, you will want to check out this site.

In addition to thanking Cynthia Thomas for recommending history-teacher.net, I should point out that she also has a great website for her social studies classes, similar to some I mentioned in my previous column.

## **Thomas Loves History**

[www.ThomasLovesHistory.com](http://www.ThomasLovesHistory.com)

This is a good example of a teacher-developed website that provides students with resources, and lets them examine their current grades, or meet with a “virtual counselor” to check test scores and credits. The “projects” link includes descriptions of all individual and group projects that students will be doing. I was intrigued that she (and presumably her school system) uses TurnItIn ([www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)) for written student assignments. The program does a good job of preventing online plagiarism. The school from which I retired (Indiana University, Bloomington) uses TurnItIn, as well.

I have also had several e-mails from teachers asking for guidance on how to teach about terrorism. Frankly, I have resisted creating a column solely on this

topic, primarily because I don't want to frighten kids any more than they already are. However, students do need to understand some of the causes of terrorism, its history, and the various terrorist groups. Moreover, many teachers (like most Americans) tend to view terrorism as primarily Islamic and primarily fueled by hatred of Americans and Western culture. So, I have reviewed several sites—some designed for teachers and others that are more general—that go beneath the daily news, examining terrorism from social, racial, economic, and historical perspectives. Here are three of them.

### Teaching about Terrorism and Tolerance

[www.massteacher.org/teaching/links/links\\_spec\\_terrorism.cfm](http://www.massteacher.org/teaching/links/links_spec_terrorism.cfm)

This list of resources and ideas is from the Massachusetts Teachers Association and is therefore not specifically for social studies teachers—though most of the recommended links are social studies-related. I included this site because it has instructional materials and information designed for all grade levels. The links include sites from the U.S. government and news media, as well as lesson plans.

### Information Resource Centers—Diplomatic Mission to Germany

[usa.usembassy.de/classroom/terrorism.htm](http://usa.usembassy.de/classroom/terrorism.htm)  
PBS, the Constitutional Rights Foundation, and the Education Development Center are some of the organizations that have designed lesson plans for teaching about terrorism. Most are designed for secondary students, but some will work at the middle school and lower grade levels. There are also very useful guides for teachers who want to deal with terrorism in the classroom from the National Association of School Psychologists, the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching from the University of Michigan, and two papers from NCSS. An excellent article from *Education Week*, “Teaching Tolerance after Terrorism,” is also linked to this site. Finally, there are several articles from

the journal *Foreign Affairs* that provide background information on terrorism, its history, and its causes.

### The Jamestown Foundation

[www.jamestown.org](http://www.jamestown.org)

The Jamestown Foundation's mission is to inform and educate policymakers and the broader policy community about events and trends that are strategically important to the United States. In recent years, it has focused on terrorism. It covers all nations in Eurasia, including nations that were former Soviet republics, China, India, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Most of the information found here would probably not be used directly with students, although upper secondary students working on nation projects would find it useful.

Turning to more general social studies sites, here is one from Delaware that seeks to combine interesting instruction and the development of students' thinking skills.

### University of Delaware Social Studies

[www.udel.edu/dssep/strategies.htm](http://www.udel.edu/dssep/strategies.htm)

Many state universities have websites for teachers, but the University of Delaware's Center for Teacher Education offers a concise, multifaceted, useful website for classroom teachers that covers the range of grade levels from pre-K up to 12. The site takes you directly to a set of instructional strategies, such as concept formation and problem-based learning. The strategy descriptions and examples are not overblown and seem easy to replicate. Other categories at this site include suggested literature for different grade levels, Internet resource articles, lesson plans for teaching the Constitution, and professional development opportunities.

Finally, let's have a bit of fun teaching history. Here are two websites that provide fun activities and quizzes for students. Sometimes I think a few teachers over-use these games and quizzes, but for those days when your class schedule is shortened by snow, or you need to have

something for a substitute teacher, these can be very useful.

### Fun Trivia-History

[www.funtrivia.com/quizzes/history/index.html](http://www.funtrivia.com/quizzes/history/index.html)

You will find hundreds of trivia games and contests, in categories as broad as ancient history or U.S. history, and as specific as early New Zealand history or the Mayan civilization. Students can play the “classic” style (where they complete the quiz and then find out how many they got correct) or the “Interactive” version (where they receive immediate feedback on each answer). There are hundreds of these quizzes—they are colorful, the graphics are well done, and the questions are surprisingly close to most textbook content and curriculum guides.

### Social Studies For Kids

[www.socialstudiesforkids.com/subjects/historygames.htm](http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/subjects/historygames.htm)

This is a very good site for social studies teachers and students. The games and other activities are a bit more “historically-oriented” and do a good job of teaching concepts. Some of the activities that I thought would be excellent for individual students, group projects, or even a whole-class presentation included National Geographic for Kids “Go West across America with Lewis and Clark” and “Explorers.” Most of the explorers covered in world and U.S. history are included. Students (upper elementary and middle school) read pages about each explorer, do suggested activities, and then take a quiz. This activity would be good for students to do together at a computer.

Let me know if you have other suggestions! 📧

*C. FREDERICK RISINGER is retired from the School of Education 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.*