

The theme of this issue of *The Teaching Librarian* is **free @ your library**. With news headlines constantly shouting recession and cutbacks, most people are becoming more budget conscious than ever before. So how can educators keep delivering great programming that uses technology when we are watching our budgets dwindle before our eyes? Well, we are a creative lot: check out the Idea File in this issue to see how your colleagues are using their research skills to locate fabulous freebies. We are also a helpful lot: click on the links below to see how some libraries are helping other libraries by offering free resources and training through the Internet.

The Clearinghouse

<http://www.sols.org/links/clearinghouse/index.htm>

The Clearinghouse will be of interest to anyone who works in a library. It is a great source of information on a wide range of library topics from funding to technology to French resources. Hosted by Southern Ontario Library Service, there is a link to Ontario Library Service North, plus many relevant external sources. The site is easy to use and full of Canadian content. I found the “technology” link to be of interest; particularly the Adaptive Technology section that showcased free downloads for products like Browsealoud (reads websites aloud while highlighting words for the reader) and Dewey Pictograms (helps people with developing literacy skills to better locate items in the library).

OPAL (Online Programming for All Libraries)

<http://www.opal-online.org/archivelis.htm>

OPAL, described as an “international collaborative effort” by libraries and their partners, provides training and web programs to library users as well as library staff. OPAL’s programs include live online events, during which participants interact using technologies such as voice-over-IP, text chatting, synchronized browsing, and more. Everyone is welcome. There is no need to register; you can join a session that is in progress, or you can check the archive for previous sessions. This site is hosted by TAP Information Services, a small technology company in the business of innovation.

Ministry of Natural Resources

<http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Species/2ColumnSubPage/262180.html>

The Ministry of Natural Resources offers free “nature” screensavers (for Windows and Mac) and an endangered species colouring book for children that highlights Ontario’s endangered plants and animals.

Curriculum Services Canada

<http://www.curriculum.org/tcf/teachers/projects.shtml>

Curriculum Services Canada offers free, top-notch, teacher-developed resources on a variety of subjects, at both elementary and secondary levels. Many of these lessons are cross-curricular. For example, the “Eco Footprints” lesson plan (created in 2009 for grades

1-8) could help teachers meet the new environmental curriculum requirements.

FREEDOM TO...

The following links may not offer anything for “free,” but they do have the word “free” in their titles so they count (okay, that may be a stretch). A techie friend recommended Freedom to Tinker (their catchphrase is “Freedom to Tinker... is your freedom to understand, discuss, repair and modify the technological devices you own”), and I’m a regular visitor at both the Freedom to Read and Freedom to Write sites in an effort to keep abreast of challenges to intellectual freedom.

Freedom to Tinker

<http://www.freedom-to-tinker.com/>

Freedom to Tinker is hosted by Princeton’s Center for Information Technology, a research center that studies digital technologies in public life. There are many different threads of commentary, ranging from very high level techie talk (I saw one recently on androids!) to open dialogue on banning online communities (such as Twitter and Facebook) in public workspaces. The online community issue is becoming increasingly relevant in our schools and libraries since students want, and expect, to be able to log on and tweet or write on someone’s wall whenever they want. The site is academic in nature, but is largely accessible to those who might call themselves “developing” techies.

Freedom to Read

http://www.freedomtoread.ca/freedom_to_read_week/index.asp

Freedom to Read Week is an important annual event that should be highlighted in every school library. Most students are shocked to hear that the Harry Potter books were challenged in the US for the inclusion of “wizardry” or that *The Tale of Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny* were banned in parts of England because the stories “portrayed only middle class rabbits”. This site encourages Canadians to “think about and reaffirm their commitment to intellectual freedom”, which is guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This year, Freedom to Read Week will be celebrated February 21-27, 2010. For a small fee, you can order a Freedom to Read kit that contains a poster, a 40-page review, classroom activities, and relevant clip art.

Freedom to Write

<http://www.pencanada.ca/>

PEN is an international organization which works on behalf of writers forced into silence (or even into prison) because of government opposition to their work. Since many school and public libraries are hotbeds of ongoing debate about censorship, this site will be of interest to those who want to learn more about both the national and international censorship situation as well as those who want to know how to become more involved with advocacy efforts. ■