

Great Websites for Busy Teachers

Bruce Wentzell, Teacher, Sandy Lake Academy, Bedford, NS

What makes a great website? I've asked myself this question a lot lately. The conventional idea is that a well-designed, attractive site makes a great website. And I think that is both true and untrue. The difference comes in how you define well-designed and attractive.

For some, well-designed is a matter of visual appeal and sophistication. Designers will go to extraordinary lengths to ensure that a particular colour is right, or that a font is aligned just so. Interestingly, this doesn't necessarily translate into increased website visits. A more useful definition of well-designed centres depends on the user. Who is likely to visit the website? What information do they need? For many website operators, the most important thing isn't the colour palette, but the accessibility of interesting content.

This isn't a terribly new idea, but it is often overlooked by many websites out there. They usually want their site to "sizzle." But, if you look at Amazon, CNN, Google and many other of the big names, you see what matters is the "meat." (Apologies to all vegetarians for the omnivorocentric metaphor. Try this instead; they want their apples to shine, but they overlook the sweetness.)

The Web is definitely an interactive, dynamic, and rapidly changing communications medium. Well-organized, edited, and timely original content set in an attractive, interactive, and consistent format are some traits of what I consider to be great Websites.

What makes a great website is focus and clarity of purpose. A great website is unpretentious. It doesn't pretend to be what it is not. It never wastes your time because it always gets to the point. A great website helps you to act. The following meet my criteria, especially for busy teachers:

[Learning Page](#)

Are you a teacher or parent of preschool, kindergarten, first or second grade students? Do you need worksheets, lesson plans or tips? Then this site is for you. (There are worksheets here that can be used for the older grades as well.) All of the lesson files and sheets are available as Adobe PDFs (Portable Document Format). All are downloadable and printable and free. This site adds new worksheets every week and is a great site for instant help.

[The Memory Project](#)

Here's a great place to come to interact and learn about the achievements of Canadians. These achievements are listed under three categories: Passages to Canada, Heroes and Heroism, and Peace and War. Each category offers reflections by Canadians. For teachers, there are very useful resources available for each category under the Teaching Tools link. Free resources are available for download in PDF format or by contacting the Dominion Institute via e-mail, phone or mail. Each category contains additional websites and is great ways to have the achievements of Canadians come alive in the classroom.

[Mission Nutrition](#)

Your mission is to teach positive self-esteem and body image, healthy eating, and physical activity to students in grades 6-8. If you are a teacher who accepts this mission and needs information to teach this subject, then head over to the Mission Nutrition site, a Canadian site that contains resources for the successful completion of your mission. The Mission Nutrition site has resources available for teachers, parents and students in both French and English. The teachers' section contains a teacher's guide for three curriculum-based units complete with learning outcomes, background information and easy-to-use lesson outlines, as well as resources and links for topics of Self-Esteem and Body Image Healthy Eating and Physical Activity. Each unit contains three lesson plans online for free download. Teachers will definitely want to check out the student area of the website for the Mission Nutrition student challenge. This is an interactive activity designed to teach positive self-esteem, healthy eating and physical activity by taking students through a day in the life of a character of their choice.

[Quia](#)

Create your own worldwide classroom using sophisticated yet easy-to-use technology. Use Quia's free tools to create your own Internet-based educational activities like online flashcards, quizzes, matching games, word search puzzles, hangman games, and TV-game-show-style trivia games. Best of all, these activities can all be customized with the teacher's own content. So far, teachers have created over 250,000 activities on Quia, in subjects ranging from English, Spanish, Science, and Math, to Economics, Medicine, and World History. The best activities are featured in the Quia Directory. It's easy to see why students love Quia--they are able to learn by playing educational games created just for them by their teachers. Quia also helps teachers teach better. Teachers can create their own class Web pages with messages to students and parents, links to favourite Web resources, and links to Quia activities that they have created. Teachers can also give quizzes online, and track and analyze student scores. Creating quizzes, games, and class web pages is free, only takes a few minutes, and there are plenty of instructions and samples to guide you along. This sure is different from making dittos on the ditto machine!

[Surfing The Net With Kids](#)

Barbara J. Feldman, the creator of Surfing The Net With Kids website has combined her skills and experience as a programmer, computer consultant, newsletter publisher, shareware author, mom and syndicated newspaper columnist to produce a first rate website for families and kids. Each week, Barbara writes site reviews for kids and families based on a theme. Website reviews are listed here under categories, available by keyword searches, and through popup menus. A free semi-weekly newsletter keeps readers in touch with the best online sites for families and teachers. This is a wonderful site for teachers and parents looking for carefully reviewed theme based and rated websites for their students and children.

[TeachersFirst](#)

TeachersFirst is a website designed to meet the needs of K-12 “teachers in the trenches.” It accomplishes this goal by focusing on practical resources that teachers need in the classroom. Each resource is selected and reviewed by one of TeachersFirst’s reviewers, all of whom have classroom teaching experience. These reviewed resources are then grouped by subject and grade level, so that teachers can find what they need quickly. This is a great place to find resources for new teachers. To keep up with the latest resources, click on Hot Topics (under Classroom Resources) and find current news or topical resources for the classroom or click on the Featured Sites section each week. If you prefer to have someone send you the latest information, subscribe to the TeachersFirst Updates e-mail monthly newsletter. If you’re looking for practical classroom information, you’ll find it here at the TeachersFirst website.

[Teaching is a Work of Heart](#)

Here’s a site with so many resources, that it should be bookmarked in a special place in your browser and viewed as many times as possible during the school year. With over 21 links to resources, tips and suggestions, this is one site where you want to pace yourself. The Back to School, Rubrics and Graphic Organizers Link and Classroom Management links merit a couple of hours to view the printable handouts and read all the tips and resources. There are also links to three Primary Teacher Time Savers CDs with each containing hundreds of printable files, and modifiable student activity sheets, student books, manipulatives, teacher forms/templates, classroom displays, and much more. Free samples are also included for downloads. Although Teaching is a Work of Heart emphasizes the primary grades, much of the information is useful to other grades as well. This is one site that will make your school year easier all year long.

[Teaching Ideas for Primary Teachers](#)

Here’s a site that is increasingly rare on the World Wide Web; a site that has been around since 1998 and managed by a full time teacher! Mark Warner is a primary teacher in Kent in the United Kingdom. Teaching Ideas for Primary Teachers is a site that he started while still in university to share his own teaching resources with others. And what a list of resources he has to share for teachers of primary age children ages 5 to 11! Ideas, activities and worksheets are organized to cover the entire UK national curriculum. Most of the resources are in html format, although some are in pdf format as well. The Time Fillers section is a great area to find ideas to fill in any free time during the class. Teachers are encouraged to contribute ideas, lesson plans, and any other information that would help fellow teachers. Primary and Junior teachers looking for a site that contains a lot of well written lesson plans, is easy to navigate and to use should make Teaching Ideas for Primary Teachers one of their first stops on the World Wide Web.

[Terri Husted's Homepage: A Homepage for New \(And Not So New\) Math Teachers](#)

Although this website bills itself as “A Homepage for New (And Not So New) Math Teachers,” it is much more than that. It’s also a homepage for new and not so new

teachers. Terri Husted presents her philosophy of teaching and teaching math based on over twenty years of experience. This philosophy is clearly stated on the opening page. It is well worth reading a number of times. Husted sums it all up in this final sentence “It is time in educational reform that we focus on the qualities of good teachers and not just good programs.” The link to Classroom Management is one I recommend for beginning teachers and teachers who want to review their class management from a different perspective. Husted offers six questions to ask yourself if you are having discipline problems in the classroom. Terri Husted's Homepage is for any teacher who wants to fine-tune their teaching especially in Math.

[Vocabulary University®](#)

Vocabulary University® is a unique website. Here’s a site which started a little more than five years ago, by the husband and wife team of Jan and Carey Cook, where all the content is created by them without any advertising and only one sponsor. Jan concentrates on the development of content and responds to all email inquiries and Carey designs the graphic puzzles and brainstorm searching for new ideas. It is a true labour of love and shows what a compassion for education can accomplish! The educational content featured on the site includes grade level interactive word puzzles that help expand one's vocabulary. Puzzles include Fill-in-the-Blanks, Definition Matching, Synonym & Antonym Encounter, Word Find, Crossword and a new feature, True or False. Teachers can also access lesson plan vocabulary exercises, vocabulary from upper elementary and high school recommended texts such as Animal Farm, Great Expectations, To Kill a Mocking Bird, word city root words which uses a graphical approach to learning vocabulary, an archive of past puzzles and more. This site is a great resource for teachers to build up student vocabulary.

[Well Known People Who Happen to be Canadian](#)

Well Known People Who Happen to be Canadian is a website created and maintained by John Terning, a theoretical particle physicist in the T8 group at Los Alamos National Laboratory, California U.S.A. who also happens to be a Canadian. Here’s a website that offers its information simply and succinctly in two columns under a Canadian flag in each of its categories. There are no annoying banner ads, no pop up ads, and no ads at all. This is one site that comes through with the facts, nothing but the facts about Canadians. Read about the many Canadian achievements in each of their respective categories. What impressed me the most about this site was learning about the numerous Canadian scientists who have received Nobel prizes in Physics, Chemistry, Medicine and Economics. If you still want more reasons to be impressed by the many achievements of Canadians, click on the link to More Canadian information. You’ll continue to be impressed by Canadians and their achievements.