

Where in the World?



by **Katharine Isbell**

Knock, knock, who's there?

Yukon

Yukon who?

Yukon never get bored of geography.

Annually, the media graphically report on North American students' shocking lack of geographical knowledge and skills. More often than not, these students, when compared with students from Europe, Asia and Africa, fare badly on standardized geography tests and many are not able to locate even the most basic geographical references such as state or provincial capitals. Fortunately for wired teachers, there are several excellent geography sites that help pique students' interest and motivate them to learn more about the world around them.

Students and teachers will never get tired of geography at the **Geoexplorer** site. This site is based in the United Kingdom and has several objectives. First and foremost, it aims "to promote the use of geography as a means of understanding the world around us." While North American instructors may not be familiar with the National Curriculum Geography at Key Stage 3 on which much of the information and resources is based, they will still find this an excellent site, especially for grades 7-9. Anything and everything, including bad geography jokes, can be found here. Neatly organized into five main sections — LinkBank, Resources, Quizzes, Revision and Virtual Geography — the site contains innumerable resources. Teachers can easily access outline maps of any location in the world, interactive geography puzzles and quizzes, and 360-degree photographs of places students might have only read about, just to mention a few. Those who register with the site will have access to even more resources. In

addition, every external site linked from this portal is a useful learning and teaching tool. One word of warning, however: teachers should be prepared to spend a few hours exploring the wealth of information available from this geography portal before presenting and using it in class.

The National Geographic Society has a companion website which is dedicated to educating and informing children about the world. The **National Geographic Kids** site is packed with fun, interactive learning activities and seems best suited for third to ninth graders. From its entry page, I found several pages that I liked. The first is the **GeoBee Challenge**, which gives students a chance to answer five geography questions that are changed daily. Students can also access past questions and find out more about the annual National Geographic Bee that National Geographic sponsors. On the day I went to the site, I found the following multiple-choice questions: "Which city has approximately the same longitude as Washington, D.C.?" Sao Paulo, a city with one of the world's fastest growing populations, is in which South American country?" "The Civil War battles of Shiloh, Fort Donelson, and Chattanooga were all fought in which Confederate State?" "The soil in tropical rain forests is generally not fertile because frequent rains wash nutrients down through the soil out of the reach of plant roots. What is the term for this process?" "In which southern state would you be most likely to hear zydeco, the accordion-based music of French-speaking Creoles?" Another page students might find practical is Homework Help on the Hotlinks page. Here approximately 50 previously published articles appealing to school-aged kids are organized into six broad categories for easy access. Since the

range of articles is not exhaustive, students might use this site to get ideas for reports or presentations. All of the articles are fact-filled and informative.

For geography issues with a more Canadian flavor, instructors can look at the site sponsored by the **Canadian Council for Geographic Education**, a joint initiative of The Royal Canadian Geographical Society and the National Geographic Society. Of special interest is the Teacher Resources page which has lesson plans, teaching ideas, a mapmaking program and links to sites with additional geography information. A few of the topics did not have complete lesson plans when I visited the site, so instructors may want to check back periodically for updates. Much of the material seems best suited to middle school students and above. Teachers of younger students may want to explore the **Canadian Geographic for Kids** site created by *Canadian Geographic* magazine.

Finally, for teachers who are focusing on the Lewis and Clark Expedition and its 200th anniversary, the **Lewis and Clark Across the Missouri** site by the University of Missouri-Columbia's Geographic Resources Center highlights digital mapping of the lands Lewis and Clark explored. Created by the faculty and students, the project shows over 27,000 square miles of Missouri and its namesake river. Using Flash technology, the bird's-eye view of the virtually rendered landscapes of the territory that the explorers traversed is especially compelling and demonstrates the incredible power of the Internet's multimedia capabilities.

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Sites for Young Explorers

Geoexplorer: <http://www.geoexplorer.co.uk/>

National Geographic Kids Site: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids/>

GeoBee: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/geobee/>

Canadian Council for Geographic Education: <http://www.ccege.org/>

Canadian Geographic for Kids: <http://www.cgkids.ca/Kids/>

Lewis and Clark Across the Missouri: <http://lewisclark.geog.missouri.edu>