

# Beyond the *World Book* Basics

By Cheryl LaGuardia

*World Book Online Reference Center* (WBORC) comes equipped with the following features: Atlas, Back in Time, Behind the Headlines, Dictionary, Enciclopedia Estudiantil Hallazgos (an intermediate Spanish-language encyclopedia), Encyclopedia Articles, Features of the Month, Magazine Articles, a Media Showcase, Pictures and Illustrations, Sounds, Special Reports, Student Resources, Subscriber News, Surf the Ages, Tables, Today in History, Videos and Animations, Web Sites, and What's New. WBORC actually consists of three modules: World Book Kids (based on *Student Discovery Encyclopedia*), Educator Tools (with ties to state curricular standards), and Research Libraries (focusing on accomplishments in eight branches of knowledge). The file contains over 26,000 articles (everything from the 22-volume print set, plus 8,000 more), over 12,000 illustrations and maps, 100-plus videos and animations, 10,000 sounds, and 60,000 cross-referenced links, including more than 7,000 prescreened web sites. Updated continuously, it is a heckuva resource.

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## How does it work?

It works in several ways, with many built-in options. You can change the display interface any time by clicking “Change Display” at screen right, toggling back and forth between the Standard Display (for more mature users) and the colorful, stylized Display for Younger Users (which is just plain fun).

In the Standard Display, you get a simple search box front and center, as well as tabs above it to take you to the Atlas, Dictionary, Encyclopedia, and Educator's Tools. At screen top are options for going into World Book Kids, the Spanish-Language Encyclopedia, or Research Libraries. Meanwhile, the main real estate is occupied by interesting boxes that draw you into the rest of the content.

## Can you and your patrons use it?

It's tough to imagine anyone over the age of two-and-a-half who couldn't use some part of this resource. Starting at the home page with a simple search for “holocaust,” I got 41 items, including an in-depth article describing the

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Holocaust, with links to articles “Before the Holocaust” and “After the Holocaust,” as well as to Encyclopedia Articles. Sidebars provided direct links to maps of Central Berlin, the location of Nazi concentration camps, and pictures (including the Yad Vashem memorial). The content is written in a broadly accessible style and is easy to find.

The file gets even more impressive in the Research Libraries module, which offers a host of primary sources, statistics, literature across the ages, science and math articles, and more. To give you an idea: the article on Antoine Lavoisier is over 3,200 words long and includes passages from several of his works. This is clearly so much more than a basic encyclopedia.

## How good is it?

My only quibble with WBORC is that it was a little difficult to return to the main screen from the Research Libraries; it would be nice if a clear link were added. But that doesn't detract from the overall excellence of this resource. It rates a resounding ten.

## What's the cost?

A subscription to WBORC includes World Book Kids as well as the Spanish-Language Encyclopedia for about \$700 per year. There is an additional fee for Research Libraries: \$100 for two modules of Research Libraries (most libraries do not subscribe to all).

## The bottom line.

While I remember the printed *World Book* of my childhood fondly, I regard WBORC with fervent awe. It is a masterwork that belongs in all libraries.

*This article appeared in the December issue of Library Journal. Cheryl LaGuardia is the Head of Instructional Services, Harvard College Library, and author of *Becoming a Library Teacher* (Neal-Schuman, 2000). Readers and producers can contact her at [claguard@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:claguard@fas.harvard.edu).*

*The results are in...*

## **World Book is the #1 Online Reference Site**

The 2006 edition of *The Complete K-12 Report*, a survey of tens of thousands of educators at all grade levels, ranked *World Book* as the number one online encyclopedia and reference site in schools.

*The World Book Online Reference Center* was the leader in 6 of the 10 categories surveyed, including:

- Most appropriate content
- Easiest to learn and use
- Fewest technical problems
- Best reference product to serve the research and reference needs of students
- Best Reputation for Serving the School Market
- Online encyclopedia schools are willing to pay for

When educators were asked which online encyclopedia they would purchase if they could have only one site to serve the research and reference needs of students, they ranked *World Book* as the number one choice.

*"...it is clear that World Book...can lay some claim to the title of 'favorite' or 'most popular' product in the school market..."*  
*"In terms of a profile of top competitors in the online niche, World Book is the favorite of librarians..."*

*The Complete K-12 Report: Market Facts & Segment Analysis, 2006*

### **Ranking of Online Encyclopedia Products on Ten Variables**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>World Book</b>	<b>Grolier</b>	<b>Britannica</b>	<b>Encarta</b>
Most appropriate content	1	2	4	3
Easiest to learn and use	1	2	4	3
Best publisher reputation	1	2	4	3
Choose only one encyclopedia	1	2	4	3
Fewest technical problems	1	2	4	3
School paid to subscribe	1	2	3	4
Frequency of use	2	1	3	4
Most precise searches	2	1	4	3
Student access	3	1	2	4
Most comprehensive content	3	2	1	4