Technology Connections. Digital Reading Tools

Article

When seeking great books for our diverse and global classrooms and libraries we can look to print and digital options. With our students from so many exciting and interesting locations, regions, and backgrounds it's great to have options for online reading content. Having digital, online, and mobile resources to support our students is incredibly important. In this month's column I focus on digital and online reading tools.

Epic!: https://www.getepic.com/

Epic! offers unlimited books for kids anytime, anywhere, and on any device. They describe themselves as a subscription-based eBook service for kids aged two to twelve, but I believe students even a little older could find this digital reading tool useful. Kids and parents can choose from more than 20,000 books, with content that is constantly increasing in size. They can read the books or watch videos online or offline on any platform, device, or type of technology.

There is a wide selection by well-known authors and from major publishers, including National Geographic and HarperCollins, and the collection includes over 500 Spanish/English bilingual books. Books can be searched by subject, genre, and age, and some are audio or read-to-me versions. With Epic! students can clock their reading stats, time spent reading, earn badges, and much more. There is a community portion of Epic! where kids can share opinions on books,

ICDL: http://en.childrenslibrary.org/

International Children's Digital Library (ICDL) was originally a research project funded primarily by the National Science Foundation, the Institute for Museum and Library Services, and Microsoft Research. Their goal was to create a digital library of children's books from all over the world. The ICDL collection had two intended audiences. The first is children aged three to thirteen, as well as librarians, teachers, parents, and anyone else who works with children in and around this age group. The second audience is international scholars and researchers in the area of children's literature. The ICDL collection has over 4,600 digital books in approximately 60 languages.

All books and materials within ICDL are offered in their entirety and in the original languages in which they were published. Most of the collection contains contemporary materials that are in copyright. The remainder of the collection consists of historical materials within the public domain. Other important literature and award-winning books are added to the collection as they become available.

The International Children's Digital Library has been in existence since 2002. This was a very early winner for the AASL Best Websites for Teaching and Learning. If you are not familiar with the website or app, take a look. The material is exceptional and the fact that so many books in a multitude of languages are freely available is well worth knowing about. Having books in Spanish is reasonably commonplace but having a book in Farsi is not. ICDL has books for children in many languages and increases any school or classroom library by 4,600 books. ICDL is well worth investigating.

Booktrack Classroom: https://www.booktrackclassroom.com

This last recommendation is a little bit different. Booktrack Classroom is a resource that offers students, teachers, and librarians a couple of opportunities. First, Booktrack Classroom provides free books to read with a soundtrack. The soundtrack is not just music, but also sounds that go along with what students are reading in order to connect with comprehension and understanding. Students can put on headphones and read the text while listening to the audio and accompanying sounds playing in the background. Second, students can write and publish their own works and add their own soundtracks to them. Language doesn't matter, there are so many options available for students. This is a great online resource for reading as well as writing.

With such diversity in our classrooms, libraries, and schools, having a list of useful online resources in reading is always helpful. It is also important to have options when it comes to student reading and engagement. Hopefully these are some options that will be useful to your students, peer educators, as well as you.

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