

Discovering hidden gems: Cultural figures support new British Library Learning website

"How tremendously exciting that there is something to explore here. It's a resource with no limits. You make of it what you can. You are the adventurer. You are the traveller. It is surely one of the wonders of the world that you can have such easy, pain-free access to this stuff. What a treat. I hope everybody at every school everywhere in Britain can be guided to this astounding adventure." Griff Rhys Jones

The new website launched today by the British Library's education department at <http://www.bl.uk/learning> provides a diverse mixture of texts, some literary classics, others more ephemeral and everyday. Readers can examine a Quarto of a Shakespeare play, a Caxton printing of *The Canterbury Tales*, an illuminated manuscript or a recipe for a plague cure. These resources enhance school lessons, each section providing background information, suggestions for classroom activities and high quality images for printouts or for use on whiteboards. Students, teachers and lifelong learners all over the world can now browse through a rich array of texts and images, from ancient Iranian myths and Renaissance anatomy diagrams to Russian Constructivist book covers and World War II maps.

Commenting on the new website, David Lammy, Minister for Culture, said, "The British Library's new Learning website encourages young people to research and be inspired by the diversity of ideas and cultures that have shaped, and continue to shape, our world. Through its schools programmes at St Pancras in London and its activities online, the British Library plays an important role in helping young people participate in our cultural heritage. I am pleased that that site continues to open up the Library's collections to a wider and younger audience."

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools, Andrew Adonis said, "I'm delighted to see that the British Library offers exciting activities and resources for learners of all ages and for teachers. I hope the Learning website will inspire young people to read more widely and help them to develop their research skills. It will help to enrich the 14 - 19 curriculum in key subject areas and strengthen the connection between schools and colleges and the British Library. Such connections are important in supporting excellence and innovation in education."

"The British Library is an astounding repository of the world's knowledge and ideas - some commonplace, some earth shattering. Our aim with this website was to create an online space where new audiences can

explore and be inspired by these ideas. Whether you are a student working on a history project, a teacher looking for lesson ideas or an adult learner interested in literary manuscripts, we hope the website

will delight and intrigue," said Roger Walshe, Head of Learning at the British Library.

The British Library invited a variety of personalities and celebrities with interests in areas such as literature, education and culture to review the website and describe their experience. The site is divided into six themed sections, making navigation easy:

1. Language and literature: Trace the history of the English language, turn the pages of the original Alice in Wonderland manuscript, or explore the written word in a vast range of both classic and everyday texts.

"This is the web at its most enlightening. There can rarely have been a more potent invitation to acquire a greater understanding and appreciation of our culture. At our finger tips we can now tap into new knowledge, presented to us in a way so enticing that we simply want more. The British Library has flung open its doors in a quite marvellous way to all and sundry. As one of the sundry, I say 'Bravo! Bravo!' Michael Morpurgo

"The British Library's collection of cookery books is a real treasure trove. Not only is it a food lover's delight, it offers a wealth of information about society, language, and fashion from medieval times until the present day. Opening up this collection to a wider audience via the new Learning website is a really excellent idea," Nigella Lawson

2. History and Citizenship: Explore 100 years of newspaper front pages, examine medieval manuscripts, or listen to the moving stories of Jewish Holocaust survivors.

"It's always fascinating to unearth the kind of everyday, forgotten texts that are so much a part of our cultural history - the recipes, logbooks, letters, posters and the like. I'm delighted that the British Library's new Learning website gives text-archeologists around the world access to so much fantastically interesting material," Tony Robinson

3. Art and Images: Look at beautiful and bizarre images whilst tracing the history of maps, the history of typography and the cultural history of the body.

"In years past I would rush out to the National Gallery whenever I ran out of ideas and needed inspiration, now I can just click on to the British Library Learning website, wake my brain up, and avoid the rain. I never cease to be amazed at how much more there is to learn. ...and the website won't let me forget. It's beautifully and simply laid out...luring me into areas of knowledge in which I had no previous interest. You don't have to be young to be stimulated by the goodies

available on the website," Terry Gilliam

4. Culture and Knowledge: Read about ancient Middle Eastern myths, or investigate the more mysterious concepts of truth, lies and the way things are classified in two wonderful animations.

"This is fantastic news for students and their teachers, as well as for all researchers and the intellectually curious. We'll all be using it. It's the proper democratising of the British Library - up till now, I've felt, a rather formidable and not easily accessible resource," Victoria Glendinning.

5. Creative Research: Glimpse the musings of the British Library's artists in residence, and find out about the Learning department's approach to creative research.

"The British Library's Learning Website is a wonderfully rich and wide-ranging resource, and will have an especial value for teachers and students. It's clearly designed, easy to navigate, contains an extraordinary wealth of information - and provides ready access to many of the Library's treasures. For all these reasons, users will find it equally valuable as a source and a stimulation," Andrew Motion, Poet Laureate

6. Teachers' Area: Find out about our workshops programme, and book a visit to the library.

"Over time digitization of old texts will unchain the British Library's treasures making them available to a wider, even infinite web audience. All this takes more canny mediation and design than easy talk about putting all the world's texts online. The British Library Learning site shows in a magnificent way how users can explore the richness of language over time without getting lost and confused by infoglut. With its coherently grouped texts interleaved with activities and commentaries, students of all ages are free to follow new lines of enquiry based on primary sources not available to them before. The rest of the world can go on a time travel journey of serendipitous pleasure seeing for themselves texts usually known only by second hand references," Tim Shortis, Language Consultant and Chief Examiner, AQA B English Language A' Level

For more information and to visit the Learning website, please go to:
<http://www.bl.uk/learning/>

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For further information or to obtain a selection of images, please contact Anne Marie Todaro at the British Library Press Office: 020 7412 7112 or annemarie.todaro@bl.uk <mailto:Victoria.Main@bl.uk>

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The British Library is the national Library of the United Kingdom. It provides world class information services to the academic, business, research and scientific communities and offers unparalleled access to the world's largest and most comprehensive research collection. Further information is available on the Library's website at www.bl.uk
<http://www.bl.uk/>

British Library Learning

The British Library Learning programme aims to support formal and informal learning in the UK and make physical and virtual access to the British Library exciting and inspiring for students, educators and lifelong learners. A wide range of activities and resources are available for learners of all ages including free workshops, projects and online resources. The programme helps build skills in research, critical thinking and source-based learning and supports the 14-19 curriculum in key subject areas.

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