

Using e-literature and online literary resources in the primary and secondary school. Part 1



Professor Len Unsworth,
Professor in
English and
Literacies

Education, School of Education, and Director, Centre for Research in English and Multiliteracies Education (CREME), University of New England, discusses relationships among literature for children and adolescents in books, on the Internet and on CD-ROMs. This article explores both familiar and new forms of literary narratives, and acknowledges electronic gamenarratives.

Students engage with new and traditional forms of narratives

Many primary and secondary school students are already engaged, outside of their experiences at school, with new and traditional forms of literary narratives in both digital and traditional formats. Many years ago, Margaret Mackey (1994) advised us that

...to talk about children's literature, in the normal restricted sense of

children's novels, poems and picture-books, is to ignore the multi-media expertise of our children.

At that time, Mackey pointed out that:

- children come to school already used to making cross media comparisons and judgments
- story worlds of the books children and young people experience are extended and enhanced by various forms of digital multimedia
- some types of digital narratives frequently have companion publications in book form.

The sustained enthusiasm of many young people in the 21st century for literary narratives is increasingly articulated with the integral role of digital technology in their lives. This can be clearly seen in the case of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books and the plethora of *Harry Potter* websites, many of which are developed and managed by juvenile webmasters. Such websites demonstrate both profound and playful engagement with the book-based narratives through online chat rooms, reviews and commentaries, as well as avid exploration of new forms of related game narratives, and the generation of fan fiction and image-focused creations elaborating interpretations of the story worlds.

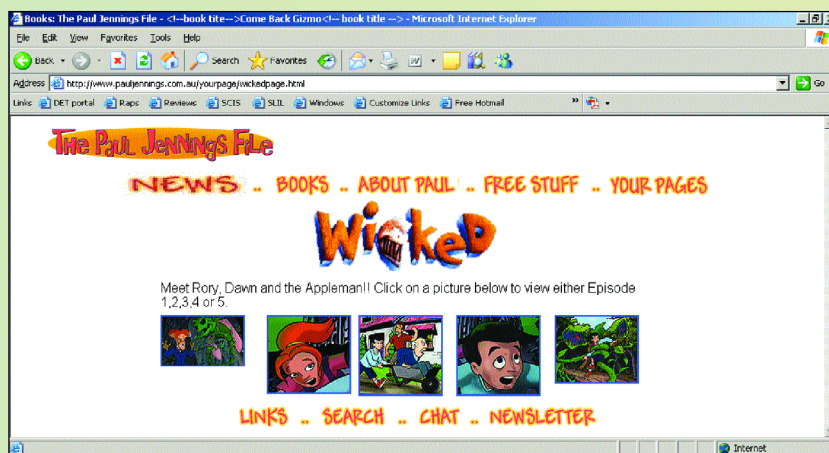
The literacies entailed are multiple, involving not only the comprehension and composition of images and text, separately and in combination, and in

paper as well as digital media, but also navigation through cyberspace to locate relevant sites, manipulation of electronic textual material, and evaluation of information, reflected in what children choose to engage with and what they choose to contribute online. Of course, the confluence of children's enthusiasm for fictional narrative and the possibilities afforded by computer-based multimedia are not confined to the *Harry Potter* phenomenon.

The online extension of young readers' involvement with a host of contemporary authors, such as Paul Jennings and Isobelle Carmody, as well as with classic stories such as *The little prince* (de Saint-Exupery, 2000a) is abundantly evidenced on the Internet, as is the opportunity for creating online narratives and experiencing new forms of e-literature, including game-narratives both online and on CD-ROM (Unsworth, 2006; Unsworth, Thomas, Simpson & Asha, 2005).

ICTs impacting literacy narrative

Children's literature has the capacity to bridge the inter-generational digital divide in the English classroom. However, in the pressurised practical world of managing classrooms, many teachers are looking for some frameworks that offer a starting point for thinking about how the impact of ICTs on literary narrative can be taken account of in planning learning



Your pages: *Wicked* <<http://www.pauljennings.com.au/yourpage/wickedpage.html>>

experiences. This article briefly addresses some aspects of that impact, and introduces three frameworks that may assist teachers in considering how to manage effective classroom programs using digital resources for developing literary understanding and literacy learning. The first is a framework for describing the articulation of book and computer-based literary narratives. The second is a framework for classifying the range of online resources for developing students' understanding about different dimensions of literary experience. The third framework outlines practical approaches to managing units of work in whole class programs using digital resources for enhancing literary understanding.

Books and computer-based literary narratives

Here we are concerned with three main categories of relationships among literary materials on the web, on CD-ROMs and in books.

Electronically augmented literary texts

The first refers to electronically augmented literary texts. This category is concerned with literature that has been published in book format only, but the books are augmented with online resources that enhance and extend the storyworld of the book. Sometimes it involves information about the genesis of the story, further details of artefacts

or additional information about characters. Sometimes it involves presentation of selections from the story in print or aurally when the author, or someone else, reads a sample chapter or segment, to entice the potential reader to invest in the whole story.

Electronically re-contextualised literary text

The second category of relationship among literary texts and digital media is the electronically re-contextualised literary text. In this category, literature that has been published in book form is re-published online or as a CD-ROM. The online re-publication takes a variety of forms. Many works that are now in the public domain because copyright laws no longer apply have been transcribed or scanned and located in online digital libraries.

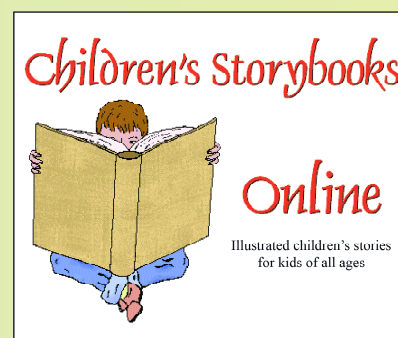
The most widely known of these is the *Gutenberg Project* <<http://gutenberg.net/>>, but there are many others such as the *International Children's Digital Library* <<http://www.icdlbooks.org>>. The scanned books contain the original images, but since copyright is not an issue, some other sites provide the texts of these stories with new images interpolated. These online versions of published books can be accessed free of charge. The second type of online version of published books is usually contemporary stories, provided by publishers, and downloaded at a cost. It is also possible, at a modest cost, to

download audiofiles for many current titles, including classics like Oscar Wilde's *The selfish giant* (Wilde & Gallagher, 1995).

Some books are published as audio only compact disks (CDs), such as Stephen Fry's reading of the *Harry Potter* books, published by BBC Audio Books. But most CD-ROM versions of literary texts include images and written text, which vary to a greater or lesser extent from those in the book versions. In some cases the images are static, simply transposed from page to screen. This is the case with *The paper bag princess* (Munsch, 1994) for example. In other cases, the original images from the book appear as animations on the CD-ROM, as in *The Polar Express* (Van Allsburg, 1997). In this CD-ROM, the animations activate automatically, but in others, like *The little prince* (de Saint-Exupery, 2000b), the animations are controlled by the mouse clicks of the viewer. In some cases, novels for mature readers, such as Steinbeck's novel *Of mice and men*, have been re-presented as CD-ROM versions including images throughout (SteinbeckSeries, 1996).

Digitally originated literary texts

The third category relating literary narratives to digital format is the digitally originated literary text.

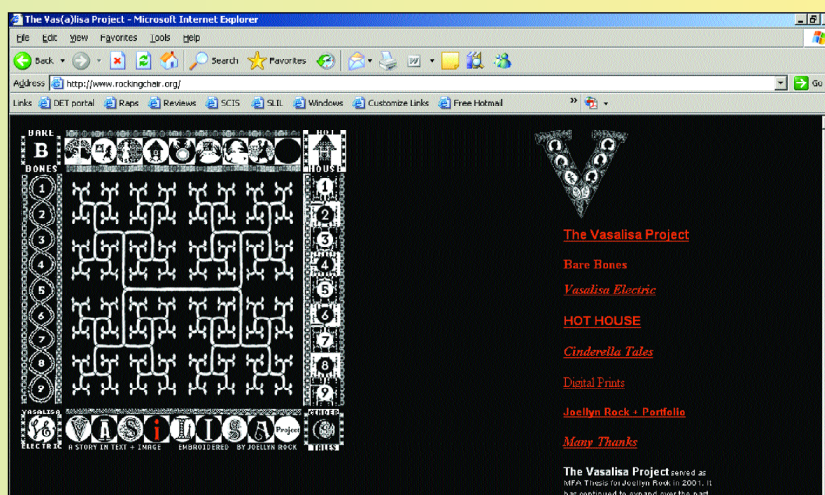


Children's storybooks online at <<http://www.magickeys.com/books/>>

These are stories that have been published in digital format only. Relatively few such stories appear on CD-ROM. Some notable examples are

Lulu's *enchanted book* (Victor-Pujebet, n.d.) and *Payuta and the ice god* (Ubisoft, n.d.). The great variety of literary narratives for children and adolescents published on the Internet can be categorised as follows:

- **e-stories for early readers** – these texts utilise audio combined with hyperlinks to support young children in learning to decode print. They do this by providing models of oral reading of stories and the pronunciation of individual words. Examples of such stories are included on sites such as *Children's storybooks online* <<http://www.magickeys.com/books/>> and *Tumblebook library* <http://www.tumblebooks.com/library/asp/home_tumblebooks.asp>.
- **linear e-narratives** – these are essentially the same kinds of story presentations which are found in books, frequently illustrated, but presented on a computer screen. For examples, such as *Wollstencroft the bear*, see *Children's storybooks online*.
- **e-narratives and interactive story contexts** – the presentation of these stories is very similar to that of linear e-narratives, however the story context is often elaborated by access to separate information about characters, story setting in the form of maps, and links to information and/or other stories. In some examples it is possible to access this kind of contextual information while reading the story. Examples of such stories are *Banph* (Left Handed Creations, 1994–2004) and *The relic triangle* (Matus, 2002).
- **hypertext narratives** – although frequently making use of a range of different types of hyperlinks, these stories are distinguished by their focus on text, to the almost entire exclusion of images. There appear to be very few such hypertext narratives specifically for children and early adolescents. While not designated for a teenage

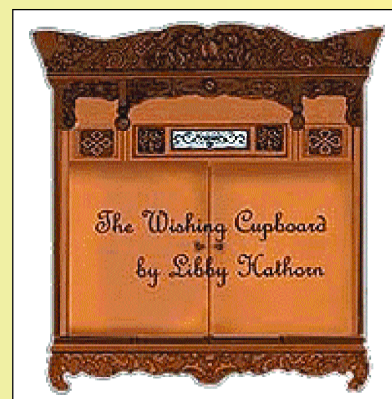


The Vasalisa project <<http://www.rockingchair.org/>>

- audience, stories on some sites such as *Word circuits* <<http://wordcircuits.com/gallery/>> are suitable for this age group.
- **hypermedia narratives** – these stories use a range of hyperlinks involving text and images, often in combination. The relationship between linear and hypermedia models of narrative is what Joellyn Rock addresses in *The Vasalisa project* <<http://www.rockingchair.org/>>. At the centre of the project is the story *Bare bones*, which is a new version of the Russian fairytale, *Vasalisa and the Baba Yaga*. By reshaping the original story's text, imagery and format, Rock indicates that she is attempting to build a bridge for the fairytale audience between traditional media and new media. A very different kind of e-narrative on *Eastgate* <<http://www.eastgate.com/LastingImage/Welcome.html>> is *Lasting image* (Guyer & Joyce, 2000), which is set in Japan in the time just following World War II. In this story, the interactivity is primarily achieved through a range of different kinds of hyperlinks.

To this list must be added some types of video games, defined as electronic game narratives, and discussed in detail in Unsworth (2006). Examples of such games include *Snow White and the seven Hansels* (Tivola, 2001), *Alice's*

adventures in Wonderland (Carroll, 2000) and Libby Hathorn's online game-narrative *The wishing cupboard* (Hathorn, 1999).



The wishing cupboard by Libby Hathorn <<http://www.libbyhathorn.com/lh/Wishing/Default.htm>>

These three categories relate literature to the resources of the Internet and CD-ROM technology. They vary from monomodal (print only) to multimodal presentation, involving print, images and sound. The digitally re-contextualised and digitally originated e-fiction also vary from linear to hyperlinked and from conventional story structure to innovative game narratives.

Online resources for developing students' literary understanding

Currently, most online learning activities and teaching plans do not adequately address significant aspects of the narrative art of

children's literature. For example, a number of scholars have drawn attention to the importance of the integrative nature of image/text relations, especially in a digital multimedia world:

...many contemporary texts make use of image and of writing at the same time, using both to carry meaning in specific ways. In that context, a theory of reading which relates to the graphic material of 'letters' alone is no longer able to explain how we derive meaning from texts.

(Kress, 2003)

Serial cognitive processing of linear print text no longer adequately characterises contemporary reading and writing, which now involve parallel processing of multimodal text-image information sources.

(Luke, 2003)

Writing about books in a digital age, Dresang noted that '...in the graphically oriented, digital, multimedia world, the distinction between pictures and words has become less and less certain [and that] in order to understand the role of print in the digital age, it is essential to have a solid grasp of the growing integrative relationship of print and graphics' (1999).

Recently, Richard Andrews has noted the importance of the visual/verbal interface in both computer and hard copy texts:

... it is the visual/verbal interface that is at the heart of literacy learning and development for both computer-users and those without access to computers.

(Andrews, 2004)

Elsewhere (Unsworth, 2001, 2003, 2006; Unsworth et al, 2005; Unsworth & Wheeler, 2002), I have shown how the interpretive tools provided by functional descriptions of verbal and visual grammar enable teachers and students to read literary texts grammatically, so that they are able to read the constructedness of the texts, simultane-

ously focusing on the 'what' of the story and the 'how' of its verbal and visual construction. This perspective on developing children's literary understanding and concomitant literacy development does not currently find explicit expression in the online resources for using e-literature in the English curriculum. Nevertheless, there are richly inspiring online resources for extending children's literary experience. A useful approach is to co-opt such resources for infusion with the above perspective, forming a basis for enhancing children's experience of e-literature in school contexts. Briefly, the range of such online contexts for developing understanding about different dimensions of literary experience includes:

- **Composition/story genesis** – this includes information about actual events, places, artefacts, etcetera, that the author drew on in composing the story. It could also include manuscript data about earlier drafts and episodes/events/characters that were excluded or changed, as well as additional information provided by the author to elaborate aspects of the story world constructed in the narrative. Examples include the *J.K. Rowling official website* <<http://www.jkrowling.com/>> which contains a great deal of information about early drafts of the *Harry Potter* novels, and the Philip Pullman site <<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/pullman/index.html>>, which includes additional information about aspects of the books in *His dark materials* trilogy that extend beyond what is provided in the novels.
- **Invitation/enticement to read** – the Internet provides teaser sample chapters/segments of stories, often available with audio and sometimes with the author as reader, as well as online reviews and reactions from readers, and story-derived games designed to arouse reader interest in the

narrative. Paul Jennings and Morris Gleitzman now promote their *Wicked* stories (Jennings & Gleitzman, 1998), through animations preceded by online games <<http://www.pauljennings.com.au/>>, and Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith promote their book, *Henry P. Baloney* (Scieszka & Smith, 2001) with a related online game <<http://www.baloneyhenryp.com/>>.

- **Appreciation/celebration** – there are many examples of fan sites on the Internet where individuals or groups of readers manage a site that celebrates an author and his/her work. These often contain biographical information, testimonials to the impact of books, favourite quotations, images of covers of different editions and a range of other features, which are listed below in other dimensions of literary engagement. One such fan site for the *Harry Potter* books is *Mugglenet* <<http://www.mugglenet.com/>> managed by 17 year old webmaster, Emerson. Further examples include <<http://www.obernewtyn.net/>> for author Isobelle Carmody, and tribute pages to William Golding <<http://www.greenser.com/lotf>>, Gillian Rubinstein <<http://www.carnelianvalley.com/hearn/>> and Patricia Wrightson <http://www.bowjamesbow.ca/2004/01/12/were_back.shtml>.
- **Interpretation/response** – two main types of online resources offer opportunities for interpretive responses to the narrative. One type is the fairly traditional lesson plans and learning tasks for teachers to download. Some of these include online learning experiences that make better use of the online digital environment. The second type is the opportunity for readers to participate in online discussions about the books they have been reading via chat rooms and forums. For detailed accounts

of work by children on various discussion forums see Unsworth, Thomas, Simpson and Asha, (2005). An impressive school site showcases the work of teacher Monica Edinger at Dalton Elementary School in New York <<http://intranet.dalton.org/ms/alice/alice.html>>. This site shows fourth grade children's work creating videos of toy theatre dramatisations of segments of *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll & Browne, 1988).

- **Adjunct composition/creation** – this kind of engagement is frequently evidenced on fan sites, such as those for Isobelle Carmody noted above, where contributors write stories in the style of particular narratives, sometimes additional episodes, sometimes parallel or related stories, often involving the same characters as the original. Some fan sites conduct competitions involving this kind of writing, with strict rules relating the new fiction to parameters of the source story. Other contributions include the creation of images, games and puzzles based on the stories. Another kind of creative composition activity adjunct to the source story is the co-creation of multi-modal story episodes in virtual worlds known as palaces. Story palaces involve participants adopting character roles and representing these characters visually on screen using avatars as well as verbally by the input of dialogue, so that they act out stories in this multimodal virtual world. Of particular interest is the *Middle Earth palace* <<http://www.middleearthpalace.com>>, celebrating Tolkien's world and *Harry Potter* palaces. For further information on story palaces see Thomas (2000; 2001) and Unsworth, Thomas, Simpson and Asha (2005). ■

[Editor's note: Part 2 of this article, with a focus on using e-literature for innovative learning experiences for students, will be published in the next issue of *Scan*.]

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