

Digital Resources

By Jennifer Prince

FREEDOM TO LEARN

Social Studies Assistance for Students and Teachers

Since the 1960s, Scholastic's "The Cornerstones of Freedom" series has been a mainstay when it comes to reliable history books for fourth- to sixth-grade students. In this online incarnation, the series continues to prove its adaptivity and its relevancy in a radically different learning environment, transforming content from the print books into enhanced ebooks. Each title is supported by an eclectic treasury of related materials that make full use of the online arena, and is backed up by a suite of resources targeting teachers and librarians, making it an ideal complement to social studies programs.

FREEDOM FLIX

www.freedomflix.scholastic.com

Grade Level Grades 3-5

Cost The cost of Freedom Flix varies depending on the type of institution, with an annual subscription for a single school building costing \$895, for example. The print books are sold separately. Freedomflix meets several grant requirements including qualifying for LSTA federal funding. The service works on all tablets and mobile devices.

Overview Each of the 30 ebook titles included in this database follows the same template to allow for easy movement around the collection. Once a title is selected, the image of the print book appears, as does a menu for some of the enhanced content. The enhanced content menu for each book has sections titled, "Watch It," "Read It," "Explore More," "Related Websites," "Project Idea," "What Do You Think?" and "Show What You Know."

Content and Usability Each whiteboard compatible "Watch It" section consists of a one- to two-minute video that begins with a Google-maps-based TruEarth image. Once the camera zooms in on the relevant locale, a montage of period paintings, drawings, photographs, and modern-day reenactment footage transitions smoothly as an easy-to-understand, natural-voiced reader narrates.

"Read It," also whiteboard compatible, features the full content of the print book with polished digital features that allow readers to tailor their learning experience to their needs. A menu runs along the top of the

screen, allowing readers to access the book's table of contents and glossary with one click. Users can also choose the audio feature in which a narrator reads (in one of two speeds) the content of the ebook, including captions. A zoom in and out feature allows readers to increase or decrease the font size. Other features include a digital highlighter, notepad, and bookmark. Changes created using these tools are stored automatically in the digital locker for easy future access.

In addition to the wealth of primary sources found under "Explore More" are links to articles from Grolier and other sources that pertain to relevant people, places, and events. Some of the entries, called "Challenge Readings," offer advanced students opportunities to explore the topic in greater depth. For instance, the "Challenge Readings" that accompany *The Bill of Rights* include detailed articles on the Federalist Papers and the Magna Carta.

Links to complementary plays, poems, songs, and book abstracts round out the section. For example, in *The Louisiana Purchase*, period additions include the John Greenleaf Whittier poem "Toussaint L'Ouverture," and a short play called *Lewis and Clark and the Bird Girl*.

"Related Websites" offers a well-curated, annotated collection of primarily .edu, .gov, and .org sites. While some, such as www.libertyskids.com, listed as a supplement to *The Revolutionary War*, are designed for kids, others, such as the website for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (a link in *Homeland Security*), are for an older audience. Links to websites with primary sources are marked with a "Living History" icon. Primary sources include an 1884 letter from a British traveler who wrote about her displeasure with the

American government's new legislation designed to cut down on Chinese immigration (in *Immigration*).

The "Project Idea" sections list activities such as making a scrapbook reflecting the plight of children during the Industrial Revolution, in the book of that title, and designing an exhibit featuring a world monument (*The Statue of Liberty*). Students are also provided with tips for project success.

"What Do You Think?" prompts critical thinking by posing questions that require varying degrees of content analysis: "Why did the Continental Congress issue the Declaration of Independence?" (*The Declaration of Independence*) and "What is the connection between immigration and discrimination? Do you think it is possible to have one without the other?" (*Immigration*).

"Show What You Know" quizzes readers with several multiple-choice questions. Scores are recorded and stored in the digital locker along with items that have been bookmarked and highlighted.

Educators have access to a "Resources and Tools" area in addition to the regular content, where lesson plans, quizzes, and writing prompts are stored. Whiteboard activities create dynamic opportunities to reinforce unit content using interactive time lines, maps, and people-identification activities. Four writing prompts included with each unit encourage imaginative thinking as well as require solid comprehension of content. For example, in *Abraham Lincoln*, one question posed is: "If you could interview Abraham Lincoln, what questions would you ask him? Write a question-and-answer column that includes four questions and four possible responses from Lincoln based on your reading." Guidelines for grading follow the prompts.

Verdict A streamlined, intuitive design and smart, interactive features make Freedomflix ideal for enhancing 21st century-literacy and technology skills. Opportunities for users to tailor their Freedomflix experience make the resource useful when meeting a variety of learning speeds and styles. Content is solid, engaging, and age-appropriate. Freedomflix is a gold medal winner.

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