

Library of Congress

Introduction

The Library of Congress (Library) was established by an act of Congress on April 24, 1800. It was initially created to meet the research needs of Congress and was housed in the U.S. Capitol. During the War of 1812, the British used the books in the Library as kindling when they burned the Capitol. To replace the collection, Thomas Jefferson sold his private collection to Congress. Jefferson's collection contained nearly 6,500 volumes on a variety of subjects.

From Jefferson's collection, which formed the heart of the Library, the holdings grew rapidly. Today, the Library of Congress is the world's largest library, with approximately 130 million items. The collection includes more than 29 million books and other printed materials, 2.7 million recordings, 12 million photographs, 4.8 million maps, and 5.8 million manuscripts. These collections are housed in the Thomas Jefferson Building (opened 1897), the John Adams Building (opened 1939), and the James Madison Memorial Building (opened 1980).

Materials are still being added to the Library collections. The Library receives items through an exchange program with other libraries and government agencies, from copyright deposits, and through gifts and purchases.

In the two centuries since its founding, the Library has taken on the mission of making its resources available and useful not only to Congress but also to the American people. Since the 1990s, the Library has been digitizing collection items and providing free online access to them. The Library currently has more than 12 million items available online. This guide gives a brief description of the resources available on the Library of Congress Web site and explains how to find resources appropriate for classroom use.

General Overview

The Library of Congress Web site provides access to five main sections: **Library Catalogs**, **American Memory**, **Exhibitions**, **Global Gateway**, and **THOMAS**.

Library Catalogs

The Library online catalog contains approximately 12 million records representing books, manuscripts, single computer files, manuscripts, cartographic materials, music, sound recordings, and visual materials. The online catalog is useful for finding materials that can only be accessed on site at the Library or through an interlibrary loan. For more information about interlibrary loans, see <http://www.loc.gov/rr/loan/>.

The Prints and Photographs Division of the Library also has an online catalog. This catalog provides access to more than half of the Prints and Photographs Division holdings. About 90 percent of the records are accompanied by one or more digital images. In some collections, only thumbnail images display to those searching outside the Library of Congress because of copyright considerations.

American Memory

American Memory is an online archive of more than 9 million digitized resources that document U.S. history and culture. American Memory is organized into more than 100 thematic collections based on their original format, their subject matter, or who first created, assembled, or donated them to the library. The collections contain photographs, prints, posters, maps, sound recordings, motion pictures, books, pamphlets, and sheet music. The Learning Page is a companion to the American Memory collections. The Learning Page includes ideas and instructions for classroom use of specific collections in American Memory.

Exhibitions

The Exhibitions page offers a wide range of online exhibitions featuring treasures from the Library collections as well as collections of other national libraries worldwide. Most exhibitions put on display at the Library in Washington, D.C., eventually end up online.

Global Gateway

Global Gateway provides access to resources about world cultures. In this section of the Web site, you will find links to country studies and special presentations about world cultures.

THOMAS

THOMAS contains U.S. Legislative information. From THOMAS you can search information for bills and resolutions (1973–present), public laws (1973–present), the Congressional Record (1989–present), roll call votes (1990–present), committee reports (1995–present), presidential nominations (1987–present), and treaties (1975–present). For more information about THOMAS, see [How to Search THOMAS](#).

America's Library and The Wise Guide

In addition to the five main areas, the Library Web site has two other sections that provide useful classroom resources.

America's Library

America's Library was created especially for students of elementary school age. It incorporates some of the Library's American historical resources into games and stories about our nation's past.

- **Meet Amazing Americans** introduces students to inventors, politicians, performers, activists, and other people who helped shape our country.
- **Jump Back in Time** allows students to take a virtual trip back in American history.
- **Explore the States** provides basic information about each state, including state capitals, birds, trees, and nicknames.
- **Join America at Play** allows students to explore facts about Americans' favorite pastimes, sports, and hobbies.
- **See, Hear, and Sing** provides access to many of the Library's multimedia collections of video and audio.

The Wise Guide

The Wise Guide is a Web magazine that introduces visitors to the many educational resources on the Library Web site. Each monthly magazine features articles linked to Web pages containing materials from throughout the Library.

Research Centers

The Library Web site has more than 20 Research Centers available online. These centers provide resources for people conducting research on a specific topic. Although these centers are not specifically geared for teachers, many provide resources that are useful in the classroom.

Conducting a Search: How to Search the Library of Congress Web Site

The Library of Congress (Library) Web site has millions of digitized resources, so finding exactly what you need can be both daunting and time consuming. Familiarizing yourself with the Library's online collections will make the search process easier.

Searching the Entire Library of Congress Web Site

The home page of the Library has a search box in the top right corner. This search engine will look for your query in html pages. It does not search for individual items such as books, photographs, or manuscripts. When you conduct a search on the Library home page, you may get thousands of results, so it is better to search specific sections of the Web site first.

Searching for Resources in American Memory

If you are looking for materials to use in your classroom, American Memory is a good place to start. Most of the digitized materials on the Library Web site are located in an American Memory collection.

From the American Memory home page, you can search across all collections, browse and search individual collections, or view subsections.

Searching Across All Collections

To search across all collections, type one or more keywords into the box located at the top of any American Memory page. Cross-collection searches look for your query in the bibliographic or descriptive records of items within collections and in some, but not all, full-text items within the collections. Cross-collection searches do not include the text of collection home pages, background text, illustrations, or special presentations.

The search engine will only return items that contain *all* of the words in your query in either the bibliographic record or full text of the item. That means if you type "thomas jefferson secretary state" into the search box, you will only see results that include each of those four terms.

By default, results are displayed in list view. Switch to gallery view to view thumbnail images/graphics of items.

Results listed first are most likely to be relevant to your search. Items will appear higher in the list when they contain more of your search terms, repeated search terms, or search terms that occur near each other.

Browsing Collections

From the American Memory home page, you can browse collections by broad topics. Simply click the topic of interest to you. You will then see a list of collections related to that topic. Use the checkboxes on this page to search more than one collection or click a collection title to go directly to that collection's home page.

To browse collections by more specific categories, you will need to go to the Browse Collections page. Click More Browse Options at the bottom of the table on the American Memory home page.

Collections are grouped into categories on the Browse Collections page. You can browse collections by topic, time period, format, and place. Choose a category to see a list of collections in that category. Then

use the checkboxes on the page to search more than one collection or click a collection title to go directly to that collection.

Searching Individual Collections

The best way to search American Memory is to limit your search to individual collections. This will make your search results list smaller and more specific, and your response time will be faster. Visit http://memory.loc.gov/learn/educators/handouts/amcollections_feb06.pdf to see an alphabetical title and description list of American Memory collections.

You can access most collections from the Browse Collections page. However, if you want to see a complete list of collections, you need to click on List All Collections at the bottom of the table on the American Memory home page.

Visiting a collection's home page will give you a better idea about what is available in that collection. On each collection home page, you will find a description, information about the resources such as copyright restrictions, links to special collections, links that enable you to browse the collection, and links to [Collection Connections](#) from the Learning Page.

Within individual collections, you have access to expanded search options. You can search bibliographic or descriptive text, and you can search the full text of text-based resources such as books, pamphlets, manuscripts, legislative documents, and broadsides. (NOTE: Some text-based materials in American Memory have not been transcribed into searchable text, and thus cannot be accessed by full-text searches.)

You can customize the settings to:

- **Match any of these words**
Finds all records with any one of the search terms entered. The more search terms you add, the more items will be returned. This is the best search method for producing the largest number of results.
- **Match all of these words**
Finds only records containing all of the search terms entered. The more search terms you add, the fewer items will be returned. This type of search helps ensure that the items found relate to all of the search terms.
- **Match this exact phrase**
Finds only records containing the words you enter, in the order you enter them. Some very common words, such as *and*, *of*, *the*, *a*, and *to*, are ignored even when matching exact phrases.

You can also adjust the settings so the search engine will:

- **Include word variants (e.g., plurals)**
The results list will include records containing not only the exact search word(s) but also records containing words with the same English-language stem(s). For example, a variant search on the word *vote* will also find instances containing *votes*, *voting*, *vote*, and *voters*.
- **Match words exactly**
In some cases, particularly when looking for a phrase, it may be useful to require that words be matched exactly.

- **Return a maximum of documents or parts**
Use this option to adjust the maximum number of results your search can generate.

In some individual collections, you can search by Core Fields (author/creator, title, subject, or item ID).

Viewing Subsections

You can view several subsections from the American Memory home page.

- **Collections Highlights** links to new collections, featured presentations, or future collections.
- **Today in History** links to a page offering a summary of key events in U.S. history for each day of the year.
- **Teachers** links to The Learning Page, a great resource for teachers. On the Learning Page you will find tips for searching, saving, viewing, listening to, and printing resources from the American Memory Web site. You can access dozens of teacher-created lesson plans using primary sources and turn-key Web-based classroom activities. You can also participate in a virtual educational community. If you just want a general idea of what types of classroom resources the Library has to offer, or if you want ideas for using the American Memory collections, you should look at the Learning Page first.
- **Ask a Librarian** links to a page providing an e-mail query form and access to live chat help. It is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Searching Other Sections of the Library of Congress Web Site

If you can't find exactly what you need in American Memory, you should search one of the other sections of the Library Web site.

THOMAS

If you are looking for legislative information, go to THOMAS. For more information about using THOMAS see How to Search THOMAS.

Prints and Photographs Division Online Catalog

If you need to find an image, you should search the Prints and Photographs online catalog. You can search all records or browse collections from the main page of the Prints and Photographs online catalog. To search all records, type one or more keywords into the search box at the top of the page. Results display in a list format by default. To see which records include digital images and what they look like, select Preview Images. Items in the Prints and Photographs online catalog have been grouped into collections. The main page of the Prints and Photographs online catalog lists and describes each collection. Below the description, there is a statement that explains whether the items in the collection have been digitized and whether the items can be viewed outside the Library. Many images in the Prints and Photographs online catalog can only be viewed as thumbnail images because of copyright limitations. For more information about using the Prints and Photographs Online Catalog, visit <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pp/pphelp.html>.

America's Library

Elementary teachers should visit America's Story from America's Library, an interactive section of the Library Web site that features stories and games about American history and culture. From America's Library, you have easy access to more than 6,000 items from the Library's collections.

The easiest way to find resources in America's Library is to browse the different areas of the Web site. However, you can also conduct a keyword search. Click on Search, located at the bottom left of the America's Library homepage or at the top of any page in America's Library. Then type one or more keywords into the search box and click on SUBMIT.

Exhibitions and The Wise Guide

If you aren't looking for anything specific, you may want to browse Exhibitions and The Wise Guide. Both of these sections allow you to view resources that have been grouped into themes. To find items in these sections of the Web site, simply type one or more keywords into the search box located at the top of the home pages. You can also easily find items by browsing the titles listed on the Exhibitions home page or browsing the archives of The Wise Guide.

Global Gateway

Teachers looking for resources on world culture should visit Global Gateway. Most of the resources in this section of the Web site are more suited for students in middle school and above, but elementary school teachers can use the resources when preparing background information for lessons.

You can search for items in Global Gateway by typing one or more keywords into the search box located at the top of the screen. However, this may yield hundreds of results. You may want to look for items by browsing the different sections. Four sections that provide useful classroom resources are: Collaborative Digital Libraries, Featured Presentations, Portals to the World, and Country Studies. The Collaborative Digital Libraries was built in partnership with other libraries around the world. These digital libraries explore the histories of France, the Netherlands, Siberia, Spain, and Brazil. [Featured Presentations](#) links you to Library presentations about world history and culture. [Portals to the World](#) contains links to Web sites that provide authoritative, in-depth information about more than 200 nations and areas of the world. [Country Studies](#) presents a description and analysis of the historical setting and the social, economic, political, and national security systems and institutions of countries throughout the world.

Research Centers

Research Centers provide information not found in other areas of the Library Web site. You can search across all Research Centers collections by typing one or more keywords into the search box located at the top of the Research Centers homepage. This may yield thousands of results. It is better to narrow your search to an individual research center. Each research center homepage has a search box located at the top of the screen. You can customize these search engines to search only that particular research center, all research centers, or the entire Library Web site.

You may want to browse each research center to see what they have to offer instead of conducting a keyword search. Below is a list of interesting resources provided by the research centers. Take some time to see what is available in these areas of the Web site.

Fine Arts

Music, Theater, and Dance

Formerly titled "I Hear America Singing," this section provides access to educational resources, collections of scores, sheet music, audio, films, and links to special presentations about composers and performers.

Library of Congress Live

Library of Congress Live allows visitors to view webcasts of live events at the Library. During these events, people present historical and cultural information with music, dance, and dialogue.

Language Arts

Poetry 180

Poetry 180 gives students an opportunity to hear or read a poem on each of the 180 days of the school year.

Guide to Poetry and Literature Webcasts

Guide to Poetry & Literature Webcasts provides links to Webcasts of poets, fiction writers, and critics as they read and discuss their own and each other's work.

Social Studies

Local Legacies: Celebrating Community Roots

Community Roots provides information about community events and celebrations throughout the United States.

Guide to Law Online

The Guide to Law Online is an annotated guide to sources of information on government and law available online. It includes selected links to useful and reliable sites for legal information.

Veterans History Project

The Veterans History Project provides access to stories of wartime service on the front lines and on the home front.

Science and Mathematics

Everyday Mysteries

Everyday Mysteries answers questions about everyday phenomena and introduces you to the Library's rich collections in science and technology.

Science Tracer Bullets

Science Tracer Bullets contains research guides that help you locate information on science and technology subjects.

Science Subject Guide for Teachers and Students

These subject guides include the research guides and other online resources prepared by the Science Reference Section of the Library of Congress.

General

Virtual Reference Shelf

The Virtual Reference Shelf provides a list of Web resources that have been compiled by librarians at the Library.

Minerva

Mapping the Internet Electronic Resources Virtual Archive (MINERVA) provides access to primary source materials that were created in digital form and do not exist in any physical form.

Ask a Librarian

If you have searched all the sections of the Library Web site and are still having problems finding the resources you need, you should visit the Ask a Librarian section. In this section of the Web site, you can e-mail questions to reference librarians and access live chat help.

General Search Strategies

Below you will find some general tips for searching the Library Web site.

Search Strategies

- Searches provide only general lists. Bookmarks will not save these lists. When you conduct a search, you should write down the keywords you searched. This will help you find your resources again.
- You can also try your query using another search engine such as Google. To do so, type your keyword followed by the words site:loc.gov.

Keyword Formatting

- Common words such as *and*, *not*, and *the* are ignored by the search engine.
- Searches are not case sensitive.
- Special characters such as letters with accent marks, #, @, and () produce unintended results and should be avoided.

Keyword Tips

- Use specific subjects and historical names and terms. For example, if you want to find resources relating to voting rights, you will get better results if you type *suffrage*. You can find more ideas about search terms at: <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/start/synonym.html>.
- Important terms for each American Memory collection can be found in the Subject Lists available from most collection home pages. These lists will link to searches for related records within a collection.
- Links to searches for related Subjects and Authors can be found at the bottom of bibliographic records. Use the names of towns, landmarks, and other geographic features that were current when the materials you are searching were created.