But I read it on the internet!

Library Lessons

Toni Buzzeo
In this fourth Mrs. Skorupski story, Mr. Dickinson and Mrs. Skorupski launch a unit on the presidents of the United States with a K-W-L activity in which Carmen Rosa Peña, an inveterate Internet user, insists that George Washington had wooden teeth. But Hunter Harris, a books-only guy, knows he didn’t. These two continue to carry on an often-antagonistic relationship as the fourth graders learn to evaluate online information using Mrs. Skorupski’s Website Evaluation Gizmo. As the website evaluation portion of the project draws to a close, Carmen and Hunter each choose to answer the same research question. Hunter does so with the help of the public library children’s librarian, while Carmen works on her own. Not surprisingly, with the help of the Gizmo, they both come to school with the correct answer.

**United States Presidents Website Evaluation Project**

The primary goal of this project is to teach students how to assess the effectiveness, usefulness, and accuracy of websites by challenging them to prove or disprove a list of “facts” about the United States Presidents. [Note: You may adapt this project for use with any subject matter that includes both facts and myths.] In doing so, they will be meeting requirements of Standard 1 of the AASL Standards for the 21st Century Learner and Common Core Writing Standards 7 and 8 under the Research to Build and Present Knowledge College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard.

- Begin by constructing a K-W-L chart (on your computer or on paper).
- Brainstorm a list of “facts” that students KNOW about any of the U.S. Presidents.
- Combine their brainstormed list with any quirky presidential “facts” they have not listed. (See Presidential Facts and Presidential Myths below.)
- Ask students to challenge any items on the list that they know to be false (highlight these in red) or suspect might be false (highlight these in yellow).
- Assign students to choose one red, one yellow, and one un-highlighted item. Ask them to try to verify each of these three items—or prove them false—using books or websites. Ask them to cite their sources. (See book and website citation forms below. Decide whether you prefer to have students e-mail you the links to the websites they use.)
- Discuss the results of their further investigations. Challenge the value of their sources and encourage them to do the same.
- Introduce Mrs. Skorupski’s Website Evaluation Gizmo (see below) and apply it as a group to one of the less reliable websites that your students used or one of your own choosing.
- Assign each student to choose one still-questionable item from the list (more than one student may choose each item), and determine its veracity using a website. Also ask them to evaluate the website they use with the Website Evaluation Gizmo.
- Invite each student to report his or her findings and to discuss why the website he or she chose was informative, easy to use, and accurate.

**Sources for Presidential Truths and Myths**

Like the myth surrounding George Washington’s teeth, much of the information we all know—or think we know—about the presidents come from quirky tidbits. Online sites as well as books are good sources for these presidential “facts.”
Books


Websites

- About American Presidents: Life Portraits
  http://www.americanpresidents.org
- Presidential Trivia
  http://www.infoplease.com/spot/prestrivia1.html
- Sites devoted to individual presidents such as:
  Theodore Roosevelt Association
  http://www.theodorroosevelt.org/
  Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association
  http://www.hooverassociation.org/hoover/did_you_know.php
  Quiz: Lincoln Myths and Misconceptions
  http://www.pbs.org/teachers/connect/resources/6868/preview/
- Sites devoted to the U.S. presidency or government such as:
  Our White House: Looking In, Looking Out
  http://www.ourwhitehouse.org/

Presidential Facts and Reliable Online Sources

George Washington’s second inaugural address was the shortest address ever, at only 135 words. http://www.infoplease.com/spot/inaugural8.html

Thomas Jefferson received a pair of grizzly bears from Captain Zebulon Pike and kept them in an enclosure on the White House lawn for two months. http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/grizzly-bears


Andrew Jackson killed a man in a duel. http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/andrewjackson

James Buchanan was the only president never to marry. http://www.infoplease.com/spot/prestrivia1.html

Andrew Johnson never attended school. http://ncpedia.org/biography/johnson-andrew


The teddy bear was named after Theodore Roosevelt. http://www.theodorroosevelt.org/kidscorner/tr_teddy.htm

William Howard Taft was so large that a special bathtub had to be built for him. http://clinton4.nara.gov/WH/glimpse/presidents/html/wt27.html


Calvin Coolidge had a mechanical horse in his White House dressing room that he rode for exercise. http://www.forbeslibrary.org/news/CoolidgeHorse.shtml

Herbert Hoover and his wife occasionally spoke Mandarin Chinese in the White House when they wanted others not to understand them. http://www.hooverassociation.org/hoover/did_you_know.php

Herbert Hoover’s son Allan had two pet alligators that sometimes wandered around the White House. http://www.ourwhitehouse.org/lionsandtigers.html

Harry Truman’s middle name was “S”—with no period after it because that was his full middle name. http://www.trumanlibrary.org/speriod.htm


George W. Bush was one of the owners of the Texas Rangers baseball team. http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/georgewbush/

**Presidential Myths Debunked by Reliable Online Sources**

Thomas Jefferson “invented macaroni and cheese.” [Note: He only drew plans for a pasta maker.] http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/macaroni

George Washington had wooden teeth. [Note: He had many sets of dentures made out of unusual materials, but none were wood.] http://gewpapers.virginia.edu/project/faq/index.html

George Washington threw a silver dollar across the Potomac River. [Note: Silver dollars were not minted until 1794.] http://www.mountvernon.org/visit/plan/index.cfm/pid/808/

Abraham Lincoln wrote the Gettysburg Address on the back of an envelope. [Note: Lincoln left Washington, D.C., for Gettysburg with his first draft mostly complete.] http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/lincoln/exhibition/gettysburg/index.html

Zachary Taylor was poisoned to death with arsenic. [Note: Scientists exhumed his body in 1991 and disproved it.] http://www.history.com/topics/zachary-taylor
## CITATION FORMAT SHEET

### BOOK

For a book with one author, follow this format.


*Note: If you use a second line, indent five spaces.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author’s last name, first name.</th>
<th>Title of book (underlined).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### WEBSITE

For a website, follow this format.


*Note: If you use a second line, indent five spaces.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author’s last name, first name (if available).</th>
<th>Title of page (in quotation marks).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
# Mrs. Skorupski's Website Evaluation Gizmo

## INFORMATIVE?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you read and understand the information on the website?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the website have information that answers your questions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the illustrations help you to understand the information?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there links to other sources you can also use?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## EASY TO USE?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the font easy to read, and is the layout uncrowded and simple?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the headings clear?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you navigate (move about) the website easily?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it clear which section of the website has the information you need?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the website searchable?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## ACCURATE?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who owns the website?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does the URL end with (.com, .edu, .gov, etc.)? What can you tell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about the website from the URL?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the website owner an organization or person with knowledge on your</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>topic?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the website selling you anything?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the website been updated recently?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>