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# Catching Some Social Studies Waves on the Internet

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There is no stopping the flood tide of activity on the Internet which is available to Singaporean teachers via the World Wide Web (WWW). With more and more of Singaporean classrooms getting wired into the electronic/information age, access to a sea of information is achievable through a click or two of a few buttons. You do not even have to be a particularly good "surfer" (computer whiz) in order to begin to link your students with the resources available on the Web. All you need is some "web-browsing" software on your hard disk such as "Netscape" (which is available free and rather easily installed) and some typing skills and you are ready to catch any of the millions of waves into the virtual world of web-surfing.

There are two rather basic ways to navigate the Internet. The first is by using what is essentially an address which is referred to as a URL (Universal Resource Locator) and which instructs the web-browsing software to go to a particular location or "home page." If you already have the URL for an particular location, such as the URL for NTU's home page (which is <http://www.ntu.ac.sg>), then all you have to do is to give the computer the URL and off you go to that location. If you are using the ever-popular and quite common "Netscape" software, then you can type a particular URL in the "location" box which is sandwiched in between two toolbars offering you various point and click commands.

The second, and easier way, to get from one place to another is to take advantage of the interactivity of the Internet by merely to click on any of the "jump links" in a particular document. These links usually appear in blue (or some other distinct colour), are in bold letters, frequently underlined, and in some way are made to stand out of the normal text on an Internet page. Placing the cursor on them and

clicking will take you to wherever they are pointed. One useful hint to remember is that once you get to wherever the link jumped to, that new address will appear somewhere at the top of your document. If you like that location and want to return to it later, you can either mark it with a bookmark or write down that URL address for future reference.

The Singapore Ministry of Education at <http://www.moe.ac.sg/> offers a good beginning point for novices to the Internet as it offers a click-on "User Manual" for the Internet itself which explains, among other things, how to get connected to the Internet via telephone modem and how to use the five major functions of the Internet (Telnet, Email, Newsgroups, FTP, and the World Wide Web [WWW]). You can also "download" (or get delivered to your computer) a copy of the latest "Netscape" software complete with instructions as to how to install it into your system. Another very good beginning point for educators in Singapore is the home page of the National Institute of Education [<http://www.nie.ac.sg:8000/>] as it not only offers some interesting information about NIE and its various programmes but it has a very useful "jump" entitled "Educational Resources on the Internet" which provides you with some 147 interactive "jumps" to various sources of information and ideas, multi media resources, and educational discussion groups.

Social Studies teachers are in a good position to exploit some of the educational potential of the WWW in their classrooms. As Social Studies is a non-examinable subject and therefore not so tightly bound by the necessities of a particular curriculum, it also affords teachers greater latitude in experimenting and varying their teaching strategies. Consequently, some Internet "exploration" sessions focusing on the major themes and components of the syllabus might be interesting and stimulating for both students and teachers.

All Social Studies teachers know that the current syllabus is built upon the "expanding horizons" concept and starts with securing the pupil's knowledge of their local surroundings before progressively introducing them to concepts more and more distant from them in time and space. Hence, the first unit in the Primary Four syllabus is "Our School: Its Environment". Currently, through the Ministry of Education home page, one can follow a string of jumps through the "Information For Public" icon and get to a listing of all the schools in Singapore [<http://www.moe.ac.sg/esp/welcome.html>]. The information

presently in the Web about the schools is only the most rudimentary and basic statistical information and not very exciting for students. A very good project that the students and faculty might work on together might be to develop a better and fuller home page, complete with graphics, providing the information the Ministry might want to make available about the school and also advertising what is special and unique about their particular school.

Some of the other topics in Unit 1, such as people at work and the "movement of goods and people" can be touched on by starting at the Singapore Government Internet Web Site [<http://www.gov.sg/indextext.html>] and following the various leads to various places as the "Labour Graphics" page or the pages set up for any of the pertinent government bodies or statutory boards.

The central focus of Unit 2 is the early history of Singapore. For an introduction to Singaporean history one could start at the page entitled "Brief History of Singapore" at <http://www.ncb.gov.sg/sog/info/history.html>. Then one could follow the jump [<http://www.ncb.gov.sg/sog/info/heritage.html>] to a longer essay (19 paragraphs) entitled "Heritage" extracted from the book, *Singapore: Island, City, State* by Kwa Chong Guan, Senior Director, National Heritage Board. More specifically, the Online Museum of Singapore Art & History [<http://www.ncb.gov.sg/nhb/museum.html>] has some interesting "exhibits" including one entitled "Raffles Revisited" where one can spend a bit of time with Sir Thomas Stamford, the founder of Singapore.

At Primary Five, the Social Studies units deal with Singapore's environment and physical needs and its economic progress. Again students can begin to explore the topic of Singapore's environment by going to the Singapore Government Internet Web Site [<http://www.gov.sg/indextext.html>] and clicking on the Ministry of the Environment home page. One very interesting activity for environmentally conscious Singaporean students is to take a virtual tour of the Botanic Gardens via the Web pages at Online Singapore Botanic Gardens [<http://www.technet.sg/OUB/tourpark.htm>]. As these pages are updated at least once a month, revisting the Gardens would be worth doing.

For various reasons environmental issues and education are a major activity on the Internet. With regards to the greater Asian

environment, Singaporean students can learn quite a bit by visiting the East-West Center Program on Environment [<http://envgov.ewc.hawaii.edu/>] made possible by a grant from the Asia Foundation. Through such projects as the Global Thinking Project [<http://www.igc.apc.org/gtpl>] Singaporean students have already joined the world-wide movement in increasing environmental awareness. Students ranging in age from 10 to 17 in schools from around the world in Australia, the Czech Republic, Russia, Singapore, Spain and the United States are actively sharing information through discussion groups and the Internet about both specific and global environmental issues.

Probably more for teachers first and then through them to their students is a vast array of information and resources regarding larger environmental issues available through the project entitled "Using Computers in Environmental Education: Interactive Multimedia and On-Line Learning" [<http://www.nceet.snre.umich.edu/computers/Computers.html>]. At this site you can find a teacher-training manual co-authored by EcoNet founder Rocky Rohwedder and IGC/EcoNet education coordinator Andy Alm which is intended to support training for beginners as well as cyberspace veterans. Other projects and activities available through jumps from this home page include such things as "Partnering," "Expeditions," "Information Collection and Exchange," "One-Line Simulations," and "Environmental Action Projects."

Turning to Unit 4 and the chronicle of Singapore's progress a good place to start could be the Singapore InfoMap [<http://www.sg>] or the Singapore Government Internet Web Site [<http://www.gov.sg>] which provides links to the home pages of some of the government bodies that have help craft Singapore's progress such as the Economic Development, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, the Ministry of National Development, the Trade Development Board, and more. Another quick reference to many of the recent achievements and developments in Singapore is available through governmental home pages and an "Overview of Singapore" at <http://www.sg/informaplmita/overview.html>. This page offers links to other pages covering Singapore's "Government and Politics," "Social Infrastructure," "Trade And Industry," and "Physical Development." Finally, another quick way to get some idea on the "progress" of Singapore by checking in

at Singapore Technologies Home Page at <http://www.st.com.sg/>. From there, interested students can find out "what's new" and get a host of news stories and write-ups of the technologies that are transforming Singapore as we live.

As noted on one of the Singaporean Web pages:

Singapore is a surprising contrast of racial and cultural roots. Immigrants came from China, Indonesia, India and the Middle East, joining the local Malay villagers and fishermen and seeking a better life for themselves and their families. Their belongings were few, their traditions, costumes, language, cuisines, festivals and religions were rich and varied.'

Therefore, one of the most significant topics in the Social Studies syllabus comes in primary six, Unit 5. Here teachers perform essential service to Singapore by helping their pupils create common identities and mutual respect between and among the various constitute communities of Singapore. The Singapore Online Guide [<http://www.ncb.gov.sg/sog/sog.html>] not only offers quick access to a large amount of fundamental information regarding Singapore but also illustrates the nation's multi-cultural character. The section on Multi-Cultural Traditions features a brief description of the different ethnic traditions in Singapore and a virtual tour of various locations in Singapore that represent and illustrate those living traditions. The tour itself offers some 19 "jumps" to other locations and bits of information. From the Singapore Online Guide, students can follow the links to "Celebrations and Festivities" which further illustrates Singapore's multi-cultural heritage through discussion of some of the ethnic celebrations that liven up the national calendar. Finally, some of the various communities in Singapore are beginning to construct their own home pages and information "gateways". An example is the Singapore Muslim Organisations Internet Gateway at <http://www2.ntu.ac.sg:8000/~ntums/sisnet.html>. No doubt more will follow, each offering Singaporean students interesting and important information about their national cultural heritage.

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<sup>1</sup> The Singapore Online Guide [<http://www.ncb.gov.sg/sog/2.multi.html>]

The last unit in the Social Studies syllabus tries to introduce Singaporean students to Singapore's neighbors in Southeast Asia. The Singapore Online Guide also offers some quick virtual tours of the surrounding region through the jump "Touring The Region". Launching from this jump will take one on a quick informational tour of Malaysia and Indonesia, Singapore's closest neighbors.

But what about the rest of the region? Well, here one can quickly learn that spies can be a very good source of information about nations and their people. The United States CIA offers a home page and a series of informational jumps to material on every nation in the world at [<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/95fact/index.html>]. This material is interactive and even offers some relatively good maps of the countries catalogues -which includes all of Singapore's neighbors, the members of Asean and all other nations in Asia.

What we have provided here are only some starting points for the exploration of the Internet and the WWW as teaching resources and tools in support of the Social Studies Curriculum here in Singapore. Much of the information available at the locations listed above would be relevant and pertinent to other classes and disciplines. The magic of the Web is just that, everything is connected in such a way that one can go in any direction and all directions and find useful and interesting material. We hope that some of you teachers out there will wax up your computer surfboards and be willing to die in, get wet and catch some of the thrilling waves on the Internet. We are sure that you and your students will benefit from the time and energy expended.