



Essential Question: How can I choose good websites for my research?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: discuss criteria for rating informational websites, then apply the criteria by examining and scoring an assigned site. They compare their results, and learn that all websites are not equally good sources of information.

After discussing what criteria they currently use to evaluate websites, students are introduced to the **Score Your Site Student Handout**, containing questions they can use to rate the quality and usefulness of an informational site. Students explore a site and complete the handout as a class, then work in small groups to rate a second site. Students discuss which evaluation criteria are most important, and how they can use what they have learned to make choices about which websites to use in their future research.

objectives

Students will:

- Evaluate the quality of informational websites
- Rate informational websites by applying criteria
- Compare their results and learn that all sites are not of equal quality

Materials and Preparation

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Materials

- **Score Your Site Student Handout**

Preparation

- Copy the **Score Your Site Student Handout**, one copy for each student, and one copy for each group
- Review the **Score Your Site Student Handout** and be prepared to guide students through the rating form
- Preview the websites listed in **Teach 1**. Choose a site to rate with the class, and be prepared to help students navigate the remaining sites
- Set up the website you chose for **Teach 1** on the computer projector or white board

Parent Resources

- Send parents the **Research and Evaluation for Elementary Students Parent Tip Sheet**
- Send parents the **Wikipedia Parent Tip Sheet**

Key Vocabulary

- **Research:** To collect information about a topic
- **Rate (verb):** To assign a value or score to something
- **Bookmark:** A shortcut on your computer that allows you to easily visit a site again
- **Dead Links:** Linked sites on a website that no longer work
- **Navigate:** To move around and find your way



teaching plans

Introduce

REVIEW the Key Vocabulary words **research** and **rate** with students.

INVITE students to imagine that they've been asked to do a report on endangered species and they need to do research on the Internet. First they use a search site to find a list of websites with information on their topic. There are many sites to choose from.

ASK How will you decide which sites to use for your research?

Sample responses:

- *I would use the first ones that come up on the results page*
- *I would use the same site I used for my last report*
- *I would use the site my friend/teacher/parents told me to use*
- *I would use a site where it's easy to find the information I need*
- *I would use a site where the information is clear and sounds right*

Record student responses so you can return to them at the end of the lesson.

EXPLAIN to students that there are ways to tell which sites are the best ones to use. In this lesson, they will learn what to look for, and they'll rate websites to see how they measure up.

Teach 1: Site Score: Who, What, and When?

CHOOSE one of the following websites to explore with the class.

- EndangeredSpecies.com
- Endangered Earth
- World Endangered Species
- World Wildlife Fund: About Our Earth
- Kids' Planet: Species Fact Sheets
- Wikipedia: Endangered Species
- Endangered! Exploring a World at Risk
- Earth's Endangered Creatures
- [Save the Rennets \(hoax\)](http://Save the Rennets (hoax))
- [Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus \(hoax\)](http://Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus (hoax))
- [The Jackalope Conspiracy \(hoax\)](http://The Jackalope Conspiracy (hoax))

DISTRIBUTE the **Score Your Site Student Handout**, one to each student. If possible, project the website at the front of the classroom so you can explore it together. You may also choose to group students around shared computers to view the site as you discuss it.

(Notice that three of the websites on the list are hoax websites about fictional endangered species. Wait to use these websites for the group activity in **Teach 2.**)



EXPLAIN to students that they will be exploring a website about endangered species of animals, and answering some questions about the site.

GUIDE students through the handout, inviting volunteers to respond to each question and encouraging class discussion. Make sure students understand that they must choose one response – 1, 2, or 3 – to each question. Have students keep score on their own handouts.

The following tips may help students understand the questions on the **Score Your Site Student Handout**.

- *Can the author be trusted?* Explain to students that this group of questions helps them figure out *who* the author of their website is. They may not find the author on the home page; instead, they can try clicking on some links. The author can be an individual, or it can be an organization, school, or college – or a group of people. Once they know who the author is, they should think about whether that author is an expert on the topic or has some background related to the topic.
- *Will this site have the information I need?* Tell students they need to look at what kind of information the site has to offer. Can they imagine using this information for a report on endangered species? Students should judge the quality of the information as best they can, and decide whether it would be useful to their research. A really good site is one they might want to bookmark to use in the future. Review the Key Vocabulary word **bookmark**.
- *Is this site up to date?* Remind students that it is important to know *when* the information on the site was written. Sometimes facts change over time, so old information may not be correct. For example, ask students why it might not be a good idea to use a list of endangered species that is ten years old. (The status of the animals on the list may have changed in that time.) It's important that students look for the signs of an out-of-date site, like old dates and **dead links**. Dates can sometimes be found at the very bottom of a webpage. Review the Key Vocabulary words **dead links**. You can show students the [WayBack Machine](#) so they can search a website to see when it was last modified. If it hasn't been changed in a long while, that's a warning sign.
- *Is this a good research site for students your age?* Explain to students that the website could be a good one, but still might not be right for them. Not all websites are meant for kids their age. Some sites are too hard to read or too difficult to **navigate**. Or they may be inappropriate for some other reason. Review the Key Vocabulary word **navigate**.

Together, add up the circled scores in each column and then add the three subtotals to obtain a final score. Have students compare their scores. Are they about the same, or different? If students rated a hoax website, could they figure out it wasn't real? How could they tell the website was a hoax based on the questions in the handout?

POINT OUT to students the “Use Common Sense!” box on their handouts, emphasizing that the most important factors to consider when they **rate** a site are *who* created the site, *what* information can be found on the site, and *when* the site was updated. Remind them that the final factor they need to consider is whether the site can be used by students their age.

INVITE students to decide whether or not they would use this website for their own **research**. Encourage them to explain their responses.



Teach 2: Score Your Site

ARRANGE students into groups of three. Assign each group one of the websites listed under **Teach 1**. Assign half of the groups hoax websites and half regular websites. Avoid telling students that some of the websites are hoaxes, but see if they can figure that out as they rate the site.

DISTRIBUTE additional copies of the **Score Your Site Student Handout**, one for each group. Ask the groups to choose a scribe who will record responses for the group.

INSTRUCT students to closely explore the website, answer the questions, and add up their scores. Encourage them to look beyond the home page when seeking answers for their questions. Also, ask them to decide, as a group, why they would or would not use the site for their own research. Allow 10 to 15 minutes for students to complete their handouts.

INVITE a member of each group to share their site's score, and explain whether they think this site is one they would use in their own research, and why. If students were assigned a hoax website, could they figure that out? How could they tell the website was a hoax based on the questions in the handout?

ASK students to calculate the highest and lowest scores a site can receive (36 points and 12 points). Have them consider the range of possible scores, and then discuss what score would constitute a "passing grade" for an informational site. (Responses may vary, but students should understand that a website they use for **research** should score 3 on the majority of questions.)

Wrap Up and Assess

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives.

ASK *What are the most important factors to consider when you rate a website?* (Who created the site, what information can be found on the site, when the site was updated, and whether the site can be used by kids their age.)

ASK *Why is it important to compare sites when doing research?* (Not all sites are equally good and equally useful.)

REVISIT the question you used to introduce the lesson: *How will you decide which sites to use for your research?* Have students answer the question again, and compare their responses to those they gave at the beginning of the lesson. Ask them to explain why their responses changed. (Students should understand that there are criteria they can learn and use to evaluate the quality and usefulness of any informational site they visit.)



Extension Activity

In groups, invite students to research an historical event. It can be an event they have been studying in school or just one that particularly interests them. Using the tips from the **Score Your Site Student Handout**, ask them to find one source of information online about the event that seems reliable and one that does not. In front of the class, have student groups describe their topic and how they decided which websites were reliable or unreliable.

**Homework**

Have students and a parent or family member choose a product or appliance in their home. Together they conduct an online search to find ratings, reviews, and opinions about the product. The student and family member then decide which ratings, reviews, or opinions they trust the most, and which ones they do not trust. In class, have students report on how they decided which website or opinion to trust. (Note: If kids do not have access to the Internet at home, they can brainstorm ideas about how they would judge the trustworthiness of various opinions online.)

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students® 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

3. Research and Information Fluency

- a. plan strategies to guide inquiry
- c. evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks

Common Sense Media is an independent, nonprofit resource that helps families and educators teach kids how to be safe and smart in today's 24/7 media world. Go to www.commonsensemedia.org for thousands of reviews and expert advice.



Name(s)

Class

Date

Directions

Read each question below. Decide which answer is right for your website. Circle the number.

Can the author be trusted?			
1. Is the author's name clear?	1 cannot find it	2 hard to find	3 easy to find
2. What makes the author an expert?	1 no information given	2 author's title given	3 background about author given
3. Grammar or spelling errors?	1 many errors	2 one or two errors	3 no errors
4. Can you contact the author?	1 no contact information given	2 email address given	3 email and postal address given
Will this site have the information I need?			
5. Is the information useful?	1 not useful	2 might be useful	3 sure to be useful
6. Would you bookmark the site for future research?	1 not worth bookmarking	2 might bookmark	3 would definitely bookmark
Is this site up to date?			
7. Can you find the date when the site was created?	1 cannot find a date	2 the date was hard to find	3 the date was easy to find
8. When was the site last revised?	1 cannot find a date	2 last revised more than six months ago	3 last revised in the past six months
9. Do the links work?	1 many dead links	2 one or two dead links	3 all links work
Is this a good research site for students your age?			
10. Is the text readable?	1 need an adult to help read it	2 need help reading some parts	3 can read it all
11. Is the site easy to navigate?	1 keep getting lost	2 have some trouble finding my way around	3 very easy to find my way around
12. Is there useful information for students?	1 few parts of the site seem useful for students	2 most of the site seems useful for students	3 most of the site seems useful for students
TOTAL EACH COLUMN			

TOTAL SCORE FOR ALL THREE COLUMNS



Website

Date Visited

Would you use this website to do your research? Why or why not?

Use Common Sense!

When you search online, remember to use the Who, What, When formula to help you rate a site. The answers will help you figure out if it's a good site to use.

- **Who** created the site?
- **What** information can be found on the site?
- **When** was the site updated?

