

The Government Publishing Office

A New Name for a New Generation

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In 1861, the United States Government Printing Office (GPO) opened its doors, providing access to the country's most important documents.

However, with its evolving mission to incorporate digital materials, apps, e-books and other technologies, it was time for a change. Section 1301 of H.R. 83, establishing appropriations for 2015, states, "The Government Printing Office is hereby redesigned as the Government Publishing Office." This new name reflects a shift from print media to a wide range of communication channels for public information.

In the past, school libraries contained vertical files filled with brochures from government agencies on topics from tourism to food safety and shelves filled with government-printed books



Ready! Be a Hero website from U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

such as the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*. Increasingly, these types of materials can be accessed online or downloaded as e-books or apps for easy access. For instance, the Ready! website (<http://www.ready.gov/kids>) provides both PDF materials and interactives focusing on disaster preparation.

It's easy for teacher librarians to become overwhelmed by the vast information sources produced by the United States government. However, being familiar with some of the starting points can help focus collection development efforts.

THE LARGEST PUBLISHER

The largest publisher in the world, the United States Government issues a wide range of congressional documents, presidential papers, research studies, and more from agencies across disciplines. (The GPO website can be accessed at <http://gpo.gov/>.)

In addition to publishing print materials, the GPO produces such government websites as STOPfakes.gov (<http://www.stop-fakes.gov/>), which helps consumers learn about counterfeit and pirated goods. It also links to resources on copyright, like the Taking the Mystery out of Copyright interactive from the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/copyrightmystery/?#>).



Taking the Mystery out of Copyright interactive.

GovernmentBookTalk (<http://govbooktalk.gpo.gov/>) is GPO's blog. It contains government information of interest to a wide range of audiences.

THE FEDERAL DIGITAL SYSTEM (FDSYS)

The GPO provides online access to government information from all three branches of government through the Federal Digital System (FDsys; <http://www.fdsys.gov/>). This source searches fifty collections, including Congressional Hearings, Congressional Record, and the Federal Register. It also includes official documents from committees. However, it doesn't include many agency publications.

High school students seeking historical documents such as the Warren Commission's report on the assassination of President Kennedy, the 9/11 Commission Report, the Civil Rights Act, and other high-profile documents can access them through FDsys. In

addition, lesser known but interesting acts and committee reports can be located, such as the Truth in Video Game Rating Act.

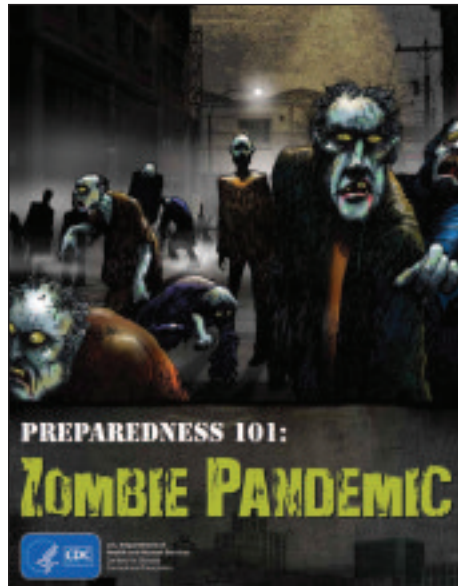
Bring biography projects alive for students through the use of primary source documents about politicians and people in the public eye. Students looking for government resources associated with particular people, including presidents, members of congress, and those who have testified before Congress, can find information listed by person. For instance, there are more than 13,000 documents containing the name Martin Luther King, Jr.

These primary source materials are an excellent way to address the Common Core standards associated with informational reading and the use of authentic materials across the curriculum.

FEDERAL DEPOSITORY LIBRARY PROGRAM AND THE CATALOG OF U.S. PUBLICATIONS

The Federal Depository Library Program was founded in 1813 to provide access to government documents. It's possible to visit one of the nearly 1,200 physical libraries located nationwide. Go to <http://catalog.gpo.gov/fdlpdir/FDLPdir.jsp> for a clickable map showing the locations. However, most teacher librarians and their students will access documents through the Catalog of U.S. Government Publications at <http://catalog.gpo.gov/>. An easy-to-use search tool provides access to government publications from various agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service and the Food and Drug Administration.

A search for “pandemic preparedness” brings up serious documents related to national preparedness and health care. However, it also produces a link to a cool graphic novel for youth titled *Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic* (http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/documents/11_225700_A_Zombie_Final.pdf) from the Centers for Disease Control. Although the story is fictional, it explores the important issue of being prepared, including having an emergency kit ready in case of any disaster or crisis.



Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic graphic novel.

For librarians and students seeking e-books specifically, include the term

“e-book” in the search at <http://goo.gl/g6UYUP>. The e-books can be downloaded free of charge on various devices. Most books can be downloaded in the ePub, MOBI for Kindle, PDF, or iBook format.

Although most of these e-books aren't designed for children, many free books would be of interest to teens. For instance, NASA has produced books like *Dressing for Altitude* by Dennis R Jenkins (<http://goo.gl/9JfcvV>) focusing on the history of aviation pressure suits.



Dressing for Altitude e-book.

Baseball: The National Pastime in the National Archives (<http://goo.gl/6B78w8>) is a book focusing on the history of baseball. The highly visual e-book incorporates a wide range of primary source documents such as patents, photos, letters, certificates, and reports that bring history alive. This e-book is an excellent tool for collecting primary source documents on an interesting theme.



Babe Ruth's World War I draft registration card is an example from the e-book *Baseball: The National Pastime* in the National Archives.

BEN'S GUIDE TO U.S. GOVERNMENT

Ben's Guide to U.S. Government (<http://beta.fdhp.gov/>) has been dramatically updated. Sponsored by the GPO, this website is intended to inform youth about the federal government and government information.

The "About Ben & GPO" section includes multiple pages about Benjamin Franklin and his legacy of publishing information.

The "Learning Adventures" section is divided into three sections designed for ages 4–8, 9–13, and 14+. Each level provides age-appropriate resources that can easily be aligned with the Common Core. Links are provided to many primary source documents.

The "Games" section includes a Branch-O-Mania quiz to test knowledge of the three branches of U.S. government.

The "Parents and Educators" section provides links to websites for kids and educators. It also links to American Association of School Librarians lesson plans associated with U.S. government and aligned with the Common Core.

The "Citizenship" section provides information about civics and citizenship. It also links to resources for those who would like to become American citizens.

THE FEDERAL CITIZEN INFORMATION CENTER

The Federal Citizen Information Center (<http://publications.usa.gov/>), located in Pueblo, Colorado, is part of the GPO. This center provides access to millions of publications including booklets, reports, and handbooks. While many of these are print publications, most are also available as free downloads.

The website allows users to search by category, format (i.e., print, PDF, e-reader, or online reading), and language. Categories such as animals, cars, going green, and health contain publications of interest to youth.

The *Consumer Action Handbook* (<http://publications.usa.gov/USAPubs.php?PubID=5131>) is one of their most popular publications. This handbook is available in both PDF and e-book reader formats. It contains information about consumer purchases, problems, and complaints. A particularly useful section helps users write a formal complaint letter.



Complaint letter format from the *Consumer Action Handbook* e-book.

U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Working closely with the GPO, the U.S. General Services Administration's Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies develops websites and apps to help connect information offered by the federal government to citizens. This agency oversees websites including USA.GOV, KIDS.GOV, and DATA.GOV.

The USA.GOV website (<http://www.usa.gov/>) is the starting point for access-

ing government information online. Users can do a search to identify information by service or government agency or by a particular type of information. For instance, a search for "infographic" brings up dozens of amazing government-produced infographics on topics ranging from energy efficiency to measles prevention. The Poison Peril infographic from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services shows information about how to prevent and treat poisonings (<http://poisonhelp.hrsa.gov/resources/materials/infographic.html>).

The USA.GOV blog (<http://blog.usa.gov/>) identifies the latest government sources. For instance, The Real Cost website (<http://therealcost.betobaccofree.hhs.gov/>) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services explores the impact of teen smoking on the body.

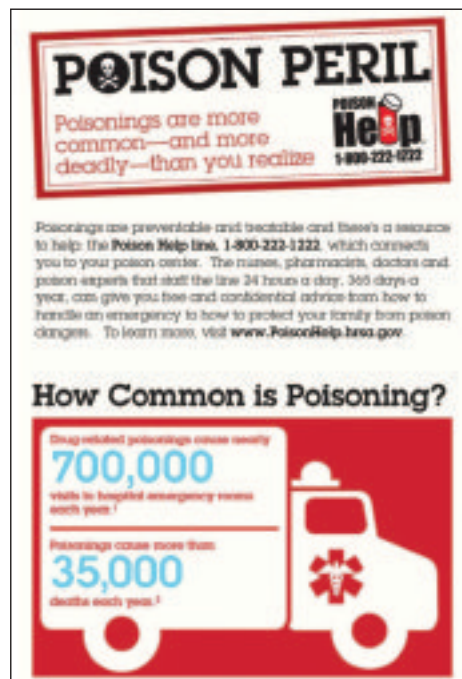


The Real Cost website focusing on teen smoking.

The KIDS.GOV website features links to government resources organized by grade level, topic, and activity, such as learning, gaming, and watching videos.



The KIDS.GOV entry page.



Poison Peril infographic.

With over 125,000 datasets from dozens of government agencies, the DATA.GOV website provides data, tools, and resources students can use in their research. The data is organized into categories including agriculture, business, climate, consumer, ecosystems, education, energy, finance, health, local government, manufacturing, ocean, public safety, and science and research. Featured datasets are highlighted in each area.

One of the featured datasets is the Biodiversity Information Serving Our Nation (BISON) dataset (<http://bison.usgs.ornl.gov/>) showing species occurrence data on a map. Users can see what species have been identified in a particular area. A search for hawks yielded over 5 million occurrences that can be viewed on a map.



Biodiversity Information Serving Our Nation (BISON)

The Food Access Research Atlas (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas.aspx>) shows areas of the United States with limited access to supermarkets and access to other healthy and affordable food. Users can display data by distance to stores and income to locate “food deserts” in cities and rural areas.

OPEN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

In 2009, the president’s Open Government Directive required government agencies “to implement the principles of transparency, participation, and collection,” including publishing government information online, improving the quality of information, and creating and institutionalizing a culture and policy of open government. This

directive included a number of new websites with useful information.

The Regulations.gov website (<http://www.regulations.gov/>) allows citizen to make comments on proposed regulations and related documents. This website provides a “real-world” writing opportunity for students across disciplines. Involve students in writing about whether they agree or disagree with a new health program, safety regulation, or certification program. Students can follow the guidelines and submit their comments online as a comment or PDF file. The website even provides tips for submitting effective comments (http://www.regulations.gov/docs/Tips_For_Submitting_Effective_Comments.pdf).



Comments page at Regulations.gov.

The Sustainability Tool (<https://sftool.gov/>) helps users learn about efficient, healthy buildings and environmentally responsible purchases. Ask students to think about how they would make their school building more energy efficient based on the website suggestions.

The USA Spending website (<https://usaspending.gov>) allows students to find out how the federal government distributes money. Involve students in examining how money is spent in the local area by entering their zip code or state. Then compare this to other regions of the United States. It’s also possible to see how much various agencies spend.

Many government agencies are working together to create cross-agency gateways that allow easier access to information. For instance, nineteen organizations in the area of science work together to produce science.gov. This website allows visitors to search for authoritative infor-

mation available at government websites. It also features web-based projects such as SuperTracker (<https://supertracker.usda.gov>). This website allows users to look up nutritional information, track food intake and physical activity, set goals, and save recipes.

CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, the United States federal government has shifted from a paper-based to a digital system for information dissemination providing anywhere, anytime access to government information. The introduction of new online tools and websites is providing easier access to information from a wide variety of government agencies. Teacher librarians will find many of these new information sources useful across the K–12 curriculum.

RESOURCES

H.R. 83. Available: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-113hr83enr/pdf/BILLS-113hr83enr.pdf>

Open Government Directive. Available: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/open/documents/open-government-directive>