



Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

Hotel D, 24 East Range (434) 982-2815 trc-uva@virginia.edu <http://www.virginia.edu/~trc/>

Fall 1996

Once Upon a Time in ENWR: The World-Wide Web as a Publication Medium for Student Essays

by Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, TA, Department
of English

In the Fall of 1995 I began teaching ENWR 101 (Introductory Composition) in the English Department's newly opened electronic classroom as part of a small group of graduate students coordinated by faculty member Peter Baker. Containing fifteen Gateway 2000 personal computers, each with a high-speed Internet connection, Bryan 203 is fully capable of supporting a paperless classroom, with students composing their essays on word processors, submitting them (from anywhere on Grounds) via electronic file transfer, and receiving instructor's comments through e-mail. Of even greater interest to me, however, was the possibility of using the World-Wide Web, with its ever-increasing popularity and its rich multimedia capabilities, as a publication medium for student essays. How, I asked myself, could the Web relieve some of the malaise that inevitably seeps into even the most successful composition classes, while simultaneously enabling me to experiment with forms of pedagogy that would have been otherwise unavailable? The end result was *Once Upon a Time in the Eighties*, a collaborative hypertext written by my first-year students and published (a term whose usage I will clarify) by us on the World-Wide Web.

The project required each student to select

and research an historically significant trend, event, or personage from the decade of the eighties, and then to prepare an 800- to 1000-word essay, while also, at the student's discretion, incorporating images, sound clips, and hypertext links both to each other's papers and to outside Web resources. Written and assembled during the final weeks of the semester, *Once Upon a Time in the Eighties* was subsequently reviewed and rated a "Top 5% Web Site," and has also been a featured link on several high-profile Internet hotlists.

Grateful as I am for the attention the project has received from various segments of the wired world, it is important to understand that there is more at stake here than a pedagogical publicity stunt. In my opinion, the crucial dimension Web publishing projects add to student writing is the dimension of audience. Every composition class runs the risk of becoming mired in a cycle wherein papers are simply shuttled back and forth in a closed loop between writer, instructor, and—once

Pertinent URLs:

Once Upon a Time in the Eighties:

<http://www.eng1.virginia.edu/~enwr1016/index.html>

My on-line syllabus, readings, and assignments:

[\[day.clas.virginia.edu/~mgk3k/enwr/enwrhome.html\]\(http://fara-day.clas.virginia.edu/~mgk3k/enwr/enwrhome.html\)](http://fara-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

The Nameless Museum, by Karlyn Crowley's ENWR 101:

<http://www.eng1.virginia.edu/~enwr1013/Art/>

Finally, *Connections*, by Andy Stauffer's ENWR 201:

<http://www.unixlab.virginia.edu/~ams4k/enwr201/conn>
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