WEBSITE REVIEWS

SPEECH BANK

http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speechbank.htm

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Overview

Speech Bank provides the most important speeches in American history. It includes speeches of presidents, politicians, economists and many other distinguishing elite. The site contains more than 369 active links to over 5000 full text, audio and video (streaming) versions of public speeches, sermons, legal proceedings, lectures, debates, interviews, other recorded media events, and declarations.

Contents

The text and audio speeches/rhetors activated on the site cover every aspect of the American society and culture. Speeches of political, military, religious, industrial leaders account for considerable part of the content, which, in a sense, can be regarded as an epitome of the American history. For example, we can find not only political speeches by Abraham Lincoln as a great president but also his collected works and the best known speech in history as one of the great speakers for the day -

Gettysburg Address. The author of the site even thoughtfully provides two sound files for this speech read by two different modern real men in the popular formats of .ram and .mp3. Interestingly, we can follow the link to acquire the background knowledge accompanying the text of the speech, allowing us to understand more about the American Civil War, why Lincoln thought the address had been a failure and about Edward Everett, the main speaker for the day. The invention of Edison's phonograph ushered in a new era of "recorded" history. Beginning with President Benjamin Harrison in the late nineteenth century to the present day Bush Administration, the site allows us to capture the real and true voices of the American presidents in recent 100 years. Similarly, we can read and listen to at least eight speeches by George W. Bush on 11 September, including the famous *The World Will Always Remember 11 September.* We can also read lone dissent congresswoman Barbara Lee in opposition to Authoring the use of military force. You can even find transcript of bin Laden's video discussing 11 Sept Attacks.

Apart from the above, we can read, in other areas, Bertrand Russell, Bill Gates, Charles Dickens, Boeing Speeches, economic globalization, AT&T, Martin Luther King, Winston Churchill, Global Warming, Cal Ripkin, and U.S Department of Education Speeches, U.S Department of Justice Speeches, U.S. Supreme Court Cases/Arguments and etc.

The educational value of the site is obvious and quite good. Teachers/learners of English can access the speeches and statements for preparation of teaching materials or appreciation of English speeches or reading/writing supplement or even listening practice. As stated, it is an epitome of the American history in standard English. Teachers should make the best of the resources. From domain and pedagogy points of view, the site is a good companion for English learners/teachers.

Example Classroom Activity - Reading and Discussion

Title: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr & I Have a Dream

Procedures:

1.Highlight the seven links about Dr. King in the page and open the links in different windows, which will show his life, works, sermons, speech about his dream, speech about war and Nobel Prize Acceptance speech separately.

2. Ask the students to read these materials one by one and their relavant background information. Or print the materials in handouts with the following questions/discussions in Procedure 3 for distribution.

3.Ask the students to answer or discuss:

1)   Explain the definitions: discrimination; segregation; racial; nonviolence; boycott; dream; justice; minister; civil rights; peace; struggle; speech

2)   How much do you know about Dr.King?

3)   When and where did Dr.King deliver the speech "I Have a Dream"? What is his dream? Why did he make such a speech?

4)   Discuss the actions Dr. King took to work toward making his dream come true.

5)   What were Dr.King's feelings about war?

6)   True or false

   A. ___ The U. S. supported democracy around the world, but Americans were not worried at all about treatment of African Americans in the U. S. in the 1950s.

   B. ___ Dr. King came from a poor, uneducated family and rose to national and international fame.

   C. ___ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. first became a leader in the black community in the early 1960s.

   D. ___ Dr. King coordinated the Montomery, Alabama bus boycott.

   E. ___ Dr. King never received the Nobel Peace Prize as many people hoped he would.

4.Redo Procedure 2 and help to explain the key or difficult words in the opened windows make the students understand further.

5.Correct the mistakes the students made in Procedure 3 and ask them to tell more about the related topics.

6.Write about a dream that you have for yourself, your family, your community, or

the world.

Technical Issues

As the size of the top graphics and few logo is small, the downloading speed is fast. I found it loaded very quickly. There are not any special browser requirements and no need of special software to use the page elements. Of course a sound card should be equipped on the user's computer for listening to the sound files. Material in audio and streaming video formats requires a digital-audio player. The author adds one of icons for free download player. The downloading speed of the sound files is also fast as they are high compressed formats such as .mp3 or .ram. The quality of the sound is satisfactory. The words in the speech files are pronounced without delay or distortion. The site claims it is best viewed at 800 x 600 screen resolution.

The design of the site is not very good. All the speech links are embedded in one page in tables. You have to scroll continuously to locate the specific hypertext. Although the author suggests using Find to search the target word, it is not convenient to switch between the Find dialogue and the main window. The site should have a category column or Letter links added directing to each word beginning in that letter as done in some dictionary websites.

Interface

The site is highly intuitive in its design and methodology. The layout is good, making full use of space. Elements are concise and clear. The graphics are small and well suited to the overall presentation and appearance. The text and graphics are well balanced. The information display seems well laid out. There are no navigation bars on sides and all the links should be opened in new windows so as to view. So it is easy to use as all the speeches, including their titles and links, are listed alphabetically up and down by first name and arranged in a table in one page. The information flows logically and straight forward. Most links work well. There is sufficient text information shown which, though not bleeding-edge technology or visual appeal that

engage and excite the viewer, is necessary for teachers/learners of English. There is an efficient search engine, which comes up with the proper information when executing. The site is not quite user friendly and employs animations and some other pictures directing to other sites including several advertising/commercial sites. There are orphan pages found. I do not really like the color scheme which is very gray and dark. The color of fonts for further reading or search concerned with each speech topic is much confused with the background color and thus the hypertext is not well readable. The author should change this tedious color to some more bright and clear tincture in both hyperlink, the content and the background. The advertising graphics should be made well arranged and equally sized if they have to be inserted in the page. As most sites do, the site should also provide a navigation bar.

Interactivity

Except for an email address, the site is lacking on the interactivity side. As an online speech bank offering large quantities of valuable speech information, the site should have been provided a forum or message board or mailing list or chat room to facilitate discussion and exchange so that the visitors will make the best of the resources to interact with each other and enhance in turn their interest in learning and discussion. Or the author may post to call for valuable or precious speech contribution either in text or sound to attract more visitors and enrich the bank

Overall Issues

The site is copyrighted by Michael E. Eidenmuller. It clearly states the contact details and include several advertising banners or sponsor's windows. As regards currency the site is regularly updated. The most recent update was from Jan 29, 2002 for addition of President George W. Bush: *2002 State of the Union Address*. The content is given more attention than overall design and interface and it, is certainly of high educational value. I especially like the distinguishing feature of providing the rich and valuable speeches in both sound and text formats. I rate this site as excellent in its pedagogy and especially in teaching and learning English and the American history as

a learning supplement, though it has a lot of potential in some aspects that needs to be flushed out.