

## WEBSITE REVIEWS

### PORTALS FOR CHILDREN

[www.yahooligans.com](http://www.yahooligans.com), [www.lycoszone.com](http://www.lycoszone.com), [www.ajkids.com](http://www.ajkids.com), [www.babloo.com](http://www.babloo.com),  
[www.alfy.com](http://www.alfy.com), [www.zompi.com](http://www.zompi.com)

by Jarek Krajka

[jkrajka@batory.plo.lublin.pl](mailto:jkrajka@batory.plo.lublin.pl)

It is often said that the Web can be used at least with teenagers of intermediate level, because the majority of websites demands that level of language proficiency and age. Young Learners' teachers are disappointed with the difficulty of finding appropriate materials for their students, materials motivating learners because of the graphics, the content, and with language easy enough to be comprehended by beginners. Thus, in this issue of "Website Reviews" I would like to address that problem and have a look at portals for kids.

We all know that portals are gateways to the Web, allowing us to search the Web by keyword, use the thematic catalogues of resources, as well as benefit from other additional services such as news, email, chat, etc. There are a number of web portals for kids, which our children can use on their own, and the teachers can find there materials appropriate for this group of learners.

Yahooligans, [www.yahooligans.com](http://www.yahooligans.com), is the kid version of the most popular [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com). Just as its adult version, it enables searching the Web for sites containing a given keyword, using such strategies of narrowing down the search as searching with a +, with a -, or using inverted commas. The number of hits is considerably smaller than with the adult Yahoo, but surely there is still plenty of material to be used. Also, the portal allows searching by catalogue, using such categories as Around the World, Arts and Entertainment, Computers and Games, School Bell, Science and Nature, and Sports and Recreation. Inside each there are subcategories, allowing us to go deeper until we find a site we need. Apart from the search engine and the catalogue, the site offers such additional services as Sports (news, results, trivia questions), News (current news), Jokes, Games, Chat, Ask Earl, Shout Out, Messenger and Club. Another interesting feature of the portal is that it includes guides for parents and teachers on how to use the materials collected. Other features of the website are Net events, cool sites, what's new, favourite places in the Web. Although the portal is very low in graphics, pages are rather slow to download. What is more, in comparison with other portals it has relatively little material collected and its graphic side may not be appealing to children.

Lycoszone, [www.lycoszone.com](http://www.lycoszone.com), is a much more lively and interesting graphical environment. On the main site the user gets a colourful picture with four characters greeting him/her and inviting to the portal. On each site of the portal appealing graphics add to the interest of children. It is similar to the previous one in that it also has searching capabilities, However, there is no thematic catalogue as in Yahoooligans, and instead material is gathered into Games, Alfy's Games, Fun Stuff, Home Work, How Stuff Works and Comics. The portal is rich in games, namely arcade games, little kids games, mind games, action games, arts and crafts games and strategy games. When accessing a Fun Stuff section, our learners can read comics, sing, watch a movie or read a story. Home Work zone is divided into school subjects, and the students have also at their disposal such additional resources as an encyclopedia, an almanac, an atlas, a dictionary or a rhyming dictionary. In How Stuff Works, children can find out the mechanisms of different everyday life objects and inventions, all written in very simple language and nicely illustrated. Finally, students can access their favourite comics online. Lycoszone, just like Yahoooligans, has special pages for teachers and parents, giving them ideas and additional resources. When compared with the previous portal, it is less like an adult portal, as there is no traditional catalogue, and is much more appealing to children's imagination because of colourful graphics.

AskJeeves Kids, [www.ajkids.com](http://www.ajkids.com), is again a kids version of a portal Ask Jeeves, [www.askjeeves.com](http://www.askjeeves.com). The interesting feature about them is that both the adult and the kid site allow natural language querying, which means that a child may ask a normal question, such as for instance "What is engineering?" In response, the portal provides links to sites where the answer to the question can be found. Sometimes the answer is on the portal's sites, but usually it links to some other websites. In comparison with a keyword search and a catalogue search, this method is much quicker and more child-friendly, and therefore this portal is highly recommended if we give our young students some searching task. Apart from that, students can use Study Tools (dictionary, thesaurus, biography, clipart, atlas), Advice (read letters with problems written to the portal and the advice given). Message Boards section allows children to see the topics raised by other students, read specific messages and reply to them or compose their own ones. Tours (Wildlife, Pirate, Wizardry, Go Buggy and Valentine's Day) are interactive collections of questions and answers on a specific topic, guiding students through a variety of materials, and providing in-depth information on a given topic in the form of a guided tour.

Babloo, [www.babloo.com](http://www.babloo.com), is a portal for "Kids and Adults with a Kid in Them." It is an integrated, interactive, and holistic learning environment for children, claiming to focus on

their intellectual, social and spiritual development. Babloo's content is multi-lingual, audio-integrated and comprises rhymes, stories, jokes, games, quiz, school subjects and other information. The graphical design of the site is extremely appealing, and really pretty pictures and friendly characters encourage children to work on the site. What is interesting about it is that it is divided into different age periods, namely a toddler, a prankster and a youngster. In each, a number of different resources can be found, such as rhymes, fairy tales, moral stories, fun learning, science experiments, amazing facts, articles, jokes, information about countries, festivals, arts and crafts, great personalities, mythological stories, etc. In order to fully benefit from Babloo's content, one needs to register by filling an extremely simple form. It should be noted that this portal, unlike others discussed, classifies content according to the age of a child, in this way reflecting more children's needs and interests.

Alfy, [www.alfy.com](http://www.alfy.com), one of the largest web portal for kids, allows 3-9 year olds to safely and easily experience everything the cyber world has to offer. ALFY is a fun, accessible, educational centre full of interactive stories, games, crafts, activities. In order to protect kids from inappropriate content, all sites are hand-selected by a team of educators, and special filtering software can be downloaded for free from the site. The animated graphics and extensive use of sounds make the site simple for young kids to navigate. ALFY is divided into eight main centres packed with original content: Brain Train (engaging activities with academic focus), Music Mania (kids playing music instruments, recording melodies, listening to their creations), Storyville (interactive stories), Create (where students design their own online masterpieces in a virtual art studio), Clubhouse (online surveys, homepages, greeting cards), Surprises (jokes, riddles, adopting virtual pets), Alfy's Arcade (games). The site can be thoroughly recommended for rich variety of materials, both for fun and learning, set in an appealing graphical environment.

Zompi.com ([www.zompi.com](http://www.zompi.com)) is an Internet web guide and search engine created for kids. It offers a safe-surf environment for kids and aims at enriching the lives of children by providing the safest, educational and fun online experience. The sites contained in Zompi.com are appropriate for and appealing to children of all ages. These websites include kid/family oriented information, online games, family resources, educational material, free and fun stuff. Zompi is a website with free access to the Internet community and its directory contains topics targeted specifically for kids. Each topic has hyperlinks to thousands of web sites, and all of them are claimed to be "kid friendly", meeting content and safety criteria. The site is similar to Yahoo!igans, as it also has standard categories (Books, Education, Music, etc.), additional services (news, sports, weather, cards, maps), and allows a keyword search.

To sum up, it can be seen that there are plenty of sites for kids in, which teachers of English can use to teach Young Learners with the Internet. The sites discussed above are the gateways to the Web, classifying content, allowing searching, preventing children from accessing inappropriate materials. Some are more like adult portals ([www.yahooligans.com](http://www.yahooligans.com), [www.zompi.com](http://www.zompi.com)), providing advanced searching capabilities and additional services. Others offer a gamelike environment for children, motivating them with attractive graphics ([www.babloo.com](http://www.babloo.com), [www.alfy.com](http://www.alfy.com)). All link and catalogue thousands of kids-oriented websites, providing teachers and learners with enormous variety and choice of interesting and interactive teaching materials.