## 136    SHOULD KIDS BE ABLE TO SURF THE INTERNET?

Dear Editor,

Most public libraries now offer all visitors, kids and adults alike, free access to all sites on the Internet. Just like any powerful tool, limits must be placed on it. After all, not all sites are good for children or appropriate for them. Some are violent. Some, in the name of free speech, say irresponsible things. Others feature incorrect information for research. And many should be labeled "For Adults Only."

In 2000, there were 7.1 million publicly available sites on the Web, with over 200 new adult sites added each day. Couple this figure with the fact that there are roughly 200 million American children under the age 18 with Internet access, and you have a recipe for disaster.

Back in 1967, the American Library Association (ALA) passed a resolution that stated "a person's right to use a library should not be denied ... because of origin, age, background, or views." Some groups argue that this resolution gives children the right to free and total access to the Internet and its unsuitable sites.

This resolution was fine in the past, but it never considered the birth of the Internet. Besides, the ALA isn't a government agency. It has no power to pass laws, and its resolutions are not legally binding.

We must pass real laws that tie U.S. government funds for library computers to the use of software that blocks out offensive material online. If the libraries don't use the software, then they don't get computers.

As a working parent, I can't be with my child every time he turns on the computer. I don't expect libraries to be babysitters. But I do expect them to work with me, not against me, in making sure my child is protected from adult-only and other irresponsible sites.

Sincerely,
Julie Richardson
Redding, California

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Dear Editor,

What if, when our nation was pushing west, someone stepped forward at the Mississippi River and said, "Okay, that's far enough!" and we had stopped? We would never know the wonders that lay beyond.

Those who would restrict Internet access are threatening to destroy expansion on a similar scale. Of the nearly 9,000 public libraries in the United States, over 60 percent offer access to the Internet. But this learning tool could be seriously hampered by the increasing number of libraries using software to block access to certain Web sites.

Lawmakers were threatening the democratic mission of libraries by forcing them to use blocking software. This software prevents access to many areas on the Internet, including sites dealing with art, literature, women's health, politics, religion, and free speech.

Public libraries provide information to all, regardless of race, economic background, and age. What if you can't afford a home computer and your only choice is to use one of the library's? If this computer uses blocking software, then you are being denied the access that people with home computers have.

Obviously, we have to protect our kids from disturbing images and vicious predators. But that protection would come in the form of teaching, not preaching. As the American Civil Liberties Union suggests, we should start Drivers' Ed-type courses that show kids how to navigate the roads of the Internet. These classes would teach children to use critical thinking and reasoning skills to distinguish between what's valuable and what's trash. We should give our kids the tools they need to make the right decisions, not make the decisions for them. Let's not kill something before we understand it.

Sincerely yours,
Ali Hershey
Salisbury, Maryland

1. Internet access is available to _____
   A. adults and children in most libraries.
   B. adults only in some libraries.
   C. some visitors in some libraries.
   D. children if they are accompanied by an adult.

2. Which statement is an opinion?
   A. Limits must be placed on Internet sites.
   B. Some public libraries offer free Internet access.
   C. The Internet is a source of information.
   D. Many libraries have computers.

3. The writer believes children should be _____
   A. encouraged to use the Internet freely.
   B. monitored while using the Internet to protect them from inappropriate sites.
   C. prevented from using powerful tools.
   D. exposed to violent and irresponsible Web sites.

4. What right of an American citizen would be violated if the Internet were censored?
   A. the right to vote
   B. the right to bear arms
   C. the right to pursue happiness
   D. the right to free speech

5. According to the first paragraph, libraries must _____
   A. place limits on Internet access.
   B. allow free access to the Internet.
   C. charge children to enter adult Web sites.
   D. not allow any children to "surf the net."

6. Julie Richardson wrote her letter _____
   A. to persuade the government to require inappropriate subjects to be blocked on the Internet.
   B. to ban Internet use in libraries.
   C. to agree with the ALA's 1967 resolution.
   D. to require adult supervision during Internet use.

7. The main idea of Ali Hershey's letter is that blocking software _____
   A. is necessary to protect children.
   B. denies users the right of free speech.
   C. denies users access to some appropriate and important information.
   D. protects children from only violent and disturbing sites.

8. In 1967, _____
   A. many households had Internet access.
   B. the Internet did not exist.
   C. children were not allowed in libraries.
   D. blocking software was popular.

9. What is the term Julie Richardson used that means bad things are bound to happen?
   A. "an accident waiting to happen"
   B. "burning bridges"
   C. "six-to-one, half-dozen to another"
   D. "a recipe for disaster"

10. What does Julie Richardson consider as "unsuitable" for children?
    A. information about body parts
    B. information about violent events
    C. information unsuitable for every family
    D. information about weapons

11. What does Ali Hershey propose instead of blocking software?
    A. joining the American Civil Liberties Union
    B. boycotting the library
    C. restricting Internet access
    D. providing classes to teach children to make responsible decisions

12. Julie Richardson proposes that libraries must use blocking software or they will _____
    A. lose their computers.
    B. forfeit their funding for computers.
    C. close the library.
    D. be breaking the law.

The word *desertification* was first used in 1949 by the French geographer Andre Aubreville to describe the change in North and equatorial Africa from productive savanna forest, grasslands, and shrublands into unproductive desert. Desertification does not refer to the expansion of existing deserts, but rather to the **degradation** of productive drylands (rangeland or cropland) into less productive desert. Drylands occur on every continent, and are estimated to cover around 40 percent of the earth's surface. In the past, drylands recovered after long droughts and dry periods through shifting agricultural practices, nomadic herding, and so forth. Today, however, pressure on drylands is heightened due to intensive agricultural practices and increasing populations.

Desertification became well known in the 1930's, when parts of the Great Plains in the United States turned into the "Dust Bowl" as a result of drought and poor practices in farming (although the term itself was not used until 1949). The massive erosion during those years has been blamed on inappropriate use of technology (ploughing the prairies), overpopulation in the affected region, and lack of rainfall. Many people believe that the problems related to the Dust Bowl have been solved by resettlement of some of the remaining population, the establishment of National Grasslands and the Soil Conservation Service, government spending and regulation, and the return in most years of "normal rainfall." However, the United Nations reports that Texas and New Mexico are some of the fastest, most severely desertifying areas of the world.

We have lots of names for this problem: droughts and floods, weeds, overgrazing, wildfire, endangered species, and the chronic **downtrodden** state of the agricultural economy (in spite of massive subsidies, enormous technical improvements, and overseas markets). These are problems for that tiny sector of the economy known as agriculture. Although we have separate government agencies in charge of each of the symptoms, these "rural problems" can and do turn into urban problems. According to the U.N.'s Kofi Annan, "drought and desertification threaten the livelihood of over 1 billion people in more than 110 countries around the world." According to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, "70 percent of the world's drylands (excluding hyper-arid deserts), or some 3.600 million hectares, are degraded."

In 1992, Rhodesian wildlife biologist Allan Savory came to a startling conclusion. Most experts on desertification blame overpopulation, overstocking with livestock, overcutting of trees, poverty, warfare,

inadequate technology or education, or shifting cultivation. In West Texas, where Savory was working at the time, none of these causes were present. Rural population was declining, livestock numbers were way down from earlier decades, mesquite trees were **encroaching**, and there was peace. Money, technology, and education were abundant, all land was privately owned, and there was no shifting cultivation. Yet West Texas was desertifying as rapidly as the worst areas of Africa or Asia.

Savory felt that the decision framework that most people use, and in which they are unconsciously trained, is well adapted to treat symptoms, but leaves the causes unaddressed. Savory was forced to conclude that the lack of a holistic decision framework was the fundamental cause of human-induced desertification, in both ancient and modern times.

By 1992, the United Nations Environment Programme had spent US $6 billion treating the symptoms of desertification, with another $450 billion called for. Though some people are skeptical of the U.N's figures for the rate at which productive land is turning into unproductive desert, the reality worldwide is that land deterioration continues to have a serious impact on the quality of people's lives. We owe it to ourselves and to future generations to understand the causes of desertification and loss of biodiversity, and to support the numerous practitioners of cost-effective, successful approaches. More efficient use of existing water resources and control of salinization have proven to be effective tools for improving **arid** lands. New ways are being sought to use surface-water resources such as rainwater harvesting or irrigating with seasonal runoff from adjacent highlands. Further, new methods of finding and tapping groundwater resources are also being pursued, as well as developing more effective ways of irrigating arid and semi-arid lands. Research on the reclamation of deserts is focusing on discovering proper crop rotation to protect the fragile soil, on understanding how sand-fixing plants can be adapted to local environments, and on how grazing lands and water resources can be developed effectively without being overused.

1. What does the passage mainly discuss?
    A. Factors limiting crop production
    B. Desertification
    C. Inappropriate use of technology
    D. Research on desert reclamation

2. The word "downtrodden" in the passage closest in meaning to _____
    A. esteemed    B. miserable    C. commendable    D. urban

3. What is the purpose of paragraph 3?

A. To explain the significance of drought and desertification in the world
B. To compare effects of desertification in rural and urban areas
C. To describe how the U.N. is combating desertification
D. To persuade people to help stop the spread of desertification

4. The word "degradation" in paragraph 1 is closest in meaning to _____

A. deterioration
B. improvement
C. enhancement
D. betterment

5. The word "encroaching" in the passage could best be replaced by _____

A. dispersing
B. retreating
C. declining
D. advancing

6. According to the passage, what did Savory conclude was the primary cause of human-induced desertification?
A. The effects of global warming
B. Politicians have not taken the problem seriously enough
C. A lack of a holistic decision framework
D. Shifting cultivation trends

7. It can be inferred from paragraph 6 that _____
A. the problem of desertification may not be as serious as previously thought
B. not enough money has been spent on treating the symptoms of desertification
C. desertification is an important global issue that needs cost-effective solutions
D. the U.N.'s figures regarding desertification are undisputed

8. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a way of controlling desertification?
A. More efficient use of water resources
B. Rainwater harvesting
C. Increased government funding
D. Irrigating with seasonal runoff

9. The word "arid" in the last paragraph is closest in meaning to _____
A. damp        B. fertile        C. lush        D. barren