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Gale Virtual Reference Library Supports Digital Literacy in a “Gold Medal” School

Students and educators at Rhode Island’s Barrington High School have good reason to be proud. Barrington recently received a gold medal in *U.S. News & World Report’s* 2014 Best High Schools ranking, placing in the top 500 based on highest college readiness, among 19,400 schools nationwide. Barrington Library Media Specialist and K-12 Library Department Head Suzanne Costa has first-hand knowledge of students’ college readiness skills. The library’s program — which features the reliable content, robust search tools, and friendly interface of the *Gale Virtual Reference Library (GVRL)* — plays an integral role in helping students become digitally literate.

“Barrington High School Library is the hub of learning in our school,” says Suzanne. “It is a very welcoming place and has been recognized for its rigorous research curriculum and the excellent technology and research skills of our students.”

Of late, Suzanne’s efforts have been to transition to a digital library environment, and consequently, a virtual learning environment for students. Barrington is hoping to embrace a 1:1 initiative in which all students in grades nine through twelve will have Chromebooks. Suzanne and her colleagues are preparing students to thrive in that environment. “We transitioned to Gale about two years ago, wanting to move towards an e-book environment. We piloted different e-books with faculty and found that the GVRL was the most popular database — and certainly the most productive for our research. Data shows it has been beneficial for our students. One of the many benefits of GVRL is the universal password. Our students only need to know one password to access all e-books.”

The library’s package of Gale databases includes the *Literature Resource Center*, *Opposing Viewpoints in Context*, *World History in Context*, *U.S. History in Context*, and *Science in Context*. “Transition to a fully digital environment was seamless,” says Suzanne. “We began by purchasing e-books of Gale print products that we had, such as the *Novels for Students* and *American Decades* series, so students and faculty were already familiar with them.” The former offers analysis, context, and criticism on the most frequently studied novels from various cultures and time periods; the latter is a cross-disciplinary source covering the events, people, and social trends that have had an impact on contemporary history.

GVRL HELPS STUDENTS ACHIEVE DIGITAL LITERACY

“There are so many benefits to Gale,” says Suzanne. “It supports a variety of reading levels, which enables us to differentiate instruction. Students can listen to articles, download files, and search in a variety of ways. The interface is friendly — there’s nothing overwhelming about it.”



CHALLENGE

- High school students need to be digitally literate to prepare for college and their futures, and must have hands-on experience to develop skills.

SOLUTION

- Gale Virtual Reference Library
- Gale “In Context” series
- Novels for Students series
- American Decades series

RESULTS

- Gale supports development of information literacy by providing easy-to-use, but powerful, search features and access to thousands of authoritative e-resources covering virtually every academic, scholarly, and professional discipline. It’s an ideal resource to complement 1:1 initiatives.
- Students become good “digital citizens” by learning the importance of crediting sources as well as proper citation with Gale’s citation tools.
- GVRL supports differentiated instruction by offering materials at different reading levels. Teachers can easily integrate high-quality resources into their curriculum, and have peace of mind in knowing that their students are using the same rich, varied resources in their papers and research projects.
- Universal password allows students to easily access all e-books with a single password.

“Gale e-books and online databases are fully integrated in the classroom instruction. At this high school, Gale digital resources enhance learning for all of our students.”

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To learn more about
this and other resources
provided by Gale, visit:
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“Primarily, the platform gives students experience with a variety of information literacy skills. In addition to providing excellent content, the Gale interface supports a variety of research skills. Students can search by subject, by keyword, and within text. I always teach the dual views — a student can look at information as a PDF (formatted like book pages) and also have the text view to search within the document. Students need to know both methods, but if they learn better in an online hyperlinked environment, they can read in the text view, and if they read better in print format, they can read the PDF.” Suzanne says students also like the citations at the end of the article, provided in MLA format. “Proper citation and giving credit to sources is all part of being a good digital citizen, and Gale products give students that benefit.”

TEACHERS INTEGRATE GVRL INTO THE CURRICULUM

“Students have improved in terms of being able to identify what kind of resource they’re using, which is an important skill. They can pull out information in a specific way and target their research. They know they can search an e-book for reference information and a magazine database for current information. For example, World History students had a Connections Through Time project, for which they researched historical information through GVRL, and connected it to the present day. They searched *World History In Context* for newspapers, journals, and magazines and made the connections through time. They have become efficient researchers, and they’ll need those skills in college.”

Librarian-teacher collaboration is integral to Barrington’s library program. “Teachers are very knowledgeable about 21st century skills and information literacy skills. We work with teachers on lesson plans, suggesting resources based on skills the students need to learn and content required. We also team-teach lessons together.” When asked if the school plans to incorporate library resources into the classroom, Suzanne says, “In terms of developing skills in research and information gathering, Gale is *the* source of information; Gale e-books and online databases are *fully* integrated in the classroom instruction. At this high school, Gale digital resources enhance learning for all of our students.”

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