NationMaster.com. *Access:* http://www. nationmaster.com/.

Gathering statistics from a variety of sources and presenting them in an easy-to-use and interesting graphical format is the purpose behind NationMaster.com. Designed by a Web publishing company in Australia and launched in May 2003, the site is an excellent ready-reference resource for teachers, students, and librarians. Self-described as "a massive central data source," the developers bring together information found in a wide range of documents, including the *Central Intelligence Agency World Fact Book* and various United Nations reports and surveys.

nationmaster.COM

The large numerical database is used as a basis for interactively generating charts and maps that rank countries in a number of topic areas.

In addition to lists of prepared country rankings, such as "Richest" (Luxembourg) and "Most Trigger Happy" (South Africa), users may also take advantage of the site's scripting language to select from the more than 600 statistical variables available to create customized charts. Whether the top five countries for life expectancy or the bottom five countries for winter Olympics medals, rankings and bar graphs appear instantly. Broad subject categories range from "Crime," "Currency," and "Democracy" to "Religion," "Sports," and "Transportation."

Other features of the site include simple but legible political maps and national flags, as well as a keyword search engine. An online encyclopedia (Wikipedia) gives additional background, definitions, history, and facts. The encyclopedia articles are embedded within regional and country profiles and are not independently searchable from within the NationMaster.com site. Discussion forums based on geographical or topic interest have also been established. Links to ads are present; however they have been unobtrusively integrated into the site.

Sources for all facts and figures are cited, which researchers will especially appreciate.

While most statistics come from international agencies, such as the U.S. Census Bureau and UNESCO, other sources include various think tanks, advocacy organizations, commercial entities, and, in one case, an individual with subject expertise. There are some inconsistencies in providing statistical definitions for all data and not all countries appear in all data results. There are a few linking errors to incorrect pages.

A relatively new site, the information found here appears to be current and accurate. Although not completely authoritative, the easy user interface gets researchers quickly to informative data. This well-designed site, whose motto is "Where Stats Come Alive!" deserves a look.—*Linda Frederiksen, Washington State University, frederik@vancouver.wsu.edu*

Omniglot: A guide to writing systems. *Access:* http://www.omniglot.com/.

Simon Ager, a multilingual Web developer, created Omniglot to provide information about all languages with a written form. Omniglot guides users to over 160 different alphabets, syllabaries, and other writing systems.

The site also provides a small bibliography as well as links to language-related resources, such as sites to download fonts, electronic dictionaries, and online language courses.

Omniglot contains details of many written languages. The writing systems are divided into five categories: alphabetic, syllabic, logographic, undeciphered, and alternative. Each writing system page includes information on origins, notable features, characteristics, the languages for which the system is used, the alphabet (and often times numerals), and links to other online sources.

The site also includes pages featuring numerous languages. These pages include a brief history of the language, the alphabet,

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transcriptions and pronunciations using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), a sample text with translation, and links to sites, such as newspapers and radio stations in that language.

Ager assures users that the site is a work in progress. He encourages submissions of invented writing systems and languages, with 12 writing systems invented by visitors to the site already present.

Another feature of Omniglot can be found at "Tower of Babel." The Biblical tale of the Tower of Babel offers one explanation of why there are so many different languages in the world. The story is available in 50 different languages from this page. Ager explains, "having a single text in a variety of languages is a good way to see similarities and differences between those languages."

A navigation bar is available on every page allowing the user to jump to the writing systems, as well as to pages such as the "Book Store," "Language Learning," "Tower of Babel," "Puzzles," "Multilingual Computing," downloadable "Free Foreign Fonts," and "Bibliography." The multilingual computing page gives the shortcuts needed for adding accents and special characters when using a Mac, Windows, or editing HTML coding, and a news page lets the user know the dates when pages were added or updated.

Omniglot has a clean, uniform look. It is easy to navigate, with easy-to-read descriptions, cross-references, and graphics, when needed to demonstrate a particular writing system. The site would be of interest to students studying languages and linguistics.— *Cassandra E. Osterloh, University of New Mexico, osterloh@unm.edu*

St. Nicholas: Discovering the Truth about Santa Claus. *Access:* http:// www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=23/.
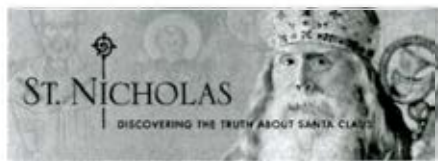
This site is the creation of the St. Nicholas Center, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to share stories and legends of St. Nicholas, encourage others to celebrate his feast day, and provide resources for education. The center also seeks "to help people understand and appreciate the original St. Nicholas, the only real Santa Claus."

This site is divided into five main sections: "Who is St. Nicholas," "Around the World," "How to Celebrate," "Events," and "For Kids."

Sections of most interest are "Who is St. Nicholas" and "Around the World." "Who is St. Nicholas" contains a short biography as well as legends and stories that attest to his character as a "protector" and "helper to those in need." Along the left side of the page, there are additional links to information about St. Nicholas, including "Origin of Santa," which tells how St. Nicholas came to be known as Santa Claus.

"Around the World" shows how different countries celebrate St. Nicholas Day with their own customs and traditions. Twenty countries, including the United States, are represented in this section. Younger users will be interested in the "For Kids" section, which contains stories, poems, legends, pictures, games, and activities.

Researchers will want to visit "Gallery." This section offers a colorful collection of images from around the world such as frescos, icons, stained glass windows, coins, book illustrations, and ceramics that feature St. Nicholas.

Searching this site can be done in one of three ways: by clicking on one of the main sections or topics, through the search box, or via the site map. Navigating around the site is fairly easy as links, a search box, and a site map are available on every page.

St. Nicholas: Discovering the Truth about Santa Claus is an up-to-date site with plans to add more content. Some of its pages, such as "St. Nicholas and the Origin of Santa Claus" list sources cited, while others such as "Who is St. Nicholas," don't. A partial bibliography of sources used to develop the site is available in the "Related Info" section.

Overall, it is a fun and easy site to visit and learn more about St. Nicholas and Santa Claus; art historians, religious studies students, and general users will find this site of interest.—*Carolyn Piatz, University of Portland, piatz@up.edu* ∎