

Learning Sideways

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NYPL Biblion Apps: An Invitation to Explore

The New York Public Library has created its second Biblion app (for iPad). Both in the series are amazing.

The more recently released second app-about Frankenstein-explores Mary Shelley's sources, process, and lasting impact on literature and imagination, and it includes the novel. The first in the series is about the 1939-40 New York World's Fair.

Both apps contain huge amounts of content from the NYPL's collections, including expert essays, source materials, historical documents, original manuscripts, image galleries, audio and video files, and all sorts of information about the "ripple effect" created by the World's Fair and Shelley's novel. There are social elements too. App users can add commentary and read or respond to commentary added by others. And the content is dynamic; the NYPL will add related content as it becomes available to them.

In the intro to the apps, the NYPL discusses how this kind of app seems like a natural evolutionary step for libraries and librarians. I agree. These apps are all about opening the stacks and helping users make connections between fascinating content.

And aside from the content itself, these apps seem like a really cool model for mobile-driven or online learning. I teach *Frankenstein*, and that app is full of great information presented in an engaging, thought provoking way-so much so that I'm planning to revise my unit to incorporate it. And both apps seem richer and far

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more engaging than a digital “textbook”-the authentic interactive element alone seems like a step up for such thought-provoking material. Who can’t help but think aloud (or via keyboard) about how Shelley’s story relates to contemporary conversations about what we think it means to be a monster-or to be human? And thoughts about the promise and peril of progress immediately bubble up in response to the World’s Fair app.

Though both apps are clearly “academic” in content, they are packaged in such a way that they seem much less like a “class” and much more like an invitation to explore.

Kudos to the NYPL!