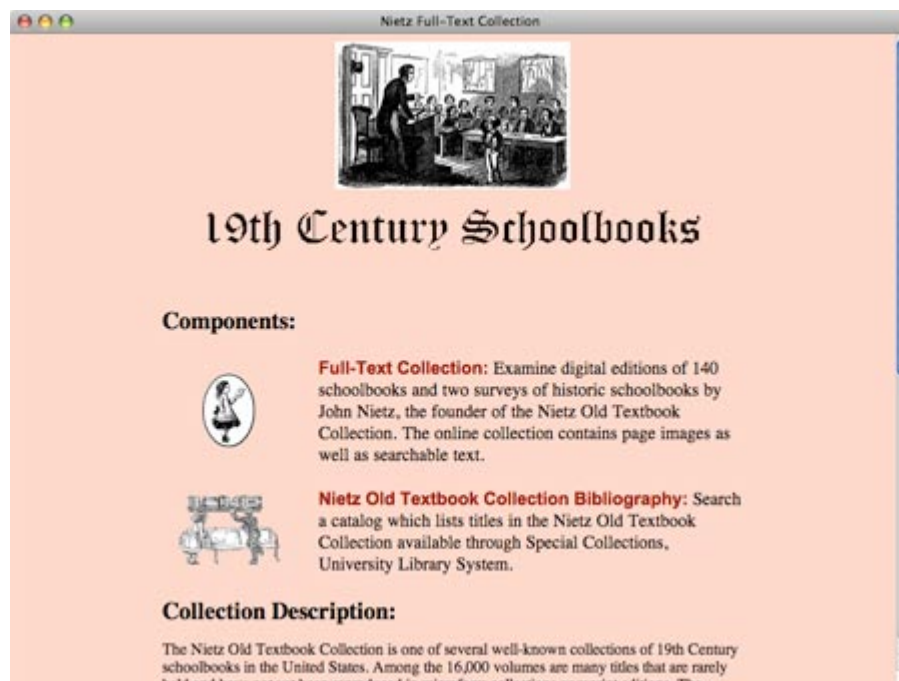


# Instructions for the Young: Nineteenth-Century Schoolbooks



*The Common-place Web Library reviews and lists online resources and Websites likely to be of interest to our viewers. Each quarterly issue will feature one or more brief site reviews. The library itself will be an ongoing enterprise with regular new additions and amendments. So we encourage you to check it frequently. At the moment, the library is small, but with your help we expect it to grow rapidly. If you have suggestions for the Web Library, or for site reviews, please forward them to the [Administrative Editor](#).*

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Patricia Cleary  
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<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/n/nietz/>

The April 2009 special issue of *Common-place*, "[Who Reads an Early American Book?](#)" prompted a search of Websites devoted to nineteenth-century texts directed at youthful readers. Among a number of valuable sites, one that stands out as of potential interest to scholars and K-12 teachers alike is the University of Pittsburgh's [Nineteenth-Century Schoolbooks](#), part of its [Digital](#)

[Research Library](#). Based on the "Nietz Old Textbook Collection" of sixteen thousand volumes, the online archive contains page images and searchable text for 140 schoolbooks. John Nietz, a professor of education at University of Pittsburgh and student of John Dewey at University of Chicago, began the collection by donating nine thousand volumes of early primary and secondary texts at his retirement in the late 1950s.

Although the quantity of material available online is just a small portion of the print Nietz collection, the multiple means of searching the digitized texts make this site user-friendly. Options include standard subject-title-author and publication-date searches, Boolean and proximity searches, and book browsing.

Typing *Phillis Wheatley* into the search engine generates just one result: a brief biography from an 1872 work, *A manual of American literature: a text-book for schools and colleges*. Slavery turns up 445 hits. Pursuing *Crispus Attucks* leads to William Holmes McGuffey's *Fifth Eclectic Reader* (1879)—one of several McGuffey readers on the site—which offers a gripping take on the Boston Massacre, one that can be instructively compared with Samuel G. Goodrich's 1843 version in *A pictorial history of the United States: with notices of other portions of America*. Although searching for specific topics generates interesting results, perhaps more fascinating are the insights to be found from browsing through texts, such as Thomas Kimber's 1815 *The American class book, or, A collection of instructive readings lessons: adapted to the use of schools: selected from Blair's class book, etc.* In addition to sections on natural history and religion, the text ranges across such subjects as "Of Fire and Its Application to the Preparation of Food," the speech of Seneca, the cultivation of taste, and the "Phenomena of Winter in the Polar Regions."

A bibliography of secondary materials on textbooks, how to read them, and how the practitioners of various disciplines have analyzed them is included. Although it contains no works published after 1999, the bibliographic coverage of twentieth-century scholarship and brief abstracts would nonetheless make it a useful starting point for working with the collection. Similarly helpful for more sustained research is the overview of library collections, microfilm, and Web resources, which directs visitors' attention to notable collections holding tens of thousands of volumes relevant to the history of education. Also included are two comprehensive surveys by Nietz, available and searchable in full online: *Old Textbooks* and *The Evolution of American Secondary School Textbooks*, both covering the evolution of texts at both the primary and secondary levels in multiple disciplines up to 1900. As the online archive does not offer introductory remarks for each work, these two volumes provide welcome context for the evolution of subjects treated in the textbooks.

In short, this straightforward site possesses a clearly defined focus, a useful archive of nineteenth-century sources on education, a good survey of secondary and archival materials, and an effective set of search tools, rendering it helpful to scholars, teachers, and students interested in investigating how subjects from spelling, rhetoric, and penmanship to American history,

geography, and art were presented in the past.

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