

# World's Best Children's Library 2.0

## Spotlight Review

by Melissa Worcester



All ages. \$39.95. DVD-ROM works with Windows and newer Macs.

*Castle Kingdom, 2940 E 4430 S, Salt Lake City, UT 84124 (801) 273-1800. [Castlekingdom.net](http://Castlekingdom.net).*

The staggering number of books on the **World's Best Children's Library 2.0** DVD is hard to wrap your mind around. The publisher claims it holds "most of the books on the English required reading list for high school, and over 500 books which boys traditionally have liked to read" including genres such as science fiction, westerns and classic English books. Many, if not most, are works of literature that were written in the 19th and early 20th centuries and are now in the public domain.

So how many books are on this DVD? 3800 books, by 530 authors. Authors you've heard of and authors you haven't. Books you've read or always wanted to read; books and other documents you never knew a certain author wrote; books and authors you've never heard of, that have been forgotten by modern publishing. Here is just a partial

list of authors: Louisa May Alcott, Horatio Alger, Hans Christian Andersen, Jane Austen, J.M. Barrie, L. Frank Baum, Bronte Sisters, Robert Browning, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Susan Coolidge, Richard Harding Davis, Charles Dickens, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, E.M. Forster, Elizabeth Gaskell, Zane Grey, Jacob Grimm, Bret Harte, G.A. Henty (a complete collection of over 200 works), Laura Lee Hope, William Dean Howells, Rudyard Kipling, Andrew Lang, Jack London, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, George MacDonald, Johnston McCulley, L.M. Montgomery, E. Nesbit, Howard Pyle, James Whitcomb Riley, Sax Rohmer, Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain, Hendrick van Loon, Jules Verne, and H.G. Wells.

How does it work and what does it look like? It's a DVD, not a CD, but it works essentially like a data CD. The simple menu allows you to browse alphabetically either by the author or by the title of the book. Under Author, you can click on the author's name in the list

on the left and see a list of the books by that author on the right.

You are allowed to print out any of the materials for your own use, if desired. With the right software, books can also be converted to speech, which is helpful for the visually impaired.

Now come the details that keep this from being an absolutely flawless product. First, when you click on the book titles in the menu listing, the text is opened in Internet Explorer, even if that's not the default browser on your computer. (This DVD supposedly works on newer Mac computers; I don't know what would happen if your Mac doesn't have IE on it.) If your security settings are set to block Active-X scripts, you will get a message asking whether you want to run these potentially risky scripts. I found that even if I hit "no," the text file still opened in the browser window, so you're not forced to run risky scripts. If you prefer, you can just use Windows Explorer and the text editor or word processor of your choice to open the various text files on the DVD, which is a slightly more

inconvenient method which doesn't force you to use Internet Explorer.

Second, with one exception, these files are just plain text, no illustrations. The exception is the series of McGuffey Readers, which are in HTML format instead of plain text and contain color pictures of the covers, black and white illustrations from inside, and lots of tables containing phonics and grammar material.

You should be aware that many, if not all, of the books on this DVD are available as free downloads from the Internet. Further, the more popular ones are often available in several file formats, some of which may contain scans of the illustrations from the printed versions of the books. The DVD does not seem to contain illustrations for any except the McGuffey Readers.

Nevertheless, this DVD is an exceptional value even as a reading list and compilation of text at your fingertips, especially if you have a slow Internet connection.

Besides all the benefits for home-

schoolers, this DVD would be a great gift for any missionary going overseas.

The texts are of good quality and can be copied to your computer's hard drive or to a portable book reader or PDA device, and you can print them out at any font size your computer and printer support. They contain stories which reflect the higher moral standards of the 19th and early 20th centuries, so they can be given to children without much oversight. Parents should note that some of the stories have magic in them. If you are familiar with the stories of E. Nesbit (which are included on this DVD) you will have some idea of the kind of magic stories I am talking about. Also, there are westerns and mysteries, including Sherlock Holmes stories, so you will find some crime depicted in some of the stories as well, though the good guys always win in the end.

This product has been compared to the Robinson Curriculum [www.robinsoncurriculum.com](http://www.robinsoncurriculum.com), but they are really quite different in many important ways. *The World's Best Children's Library* seems to

contain a great many more books than Robinson, and they are more oriented toward reading for enjoyment, while the Robinson books are more skewed toward history, science and religion. The Robinson Curriculum is an actual curriculum so it includes many textbooks and resources that are not novels (vocabulary, etc.), which *The World's Best Children's Library* does not. The Robinson Curriculum also comes with lots of academic helps, such as printable flash cards, a course of study, vocabulary excerpts for each book, and SAT style comprehensive exams for many books. Additional print resources are also available. *The World's Best Children's Library* is viewed in Internet Explorer, while Robinson Curriculum has its own stand-alone viewer.

Bottom line: the products are actually complementary; if you like one, you might like both. Robinson is a more complete curriculum. The World's Best Children's Library contains many additional books for the voracious reader at a very reasonable price.

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