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Grade schoolers liven up the Net

Fourth, fifth and sixth graders from around the United States were busy this week dividing some \$500,000 in cash and prizes along with their coaches and schools. Their winnings come for creating educational Web sites whose topics ranged from J.



By [Miguel Llanos](#) | May 20, 1998 | Topic: [Servers](#)

Fourth, fifth and sixth graders from around the United States were busy this week dividing some \$500,000 in cash and prizes along with their coaches and schools.

Their winnings come for creating educational Web sites whose topics ranged from J.J. the Whale to Down Syndrome to ancient Egypt.

28 winning teams were selected from nearly 300 entries in the first annual [ThinkQuest Jr.](#) (<http://www.advanced.org/tq-junior/>) contest.

The top award, the Best of Contest category, went to three first-time Web creators: Mona Haynes, 9; Leah Minamide, 12; and Amelia Rhodewalt, 10.



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Coached by Minamide's mother, Elaine, the team used e-mail to overcome a huge geographical obstacle: Haynes lives in Boston, while the Minamides live in Escondido, Calif., and Rhodewalt lives in La Quinta, Calif.

Assisted with technical guidance from their fathers, the team created a nifty site about the rescue and recent release by Seaworld of J.J. the Whale. Each of the three students was awarded \$5,000 in cash, their teacher-coach \$10,000 in cash, and their school \$5,000 in cash and computer networking equipment.

Elaine Minamide, an English teacher at the North County Christian School where the project was based, laughed when asked who'd decide how her daughter spends her prize money. "We'll definitely put most of it away for college," she said, but "we'll let her play with some of it."

Ironically, their school doesn't even have a Web site of its own. But Elaine Minamide expects the award will mean "a launching forward for our school" onto the Web.

Building digital equality

Robert Steen, vice president of ThinkQuest, said the contest aims to create a curriculum for

the next century by "helping to ensure that kids have the resources and support, and develop the experience and understanding, to be equal participants in the digital future."

And teacher John Wensley, who guided one of the first-place teams, said the contest proved "extremely motivating." That team, based at Mountain View Elementary School in Kenai, Alaska, created a site about how one of their fellow students deals with Down Syndrome.

"ThinkQuest Jr. provided us with an educational and extremely motivating opportunity to develop our students' academic skills," he said, "and to increase their awareness of the power and educational potential of the Internet."

Other top winners

The remaining first-place winners, by category, are:

-- **Online Math Applications** (Palos Verdes Intermediate School, Palos Verdes, Calif.) includes tips on how kids can save for their future.

-- **Ancient Egypt** (Lagunita Elementary School, Salinas, Calif.) uses Jeopardy-like interactive quizzes about mummies, hieroglyphics and assorted deities.

-- **The Real Truth about Fast Foods and Nutrition** (Ralya Elementary, Haslett, Mich.) analyses the fat, carbohydrate and protein ratio of foods like Big Macs and Taco Bell burritos.

-- **Tracking Creativity** (Grahamwood Elementary, Memphis, Tenn.) explores the origin of idioms and odes.

-- **The Birth of a Nation** (Clarke Middle School, Lexington, Mass.) takes visitors back to Revolutionary America.

At the awards ceremony last Friday, first place students each received a \$3,000 cash award and their teachers, \$6,000. Second- through fifth-place winners also received cash awards.

Moreover, Cisco Systems donated Web servers to schools designated by the coaches of the 28 winning teams.

Contests for every school age

Open to students in 4th, 5th and 6th grades, ThinkQuest Jr. is a spin-off of [ThinkQuest](#)

(<http://www.thinkquest.org/>), a program for students age 12 through 19 that has awarded more than \$2 million in prizes. This year's ThinkQuest contest is in progress, with awards to be announced in November.

More than 20,000 students and their teachers have participated in the ThinkQuest contest, creating more than 1,000 Web sites that live on ThinkQuest's servers. These sites log more than 1,000,000 hits each day, ThinkQuest says.

The ThinkQuest Jr. winners, and all entries for that matter, can be found at the ThinkQuest Jr. Web site.

Details on future ThinkQuest Jr. contests will be announced in September, while the application deadline for next year's ThinkQuest is Feb. 28, 1999.

Both contests are sponsored by Advanced Network & Services, a little known but important company when it comes to the history of the Internet. A nonprofit founded in 1990, Advanced built the largest and fastest part of the Internet, a network backbone that was sold to America Online in 1995.

The proceeds from that sale are used to fund the ThinkQuest programs.

Other co-sponsors are Microsoft and Adobe, and ThinkQuest is seeking further funding from other industry leaders. ()

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