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Look who's talking

Site gets synapses firing with fascinating speakers

As schools let out for summer vacation, it's tempting to let your brain take a break as well.

If, however, you're interested in continuing to learn while the classrooms are locked, www.ted.com is a good place to do it.

TED, which stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design, is a nonprofit organization devoted to "ideas worth spreading." The tag line on the site is "Riveting talks by remarkable people, free to the world." It's a collection of videos of people from a wide range of specialties giving lectures on their areas of expertise. The lectures are recorded at TED conferences around the world.

The speakers range from celebrities known to most people, such as Al Gore or Bono, to individuals that are only renowned in their field, such as Brian Skerry, a National Geographic photographer, or Paula Scher, a graphic designer.

The site has a very clean, polished look to it with an innovative interface. Still images from various lectures are displayed at different sizes. The size of each image corresponds to the criteria you select when searching for subjects. For instance, if you are looking for lectures about science and you selected "newest releases" as your search criterion, the newest lectures would have the biggest pictures. If you switched your criterion to "inspiring," the pictures would reshuffle with the most inspiring lectures being displayed as the biggest images.

When you place your cursor over an image, a window pops up with the title, length, date posted, date recorded, synopsis, comments and a link to the actual lecture video. You can also opt to view the subjects as an alphabetical list of links, with the number of lectures per subject denoted beside each one.

Each of the categories, Technology, Entertainment, Design, Business, Science, Global issues and All, has the

following search criteria that can be applied to it:

- Newest releases
- Most languages
- Most emailed this week
- Most comments this week
- Most favorite all-time
- Rated jaw-dropping
- Persuasive
- Courageous
- Ingenious
- Fascinating
- Inspiring
- Beautiful
- Funny
- Informative

I spent a good deal of time selecting categories and applying the different searches just to see the images that came up before I even watched a lecture. There are so many lectures covering so many subjects that it gets a little overwhelming.

When I finally did select a video to watch, "Brian Skerry Reveals Ocean's Glory — and Horror," I was impressed by the quality of the video and audio. It loaded quickly and streamed very smoothly. The video was sharp, and the sound was clear and synched well with the images.

I could easily imagine spending a good deal of time watching the numerous lectures you can access from the home page, but there's much more to the site. There are numerous links in the banner across the top of the home page. The first three, Themes, Speakers and Talks are just different ways to navigate to the lectures. After that, the following links take you to pages devoted to various aspects of TED:

Translations: TEDTalks translates lectures into foreign languages using volunteer interpreters from around the world. There are charts and information on the languages and translators.

TED Conferences: Lists of conferences, past and present, where lectures were recorded.

TEDx Events: This is labeled new and gives information on how people can organize local TED-like events.

TED Prize: This is a \$100,000 prize

Ten notable speakers:

1. **James Cameron:** Before *Avatar* ... a curious boy
2. **JK Rowling:** The fringe benefits of failure
3. **Steve Jobs:** How to live before you die
4. **Natalie Merchant** sings old poems to life
5. **Jane Goodall** on what separates us from the apes
6. **Al Gore** on averting climate crisis
7. **Frank Gehry** asks "Then what?"
8. **Burt Rutan** sees the future of space
9. **Bono's** call to action for Africa
10. **Tony Robbins** asks why we do what we do

awarded annually to someone TED determines to be exceptional. It also comes with "One Wish to Change the World." I don't know who finances the prize, or for that matter, who grants the wish. Current and past winners are featured with links to learn about and help with their wishes, and to watch their lectures.

TED Fellows: This is a program that brings together interested parties from the various disciplines (technology, entertainment, design, the sciences, the humanities, the arts, NGOs, business) to try to make the world a better place.

TED Community: There are profiles of members of the TED community on this part of the site.

About TED: Obviously, this is an overview of TED.

TED Blog: Videos and comments are posted here.

TED is a site I would recommend to anyone interested in learning more about the world we live in. I didn't watch enough videos yet to detect any political agenda that the site might be harboring, although my first impression is that it leans a little to the left. However, the range of subjects and speakers would seem to defy any attempt to label it either liberal or conservative. I think it's just a lot of very bright people sharing a lot of valuable information.

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