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## Encyclopedia britannica 15th edition worth

It was either a door-to-door salesman or a hawker at the county fair who suckered my parents into buying the Encyclopedia Britannica. My folks have always been putty for smooth salesmen—over the years they’ve been cowed into paying too much for a supposedly amazing vacuum cleaner, a set of purportedly indestructible kitchen knives, a home water softener, and too many infomercial gadgets to name. They were the perfect marks for the encyclopedia man: They wanted to give their kids a good start in life, they believed in the expansive possibilities of consumer goods, and they trusted the authority of the Britannica name. I don’t know exactly how much they shelled out for those books, but I remember it was a major purchase—big enough that they had to pay on an installment plan, and big enough that when the books arrived in the mail, we greeted them as joyously as we would a new car. My sister and I cleared a space on the bookshelf and carefully installed them in alphabetical order. And that’s pretty much where they’ve remained, mostly unopened and forgotten, ever since. During all of middle- and high school, I reached for the Britannica two or three times, at most. I remember wanting to find the books illuminating but always finding the experience unfulfilling. Nothing about the design was meant to appeal to young minds—the volumes were heavy, the organization cumbersome, the print too small, the prose impenetrable. Looking back, it’s obvious that of all the gimmicky things my parents bought, these books were their biggest mistake—the most expensive, the most useless, and the most exploitative. That’s why I felt no twinge of sadness when the Britannica company announced this week that it has suspended its print edition. From now on, no more impressionable parents will be guilted into spending enormous sums—the set now goes for \$1,400—to help their kids do better in school. Good riddance! Well, the Britannica isn’t quite dead yet. While the company is ditching print, it’s not done with quilling its potential customers. The encyclopedia, the company says, now lives beyond the book—its volumes of knowledge are now dished up in a variety of online services, DVDs, and mobile apps. The company offers a free version of the online encyclopedia, but it is clogged with acres of ugly ads. The entry for Abraham Lincoln, for example, offers me deals on a Discover Card, ultrasound tech training programs, auto insurance, Lenovo PCs, “pretzel crisps,” a weight loss product, a Google text ad for Lincoln cars, and Alamo auto rentals. If you want to escape the ads, you have a few choices: Pay \$70 a year for a subscription to the main encyclopedia, \$130 a year for a subscription to the “learning bundle” (which includes a kids’ version of the encyclopedia), \$2 a month for access to the iPad app, or \$40 for a set of reference DVDs. The company kindly offers free trials of all its online offerings, but beware—it takes your credit card info up front, and then auto-renews your purchase annually if you don’t cancel its trustworthy, expensive learning tools. My advice is to make the wiser, cheaper choice, one that will prove more helpful to your kids in the long run: Pay nothing to Britannica and teach your young ones to use Google and Wikipedia. While there are many legitimate complaints to be leveled at Wikipedia (rarely, it gets things wrong; sometimes, its entries are vandalized), the free, crowdsourced encyclopedia is better than Britannica in every way. It’s cheaper, it’s bigger, it’s more accessible, it’s more inclusive of differing viewpoints and subjects beyond traditional academic scholarship, its entries tend to include more references, and it is more up to date. Most importantly, learning to navigate Google and Wikipedia prepares you for the real world, while learning to use Britannica teaches you nothing beyond whatever subject you’re investigating at the moment. In its marketing materials, Britannica casts itself as an island of expert authority in a world glutted with erroneous information, “There’s no such thing as a bad question—but there are bad answers,” the site says. “Get answers you can trust with Britannica Online Premium.” This is a dubious argument; a study published in Nature in 2005 found that both Wikipedia and Britannica were good references, with each getting a similarly small number of facts wrong. But even if it were true that Britannica is substantially more accurate than Wikipedia, why do you want your kids to learn in a cloistered ecosystem that’s separate from the rest of the media? In today’s news environment, you can’t blindly trust anything you see—you have to question everything for yourself. Britannica promotes blind trust. Wikipedia invites investigation. To see what I mean, let’s go back to that Lincoln entry. Britannica’s piece is written by Richard N. Current, a historian who’s written several books about Lincoln (a fact I learned on Wikipedia; Britannica offers only a two-line bio of Current). This is Britannica’s main claim to accuracy—it invites experts to write its entries, and then its small army of fact-checkers and editors make sure that everything is correct. In a promotional video, the company’s editor-in-chief points out that over its history, some of the world’s most distinguished experts have contributed to Britannica—“all the way from Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie to Bill Clinton, Chris Evert, Tony Hawk, Desmond Tutu, and many others.” So I’m supposed to trust Britannica’s entry on Lincoln because it’s written by a guy who really knows Lincoln, and I’m supposed to think of its entry on skateboarding as being on the up-and-up because Tony Hawk wrote it. That seems misguided to me: I don’t think Tony Hawk wants to steer me wrong, but shouldn’t I be able to check his facts? Richard Current says that Lincoln was born “in a backwoods cabin 3 miles (5 km) south of Hodgenville, Kentucky.” How do I know that’s true? Unlike in Wikipedia, Britannica’s articles don’t include links to source material. You’re meant to believe what they say because it’s right there in the book—or, now, online. By comparison, when Wikipedia tells me about Lincoln’s birthplace, it cites its information with a source—Lincoln scholar David Herbert Donald’s 1996 biography of Abe. Is Wikipedia wrong about Lincoln’s birth? I don’t know. But I know how to check—I can look at the biography it suggests, and I can check many of the rest of its assertions through its hundreds of footnotes. Similarly, the free encyclopedia’s skateboarding article points out that commercial skateboards appeared in the late 1950s. But unlike Tony Hawk, Wikipedia cites as a source this About.com piece, which argues that “no one really knows who made the first board.” Now, who’s right here—Tony Hawk or About.com? At the very least, the Wikipedia piece suggests there’s some controversy about the birth of skateboarding, a controversy that could lead me to do my own investigation of the primary sources. I needn’t just believe Tony Hawk because he’s Tony Hawk. Don’t buy what Britannica’s selling. Its reliance on expert authority may yield mostly accurate information, but it teaches kids to believe everything they read. If you pay for this service, you’re building a cocoon of truth around students who’ll one day enter a world where everyone claims to be an expert—and where a lot of those people are lying. If you want to learn to suss out the liars, there’s no better training than Wikipedia. encyclopaedia britannica 15th editionClear all24 results per page48 results per page96 results per page Preview Preview Press Photos/Lance Wynn In a row: Part of a set of New Catholic Encyclopedia volumes from 1967 are displayed in Kent District Library’s Plainfield branch librarian Dave Shaw’s home.Dave Shaw remembers when the encyclopedia salesman came to his family’s rural Cass City home -- in Michigan’s thumb -- nearly 35 years ago. Shaw was 9 years old, and had persuaded his parents to get a brand-spanking-new set of Encyclopedia Britannica. "I can remember when they came in the mail," recalled the Southeast Grand Rapids resident. "There were all these boxes. Unpacking them was a really big deal."Shaw, who owns three sets of the books, may be in a growing minority of encyclopedia owners.A series of announcements recently from publishers across the globe suggests those multi-volume, dust-attracting shelf hogs many grew up with using in their homes and schools may be on their way out of print.Sales of Encyclopedia Britannica’s 32 volumes peaked in 1990, but in the next six years, they dropped 60 percent, and the company reinvented itself online. In 1996, Britannica eliminated its legendary staff of 1,000 door-to-door salespeople, already down from a high of 2,000 in the 1970s, in the face of competition from Microsoft’s Encarta encyclopedia for home computers.With its online version, Britannica says it updates an article every 20 minutes.Recycling encyclopedias If you have a set of old encyclopedias on your shelves, here are some ways to use them or get rid of them: • Make a bookshelf out of them. For plans, go here. • Call your local library and ask if you may donate your set to be sold. • Put it up for giveaway on freecycle.org. • If they’re really old – say, more than 100 years -- call a rare bookseller and ask if they’re worth anything. • Find out if a local recycler takes them. But call before you haul a set to the curb. The Encyclopedia Americana still has good sales in print volumes, but the company also is focusing on its online outlets.Cue the dirge? Not so fast.Kent District Library spokesman Eric DeHaan said the system is investing more in online databases and paring down -- but not eliminating -- annual hard-copy encyclopedias.Ditto for the Grand Rapids Public Library.For example, KDL subscribes to World Book Encyclopedia’s online version, so patrons can go to the Web site and access it from home or at any branch. GRPL patrons can access Encyclopedia Britannica online.Many schools also are keeping encyclopedias around.Linda VanderJagt, assistant superintendent at Forest Hills Public Schools, said the district regularly orders updated print versions of encyclopedias.“There are kids who don’t have access to technology at home, and we feel they should have access to hands-on reference materials,” VanderJagt said. “You need to have that balance.”VanderJagt said her family had an encyclopedia set at home when she was growing up.“It was a huge investment my parents paid monthly on,” she said. “They didn’t have much money, but they thought it was important. I can remember sitting there as a child, looking up things and learning about different places and people.”Inexpensive optionsThe Grand Rapids Public Schools district’s Student Advancement Foundation recently completed re-stocks at all its 56 libraries. Roger Schindler, director of library media services and foreign language, said whereas district libraries used to carry more than one set of encyclopedias, each now has just one.“They are very expensive, and they’re out of date within a couple of years,” he said.Students are directed to the Michigan Electronic Library system online -- mel.org -- a taxpayer-funded, free Web site of complete encyclopedias that are continuously updated.“That’s where I see the whole thing going,” said Schindler, who isn’t mourning the loss of the print versions. “For the price of one book, you can subscribe to the online service,” he said.Stacked up: Part of a set of The Encyclopedia Britannica’s 13th Edition are in Kent District Library’s Plainfield branch librarian Dave Shaw’s home. Shifting ideasIronically, Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia that allows anyone to submit and edit content, announced in April it is coming out with a one-volume version in Germany in September, and will look at other languages depending on the response to it.The 992-page book will contain about 50,000 of the Web site’s most popular articles, condensed to eight to 10 lines, according to the San Francisco Chronicle.For every person who has a set of encyclopedias at home that they still use, who knows how many more have them and haven’t cracked them open in years?What to do with old encyclopedias?Argos Used Books in Eastown doesn't want them.“Nobody buys them anymore,” store owner Jim Bleeker said. “Maybe once every several years, somebody might voice an interest, but mostly, nobody asks for them, and we don’t really look for them.”If Argos does end up with a set, “Sometimes, they just get thrown away,” Bleeker admits. “I believe we have an old set of Encyclopedia Britannica buried in the basement, but there are none on the shelves. They can take 5 feet of shelf space and aren’t going to move.”Giveaways get trickyAt the Salvation Army thrift store on Division Avenue SE, encyclopedias are on the list of “do not accept” items.Goodwill’s 12 retail stores in West Michigan accept encyclopedias, but don’t typically re-sell them in the stores.Goodwill spokeswoman Jill Wallace said donated encyclopedias typically end up online at shopgoodwill.com.Speaking of Web sites, there’s always eBay. A recent search for “encyclopedia set” yielded a couple of hundred hits. A complete, 22-volume 1986 World Book Encyclopedia had the “buy it now” price of \$49.99. The owner of a 26-volume set of 1955 Britannicas was asking \$500, but had no bids.And a 22-volume set of the 2004 World Books could be snatched up for \$189.99.Not bad when you consider the 2008 set, classically bound, will set you back about \$1,000. But not such a deal for those who prefer to click and buy the most up-to-date version -- the encyclopedia’s 2008 Windows DVD version with bonus material selling for \$39.95.There’s always the environmentally friendly way to dispose of them:Grand Rapids Public Schools’ Schindler said the district offers its old encyclopedias first to students, then to teachers and, finally, “to a guy who comes in and gets them and has them shredded into insulation. That’s what we do with all our old books.”On paperShaw, a librarian at the Kent District Library’s Plainfield branch, has encyclopedia sets including a complete set of Encyclopedia Britannica from the 1920s he picked up for \$5 about 20 years ago at an estate sale. The set is stored in his son’s bedroom in the attic and doesn’t get much use, he said, but he plans to hang onto it, “because the writing is a lot different than what you see nowadays. And there are entries in those you’re not going to find in newer encyclopedias.”History lessonsShaw also owns a nearly 40-year-old “New Catholic Encyclopedia” minus one volume. He keeps the set in his dining room and uses it to research church history.The third set -- a complete Encyclopedia Americana, circa 2000 -- was purchased at a library sale.Shaw’s wife, Barb, used it when she home-schooled their three children.“I do refer to it occasionally,” Shaw said, “but it probably gets used the least.”As more encyclopedias migrate online, Shaw says he still likes to hold a volume in his lap, crack the spine and see where it takes him.“It has this random aspect,” he said. “If you just open it up to any page, it often leads you to other ideas and topics as well.”The New York Times News Service contributed to this reportEmail YourLife: yourlife@grpss.com how much is a 15th edition encyclopedia britannica worth. are old encyclopedia britannica worth anything. is encyclopedia britannica worth anything



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