YOU CAN U
by jok church
with beakman & jax

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Dear Jax,

I have the Internet.
Why do I still have
to go to school?

Luis Rotillo
San Juan, Puerto Rico
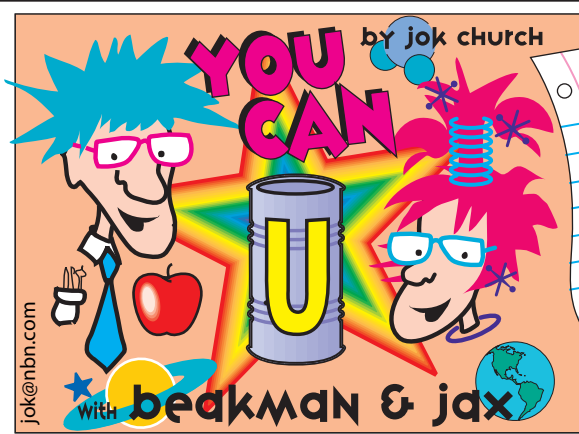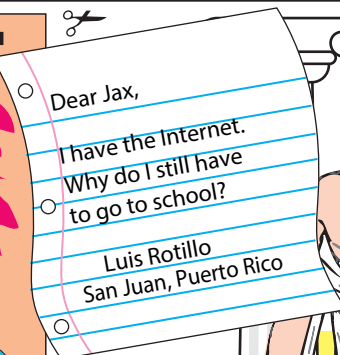
A Pretty Old Problem

The first guy to have a problem like this was Socrates (SOCK-rah-teez). He lived about 2,400 years ago in ancient Greece.

Socrates saw people were mixing up opinions with facts. They were getting all dazzled by who was saying stuff instead of looking at what was being said.

The Internet is like that, too. Most Web stuff looks really good. It looks like it came from powerful people who must be right. Right?

Actually it's wrong. You still have to figure out what is being said, not just who is saying it, or how good it looks. You still have to think critically.

Socrates
469 b.c.e.–
399 b.c.e.

Dear Luis,

The Internet is not a school. It's more like a library – a place to keep stuff. School is where you practice thinking. Even though it's not an official subject, you actually learn how to think at school.

Anyone can publish anything he or she wants on the Internet. That's great because everyone gets a voice. Free speech is fabulous.

But there are some real crackpots out there, publishing lots of completely bonkers stuff.

You need to know how to think to sort it all out.

Jax Place
Jax Place

Stupid Internet Ideas:

We found all this stuff on the Internet:
• Clove tea will cure AIDS.
• Jesus lives on another planet.
• The president of the United States is an alien.
• All pro basketball players are millionaires.
• The United Nations has secret prisons in Tennessee.
None of that is true even though it all looked good on the Internet and had good-looking pages.

Cleaning Or Clearing Up

Things are easier to understand if you think of the Internet as a big library.

The job of a library is to store ideas, information and opinions – all of them, whether or not we agree with them. Books by really bad guys, like Adolf Hitler, are at the library. It's not because they're good books. It's because storing this information is important to history and humanity.

The Internet is like that, too. There's lots of stuff on it that we don't agree with. But stuff on the Internet is not there for our individual approval. It's there because someone else thinks it's important enough to store – and everyone gets a voice on the Internet.

Soon Internet protocol will allow parents to link your computer to a site server that can screen Internet sites for your family. That will make the Internet even more like a library. All ideas and opinions are there, and so is a librarian to act as your guide.

P.S. from Beakman: Thinking is not something everyone knows how to do equally well. One reason why is the skill of thinking isn't usually thought about or valued much.