This new, growing, and exciting database includes almost 80,000 works of art from a consortium of more than thirty important museums in the United States and Canada. It is available from WilsonWeb and the digital images are searchable in the same manner as other subscription databases. Although the use of AMICO Library is in no way limited to K-12 schools, the images are licensed to educational institutions so that students can use them in assignments and teachers can use them in lectures, presentations, and even in password-protected web courses. This is one of the best new products available and every library media center should consider it.

First, a disclaimer of sorts. It is pretty presumptuous for someone to review an art database whose entire art education, before becoming a library media specialist, consisted of a first grade teacher who told her to color inside the lines, and a college western civilization professor who thought his students should be able to identify Ionic, Doric, and Corinthian columns. But perhaps it is the art-deprived who can really appreciate what AMICO Library could have done for this rural Ohio child—and can do for a contemporary rural Ohio child or for any child for that matter. When, in my first job in Maryland, my art teachers gently suggested that an art-literate library media specialist might be more helpful, I did take some art history courses. My best art history professor always required us to see the actual paintings we were researching, because there is no substitute for seeing the original art work, so we had to research paintings from “local” museums—Washington, Baltimore, New York, Boston.... While I learned to agree that this was an important requirement (and of course, it got us into museums), it made me only sadder that so many American children don’t have the opportunity to see quality original art, if their schools even pretend to care about the arts. All of this long introduction is to establish the significance of this wonderful new art database that makes it possible for every child to have a virtual experience of seeing “the real thing.”

Because the collection is from libraries with a wide geographical distribution, it permits children to see objects beyond the museums where they live. Because it is a searchable database, it allows children to identify a wide variety of objects that connect, in some way, to their learning. AMICO Library thus goes beyond the important museum collections on the Web, and the video disc collections that were generally limited to the works from one museum, although it shares with the latter the ability to sort for specific kinds of items.

Of the many fine features of this database, two especially stand out for me. The first is the incredible quality of the reproductions in their high-resolution formats. A search of the database brings a page of explanatory information and a thumbnail of the art object, and in some cases a table of thumbnails of details or parts of an object. Each thumbnail then has a link to bring up the high-resolution version. I never fail to experience a little gasp as the art work appears on my screen. Three-dimensional objects appear three dimensional. Flat pieces are stunning in their color and detail. Even black-and-white photographs seem to allow the light to filter through. This is as close to seeing original art as possible.

The second quality that appeals to me is
the possibility for students to use the database
to make meaning from the art. Children need
to see art in the context of the lives of people.
Although I have enjoyed museum visits with
children, it is difficult for them to see work
after work and gallery after gallery in any sort
of meaningful context. Great museum programs
designed especially for school groups try to cre-
ate this kind of context and AMICO Library
does this as well. Gifted students will use
AMICO Library to browse and make their own
connections—going from item to related item,
crossing boundaries of medium and artist and
subject and time, learning much about beauty
and its production as they wander. All students
will benefit from teacher guidance that will
direct them to meaning through art. Students
can look at pieces from specific cultures, by
specific artists, by specific media, and by themes
and subjects. The database is not just for art
classes, but for literature, history, and world
culture classes as well.

Art teachers can use the database for stu-
dio art as well as art history. Because the works
are searchable by medium (painting, sculpture,
costume and jewelry, photography and so on),
examples of art techniques are easily at hand.
The photography examples are quite striking
and illustrate techniques and effects that will
enhance student understanding of that art form;
indeed, that can be said for any of the media.

AMICO Library has search capacities for
limiting by date, so history students can iden-
tify the art created during any time period be-
ing studied. This would be useful also when
students try to match intellectual developments
in science, technology, literature, and music
with art from the same time period.

The obvious use of the database that must
occur to any creative library media specialist
or teacher is the opportunity it provides to
make art works the center of interdiscipli-
ary units. Here, I recommend that teachers
and library media specialists browse to see
what is there, waiting for inspiration. A paint-
ing with a window recalled for me James
Cross Giblin’s wonderful book Let There Be
There are 215 hits in the database of art works
about windows! Add these resources to other
books, Jeannie Baker’s Window or even The
Wide Window of Unfortunate Events fame, and
to all of the poetry and music about windows,
the geometry and physics about windows, the
architecture and symbolism of windows, and
an exciting unit unfolds.

Cultures with art works in the database
include Native American (both as subjects of
works and as creators of art), North American,
Chinese, Japanese, African, and both historical
and contemporary European. The scope of art
works is impressive. Painting, drawing, and
printing predominate in included objects, but
sculpture, photography, mixed media, architec-
ture, and even installations are represented. The
depth of the database for schools is increased
incredibly by the inclusion of costume and jew-
elry, decorative and utilitarian arts and other
objects, and textiles. There are ancient cloths,
tapestries, American samplers and quilts, and
20th-century designs in the textiles collection.
This breadth of chronological coverage is typi-
cal of all the media in AMICO Library.

Each work of art in the database is accom-
panied by information about the object. Title,
artist, nationality, date of creation, materials,
and dimensions are given. The museum that
owns the work is listed, along with its location
and any special details about the work’s acquisi-
tion. Some of the works have fuller descrip-
tions; for example, about a third of the paint-
ings have this feature. This useful information
tells about the artist or the work, and the
AMICO staff say that more works in the fu-
ture will have these descriptions. Because the
details come from the owning museums who
currently prefer to use their own language and
descriptors, there is not really a controlled vo-
cabulary, which leads to some confusion and
complexity in searching the database. One field
that I appreciated in the video disc art collec-
tions—style or movement—is not currently ap-
plied to the AMICO collection. Thus, one can
search Picasso, but not Cubism. A good library
media specialist can assist students through
these minor search problems. The usual
WilsonWeb search documentation is attached
to the database.

WilsonWeb’s vending of the independent
AMICO Library means that the richness of the
art image database can be combined with the
wealth of existing Wilson art and biography
databases in simultaneous searches to create a
powerful Web-based learning and teaching tool.
Pricing for AMICO Library from WilsonWeb
follows the practice of charging per pupil, so
even smaller schools can afford to make this
exceptional resource available to teachers and
students. More information about the database
can be found at both the AMICO site (http://
www.amico.org) and at WilsonWeb (http://
www.hwwilson.com). Whether used alone, or
with the other Wilson databases, AMICO Li-
brary opens the meaningful world of fine and
decorative arts to children, whether they live
in a large metropolitan area with many muse-
ums, or in rural areas and small towns with
limited opportunities to experience quality
original art. This is an exceptional reference
product.