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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: November 8, 2007

Virtual World Library Book Discussions for Tweens

(East Peoria, Illinois) -- Whyville, the American Association for School Librarians, Alliance Library System, the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, and TAP Information Services are pleased to announce a library book discussion of *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by Clive Staples Lewis for tweens ages 9-13. The book discussions will be held on Wed. Dec. 5 at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. central; Thurs. Dec. 6 at 10:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. central; and Fri. Dec. 7 at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. central in the Greek Theater in Whyville. The discussions are being held as a kickoff activity to offer library services for children at a Whybrary which is currently under construction. There is no cost to participate in the discussion; however interested public and school libraries that would like to participate need to contact Valerie Brandon at Alliance Library System (phone: (309) 694-920 ext. 2119; e-mail: vbrandon@alliancelibrarysystem.com) to reserve spaces—each discussion can only accommodate 25 students. After reserving a space, they should have their students visit Whyville at least 3 days in advance to set up an account and earn their text chat license. Libraries will also need participating children have their parents sign a permission form that should be sent to Whyville before participation. In addition to the debut of the Whybrary and the book discussion group in Whyville, the event will launch a fund raising initiative so that additional programs and activities can be planned for participating libraries. Interested librarians may also join a Google group for ongoing discussion of Whyville at <http://groups.google.com/group/whybrary>.

WHAT IS WHYVILLE?

Since its inception in 1999, Whyville has grown to a population of almost 3 million registrants and a run rate of 35 million page views per month. Every day, tens of thousands of children from around the world visit to interact, have, and explore topics in science, economics, citizenship, and more. They become Whyville citizens by creating avatar-base personas and earning virtual "clam" salaries by participating in educational activities. They design rocket engines, fly hot air balloons, start their own virtual businesses, and even campaign for a seat in the Whyville Senate. The Whyville Times, the town newspaper, is filled with articles written by the citizens on town issues as well as world events. Whyville's activities are interactive, open ended, and foster creativity. Whyville has also been rated "Best on the Internet" for child safety by iParenting for two years in a row.

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

"We hope this will be the beginning of a collaborative effort between libraries of all kinds to promote books in all formats, information and fun for kids and young adults spending their time online," said Dr. James Bower, Founder and CEO of Numedeon Inc., the company that runs Whyville.

"This is where many of our next generation and future tax payers are, on the net in social networking sites with their friends," state Kitty Pope, Executive Director of the Alliance Library System. "We have worked with librarians from all over the world to pioneer library services in virtual worlds for teens and adults. It's now time to reach out to kids."

"Whyville is a perfect fit for libraries since it's such a safe and educational platform. Adapting library services to where youth are is a win-win for all!" said Kelly Czarnecki, Teen Education Librarian at PLCMC.

JUST IMAGINE—THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS

Imagine a virtual world filled with library materials in all formats (print, audio, video) and programs of all types, from story hours and book discussions to natural history to art to science and technology. Children from around the world visit regularly, exploring materials and participating in activities together. The education in Whyville is designed to be hands-on, inquiry based and constructivist.

They can attend a live or video story hour, browse stories in many formats, and look at exhibits. They can meet other children from all over the world. They go on a virtual dig as archaeologists in a museum of natural history. They attend a live discussion session on carbon dating at a virtual open air theater. They can create their own stories and share them in whatever format they choose. Libraries are about books, stories, and community—books and stories in a variety of formats be it print, a movie, a video, a cd-rom, DVD, or storytelling.

This favorite web destination for children serves as a virtual space where experiences from a recent library visit can be shared and extended. It supports a "between-visit" experience that strengthens the relationship between libraries and the communities they serve. Sound far fetched? Not all! Whybrary is an extension of Whyville.com, the premier educational virtual community for children.

ABOUT NUMEDON AND WHYVILLE

Numedeon specializes in the design and operation of virtual worlds. It is the parent company of Whyville.com which remains the only learning-based virtual world for today's digital kids.

Whyville is about to surpass 3 million registered users, and is an environment that engages its vested "citizens" to learn about life, while having fun. Numedeon's technology enables organizations to be on the inside of virtual worlds, and in the case of Whyville, providing them with the means to truly interact with the hard-to-reach demographic of 8 to 15 year olds.

Sponsored programs in Whyville include:

Reading programs (supported by Scholastic); pop music concerts (EMI, Virgin records, Hollywood Records, Radio Disney); investigations of important issues like global warming (An Inconvenient Truth/Penguin Books), and immersive activities involving automobile engineering (Toyota), human disease (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and biotechnology (Texas Workforce Commission), to name only a few. Numedeon was created by scientists from Caltech to invent innovative new ways to harness the engagement power of the Internet. Numedeon already supports a number of "private label" virtual worlds using its proprietary technology and will soon be launching several new virtual worlds of its own.

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