

# kōjām

a gateway to eBooks for Marshallese students  
kojam.wordpress.com

## who?

The United States Embassy Majuro is seeking to increase student access to eBooks in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

A 2011 national census indicated that more than 70 percent of the RMI's population lived in one of two urban centers, Majuro or Ebeye. Mobile phone service is available in both areas. In 2013, however, the World Bank attempted to calculate actual internet penetration on the islands and concluded that a mere two percent of the RMI's population subscribes to internet services, and that only about one quarter of the population has "access" to a mobile phone (meaning even fewer own a device dedicated solely to personal connectivity), thereby making it one of the very least "connected" countries in the world.

Students, parents, and educators in the RMI need more tools to help expose youth to digital reading, even if only on stationary computers in schools.



## where?

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is a remote nation-state in Micronesia comprised of two archipelagic island chains of 29 coral atolls, each made up of many small islets, and five single islands in the North Pacific Ocean, about half way between Hawaii and Australia. The population as of July 2014 was estimated to be 70,983 people, 98 percent of which consider themselves Marshallese or mixed Marshallese. Marshallese is considered an official language, with an estimated 98.2 percent of the population speaking it. English is also an official language. It is widely spoken as a second language and the English literacy rate is estimated to be 93.7 percent. But worryingly - and despite the fact that so many people claim to dream of spending their lives on a tropical island - a journalist describing the harsh realities of 21st century socioeconomic conditions in the Marshall Islands once remarked that "alcoholism is more common than lucrative employment" and "the suicide rate is among the highest in the world" (Leonard, C. 2005. In the remote Marshall Islands, residents dream and save for years for a new life in Arkansas. Arkansas Democrat-Gazette).



This information was adapted from the Department of State's U.S. Bilateral Relations Marshall Islands Fact Sheet and the CIA World Factbook. To learn more, visit <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/26551.htm> & <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rm.html>.

## why?

After the United States gained military control of the Marshall Islands from Japan in 1944, it carried out frequent nuclear weapons testing between 1946 and 1958, sickening and injuring many Marshallese and damaging and destroying much land. The Marshall Islands signed a Compact of Free Association with the United States in 1983 and gained independence in 1986 with the Compact's entry into force. The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is now a sovereign nation. But the United States has full authority and responsibility for security and defense of the Marshall Islands and provides almost all social services. Under the Compact, the U.S. provides the Marshall Islands with approximately \$70 million annually through FY 2023.

Enhancing educational opportunities available to Marshallese students is a key U.S. priority. My work with the U.S. Embassy Majuro has attempted to inform embassy staff of how best to increase access to and usage of eBooks in the region going forward and to provide them with some preliminary tools to promote and accomplish these goals.

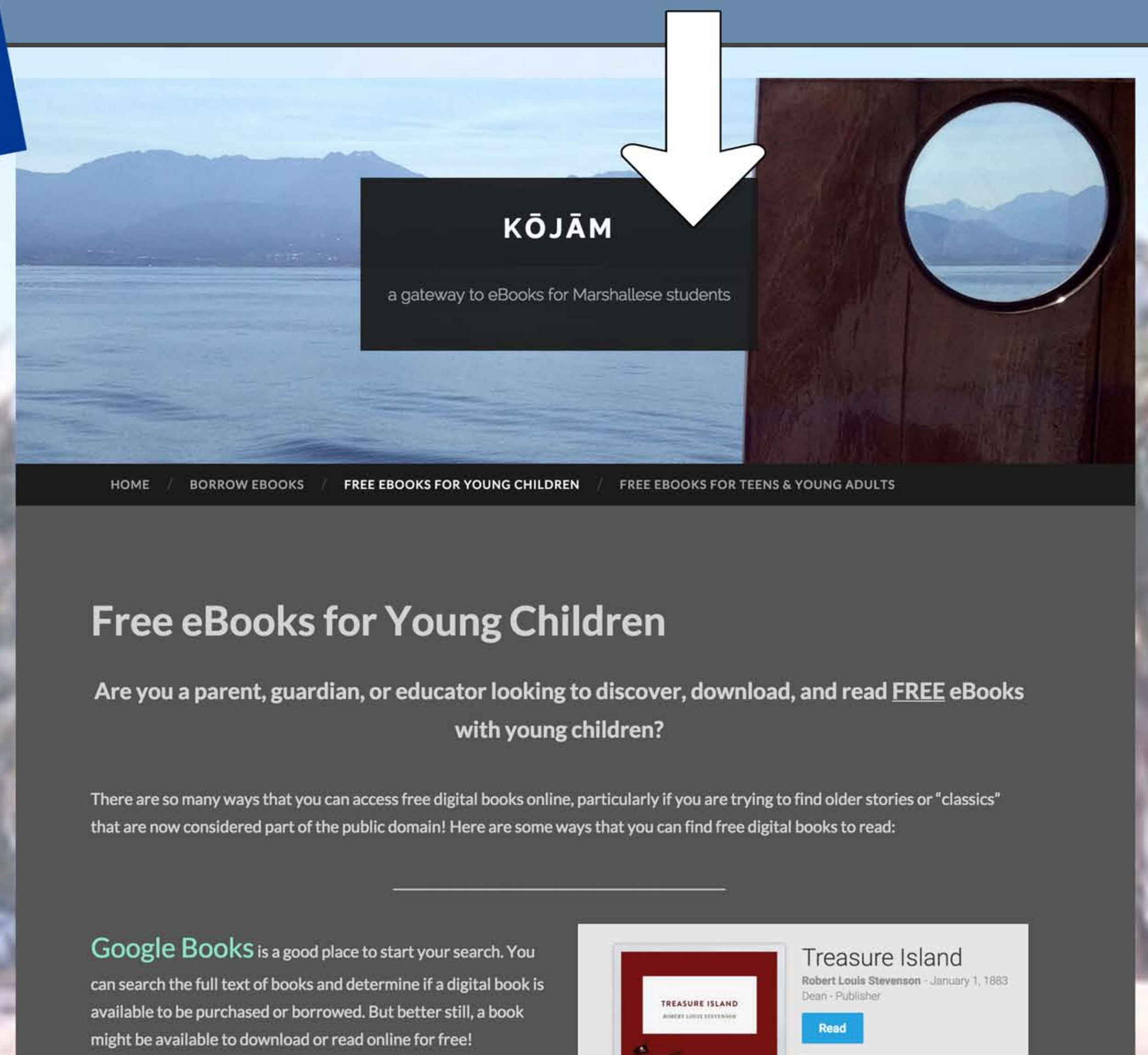
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## what?

"Kōjām" is the Marshallese word for a door, doorway, or gate. I have developed and launched a web site that can serve as a single, straightforward portal to direct students and educators in the Republic of the Marshall Islands to thousands of eBooks currently available for free from a variety of online sources.

Kōjām is a non-intimidating introduction for new digital readers that gathers links to many eBook sources together and describes them in one convenient, easy to remember, easy to locate place. In the future, if additional funding is secured, this portal is poised to link out to even more titles available via an OverDrive subscription.

I have also developed outreach materials to help inform students and educators about the existence of this portal and how to use it.



## how?

I have constructed a preliminary, freely hosted version of this web site and launched it at [kojam.wordpress.com](http://kojam.wordpress.com). In the future, it will likely be migrated to more official government or academic servers maintained either by the embassy itself or the College of the Marshall Islands. Documentation has been provided to make this transition as smooth and efficient as possible.

I have also liaised between the embassy and OverDrive to acquire price quotes for various subscription options and to determine which titles might be available in the region. The embassy now knows exactly how much funding it will need to acquire in order to provide eBook lending services via OverDrive in the near future. I have provided them with an action plan and put them in touch with my contacts at OverDrive so that this discussion may progress as funding becomes available.

I have also developed outreach materials including a basic press release and poster so that students and educators can be made aware of the Kōjām portal.

## when?

The U.S. Embassy Majuro hopes to secure a grant to fund an OverDrive subscription in the coming months. Until then, students, parents, and educators may access the portal I have designed and launched at [kojam.wordpress.com](http://kojam.wordpress.com) to explore sources of free eBooks and to familiarize themselves with viewing and downloading freely available digital resources.

Cynthia Scott Traeger, MLIS

whyhelloctynthia@gmail.com | @whyhelloctynthia

Information School  
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

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