



This Issue's Theme:

Engaging Elementary Students with Primary Sources

This issue explores how teachers can use primary sources with elementary students.

Teaching with primary sources—original documents, photographs, music, film, clothing, and other artifacts which were created at the time under study—offers unique opportunities for students of all ages to connect with the past in personally meaningful ways. Available in a variety of formats, primary sources can engage even the youngest learners and help them construct new knowledge and develop critical thinking skills. Designing activities for grades K-5 requires careful selection of primary sources that will prove both accessible and relevant to students. The feature article in this *TPS Quarterly* issue details this strategy and others for teachers to instruct elementary students using primary sources

About TPS Quarterly

Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) Quarterly is an online publication created by the Library of Congress Educational Outreach Division in collaboration with the TPS Educational Consortium.

Published quarterly, each issue focuses on pedagogical approaches to teaching with Library of Congress digitized primary sources in K-12 classrooms. The *TPS Quarterly* Editorial Board and Library staff peer review all content submitted by TPS Consortium members and their partners. Please email questions, suggestions or comments about *TPS Quarterly* to Stacie Moats, Educational Resources Specialist, at smoa@loc.gov.

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Newsletter Archives

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Primary Sources and Elementary Students

by Gail Petri

Can teaching with primary sources like photographs, manuscripts, maps and historic sheet music engage young learners? Skeptics might argue: "Historical materials are boring... There is too much text... The vocabulary is difficult... Students won't understand the history." However, current research, teacher testimonials and personal experience indicate that primary sources can bring history alive for elementary students.

Nearly all state standards acknowledge the importance of teaching with primary sources. Exposure to these raw materials can spark students' imaginations and support inquiry, historical thinking, and constructive learning. Photographs, prints, and movies provide detailed visual images. Authentic documents such as newspapers, journals, advertisements, diaries, and letters provide vivid images. Music and recorded oral histories supply an auditory framework to add depth to historical and cultural understanding.



The first Thanksgiving 1621 / J.L.G. Ferris.
From the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Using Primary Sources with K-5 Students

As elementary teachers know from experience, younger students are characteristically active, curious, and concrete learners. They are in various stages of developing their language and reasoning skills, teamwork, and fine motor abilities. Students in grades K-5 need to be able to connect history about people, places, or events to their own experiences. Primary sources offer unique opportunities for personalizing the past.

Teaching younger students with primary sources requires careful planning. Begin by identifying the learning goal or essential question of the activity. Depending on the chosen topic, there are many primary sources available online. It is critical, however, to select primary sources that are accessible **and appropriate for the students' grade level**. Elementary teacher **Sara Suiter**, Library of Congress 2010 Teacher-in-Residence, recommends selecting primary sources with some or all of the following characteristics:

- a date of creation or publication is easily identifiable;
- the original format is evident (such as a page from a book, poster, or newspaper article);
- **the author's name is on the document;**
- handwriting or typography is legible and decodable;
- the content of the primary source can be easily placed in a time period familiar to the students; and,
- the facsimile of the primary source is clear and has a high resolution.

Select one or more primary sources. Consider how to structure a primary source-based activity that will engage students, prompt them to think critically, and help them construct new knowledge. Students should feel that they are in charge of the historical investigation and responsible for their own theories and conclusions. The chart on the following page illustrates examples of types of primary sources and strategies for designing grade-level appropriate activities.

Grade Level	Primary Sources	Strategies
K	Introduce artifacts, photographs, posters, oral history recordings, song recordings, and other primary sources without text	Connect primary sources to self: make observations and basic comparisons; and, categorize several sources
1-2	Introduce diary entries, drawings, simple maps, and other primary sources with limited text, such as tickets, receipts, menus, and catalogs	Expand primary source connections to family: observe/analyze/compare primary sources; diagram similarities and differences; and, distinguish fact from fiction
3-4	Introduce newspapers, broadsides, letters, charts, documents and other primary sources with larger amounts of text; and, include primary sources with multiple viewpoints	Expand primary source connections to community and local region: invite students to discern point of view and bias; and, conduct more in-depth analysis
5-6	Introduce more complex historical documents (e.g., the Declaration of Independence), different types of maps; and, include primary sources in multiple formats on the same topic	Expand primary source connections to nation: compare drafts with final versions; compare multiple points of view and bias; and, synthesize learning and construct new knowledge

Consider these teacher-tested suggestions for introducing primary sources into the daily classroom routine. For grades K-2, encourage students to place themselves in an image and imagine what they see, hear, feel, and touch. Or, have students reenact a photograph using the tableau strategy. For grades 3-5, challenge students to create a timeline using primary sources or create found poetry—using language from primary source texts on a variety of subjects to retell the historical content in poetic form.

Such introductory activities help teachers and younger students become more comfortable with connecting to and analyzing primary sources. But, this is only the beginning. The possibilities are endless for helping students in elementary grades delve more deeply into learning with primary sources.

Getting Started Using Library of Congress Primary Sources

With limited time, how can elementary teachers begin exploring possibilities for primary source-based learning? The Library of Congress Web site offers millions of digitized primary sources. There are many ready-to-use classroom materials on the *Library of Congress' Teachers Page*, including primary source sets and lesson plans, as well as additional educational resources throughout the Web site.

Explore the *Teachers Page* for ready-to-use teaching materials. Primary source sets offer a selection of resources on specific topics. These sets are available as easy-to-print PDFs and are accompanied by historical context and a primary source analysis tool.

There are many ways to use a primary source set. For example, a lower grades' teacher may want to select a single image from the Thanksgiving primary source set. She may use *The First Thanksgiving 1621* to prompt students to think about their own Thanksgiving traditions and make basic comparisons between past and present.

An upper elementary teacher may select multiple sources from this same set. Images of the landing at Plymouth in 1620, meetings with American Indians, and the first Thanksgiving can help students consider the artistic vision in contrast to the reality of the actual events. Teachers can select questions from the teacher's guide to *Analyzing Primary Sources*. These questions will help students record their investigations with the *Primary Source Analysis Tool*.

Lesson plans available on the *Teachers Page* provide more detailed instructional procedures and resources. Among those specifically geared for K-5 students are *History Firsthand*, *Voices for Votes: Suffrage Strategies*, and *Marco Paul's Travels on the Erie Canal*. Additionally, many elementary teachers adapt lesson plans originally written for older students.

Other sections of the Library's Web site offer materials appropriate for elementary students. Visit *America's Library* for elementary level historical vignettes featuring primary sources. Navigate to *Meet Amazing Americans* for biographical entries.

Jump Back in Time highlights specific events throughout American history. On this page, have students select their birthday. Each date highlights two or three primary sources with brief textual explanations of a historic event that happened on that day. For example, December 1 features Rosa Parks' 1955 arrest for civil disobedience. Students can analyze a photograph of Rosa Parks being arrested, a page of sheet music from "We Shall Overcome," and a newspaper headline from the December 6, Montgomery, Alabama, newspaper.

Close examination of these primary sources combined with guided reading of the factual text provides students with historical context while making this event more relevant. Consider extending this activity by reading a book about Rosa Parks and asking students to develop a list of related topics for further investigation.

Next Steps

Keep it simple and build on your successes. Begin by using one primary source at a time. Explore these specific primary source links and related ideas for prompting student thinking:



Study a 1910 color print, *Twentieth Century Transportation*. How has transportation changed in the 21st century?

Read a classic book at <http://www.read.gov/books/>. Compare the 1901 version of *Denslow's Three Bears* to modern day versions.

Watch and analyze the 1903 Edison movie, *Emigrants landing at Ellis Island*. Ask students to write a news article or diary entry as if they were there.



Observe and analyze Thanksgiving photographs - *Thanksgiving Day lesson at Whittier (1899-1900)* and *School Children's Thanksgiving Games (1911)*. How do students celebrate Thanksgiving today?

Develop a personal collection of primary sources. Work with your school librarian and grade-level teams to share resources. Display materials in the classrooms and halls. Continue exploring Library of Congress online resources. Make using primary sources a daily part of your teaching routine to help your elementary students develop critical thinking and analysis skills.

Gail Petri, a former K-5 Teacher Librarian from the Rochester, New York area and a 2000 Library of Congress American Memory Fellow, has worked as an Educational Resources Specialist for the Library of Congress since 2002. She authored the book, The American Memory Collections: Primary Resources Across the Curriculum Grades 4-6 and several other publications.

Research and Current Thinking

For each issue, Teaching with Primary Sources Consortium members submit summaries of and links to online resources—articles, research reports, Web sites, and white papers—that provide research and current thinking relating to the theme. This Research & Current Thinking focuses on engaging elementary students with primary sources.

Achieving History Standards in Elementary Schools

This article summarizes research on children's ability to learn history, examines national standards and purposes of history instruction in elementary schools, and describes practices that develop historical knowledge, thinking skills, and interest. www.ericdigests.org/1995-1/history.htm

Applying KWL Guides to Sources with Elementary Students

The author suggests that KWL Guides offer a straightforward way to engage elementary students in historical investigation and source analysis and discusses preparation, procedures and pitfalls of the strategy. teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/teaching-guides/21806

Back When God Was Around and Everything: Elementary Children's Understanding of Historical Time

A study of students' understanding of historical time concluded that even the youngest students made some basic distinctions in historical time and that those distinctions became increasingly differentiated with age. The study found that dates had little meaning for students before third grade and only by fifth grade did students extensively connect particular dates with specific background knowledge. www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED370716.pdf

Bringing History Home: A K-5 Curriculum Design

This article describes the elementary history curriculum and project, and explores how it aligns with theory and research in history education. www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/42.3/fillpot.html

The Evidence Base for Social Studies: Social Studies in Elementary Education

A research literature review highlighting the role and current state of social studies in the elementary school classroom. The author lists questions for constructing or using cross-curriculum lessons to teach social studies. ims.ode.state.oh.us/ode/ims/rrt/research/Content/elementary_education_what_we_know.asp

Playing with History

This article summarizes research by faculty at a Virginia elementary school on: "How can I meet the SOL (Standards of Learning) and POS (Program of Studies) objectives and keep play alive in my K-1 classroom?" <http://gse.gmu.edu/research/tr/articles/ritchie/playinghis/>

Social Studies for Early Childhood and Elementary School Children: Preparing for the 21st Century

This paper discusses definition, rationale and goals; developmental characteristics to consider, an overview of the basic research and a look at the current status of social studies in the elementary school followed by discussion of pre-service and in-service education for teachers. www.socialstudies.org/positions/elementary

Using Digital Primary Sources to Teach Historical Perspective to Preservice Teachers

The article focuses on the use of digital primary sources to teach historical perspective to preservice teachers. A variety of digital primary sources were used to teach historical perspective and to model teaching strategies for use in elementary classrooms. www.citejournal.org/vol10/iss3/socialstudies/article1.cfm

Using Primary Sources in the Primary Grades

"What do a stamped Christmas postcard dated 1910, a Confederate one hundred dollar bill, soda pop bottles from Egypt, ice tongs, a rug beater, and a woven prayer rug from the Middle East with a picture of the Kaaba at Mecca have in common? These and many other artifacts are primary sources, the very real "stuff" of the social studies that can engage the young learner in active learning. The use of primary sources in the classroom is a way for students to develop the intellectual curiosity that leads to further research and increased awareness of the world around them." www.ericdigests.org/1999-1/primary.html

To access links to resources cited above please visit the online version of this edition of the Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly online at <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly>

Learning Activity - Elementary Level K-2

30-SECOND LOOK: CLASSROOMS THEN AND NOW

Overview

Students practice their observation skills by participating in a timed 30-second look at a historic photograph of a classroom. Students may then work together as a class to record and compare their personal observations, ideas and questions about the photograph, or they may record their observations individually and pair and share with a partner first. Students conclude the activity by re-examining the photograph to identify similarities and differences between this classroom from the past and their classroom today.

Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- observe details in a historic photograph;
- express ideas and questions about the photograph based on observations and prior knowledge; and
- identify similarities and differences between the historic photograph and their own classroom.

Time Required

One 45 minute class period or less, depending on grade level

Grade Level

K-2

Topic/s

Culture, Folklife

Subject/Sub-subject

History

Standards McREL 4th Edition Standards and Benchmarks

Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

Life Skills: Thinking and Reasoning

Standard 3. Level I [Grades K-2]

Benchmark 8. Identifies the similarities and differences between persons, places, things, and events using concrete criteria.

View and Print the complete learning activity:

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/elementary/pdf/elementary_activityK-2.pdf



Johnston, Frances Benjamin. "Classroom scenes in Washington, D.C. public schools: studying live dog, 5th Division." 1899? From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Learning Activity - Elementary Level 3 - 5

EVERY PICTURE TELLS A STORY

Overview

Students analyze a Lewis Hine photograph and use their observations to produce a creative writing piece. Working in pairs, students analyze the photograph before using the bibliographic information to answer their initial questions. Using their observations and imaginations, students create comic strips that describes what happened just before and just after the photograph was taken.

Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- analyze a historical photograph;
- construct new understandings connected to prior knowledge; and
- develop characters using dialogue

Time Required

One 45-minute class period; activity extension idea requires additional class periods

Grade level

3 - 5

Topic/s

Culture, Folklife

Subject/Sub-subject

Language Arts

Standards McREL 4th Edition Standards and Benchmarks

Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

Language Arts

Standard 1. Benchmark 8. Writes narrative accounts, such as poems and stories (e.g., establishes a context that enables the reader to imagine the event or experience; develops characters, setting, and plot; creates an organizing structure; uses transitions to sequence events; uses concrete sensory details; uses strategies such as dialogue, tension, and suspense; uses an identifiable voice).

Credits

Sara Suiter, 2010-11 Library of Congress Teacher-in-Residence, fourth grade teacher from Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom Public Charter School in Washington, DC

View and Print the complete learning activity:

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/elementary/pdf/elementary_activity3-5.pdf



Hine, Lewis W., photographer. "Michael McNelis, 612 Noble St., age 8 yrs. old, newsboy." Photograph. 1910 June. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division: National Child Labor Committee Collection.

Teacher Spotlight

**Vicki
Heisler**



In each issue, we introduce a teacher who participated in Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) professional development and successfully uses Library of Congress primary sources to support effective instructional practices.

This issue's Teacher Spotlight features elementary school teacher Vicki Heisler. The TPS program at University of Northern Colorado nominated Vicki for her effective classroom use of primary sources with elementary students. Vicki has taught for more than 30 years and currently teaches 5th grade at Meeker Elementary School in Greeley, Colorado. In this interview, she discusses teaching strategies and her favorite Library of Congress online resources.

What motivated you to participate in the TPS workshops in your local area?

My personal fascination with history was a strong motivator. As a "tweenager," I lived with my family near Washington, DC while my father was stationed by the U.S. Army at the Pentagon. We visited the Library of Congress and I remember my father telling us that this was "our library." Years later as a teacher, I am just as thrilled that this is "my" library—and so full of things to learn! I love sharing the Library of Congress and its resources with my students.

Tell us about the first time you tried using primary sources in the classroom.

I actually used old family photos to tell students about my grandmother's life—how she rode in a horse and buggy to board in the big city during the week to attend classes and became her family's first high school graduate. My students were enthralled and pored over the photographs whenever they got a chance. I knew I had hit on something that was instructional magic.

How do you use primary sources to teach elementary students?

Elementary students love primary sources! For them, being told about history is not nearly as satisfying as

interacting with evidence of it. I often introduce historical fiction and nonfiction texts by having students analyze related images from the Library's collections. For example, I use a variety of Civil War-related primary sources with students when reading Paul Fleishman's book, *Bull Run*, and the *Westward Expansion: Encounters at a Cultural Crossroads* primary source set when introducing reading anthology selections such as "Prairie Girl: The Life of Laura Ingalls Wilder" and "The Journal of Joshua Loper: A Black Cowboy."

"Framing" is a great technique for helping younger students to analyze prints and photographs. Laminate L-shaped pieces of construction paper and pass one out to each student with a picture. Ask students to frame a detail, such as "covered wagon," then ask a question about this aspect like, "How does this help you identify the time period?" Continue along: "frame the man with a plow" and, "What is a plow? What does it tell you about how people made a living?" Analyzing each detail separately helps students to see the big picture through new eyes.

What is your favorite resource available on the Library of Congress Web site?

I find it hard to pick a single favorite, but I heavily utilize primary source sets from the *Teachers Page*, and I love the *Veterans History Project*, perhaps because I am a sergeant's daughter. Additionally, the Library has many wonderful primary sources relating to several key historical figures we study in 5th grade, including the Wright Brothers and Abraham Lincoln. I have even used *Lincoln's student sum book* to inspire my kids in math.

What advice do you have for teachers who have never tried teaching with primary sources?

Teaching with primary sources opens a world of new ideas and perspectives to students of all ages. If a manuscript is hard for your students to read, transcribe it for them and provide copies in large print. With younger students, depend heavily on the Library's wonderful prints and photographs collections since images are often more accessible for them than text.

I recommend the Library's *Primary Source Analysis Tool*, which students can complete as an online form or printed copy. I have actually had students request this tool to use as we work with materials not in the social studies. Primary sources are great for developing students' critical thinking and 21st century skills.