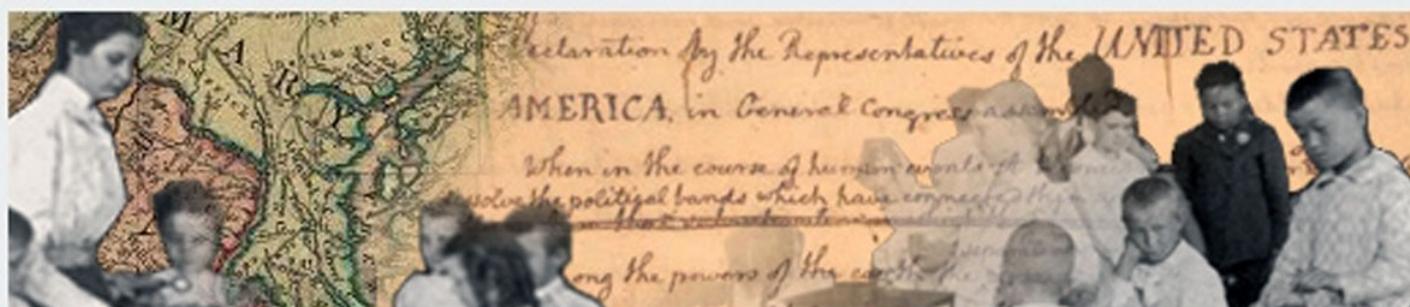


# Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly

Vol. 3, No. 3, Summer 2010



## This Issue's Theme: **Supporting English Language Learners**

**This issue explores how teachers can use primary sources to support English language learners.**

English language learners (ELLs) are a diverse group of students, including those who are just beginning to learn English and others who have already achieved considerable proficiency. Teaching with primary sources can help English language learners of all backgrounds develop language skills and connect to academic content through inquiry. Primary sources, which come in a variety of formats such as images, manuscripts and audio recordings, offer multiple entry points for students to engage in critical thinking and construct new knowledge. The feature article in this *TPS Quarterly* issue provides strategies for teachers to support English language learners using primary sources.

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### Teaching with Primary Sources

The Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) Program works with universities and educational organizations to offer professional development that helps teachers use the Library's digitized primary sources to deliver effective instruction.

Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly provides information and materials that support this goal.

For more information about Teaching with Primary Sources or to identify a TPS consortium member in an area near you, please visit the web site at <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps>.

## Primary Sources and English Language Learners

by Tuyen Tran

### Introduction

"If you give real artifacts, real documents, and real language to your students," Kate Bowen says emphatically, "then you can empower them to love history." She would know. Currently a fifth grade teacher at Patwin Elementary School in Davis, California, Bowen and her teaching partner, Sarbjit Nahal, have forty-eight years of teaching experience combined. The pair has had 20 percent English learner (EL), also known as English language learner (ELL), classroom enrollment annually. On any given day in their heterogeneous classroom, their instruction includes a variety of EL strategies and academic literacy support. This includes grammar support, vocabulary and writing exercises, oral language practice, role plays, sequencing activities, primary source analysis, and the use of discipline-specific graphic organizers such as cause and effect charts.

Particularly effective are the students' WOW portfolios, a collection of their word of the week assignments. After selecting a key concept, event, or character that will be the focus of the week's history lesson, Bowen has students write a definition, use it in a sentence, and identify its part of speech or grammatical function. In addition to their other summative assessments, Bowen's students incorporate new vocabulary into a visual representation of the term, such as the Mayflower Compact.



### Student's written text

Part of Speech: Proper Noun

Definition: The first document of self-government in North America

Sentence: The Mayflower Compact was signed by 42 men.

Teachers such as Kate Bowen play essential roles in serving students' needs with accommodations providing universal access to all academic subjects.

### Primary Sources and English Learners

Primary sources provide unique opportunities for English learners to use inquiry and develop schema, language, and critical thinking skills. Using images to introduce a lesson provides tangible historical evidence to preview new content. Bowen has found that the use of images generates especially active participation by her ELs. For example, in a painting depicting George Washington's famed crossing of the Delaware River, students can confidently identify what they see (e.g., "I see a man standing at the head of the boat.") and make inferences (e.g., "He looks like he's the leader because he is in front."). Analyzing an image can serve as an early formative assessment to gauge prior knowledge and gain background information.

There is a growing consensus among policymakers and education specialists that content literacy is critical to English language development.<sup>1</sup> Rather than segregating ELs for specialized training in English language proficiency divorced from the content areas, education researchers encourage teachers to modify classroom instruction to meet the needs of all learners.<sup>2</sup> English learners must have access to mainstream instruction that integrates "language as a vehicle for learning academic content and learning about the world."<sup>3</sup>

The discipline of history poses both opportunities and challenges to English learners. Studying history offers many entry points for teaching ELs because of the subject matter's potential to reflect students' life experiences and to connect those experiences to new concepts. High-quality history-social science instruction makes it possible for English learners and low-literacy students to develop the academic literacy and language they need to excel in the core curriculum. It also provides the background knowledge that is vital to reading comprehension.

An inquiry-based history curriculum using both primary and secondary sources is particularly effective for motivating and engaging all students to seek and process information purposefully.<sup>4</sup> In Kate Bowen's class, a Jamestown unit designed in part to teach perspectives incorporates historical fiction such as *Blood on the River* and multiple documents from the Jamestown primary source set from the Library of Congress Teachers Page. She asks students, "How did the settlers' and the Powhatan Indians' perceptions of one another affect their relations?" Such questions help them to understand that history is always evolving, that the teacher does not have all the answers, and that it is important to look at point of view. Students analyze, interpret,

and make an argument based upon sources such as Jamestown’s passenger manifest, Chief Powhatan’s prophesy, John Smith’s maps and journals, and portraits from the eighteenth century. Working with real materials from the past excites the students to embark on their own in-depth historical investigations.

### **Strategies for Supporting English Learners with Primary Sources**

Language development is critical to the EL student’s ability to access content knowledge because history is primarily a text-based discipline. Written primary sources and history texts in general are often dense, have multiple forms of text organization, and use complex noun phrases. They are often complicated for students to comprehend, especially if written in archaic language. Such challenges should not deter teachers. Teacher modeling, guided practice and structured sentence and paragraph scaffolds can make historical texts more accessible to students. Furthermore, even though expository writing in history can be difficult for ELs, this type of academic exercise helps students practice essential historical thinking skills, such as using content vocabulary, articulating interpretations, and making arguments supported by relevant evidence. Therefore, teachers must equip themselves with a variety of reading strategies and graphic organizers to assist students in understanding and analyzing primary sources.

Here are two strategies which teachers can use to help students decode language and derive historical meaning from texts:

Ask students to consider the language patterns found in historical writing: chronology (series of events), cause and effect, compare/contrast, debate, point of view, description, and argument/explanation. This strategy uses graphic organizers to help students recognize the organizational patterns of history texts to identify the signal words that build a historical argument and narrative, thus increasing text comprehension.

Use sentence chunking or sentence deconstruction to help students examine elements of grammar such as transitions (conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositional phrases), historical processes (verb phrases), participants, and outcomes or recipients. This strategy helps students interrogate the text, sentence by sentence.

### **Conclusion**

These close reading strategies are only two of the many approaches that teachers can incorporate into their lesson design to use primary sources that can engage all students. English learners should have ample experiences learning how to read and evaluate various types of primary sources. The benefits of student engagement with primary sources are numerous as long as the instruction is strategically planned.<sup>5</sup> As teachers have discovered, teaching with primary sources can provide students with rich learning experiences by making both the English language and academic content more accessible.

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<sup>1</sup>Diane August and Timothy Shanahan, eds., *Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates), 2006. Rafael Heller and Cynthia Greenleaf, *Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas: Getting to the Core of Middle and High School Improvement* (Washington, DC: Alliances for Excellent Education), 2007. Shanahan, Timothy and Cindy Shanahan. “Teaching Disciplinary Literacy Strategies to Adolescents: Rethinking Content-Area Literacy,” *Harvard Educational Review* 78, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 40-59.

<sup>2</sup>Claude Goldenberg, “Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does—and Does Not—Say,” *American Educator* (Summer 2008): 13.

<sup>3</sup>Laurie Olsen, *Reparable Harm: Fulfilling The Unkept Promise of Educational Opportunity for California’s Long Term English Learners* (Long Beach: Californians Together), 2010, 19.

<sup>4</sup>Bruce VanSledright, *In Search of America’s Past: Learning to Read History in Elementary School* (New York: Teachers College Press), 2002, 134.

<sup>5</sup>Keith Barton, “Primary Sources in History: Breaking Through the Myths,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 86, Issue 10 (2005): 745-753.

## 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. Our current focus is teaching English language learners using primary sources.**

**Center for Research on the Educational Achievement and Teaching of English Language Learners (CREATE)** <http://www.cal.org/create> CREATE is a partnership of researchers investigating instruction and text modifications that facilitate learning for ELLs. The website features news, resources and research designed to address the critical challenge of improving educational outcomes of ELLs.

**iColorín Colorado!** <http://www.colorincolorado.org> This bilingual resource provides information, strategies, activities and resources for teachers and Spanish-speaking families of ELL.



*Grammar school children gathered around a table doing woodworking projects while teachers watch nearby in a classroom. Library of Congress American Memory Photographs from the Chicago Daily News, 1902-1933.*

**Connect Students' Background Knowledge to Content in the ELL Classroom** <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/20827> The author outlines ideas to help teachers enhance curriculum and make material culturally relevant and accessible to ELLs.

**Increasing ELL Student Reading Comprehension with Non-fiction Text** <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/29035> A look at components of non-fiction texts and effective strategies to help ELLs gain skills to not only understand content, but text structure to approach content effectively throughout their education.

**National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NELA)** <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu> NCELA collects, coordinates and shares research and resources supporting an inclusive approach to high quality ELL education.

**Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does—and Does Not—Say** [http://www.edweek.org/media/eil\\_final.pdf](http://www.edweek.org/media/eil_final.pdf) This article synthesizes major research reviews conducted by the National Literacy Panel and researchers affiliated with the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence in 2006.

**Making Social Studies Meaningful for ELL Students: Content and Pedagogy in Mainstream Secondary School Classrooms** <http://www.usca.edu/essays/vol16spring2006.html> A look at challenges and successes of developing an instructional environment to teach social studies to a sheltered population of ELLs."

**Preparing an Engaging Social Studies Lesson for English Language Learners** <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/35950> This article provides tools and resources to prepare social studies lessons that engage and benefit English language learners, including strategies for planning social studies lessons with ELLs in mind, lesson planning concepts and building social studies background knowledge.

**Practical Guidelines for the Education of English Language Learners: Research Based Recommendations for Instruction and Academic Interventions:** <http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/lep-partnership/interventions.pdf> Evidence-based recommendations for those seeking to make informed decisions about instruction and academic interventions for ELLs as well as ideas for class-wide and individualized interventions."

**Teaching English Language Learners Across the Content Areas. Ch. 2: Lesson Planning to Ensure Optimal Engagement of ELLs** <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109032/chapters/Lesson-Planning-to-Ensure-Optimal-Engagement-of-ELLs.aspx> A look at difficulties ELLs face in traditional classrooms and specific content areas along with ideas for connecting to prior knowledge, supplementary materials and modifying lesson plans.

**Using Objects with English Language Learners** <http://blog.americanhistory.si.edu/osaycanyousee/2009/10/using-objects-with-english-language-learners.html> A museum educator describes experiences using objects to cross cultural and linguistic divides in this blog posting from the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

**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

### TRANSPORTATION NOW AND IN THE PAST

#### Overview

Students work in groups to analyze photographs of different transportation methods from the early 1900s and then compare and contrast transportation in the past with transportation today. As students construct conceptual understanding, they also develop academic language and vocabulary through structured support. The activity offers techniques to support English Language Learners (ELLs).

#### Objectives

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

- identify common methods of transportation in the early 20th century;
- describe how transportation has changed and how it has remained the same;
- analyze a historical photograph; and,
- develop academic language and vocabulary in English about transportation.



*Palmer, Frank, photographer. "Coeur D'Alene man, Phillip Wildshoe and family, in his Chalmers automobile." Photograph. c1916. From Library of Congress: Miscellaneous Items in High Demand.*

#### Time Required

Two 45-minute class periods, activity extension idea requires additional class periods.

#### Grade Level

K - 3

#### Topic/s

Transportation (Cities, Towns)

#### Subject/Sub-subject

History

**Standards** McREL 4th Edition Standards and Benchmarks

#### Grades K-4 History

Standard 1. Understands family life now and in the past, and family life in various places long ago

#### Historical Understanding

Standard 1. Understands and knows how to analyze chronological relationships and patterns

#### Credits

Adapted from a unit plan created by Lisa Hutton, Associate Professor of Teacher Education at the California State University (CSU) at Dominguez Hills and Co-Director of the History Project at the CSU Long Beach and CSU Dominguez Hills.

#### View and Print the complete learning activity:

[http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical\\_thinking/pdf/elementary\\_activity.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical_thinking/pdf/elementary_activity.pdf)

## Learning Activity - Secondary Level

### SHOULD THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND THE PRESS EVER BE LIMITED?

#### Overview

Using the Sedition Act of 1798 as a historical case study, students analyze several text-based primary sources. They discuss their findings to better understand the term “sedition” and the historical context of the late 1790s. Students consider the question, “Should the freedom of speech and the press ever be limited?” and then write responses using evidence from the primary sources. The activity offers techniques to help students, especially English Language Learners (ELLs), analyze text-based primary sources.

#### Objectives

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

- Define the term “sedition”;
- analyze a text-based primary source;
- describe the domestic debate around the Sedition Act; and,
- develop a written response to the question, “Should the freedom of speech and the press ever be limited?”



Stuart, Gilbert, 1755-1728, artist. *John Adams, second President of the United States*. Pendleton's Lithography. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs.

#### Time Required

Two 45-minute class periods

#### Grade level

9 - 12

#### Topic/s

Government, Law; Presidents

#### Subject/Sub-subject

U.S. History

**Standards** McREL 4th Edition Standards and Benchmarks

#### Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

#### United States History

Standard 8. Understands the institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how these elements were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

#### Credits

Nicole Gilbertson, Ph.D.

Director of the University of California, Irvine History Project

#### View and Print the complete learning activity:

[http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical\\_thinking/pdf/secondary\\_activity.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical_thinking/pdf/secondary_activity.pdf)

## Teacher Spotlight

**Lindsay  
Robinson**



**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 11<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. History teacher Lindsay Robinson. The TPS program at the University of California, Davis, nominated Lindsay for her effective classroom use of primary sources to support English learners (ELs). A 12-year teaching veteran, Lindsay teaches at Firebaugh High School in Firebaugh, California, a small agricultural community. Thirty-six percent of Firebaugh-Las Deltas Unified School District's 2,286 students have been classified as ELs and many of Robinson's students hope to be the first in their families to complete high school. In the interview, Lindsay discusses teaching strategies and her favorite Library of Congress online resources.

**What motivated you to participate in the TPS workshops in your local area?** I am always looking for primary sources to use in U.S. History lessons and heard about a TPS workshop with this emphasis. I had trouble navigating the Library of Congress website in the past, so this was an opportunity to be guided through the site by knowledgeable facilitators. I was interested in a model activity featuring a process of selecting primary sources that enables students to grasp key concepts upon which a lesson is structured.

**Tell us about the first time you tried using primary sources in the classroom.** Early in my career, I tried teaching with primary sources and was not entirely successful due to a number of factors. I only used text-based documents instead of a variety of formats. Students had difficulty with vocabulary and lacked historical context and needed more previewing and scaffolding than provided to analyze the documents. As a result, I led the discussion despite students' interest.

I learned from that experience and also gained effective strategies from the TPS workshop which

resulted in great student-driven discussions sparked by primary sources. For example, when teaching the Great Depression, we begin the unit with a photograph from Dorothea Lange's Migrant Mother series. I use a "description first" analysis approach, asking students to describe what they see and then develop possible scenarios about the photograph before giving background information. The students respond enthusiastically because they anticipate and "buy into" this eyewitness account of history. This technique helps students practice language skills and understand the Great Depression because they have this evocative image to associate with it.

**How do you make primary sources accessible to English learners (ELs)?** It is important for ELs to understand context, so we discuss historical background before analyzing a primary source. When possible, students analyze a text-based primary source in their first language before analyzing the same source in English to help them feel less intimidated. Another strategy is to pair a visual primary source with one that is text-based because images are more accessible to ELs and students with limited language skills. For example, students analyze a photograph before studying a related document. Students informally analyze the document together verbally before writing about it. Cooperative, informal learning puts EL students at ease and is very effective. I also preview new vocabulary that EL students will not recognize.

**What is your favorite resource available on the Library of Congress Web site?** My favorite resources are the primary source sets. Each set has multiple primary sources connected to one theme or topic and includes historical background, analysis tools and lesson ideas. Two sets of particular interest are "Dust Bowl Migration" and "Primary Sources by State". I also use the online exhibitions with students; my current favorite is "'Suffering Under a Great Injustice:' Ansel Adams's Photographs of Japanese-American Internment at Manzanar".

**What advice do you have for teachers who have never tried teaching with primary sources?** Start by using tools and materials available on the Teachers Page. If you have never used primary sources before, try a primary source set. After teaching with one or more of these sets in class, you can adapt or add layers to the lesson. I also urge teachers to use the Teacher's Guides and Analysis Tool for Students, which are especially useful for EL students.