One of the challenges that comes with using primary sources is that, when you find them online, they often do not come with context. What’s the story with a particular source? Why is it significant? This is why teaching with exhibitions is a good strategy—each primary sources comes with a paragraph of context that helps you to plug that source into the larger story.

Every time the Library of Congress produces an exhibition at one of its buildings in Washington, D.C., it also creates an online version of that exhibition so that everyone can enjoy looking at and learning from the documents and artifacts assembled to tell stories that are important to American and world histories and cultures. Since the Library’s online exhibitions page may be a bit difficult to navigate, we’ve highlighted some of our favorites and suggested ways to work them into classroom instruction.
Lesson Idea—The Evolution of Aviation

The Library of Congress is home to the papers of Orville and Wilbur Wright, who gained world renown in 1903 with their first successful manned and sustained flight of a heavier-than-air flying machine. But a better way to engage your students with the materials might be through an exhibition called The Dream of Flight, which puts the Wright Brothers’ success in the context of the centuries-long fascination of humans with the idea of flying.

Divide the class into six groups and give each group one of the following primary source images, printed from the exhibition: “Wings of Wax,” “Winged Victory,” “Da Vinci’s Flying Machines,” “Lighter-Than-Air Vehicle,” “The Mongolfier Brothers’ Hot-Air Balloon,” and “On Aerial Navigation” (all from “The Dream” section). Have each group analyze its image. How does this thing fly? Then, all groups will work together to arrange their images in what they think is chronological order. Have them explain their choices, and then give them the paragraphs that go with each source for explanation (plus the additional paragraphs that pop up with the Discover! Buttons). Were their hypotheses correct? What are the general trends in the evolution of flying machines from the 15th-19th centuries? Next, show the Wright Brothers’ diary entry from Dec. 17, 1903 (Orville’s Account,” 2 of 2, from “The Achievement”; students can read the full transcript here, or an excerpt here). Then show the famous “First Flight Photograph” of the Wright Brothers. How did each of the predecessors (from the groups’ primary sources) influence the Wright Brothers’ success?

This lesson idea can be adapted to meet TN curriculum standards for 6th-8th grade Science (Embedded Technology & Engineering) and high school Physical World Concepts (Mechanics).

Lesson Idea—The Civil Rights Act of 1964

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is arguably one of the most important pieces of legislation passed by Congress in the 20th century. The Act outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It effectively ended segregation across the country and brought an official end to the Jim Crow period. It also sought to address racial discrimination in voter registration and in education. The passage of the act was a major victory for the civil rights movement. It came on the heels of the Birmingham campaign which included the Children’s Marches and Bull Connor’s attacks with water hoses and police dogs as well as President Kennedy’s assassination. This legislation would be followed a year later by the Voting Rights Act and the Selma campaign.

To begin, have the class watch the exhibit overview video. In this lesson, students will address why the legislation was needed, what the legislation did, and how it changed our nation. Divide the class up into six groups (students will need access to computers for this activity). Each group should be given a different section of the Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom exhibition. Direct each group to read the section description and review the timeline. Reflecting on their initial questions, how can this section help us to answer those questions? Also, have each group select one exhibit item they feel exemplifies the need for the legislation. Each group will present their findings.

As a class, listen to President Johnson’s remarks to the nation before he signed the bill into law. What case does the president make for the need for this law? How does he describe the intended impact of the law?

Finally, ask your students what the long-term impact of the Civil Rights Act is. Then have your class watch the legacy video. As an exit activity, have your students write a brief reflection on how the Civil Rights Act has impacted their lives.

This lesson idea can be adapted to meet TN curriculum standards in Social Studies (5.66, US.94) and English Language Arts (Reading: Informational Text).
LESSON IDEA— THE PHENOMENON OF ENTERTAINERS IN POLITICS

The adoption of television into the American home in the second half of the twentieth century sparked many changes in culture, politics, and home life. One of the major changes brought about by the rise of television was the rise of entertainers who involved themselves in politics in a very public manner. Comedians used satire to point out what and who they disagreed with in politics, often to the ire of some of their fans. Politically active entertainers like Bob Hope, Sammy Davis Jr., Johnny Carson and others used their positions within the entertainment industry to spread their opinions as well as awareness of current political and cultural situations to their audiences.

The Library of Congress’s Hope for America: Performers, Politics, and Pop Culture exhibition showcases the phenomenon of entertainers becoming more and more involved in politics and sharing their political beliefs through humor. Use the subsections Hope and Satire and Satire Enters Television, as well as the Hope for the World, Entertaining the Troops, Televison and Politics, and Entertainment and the News subsections to give background on Bob Hope and other entertainers who used their media platforms to discuss politics, as well as the increasing overlap of entertainment, television, and politics. Then let students explore the Entertainers in Politics subsection and either pick one of the entertainers on the page or come up with an entertainer in politics not mentioned on the web page and (for homework) write a brief (no more than 2 page) essay on their entertainer’s foray into politics. Students can also give mock interviews, in character as their chosen entertainer/politicians, and answer questions from the audience, such as how technological advances in media allowed for these entertainers to become politicians, and whether being an entertainer helps a person’s chances to win votes in America.

This lesson idea can be adapted to meet TN curriculum standards for high school U.S. History & Geography (US.83, 85) and English Language Arts (Reading: Literature).

FEATURED FEATURE— POLITICAL CARTOONS MINI-EXHIBITION

Most Americans today receive news via Facebook, Twitter, or some other internet newsfeed. While these media provide news quickly, concisely, and, some may argue, efficiently, do these news sources challenge people to think? It is a question worth pondering, and a subject TPS-MTSU has tried to address in a new primary source set, which spotlights a sampling of political cartoons from 1867-1920. Like a Facebook post, a political cartoon is quick and concise. Unlike many newsfeeds, however, political cartoons challenge viewers to know contextual content, be aware of bias, and understand symbolism and satire. Herb Block, a cartoonist whose cartoons are kept at the Library of Congress, stated that he “often summed up the role of the cartoonist as that of the boy in the Hans Christian Anderson story who says the emperor has no clothes on.” Cartoons expose people, events, and issues for what they really are and provide a helpful supplement to any warm-up activity, formative assessment, or discussion session. Take a look at several of the cartoons in the primary source set. This 1871 cartoon by Thomas Nast equates William “Boss” Tweed with a vulture. Ask your students, why is symbolism important? In another cartoon, drawn by Louis Glackens in 1906, pigs, sheep, and cattle lounge around a Chicago meat-packing plant (when you clock link, scroll down to The Jungle) sipping ice tea. Why did Glackens use satire? In this cartoon, drawn by Winsor McCay in 1913, children fall like water over a water wheel, a reference to the then ongoing National Child Labor Committee investigations. Ask your students, how are visuals more powerful than words?

This resource meets the following TN Social Studies Standards: US. 4, 8, and 22 (and seventeen more) as well as Visual Arts 3.1, 3.3, and 4.1 for high school.
Entertainment power couple Danny Kaye and Sylvia Fine were major players in the film and theatre industry in the mid twentieth century. Danny danced, sang, and acted from stage to screen while Sylvia composed music and lyrics for many of Danny’s films and performances. The couple later used their influence to participate in and further humanitarian efforts, with Danny Kaye becoming the first Good Will Ambassador to UNICEF in 1954. The exhibition "Danny Kaye and Sylvia Fine: Two Kids from Brooklyn" can be used to develop lesson plans that will meet standards 8.1, 8.2, and 8.3 for Social Studies, and Theatre standards for high school.

"O Captain, My Captain," [1865] Printer's proof with author's corrections, 1888 (“Two Laments,” 2 of 2, detail)

Take a look at Walt Whitman’s revisions of his famous poem, “O Captain! My Captain!” Why do you think he changed the sixth line in the first stanza? Who is the "captain" this poem refers to? For more information about Whitman’s life and poetry, check out the exhibition "Revising Himself: Walt Whitman and Leaves of Grass.

Caribbean Luxury [April 24, 2003, detail]

This satellite image shows the Caicos islands in the northern Caribbean. What causes this color differentiation in the image? Where is the land? To learn more about how these images were developed, read the overview for the "Earth as Art 3: A Landsat Perspective" exhibition.

Photograph of Jung’s monument at Bollingen, after 1950.

Carl Jung is one of the 20th century’s foremost contributors to the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis. He originated the idea of the “collective unconscious,” and believed that dreams held the key to interpreting a person’s inner mind. He was deeply influenced by Sigmund Freud, but bitterly broke with Freud over the nature of the unconscious. After that, he further developed his theory of archetypes, such as the hero, and illustrated his concepts in the magnificent Red Book. This amazing manuscript, detailed in this online exhibition, really crosses the line between scientific inquiry and dreamlike intuition.