We are excited to offer "Teaching History Today: Content and Strategies for World and U.S. History" for a second year. This year’s program on June 4th will feature the MTSU Center for Popular Music and the Albert Gore, Sr., Research Center as well as a new slate of historians from the MTSU Department of History. Contact Kira for more information.

We are partnering with the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site for a special workshop, “Expanding Citizenship from Civil War to Civil Rights,” in July! Click here for more information.

Have you planned your summer PD yet? Be sure to check out our full schedule on our Upcoming Workshops page!

“AWESOME” SOURCE OF THE MONTH:

DCM 1416: Fred Gretsch Mfg. Co. / Ocarina [1940]
This plastic whistle is part of an extensive collection of flutes and whistles at the Library of Congress. Teachers can check out teaching resources for this collection here. How do the many different types of instruments reflect their purpose and usage?

THEME: MATERIAL CULTURE

Material culture is a broad category that can include any object created by humans, from smart phones to pottery vessels to buildings. Everyone is surrounded by material culture every day; this provides an engaging way to get students to think about created objects as primary sources. The type of objects we create, what we use to create them, and how we use the objects can reveal the values, needs, preferences, practices, and materials that represent us and our society.

Oftentimes, material culture is the only way to learn more about societies that didn’t leave behind many written documents, such as enslaved African Americans in the antebellum U.S. Furthermore, material culture is often the best way to learn about traditional culture or folkways, which are not usually transmitted through written sources.

Content created and featured in partnership with the TPS program does not indicate an endorsement by the Library of Congress.
Lesson Idea—Mayan Artifacts

The Mayan civilization that flourished in the area of the Yucatan peninsula of Mexico from around 2000 B.C. to around 900 A.D. was highly advanced in its mathematical, cultural, and political systems. While the Maya developed a particularly sophisticated system of writing, the knowledge of how to read it was largely elusive to the outside world until the later 20th century. This meant that, for years, the only way that other people (especially Americans and Europeans) could learn about the Maya was through their material culture. Thanks to the Jay I. Kislak Collection at the Library of Congress, students can learn more about the Maya (and other pre-Columbian civilizations) through several fascinating artifacts.

This lesson will focus on two specific artifacts, a flask and a box, both of which would have contained ritual ointments and objects. Begin by showing students an enlarged image of the flask. Can they make out what’s happening in the carving? What kinds of things might one put in a flask? Next, have them read the descriptions of the artifact and of the ballgame it depicts. What does this artifact say about Mayan sports and religion?

It will help for students to be on computers (with Flash Player) so they can access the special presentation for the Tortuguero box. This allows them to rotate the box and get a sense for the object in 3D. Have them read both the Full Translation and the Story Summary, then analyze the box with the Primary Source Analysis Tool. What does this artifact say about Mayan rulers?

This lesson idea meets state standards for 7th grade Social Studies (7.65, 68) and Visual Art (4.1.3, 4.5.3).

Lesson Idea—The Tractor

Today as you drive through rural areas, it is not uncommon to see old farm equipment such as tills, spreaders, or rakes used as decoration on people’s property. These items, like the classic John Deere tractor, speak to a time when most families were small farmers. What can these old pieces of farm equipment tell us about how previous generations lived and worked the land? Mechanization and new technologies that developed as part of the Industrial Revolution changed farm labor and reshaped American life. Arguably, one of the most impactful items to be introduced to farm work was the tractor.

Begin by having students look at the images related to the article “Survey Shows Difference in Cost of Tractor and Horses.” Focusing on the tools (including the horses) used in each, what would it be like to farm using those particular tools? Next have students read the article and discuss their reactions. What can we conclude about the impact of tractors? Next have students analyze “Which are you feeding our allies or your horses?” What impact does owning a tractor have on the war effort? What other arguments are being made for transitioning farm labor to tractors and machinery? What can we conclude about the transition from horses, mules, and other animals to tractors? Why might farmers be reluctant to make the switch to mechanized farming?

Next, have students analyze the images on page two of this primary source set. Based on these sources, how have tractors and mechanized farming impacted agricultural workers? What demographic changes might this have caused in rural areas of the country? Have students research their own communities or regions. How many farms operated in their counties in the early 1900s? For more information on family farming traditions in the state, check out the Tennessee Century Farms program and its Facebook page.

This lesson idea can be adapted to meet curriculum standards in high school U.S. History (US.7). For additional ideas on ways to explore the material culture of farm labor, check out our lesson activity: Agriculture Around the World.

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Important Links:

- Video: What was in Lincoln’s Pockets?
- Teaching History with 100 Objects
- Lesson Planning with Artifacts
- Blog: From Snowballs to Sculptures: Material Culture That Melts
- Smithsonian X 3D
- Slates, crayons, and quills: Back to school supplies of the past
- Lesson Plan: Growth of Cotton Economy
- Collection: Baseball Cards
- TN State Museum: Traveling Trunks

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Miniature flask with ball player panel. Guatemalan Lowlands, Maya, AD 600-900.

Ford tractor demonstration [1921]
Lesson Idea—Kids and Consumerism

The items Americans purchase and the way in which they are bought change drastically with each generation, but much remains the same when it comes to children’s entertainment and toys. Have students analyze these photographs (A, B, and C) to determine how the way children played decades ago compares to their own experiences. To allow a more thorough analysis, cut copies of the photographs into four squares. Divide the class into groups giving each group a different quadrant to analyze before projecting the whole picture and asking groups to share details from their particular quadrant. Where are the children? Who and what are they playing with or entertained by? Where do you think these items were purchased? How is their playtime different than when you were a young child?

One of the most noticeable shifts in economic history occurred during the 1920s as advertising reached new markets and the expansion of credit and mass production led to consumerism. Like today, many advertisements during the 1920s targeted children, such as this Christmas time ad for dolls. Ask students to think about the strategies used to gain readers’ attention and increase sales. Students may point out the illustrations, ad placement, or sale prices.

Have students read tips from the 1920s in the Art in Advertising before creating and presenting an advertisement of their own. Conclude the lesson with a discussion. How did the 1920s economy affect culture in the United States? What can material culture tell us about consumerism?

This lesson idea meets state standards for high school U.S. History & Geography (US.34).

Featured Feature—“Beginnings of a Movement” Summer Institute

With summer right around the corner (really—it will be here before you know it!), it is time to think about the annual TPS-MTSU Summer Institute, which will take place June 12-14 in Murfreesboro. The institute is a staple of our summer PD schedule with each year’s theme building off the previous year’s. This year we are exploring the decades leading up to the modern civil rights movement (1930-1954). It was during the Great Depression, WWII, and the immediate post-war period that the organizing and legal groundwork was laid for the modern civil rights movement. Organizations like the NAACP, Urban League, and CORE worked to end Jim Crow practices through protest, lobbying for new laws, and use of the judicial system to fight for their constitutional rights. The return of African American soldiers after WWII would accelerate the pace of change as they refused to bow down to racial violence and intimidation upon their return home. These years sparked the beginnings of a movement that would edge the nation closer to living up to its founding ideals.

Content experts will discuss the changes happening during this pivotal period including the role of African American WWII veterans in the push against racial injustice. Participants will spend time researching relevant collections, exhibitions, and materials available from the Library of Congress. Experienced educators will share strategies on incorporating the inquiry method and primary sources in the classroom. TPS staff will discuss the importance of using historic sites as primary sources and strategies for connecting site visits to classroom teaching. This year’s institute will feature a visit to sites related to the Columbia Race Riots.

For more information including the institute agenda, visit the institute’s Web page.
Washing Clothes

This photograph depicts a lady washing clothes near a river in 1938. Ask students about what they see and how she is completing the task. Focus on the tools she is using such as the rocks and buckets. What do students not see? How do they wash clothes today? What is different? What can they infer about this lady and her life in West Virginia? What can they conclude about life in the late 1930s? To view more photographs like this one, click here.

Kites Around the World

Ask students to think of a tradition that is important to them, such as cooking a certain dish, playing a game, visiting places frequently, or reading stories. How might people from other cultures view those activities? What parallels can be drawn across cultures using their examples? How are the cultures different? What remains the same in each culture? Take a look at “Kites Rise on the Wind: The Origins of Kites,” which explains how kites have been used for various purposes by people around the world.

The “Blues Trail” Marker

A guitar as a local marker in Tutwiler, Mississippi, on the "Blues Trail" in the state's vibrant Mississippi Delta region [Nov. 10, 2017]

The Mississippi Blues Trail was created in 2006 to interpret the state’s rich musical history. It highlights over 200 places. Tutwiler, Mississippi, is best known as the site of inspiration for “Father of the Blues” and Alabama native W. C. Handy’s “Yellow Dog Blues.” Have students choose a different marker from the Mississippi Blues Trail to research.

The Codex Quetzalecatzin

Created in 1593, this watercolor map depicts Aztec genealogical information and land ownership near modern-day Mexico City. The rare artifact was digitized by the Library of Congress after being obtained by a private collector in France in late 2017. Dyes and pigments, Nahualtl hieroglyphics shown alongside Latin writing, and Spanish titles for Aztec elites are some of the details used by historians to date the map. Ask students what interesting things they notice about the Codex Quetzalecatzin. Learn more about Cortes and the Aztecs by viewing these maps, artifacts, and documents.