TEACHING with PRIMARY SOURCES—MTSU
NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2017

WELCOME!

Teaching with Primary Sources—Middle Tennessee State University, administered by the Center for Historic Preservation, engages learners of all ages in using primary sources to explore major issues and questions in many different disciplines.

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NEWS

- We are heading to west Tennessee in early April. Join us in Brownsville at the West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center on Friday, April 7, for “Strategies for Using Text Sources” and Memphis at Shelby County Schools’ Teaching and Learning Academy on Saturday, April 8, for “Defining Citizenship.” For more information or to register, please email Kira.

- Do you know the story of the “Devil Baby” of Hull House? Check out our latest lesson plan that examines Jane Addams, immigration, and the story of the “Devil Baby.” Also see the lesson idea on p. 3 of this issue!

- Mark your calendars! Our summer institute will be June 13-15 at the West Tennessee Delta Heritage Center in Brownsville. This year’s focus will be the Jim Crow era.

“AWESOME” SOURCE OF THE MONTH:

Hilda Kassell, E. 53rd St., New York City. Father reading newspaper, two children viewing television [1950]

If you were to stage a similar photo today to show the generational divide between preferred formats of media, what would the kids be doing and what would the father be doing?

THEME: MEDIA LITERACY

Americans have access to a plethora of different media sources today, including news articles, blog articles, Web sites, Facebook memes, television news and shows, documentaries, and, of course, traditional print media. The sheer volume of media available to students can sometimes make it hard for them to be able to sift through stories and decide how to take them—as information, entertainment, propaganda, etc.

The proliferation of “fake news” claims from both ends of the political spectrum further more creates an atmosphere in which it is more important than ever for students to learn basic media analysis skills. And, since all media formats and stories can be primary sources for how society views things/is meant to view things, primary source analysis tools are a good way to confront media sources.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

- March 3 (Rainsville) - “It Happened Here: Connecting Community and National History with Primary Sources” at the Bringing It Home: Utilizing Local History in the K-12 Classroom Series at Northeast Alabama Community College.

- March 10 (Gatlinburg) - Tennessee Council for Social Studies Conference sessions: “Building Historical and Critical Thinking Skills in an Age of Fake News” and “Using Primary Sources in a Group Project Setting” at the Park Vista Hotel. For more information on the conference, click here.

- March 11 (Knoxville) - “Strategies for Using Text-Based Sources in the Elementary Classroom” at the East Tennessee History Center from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. ET. To register, email Lisa Oakley.

- March 18 (Murfreesboro) - “The Mystery of the ‘Devil Baby’ at Jane Addams’ Hull House” at the Elementary Integrated Curriculum Conference at MTSU.

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Lesson Idea—Evaluating Newspapers

Newspapers have played an important role in our nation’s history as a medium for sharing information and news. Newspapers allow us a glimpse into how individual communities contextualized the world around them and how they saw their place in larger events. They also provide us with a record of the public dialogue around pressing issues of the day. While newspapers can be a great primary source, they are not without their challenges. Editors and journalists write stories that are influenced by their own (or corporate) perspectives, the source material before them, and what will sell. When reading newspapers, it is important to analyze the content and read it with a critical eye.

Using newspapers to teach history allows us the opportunity to teach these skills to our students and discuss how those same skills apply when reading modern newspapers, both print and digital.

The Library of Congress in partnership with the National Endowment for the Humanities has been engaged in a multi-year project to digitize portions of America’s newspapers. Chronicling America currently has over 11.6 million pages available from over 2,100 newspapers from all fifty states. For each newspaper issue, you will find bibliographic information that includes a short history of the paper, which provides valuable insight when analyzing how these papers covered the news. For suggestions on how to use this database in a research activity, check out our November 2016 newsletter.

In this activity, students will read and analyze three articles written after the Memphis Massacre in early May 1866 from three different papers representing different areas of the country for the purpose of determining how the event was described and why the event was significant to what was happening in the country at the time. Distribute the three articles to the class and have the students read the articles without providing any details about the events discussed in the articles. Students may find it helpful to use a graphic organizer to help organize their thoughts for each article as they read them. Allow students time to record their notes about how these articles compare and contrast to each other. What are the main points of agreement in the three articles? What are the main differences? What can we determine about the events that happened in Memphis on May 1-2, 1866? What questions do the students have about what happened after reading the articles?

Next ask students to read the articles again, highlighting phrases and words that indicate the writer’s perspective and show editorial bias. Have your students read the bibliographic information available for each paper: Nebraska advertiser, The Wyandot pioneer, and The Bolivar bulletin. To help students analyze this a bit deeper, you may choose to use the HIPPO analysis which focuses on historical thinking skills. This can be done individually or as a class. Students will need to consider how these events fit into the larger historical timeline. As you work through the different categories of audience, perspective, and purpose, have them consider how this shapes the newspapers’ coverage of events. Also, discuss the technology used to disseminate information across large geographic areas at the time. How might that factor into newspaper coverage of events?

Finally, have your students reflect on the takeaways from this exercise in relation to how we read newspapers today. You might consider having your students pick a modern topic and find different newspaper accounts of the events. Using the skills from the earlier exercise, have them present their analysis of the modern example. How does technology change modern print media? How does this apply to other modern mediums that news is shared?

This lesson idea is can be adapted to meet state curriculum standards in 5th grade to high school Social Studies (5.20, 5.23, 8.82, 8.90, US.2) and English Language Arts (Reading: Informational Text).
Lesson Idea– George Orwell’s 1984

When we think research, we may envision archives, primary sources, and scholarly work. Though these sources are crucial to our understanding of history, works of fiction can also tell historical stories. These stories reflect the concerns and values of the authors who created them, and by understanding these concerns and values, students can obtain a deeper knowledge of history.

George Orwell’s novel 1984 is a great example of a fictional work that reflects the author’s concerns and values. Published in 1949, the novel depicts a dystopian world controlled by a totalitarian government, led by Big Brother and policed by the Thought Police. 1984 serves as a warning against totalitarianism and is considered by many to be one of the most influential books in the 20th century.

Either pre-read and select sections from 1984 or have your students read the entire book. This lesson idea is a great opportunity to engage in cross-curricular instruction. Coordinate between English and Social Studies colleagues to immerse your students in the literary and historical world of 1984.

Make sure to establish context before reading. Who was George Orwell? Where was he from? When was this published? What was going on during that time period? How do you think this influenced Orwell? After your students have read from 1984, ask them what themes they picked up on. Who do you think this book was directed at? What issues do you think it was trying to address?

After reading, have your students look for ways that 1984 has been incorporated into popular culture. For example, this political cartoon from Herblock uses “doublethink” to convey a political argument. Have your students create a report on their source and the Orwellian features that are present. You can then have the students present the report to the class. For alternative projects, have your students write a letter to George Orwell describing how the book affected their lives and their overall thoughts about it using the “Letter About Literature” example on the Library of Congress.

This lesson plan can be adapted to fit U.S. History and Geography Standards 62 & 76, English 9-12 (Key Ideas and Details, Reading: Informational Text).

Lesson Idea– What Sounds “True” or “False”?

This lesson idea builds off the newspaper literacy activity on page 2, but furthermore asks the questions of what sounds true or false to students when they read/listen to stories in the media. We make decisions every day about what we’re going to trust as true and what we’re going to be suspicious of, and it’s a good cognitive skill to analyze what those decisions are based on, whether the clues are coming from the media piece itself or from our own minds.

Students will read two different newspaper articles talking about a sensational story from 1913 that a Devil Baby was born at reformer Jane Addams’ Hull House. Students might immediately decide that there can be no such thing as a Devil Baby and that the whole story must therefore be false. However, this activity compels them to decide what portions of the articles could be true, versus those that are suspicious.

This worksheet is four pages long, but only the first two pages are for students—the third and fourth pages are the teacher’s key.

After students have had a chance to fill out both pages of the worksheet, split them into pairs to discuss, or discuss as a whole class. There will most likely be a variety of similar and different answers in both the “true”-sounding and “false”-sounding boxes. Ask students what led them to label things true or false? Can they pinpoint where those decisions come from? (For instance, the fact that the article specifically mentions the academy of science and the art institute might indicate that the involvement of those organizations was a fact.) Then, ask students to compare the words and phrases they put boxes around that indicated some sort of judgement, hedging, or filter on the part of the author. How does the phrase “it is claimed” change the way you read the information? Why would journalists use these words/phrases? Lastly, have students reflect on why newspapers would report a story that was false? What instead are they actually trying to say about immigrants? For more on this idea, see our newly posted lesson plan, The Devil Baby: A Story of Immigration and America.

This lesson idea meets state curriculum standards for 5th grade and high school Social Studies (5.40, US.9) and English Language Arts (Reading: Informational Text).
**Bloody Sunday**

Alabama Police Attack Selma-to-Montgomery Marchers, March 7, 1965. [Courtesy of the FBI]

On a day that would become known as Bloody Sunday, civil rights activists and community members began a march to Montgomery to advocate for voting rights. The violent attack by state troopers on the marchers was aired that evening on TV and seen in homes across the nation. These powerful scenes helped to build support for the Voting Rights Act. How have social movements used available media to build public support and awareness?

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**The 1960 Election**

Senator John F. Kennedy, “Television as I See It: A Force That Has Changed the Political Scene.” [1959]

The final debate of the 1960 election between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon was the first debate to be broadcasted live. Kennedy exhibited a youthful and energetic appearance, and many say this tipped the balance in his favor for the election. How has television affected media literacy? How much do appearances matter? In what ways has it affected the way we communicate? For more on the 1960 election, look at this Today in History and the following article.

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**Fireside Chats**

FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] FIRESIDE CHAT ON U.S. SUPREME COURT REFORM PLAN [1937]

Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s fireside chats defined a generation of Americans. The advent of the radio and its increasing affordability ensure that Roosevelt’s chats reached a large audience. Why do you think that Roosevelt chose to communicate this way? What are the benefits/drawbacks of radio communication?

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**The Songs of Temperance**

The Lips that touch liquor, shall never touch mine [1874]

The Temperance Movement opposed alcohol in all its forms. Songs were often used by the movement to describe its goals and the dangers of liquor. Why do you think they chose songs to communicate their message? How do you think they chose songs to communicate their message? How have songs been used traditionally to communicate? How can you practice media literacy when analyzing songs?