TEACHING with PRIMARY SOURCES—MTSU
NEWSLETTER: JULY 2015

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.

Contact: Stacey Graham or Kira Duke at (615) 898-2947 or www.mtsu.edu/tps

NEWS

• TPS-MTSU will be offering additional workshops with Tennessee History Day this fall. Join us in Cookeville on September 12th, Memphis on September 17th, or Clarksville on November 2nd. The workshops in Cookeville and Memphis will be for teachers with previous History Day experience, and Clarksville will be for teachers new to History Day. For more information or to register, email Jennifer Core.

• Are you looking for an affordable fall conference to attend or present at? Consider the Tennessee Council for History Education conference which is taking place in Nashville on October 1st. This year’s conference will focus on Commemorating History: The Literacy of Memory. If you are interested in presenting, please email Kira Duke for more information.

“AWESOME” SOURCE OF THE MONTH:

Virginia Dare marker, 1/5/24 [1924, detail]
Perhaps the very first mystery in American history concerns the fate of the colonists who settled on Roanoke Island, NC, in 1587. Virginia Dare, the first white child born in the New World, later became the subject of folklore. This marker, photographed in 1924, seems to conflate her experience with that of the later Jamestown colony.

THEME: HISTORY MYSTERIES

History is full of mysteries. A good way for students to conceive the role of the historian is as a detective, who must sort through clues (a.k.a., primary sources) in order to solve the mystery. However, despite what we have grown used to from watching countless TV shows and movies, not all mysteries actually get solved. Approaching history as a mystery may also help students grow less uncomfortable with the thought that we may never know how or why something really happened.

So, did the Bell Witch really exist? What were pirates really like? Did Paul Revere save the colonists via his midnight ride? And what happened to Amelia Earhart? This issue also explores misunderstandings of history, much in the same way as our Myth-busters issue of January 2014.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

• July 13-15 ( Cookeville) — World War I Summer Institute in partnership with the Tennessee State Library and Archives. Institute is full.

• July 21 (Johnson City) — “Introduction to National History Day and Teaching with Primary Sources” workshop at East Tennessee State University from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. EST in partnership with Tennessee History Day. To register, email Jennifer Core.

• July 22 (Johnson City) — TN History Day and TPS Intermediate workshop at East Tennessee State University from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. EST in partnership with Tennessee History Day. To register, email Jennifer Core.

• July 23 (Cleveland) — TN History Day and TPS Intermediate workshop at Museum Center at 5ive Points from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. EST in partnership with Tennessee History Day. To register, email Jennifer Core.

• August 11 (Chattanooga) — “Research, Resources, and Reconstruction” Sessions at Tennessee History for Kids Tent Revival. Session times TBA.

Content created and featured in partnership with the TPS program does not indicate an endorsement by the Library of Congress.
LESSON IDEA – THE BELL WITCH

Since 1817, a farm in Robertson County, Tennessee, has been haunted by the “Bell Witch,” an invisible entity who allegedly tormented the family and descendants of farmer John Bell. Today, the site remains an attraction for the public, including ghost hunters. Reports of strange noises and paranormal activity have been recorded up to the present. What happened in 1817 to cause the nationwide publicity of what Dr. Nandor Fodor once described as "America's Greatest Ghost Story"? What happened that could capture the attention of President Andrew Jackson and drive him to investigate?

As a class, read two accounts of the Bell Witch story. Begin by reading the legend from the Official Bell Witch Web Site. How current is this Web site? What is the purpose of this text? Next, read "Story of Witchcraft," a newspaper article from the Hartford Herald starting at top of second column. When was this article written? What is the purpose of this text? How do these two readings differ? What do the two readings together tell the reader or work together to tell a story?

This lesson idea meets TN standards for 8th grade English/Language Arts (Reading: Literature).

LESSON IDEA – REAL VS. FICTIONAL PIRATES

Pirates in the Americas often make us think of Robin Hood-like figures who had grand adventures on the open seas, stealing from wealthy monarchs or trading companies. We think of pirates depicted in popular culture like Captain Jack Sparrow from Pirates of the Caribbean, Long John Silver from Treasure Island, and Captain Hook from Peter Pan. Fictional pirates shape much of our ideas about what life was like during the Golden Age of Piracy in the Americas (roughly 1650 to 1730). In truth, we have very few primary sources to document the lives of pirates. Most of the primary sources come from those who were victims of pirate raids or those charged with hunting them down.

To begin this lesson, have students list adjectives they would use to describe a pirate during the Golden Age of Piracy. After they have compiled their lists, ask them what they used as a basis for their mental images of pirates. Next, have students read an excerpt from Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson (pp. 92-98). Depending on your students’ reading abilities, you may need to divide this excerpt up into smaller sections and have students work in small groups. You may also want to provide a vocabulary list (scroll down the page to find the glossary). What adjectives would they use to describe the pirates in this excerpt? Is there anything that surprises them about the way pirates are presented?

Next, students will analyze images of real pirate captains: Blackbeard (see image to the right), Black Bart, Charles Vane, and Captain Kidd. Divide the class into groups and give a different image to each group. Have each group develop an adjective list for its assigned captain. Allow groups a chance to share their lists. If time allows, have students research the history of each pirate captain.

Finally, have students compare their three adjective lists. What are some common themes they see? What are some of the differences? How might the stories of these real pirate captains have influenced the writing of Treasure Island and more current depictions of pirates in popular culture?

This lesson idea can be adapted to meet TN standards for middle and high school in English/Language Arts (Reading: Literature).
**Lesson Idea— Paul Revere’s Ride**

“The British are coming!” awakens the minds of Americans to the midnight ride of Paul Revere, but were these the words that truly awoke the people of the Massachusetts on the eve of the American Revolution? Whom was he really warning? On the night of April 18, 1775, this local silversmith set off for Lexington where he was to warn John Hancock and Samuel Adams of the approaching British troops that would lead to the first battle of the American Revolution. That night’s events remained in obscurity until Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1861 poem, “Paul Revere’s Ride,” which has an energized and rhythmically memorable form that immortalized Revere’s actions in American folklore.

Begin the lesson by asking your students for their perception of Paul Revere’s midnight ride and write any keywords on the board. Then, have them read a summary of the ride from the Paul Revere House in Boston to establish an understanding of the event. Split the class into small groups and have them read Paul Revere’s government deposition and a letter Revere sent to Jeremy Belknap describing his actions that night. The groups should compare these two accounts, and then record keywords and phrases that describe the main differences and similarities. Finally, have the students follow along with the text while listening to the 1916 recording of Longfellow’s poem. Analyze how different words are used to explain the same event. How are the words that are more commonly used to describe the midnight ride different from the actual words of Paul Revere? And Longfellow’s poem? How does poetry change the story? Eighth grade teachers could also have their students think about why Longfellow would have written the poem at the beginning of the American Civil War.

This lesson idea meets TN curriculum standards in 4th and 8th grade Social Studies and 4th-12th grade English/Language Arts Common Core Standards (Reading: Informational Text and Literature).

**Lesson Idea— Amelia Earhart’s Disappearance**

For almost eighty years, the unsolved disappearance of aviator Amelia Earhart, navigator Fred Noonan, and their plane Electra has captivated the American public. Earhart emerged as an international celebrity in the 1920s, became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean in 1932, and was a strong advocate for women’s participation in aviation.

Early in July 1937, Earhart and Noonan were flying over the Pacific Ocean, a dangerous leg of their attempt to fly around the world, when they lost contact with a Coast Guard ship nearby. Immerse your students in the drama surrounding the disappearance by sharing with them the first news reports published in the July 2, 1937, issue of the New York Times.

First, as a class break down the headline and the six subheads at the top of the article. What information is presented? Is the information presented so as to make people want to read the article or to feel a certain way? Next, divide your students into four groups and give each group part of the article to analyze—the article is divided into sections based on subheads (Group 1: beginning of article through end of second section; Group 2: third and fourth sections; Group 3: last section through the 9th paragraph; Group 4: remainder of article). Each group should create a timeline for its section. For each event on their timeline, the students should give the source for that information, if provided in the article. Come back together as a class and make a master timeline based on the groups’ timelines. Then, discuss with your students what they think happened to Earhart and Noonan. Finally, let your students know that The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR) is in the midst of an investigation into Earhart’s disappearance. TIGHAR’s researchers believe that Earhart and Noonan landed on a tiny Pacific Ocean island near to the island they had been aiming for and died there after living as castaways.

This lesson idea meets TN curriculum standards in 5th grade social studies (5.47) and 5th grade English/Language Arts Common Core Standards (Reading: Informational Text).
Bermuda [1976]

Known as the Bermuda Triangle, this area of the Atlantic Ocean is known for the disappearances of aircrafts and boats over the years. Also known as the Devil’s Triangle, the area is bounded by Bermuda, Puerto Rico, and Miami. Believed by many, including Christopher Columbus, to be a haunted and supernatural location, some boats and aircraft still avoid this 500,000 square miles of water. The mystery of disappearances remains unsolved today.

Ancient Roman Engineering

Pont Du Gard [1860]

Ancient Rome could never have supported a population of one million people or its vast empire without its aqueducts. Even today the experts aren’t quite sure how ancient engineers managed to construct these enormous public works to such precise specifications, sometimes sloping only a foot or so per mile over 30 to 80 miles. Watering Ancient Rome from Nova offers a thorough introduction to the aqueducts, like the Pont du Gard above in France, and their importance in providing Rome and the empire with an endless supply of water.

Franklin and Electricity

Experiments and Observations on Electricity, Made at Philadelphia in America [1951]

Everyone knows that Benjamin Franklin flew a kite during a thunderstorm and discovered electricity, right? Not exactly. People knew about electricity long before the 18th century, though the phenomenon was poorly understood. Franklin conducted many experiments with electricity and even coined terms we use today like battery, charge, and discharge. Conduct an electrical experiment yourself with this online game from PBS and see if you have what it takes to be a scientist!

Was Richard III “Rubbedished”?

Thos. W. Keene. Richard III [1884, detail]

Richard III, the King of England notorious for (supposedly) killing his nephews and losing his life at the Battle of Bosworth (“My kingdom for a horse!”), has recently been unearthed in a parking lot in Leicester, U.K. For hundreds of years, his final resting place had been a mystery, as has the idea that his reputation was trashed by Shakespeare. While some aspects of his life are still unknown, you can learn about his life and death and the incredible archaeological undertaking that discovered his body at this special Web site at the University of Leicester. You can also watch videos about the project at the Smithsonian Channel.