TEACHING with PRIMARY SOURCES—MTSU
NEWSLETTER: NOVEMBER 2014

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
• For U.S. history teachers, we have new primary source sets designed for the state social studies standards! The first focuses on the pre-colonial period up to 1850; the second picks up with 1850 and goes through the contemporary period. Many of the primary sources that students will be required to read are included in these sets.

• Do you have a lesson plan you would like to share with others? TPS-MTSU offers a $250 stipend for teacher-created lesson plans that use Library of Congress primary sources and the inquiry method. We are currently looking to add more early elementary lesson plans and cross curricular activities at all grade levels to our Web site. If you would like more information, please contact either Kira Duke or Stacey Graham.

THEME: CLASSIC AMERICAN LITERATURE
This month we are exploring an English/Language Arts topic: great American novels. At what time in Americans’ lives do they read the most classic novels? The answer for most people is high school, and possibly middle school (maybe college). Making sure students get the most out of literature is therefore vital in ensuring they form a lifelong love of classic books. Wouldn’t it be great if students actively read the classics for pleasure after they became adults? Americans have much to be proud of in the literary genre: Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852), Little Women (1868), The Red Badge of Courage (1895), The Call of the Wild (1903), The Sound and the Fury (1929), For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940), Invisible Man (1952), To Kill a Mockingbird (1960), In Cold Blood (1966), Beloved (1987), and many more.

“AWESOME” SOURCE OF THE MONTH:

Texas tenant farmer in Marysville, California, migrant camp during the peach season, 1935; click and read full title!

UPCOMING EVENTS:
• November 6 (Murfreesboro) — “Teaching Strategies for Middle and High School” Afterschool Workshop at the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. To register, email Kira Duke.

• November 13 (Franklin) — “Examining Tennessee’s Last Campaign” with the Tennessee State Library and Archives from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. To register, email Kira Duke.

• November 21 (Knoxville) — “Teaching World War I” at the East Tennessee History Center from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. EST. To register, email Lisa Oakley.

• December 5 (Knoxville) — “Teaching Early Tennessee History” at the East Tennessee History Center from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. EST. To register, email Lisa Oakley.

The Grapes of Wrath (1939) by John Steinbeck can be condensed into these 12 words: parolee, preacher, eviction, migrants (see image at left), labor, camps, corporations, union, strike, kill, farewell, and feed. (What’s this about? See p. 3 to find out….)
LESSON IDEA— *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

Written by F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1925, *The Great Gatsby* is known as the author’s most important works. Set in the fictional town of West Egg, Long Island, in the 1920s, the book describes the height of the Jazz Age, with extravagant costumes and decadence. Fitzgerald takes his readers on a journey to an age of excess before the Great Depression in the United States, illustrating the ornate costumes of flappers and luxurious parties. *The Great Gatsby* is a novel taught across the United States. The book has been made into films in 1926, 1949, and 2013 (you and your students can [watch the 2013 trailer here](#)).

For students who have not read the book, teachers may prompt them with questions based on the trailer above. How does this book or movie portray the 1920s? Why do you think this time was known as the “Roaring Twenties”? What was going on in America’s economy during this time? How does this novel and movie compare to what we know of the Great Depression, which struck the United States in the 1930s?

This lesson idea can be adapted to meet state standards for 6-8th grade CCSS for ELA (Reading: Literature).

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LESSON IDEA— *Moby Dick* (1851)

Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* remains one of the best-known American adventure novels and describes a vengeful sea-captain’s pursuit of the whale that took his leg. Based both on Melville’s own experiences as a whaler and the disaster of the *Essex*, sunk after it was rammed by a sperm whale in 1820, *Moby Dick* was one of many whaling books and songs created in the first half of the nineteenth century. Have your students listen to one such song (*Whaling Song*) performed by Nantucket resident James Gibbs and recorded in 1934. As you listen to the song and the subsequent interview with Gibbs, ask your students: What are the purposes of songs? Do songs help individuals remember events and people? Do songs tell the complete truth about events or do they alter and mythologize events? Why? What current songs remind you of Gibbs’s whaling ballad?

Although fiction, *Moby Dick* tells the story of one of 19th-century New England’s major economic industries. Whale blubber was used to make an oil that was used to light lamps before the widespread use of petroleum and electricity. Have your students look at photographs of whalers hauling in a whale (*Cutting in a sperm whale*) and cutting off slices of blubber (*Peeling blubber from a beached whale*). Since whale oil is not used today, have your students analyze the two right-hand columns of a newspaper article from *The Ogden standard-examiner on August 20, 1922* in order to understand why whale oil no longer plays a role in the economy.

To bring in popular culture connections, the sinking of the *Essex* has been recorded in Nathaniel Philbrick’s award-winning book *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*, and it will be the subject of a 2015 movie adaption of Philbrick’s book ([watch trailer](#)).

This lesson idea can be adapted to meet state standards for 6-8th grade CCSS for ELA (Reading: Literature).
The Cozy Classics series of children’s board books takes a classic novel and adapts it for small children in a unique way. The authors Jack and Holman Wang condense the story into twelve basic, kid-friendly words, each of them illustrated with a crucial scene from the story. For example, their adaptation of Moby Dick tells the story through these words: sailor, boat, captain, leg, mad, sail, find, whale, chase, smash, sink, and float. The book includes charming pictures of Ishmael, Ahab, the Pequod, and the whale made out of felt.

The process of selecting the twelve best words to summarize a classic novel is not as easy as Cozy Classics makes it look. It exercises critical thinking skills such as determining the main idea, summarizing, and sequencing. When I tried it for Fahrenheit 451 (1953) by Ray Bradbury, I came up with fireman, wife, books, burn, stash, professor, television, poem, flames, war, memorize, and phoenix. For Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) by Zora Neale Hurston, I decided on story, slave, daughter, marriage, town, store, hit, independence, love, muck, hurricane, defense, and innocent. What books are you reading with your students? What twelve words would your students come up with to condense those books?

Once you have selected what book you will be adapting, search the Library of Congress Web site for images that illustrate the words and concepts that students identified as central to the story. For Fahrenheit 451, for instance, you could search on “book burning,” “McCarthyism,” or “television” (see next page). For Their Eyes Were Watching God, you could search on “Eatonville” in the Prints and Photographs Online Catalog for images associated with Hurston’s fieldwork, which helped inspire her story. Students could also create illustrations using various art media, and assemble all the words and images together in the form of a book. If your school has a childcare class or partners with a pre-K classroom, your students can have a story time with young children to introduce them to the books the “big kids” are reading in school.

This lesson can be adapted to meet state standards for 6-12th grade CCSS for ELA (Reading: Literature & Writing: Literature).

In 2012, the Library of Congress opened an online survey about books that have had an impact on the lives of Americans. This online project hoped to foster a conversation in our country about the role of literature in our lives and how it affects American culture and thought. The results of this survey were shared in an exhibition, Books That Shaped America, which opened just prior to the National Book Festival that fall. The exhibition contains five sections exploring important literary works in fifty-year increments starting with 1750. Selections include works by Thomas Paine, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain, Ralph Ellison, Dr. Seuss, and Cesar Chavez, just to name a few. Many of the books featured in the exhibition should be familiar to students, as they are highlighted in the new state Social Studies standards.

You might consider using this exhibition a couple of different ways with your students. First, you might poll your students on how many of these books they are familiar with. Depending on the grade level you are working with, you might challenge students to select a title featured in the exhibition to read and present to their classmates. After students have presented on the book(s) that they read, have the class discuss how each book influenced American culture when it was published. How far-reaching was that impact? Are these books still shaping American thought and culture today? How many of these books have been translated into film? You might have students do a comparative study of the film adaptation to the book. You might also have students conduct a survey in your school about the books that have influenced the thinking of their fellow students and build an exhibition that reflects their findings. This project could be done in collaboration with drama and arts programs to add visual and theatrical elements to the exhibition. Students can also take the survey to add their suggested titles to the exhibition list.
**Gone with the Wind (1936)**

Building where Margaret Mitchell wrote her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel "Gone With the Wind" in Atlanta, Georgia [ca. 1980-2006]

*Gone with the Wind*, the most popular romance novel of all time, was the only book published by Mitchell during her lifetime. The popularity of the book and the film overwhelmed the author, who later burned all of her other works. A novella she wrote in her teens was published in 1996 after being discovered in letters written by Mitchell.

**Fahrenheit 451 (1953)**

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

Ray Bradbury’s dystopian *Fahrenheit 451* challenged readers to think about a culture without books. Although Bradbury warned readers about the negative potential of television, it is hard to imagine that he could have foreseen the enormous impact of TV and video on current culture. As your students look at the above photograph, ask: What is the photographer’s opinion of television? Of newspapers? Do you agree? Is it healthy for young children to watch television?

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**The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884)**

[Huckleberry Finn / E.W. Kemble, [1884]

Mark Twain (real name: Samuel Clemens) is one of the best-known American writers for a reason: his memorable characters and acerbic wit captured uniquely American lifeways, centered around the Mississippi River. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is also an example of how attitudes towards books and issues can change drastically over time. Read this excellent blog post about how to confront the controversy of this book using primary sources, and read the whole book [here](#).

**The Iceman Cometh (1946)**


Written by Eugene O’Neill, a Nobel Prize winner, *The Iceman Cometh* is a play that discusses socialism and anarchy. Despite being a best-seller, the play is rarely performed due to its length (nearly five hours on stage). Why is it important to read plays, as well as novels, in school? How do plays differ from other works of literature?