

# American Archives Month

OCTOBER 2007

## Celebrating the American Record With Young People

### Ideas for Reaching Out to Students in Elementary Through High School

This special section of the *2007 American Archives Month Public Relations Kit* will help you “spread the good word” about archives to youngsters. They’re current and future users of our materials, they’re influencers of our culture, and they may even be future archivists!

By informing students of the value and power of archives, you can

- Help educate young people about the importance of preserving their own cultural heritage – thus contributing to the completeness of America’s documentary record;
- Help expand your repository’s user base; and
- Help “refresh” the graying archives profession by stimulating an interest in archives as a career.

Provided here are ideas for you to use in participating in school career days, working with a teacher to prepare a classroom lesson, or inviting a group of students to visit your repository. If you’re looking for a general handout to add to your materials, be sure to download the “What Is an Archives?” page from the SAA website. See page 4 of this special section for details.



*The Library of Congress website is one source of great information about how primary sources can be used to enhance learning. See [www.loc.gov/learn](http://www.loc.gov/learn) to get started!*

#### A Message for Students:

### Your History Is Our Country's History...

Letters from relatives, your grandmother’s diary, photos and videos of you and your friends, and other material collected over the years provides vital and unique information about your life or the history of your family. Obviously these items are important to you. But they also may be important to your community, state, or country, too. Whether or not members of your family attained a degree of fame, they have contributed to the heritage of a certain place and time. When you donate your personal or family papers to an archives, your family history becomes a part of your community’s – and America’s – collective memory. ■

## LESSONS LEARNED

## Archives in the Classroom, Students

Some archives support robust education programs, with educators on staff, a full schedule of opportunities for teachers, activities for students, outreach programs for community groups, lecture series, conferences, publications, and more. Other institutions support education projects on a smaller scale. And some organizations are just starting to develop programs.

Whichever description best fits your organization, there can be no denying that education programs reap valuable rewards. They inspire community members to better understand your holdings and mission. They help you attract and maintain enthusiastic volunteers and staff members. And they help

you gain valuable support for other aspects of your operation.

If you are just starting to consider your archives' role with regard to the education community or making plans to expand it, the following ideas and resources may be useful.

- If you're a parent, start by talking to your child's teacher or principal. Ask what the class is studying (if you're not already aware!) and find out whether the teacher is willing to have you bring in some materials to supplement a lesson or schedule a field trip to your repository. An excited teacher may well share your availability with her/his colleagues!

- If you're not a parent, call your local school(s) anyway!

- Most of the 50 states mandate use of primary sources in the classroom. Demonstrate your expertise by suggesting some sources the teacher might use.

- Remember that although the focus of classroom use of primary sources often is on social studies, they can also be used effectively in English, music, art, geography, and even math and science classes.

- Work with the teacher to plan the lesson. S/he understands the standards and the goals for a particular lesson; you can provide content ideas and suggestions

for resources to enhance the lesson.

- Start small. You don't need to create a complete lesson. Begin by supplying a map that relates to a local history lesson or a diary entry that relates to an event the students are studying.

- Be creative. The unexpected may be a perfect caper to a lesson. Do you have a document or artifact in your repository that is especially interesting to youngsters?

- Tailor your selection of materials to the appropriate grade level. Younger students might be asked to count the number of people in a picture or watch a silent film and tell the story that they see. Older students might

## Lasting Impact: "Pitch Perfect" Primary Sources

**Danna Bell-Russel, educational outreach specialist for the Library of Congress**, knows first hand the lasting impact a primary source can have in a classroom. But she stresses that primary sources can apply well beyond social studies – and become integral parts of the educational experience in English, music, art, geography, and, yes, even science and math classes! "Primary sources can be used to improve critical thinking, do analysis, and show bias or differences in how a story or event has been seen in history and may have changed," says Bell-Russel.

A favorite story occurred on a trip to California with the Julliard Quartet to visit the Idylwild Arts Academy. "We took a large col-

lection of musical materials, including an original page of Brahms sheet music. One student was completely overwhelmed and excited by this one document; it was the same piece he was practicing for a performance!" relates Bell-Russel. "In studying the primary source, he noticed that the transcription he was using was completely different. At every class break, he returned to look at the music. He brought his friends back. And then he brought his violin to try and play the piece as originally transcribed...."

You, too, can find a way to make your archives' primary sources "pitch perfect" in the classroom! ■

# in Your Repository

work with ledger books and figure out how much it cost to run a farm or company. (Example: Use the ledgers from George Washington's papers to determine how much it cost him to run his farm).

- Make sure to review the material you plan to show to determine whether it contains words that are no longer in use (and that you may need to explain) or words or images that may be inappropriate for the age group.
- Help the teacher prepare students for the lesson and your visit by providing some information about primary sources and archives. And assist in developing follow-up activities to make sure that students gained the knowledge that was intended.
- Consider how you might help raise awareness about the importance of ensuring the diversity of America's documentary record. Include in your materials examples of documents created by members of under-represented groups.
- If you bring materials into the classroom, make sure that

the room is neat, clean, and clear of anything that might damage the documents.

- Make sure the teacher stays in the room and assists with teaching the lesson. This is not a time for her or him to get other work done.
- Don't overtax yourself. If your popularity as a presenter means that you're receiving too many requests, seek assistance from other repositories in your area.

**For some ideas about primary sources that are helpful and fun in supplementing lessons, see the following online resources:**

#### **From Library of Congress**

- [http://memory.loc.gov/learn/community/cc\\_greatdepression\\_kit.php](http://memory.loc.gov/learn/community/cc_greatdepression_kit.php)
- <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/01/map/>
- <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/>

#### **From Public Broadcasting Service**

- <http://pbskids.org/historydetectives/parentsteachers/index.html> ■

## Resources to Note

### **National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)**

[www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org)

NCSS is the largest professional organization for social studies teachers in the country, with more than 26,000 members and affiliate groups in virtually every state. Working with NCSS is a great way to reach teachers. The organization holds annual national, regional, and state conferences and publishes *Social Education*, *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, and *The Social Studies Professional*. Since 1977, the group has partnered with educators at the National Archives to publish "Teaching With Documents" articles in *Social Education*. NARA has found this to be a great way to reach teachers with the message that documents can be valuable teaching tools. Many of the state affiliates publish journals as well. Perhaps they'd like to work with you to promote your holdings and mission!

### **National Council for History Education (NCHE)**

[www.nche.net](http://www.nche.net)

NCHE is a non-profit corporation dedicated to promoting the importance of history in schools and in society. The group has state councils and hosts an annual conference as well as state and regional conferences and meetings. It has partnered with numerous Teaching American History Grant recipients in recent years, working with hundreds of teachers to alert them to resources available in museums and archives. NCHE publishes *History Mat-*

ters monthly during the school year. Another publication of interest is "Building a United States History Curriculum" — a manual on implementing the Bradley Commission's US History Guidelines, which emphasize the importance of primary source documents and original research.

### **National History Day (NHD)**

[www.nationalhistoryday.org](http://www.nationalhistoryday.org)

National History Day (NHD) is an academic organization for elementary and secondary school students. More than half a million students, working with thousands of teachers nationwide, participate in the NHD contest each year. Early in the school year, students choose historical topics related to an annual theme and conduct extensive research. After analyzing and interpreting their sources and drawing conclusions about their topics' significance in history, students present their work in four categories: original papers, exhibits, performances, and documentaries. These products are entered into competitions in the spring at local, state, and national levels and are evaluated by professional historians and educators. The program culminates in a national competition each June at the University of Maryland at College Park. NHD publishes an annual teachers' guide, supports a website that provides links to dozens of archival institutions, and supports professional development opportunities for teachers. Every state has a state coordinator. SAA is an endorser of National History Day. ■

SAA is especially grateful to two individuals who contributed their time, expertise, and great ideas to this supplement: Lee Ann Potter, Head of Education and Volunteer Programs at the National Archives and Records Administration; and Danna Bell-Russel, Educational Outreach Specialist, Office of Strategic Initiatives, Library of Congress.

# School Daze

## Growing the Profession by Participating in School Career Days

What if you were asked to participate in a career day at your local elementary school and you have to follow a fireman and precede the owner of the local ice cream store?

Declining the offer shouldn't even cross your mind! Here are some tips for making sure that you get the message across to your young audience.

### Get Ready...

**1.** Pretend you are the age of the students who will be in your audience. Consider what materials in your collection might spark their interest. Do you have photographs of children their age? Do you have letters written by children? Do you have interesting maps of your community? Anything related to a famous person with whom the students might be familiar?

**2.** Make color facsimiles of the documents you identified in #1. (Or, if you have original documents that can stand the travel, include those. Students enjoy seeing "real old stuff.")

**3.** Place the facsimiles in Mylar sleeves and in acid-free folders.

**4.** Place the facsimiles and folders in acid free boxes.

**5.** Grab white gloves, magnifying glasses, and pencils.

**6.** Spend some time thinking about what you like about your job. Write down the top three things that you like best.

**7.** Think about words you might use in your talk with which the students might be unfamiliar. Make a list of them and think of simple ways to explain what they mean.

### Get Set...

**8.** Wear clothing like you wear on a typical day of work. If that includes a stack coat, wear it, too!

**9.** Bring the facsimiles, boxes, gloves, pencils, and magnifying glasses with you, along with brochures or handouts about archives and archivists and your facility.

### Go!

**10.** Start your presentation by asking students (indicating their answers by a raise of hands) if they like the aspects of your job that you like (see #6). It's likely that some of those aspects may include: if they like solving mysteries; if they have ever wanted to be an explorer; if they like helping people; and if they like to use their imaginations.

**11.** Tell them stories – about someone you helped, about the oldest document you ever held, about something you learned yesterday. Try to integrate into the stories the vocabulary that you identified in #7.

**12.** Invite the students to discover the contents of your acid-free box. Maybe dim the lights and ask why that might be important. Ask for a volunteer to put on the gloves and take out the documents. Ask others why they think gloves might be important. Ask another volunteer to use the magnifying glass and look for particular items that you have pre-selected. It may be helpful to make enough copies for all students to participate.

**13.** Let them guess what subjects you studied in school. Let them guess what a "typical" day is like for you.

**14.** Bring pictures of where you work or brochures for them to keep. If possible, invite them to pay a visit to you at work. Make a plan with their teacher for a class fieldtrip.

**15.** Remember that enthusiasm is contagious! Have fun!

— Lee Ann Potter ■

# What Is an Archives?

*The full article entitled "What Is an Archives" is available for download from the SAA website. You can download it, print multiple copies (preferably on a color printer), and make it available to students who visit your repository. Or take it with you to distribute to students on your next career day visit!*

An archives is a place where people go to find information. But rather than gathering information from books as you would in a library, people who do research in archives often gather firsthand facts, data, and evidence from letters, reports, notes, memos, photographs, audio and video recordings, and other *primary sources*.

Whether or not you realize it, you probably have an archives in your home. It might be in a filing cabinet in the study, a box in the basement, a chest in the attic – or even in all three. This is your personal archives: a collection of material that records important events from your family's history.

Believe it or not, there are similarities between your family's archives and local, state, or national archives. All save items to serve as proof that an event occurred, to explain how something happened, or for financial or sentimental reasons. All types of archives may be stored in more than one location. And both personal archives and larger archives save a variety of materials that can range from letters to photographs, to films, to databases, to official documents, and more.

### But what are the differences?

Archives come in all shapes and sizes. There are national archives, state archives, city archives, community archives,

business archives, church archives, and more. There are archives for different types of government records, and also archives that contain the personal records of people and organizations. There are archives that contain the personal papers of famous leaders (for example, Martin Luther King, Jr), authors (for example, Maya Angelou and Ernest Hemingway), scientists (for example, Albert Einstein and Marie Curie), performers, religious and business leaders, social activists, and more! Archives – and the professional archivists who work in them – make sure that all important records will be available for research by generations to come.

America's largest archives is the National Archives in Washington, DC. What makes America's National Archives different from what you might call your personal memory box?

The materials held by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) number in the billions! NARA's holdings are created either by or for the federal government. The material comes from the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Although your records are personal, those held by the National Archives are official. Your family's archives might contain, for example, your great-grandmother's diary, while the National Archives retains the correspondence files of previous directors of federal agencies. Or your family's archives might include your birth certificate. The National Archives holds the original, signed "birth certificate" for our nation – the Declaration of Independence.

Visit our website at [www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org) for the complete article, "What Is an Archives?" ■