

St. Ambrose University Library Archives
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CSI:

CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION



Program Title: CSI: Archives

Target Audience: College Students in Information Literacy Classes

Goals:

- Discover what an archive is and the roles of an archivist
- Recognize the archive as a resource
- Learn research etiquette and handling techniques

Overview of the Program

I work in a university library archive. I want students to obtain an understanding about the role of an archive and learn about handling techniques. I believe that learning stems from memorable experiences. Rather than preaching the endless list of rules for researchers to follow in an archive, I present the material in a fun way. In the program *CSI: Archives* participants examine archival crime scenes and determine how each document or artifact met its untimely demise. Viewing traumatic scenes ensures that audiences will not commit the same crime.

I have been working with the university's librarians who teach information literacy classes. The librarians bring their students to the archive for one class period during the semester. The classes last for about an hour. The program can be edited for time and content. This is the basic outline I use for the program, I usually add more while I am presenting. I have included additional notes in red.

The Script

I have everyone gather around the table that has been set up with the crime scenes. This gives them time to look while I am speaking. I take this opportunity to explain who I am, what I do and what is an archive. You always have to be excited when you are presenting about your work. If you are not interested in what you do, audiences won't be interested either.

St. Ambrose University Library Archive

A place where people go to find information, stores records of historic, enduring value.

What do we have here? We are a repository for institutional and historic records. This means we have stuff that is important to keep. . . FOREVER!

We have a lot of stuff in this room. We have records of all kinds! There are yearbooks, catalogues, student publications and newspapers, photographs, artifacts and institutional records.

Collecting Information

I am the gate keeper. I decide what will last forever and what gets destroyed. People bring us stuff and I actively seek materials for the collection.

Organizing Information

As the Archivist – organize records, archival material and objects

Arrange it, re-house the material (This is a fancy way of saying I put things in folders and then in a box). I create an inventory or finding aid for the collection. (Fancy way of saying what is in the box). I organize the material so that it can be used. **I have a tiny archival collection in a business card-sized box that I pass around.**

Requesting information

Your Job: Researcher – conduct an organized and systematic investigation into something; find information; seeker of information

1. Contact the Archivist.
2. Describe the type of information you are looking for, be as specific as possible. We will have a better chance of finding the information if you include as much detail as possible.
3. Include your contact name with e-mail address or phone number.
4. The Archivist will get back to you as soon as possible. An appointment may be scheduled for you to view the information

My job is not to do the research for you. But I will help you access the information you need. **I have a handout with the proper procedure for requesting materials and my contact information.**

Preservation

Another part of my job is preservation, or ensuring that the physical objects and materials last forever.

Agents of Deterioration: Light, Temperature, Relative Humidity, Water, Pests, Fire, Pollutants

I talk a little about what the agents of deterioration do to materials in a collection. I have examples of bad things that have happened to documents and objects that I can show audiences.

The biggest threat to the collection is you!

Crime Scene Investigation (See corresponding images for the crime scene set up. I make the students tell me what happened in each scene. We talk about what not to do when working with a collection. More importantly, we discuss why these things are bad for our collections. Our actions today have consequences that last for generations to come.)

1. Food (greasy, dirty hands stain material and attract pests) and drink (spill, water damage and stains)
2. Pens, sticky notes, tape and torn paper (bad habits and supplies can cause permanent and irreversible damage)
3. Pages in a folder out of order (loss of information and the importance of original order)
4. Photograph with permanent marker defacing image (vandalism)
5. Box with missing object (theft)
6. Box with broken object (physical loss)

I always do a recap about what we have learned when working with collections. This information is also on the handout.

Handling Materials

- Wash hands before handling any materials.
- The Archivist will bring materials for you to view.

- Use only pencils to take notes; pens are **not** allowed.
- Do **not** mark or write on materials.
- Handle all materials with care.
- Maintain all materials in the exact order received.
- You may use laptop computers to take notes.
- Do **not** eat or drink when working with the materials
- Don't steal or vandalize anything.

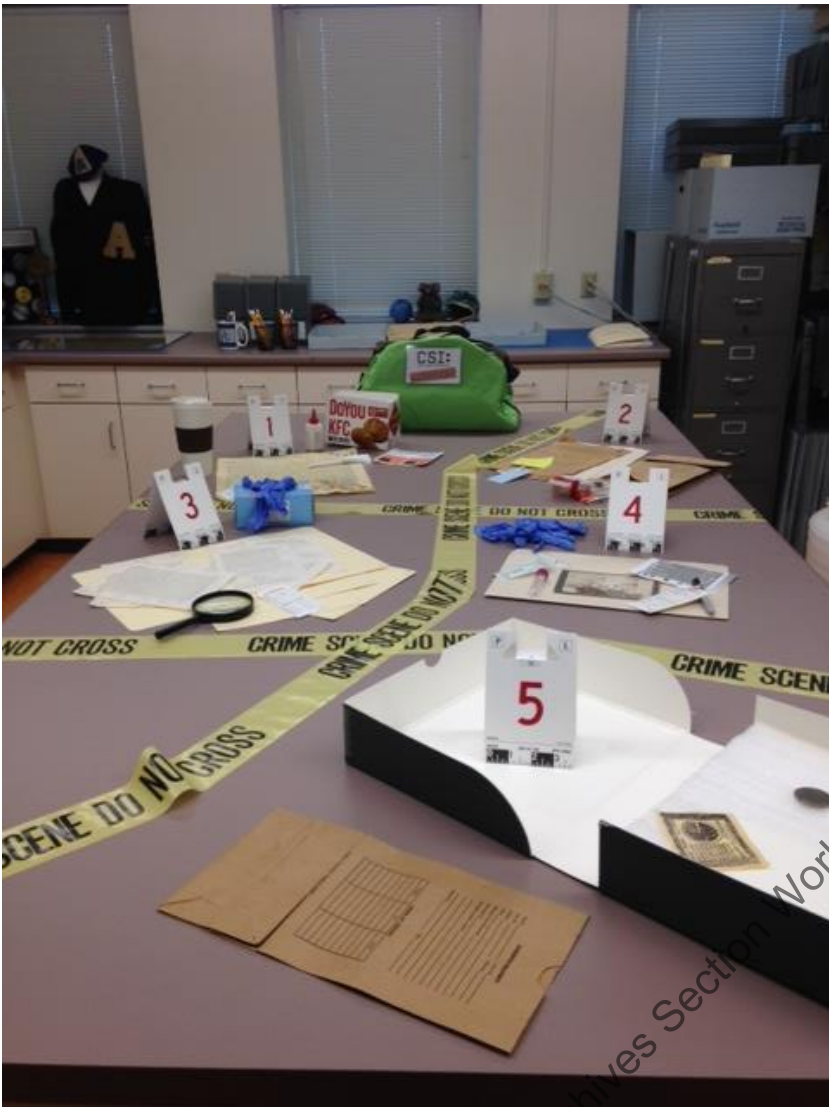
I make a statement explaining that I know there are a lot of rules but I think they are worth following to have these things around for their childrens' childrens' children to see.

This is a great spot to transition into another program. I say something like, "Now that you know how to handle things, it is time to actually use a collection." I have a few teaching collections that examine the history of some of the buildings on campus. They use the collection to identify if the sources are primary or secondary. They begin to piece together the story of the building. Or this is a great time to do a quick tour of the archive and show highlights from the collection.

I always try to end with a statement like this:

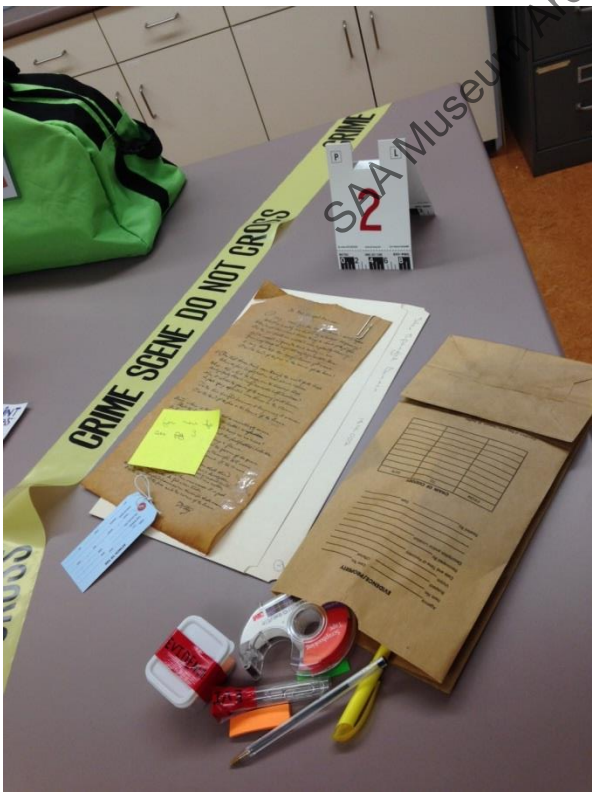
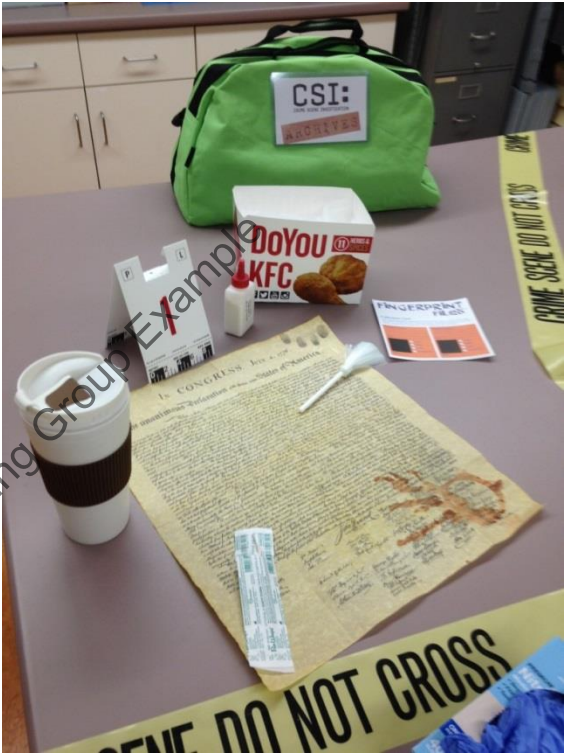
I don't want you to think that an archive is a place where documents go to die, it is a place where they can be discovered. I also don't want you to think that an archive is just for old stuff. We are seeking stuff from today too. In fact, we would be happy to have some of your stuff from your time at St. Ambrose. We will take anything and everything including the pictures on your cell phone. E-mail them to me!

SAA Museum Archives Section Working Group Example

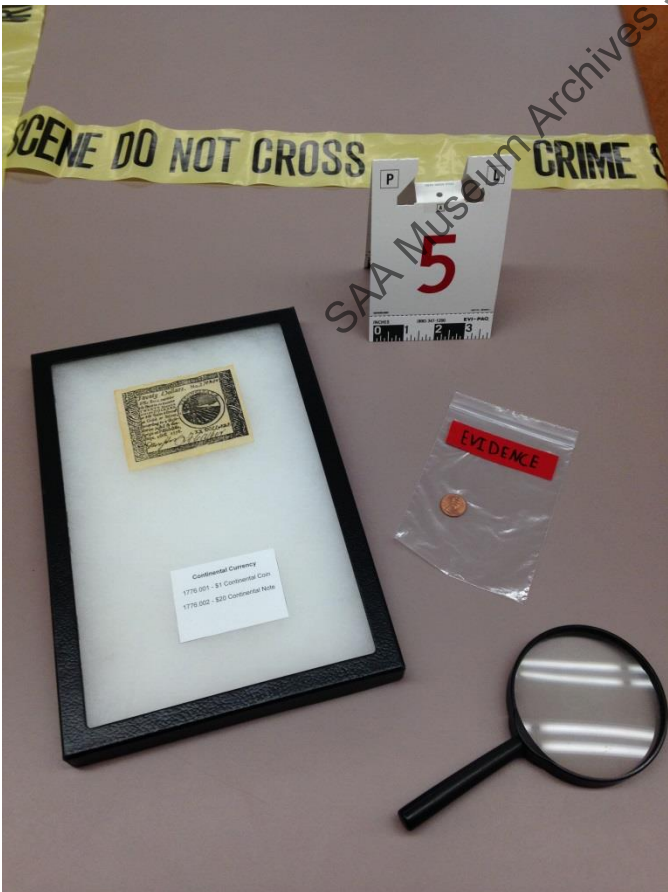
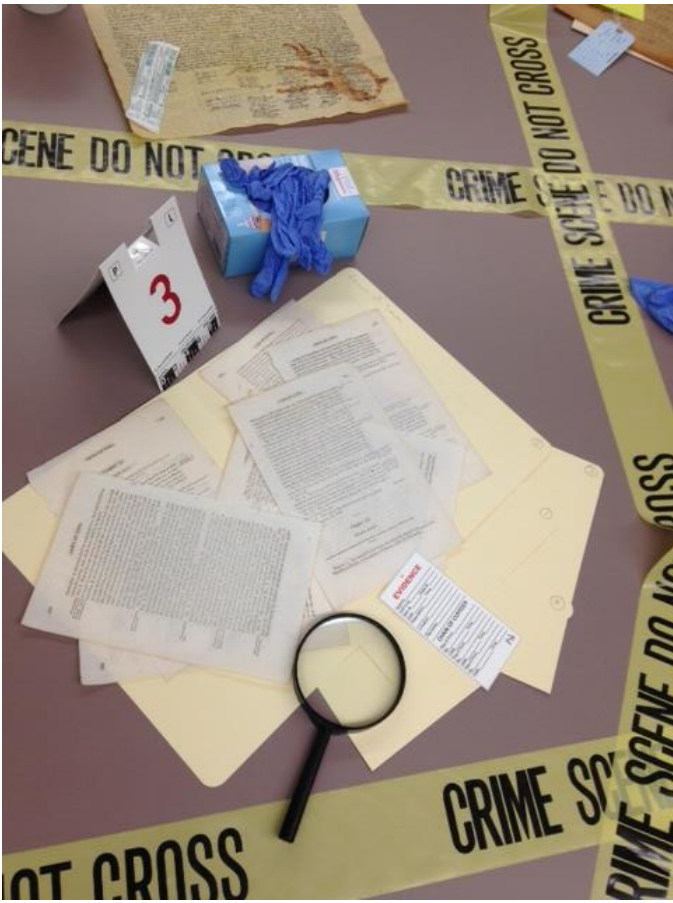


Left – Set up for CSI: Archives.

Below – Crime Scene 1. Someone was eating KFC chicken and got their dirty, greasy finger prints all over the Declaration of Independence. They also spilled their coffee all over the document, leaving stains. Props: fingerprint kit, coffee mug, KFC box and cotton swabs.



Left – Crime Scene 2. Someone took notes on the Star Spangled Banner in pen! They ripped the page and taped it hoping no one would find out. There is also a paper clip lodged in the document's upper right corner. The fatal blow is the sticky note. Props: Evidence bag, toe tag, pens, paperclips, tape dispenser, etc.

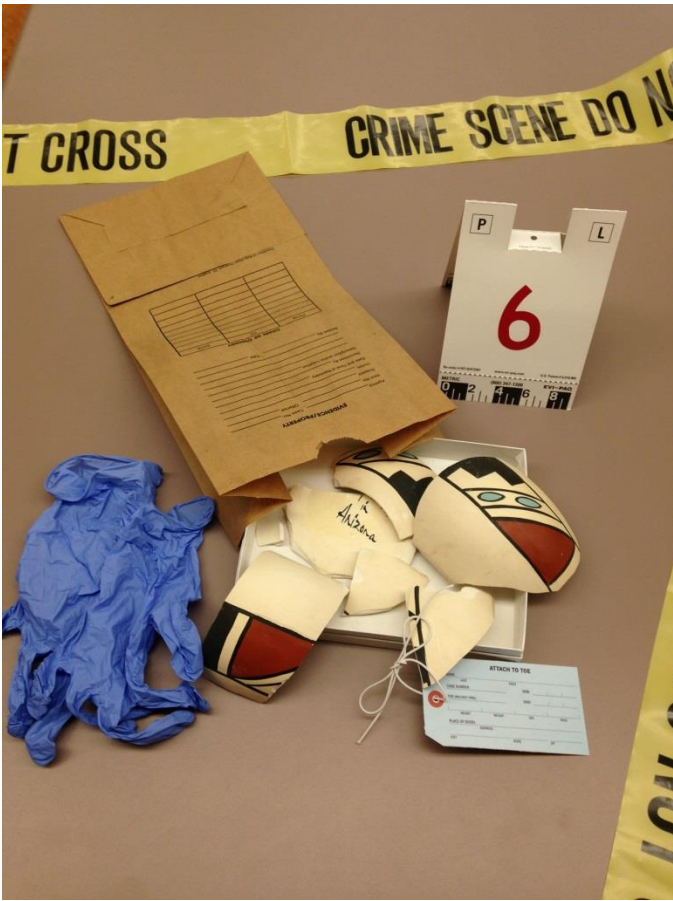


Above Left – Crime Scene 3. Folders and documents are out of order. This can result in loss of information, which is tragic. Props: Magnifying glass, evidence chain of custody tag and box of latex gloves.

Above Right – Crime Scene 4. A photograph was vandalized with a permanent marker. This damage is permanent and irreversible. Props: Permanent marker with evidence tag, cotton swabs, photograph color scale and gloves.

Below Left – Crime Scene 5. The Continental coin has been stole from the currency collection. The thief replaced the coin with a penny. Props: Riker box with piece of currency missing, box contents label, penny in evidence bag and magnifying glass.

Left – Crime Scene 6. The Native American pot was dropped! Props: Broken pottery, toe tag, evidence bag and gloves.



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