

The Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) Collective

<https://tpscollective.org>

Reviewed by Beth South, Indiana University East

The Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) Collective “is an online hub that brings together resources, professional development and support for those who teach with primary sources, including librarians, archivists, teachers, cultural heritage professionals, and anyone who has an interest in using primary sources in an educational setting.” The collective community is made up of “learners, lurkers, and leaders” from the various institutions and professions mentioned, and volunteers from this group contribute and maintain the content on this website.¹

The TPS Collective includes five main resources: “Community of Practice,” “Notes from the Field,” “Teaching Tools,” “Readings,” and “About Us.” The Community of Practice heading focuses on programming and events like [TPS Community Calls](#), which are regularly scheduled presentations or discussion-driven meetups that focus on current issues facing the TPS community, including sharing information from related organizations such as the Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) of the American Library Association and the Society of American Archivists. “[Notes from the Field](#)” is the publication aspect of TPS Collective that is part of a collaborative effort between the TPS Collective and RBMS Instruction and Outreach Committee. This resource is an open peer-reviewed newsletter highlighting practical lessons from those teaching with primary sources. The Teaching Tools heading lists case studies, assessment tools, and lesson plans, as well as advertises [Sandbox Sessions](#), which are small, hands-on sessions focused on exploring tech tools related to TPS. Then, there is the Readings page, which lists a bibliography of relevant readings in chronological order. The About Us page provides information on the collective’s community values, the definition of “primary sources” that the TPS Collective uses, ways to volunteer, and contact information.²

The website is easy to navigate, with multiple ways to get to useful and relevant information. In addition to accessing resources through the top page menu, the homepage includes a few of the collective’s most popular and interactive resources, such as “TPS Community Calls,” “Notes from the Field,” “Sandbox Sessions,” and “Teaching Tools Library.” If you scroll a bit further you will also see their mission statement and their most recent submissions of news, activities, or events.

¹ “About Us,” TPS Collective, accessed March 19, 2021, <https://tpscollective.org/about-us/>.

² “About Us,” TPS Collective.

As someone who is new to teaching with primary sources, I needed some inspiration for teaching an online archives class this spring 2021 semester. I found this website to be incredibly informative and was surprised by the range of resources available. For example, the “Teaching Tools” heading has a page devoted to [Tech Tools](#). There I found several recordings from past Community Call events, including one that focused on using Zoom for TPS instruction and another that showcased ten-minute demonstrations on technology tools for remote TPS work. The latter recording was where I first learned about the phone app [Tiny Scanner](#) and I have found it to be tremendously useful in my current remote work.³

This site does rely on volunteers, so there may be a time lag in when new content is added or updated. For example, when I started this review in March 2021, the “Notes from the Field” had not been updated since February of 2020, but now there has been several new articles added as of April 2021. This disruption may have been Covid-19 related. However, this does not affect the website’s usefulness, especially because many of the collective’s past discussions and tech demos are recorded and accessible on the site.

When the website may be behind in sharing information, one can join the TPS Collective listserv to stay up to date on what is happening within the collective. The listserv is an active, but generally low traffic listserv that relays what is new within the community as well as being helpful for asking questions and sharing expertise. I joined the listserv in November 2020 and have found the questions posed and discussed of great interest, even if the questions did not directly apply to me at the time. While some questions created more discussion than others, it has not overwhelmed my email’s inbox. The link to sign up for the listserv is on the “About Us” page, and it takes you to a very short [Google form](#) to fill out.

One of the collective’s newest tools, and another low-key way to get involved, is the [“Teaching Tools Library.”](#) Created on Zotero, this is a shared TPS community library that provides access to a growing collection of TPS-related lesson plans, activities, guides, and other content.⁴ One can email them or join the Zotero group to contribute. While the TPS Collective website already provides a lot of helpful information, the Zotero library adds another useful tool for organizing and sharing TPS-related content that falls outside the organization.

The more social aspects of this community, such as the “TPS Community Call” discussions and the listserv, appeal to me personally as a learner and lurker. However, for those who want to be more of a leader in this collective, one can volunteer for different teams: the Sandbox Team that plans hands-on tech tools

³ “Tools for Virtual TPS Work (TPS Community Call-May 28, 2020),” TPS Collective, accessed March 19, 2021, <https://tpscollective.org/events-and-opportunities/tps-community-call-thursday-may-28-2020/>.

⁴ “Teaching Tools Library,” TPS Collective, accessed March 19, 2021, <https://tpscollective.org/teaching-tools-library/>.

sessions; the Community Calls Team that helps with the planning and scheduling of Community Call presentations or open discussions; the Unconference Team, which plans regular unconference events; the “Notes from the Field” Editorial Team; the Website Development Team; and the Facilitation Team, which pursues professional development and relationship-building opportunities for the TPS Community.⁵

Overall, the TPS Collective is a useful resource for anyone new to primary source instruction, like me, or those who find themselves currently teaching online and need some help locating appropriate tech tools or assignments that work in an online environment. The website provides practical, hands-on tools and guides, as well as professional development and volunteer opportunities. The TPS Collective is a great place to gain new teachings ideas, and is also a welcoming space to find community and to get involved with other TPS professionals.

⁵ “About Us,” TPS Collective, accessed March 19, 2021, <https://tpscollective.org/about-us/>.