

Book Reviews

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Jen Hoyer, Kaitlin H. Holt, and Julia Pelaez with Brooklyn Public Library.

What Primary Sources Teach: Lessons for Every Classroom. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2022. Paperback/Ebook, 170p., \$55.00/\$49.50. (9781440878558/9781440878565)

Every year nearly a dozen articles and a book or two are published on teaching with primary sources for librarians and archivists. Cultural heritage professionals with instruction responsibilities attempt to maintain at least a peripheral awareness of this ever-growing mountain of scholarship. However, much of the professional literature (specifically the case studies) can be challenging to apply in practice. Often, case studies are for specific resources or based on content-specific learning objectives. While such literature is inspiring, it can be nearly impossible to replicate depending on an institution's collections and collecting areas or not applicable given the limits of an organization's technology, programming space(s), or human resources. Jen Hoyer, Kaitlin Holt, and Julia Pelaez's *What Primary Sources Teach* provides twelve lesson plans aligned to both the "Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy" and Common Core Standards for 4th–12th grade students that are designed to be replicable with a wide variety of cultural heritage collections. The authors correctly assert that these instruction sessions can be adapted for higher education and community groups. *What Primary Sources Teach* is the best book on teaching with primary sources that I have read since I changed careers from teaching secondary school social science and English language arts to special collections librarianship.

The authors' instructional expertise was honed while working together for several years in the Brooklyn Public Library's Center for Brooklyn History delivering Brooklyn Connections programming. *What Primary Sources Teach*'s introduction traces the implementation and evolution of the Brooklyn Connections program to both frame the content and demonstrate the authors' expertise in teaching with cultural heritage resources. Begun in 2007 for 8th grade students to learn about research in archives and special collections settings and to help students draw connections between their lives and Brooklyn's history, the program quickly expanded. Today the Brooklyn Connections education program is available to Brooklyn students in the 4th through 12th grades. The program provides six instruction sessions where educators take facsimiles to the schools and the classes take at least one field trip to the Center to interact with original materials. Through their work as educators in the Brooklyn Connections program, Hoyer, Holt, and Pelaez have likely delivered hundreds of primary source instruction sessions.

While the bulk of *What Primary Sources Teach* is dedicated to providing the twelve detailed lesson plans, the first three chapters present the authors' teaching philosophy and provide detailed explanations of how to reproduce the later lessons. Every librarian and archivist teaching with cultural heritage resources should take a few minutes to read at least the first and second chapters of this work. Chapter one, "Differentiation," is devoted to defining its title for informal educators who have (probably) not completed a formal education program. Hoyer, Holt, and Pelaez provide a summary of educational scholarship on the role of differentiation in education and how an accurate understanding can and should frame every lesson both formal and informal educators deliver. While the authors do mention a number of differentiating activities, the questions they provide for educators to consider when preparing an instruction session are the most applicable part of this chapter.

In this first chapter, the authors also take a moment to define pertinent educational jargon that informal educators may be unfamiliar with prior to working with primary and secondary students. Most of these terms identify special populations which benefit from differentiation in classroom settings. Throughout the remainder of the work when discussing differentiation activities, the authors refer to students "who require more support" and "who need less guidance." This phrasing captures the spectrum of prior knowledge and skills that exist in the classroom.

The second chapter attempts to address what is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching with primary sources scholarship. Frequently, instructional case studies describe interesting lessons that are dependent on specific resources from the author's institution. In "Choosing Sources: Teaching with Your Collections," Hoyer, Holt, and Pelaez address this by presenting a series of questions intended to help educators

interrogate the collections they steward and then select the most “suitable” source at their institution for each lesson. The authors repeatedly emphasize that there is no perfect source, just the best option available within an institution’s collection. The questions that Hoyer, Holt, and Pelaez have put together will be incredibly useful to new (or less imaginative) educators who are interested in implementing the lessons in *What Primary Sources Teach*. The questions from chapter two will also be useful for informal educators interested in reflecting on the instruction sessions they deliver regularly or when developing new lessons. When faculty request an instruction session utilizing special collection resources it is usually driven by the course’s content. For librarians and archivists with a wide array of responsibilities it is quick and easy to select the resources that most closely match the topic requested. Taking the time to mentally run each resource through Hoyer, Holt, and Pelaez’s questions can help determine if the obvious resource choice is the most accessible choice from a student’s perspective.

Experienced educators or those with some formal education training can skim chapter three and then jump into whichever of the lessons that they find most intriguing. The third chapter explains the parts which make up each of the following lesson plans. Each lesson includes: an aim, objective, anticipated lesson length, materials, choosing sources (authors describe the criteria for their selections), procedure, assessment, differentiation, reproducible worksheet(s) with sample facsimiles from the Center for Brooklyn History’s collections, and alignment with both the “Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy” and Common Core Standards.

Those final two parts of each lesson are what makes *What Primary Sources Teach* the best book on teaching for librarians or archivists that I have read since I completed my MLS program. Focusing the lessons on skills-based standards rather than content standards addresses another of the challenging aspects of applying teaching with primary sources scholarship. By emphasizing how to identify suitable resources and presenting lessons that are both skill-based and standards-aligned, Hoyer, Holt, and Pelaez have completed around eighty percent of the work for informal educators interested in partnering with local schools. All that is left for the educators reading this volume to do is to reach out to primary and secondary educators to let them know you can offer standards-aligned cultural heritage resource-based instruction sessions, and then select the most suitable resources for each lesson based on the classroom students grade level and subject. While readers who are new to an institution or unfamiliar with their institution’s holdings may struggle to identify sources appropriate for the lessons, this set of questions is invaluable as a means to select from a larger collection.

Growing as it does out of a program aimed at upper elementary, middle, and high school students, *What Primary Sources Teach* assumes an instruction session focused on learning to use primary sources. Archivists and librarians in special collections

departments at college and university libraries may need to think a bit differently about *What Primary Sources Teach*'s lesson plans since many teaching faculty request instruction sessions based around either a specific course theme or collection item(s), or simply do not know what to ask for, so they want a "show and tell" type of session. Special collections professionals could apply the book's lessons in at least two ways. The first would be to use the skills-based activities in content-based instruction sessions as a secondary instruction session objective (after making sure that the faculty's requested content is at the forefront of the lesson). The second is to utilize the skills-based lessons in this volume to develop a few different instruction sessions to deliver when a "show and tell" session is requested. These lessons could show off various collection strengths and provide meaningful educational experiences when instructors do not know what to ask for. Additionally, having a couple of different sessions ready to go will not rely on the same set of resources again and again.

What Primary Sources Teach is a new type of book for educators in cultural heritage positions. The lessons in Hoyer, Holt, and Pelaez's work are skills-based and aligned to both Common Core Standards and the "Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy." This work is an excellent fit for educators seeking to increase their partnerships with local primary and secondary schools. For librarians and archivists working in higher education struggling to incorporate the "Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy" into their content-based instruction sessions, this volume has activities aligned to those standards. Overall, this work has the greatest number of applicable or easily adjustable lessons of any book on teaching with primary sources that I have read in the last decade (that is the third time I have written this, reader). I hope it becomes standard practice in the future for primary source case study scholarship to include the "Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy" that each case study addresses. — *Laura French, Baylor University Libraries*