



HISTORY BYTES

BY TIM GROVE

Going Beyond Digitization

Many history organizations have begun to think about how they can use their websites to educate the public, not only about content but also about process. While most of the recent activity related to websites has focused on digitization and making collections available online, the obvious next step is teaching researchers of all ages how to use the materials well and to think critically about historical sources. The sites below offer a variety of approaches to showing the research process. Some are more successful than others, but all demonstrate an attempt to help people understand how historians draw conclusions from primary source material. The examples are targeted to teachers and students.

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution www.objectofhistory.org

This work in progress is a partnership between the National Museum of American History and George Mason University's Center for History and New Media (CHNM). The site debuted in February 2007 with the goal of providing teachers and students of American history with access to both the museum's collections and its curatorial expertise. The primary focus is the study of material culture, using objects as primary sources. A secondary focus is the process of collecting or answering why objects have value. The site features six important objects from the museum's collections including an icon of the civil rights era (a section of the Greensboro lunch counter) and a revered object from early American history (the desk on which Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence). A variety of materials encourages us to look closely at the objects. In short videos, curators talk about why they collected the specific objects and provide historical context showing why the object



Congratulations
to the AASLH Award of Merit Winners listed below.

The Boca Raton Historical Society received an award specifically for their excellent website. The other winners' projects included a Web component.

Boca Raton Historical Society
www.bocahistory.org

Minnesota Digital Library Coalition—Minnesota Reflections
reflections.mndigital.org

The History Project: Interpreting GLBT Boston
www.historyproject.org

9th Judicial Circuit Court—Judge Cecil Poole Biography Project
www.cecilpoole.com

is important in history and what kinds of information it provides. Other sources of information include condition reports, historical photographs, and oral history audio segments. The developers are experimenting with a series of live forums with the curators that facilitate an exchange between the classroom and curators. The project aims "to provide smaller museums and historical societies with a model for creating similar materials using their own collections and expertise." In January 2008, the CHNM will offer a downloadable package that will include templates, a database structure, and a guide to creating object lessons using the software. This free package will be available to all interested users and will be composed using open source software.

Museum of London www.museumoflondon.org.uk/learning/features_facts/voh/Voh_kit/index.htm

This "virtual object handling workshop" is targeted to younger children and is an engaging way to teach about object analysis. It features three everyday objects from the Museum of London's collection, representing the Roman, Tudor, and Victorian periods. A cartoon figure named Molly guides users as they analyze the objects. Through standard questioning strategies, Molly explains how historians and curators study artifacts. The

activity introduces various tools along the way, including a microscope and chemical spot tests. The activity is available in both text and flash versions.

The Library and Archives of Canada www.collectionscanada.ca/forgery/index-e.html

Detecting the Truth: Fakes, Forgeries, and Trickery, a site targeted to younger ages, looks at the process of authenticating photographs, maps, documents, paintings, money, and stamps using items held at the Library and Archives of Canada. The site discusses the techniques and tools that conservators, archivists, and librarians use to distinguish the real from the false. An online activity allows users to apply the information they learned to identify a forged stamp.

The Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago mesopotamia.lib.uchicago.edu

The online activity *Dig into History: Mesopotamia* simulates an archaeological dig of ancient sites in Iraq and was funded in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. A cartoon figure of an archaeologist named Fahima Muhammed guides the user to three locations and shows how archaeologists dig for artifacts. Along the way,

users can record information about the artifacts they have found and learn some of archaeology's policies and procedures. The artifacts are focused around three themes: agriculture, the development of writing, and science and inventions. After a successful dig, users can also curate a museum exhibition using photographs of the artifacts found in the dig.

University of New Mexico
americanimage.unm.edu

This NEH-funded site focuses on photograph analysis. It features a collection of World War II-era photographs by John Collier, Jr. held at the Maxwell Museum of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico. Because the Farm Security

Administration/Office of War Information hired Collier to document day-to-day life in America emphasizing issues of civil defense and public morale, the images provide a snapshot of ordinary life across the United States. Three lesson plans in an activity format encourage the user to examine photographs closely. One offers a comparison of historical photos with photographs from today. Another encourages discussion of the photographs using the website www.flickr.com. The third allows the user to create his or her own propaganda film using Collier photographs, video clips, and posters from the WWII era.

These sites, although targeted for use by younger students, provide valuable

opportunities to reach audiences. The more tools we provide to teachers to help them teach critical thinking skills through primary sources, the more future generations will see the value of preserving history. But what about the adults who don't understand how historians draw differing interpretations of historical events? What can we do to teach them? I'd like to hear about websites or projects in progress that target adult audiences with information about the historical research process. ●

"History Bytes" is a forum for discussing web issues facing all types of historical institutions. Tim Grove can be contacted at grovet@si.edu.

The American Association for State and Local History

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