# A Metacognitive Approach to Teaching Critical Primary Source Literacy and Discovery

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## NUTRITION INFORMATION

For researchers completing exploratory studies in the archives, this lesson plan asks them to reflect upon the way that they learn new information. They will also gain experience finding, accessing, and using archival materials and practice developing arguments from historical sources. The following is a result of a partnership between Special Collections & University Archives and the Language, Writing, and Rhetoric area group within the Department of English at the University of Maryland, College Park. Graduate students in ENGL 649B were prompted to plan an archival visit, explore a small portion of UMD's holdings, document their research activities, and argue for the significance of a larger study based on this pilot work. The following outlines how to scaffold teaching search and discovery practices and critical primary source literacy in advance of students' individual visits.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learners will

- understand and articulate how archival research is an iterative process that includes defining an information need within a historical or cultural context, initiating and refining a search strategy, and seeking alternative points of view on a topic

- recognize and critique the possible limitations of archival research, acknowledging that records may not exist or be publicly available; that point of view and authority are constructed and not objective; and that the creation of, survival of, and access to archival collections are mediated by human actors
- engage in metacognition by reflecting on and sharing their assumptions, misconceptions, and familiarities with the complexities of the archival research process

## RELEVANT RBMS/SAA JOINT GUIDELINES

2B, 3B, 4A

## COOKING TIME

75 minutes

## NUMBER SERVED

12 students

## INGREDIENTS

- artifacts from our Maryland History, Literature, and DC Punk Archive collections that exemplify political or activist rhetorics

- PowerPoint presentation with screenshots of ArchivesSpace and collection materials
- worksheets (deployed in the following order)
  - "Archival Research—Preconceptions" (metacognitive activity; figure 1)
  - "Exploring Archival Objects" (critical primary source literacy activity; figure 2)
  - "Finding Archival Objects" (search and discovery activity, one for each of the three collections with students divided into three groups; figure 3)
  - "Archival Research—Reflections" (metacognitive activity; figure 4)
- equipment—laptop, iPads, big screen, book props, pencils
- flexible classroom setting OR other venue to accommodate multiple groups

## PREPARATION

### Advance Planning

This lesson infrastructure took approximately 6 weeks of synchronous and asynchronous communication between the coinstructors and the faculty member. It is important to consider that the preplanning negotiation period is amorphous and may require patience with faculty responsiveness and a willingness to rework previous plans based

Name: _____     Date: _____

**ENG 649B: Archival Research - Preconceptions**

1. What do you think or already know about archival research?

2. How do you feel or think you'll feel about the process?

3. What do you think the challenges might be?

**Figure 1.** Worksheet, "Archival Research—Preconceptions"

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Name: _____     Date: _____

**ENG 649B: Exploring Archival Objects**

1. Describe an object on the table. What can you <u>physically</u> see or touch?

2. Who is the author or creator, and why was the document created?

3. Whose point of view do you believe is being shared? Is this an objective source? What viewpoint is in opposition, or being silenced?

4. What are some reasons why this object is worth preserving? What does this object say about UMD Archives & Special Collections' collecting practices?

5. Find examples in the object of rhetorical devices or persuasive language.

6. What language can you find creating in-group identity or prioritizing a specific voice? How do you know which voice is being explored, enacted, or even critiqued?

**Figure 2.** Worksheet, "Exploring Archival Objects"

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on faculty feedback. This period also involved 2 one-hour lesson planning sessions for coinstructors to design and synthesize teaching materials, which included lecture, a discovery lesson, active learning activities, and a preconceptions-reflections activity. The coinstructors met twice to select materials for the session and develop activity handouts.

**Establishing Expectations**
Conceptualize an instruction session that does not assume nor preclude students' knowledge of, or access to, archival discovery tools. Build in time for repetition—it makes the learning process smoother and more successful. Articulate to faculty the impact of their assignments on both their students and library staff. It is

important for everyone involved, if possible, to assess students' proficiencies with library resources and research methodologies prior to finalizing the assignment expectations. Before their special collections visit, the faculty member should articulate the value of archival research to students.

Name: _____　　　　Date: _____

**ENG 649B: Finding Archival Objects**
**Group 1 - Labor**

There are a few ways to go about finding your item and collection.
Below are some hints to get your started, but don't be afraid of trying something else!
**Document your search process as you go along in the space provided.**

1. Look at the folder. Is there any information that looks useful?
   What is the big picture (which collection)?

   _____

   What is the small picture (which item)?

   _____

2. Go to archives.lib.umd.edu

3. In quotation marks, search for the big picture name.

   "_____"
   　　　　　　　*Example: "Spiro T. Agnew Papers"*

   Why do we use quotation marks?

4. Click on the collection name (*hint: it should be the first one!*)

5. Search for the speaker's name

   _____
   You can search by typing in the search box or navigating through the collection links.
   Describe your process below:

**Figure 3.** Worksheet, "Exploring Archival Objects"

**ENG 649B: Finding Archival Objects**
**Group 2 - Dunbar**

Before you begin, think: where should you start your search - in ArchivesSpace or the library catalog? Use the hints below and document your search process in the empty space.

Search for the author, then use the left menu to specify *where* you are searching.

Search Tools
☑ Group related editions

⊙ **Library**
☑ Libraries Worldwide
☐ Big Ten Academic Alliance
☐ USMAI Libraries
☐ University of Maryland, College Park
　☐ McKeldin Library
　☐ Architecture Library
Show More

⊙ **Content**
☐ Full Text
☐ Peer Reviewed (37029)
☐ Open Access

Narrow further using the author's name, again using an option in the left menu.

⊙ **Author**
☑ All Authors
☐ Dunbar, Paul Laurence (7)
☐ Brooks, Dunbar (4)
☐ Chaplin, Jane Dunbar (2)
☐ Blanck, Jacob (1)
☐ Braybrooke, Neville (1)
Show More

**ENG 649B: Finding Archival Objects**

**Group 3 - Punk Rock**

After analyzing the object, use a **mobile device** to find the item in ArchivesSpace.

What is the ArchivesSpace URL?

_____

Write down your search process and any keywords you used to find the item:

Name: _____          Date: _____

### ENG 649B: Archival Research - Reflections

Now that you have had a chance to search for archival materials, reflect on your experience:

1. What have you learned about the archival research process?

2. How do you feel about the process?

3. What were the challenges you encountered while searching?
   Do you foresee further challenges as you pursue more research?

**Figure 4.** Worksheet, "Archival Research—Reflections"

### Lesson Progression

- Distribute "Archival Research—Preconceptions" handout and allow students to individually record their responses. Solicit a few responses from students. Collect handout. (3–5 minutes)
- Distribute "Exploring Archival Objects" handout. Direct students to explore the assigned collection items at their table. Students work together to observe and record their analysis and impressions. Ask students to share observations. *Note:* There should be enough items for each student or each pair of students to observe. Too few objects will lead to too few voices and limited interpretations. (8–10 minutes)
  - *Note:* This activity encourages students to look carefully and critically at archival objects, asking them to consider point of view, authoritative voice, and why these items may have been collected.
- Provide a short lecture that introduces historic background of collections, connections between objects and course themes, and an illustrated tutorial of ArchivesSpace and WorldCat. Allow time to assist students who need to register for an ArchivesSpace account. (15–20 minutes)
  - *Note:* It is better to at least start with screenshots rather than conduct a live tutorial of the search interface, as the movement between tabs and clicking can be difficult for students to follow. Emphasize that archival discovery tools and websites are not always intuitive and rarely mimic secondary source research platforms such as EBSCOhost or Google.
- Distribute "Finding Archival Objects" handout. Students may use their own devices (e.g., laptops, phones, tablets) or borrow iPads. Each group's finding activity should be slightly different to reflect alternative search methods and collection requirements. For example, students must be able to differentiate between different information retrieval systems and their types of collections. (15–20 minutes)
  - *Note:* This activity should function as an open-ended scavenger hunt, where the handout points students in the right direction for finding their group's assigned materials and offers hints without spelling out the entire search process.

- Facilitate discussion on discovery processes—How did students develop keywords for inquiry? What challenges did they encounter? (10–15 minutes)
- Distribute "Archival Research—Reflections " handout and ask students to process their experience and record their responses. Solicit a few responses from students. Collect handout. (3–5 minutes)

**TASTE TEST**

Before leading activities, explain to students the instructional and metacognitive purpose of each worksheet, which will be collected at the end of the session.

- Student self-assessment: Preconceptions/Reflections activities
- Instructor assessment: Read through collected student worksheets, reflect on learning outcomes and student responses, identify successes and challenges

While evaluating the worksheets, explore your initial reactions. Do these align with your learning outcomes and previous assumptions about student comprehension? Do you see evidence of students engaging in lower- and higher-order thinking skills and the false concept of primary source objectivity? Do you see students gaining or expanding their understanding of the archival research process, particularly of the tools and time involved?