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Instant Archives: For Researchers on the Go

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Instant Archives

For Researchers on the Go

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

This recipe was originally designed for a health care policy class and tied in with a small display on the 1918 influenza pandemic. Health care policy is in the College of Business and Technology. Although it is an upper-level class, students were unlikely to have experience working with primary sources. The recipe frames primary source instruction around a theme that interests students because it relates to one of their classes. Through small-group work, students gain hands-on experience working with sources, examine how sources fit into a historical narrative, and draw comparisons with current topics in which they already have experience. The second objective of the recipe is to demonstrate how basic ingredients can easily be remixed into a variety of dishes.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to

- define what a primary source is and identify basic aspects of a primary source
- analyze and compare a historical event to current events or practices

RELEVANT RBMS/SAA JOINT

GUIDELINES

3A-C, 4B-D

COOKING TIME

50 minutes (For longer classes, additional related topics can be added. For a 75-minute class, I added the AIDS/HIV epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s.)

NUMBER SERVED

5–30+. For a greater number of students, focus on group work and use reproductions as needed to give each group sufficient material to work with. Alternatively, have each group do a deep read of a single source and allocate more time to allow each group to share results and to piece together their analyses to form a collective understanding of the topic.

INGREDIENTS

- Materials that connect with theme. You DO NOT need a deep collection on the theme. Student and local newspapers, with a scattering of other common sources, can address a wide range of topics. Examples:
 - articles from the student newspaper
 - issues of an alternative student-produced publication
 - brochures from campus events
 - administrative documents
 - yearbooks
 - government documents
- Projector and PowerPoint presentation

(optional, but helpful for concisely presenting background information).

PREPARATION

Ahead of Time

- Working with the professor or instructor, determine an appropriate or desired theme for class. In the example case, this was the 1918 influenza pandemic.
- Brainstorm and pull materials that fit the theme for class. Consider your time frame and the level of the class when selecting sources.
- Create groups of sources—you will want enough clusters of materials to support groups of 3 to 5 students. Our clusters were first thematic, then by time period, but options will depend on theme and sources.
- If necessary, make reproductions of materials. Because of the fragility of hundred-year-old newspapers, because we wanted to use more than one issue from the same volume, and because we wanted to focus more on content than on proper handling techniques, we chose primarily to use reproductions in our classes. To give students experience working with authentic materials, we also had originals present in the classroom. Reproductions may or may not be

appropriate. They do not allow examination of form, don't always show use or wear over time, and don't allow students to develop skills in the physical handling of archival materials.

During the Instruction Session

- Begin by covering the definition of a primary source and why primary sources matter. Start with asking if any students know what one is, then provide appropriate detail based on responses. (3–5 minutes)
- Briefly introduce the concept of “silence in the archives”—how archives are constructed, which voices are present and which have been excluded, why some stories can't be told directly or easily. For health care, tie in similarity with modern disease transmission and outbreaks or health care outcomes. (3 minutes) *Note:* If this concept is not relevant to your theme, you may omit it and reallocate the time to either the previous or the next step.
- Frame the historical context of the topic, in this case, the 1918 influenza pandemic. For this topic, I gave a mini-lecture, with bullet points highlighting key facts that students would need to interpret the provided primary sources. I combined a global perspective, which showed the overall spread and history of the pandemic, with a local one, which gave students additional information regarding how the pandemic was experienced in Nebraska. (5 minutes)
- Students break into groups and work with primary sources; instructor circulates to answer questions and nudge students toward deeper understanding. (20 minutes) *Note:* Because of the brief amount of time spent on context and background, expect to answer a wide variety of questions. Sample guiding questions:
 - Why do you think the town made the choices it did about flu-related communication?
 - What external pressures did it face regarding its messaging?
 - How do you think what it told people about the flu affected both people's decision-making and disease spread?
 - How can looking at sources on the handling of a past health crisis inform current health care policy?
- Conduct a large group discussion of insights related to the sources. (10 minutes)
- Social media activity/assessment—Students are asked to create a mock social media post (see Taste Test for details) for the platform of their choice. (5–7 minutes)

on one primary source they used. Students choose whether to post this to their own social media, or whether they want to allow the archives to post it (either anonymously or not). The level of insight varies, but the activity is an engaging way of getting some basic feedback from students while also generating content for the archives Twitter.

TASTE TEST

Assessment for this recipe occurs primarily through a final social media activity where students are asked to create a post around a prompt. While the exact assignment varies—sometimes it's just an end-of-class activity, while other collaborating professors give extra credit—it is generally “One thing I learned today” or a substantive comment