

Teaching with Primary Sources: Deepening Discussions in the Online Classroom through Primary Source Analysis

Project Overview

VHS Learning has designed a new U.S. History curriculum for the 2023-2024 school year, using primary-source analysis through asynchronous discussion as the centerpiece of each week's curriculum. We believe that frequent primary-source analysis experiences will increase students' sense of connection to classmates, self, and the curriculum. By engaging in meaningful dialog with a diverse, global student body, each student will broaden their understanding of American history and its relevance to our lives. All along our journey, we will share tools and data so others in the TPS Consortium can learn from our work.

Lessons

Lesson Collection: A complete set of 33 lessons, focused on primary-source analysis through discussion. These lessons are offered for the TPS Consortium to freely view and use, with attribution.

Micro-credentials

VHS Learning has developed two micro-credentials to support our teachers as they implement this new curriculum. These micro-credentials are offered free-of-charge for the TPS Consortium to view and use, with attribution.

- [Teaching with Primary Sources: Facilitating and Assessing Discussions](#)
- [Teaching with Primary Sources: Facilitating Primary Source Analysis](#)

Micro-credential Review

VHS Learning may review micro-credential submissions to award 15 professional development hours (PDPs). This review is provided free-of-charge for all VHS Learning U.S. History teachers. For all others, the review fee is \$75. To request a review of your micro-credential, please request support in the [VHS Learning Service Center](#). Include the following information:

- Your name and email address
- Subject: TPS Micro-credential Review
- State whether you are a VHS Learning teacher

A member of the VHS Learning team will respond to the case with a link for payment and invite you to attach your micro-credential submission for review.

Pilot Year Outcomes

Student responses on the end-of-year survey highlighted the powerful impact of the Teaching with Primary Sources pedagogy. When comparing student responses to the previous school year, the new curriculum helped students connect to the content more deeply. Significantly more students this year reported that with the Teaching with Primary Sources curriculum they:

- Learned a lot
- Found the course to be interesting
- Had the opportunity to connect topics to real-world situations.

Not only did the emphasis on primary sources empower students to connect with history, but it also allowed them to connect with each other in authentic and meaningful ways. Students in the course hailed from several U.S. states as well as nations across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Students' unique perspectives and experiences were assets they proudly shared through their weekly discussions with classmates. On this year's end-of-year survey, significantly more U.S. History students reported that:

- Discussion prompts led to meaningful conversations with classmates
- Students worked together effectively in group activities
- Group activities deepened their understanding of course content
- Group work helped them improve their communication skills

At the end of the course, students reflected on the most memorable primary sources they encountered. Many students cited their explorations in the Library of Congress collection, Voices Remembering Slavery. In the final discussion students shared a personal primary source from their own lives as they said goodbye to their classmates. Students shared family recipes that had been passed down several generations; art and photography they had created; prized possessions like ballet slippers, baby blankets, and AirPods. Students recognized the power of these primary sources to tell their story to the world. One student explained how her cell phone keeps her connected to family outside the United States; another hopes her photography will inspire others to prioritize protecting the environment; another aspires to make a positive difference through volunteerism and kindness. This, perhaps, is the greatest marker of success in the new VHS Learning U.S. History course: VHS Learning U.S. History students are ready to step into their unique roles as tomorrow's history-makers!