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Teaching U.S. History from an Oregon Perspective:

A Multimedia Approach to Educational Outreach

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You never know what two archivists will dream up over a cup of java. Was it the caffeine or our experience with outreach to teachers and our vision of the possibilities of technology that led fellow archivist Amy Bowman and me come up with a crazy plan: to produce televised professional development workshops for Oregon high school teachers? And not only that, but to bundle the programs into an innovative multimedia package that includes digitized primary source documents from the Oregon Historical Society Research Library, educational standards-based curriculum materials, and other resources to help teachers incorporate Oregon content into their U.S. history classes. Why would two busy archivists be interested in doing such a thing? And why does it matter?

The key to all this is the primary source documents, the first-hand accounts of historical events, that are the mainstay of our archival and artifact holdings. Primary source documents provide the “evidence” that makes history a social *science*. Librarians, archivists, and collection managers who work in special collections libraries, archives, and museums are all custodians of the historical record.

The use of primary sources in the classroom allows students to see that history is an active process of inquiry and analysis that requires an understanding and interpretation of evidence. Students must learn how to engage with these sources and to scrutinize them for their value as evidence, looking for historical clues and uncovering bias and falsehood to reveal the measure of truth they may hold. This higher-order thinking cuts across the curriculum and prepares students for the kind of complex decision-making that is necessary in today’s world.

The Oregon Historical Society has collected, preserved, and documented Oregon’s history for over a hundred years through its museum and research library. Collecting and preserving historical artifacts and documents is in itself not enough to serve the needs of Oregonians. We can also use our substantial collections to educate the public and spark conversations about past issues and events that shape us today. Good stewardship of these documents includes making this goldmine of educational resources available to Oregon’s teachers and students. This is the approach we took in our project, *Teaching U.S. History from an Oregon Perspective*: to create access to and make relevant essential components of Oregon’s story.

DVD sets containing the program videos and companion materials are on the shelves in Portland Public High School Libraries.



 THE OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Teaching U.S. History *from an Oregon Perspective*

Standards-based teacher workshops and curriculum materials using primary sources from Oregon’s premier history library

Oregon Historical Society Davies Family Research Library
1200 SW Park Avenue | Portland, OR 97205
libreference@ohs.org | 503.306.5240
WWW.OHS.ORG



For some time, the OHS and its partners have extracted materials from our collections goldmine for face-to-face teacher workshops and educational online resources, such as the Oregon History Project and its interactive companion website, Timeweb, and the Oregon Encyclopedia. We've partnered with Oregon Public Broadcasting to produce the *Oregon Experience* television series. And we've encouraged scholars and writers of all kinds to record their findings in publications, including our own *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, published continuously since 1900.

These resources provide a great foundation for addressing the current needs of teachers. Specifically, Oregon educators have told us of their critical need for professional development and curriculum materials to fulfill state curriculum guidelines requiring Oregon content in social studies courses. This Oregon content is not provided by the standard textbooks. And according to the 2010 Oregon Heritage Vitality Report, teachers are not learning it in college either: "None of the teacher-education programs require coursework in Oregon heritage or history."

We initially designed this project to meet Oregon state educational standards adopted in 2001, in which primary sources play an important supporting role. The literacy and content components of the more recent and broadly-adopted Common Core State Standards, place an even greater emphasis on understanding, interpreting, and utilizing primary sources, including those with local, state, and tribal content. But it is no simple matter to identify documents and to develop exercises that fit into the prescribed curriculum. Teachers are hard pressed to do it on their own. We who are stewards of our state's heritage materials can blend our knowledge of collections with educators' knowledge of student needs and state educational requirements to help fill in the gaps.

It was just this kind of collaboration that allowed us to venture into new territory to create this multimedia product. This pilot project built on an existing relationship between Portland Public Schools and the OHS. Funding also helped determine the project's parameters. The Mt. Hood Cable Regulatory Commission offers capital grants for projects that utilize cable system technology within Multnomah County. The MHCRC funded the computer and camera equipment needed to scan the primary source documents and the costs to film and edit the televised workshops. Our own institutions supported the many hours of staff time that went into this project. Additional funding came from a National Endowment for the Humanities Teaching American History grant to the Portland Public Schools, and Oregon Community Foundation support to the Oregon Historical Society.

Our partners at Portland Public Schools provided important feedback throughout the project. First, district educators worked with us to determine the subject content of the programs. We settled on eight videos. The first three introduce OHS resources: the Research Library, the Oregon History Project and Timeweb, and the Oregon Encyclopedia. All are important resources that teachers and students can use to find and understand primary sources. The other five programs encompass twentieth-century topics covered in the high school U.S. history curriculum: World War I, the Progressive Era, the Great Depression and New Deal, the Cold War, and the Vietnam War and Counterculture Movement.

A team of OHS archivists (Amy Bowman, Megan Friedel, Geoff Wexler, and I) had the fun job of digging through collections to find documents of all kinds that would be suitable for classroom use. We found letters, photographs, pamphlets and fliers, articles, posters, maps, moving images and the like that would make meaningful connections with students as well as fit with teaching objectives. The documents we uncovered include:



- Letter from George Shibley to Oregon Governor George Chamberlain regarding direct democracy (1908)
- Temperance flier with a map showing the “dry” counties in Oregon (1910)
- Photograph of military enlistees from Enterprise, Oregon, with a banner reading “Remember the Lusitania” (1917)
- Circular letter by John A. Jeffery, district manager of the Townsend National Recovery Plan for the Third Congressional District of Oregon, describing the need to pass legislation in support of the old age pension plan (circa 1937)
- Subpoena for Julia Ruuttila to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (1956)
- “The Day Called ‘X,’” a CBS television documentary depicting a dramatized evacuation of Portland during a potential nuclear attack by air (1957)
- Leaflet from The Family proposing that a rock festival, Vortex I, be held during the American Legion Convention and People’s Army Jamboree in Portland (1970)

All of the documents selected for these programs tie Oregon people and events to the national and even international scene.



Document scanning commenced after our panel of educators reviewed our document choices. Next, we developed film scripts and the camera started rolling. We did the bulk of the work with in-house presenters, discovering a few hidden talents along the way.

The first video, Introduction to the OHS Research Library, showcases the variety of OHS library collection types during a guided tour of the reading room. An online tutorial for the OHS online collections catalog and the Northwest Digital Archives follows.

We used online screen-capture video for most of the second program, a tutorial for the OHS's award-winning educational websites, the Oregon History Project and Timeweb. The Oregon History Project treats a broad range of historical topics with narratives written by some of Oregon's finest historians, and illustrated by primary source documents and artifacts. The project's companion website, Timeweb, presents primary sources in an interactive timeline. Visitors to this student-friendly site can create customized timelines by using preset filters and topics. In both the OHP and Timeweb, each primary source appears as a downloadable image set in context by an historical background piece.

Our partners at the Oregon Encyclopedia filmed and produced the third video. They filmed interviews with editorial board members to illuminate the special characteristics of this online encyclopedia of history by and for all Oregonians. A brief tour of the website and tutorial concludes the video program.

The remaining five subject-based programs cover the historical topics mentioned above. In these longer videos, the pre-selected primary source documents drive the content. Each 23–30 minute video consists of four components:

- Brief introduction
- Ten minute historic narrative piece designed to place the primary source documents in historic context, using OHS library documentary resources
- Teacher workshop featuring classroom exercises developed using a sampling of the digitized primary sources
- Mini-tutorial highlighting specific features of the OHS library's online collections catalog, the Oregon History Project and Timeweb, and the Oregon Encyclopedia.

The DVDs also contain companion materials for each of the five subject-based programs include:

- Digitized primary source documents
- Curriculum guide with lesson plans and other helps for using the primary sources in the classroom
- Bibliography for further reading
- Pertinent *Oregon Historical Quarterly* articles
- Document analysis worksheet templates covering eight formats from maps to motion pictures (developed by the Education Staff at the National Archives and Records Administration and used with permission)

The filmed teacher workshops begin with a document analysis, using a different document type for each program. This provides an entry point for working with primary sources, suitable for teachers and students just starting out with this kind of analysis. The examples are loosely based on National Archives and Records Administration worksheets, and set up the central feature of the curriculum piece: the Document Based Question Set (DBQ).





Hannah Allan delivers the World War I teacher workshop. The document analysis in this program ends with a comparison of two war propaganda posters.

Document Based Questions are used in Advanced Placement and other higher level high school courses to develop students' abilities to extract meaning from and create arguments based on a set of historical documents. A series of questions provided for each document guides students through a close examination of the document and then leads them to make connections to broader questions. Each program includes one DBQ set and helps for creating additional sets. Although DBQ sets target higher level students, teachers can extract lessons from them and adapt them to other levels. A variety of other exercises with built-in flexibility is also included in the curriculum guide.

Portland Public Schools educators directly contributed some of the curriculum materials and provided valuable guidance in the creation of the remainder. They also evaluated the videos during their initial broadcast on PPS Cable Channel 28. Their feedback was absolutely critical in assuring that the entire series met our goals and expectations.

This valuable feedback showed us that we were on track. Our panel of educators told us:

- “The instruction I use now does not have any local history in it. This is exciting information.”
- “These are closely aligned [with state standards] and will save me hours of lesson planning.”
- “Local materials will help my students relate to these topics in ways that no other materials can.”
- “They really bring the broad concepts and events to a human level.”
- “These materials will help me to assist students in analyzing multiple sides of particular issues and help them to contextualize them in terms of what is happening today.”
- “It will increase the amount of time my students spend doing the authentic kind of analysis of primary source documents that historians do.”



Teachers reported that they would use the materials in a broad range of social studies courses. They also gave us ideas about what we could do in the future to make our existing programs even better.

The programs are now being woven into the district's curriculum support network. Thanks to the district's media specialists, DVD sets containing all of the videos and companion materials are on the shelves in all PPS high school libraries. A new PPS Sharepoint site also provides access to these materials, thanks to Rick LaGreide, a history teacher and the district's chief liaison for the project. And our wonderful partners at PPS Television Services continue to broadcast and stream our eight videos.

Although at present Portland Public Schools is the chief beneficiary of this project, we would love to reach a wider audience. The next steps are still in the works, but the possibilities are wide open.

What is clear from this exercise is that digital technologies continue to open new doors for innovative educational outreach. It is up to us to draw upon our ingenuity and our connections to make the best of it. If it takes a little caffeine and camaraderie, all the better. 

Teaching U.S. History from an Oregon Perspective

Oregon Historical Society
<http://ohs.org/>

2010 Oregon Heritage Vitality Report
<http://www.oregon.gov/OPRD/HCD/OHC/docs/HVreport2010.pdf>

Common Core State Standards for Education
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=1802>

Mt. Hood Cable Regulatory Commission
<http://mhcrc.org/>

OHS Online Collections Catalog
<http://librarycatalog.ohs.org/eosweb/opac/>

Northwest Digital Archives
<http://nwda-db.wsulibs.wsu.edu/nwda-search/>

Oregon History Project (new url)
<http://www.ohs.org/the-oregon-history-project/>

Timeweb
<http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/timeweb/>

Oregon Encyclopedia
<http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/>

