

Swarthmore College

## Works

---

Library Staff Works

Library & Information Science

---

Spring 2021

### DBQ: Document-Based Quarantine

Celia Caust-Ellenbogen

*Friends Historical Library*, [ccauste1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:ccauste1@swarthmore.edu)

Jordan Landes

*Friends Historical Library*, [jlandes1@swarthmore.edu](mailto:jlandes1@swarthmore.edu)

R. Landes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/sta-libraries>



Part of the [Other Religion Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Celia Caust-Ellenbogen, Jordan Landes, and R. Landes. (2021). "DBQ: Document-Based Quarantine". *RBM*. Volume 22, Issue 1. 16-24. DOI: 10.5860/rbm.22.1.16  
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/sta-libraries/110>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#)  
This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Library Staff Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact [myworks@swarthmore.edu](mailto:myworks@swarthmore.edu).

## DBQ: Document-based Quarantine

---

*This paper presents how one school and one special library handled the first months of quarantine and remote teaching and learning as COVID-19 hit the United States in spring 2020. While teaching with archives has long been a part of the professional discourse within the archival and special collections community, changes in methodology in teaching remotely and modifications to the Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) exam's document-based question (DBQ) called for experimentation and innovation. The collaboration between APUSH teachers at Woodbridge Senior High School in Virginia and the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania provided one solution to preparing students for the modified AP exam. The authors of this paper explore the background and context of the work of teachers and archivists, describe the actions taken in spring 2020, and analyze the results and impact. Lessons learned and future opportunities for collaboration are then examined. The paper concludes with a proposal that similar relationships and activities are not just possible but also beneficial for all involved.*

Teaching with archives has long been a part of the professional discourse within the archival and special collections community, with archivists providing specialized support for K–12 teaching at least since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> Interest in the topic has been on the rise in recent years, exemplified by the growth of a “Teaching with Primary Sources” community known as the TPS Collective since 2015,<sup>2</sup> a new *Trends in Archives Practice* volume focused on *Teaching with Primary Sources* issued by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) in 2016,<sup>3</sup> and *Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy* released jointly by SAA and RBMS in 2018.<sup>4</sup>

---

1. Jen Hoyer, “Out of the Archives and into the Streets: Teaching with Primary Sources to Cultivate Civic Engagement,” *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 7, no. 1 (April 21, 2020), <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol7/iss1/9>.

2. A Teaching with Primary Sources Unconference was first held in conjunction with the Society of American Archivists (SAA) conference in 2015 and has been held in coordination with each SAA conference since (see <http://teachwithstuff.org/category/unconferences/>). Around the same time, the Teaching with Primary Sources Collective (TPS Collective) was formed in 2015–2016 as a collaboration between the SAA Section on Reference, Access, and Outreach, and the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (see <http://rbms.info/tpscollective/about-us/>).

3. Society of American Archivists, “Product Details | Teaching With Primary Sources,” accessed August 7, 2020, <https://mysaa.archivists.org/productdetails?id=a1B0b00000e1IAREAY>.

4. SAA-ACRL/RBMS Joint Task Force on the Development of Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy (JTF-PSL), approved June 2018, accessed August 7, 2020, [https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/Guidelines%20for%20Primary%20Souce%20Literacy\\_AsApproved062018\\_1.pdf](https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/Guidelines%20for%20Primary%20Souce%20Literacy_AsApproved062018_1.pdf).

It is immediately apparent from even the most cursory literature review that, while some archivists address K–12 education in their writings and conferences, the emphasis within the archival and special collections community is strongly on undergraduate instruction. The TPS Collective maintains a bibliography with more than 165 entries at the time of writing, with entries dating from 1986 to 2020. The term “undergraduate” appears in the titles and abstracts listed on the page 133 times, while “K–12” has 42 hits on the page and “high school” appears only eight times.<sup>5</sup>

While the archival literature is not as robust in addressing the needs of high school teachers and students as it is in discussing undergraduate needs, several writers have highlighted that the document-based question or “DBQ” offers particular promise for archivists.<sup>6</sup> Best known for its key role in Advanced Placement (AP) testing for college-equivalent credits, the DBQ has been notably adopted on New York State exams, and variations of it have proliferated along with the rise of standardized testing. Related skills are now standard on many Common Core Standards across K–12 grade levels.<sup>7</sup>

First introduced to AP tests in 1973, the DBQ was “intended to measure ‘historical craftsmanship’ that the historian used in sorting, weighing, and evaluating data.”<sup>8</sup> It presents students with a small selection of documents offering different perspectives on a historical topic. Students must describe the broader context relevant to the prompt and accurately use evidence from supplied sources to support their thesis; extend analysis for the sources to account for point of view, purpose, historical context and intended audience; and demonstrate a complex understanding of the historical development that is the focus of the prompt by showing nuance or insightful connections within and across time periods.<sup>9</sup>

Scholars have observed how the incorporation of primary source analysis into standardized testing has placed demands not just on students, but also on teachers, to build new archival skills. “Prior to standardized testing, primary sources were primarily the tools of social studies teachers who dared to venture beyond the text-

---

5. Teaching with Primary Sources Collective, “Teaching with Primary Sources Bibliography,” accessed August 7, 2020, <https://rbms.info/tpscollective/bibliography/>.

6. Patricia Garcia, “Accessing Archives: Primary Sources and Inquiry-Based Learning in K–12 Classrooms” (UCLA, 2015), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/31v4n498>; Julia Hendry, “Primary Sources in K–12 Education: Opportunities for Archives,” *American Archivist* 70, no. 1 (January 2007): 114–29, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.70.1.v674024627315777>.

7. Garcia, “Accessing Archives,” 16–18.

8. Mike Henry, “The DBQ Change: Returning to the Original Intent,” AP Central, accessed August 7, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160303231132/http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/members/homepage/10467.html>.

9. CollegeBoard, “AP United States History Course,” AP Central, May 31, 2016, <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-united-states-history/course>.

book,” Patricia Garcia notes in her dissertation studying primary source access and understanding in K–12 classrooms, continuing to observe that “analyzing primary sources [has] become a necessary skill for passing standardized tests in testable subject areas, such as English language arts.”<sup>10</sup> In her article “Primary Sources in K–12 Education: Opportunities for Archives,” Julia Hendry specifically highlights the DBQ as an illustration of educational trends that create opportunities for archivists. “Despite a widespread acceptance of the value of using documents in the classroom, it appears that many teachers find this to be a difficult task,” Hendry notes.<sup>11</sup> She echoes a chorus that is widely known throughout the archival literature and, indeed, in the professional literature of educational studies.<sup>12</sup> When selecting primary sources that will help their students build the skills to succeed at the DBQ, teachers’ goals and needs are very different from those of the “traditional” archival user.

Our paper co-author Robin Landes, with 25 years of high school history teaching experience, describes the hunt for appropriate digital primary sources as a paradox of “feast or famine.” Where some of the most well-known websites overwhelm teachers with a flood of options (such as Library of Congress’s *American Memory* project or the National Archives’ *DocsTeach*), at the opposite extreme, resources such as Stanford’s History Education Group’s (SHEG) *Reading Like a Historian* and *Beyond the Bubble* projects focus on a limited number of sources. There are few options in the middle, leaving identification of tightly aligned, curriculum-driven evidence a challenge. And, indeed, sources and evidence incorporated into lesson plans can make or break effectiveness. Repetitive use of documents such as Thomas Paine’s pamphlet *Common Sense*, *The Federalist Papers*, and others that students see in elementary, middle, and high school diminishes their impact. Some such sources are curriculum driven, but there are so many other novel ones that enable learners to practice making connections to content. Individualized support from experts is sometimes the only way teachers can manage to find new sources within their limited schedule.

### **The Impact of COVID-19 on AP History Classes**

If the importance of the DBQ for students, and the challenges for teachers in preparing them for it, were clear before, COVID-19 and its impact on the American educational system threw these issues into stark relief.

---

10. Garcia, “Accessing Archives,” 17.

11. Hendry, “Primary Sources in K–12 Education,” 124.

12. John Lee, Peter E. Doolittle, and David Hicks, “Social Studies and History Teachers’ Uses of Non-Digital and Digital Historical Resources,” *Social Studies Research and Practice* 1, no. 3 (Winter 2006): 291–311.

On April 3, 2020, the College Board announced that all AP tests would be shortened from the usual three- to four-hour duration down to just 45 minutes, eliminating all multiple choice, long essay question and short answer sections. For history students, this left just one section to account for the entire score: the DBQ.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the DBQ rubric would be modified from 7 to 10 points, with extra points for bringing in additional outside evidence (besides the document excerpts provided with the question) and for additional extended analysis.<sup>14</sup>

Suddenly, the stakes for a good performance on the DBQ section skyrocketed. At the same time, with teachers and students largely confined to their homes and most archives across the country closed, options were severely constricted for teachers seeking quality primary sources to prepare their students adequately for the DBQ.

COVID-19 had an impact not only on academics, but also on students' Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)—the process through which people understand and manage emotions, work on goals, feel and show empathy, and establish and nurture positive relationships. There have been numerous articles and think-pieces on this subject, but one survey released in July by Nationwide Children's Hospital in Ohio attempted to quantify these concerns. The survey found that, while 44 percent of parents were concerned about children catching COVID-19 from in-person classes in the fall, 38 percent of responding parents worried their children would fall behind academically if online learning were to continue, and nearly as many parents—36 percent—voiced concern about their child's "emotional well-being" and "trouble feeling connected" in an online environment.<sup>15</sup> RAND Corporation found teachers and principals were also concerned about students' social and emotional learning, according to its American Educator Panels (AEP) data, a survey of

---

13. M. Virginia H., "2020 AP Exams: COVID-19 Impact and What You Need to Know," Sallie Mae, May 1, 2020, <https://www.salliemae.com/blog/new-ap-exams/>.

14. CollegeBoard, "AP History Modified DBQ Rubric (10 Points)," AP Central, 2020, <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/pdf/ap-2020exam-history-rubric-2020-dbq.pdf>.

15. Brian P. Dunleavy, "Survey: Many Parents Worry Children Will Catch COVID-19 at School," United Press International (UPI), July 29, 2020, [https://www.upi.com/Health\\_News/2020/07/29/Survey-Many-parents-worry-children-will-catch-COVID-19-at-school/2521595967531/](https://www.upi.com/Health_News/2020/07/29/Survey-Many-parents-worry-children-will-catch-COVID-19-at-school/2521595967531/). SEL was the topic of a number of other studies. For example, one study of 2,300 children in the Hubei province of China who were confined at home due to COVID-19 found that 22.6 percent of them experienced depressive symptoms, which is 5 percent higher than the national average for children in Chinese primary schools (17.2%). The same study found that 19 percent of these confined children experienced high levels of anxiety. (Xie X, Xue Q, Zhou Y, et al., "Mental Health Status among Children in Home Confinement During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak in Hubei Province, China," *JAMA Pediatrics* 174, no. 9 (2020): 898–900, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1619>). The Center for Promise, in collaboration with Boston University School of Education, surveyed 3,300 young people aged 13–19 and found that one in four respondents self-reported losing sleep, feeling depressed and strain, and losing self-confidence. (The Center for Promise, "The State of Young People during COVID-19: Findings from a Nationally Representative Survey of High School Youth," June 2020, <https://www.americaspromise.org/resource/state-young-people-during-covid-19>, 4).

representative samples of K–12 public school educators queried in late April and early May 2020.<sup>16</sup>

SEL is an important consideration not only for students, but also for teachers in an online teaching environment. The prominent educational leadership researchers Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey spoke with more than 70 teachers about their experiences pivoting to online instruction in spring 2020 and came up with a list of recommendations, including this set: “It’s also important to recognize the staff’s social and emotional needs.... Take breaks and find ways to socialize with your colleagues. Have at least one extended conversation with someone outside your home each day. And if you begin to feel overwhelmed, reach out to others.”<sup>17</sup> Closely tied to this advice regarding SEL is that of Mark Gozonsky, who reinforces the need for relationship building and collaboration in saying, “It is essential to good teaching to feel you are not alone.” Acknowledging the ineffectiveness of many school districts and administrations in supporting teachers through the online transition, he advised teachers working through the pandemic to imagine their own personal “teaching dream team” and reach out to fellow teachers and support people who can “share impassioned texts built on strong evidence” as well as tech tips and activity suggestions.<sup>18</sup>

### Assembling the Dream Team

Woodbridge Senior High School in Prince William County, Virginia, closed its doors to in-person learning on March 13. That semester, Woodbridge offered two Advanced Placement United States History (APUSH) sections, each taught by a different teacher (Robin Landes and Carolyn Fusco). Both teachers knew they still had to prepare the students taking the course for the exam in May and that this had to be facilitated remotely. For the sake of efficiency in a stressful time, the two teachers decided to team-teach a series of review sessions for students from both

16. In RAND’s survey, the vast majority of teachers (84%) and principals (85%) expressed some need for lesson plans, strategies, or other high-quality materials to support social and emotional learning while school buildings were closed; nearly one-quarter of both teachers (21%) and principals (23%) classified that need as “major” or “very major.” Looking forward to the future when school buildings could be reopened, 28 percent of responding teachers felt that “Supporting students’ social and emotional well-being” would be a “Much higher priority” compared with prior to when they closed; an additional 40 percent stated it would be a “Somewhat higher priority.” Only 1 percent of teachers felt SEL would be a lower priority when school buildings reopened. School principals agreed: more than half of principals in the study (56%) felt that “Enacting new social or emotional learning interventions or initiatives” would be a higher priority in reopened school buildings than they were before COVID-19. (Laura S. Hamilton et al., “COVID-19 and the State of K–12 Schools: Results and Technical Documentation from the Spring 2020 American Educator Panels COVID-19 Surveys,” May 26, 2020, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA168-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA168-1.html)).

17. Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, “4 Steps for Powerful Distance-Learning Experiences,” SmartBrief, July 16, 2020, <https://smartbrief.com/original/2020/07/4-steps-powerful-distance-learning-experiences>.

18. Mark Gozonsky, “It’s OK to Let Students Keep Their Video Off While You Teach Online. I Promise,” *Chalkbeat*, August 3, 2020, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/8/3/21345909/its-ok-to-let-students-keep-their-video-off-while-you-teach-online-i-promise>.



Public Universal Friend silhouette.  
*Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.*

sections. Scrambling for strategies to be most effective, Robin reached out to her sister, Jordan, who happened to be the Curator of the Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College. Located just outside Philadelphia, the mission of the Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College (FHL) is to collect, preserve, and promote study materials that document the history of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), its members, and its characteristic testimonies. FHL functions not solely as an important educational resource for the Swarthmore College community, but also as a world-renowned research facility and collection with a special relation to the Society of Friends and the wider academic community.

What began as the sharing of a few documents evolved into archivists stepping up as members of the Woodbridge APUSH “dream team.” Adopting a “visiting expert” model, three staff members from FHL archivists alternated visiting class sessions, each taking on a different unit and time period. This was a way to allow multiple staff members the opportunity to share their interests and expertise with the class, without creating too much work for any one archivist.

Archivists and teachers worked together to co-create slide decks incorporating carefully selected sources paired with content specified in the curriculum. Archivists sought to identify resources that were easily accessible online and met criteria that would make them particularly engaging for students and usable for the DBQ: interesting stories, surprising details, diverse representation, images with

visual impact, and short, pithy texts. Introducing new historical figures, documents, and stories (not in the textbook) are not only more engaging for students, they also make the resulting exam answers stand out to exam reader/raters awash in a flood of the same small number of commonly used sources. Among other selections, documents and images by and about the 18th-century gender-nonconforming preacher known as the Public Universal Friend, abolitionist and prison reformer Abby Hopper Gibbons, and 19th-century Presbyterian missionary Belle Hawkes (and her cats!) enabled students to elaborate in their writing on important course themes such as reform, gender roles and issues of labor.<sup>19</sup>

### Evaluating the Evidence

The archivist-teacher collaboration at Woodbridge offered positive outcomes for all: students, teachers, and archivists.

Anecdotally, several students reported to their teachers that they enjoyed the sessions with archivists. In the words of one student, “It was very helpful and exciting to have fresh perspectives on the information we’d been learning all year long. I also appreciate that they went more in-depth about some of the people by offering nuanced views.” The sources shared were memorable—in particular, stories of women in roles atypical for the time period and of a gender-nonconforming historical figure made strong impressions. Because of the special circumstances of COVID, Woodbridge teachers actually saw the essays by students for the first time since the inception of AP testing. They noted that several students did use the documents presented by the archivists and that this contributed to their success and high scores. In the words of the other Woodbridge teacher, Carolyn Fusco, “The information and practice garnered was a ‘win-win’ experience at a much-needed time when students were missing the in-class experience.” Cynthia Treichler, Assistant Principal, also attested to the success of this endeavor. In her words, “Ms. Landes and Ms. Fusco truly embraced the concept of flatten[ed] classroom walls last spring. They leveraged video conferencing as an opportunity to bring field experts into their virtual classroom to prepare students for a modified AP US History exam through the lens of primary source analysis. This level of collaboration is something we hope continues in the years to come.”

In inviting these outside speakers, the teachers were not only concerned about the students’ academic success, but also their loss of social and emotional learning, a byproduct of the pandemic as elaborated above. The willingness of experts to share

---

19. The papers of Abby Hopper Gibbons from Swarthmore College and Belle Hawkes from the Presbyterian Historical Society were digitized shortly before the pandemic as part of the *In Her Own Right* project, <http://inherownright.org/>. Swarthmore is a lead agent on the project, which has received major funding from the Council on the Library and Information Resources and National Endowment for the Humanities.



and explain sources, to empathize with the students' challenges, and to help them work toward their goal of doing well on their AP test made students feel more supported at a time when there was much uncertainty. It also provided positive examples of relationship-building and gave the students a glimpse of the working of higher education and the willingness of scholars to collaborate and provide support.

Of course, the students were not the only ones experiencing a loss of sense of community and support. Even in normal times, for many teachers, lesson planning is hindered by difficulty locating the right sources—especially in advanced courses. The needs of the teacher, class, and particular students are very personal. The opportunity to ask specific questions and get targeted sources to support answers was very effective and allowed for instruction to be highly focused and responsive to the students' needs. But possibly the best outcome of this semester was the ability to build and grow relationships at a time where all parties felt somewhat isolated by being forced from their usual routines by quarantine and were experiencing a setback in their social and emotional learning. Both teachers felt uplifted by working with higher education experts.

FHL archivists also benefited from this experience. The library routinely hosts college classes; but, when COVID-19 caused Swarthmore's campus to shut down during spring break 2020, professors canceled the few remaining FHL class sessions scheduled for the rest of the semester. FHL staff immediately began planning and strategizing for what online course instruction could look like if fall semester 2020 were to be partially or entirely online. When given the opportunity to collaborate with Woodbridge teachers and experiment right away with students, FHL staff acted quickly. The chance to promote archival and research skills is always a motivation for archivists when working with students of any age and experience. The additional analytical skills and exposure to primary sources needed by students for the modified DBQ made archivists' participation even more meaningful. FHL staff were thrilled to share documents, images, and other sources with a new audience. Indeed, the mission of FHL includes a statement about actively encouraging the use of FHL collections by students, scholars, and other researchers and cultivating new audiences and, as stated above, promoting the study of materials documenting Quakers. Finally, establishing and deepening relationships between teachers and archivists has led to further sharing of effective teaching and presentation tools in the months since the original work.

### **Expanding the Dream Team**

At the time of writing, the authors are making final preparations for fall 2020. At Woodbridge, instruction will be conducted remotely for the foreseeable future. Building on the successes of the spring, the APUSH teachers will expand their dream team even further by bringing Advanced Placement Language teachers on

board. Students in both classes will write year-long research papers making use of the recent best-seller, *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds (with the tagline, “A Remix of the National Book Award-winning *Stamped from the Beginning*”). FHL archivists will support this project by presenting sources during the course of the school year that align closely with the topics and themes addressed in *Stamped*, enriching that experience with additional examples and intriguing documents.

We started this article with the fact that teaching with archives has been a part of practice by teachers and archivists since the 1970s and by mentioning further developments in the past five years or so. What this paper discusses is an additional innovation in methodology, specifically in the relationships between teachers and archivists and in creating a teacher-archivist “dream team” to promote more seamless exchange. Relationships between teachers seeking location-specific or subject-specific primary sources and archivists looking for audiences for rich collections are mutually beneficial, as demonstrated by the partnership of history teachers at Woodbridge Senior High School and the FHL. While remote and hybrid teaching places a greater demand on teachers preparing for a semester and planning lessons, working with a dream team distributes the altered responsibilities that have emerged during our document-based quarantine.

What can an archivist do if her sister is not a high school teacher—and if she otherwise does not have a good way to connect with an educator? One suggestion at this point is the creation of a primary source reader that aligns with the curriculum. The Stanford History Education Group produced an open textbook called *The American Yawp*.<sup>20</sup> Teachers are readily adopting this book, which is freely available at a time when hard copy texts were never returned after school let out in the spring and instruction remains virtual. *The American Yawp* is accompanied by a primary source reader. While very good, it consists largely of sources typically seen in the general study of American history. If teachers and archivists could partner up locally and produce a primary source reader that is highly specific to a state or local curriculum, it would be far more meaningful and effective. Teachers can take these sources and pair them with engaging strategies to produce classroom materials. Taking this a step further, since archivists are experts on the context and content of the sources, they might even suggest a rubric for use by teachers and students when analyzing them.

---

20. Joseph Locke and Ben Wright, eds., *The American Yawp*, accessed September 9, 2020, [www.americanyawp.com/](http://www.americanyawp.com/).