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### Engaging Students with Historical Newspapers in an Environmental Journalism Course

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#### **Abstract:**

*As the first rough draft of history, historical newspapers can give contemporary researchers a view into past events and how they were reported. As primary sources, the use of newspapers in education can foster inquiry-based learning, a pedagogical approach that can enhance students' critical thinking skills. As part of a Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Program grant, the author partnered with a journalism professor to integrate the use of newspapers as primary sources in an environmental journalism course offered to undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Arizona. Articles on various environmentally related topics were selected from historical Arizona newspapers, which were shared with the students during a library class session. Students worked in groups to examine the newspaper reporting on different topics of concern in Arizona, such as forest fires, mining, and dams and water issues. Students then engaged in an activity of observing, reflecting, and questioning to analyze the newspaper articles as primary sources. The author created an evaluation worksheet – adapted and expanded from the Library of Congress' Teacher's Guide to Analyzing Newspapers – which guided the students in thinking about news content. They were asked to consider the significance of placement of news stories (e.g., above or below the fold, front page or not), who the audience might be, and what else was reported in the newspaper at the same time. Because the course included both journalism and non-journalism science majors, students were encouraged to think not only about how environmental issues were reported, but also how reflecting on historical news coverage can inform their own environmental journalism. This paper describes details of the library class, including the library guide, newspaper articles used in the course, and the evaluation guide, and considers how newspapers as primary sources can be used in education.*

**Keywords:** newspapers, primary sources, teaching, journalism

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## **Background**

In 2021, the author and two colleagues at the University of Arizona Libraries (UAL) received a Library of Congress (LC) Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) grant. The TPS grants are awarded by LC “to build a nationwide network of organizations that deliver educational programming and create teaching materials and tools based on the Library’s digitized primary sources and other online resources” (Library of Congress, “Teaching”). The UAL TPS project, “Fostering the ‘Aha!’ Moments of Learning with Primary Sources through Librarian-Faculty Partnerships,” focused on collaborations between subject liaison librarians or archivists and disciplinary faculty to incorporate primary sources into their courses. The UAL received three years of funding for our project.

The Library of Congress defines primary sources as “the raw materials of history — original documents and objects that were created at the time under study” (Library of Congress, “Getting Started”). Engaging with primary sources can provide students with “aha!” or “lightbulb” learning moments, helping them make connections to what they are studying. Teaching with primary sources can “drive curiosity, engagement, even awe in students, and allow instructors to achieve their student learning goals” (Tanaka et al, 2021). We aimed to facilitate that learning by partnering with instructors to co-create lessons using Library of Congress digital primary sources in university courses. One requirement of the grant is to use LC digital primary sources, of which there are vast holdings – according to the LC site there are millions of items – of various types in different languages and covering a wide range of subjects. This gave us an opportunity to work with faculty and students in a variety of disciplines.

Over the three years of the grant, our project has included five librarians, one of whom is also an archivist, and thirteen faculty members in eleven different UA departments or colleges. We incorporated teaching with primary sources into fourteen different courses, reaching over 350 students, from lower-division general education courses to upper-division courses in the majors to graduate-level seminars. The disciplines or colleges of the faculty members included: Education, English, Gender & Women’s Studies, Government & Public Policy, History, Honors College, Italian Studies, Journalism, Middle Eastern & North African Studies, Music, and Public & Applied Humanities.

In addition to creating lesson plans, our project team also hosted a TPS Symposium, led a campus-wide learning community around teaching with primary sources, and created a TPS Portal (Figure 1), which hosts the lessons, primary source sets, and other resources for instructors. All these activities are intended to innovate and expand our engagement of students and instructors with primary sources, with the goal of improving student learning.

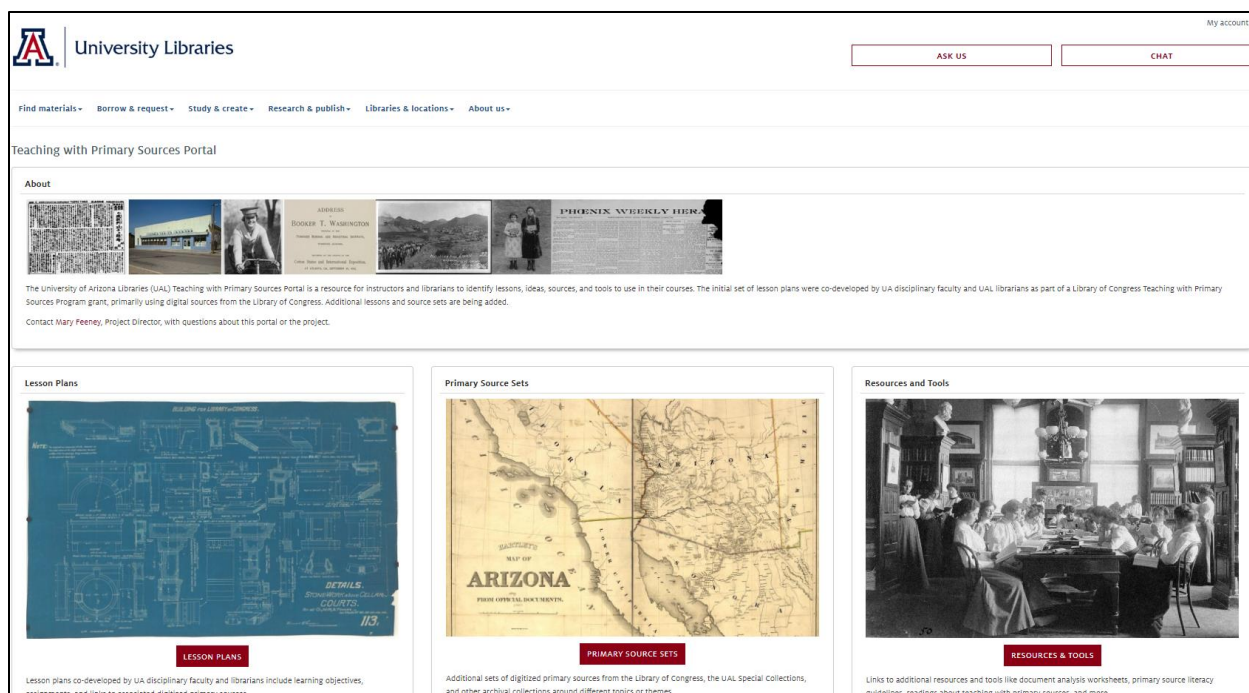


Figure 1. Teaching with Primary Sources Portal, University of Arizona Libraries.

## Course

In the third year of the grant, 2023-2024, the author partnered with a UA School of Journalism faculty member, Dr. Susan Swanberg, who would be teaching an environmental journalism course in spring 2024. The course is a combined undergraduate and graduate level course that is open to majors and non-majors, and students in the course included both journalism majors and students in science disciplines. Writing assignments for the course included a story about an event, an opinion piece, and a feature story, all related to the environment in some way. Their stories needed to incorporate background research, which the *Framework for Information Literacy in Journalism* identifies as a knowledge practice for journalists (and journalism students) (ACRL 2022). For the TPS project, the author and the journalism professor wanted to incorporate primary sources into the course as a means to inspire story ideas and as sources for background research. Objectives for the library session included:

- Learn what primary sources are.
- Learn about examples of different types of primary sources.
- Critically evaluate newspapers as primary sources by observing, reflecting, and questioning.

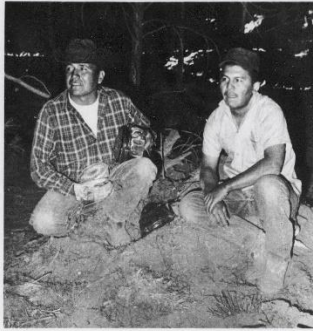
## Lesson Planning and Preparation

The author and the journalism professor met a couple of times before the spring 2024 semester to discuss ideas for how to introduce primary sources into the course. Given the TPS grant project's parameters to use digital primary sources from the Library of Congress, and that this was a journalism course, it was decided to use historical newspapers from *Chronicling America* as the primary sources for the lesson. *Chronicling America* is the open access database of digitized historical newspapers published in U.S. states and territories from the 1700s through 1963

(Library of Congress, “Chronicling America”). In addition, the author is a co-project director of a National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP) grant to digitize Arizona historical newspapers, which are hosted by the Library of Congress through Chronicling America (University of Arizona Libraries 2022). Thus, this course was an opportune way to introduce students to newspapers published in Arizona. In discussing the advantages of designing learning activities that use historical newspapers available through Chronicling America, Hibbler (2015) notes that “newspaper articles provide short examples in the limited time available during most library instruction sessions. Newspapers are also a type of primary source that is often more readily available for undergraduates,” with Chronicling America being a free resource.

The author and the journalism professor determined that newspaper articles for the environmental journalism course would be selected ahead of time and provided to the students, so that the focus of the lesson and the class session would not be on searching for materials but rather on evaluating sources. There are several environmental topics and issues of concern in Arizona, and the author and journalism professor identified four for the lesson: dams and water issues, forest fires, mining, and the establishment of Grand Canyon National Park. For each topic, four to eight newspaper articles were identified, primarily found by searching Chronicling America. The Arizona newspaper articles that were selected examined each environmental topic over a period of time, from as early as 1899 through 1963.

For example, on the topic of forest fires, newspaper selections included a brief article, “A Raging Forest Fire,” published in the *Coconino Sun* on April 22, 1899, that described a fire that had been “raging in the timber south of town during the past week” and that had “burned over many miles of timber and grazing land” (*Coconino Sun* 1899). The article goes on to explain that “the origin of the fire is not known, but it was no doubt started through the carelessness of some camper” (*Coconino Sun* 1899). Alongside that article on the library guide, another selection included a lengthier news piece published on the front page and continuing on the second page of the same newspaper in 1900: “The Public Forests. Their Importance—The Efficiency of the Forest Rangers—Grazing on Reserves” (*Coconino Sun* 1900). This article reported data about the number of forest fires in the previous year and the expansion of the forest fire law and penalties. A later article, “First Fire Flames Lash Apache Forest,” (Figure 2) published in 1963 in the *Fort Apache Scout* was also included (*Fort Apache Scout* 1963). This article contrasted with the earlier newspaper articles in that it included a full page of photographs of the fire, firefighters, and the aftermath in the forest. The newspaper was published by the White Mountain Apache Tribe, providing students a different perspective.



Man walks thru Fire! 'Forest', that is . . . . And a Pair of Fighters pause for rest . . . . Even sturdy rail ties fail to miss burn!

# The Fort Apache Scout

Official Newspaper, White Mountain Apaches  
Vol. 2 - No. 1

June, 1963

10c

Fort Apache Indian Reservation  
Whiteriver, Arizona

## Early Dawn Lion Bout Sends Two to Hospital

CEDAR CREEK - Two local men were hospitalized early this month following a 30-minute sunrise battle with a 135-pound female mountain lion.

Donner Clawson, 27, and his father-in-law, Carl Cosay, 55, were reported in good condition by officials at the Public Health Service Hospital in Whiteriver.

Both men had to undergo a prolonged series of anti-rabies shots after the lion was found to have been rabid. Each man received multiple lacerations and cuts of the arms, legs and abdomen.

Clawson also suffered a broken left arm from a jaw-bite received from the huge animal.

The action started shortly after 5 a.m. when the lion, which had apparently come down from the nearby hills to stalk some coits, was spotted by the family dogs.

The dogs gave chase and the lion took refuge under a pickup near the Cedar Creek Trading Post. Clawson and his wife, Shirley, 22, were asleep in the bed of the pickup.

Mrs. Clawson, awakened by the barking dogs and the snarl of the 7-foot cat shook her husband awake. As Clawson stepped from the truck to investigate, the lion grabbed his left leg in its jaws.

The huge cat let loose of Clawson's leg to fend off an attack by a little black dog, but grabbed Clawson by the left arm when the little dog retreated.

The wild commotion of barks, howls, snarls and yells awakened Cosay and his son, Lam, 17, who were sleeping in a nearby house.

Both ran out to help Clawson and the battle was on in earnest. Wayne Kirkpatrick, owner of the trading post, reported: "This sure was no three-minute round."

He declared the lion, the dogs and the three men went "round and round in the yard for what seemed like 30 minutes."

The younger Cosay tried to pry the lion's jaws loose from Clawson's arm, while Cosay straddled the animal's back to keep it from moving.

Clawson in the meantime, was pulling at the cat's ear with his free hand.

Clawson was finally freed from the lion's jaws and both he and Cosay ran into the house while Lam ran to the trading post and awakened Clawson's brother Roger, 35, who grabbed a .30-30 rifle and ran outside to assist.

As Roger emerged from the building, the lion charged him, and received three fatal wounds from Roger's rifle for his efforts.

Roger then drove the two injured men to the hospital for treatment of their wounds.

Throughout the battle, Mrs. Clawson sat atop the cab of the pickup, a frightened spectator.

Kirkpatrick said it was the first time "in many years" that a lion had attacked a human in this area. The head of the cat was sent to Phoenix for examination where it was found to have been rabid.

## First Fire Flames Lash Apache Forest

MILE-WIDE SWATH CUT BY BLAZE

McNARY - The first big forest fire of the season in Arizona roared for two days near here early this month before it was brought under control by Apache fire fighters and tanker planes dropping borate slurry.

The fire, which started on Memorial Day, skipped along tree tops, and fanned by winds up to 25 miles an hour, raged over more than 200 acres of prime timber the first day as weary fighters worked through the night to bring it under control.

Cutting a mile-wide swath and almost a mile long, the fire started in the Gooseberry Butte area 8 miles East of here just

north of the Apache railroad to Maverick.

A crew of 50 men and two bulldozers which were initially called out to quell the blaze were supplemented by more than 150 additional fighters and six more bulldozers by the first night.

Pictures, Page 7

Most of the fire fighters were Apaches from the fire control headquarters at Whiteriver who are especially trained for the rigors and dangers of the job.

They were later supplemented by workers from South-

west Forest Industries, lumbermen and volunteers.

Tanker planes leased by the Forest Service from the federal government dropped hundreds of gallons of slurry on the fire during the two-day battle.

Planes were called in from Winslow, Prescott and Phoenix when authorities found that gusty winds were carrying the flames rapidly through the tinder-dry forest.

Four hours after it had started, the fire had burned 70 to 80 acres of high-grade timber, reported Harry L. Brewer, fire control technician at Whiteriver.

Continued Page 7, Col. 1

## Mail Goes Z-I-P at Whiteriver!

WHITERIVER - The five-digit ZIP Code for Whiteriver will go into effect July 1st. Postmaster Ara Sparks announced here this week.

The ZIP Code for the residents here will be 85941, she announced and asked that everyone in the Whiteriver mailing area use the ZIP Code to speed deliveries on all their correspondence and reduce the chance of mis-sent mail.

Postmaster Sparks stressed the importance of all citizens of Whiteriver learning this city's ZIP Code and using it in their return address on all correspondence. In answering mail, she said, ZIP Codes taken

from return addresses on incoming mail should be used.

"The ZIP Code is literally the last word in mail addressing," Mrs. Sparks said. "It should follow the city and state in addresses."

She cited this example of the proper use of ZIP Code:

Ara O. Sparks  
Postmaster  
U. S. Post Office,  
Whiteriver, Arizona, 85941

The new ZIP Code plan, Mrs. Sparks said, for the first time will permit the Post Office Department to short-cut repeated address reading.

"The address on mail must often be read as many as eight or ten

times by postal employees, to get it to the proper destination," Mrs. Sparks said. "Each handling slows the process of mail dispatch and adds to the opportunity for human error."

"With ZIP Code, a clerk needs only a glance at the code to know immediately to what national area, state and post office the letter is destined, and to speed it on its way, cutting up to 24 hours off the time between deposit and delivery."

Mrs. Sparks said that when ZIP Code is in full swing, the United States will have "the most modern system of mail distribution and delivery in existence."

(Ed. Note: See guest column on Page 2.)

Figure 2. Front page of the Fort Apache Scout, June 1, 1963.

## Library Guide

The author created a library guide (Figure 3) for the course using Springshare's LibGuides, which the UAL uses for its general subject guides and more specific course guides. The course guide served as a platform to link to the newspaper articles in one place to facilitate the in-class time for students to read them (University of Arizona Libraries 2024). A representative image taken from a newspaper served as the visual cue for each topic. For example, a graphic from the *Navajo Times* illustrating the location of various dams and reservoir capacities on or near the Navajo Nation was used as the visual header for the "Dams and water issues" section of the guide (*Navajo Times* 1962).

The screenshot shows the University Libraries LibGuide interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with options: Find materials, Borrow & request, Study & create, Research & publish, Libraries & locations, and About us. The main title of the guide is "JOUR 455/555: Environmental Journalism: Newspapers as Primary Sources".

The guide is divided into three main sections:

- Dams and water issues:** This section features a map titled "DAMS AND WATER ISSUES" showing the location of various dams and reservoirs on or near the Navajo Nation. Below the map is a list of newspaper articles:
  - "Davis Presents Facts About Colorado River", *The Arizona Republican*, March 16, 1922.
  - "Hoover Disregards Adverse Propaganda and Puts Stamp of Approval on Boulder Project", *Mohave County Miner and Our Mineral Wealth*, March 17, 1922.
  - "Boulder Canyon Dam Will Furnish Cheap Power for Operation of Oatman Mines", *Mohave County Miner and Our Mineral Wealth*, March 17, 1922.
- Forest fires:** This section features a newspaper clipping titled "HEAVY FOREST FIRE" with the headline "Fire in Huachuca Mountains Beyond Control--Soldiers Sent to Aid Citizens". Below the clipping is a list of newspaper articles:
  - "A Raging Forest Fire", *The Coconino Sun*, April 22, 1899.
  - "The Public Forests", and article continuation on next page, *The Coconino Sun*, January 20, 1900.
  - "To Prevent Forest Fires", *The Coconino Sun*, July 14, 1900.
  - "Forest Fires Raging", *The Holbrook Argus*, June 2, 1906.
  - "Disastrous Forest Fire", *The St. Johns Herald and*
- Analyzing Newspaper Content:** This section provides instructions on how to use the guide: "Read each of the articles linked under your topic. As you examine and analyze the news items, use the Analyzing Newspaper Content guide to Observe, Reflect, and Question." It includes a link to "Analyzing Newspaper Content".

At the bottom of the guide, there is an "Additional resources" section with a search bar and links to "Chronicling America" and "UA Libraries News/Newspaper Databases". A link to "Learn more about primary sources" is also present.

Figure 3. Library course guide for JOUR 455/555: Environmental Journalism: Newspapers as Primary Sources

In addition to links to selected newspaper articles, the guide includes contact information for the author, who is the News Research/Journalism Librarian, and links to additional newspaper databases, as well as a link to learn more about primary sources. A worksheet for analyzing newspaper content, described in more detail below, was also linked from the guide.

## Worksheet

To guide the students' examination of the newspaper articles, the author created a worksheet, Analyzing Newspaper Content (Feeney 2024). The worksheet was adapted and expanded from the Library of Congress' "Teacher's Guide to Analyzing Newspapers," and used a method of "Observe, Reflect, Question" for engaging students with primary sources (Library of Congress, "Teacher's Guide").

On this worksheet, "Observe" introduces students to the newspaper source with questions like What is the name of the newspaper? Who wrote the article? Where was it placed in the

newspaper? This question about placement introduced the concept of “above the fold” – where a news item is placed in the top half of the front page of a folded newspaper. Another observation question included: What are the surrounding stories, advertisements, or other content?

The “Reflect” part of the worksheet guided students to a deeper level with questions such as: What do you think might be significant about what you observed? For example, the placement of a news item on the front page and/or “above the fold” might signify the importance of the news item or what value the editors placed on the story. Reflecting on what surrounding stories or advertisements they observed could help the students think about the context of a news story in relation to other pieces in the newspaper. One of Hibbler’s learning activities with historical newspapers demonstrated the importance of looking at the context in which a newspaper article exists and considering the other items that appear alongside a given article. This can lead to “serendipitous discoveries” and provide “valuable contextual information” (Hibbler 2015). Additional reflection questions included: Who do you think was the audience of the newspaper? What else was happening when this item was published? Krahmer, Scarborough, and Fisher (2023) also used digitized historical newspapers to engage students with primary sources in a sociology course. Their library session, in part, taught students about the importance of considering context when using primary sources.

In the “Question” and “Further Investigation” sections, students were encouraged to identify what they still wondered about and to think about what other newspapers or other types of primary sources might be important to include in their research.

### **Library class session**

Before the class session, the journalism professor assigned readings for the students to provide more context about the study of journalism history. Students were also asked to review the UAL’s FAQs about primary sources (University of Arizona Libraries, “What are primary sources?”). The class of about nineteen students met in a seminar format, in which students sat around a long conference table, which helped facilitate small group work and discussion. At the beginning of the class session the professor and the author reviewed what primary sources are and discussed some examples of types of sources, from photographs to data from scientific studies, from correspondence to diaries, and from legal documents to newspapers.

Small groups of four to five students were formed, with each group selecting one of the environmental topics to review, reading the newspaper articles linked on the library course guide. Students used the Analyzing Newspaper Content worksheet to guide their discussions, and most of the class time was allocated for their small group discussions. During the students’ discussions, the author observed that students raised additional questions outside of what guided them on the worksheet. For example, some wondered not just where a newspaper was published but questioned if it had been located in an Arizona-Mexico border town, which may have provided more information about the audience of the newspaper. Each group was asked to report to the rest of the class any insights they gained from examining the newspaper articles on their topic. Students looked at other pages of the newspapers, not only the article provided or the page where that article was located. They observed differences in journalism standards in historical newspapers as compared to present-day news media, such as there often being a lack of byline or author attribution, and often no quotes from sources.

With this inquiry-based approach, students were not asked to search for articles on specific topics, nor were they looking for “answers.” The purpose of the lesson was to examine newspapers as primary sources by observing, reflecting, and questioning the sources and encourage the students to think not only about how environmental issues were reported, but also to reflect on how historical news coverage can inform their own environmental journalism.

### **Future Work**

One of the goals of the University of Arizona Libraries’ Teaching with Primary Sources grant project is to provide instructors with ideas and supportive materials to encourage them to incorporate primary sources in their courses. To that aim, the project team is building out a Teaching with Primary Sources Portal that is hosted on the UAL’s website where instructors can find practical examples of lessons and sample primary source sets. On the TPS Portal, instructors can filter the lesson plans or primary source sets to focus on places, time periods, types of primary sources used, and disciplines. For example, if an instructor wants to use photographs and newspapers in their own course, they can use the filters on the portal to identify lessons that use these types of sources. While the lessons may not be in their same discipline, it is hoped that instructors will be able to adapt the ideas to their own fields.

The lesson that was co-developed by the News Research/Journalism Librarian and the journalism professor for this environmental journalism course will be added to the TPS Portal as an example of engaging students with newspapers as primary sources and guiding them through a process of inquiry in analyzing those sources. The author and the project team plan to continue adding additional lessons to the TPS Portal, in collaboration with disciplinary faculty. The author also plans to develop additional curated topical newspaper primary source sets for use in courses.

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