Curation of Digitized Artifacts in the Study of Historical Fiction

Ewa McGrail  
*Georgia State University, emcgrail@gsu.edu*

Kevin Powell  
kpowell5@gsu.edu

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Curation of Digitized Artifacts in the Study of Historical Fiction

As we all know, online communication and information technologies are reshaping today’s education and work environments by changing the ways information is exchanged and retrieved.

For digital natives (individuals born after 1990), using interactive technologies to locate information and share digital content has become second nature. Their facility with social networking platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr (Houston, 2011) have actually led both to the vast improvement and reach of these programs and to the existence of both derivative and competitive programs, such as Reddit and Foursquare. In a sense, all of these technologies are the natural result of an Internet that has made a virtually endless amount of information available online to nearly everyone with a computer and a connection. There was (and is), therefore, a strong need for orientation and the creation of relevance in this vast sea of information.

Among the many kinds of available information are digital artifacts. These are items that have been collected online and are accessible to teachers and students alike. Such artifacts include texts, photographs, and video clips of tools and objets d’art used for various purposes by the peoples of the past. These artifacts can offer a context for students’ understanding of historical fiction (Morgan et Rasinski, 2012). Studying these artifacts also brings authenticity to learning, since many artifacts embody the norms, culture, discourse, and values of the people who lived in the past (Fühler, Farris, & Nelson, 2006). Digitized artifacts can often convey important understandings by reproducing original mediums and modalities (e.g., clothing items, pottery, audio/video recordings, or images), thus making such explorations interactive and engaging journeys. In addition, the use of digitized artifacts in literature instruction provides opportunities for teacher librarians, literacy teachers, and content area teachers to collaborate (Kapitzke, 2001). Literacy and content area teachers share expertise in their discipline, while teacher librarians, for example, provide expertise in subject-specific searches and different research tools, as well as assist the uninitiated with profitably searching online collections (Dow, 2013; Loertscher & Marcoux, 2010).

Although many of these collections of digitized artifacts are available online, students may not always know which sources and publishers represent reliable scholarship and high-quality reproductions of primary sources or how to locate such resources and databases. In this article, we first review websites of interest to teacher librarians to help students search for high quality digitized artifacts online. Next we analyze and evaluate social bookmarking services that can be used to organize, share, and curate digitized artifacts online. We conclude the article with sample instructional activities for using and curating digital artifacts in the classroom.

HIGH-QUALITY WEBSITES WITH DIGITIZED ARTIFACTS

We review five of our favorite websites for teacher librarians who want to improve students’ understanding of historical fiction texts: Flickr Commons, Boston Public Library, New York Public Library, the Smithsonian Institute, and the Library of Congress.

Flickr, a popular photo-sharing website, includes a special section devoted to history and archived collections called the Commons (http://www.flickr.com/commons). In this section, users can click on participating institutions’ photo streams (online photo galleries), browse a sampler of photos, or use the search box to conduct a keyword search. By clicking on a particular institution, the user can also browse sets of photos organized by historical era. The sets we enjoyed included the ones on women’s suffrage, African American his-
Table 1 - Recommended Artifact Databases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flickr—The Commons</td>
<td>Special section of the popular photo-sharing site Flickr devoted to historical photos and artifacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repository of Primary Sources—University of Idaho</td>
<td>A repository of over 5,000 websites describing primary sources searchable by geographic region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library of Congress for Teachers</td>
<td>Artifacts from all periods of United States history, including films, maps, sound recordings, newspapers articles, photographs, and other documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eduplace</td>
<td>A repository of primary sources categorized into U.S. history and world history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston and New York Public Libraries</td>
<td>Special collections online, photostreams on Flickr, and online galleries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Library of Georgia</td>
<td>Digitized manuscripts, books, photographs, and government documents relevant to the study of the history of Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California, Berkeley</td>
<td>Includes tips for finding primary resource documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia State University</td>
<td>Digital collections specializing in documents from the American south, popular music collections, and oral histories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Council for the Social Studies</td>
<td>Offers primary resources and teaching activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yale University</td>
<td>A collection of over 500,000 images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithsonian Institute</td>
<td>Online exhibits and images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Archives</td>
<td>Teacher resources for using primary sources, links by topic and media type, and online exhibits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Deal Network</td>
<td>Documents gathered from the National Archives, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, and other collections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Rhetoric</td>
<td>Sound recordings of famous American speeches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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With all of these readily available digitized artifacts online, the problem facing teacher librarians and students today is how to effectively organize, share, and solicit feedback on these artifacts. Fortunately, there are several options. Digital curation is an important role of teacher librarians; they
are uniquely adept at critically organizing information to foster student growth. Additionally, researchers have emphasized that digital curation is an essential information skill as students develop and make sense of what they discover on the Internet (Rosenbaum, 2011; Valenza, 2012). Included in Table 2 is a list of recommended digital curation platforms, with descriptions and characteristics of each.

All of the recommended platforms have the ability to create and share online collections of artifacts. They also meet the requirements for curating digital archives such as the following, proposed by Valenza (2014):

**Aggregation**—They allow for assembling many artifacts and resources in one location.

**Distillation**—They allow for selecting, annotating, and presenting the most relevant artifacts in a unified and simple format.

**Elevation**—They afford extracting from the vast amount of information and digital archives the newest and most insightful artifact finds with the help of social media tools (e.g., blogs or RSS feeds).

**Mashups**—They allow for adding new ideas and insights through repurposing and merging artifact content, forms, and media.

**Chronology**—They allow for arranging and synthesizing artifact content over time and across diverse perspectives. (Valenza, 2014, adapted from Bhargava [2011])

When choosing a social bookmarking service for curation, users should keep these criteria in mind. They should also determine their goals for the service and consider how personal they want the experience to be, how they want the artifacts to be organized, and how popular (and hence useful) the social bookmarking tool is (see Figure 1).

Diigo (http://www.diigo.com) can be used to bookmark intriguing artifacts on the Internet, post links for future reference, solicit feedback, and share bookmarks. Diigo users can make folders for a broad range of interests, as well as private folders, public folders, and group pages. The group page on the Diigo page allows users to collaborate with other teacher librarians

### Table 2 - Recommended Platforms for Curation of Digitized Artifacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
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| **Diigo** | A social bookmarking service that allows you to organize, bookmark, and save webpages and digitized artifacts. | • Embraced by education professionals  
• Highlight texts and create folders  
• Can create groups with colleagues and classmates |
| **Storify** | A website where individual users can organize what they find on the internet into a narrative. | • Popular site, easy to get started posting direct links on digitized artifacts  
• Aesthetically appealing interface  
• Ability to have multiple editors |
| **Tumblr** | A blogging platform that allows users to post images, texts, videos, and links | • Popular site with an excellent user interface for organizing artifacts  
• Timely feeds to follow with digitized artifacts of educational interest  
• Lower number of education pages than other bookmarking services |
| **LibGuides** | Designed for curation and archiving instructional material from the web | • Used by K-12 teacher librarians, higher education, and public librarians  
• Easy to use templates, excellent user interface, and thousands of examples  
• Provides user with recommended resources for a multitude of areas of study |
| **Pinterest** | A social bookmarking site that lets users organize and share what they find on the web | • Popular site, easy to use, can tag and save images easily  
• Primarily used as a social tool rather than an educational tool, but it has a growing number of users who share teaching ideas and digitized artifacts |
| **Feedly** | A news aggregator similar to the posthumous Google Reader. | • Organize and read content online  
• Share content with others  
• Available as a cloud-based service |
Another engaging project for teacher librarians and literacy teachers to consider is Historic Re-Enactment. This activity allows student actors to re-enact a historical event or portray a person or some other aspect of history from the specified time and place, and in this way, "transport" themselves and their audience into a living past. Students utilize the online databases and social bookmarking and digital content curation tools that we discuss in this article to find digitized artifacts and other information that will help them learn as much as possible about the event, person, or cultural group. This might include examples that show dress code, hairstyle, discourse, equipment, or everyday life objects. They then move to the experimental and re-enactment phase, where they build an "event set" or alternately, "become" the person they have selected from history. Note that in both of the above project examples, students have to do thorough research to find quality sources and stay well organized. More importantly, they hone their analysis and synthesis skills, as they have to arrive at their own understandings and representations of a select historical event or person. The process that we invite the learners to engage in through these projects is similar to what Loertscher (personal communication, December 6, 2013) defines as the three steps to curation projects:

1. The act of curation of quality items
2. The analysis of what has been curated by individuals and groups
3. The synthesis of what it all means in understanding the topic at hand

The digitized online databases and the social bookmarking and content curation services that we review in this work will help students learn these skills and accomplish their project goals.

Students can further develop their historical re-enactments with a documentary on an event, character, or social or cultural phenomenon. Windows Movie Maker or Photo Story 3 for Windows for PC users and
iMovie for Mac users are free computer-based digital story-making programs that students can use to create a documentary. Voice Thread (both PC and Mac versions) or iMovie and Voice Thread on iPad/iPod/iPhone are, on the other hand, affordable web-based applications.

Additionally, vibrant communities of artifact enthusiasts continue to pop up on social bookmarking platforms including Facebook and Google+. Students, literacy teachers, and teacher librarians could join in on the fun by sharing artifacts and making comments on pages such as Vintage Los Angeles (https://www.facebook.com/VintageLosAngeles), Atlanta Time Machine (https://www.facebook.com/AtlantaTime-Machine), and Vintage Toronto (https://www.facebook.com/VintageToronto). The use of these social bookmarking sites for curation of digitized artifacts opens up a number of rich opportunities for connecting our students with the past. We hope that you will consider using these social bookmarking sites and curation tools in your instructional activities to bring to life the events and lives of the people from the past.

REFERENCES


Ewa McGrail is an Associate Professor of Language and Literacy at Georgia State University. In her research, Dr. McGrail examines digital writing and new media composition; copyright and media literacy; technology in teaching and learning, and multimodal assessment. She is also an ardent supporter of students and educators from outgroups or who are otherwise not in the mainstream.

Kevin Powell is a doctoral student at Georgia State University. As a former elementary school teacher librarian and middle school language arts teacher, Kevin focuses his research on student engagement and learning in small group contexts and collaboration between teacher librarians and language arts teachers in technology-based inquiry.

OLDIES BUT GOODIES

Siegel, Jerry, John Byrne, Grant Morrison, and others. Lois Lane: A Celebration of 75 Years. DC Comics, 2013. 384p. $39.99. 9781401247034. Grades 7 and up. With almost two dozen chapters, this collection surveys all the Lois we've had, from the suspicious to the charming to the adventurous to the damsel in distress. With a handful of short introductions to the various sections, the collection also helps contextualize the major phases in the history of Lois. Some of the older stories are dated, but they're pointedly dated, and put back-to-back here, they tell not only the story of Superman's girlfriend, but also of how we keep needing different things from her.

Duffy, Chris, editor. Fairy Tale Comics. First Second, 2013. 128p. $19.99. 9781596438231. All ages. From the obscure ("Sweet Porridge") to the familiar ("Little Red Riding Hood"), from the lushly illustrated (Brett Helquist's "Rumplestiltskin") to the oddly flat (Charise Mericle Harper's "The Small Tooth"), and from the charming (Luke Pearson's "The Boy Who Drew Cats") to the ironic (Joseph Lambert's "Rabbit Will Not Help"), this collection gives an excellent overview of fairy tales from various traditions, with characters that are engaging and endings that, if not always what the Grimms would have liked, work very well today.

Shanower, Eric. Age of Bronze: Betrayal, Part Two. Image, 2013. 176p. $28.99. 9781607067573. Grades 9 and up. The Trojan War rages, and at the center of it is a woman. No, at the center are three women: Helen, of course, but also Cassandra, who speaks prophecies no one will hear, and Cressida, the beloved of men on both sides of the battle. It is on Cassandra and Cressida that this volume focuses, following them through the intrigue, passion, and desperate hope that pushes these men of the ancient world to starve and kill and die.