



AER Newsletter

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Welcome!

Thank you to our readers and contributors for making our first Archival Educators Roundtable Newsletter such a success! It is always inspiring to read about the work being done in the field, to make new connections, and to gain feedback from other professionals. Both AER meeting attendees and new subscribers have offered such positive words about the newsletter, and we hope many more of you will add your insight and experiences in the future by being a contributor.

The 4th Annual AER Meeting was held in August, and, as always, the professionals around the table – elementary and high school educators, librarians, archivists, historians, education coordinators, and program managers – shaped a productive day of conversations and hands-on activity development. We are gearing up for the AER Winter Workshop – taking place February 6, 2020 at the Rockefeller Archive Center. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy and learn from the articles in our Winter Issue! This issue’s contributors continue to underscore the incredible primary source education work being done with students of all grade levels.

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Marissa Vassari, Archivist and Educator, Rockefeller Archive Center
Elizabeth Berkowitz, Outreach Program Manager, Rockefeller Archive Center

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Progressive Education and Primary Sources at City and Country School

*Jordis Rosberg
Archivist and Research Librarian
City and Country School*

At [City and Country School](#) (C&C), an independent progressive elementary school in downtown Manhattan, I hold dual positions, working as both a research librarian and the school's archivist. Having started my career at the school 15 years ago as a classroom teacher, I moved into my role in the library ten years ago, and added oversight of our decades-old Archives a few years later. It has been a tremendous experience to work simultaneously in the library and the Archives. Each year, I awaken to deeper connections and conversations between the two – the two collections, the two institutional roles, and the opportunities the two provide, on their own and in tandem, for meaningful learning experiences.

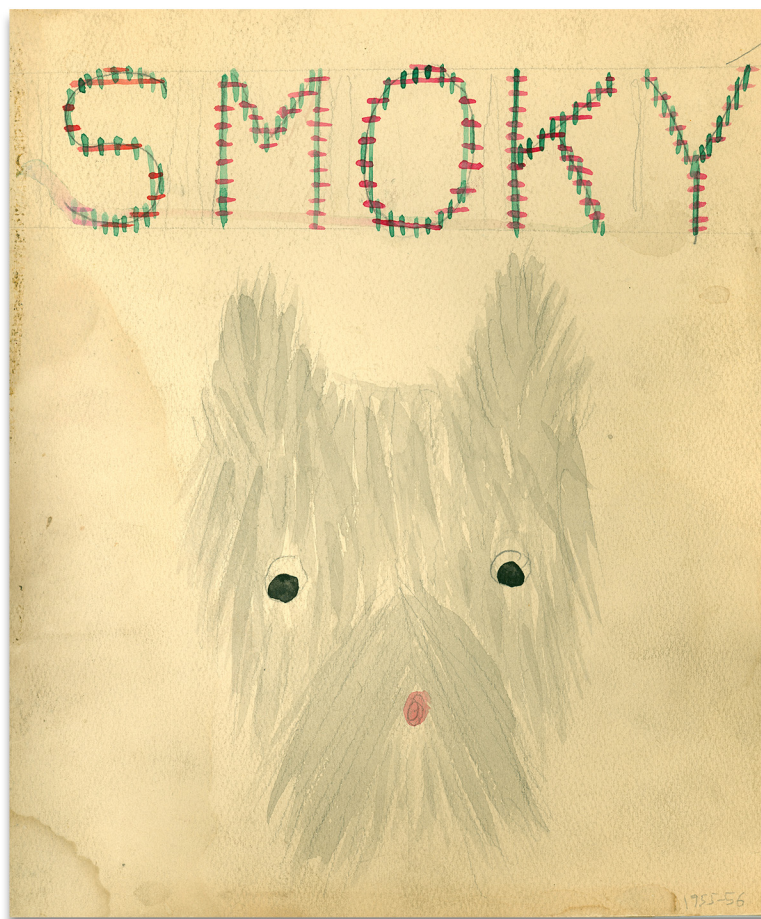
C&C opened in 1914, and has been a leader in progressive education since its inception. Founded on the principle that children learn most meaningfully through play, the school is Social Studies-based and structured around children's explorations. In the Lower School, students engage with topics of study through trips, experiences, and questions, expressing their observations and learning through their play with a set of open-ended materials: wooden unit blocks, paints, clay, paper, and wood. These open-ended materials were originally selected by [Caroline Pratt](#), the school's founder, and have remained as dynamic, relevant, and expressive as they were in 1914. As students progress through the school, the open-ended materials through which they both learn and express their learning evolve, and are of an increasingly academic nature. Books are, of course, one such considerable material, rendered even more foundational by the fact that C&C considers individual student research to be the primary means of engaging with Social Studies.



City & Country Teacher with Students, Roof Yard, 1921.
Courtesy of City and Country School Archives.

Individual research provides children with opportunities to engage in holistic, self-directed, experience-based learning – the type of learning that lies at the heart of C&C’s progressive model. In addition to the resources available for research in the school’s library, C&C has a rich archive of documents, artifacts, and photographs related to the school’s century-plus history. As both librarian and archivist, I am always on the lookout for ways to fold these materials into the work of the children, especially as examples of primary sources. The analysis, decoding, interpretation, and wrestling required to engage fully with a primary source, whether text or object, is a learning experience that we strive to incorporate whenever possible. Thus, I try to collaborate with teachers regularly to integrate archival experiences into the work and curricula of their classrooms.

Some of the most effective and memorable archival projects have fostered connections between 21st century students and their C&C peers from the past. Through these activities, students have honed their research skills while learning how primary sources can engender impactful, meaningful stories that link one generation to the next. When our 8-year-olds, who run the school Post Office, come down to the Archives to look at the stamps made by 8s in the 1970s, they are having a dual learning experience: they are practicing their observational and inquiry skills (*What do the different prices mean? How did they make the stamps sticky? Did they use a computer to make the stamps?*), and they are exploring their own place in the Post Office’s century-plus history and how every group of children remakes this long-standing tradition in their own vision. Here is research, experience with primary sources, and personal relevance.



Cover of XIIIs/IVs Storybook, 1956. Courtesy of City and Country School Archives.

In the 12s (C&C identifies classes according to students' ages, rather than by grade levels), C&C students work with our 4s and, at the end of the year, each student writes and illustrates a picture book for the 4s, taking into account the narratives and imagery of interest to the children they have grown to know so intimately. In anticipation of creating these books the groups visit the Archives and look through the robust collection of 12s-made books we have dating from the late 1950s. Together, we explore the types of stories and characters 12s have incorporated over the years. We also look at materials -- what has held up over the decades, and what is degrading quickly? These books are primary sources relevant to the work of our current 12s, and give rise to questions such as: What family imagery was common in 1962? How did students depict the school in 1975? What binding and illustrating materials were in common use in 1990?

City and Country's 13s, the oldest group of children in the school, create and write the school newspaper, and often do articles related to either the school's history or program. Students will interview me, as the archivist, about any number of topics, such as the school's name or Library program or the socio-economic make-up of the student body over the decades. Whenever possible, I follow up on these interviews by sharing with students relevant documents, such as staff meeting minutes from the 1920s or school brochures with program descriptions or tuition rates, so students can read, interpret, and draw on the evidence themselves. In this way, by accessing the same primary sources that allowed prior researchers to draw conclusions about a piece of the school's history, the students are able to make their own inferences and engage in authentic evidence-based reporting.

One of my favorite touchpoints with students is when the 11s visit the collection in September as a warm up for the historical inquiry they will be practicing all year. For this exercise, I lay out an array of items, each numbered but not named, and children have sheets with spaces to note observations, ask questions, and make connections for each. Among the items I usually display are wooden dolls created and marketed by our founder prior to opening the school, a clay sculpture made by a student, a photo of one of the school's early outdoor play spaces, a list of parent occupations from the 1920s, and a map of trip destinations made by a teacher. Here, the children have the opportunity to look at a variety of items from the perspective of expert community members -- this is the history of their own school after all! -- and yet with the fresh eyes of children who have not seen these objects before or known this aspect of the school's history; they are able to both ask genuine questions and to recognize some of the context. As children explore and engage with these items in pairs, we also have the opportunity to discuss and question the value of such items -- why does the school invest the space, time, and money in preserving items from its history? Why *these* items? What is the value of an archive, a museum, a collection of artifacts related to an institution's or culture's past? This questioning allows the children to enter their upcoming Social Studies units with a different perspective, one more aware of the choices made to construct, and reconstruct, history. Here are some fundamental questions about the narratives we create around history in real time, and in retrospect.

All of the above are regular opportunities children at City and Country have to engage in authentic primary source research by drawing on the school's rich Archives collection. However, these same strategies for engagement with primary sources can be implemented in school settings without an institutional archival collection. Integrating the study and close analysis of historical school photographs, lessons, and yearbooks with research and writing curricula, even if not from the students' own school, similarly connects classrooms with the narrative potential of the past, while building critical thinking skills.

While my archival initiatives with C&C students can feel numerous in the throes of the school year, I know there is room for more -- more use of the collection by a wider range of ages around more various objectives. One of the most marked but often underutilized perks of having an archive within a school is the opportunity it affords children to really interrogate the choices -- and implications of those choices -- that we make about what we value and how that is reflected in a collection, whether an archive, a library, a museum, or other. C&C students know their school and its history well, particularly as they move through the grades, and are sometimes able to question what is lost or altered by the choices made in the Archives in a way they may not be able to around a historical topic. These are moments of deep, genuine historical thinking arising from children's own experiences and questions, and are some of the most exciting conversations I have had the chance to participate in as an educator.

AP US History in the Archives: A World War II Principal in Context

David Reader

History Teacher

Haddonfield Memorial High School

In the past twenty years of teaching at the secondary level, I have consistently incorporated archival research assignments into my United States history courses. There is immeasurable value in bringing students into an archive and engaging in the research process that so many historians have experienced. The archives provide students with various types of documents, images, and other ephemera that traditional textbooks omit. Archival research allows a topic to come alive through the connections that students develop with the letters, images, and other archival materials and develops a relationship between the students and the materials. The success of the assignment requires that all parties work a little harder and outside their comfort levels to provide a rewarding educational experience in the archives.



Left to right: students in David Reader's class conducting their research. Courtesy of author.

The Reynolds' Project

The Advanced Placement United States History class at Haddonfield Memorial High School in New Jersey dedicates a quarter of the school year to conducting archival research at the [Historical Society of Haddonfield](#). The emphasis of the assignment is on the correspondence between Principal William "Bull" Reynolds of Haddonfield Memorial High School and his students who graduated or left high school early to serve in World War II. The Historical Society of Haddonfield has the letters that both Principal Reynolds wrote to his students and the letters from soldiers to their former principal.

Principal Reynolds kept the soldiers up to date about the town and school, including a copy of the school newspaper the *Haddon Higher*. Depending on the responses he received from the soldiers his letters became more informative and addressed their specific questions, like who won the homecoming football game and what classes should be taught at the high school. Soldiers expressed their thanks for the letters and quickly described their situation; many discussed their training and the significance of their high school education in determining their role in the military. A few soldiers included photos and shared stories of meeting other Haddonfield residents while serving. The students illustrate empathy towards the soldiers in their resulting presentations because of the similarities in age, references to specific high school events that current students experience, and the direct relationship some students have with the families of the soldiers who wrote the letters.

The impetus for this assignment stems from multiple visits and conversations with Dana Dorman, the Historical Society of Haddonfield's archivist, and Society members who knew Principal Reynolds and his legacy. We spend a few months going over the collection of Reynolds' letters and other World War II documents, postcards, propaganda leaflets, and other organizational materials related to the home front during the war years. The Historical Society of Haddonfield then hosts a brief open house for the students a few months prior to the due date of the assignment to see the materials, go over the rules for research in the library (no pens or beverages), and to discuss the expectations of the students, archivists, and teacher.

The assignment breaks the class into groups that are each responsible for specific letters in the Reynolds collection to read, transcribe, and incorporate into a five-page paper that focuses on a theme found in a minimum of three letters. Some themes include homesickness, nostalgia for life before the War, local goings on. The group then presents on their category of correspondence.

Students earn two grades: one for the collective effort in their group presentation and another individual grade for the five-page paper. The dual aspect of the assignment allows for students to highlight the letters they found interesting and to share their group findings from the archive with their colleagues and families in a community setting. To assuage student worries about their grade and letting down their group, one solution I devised is for students to keep a journal of all their research, a list of sources searched, and their notes on the documents that they have read in order to satisfy the grading requirements.



David Reader speaking before student presentations. Courtesy of author.

In the past few years, the class and the Historical Society of Haddonfield have hosted an evening panel open to the public in the library at Haddonfield Memorial High School. Students use their time to show their presentations, answer questions about their research, and to ask questions to the Haddonfield residents who had family members who wrote the letters. The evening panel allows the students to meet the children of Principal William “Bull” Reynolds and other residents who grew up hearing the stories. This is a unique experience for the students and residents of a small town, and one that creates impactful, intergenerational connections.

Tips for a Successful Collaboration Between Educators and Archivists

For the Reynolds assignment and for my other archival work with high school students, my preparation begins months in advance and requires multiple visits to the archives to research the materials and collections that will be incorporated into the final assignment. I have found that teachers and archivists need to work together to create an assignment that incorporates the strengths of the archival collections into the course and school district curriculum. The relationship between the teachers and archivists is instrumental for the success of the assignment and helps foster a positive student experience. I strongly recommend that teachers volunteer or spend time in the archives working in the collections of interest to experience the obstacles that students will likely encounter throughout their research. The better the understanding that a teacher has of the building, collections, policies, and staff makes the experience for the students less intimidating and overwhelming.

I also attribute the success of working with the Historical Society of Haddonfield and, for other projects, with the [Historical Society of Pennsylvania](#) to boundaries. Archivists and librarians are influential in helping to create the parameters of the assignment due to their superior knowledge of the various collections and materials available. Clear objectives and set limitations on what types of documents, collections, and a set time frame all provide the students with guidance and realistic expectations headed into the archives.

“Dead ends”—when students are unable to find materials to support their research—are an important part of the research process that challenges students, teachers, and archivists who approach this issue differently. Constant communication between the teacher and the archivists during the student’s research is essential to avoid these potential dead ends that students may encounter in the archives. However, these research dead ends expose students to the problems that many historians face in the profession. Teachers and archivists need to reassure students that some dead ends will be resolved through further research and assist with any materials possible to help answer their questions. This collective effort by the teacher, archivists, and librarians will illustrate to the students the complexities of historical research and the difficulties of fully knowing the past.

Overall, teachers who are looking to visit an archive with their students should email, call, or visit ahead to meet the archivists, librarians, and other staff members who will work closely with you and your students. These relationships play an important role in my archival assignments because of the uncertainty that students feel their first time being the historian. Thinking through what I want the students to learn from their research is stressed in the structure of the assignment. Providing clear objectives and goals gives the students the confidence they need to begin their research and the guidance of friendly archivists will further enhance their overall experience at any archives.

Sample Lesson Plan: World War II Haddonfield Memorial High School 1941 to 1945

David Reader

History Teacher

Haddonfield Memorial High School

- The third quarter assignment will be based on the men and women who either attended or graduated from Haddonfield Memorial High School and served in World War II. This assignment will require all students to visit the Historical Society of Haddonfield to develop a multimedia presentation and an individual research paper. Each student will also be responsible for the transcription of TWO letters within their assigned letter grouping from U.S. servicemen to their Principal William “Bull” Reynolds. The letters will serve as the central point of your paper and research. *NO typed letters by either “Bull” Reynolds or servicemen can be used.*

- Students will be divided into groups to research specific letters of correspondence that were exchanged between Principal Reynolds and HMHS graduates or students who attended HMHS but left early to fight in the war. The groups will be given class time to visit the Historical Society of Haddonfield to work on this assignment, some students may need or want extra time to work at the Historical Society and can request access through Ms. Dorman, the Archivist at the Historical Society of Haddonfield.
- The group assignment requires each group to divide the work evenly between the members and agree to serve in specific roles for the individual component of the project. The group assignment will focus on a multimedia presentation that can be a Google slideshow, a Ken Burns-esque documentary, or another teacher approved presentation. Presentations must include images of the letters, soldiers, Haddonfield in the 1940s, and other WWII appropriate images that are connected to your material (Library of Congress and National Archives are good alternatives). Each group presentation is fifteen to twenty minutes in length. *This year (2020) we will have an EVENING event with the Historical Society of Haddonfield in the HMHS Library - it is expected that a minimum of one member per group will be able to attend and deliver an abridged version of their group's presentation.*
- The individual assignment provides each student with a specific responsibility that is complementary to the group assignment. Students should approach the individual component of the assignment as a historian writing a specific chapter in a larger book on World War II. Groups must discuss and decide the following roles for the members of their group historian of the national home front (USA), historian of the war (the theater in which the HMHS or students are fighting - must read letters prior to research), historian of race and gender (African-Americans and Women in the war - must read letters prior to research), TWO historians for Haddonfield and Camden County during the war.
- Every student is REQUIRED to TRANSCRIBE TWO hand written letters from soldiers to Principal Reynolds.

Individual RESEARCH and PAPER REQUIREMENTS

- a. Research papers need three scholarly articles pertaining to the role of the historian (Homefront National, War Theater, Race and Gender, Haddonfield/Camden County). Students need to use EBSCO, J-STOR, and other electronic databases for these articles.
- b. Your Paper needs a clear thesis that incorporates the similarities of the letters and uses both the primary and secondary sources.
- c. Your Paper needs a bibliography.
- d. Your Paper needs to be between four to six pages in length (not including bibliography) typed, Times New Roman, Font 12, and double spaced.
- e. You MUST submit your paper and two typed transcripts of the letters – *in three ways, a hard copy, an e-mail copy, and through Canvas.*
- f. Questions about your thesis, common theme, or scholarly articles can be emailed or discussed through an appointment – do not hesitate to ask questions.

#AskAnArchivist as Advocacy for Archival Education

Brett Dion

Archivist

Bank Street College of Education

Since I arrived as the [Bank Street College of Education](#) archivist in early 2018, I have wanted to engage students and teachers with the Archives. Bank Street is a leading progressive education institution in New York City. With over a century of history, it began as an experimental education think-tank in 1916, then established one of the first nursery schools in the U.S., opened a school for teachers, and—in the 1950s—was certified to issue the Master's of Science in Education degree, and initiated the [School for Children](#), a laboratory for students of elementary-school ages. Today's Bank Street College of Education has grown to include equitable, dynamic, deeply engaged programs in children's education, graduate and continuing education, outreach to communities and schools, and policy research & development.

One of the unique adjustments I've had to make with this new job has been dealing with the constraints of space and time. The Archive's space—with stacks of unprocessed banker's boxes getting in the way of the shelved document boxes available to researchers—and the time commitment—twenty hours a week—can often make the job feel daunting. What alleviates the perception of never-ending processing or slow-motion accomplishment are the random inquisitive visitors. Researchers will email or come in for appointments and it's like opening a window to what's going on in someone else's kitchen. Even a reference question during my time on library duty is a welcome interaction to help, and to come up with an answer quickly is even better. What particularly adds pizzazz and fun to the week-in, week-out of my job are the opportunities to do a show-and-tell version of archival education with students. What's tantalizing, too, is the possibility for more.

Whether at the level of our Graduate School students, or of our PreK – 8th grade students in the School for Children, I think that the Archives hold incredible stories to tell about the innovators of progressive education, their partnerships, the time in which they lived, and the institutions they founded. I believe that by showing even a few, key primary sources, the innate curiosity of students at every level can be stimulated, and that the archives can then be considered a resource for institutional knowledge and school pride in addition to the already established role that it plays as a repository.

One of my early attempts to engage the Bank Street student body was the annual #AskAnArchivist event on Twitter that occurred on Oct. 2, 2019—my second as the Bank Street College of Education Archivist. The Library and the College teased out the event on social media, even inviting those uninterested in Twitter to send emails with their questions about the collections or archiving in general. Coincidentally, the Archives hung an exhibition that narrated the origin story of Bank Street's Nursery School in the lobby of the main campus building during that first week of October, generating further community awareness of our holdings.



Brett Dion during the "Ask an Archivist" event with Bank Street School for Children students.
Photo by and courtesy of Kharissa Kenner.

The day came, however, and...nothing. No one participated directly with the Library's handle @BankStreetLib or emailed me. However, while we had an off year with the #AskAnArchivist Day itself, the Twitter campaign ended up providing openings for me to engage with the Bank Street community in other ways. Despite low participation in #AskAnArchivist Day, the Twitter campaign enabled me to promote the exhibition via #AskAnArchivist tweets. However, the real, unintentional fruit of the 2019 #AskAnArchivist Twitter event was the interest shown by one of my Library's colleagues, Kharissa Kenner, our new Children's Librarian, when I talked about the hashtag initiative in a staff meeting.

Kharissa was inspired to take #AskAnArchivist offline and arrange for her seven and eight-year-old friends visiting from the School for Children to think up and ask me ten questions. A week after our non-event on social media, there was a real, live "Ask an Archivist" event in the children's reading room of the Library. I was prepared to answer:

1. What does an archivist do?
2. What types of artifacts can you find?
3. Do you like being an archivist?
4. How many years have you worked at Bank Street?
5. When was Bank Street built?
6. Who built Bank Street?
7. How long did it take for Bank Street to be built?
8. Do you know how many books are in this library?
9. How do you remember all the things you learn about artifacts?
10. Are you a teacher too?

Two groups of 8-9 students each talked with me for a few minutes. I carted in the basic, commonly seen items from the archives, including document boxes filled with folders of letters, memos, and photos, as well as a significant book in Bank Street history. I also brought out a seemingly ancient form of communication--a slide carousel. We didn't get through all the questions for either group, as one of my items inevitably inspired conversation or one of their questions led to follow-up comments.

Of all the questions, #7 may have been the most challenging. Did the students want to know how long it took to establish the School for Children after Bank Street was originally founded as the Bureau of Education Experiments? (32 years.) Did they want to know how many years the West 112th building was under construction? (3, from demolition of the old building to the ribbon-cutting of the new.) Did they want to know how long it took for the organization to formally name itself Bank Street after it relocated to 69 Bank Street in 1930? (20 years.) When the students asked the general question about Bank Street's building, I then thought it best to save these more detailed answers for another time, and instead included the people in front of me as part of my response. "Bank Street College is always building," I said, "because new people are always adding to it." One friend named Violet--her hand held high--responded with: "The building isn't just these things," as she pointed to the walls, the floor, the ceiling, "but how our minds are growing." I was floored by her answer, but I tried not to show it. Afterwards, I realized that student insights such as these were what I'd been looking forward to ever since my first day at the College.

Photos of the Nursery School at City and Country School as published in *A Nursery School Experiment* (1922).
Courtesy of the Pennsylvania State University Libraries, via Google Books.

1924:
Harriet M. Johnson speaks about the aims of the Nursery School at the National Conference of Social Work.

1925:
HMJ's "Educational Implications of the Nursery School" is published in a special, preschool-themed issue of *Progressive Education*. By HMJ's count, in a speech at a school opening, there are 46 nursery schools operating in the country.

1926:
At the NEA annual meeting, HMJ delivers "The Education of the Nursery School Child." *Childhood Education* then publishes the speech.

1927:
HMJ addresses a conference of the Child Study Association of America with "Observations on Young Children in a Nursery School."

Two views of record-keeping. Above, a 1921 hand-drawn table focused on physical health. Bank Street College Archives. Below, a 1922 preprinted version with details on social behavior. *A Nursery School Experiment*. Courtesy of the Pennsylvania State University Libraries, via Google Books.

A child conquers the peaks of the skylight on the Nursery School rooftop, 1924. Bank Street College Archives.

Rooftop adventure in winter weather, 1925. Bank Street College Archives.

One of the Bank Street Archives' exhibition panels on the origin of Bank Street's Nursery School, October 2019. Courtesy of author.

Other students thought about the physical aspects of Bank Street's space. I described what our building looked like when it was under construction fifty years ago in the Fall of 1969--open floors with beams and columns and no walls, with a team of construction workers adding to it all the time. One student asked about the tree in our lobby, and I share that the tree was part of the design, that the lobby was constructed to fit a tree, and the tree was installed before all the walls, doors, and furniture were added. After that--one of the challenges of working with young children--we got further sidetracked with discussions of how the fencing stays put on the building's rooftop playdeck. It's at this point that I remembered thinking how much classes in improv comedy would help before working with young children--like a skilled improvisational comedian, being an attentive listener who can quickly switch topics is really important to have fun with an audience of this age. Two weeks later, Kharissa and I ran the in-person "Ask An Archivist" sessions again, this time with two other groups of 7- and 8-year-olds.

In the future, I would like to build on the success of our in-person #AskAnArchivist series, and I imagine a more thorough, hands-on approach to history with 6th - 8th grade students in the School for Children. It makes so much sense to me to use archival documents to inform these students about the many threads of their school's history, while simultaneously helping them learn to evaluate primary sources and develop critical thinking skills. Bank Street College is a place where I encounter student-faculty legacies in nearly every corner of every office or classroom in the institution; a staff member's father was also a student or on the faculty or someone's daughter went to the School for Children and got their MS Ed. from the Graduate School. The schools can continue that kind of tradition by tapping into the preserved institutional memory of the Archive, and by using the resources of the Archive as a means to shape curricula and build literacy and research skills. It is my hope that, in the future, with a dedicated commitment to a robust archival outreach and education program, the Bank Street Archives could take Bank Street from #AskAnArchivist Day to a class-with-an-archivist everyday.

Educator Spotlight: The Loose Agenda

Marina Lombardo

Educator

Pocantico Hills Central School District

"You need to meet Marissa."

Those might not have been my principal's exact words, but that is what I heard when he rushed into my classroom in April of 2017. He had just returned from his initial meeting at the Rockefeller Archive Center with Marissa Vassari, an archivist and educator. The Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) is a repository for documents related to the history of philanthropy. They had recently established an education department and were looking to collaborate with my nearby school, Pocantico Hills, as their lab site. My principal, a man with big ideas and vision, immediately said: "Yes!"

You need to meet Marina. Well, I can't say with certainty anyone ever said that, but they could have. I'm Marina. At the time, I taught 5th grade English Language Arts and Social Studies at Pocantico Hills Elementary School. I met Marissa while sitting around a long conference table at the RAC. Marissa told my colleagues and I about the work she had recently completed with 5th graders elsewhere and my mind began to swirl. Marissa's work included authentic, inquiry-based work that used documents ranging in subject from the 1938 *War of the Worlds* broadcast, to original letters discussing the permanent home for the United Nations headquarters, to conversation pieces that established protected locations for national parks.

I wanted in for my students.

My principal was right. We needed to meet. I needed to meet her. She needed to meet me. And we have met many times since.

As I shared the 5th grade ELA and social studies curriculum with Marissa, she took notes in her journal and made connections between my curriculum and all the treasures stored in the RAC vaults. It was when I mentioned my curiosity regarding the potential to embed the United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goals](#), a set of 17 global goals identified by the United Nations, into a culminating unit that we found just the right synergy.

The RAC has records of correspondence between Trygve Lie, the UN's first Secretary-General, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the son of Standard Oil magnate John D. Rockefeller and later overseer of the family philanthropic organizations. The conversation between the two men cemented the permanent home for the United Nations headquarters in 1946. Marissa and I decided that we would design a unit that used both these letters and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals to inspire our students to compose original speeches that would advocate for and bring attention to global issues affecting all citizens throughout the world. The project seemed *seamless, perfect, and doable*. We had the making of something great!



One of Marina Lombardo's students presenting her "Hawk Talk." Courtesy of RAC.

The First Project: “Hawk Talks: Connecting to the United Nations and the Sustainable Development Goals”

The students worked thoughtfully throughout the project, but, surprisingly, it proved to be more of a struggle than anticipated to integrate the historical primary sources with the contemporary Sustainable Development Goals. However, upon personal reflection and in conversation with Marissa, we realized that, despite challenges, the student gains from the project were perhaps things we hadn't initially planned. Aside from the curricula content, I realized that what this first archival education project offered to Pocantico Hills students was an interaction with the RAC, a community organization, and an opportunity to discover local history connected to their school. Moreover, the students developed an understanding of and respect for the archival profession. Several students collaborated on a poem that described their experience:

“If a kid were to meet some archivists from the Rockefeller Archive Center, they would probably wonder what an archivist does. They would want to know what their job is and why they do it.

They would most likely want to know how the archivists could support them to become strong researchers. They may ask, 'What can you do in an archive?' and the archivist may answer, 'I find research about your topic and can help you learn more about how The United Nations found their permanent home in The United States.' The kid may say, 'Tell me!' And the archivists would most likely say, 'I'm not going to tell you that. I'm going to show you instead.'

Then, the kid would become very curious and they would most likely take an interest in what the archivists say. They would realize that being at the archives would give them an experience that they could use later in life. They would learn that whenever they needed to do research they could always go to the archives for help.”

Rethinking Primary Source Curricula

The following year, I was confident that my previous experience collaborating with the RAC would only nudge me to do better. After all, I had a partner who was encouraging me to grow as a practitioner and supporting me as I took risks. After working with Marissa for one project, I realized that I needed to re-evaluate the way I was designing experiences for the students.

Seamless. Perfect. Doable.

I eliminated those words from my mindset. *Responsive, accessible, and relevant* became the underlying concepts to which I gave my attention. I came to understand that perhaps the most effective way young people can use historical primary sources in the classroom to inform the future might be to frame this connection through current technologies.

I have learned in my years of teaching that inquiry-based learning yields some of the best, most unpredictable outcomes. And the best questions to ask students are the questions neither of you already have the answer to. In thinking about how to shape my second encounter with primary source education, the new question that emerged was: *"How can we create an opportunity for students to share their voices using primary sources?"*

Using both historical materials and contemporary technology, Marissa and I were able to take on the challenges of designing meaningful real-world experiences supported by important and relevant historical documents. We did this by facilitating a student podcast. A podcast seemed like a great direction to go in that would offer students a way to participate in creating a collaborative piece of digital literature, honoring both their voices and the times that they are growing up in. The aim was to give them a variety of skills to blend the past within the present.

Although neither Marissa nor I had any experience with podcasting, we were excited to give it a try with a group of 8th graders.

An 8th Grade Podcast on the Near East Relief: "Conversations with Conviction: Near East Relief"

Here is how we did it:

The students visited the RAC and analyzed posters from the Near East Relief that were part of a 1920s ad campaign designed to inspire individuals to contribute to Armenian orphanages. The students made inferences based on the visuals and texts of the posters to break the ground into deeper thinking. For example, one student began to share his thoughts on how the posters showed images that could persuade others to donate money. These inferences became the beginning pieces of a podcast script entitled, "Conversations with Conviction." Not only did the students refine their understanding of the content behind the poster through additional research, they worked collaboratively to craft a script that connected the historical circumstances behind the Near East Relief ad campaigns to current times and events.

What I discovered was that starting with the past inspired the future. Though our initial guided inquiry and podcast focused on the Near East Relief and its ad campaign posters, this project set the stage for the students to conduct their own independent study. The students each chose a historical individual who had invested their time, attention, and resources into helping those in need.

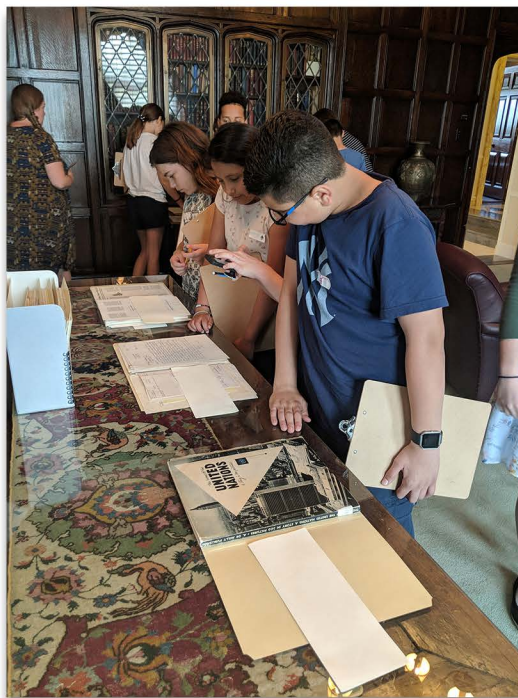
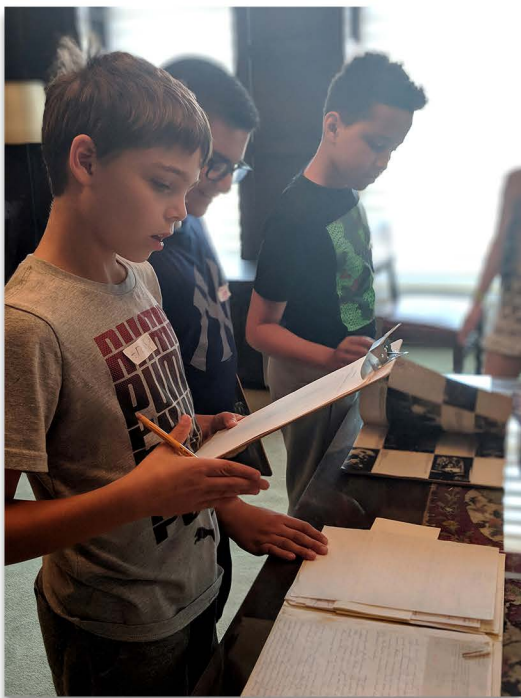
The students then developed a personal connection to that person and the corresponding the historical events, and they then created and published a piece of writing on that individual that was relevant to their current interests, *responsive* to their academic needs, and readily *accessible* to them as 21st century learners.

For several weeks, the four 8th graders and I met daily to build the collaborative script. Using a shared document on Microsoft Word, we drafted, revised, rearranged, and edited one another's work. If we were repetitive or the lines didn't flow, we agreed to make changes. Sometimes, the students would discuss the topic at hand and I would transcribe what each said.

After the script was complete, recording was easy. We used [Audacity](#), an audio editor and recording program that was already installed on the students' laptops. To create a podcast, the show is recorded in segments and compiled at a later date. This offered us the time to refine our speaking skills and listen and assess our work. Not only that, Marissa and two research fellows from the RAC were able to join us when they were available, adding invaluable information to further enhance the project. Pocantico Hills' School-Library Media Specialist, Anne Price- Gordon, supported our work by melding four separate recordings into one flawless 20-minute show.

There is one more opportunity that came about through Marissa and Marina's collaboration:

Now the world has the opportunity to meet our students, learn about history, and discover their work -- on our [new podcast!](#)



Marina Lombardo's class looking at archival material during a Rockefeller Archive Center visit.
Courtesy of RAC.

Some Thoughts

Students should know that what they have to say matters and that they deserve to be heard. When a student is compelled to share their opinion, they need to have a platform to do so.

Beyond hearing what students think, there is another reason that students need a platform to share their insights: because tomorrow's students may study what today's students have to say, just as today's students study what others have said throughout history. Their work can be preserved for the benefit of future researchers.

As we connect students to the past, they can lead us to the future. I've learned that working with an archivist, such as Marissa, can support educators as they travel back and forth through time to create responsive, accessible, and relevant experiences for learners of all ages.

Member News

Got some news to share? We'd love to hear from you!
Email us at AEREditor@rockarch.org



AER Newsletter

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