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## Book Review: Using Primary Sources: Hands-On Instructional Exercises

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## USING PRIMARY SOURCES: HANDS-ON INSTRUCTIONAL EXERCISES

*Edited by Anne Bahde, Heather Smedberg, and Mattie Taormina*

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In the Preface, the editors share that their primary objective for this book was “to compile a toolkit that cultural heritage professionals can use in a variety of instructional situations” (p. ix). Indeed, Bahde, Smedberg, and Taormina have collected thoughtful contributions from professionals teaching in libraries, archives, special collections, museums, and academic disciplines, to craft a resource that will appeal equally to both early-career and seasoned peers.

The book is divided into the two sections “Classic Exercises with a Twist” and “Taking it Further,” and each presents contributed exercises for use in instruction. These exercises are helpfully detailed, and for each the reader will find a stated intent, a listing of specific learning objectives, an accounting of instruction logistics to consider, and indication of appropriate and intended audiences. There are many fresh ideas to support special collections

instruction that integrates an array of material formats (such as photographs, illuminated manuscripts, legal records, or artists' books) and that eclipses prevailing “one shot” and “show and tell” instruction session formats. The included exercises also attend to important, current conversations in libraries, archives, and museums: research ethics, balancing patron access with privacy, the role of finding aids and other tools that support discovery, and the place of surrogates (facsimile copies) in collections-based research and instruction.

An illustrative example of the exercises that are featured in the first section is “Approaching the Book as an Artifact,” contributed by Kelli Hansen, print collections librarian at the University of Missouri Libraries. She walks the reader through a class session that introduces the audience (upper-level high school students or lower-division undergraduates) to methods for understanding the physicality of a book and interpreting their own close analysis of bibliographical detail. Hansen outlines the arc of the class from an initial period of “observation and inference,” where students begin to interact with and assess the book as an object, through a brief “hands-on activity” (with attention to care and handling of the book), and a closing “wrap up” when the instructor assesses student learning and reinforces educational outcomes. She offers helpful tips throughout, such as “do not worry about introducing bibliographic

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terminology . . . throwing a lot of unfamiliar words at students this early in the session will run the risk of losing their attention” (p. 10). Likewise, she provides additional ideas for extending or differently situating this instruction plan by adding the development of a class exhibit or using the session as the first step in a student research paper assignment.

The second “Taking it Further” section of the book presents a more extensive selection of exercises, which in many cases describe involved activities to facilitate advanced student learning outcomes. A sampling of the 23 exercises outlined in this section includes Peter Carini’s “Quick Curation: Building Analytical Skills through Context and Juxtaposition,” Sarah M. Horowitz’s “Picturing the Past: Introducing Special Collections Research through Photographs,” Rebecca Larson-Troyer’s “Deconstructing Description: Teaching Archival Literacy through Finding Aids,” and Sean Heyliger and Juli McLoone’s “Prioritizing Privacy vs. Access: Primary Sources in the Digital Age.” Here again, each exercise helpfully features detailed learning objectives and suggestions for exercise adaptation and customization.

In addition to providing a comprehensive collection of practical instructional exercises, the editors of *Using Primary Sources* intentionally attend to information literacy concepts and concerns. In the Preface, they point out the importance of helping students of all ages to develop “archival intelligence” and “artifactual literacy,” which they describe as “the ability to analyze and interpret primary sources once they have been found” (p. ix). The lengthy Introduction explores information

literacy and the learning experience in the specific context of the special collections classroom. The editors point out that library and information science and museum studies graduate programs provide only limited instruction specific to teaching with special collections materials, while also acknowledging that there exists an expanding body of related literature and an increasing selection of continuing education and professional development opportunities. The editors describe their desire “to advance the conversation in our allied professions about best practices and effective educational methods, including active learning, object-based learning, and the significant learning experience” (p. xiv). They survey each of these methods and point to sources for further reading. Primary source literacy is also explored briefly as a literacy that “possesses unique features that reflect the complexity of research using historical materials and the materials themselves” (p. xix). Encompassed by primary source literacy is the ability to: identify source formats and types; search for, and gain access to, primary sources; understand the larger contexts in which primary sources are situated; and appreciate the evidentiary qualities of these unique materials.

*Using Primary Sources* provides fresh and inspiring ideas for stimulating students’ creativity while engaging them in hands-on interaction with primary source materials. While these ideas may be most useful as starting points for educators who seek to reach beyond a “show-and-tell” approach in their instruction for undergraduate and graduate students, there are many exercises that are well suited to use with K-12 learners and community members.

Instructors who are developing their knowledge and practice will also appreciate the book's broader attention to information literacy and pedagogy, which are addressed directly but also elucidated through the contributed exercises. Most importantly, *Using Primary Sources* encourages educators to make creative and innovative use of local and unique special collections and demonstrates the value of reaching out to engage learners of all ages.

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