

History in the Making

When news broke that a virus was rampaging through China, no one thought the world would look like it does today. This is a unique time in our history, and every little thing we experience is a story that future historians will use to understand the world we are living in right now. The Journal of the Plague Year Archive seeks to capture those stories and preserve them for future researchers. However, the professors at the Arizona State University created archive has taken the idea of an archive a step further. The JOTPY is a crowdsourced digital archive that draws its digital artifacts from real people in real-time; however, it does not lock those stories away. The people who share their stories with the archives can view their stories and the stories of others living through this stressful and uncertain moment. The archive acts as both a time capsule and a place for people to find connections with people all around the world. Through the stories submitted to the archive, people can see that they are not alone in their experiences. The bars in San Francisco are facing the same struggles and uncertainty as the bars of New York City. Students are graduating in unique and memorable ways from Harrisburg, PA to Phoenix, AZ. Food shortages and scarcity are impacting communities across the country. The archive collects experiences from not only the United States but across the globe.

The Journal of the Plague Year was created by ASU professors Dr. Mark Tebeau and Catherine O'Donnell in March of 2020. While the archive started at ASU, the project now has connections to universities and institutions around the world. The archive is open to sharing its contents and the experience it offers students from high school to graduate school level. The JOTPY archive is run by professors, fellows, and interns from ASU and other universities and institutions. It also offers educational resources for teachers to use in their lesson plans. Submitting to the archive ensures the knowledge of future researchers and helps students understand the significance of the time they are living through and how that knowledge may one day be used. The JOTPY archive also collects items based on specific topics that help to group items together. People are interested in how the pandemic impacts things like food, the military, entertainment, and even the protests against police brutality. Every part of daily life is historically significant and worth preserving.

No one can predict what the future will look like, but archives like the Journal of the Plague Year archive will help the future better understand our present. The JOTPY also helps us find connections with the world we have been cut off from during lockdown. While we wait for the all-clear that may or may not ever come, we can take comfort knowing that our experiences are being captured for future generations. That our stories will be told how we experienced and remember them. Consider sharing your story with the archive and the world.