

Teaching the Archives

A Journal of a Plague Year: An Archive of Covid-19



July 2020

Claire A. Tratnyek, Victoria Cain

Northeastern University

Funded by the New England Humanities Consortium

Modules Overview

Introduction

Welcome to the Teaching Modules for the COVID-19 Digital Archive, *Journal of the Plague Year*! These modules are designed to be used across disciplines for undergraduate/graduate level courses, for teaching students about archives, archival practice and ethics, collecting for digital archives, and collecting during the pandemic. Each module can be taught independently, although teaching 2 or 3 modules together would enhance students' understanding of many of the core concepts. All 6 of the modules can also be taught together as a mini-unit on archives.

The modules will provide you with readings, discussion questions, and activities, but they are easily customizable. You are encouraged to use anything that works for your course, and make substitutions, additions, or modifications to connect the modules more closely with your curricula. Some modules are especially well suited to certain disciplines in the humanities and social sciences – like *Archival Silences* for sociology or anthropology, or *Archives and Civic Purpose* for political science – but each module, if treated as a jumping-off point, can be used in a variety of courses and disciplines.

Each module is designed with undergraduate students in mind. The readings for each module include at least one theory or methodology text (more complex), and two or more short articles from news sites, magazines, and/or journals (less complex), along with occasional podcasts and short videos. This mix of readings is designed to expose students to a variety of ideas through multiple media types, and to allow room for educators to supplement the modules as they see fit. Discussion questions and activities are, therefore, designed to use the readings as common ground while expanding students' engagement with essential topics, questions, and practices. Again, please use what works best for you, your students, and your curricula.

These teaching modules were created with funding provided by the New England Humanities Consortium, and the support and scholarship of the *Journal of the Plague Year: An Archive of COVID-19*. Thank you to everyone who helped to create this curriculum.

Use of Modules

- Each module can be used on its own or paired/grouped with one or more modules. Each module includes recommendations for pairing/grouping. Please use this overview list if you plan to choose modules to use together, or check the “Pairs Well With” section at the end of each module for ideas on what other modules to group together.
- Each module is designed for use over one week of instruction, but can be condensed or expanded to meet the needs of your course by substituting, modifying, or supplementing readings, activities, and discussion questions.
- Each module consists of 4-6 short readings (articles and excerpts) and/or media (videos, podcasts), discussion questions, and 1-3 activities. The module could be used in its entirety, or the instructor/student could choose from the suggested discussion questions and activities and assign/complete only a few. Some of the readings are presented in a “choose one or read both” format; discussion questions and activities are based on broad themes from the readings, not specifics.
- Discussion questions are designed to be used in both in classroom and online distance learning scenarios, but would regardless work best with groups of 4-8 students and a loose, “Conversation Café” discussion structure (for zoom breakout rooms or in-classroom scenarios) or as threads within synchronous or asynchronous Slack groups discussion. Discussion questions could also be used as writing prompts in learning scenarios where there is no synchronous discussion component.
- Activities are designed to be completed by students either independently or with one or two partners. Activities may take the form of a short, written response to readings and/or discussion with their partner(s), an exploration of the COVID-19 Digital Archive or other online archive, analysis of an archived item or collection, or student contribution to the COVID-19 Digital Archive. No activity should take longer than 60-90 minutes for a student to complete.

Module 1: Archives 101

- **Essential Questions:** What is an archive? What does an archivist do, and what complications may arise in doing these jobs successfully? Who are the stakeholders in an archive, and how are their competing needs addressed?
- **Activities:** Evaluate and contribute to the *Journal of the Plague Year* COVID-19 Digital Archive
- **Pairs Well With:** Module 1 provides an overview for the rest of the modules in this collection, and would be a good starting place for discussions of archival work, ethics in the archive, digital archives, the COVID-19 Digital Archive, and why archives are important for governments and scholars alike.

Module 3: Archives and Civic Purpose

Module 4: Archival Silences

Module 6: Oral Histories

Module 2: Digital Archives

- **Essential Questions:** How does the digital realm change the nature of archives? How are privacy and access concerns balanced by digital archivists? How is metadata active interpretation?
- **Activities:** Use the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine and the COVID-19 Digital Archive for research
- **Pairs Well With:**

Module 4: Archival Silences

Module 5: Rapid-Response Collecting

Module 6: Oral Histories

Module 3: Archives and Civic Purpose

- **Essential Questions:** How does record-keeping matter in the context of a democratic government? Is archival practice neutral? Who controls the records kept in archives, and who controls access to these archives? What 21st century events may pose a challenge to future historians because of the way records of these events have been collected?
- **Activities:** Researching 21st century events in digital archives, evaluating government archive case studies, and assessing students' local government archives
- **Pairs Well With:**

Module 1: Archives 101

Module 4: Archival Silences

Module 5: Rapid-Response Collecting

Module 4: Archival Silences

- **Essential Questions:** Whose voices are absent from traditional and digital archives? How does an archive's collecting policy influence what is understood to be the historical record?

- **Activities:** Reviewing and rewriting metadata, and creating a collecting plan for the COVID-19 Digital Archive

- **Pairs Well With:**

Module 1: Archives 101

Module 2: Digital Archives

Module 6: Oral Histories

Module 5: Rapid-Response Collecting

- **Essential Questions:** What is Rapid Response Collecting (RRC)? What are the best practices and challenges of RRC, and why is it an important type of collecting?

- **Activities:** Evaluate and compare recent rapid response collecting endeavors

- **Pairs Well With:**

Module 2: Digital Archives

Module 3: Archives and Civic Purpose

Module 6: Oral Histories

Module 6: Oral Histories

- **Essential Questions:** How has oral history brought to light the stories of groups whose history might otherwise have been hidden? How has the practice empowered individuals and been employed for advocacy? What are the advantages and disadvantages to using oral histories?

- **Activities:** Analyze an oral history from the COVID-19 Digital archive and conduct oral histories to upload to the archive

- **Pairs Well With:**

Module 1: Archives 101

Module 4: Archival Silences

Module 5: Rapid-Response Collecting