Making History Visible: Primary Sources, Place, and Student Inquiry

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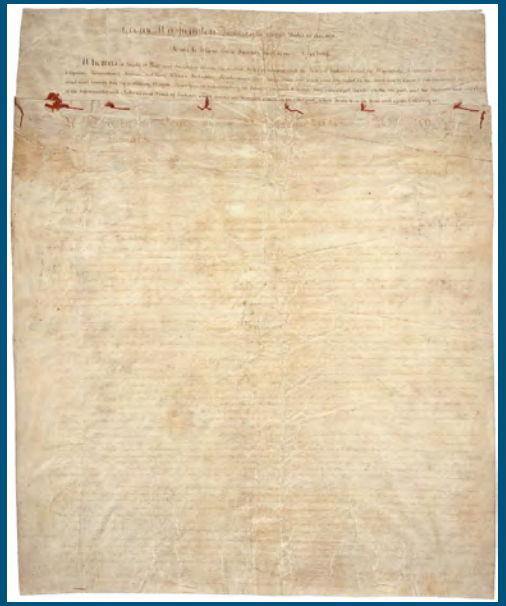
Why This Topic?

The Treaty of Greenville: The Battle of Fallen Timbers, Native Nations, and the Transformation of the Northwest Territory

Why this story?

- A nationally significant story rooted in Northwest Ohio
- Native sovereignty and resistance
- U.S. expansion and settlement
- Diplomacy, conflict, and contested land
- Multiple perspectives and complex historical questions
- Local history provides an entry point into national history

Bottom line:
Local stories are national stories.



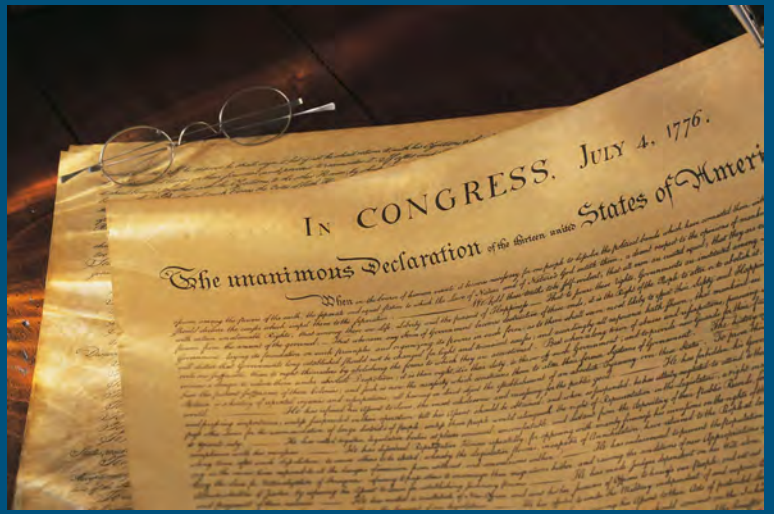
Why Primary Sources?

Primary sources ask students to DO history.

Students learn to:

- Observe closely
- Ask questions
- Analyze evidence
- Consider creator, audience, purpose, and context
- Identify perspective and bias
- Compare and corroborate sources
- Notice whose voices are present —and absent
- Develop evidence-based interpretations

“What happened?” → “How do we know?”



The Social Studies Squeeze

What happens when instructional time becomes scarce?
Social studies can lose time to:

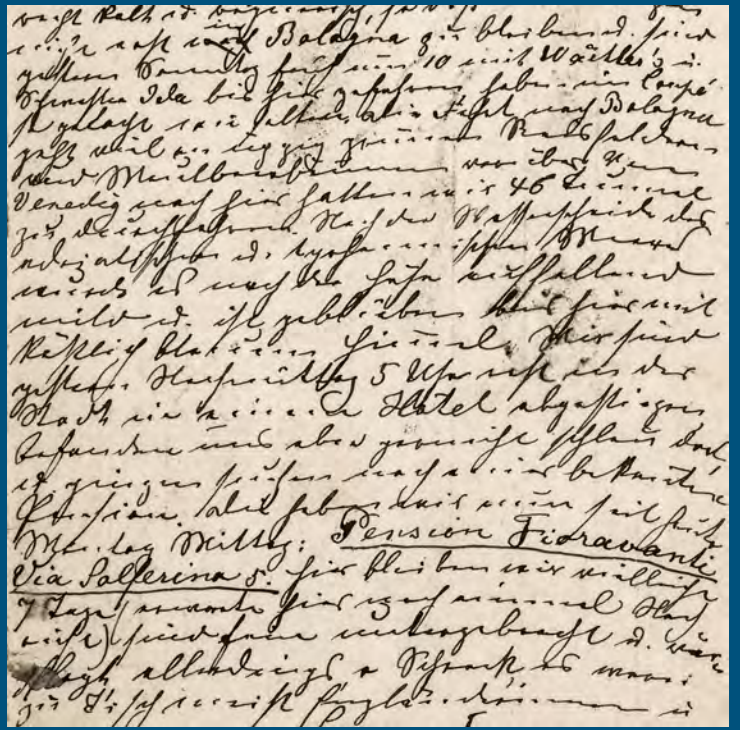
- English language arts
- Mathematics
- Intervention
- Tested subjects

What students may lose:

- Content and background knowledge
- Historical and civic understanding
- Inquiry opportunities
- Complex informational texts
- Exposure to multiple perspectives

The solution is not ELA OR Social Studies.

Social studies can be a powerful vehicle for literacy.



High-Quality Social Studies Materials ARE Literacy Materials

Primary sources provide authentic reasons to:

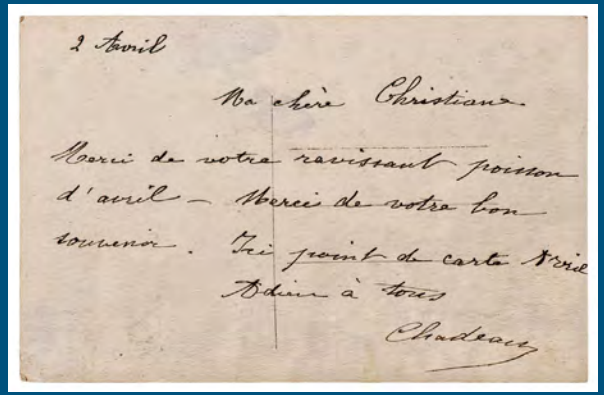
- Read complex informational text
- Build vocabulary and background knowledge
- Determine central ideas
- Analyze point of view
- Compare multiple accounts
- Cite textual evidence
- Engage in discussion
- Write evidence-based arguments



Skills + Knowledge + Inquiry

From Thousands of Digital Objects to a Primary Source Set

Creating a set meant more than finding interesting sources.



I had to:

- Search DPLA's aggregated collections
- Evaluate sources for instructional value
- Build a coherent story across multiple sources
- Seek multiple perspectives
- Identify gaps and missing voices
- Provide enough context —without doing the thinking for students
- Develop source-specific inquiry questions
- Revise in response to feedback

Curation is an instructional decision.

Why DPLA and This Work Matter

Digital access is only the beginning.

DPLA helps connect:

Cultural institutions → Digital collections → Educators → Students

High-quality Primary Source Sets provide:

- **Access** to authentic historical materials
- **Curation** that makes large collections manageable
- **Context** that supports understanding
- **Inquiry** that invites students to think
- **Multiple perspectives** that complicate simple narratives



My biggest takeaway:

Students need something worth reading, questioning, and investigating.

Give Students the Evidence



Do not just teach students what happened.

Give them the evidence and teach them how to investigate it.

Primary sources help students:

- **Question** what they encounter
- **Analyze** evidence and perspective
- **Connect** local stories to larger histories
- **Build** knowledge through meaningful content
- **Think** like historians

Our students deserve something worth reading, something worth questioning, and something worth discovering.

Closing Question:

What history is waiting in our digital collections our students to discover?