**Transcription and Annotation of Historical Correspondence Lesson Plan**

**Introduction:**

In this exercise, students learn to pose questions of primary source documents by reading and analyzing historical personal correspondence. They conduct research to generate historical questions or problems and use their findings to create an introduction, transcription, and annotations for the letters.

The larger goal of this exercise is to introduce students to research and its practical applications in a fun and accessible way. The exercise will introduce students to [*Tropy*](https://tropy.org/), an open-source notetaking program that allows researchers to organize, annotate, and transcribe primary sources. Although students are not required to formulate an original thesis, they do begin the process of generating historical questions and learn to conduct independent research and synthesize primary and secondary sources.

**Primary source learning objectives / outcomes (from the Society of American Archivists** [***Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy***](https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/GuidelinesForPrimarySourceLiteracy-June2018.pdf)**):**

* 1. Examine a primary source, which may require the ability to read a particular script, font, or language, to understand or operate a particular technology, or to comprehend vocabulary, syntax, and communication norms of the time period and location where the source was created;
  2. Identify and communicate information found in primary sources, including summarizing the content of the source and identifying and reporting key components such as how it was created, by whom, when, and what it is;
  3. Understand that a primary source may exist in a variety of iterations, including excerpts, transcriptions, and translations, due to publication, copying, and other transformations;
  4. Situate a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and culture in which it was created; the author or creator; its format, genre, publication history; or related materials in a collection;
  5. Demonstrate historical empathy, curiosity about the past, and appreciation for historical sources and historical actors;
  6. Cite primary sources in accordance with appropriate citation style guidelines or according to repository practice and preferences (when possible).

**Activities:**

* + 1. Class visit to the Archives (1 hour)

The archivist will give a presentation summarizing the two correspondence collections and the assignment. The archivist will

* introduce personal correspondence as a literary genre and a primary source;
* emphasize the subjective nature of correspondence as a historical evidence;
* review critical thinking and analysis of primary sources;
* discuss how to develop an historical question;
* review the open-source notetaking program, [*Tropy*](https://tropy.org/);
* review the assignment.
  + 1. Download [Tropy](https://tropy.org/) notetaking program (1 hour)

Download *Tropy*, review the User Guide, and view the “How-to-Use” YouTube webinar. If possible, students should download Tropy to their laptop prior to the Archives class visit.

* + 1. Archives Research Visit (1 – 2 hours)

Students will visit the Archives over a period of one week to select at least ten letters from the two correspondence collections. Using their smartphones or Archives digital camera, students will take a digital photograph of each letter and load it into *Tropy*.

* + 1. Transcription and Annotation

Using Tropy, students will create appropriate metadata, transcription, and annotations of each letter.

* + 1. Final Report

Students will write a 2-3 page report that will provide historical context, a brief summary, and a short analysis of the content of the correspondence. Finally, the report must include a possible historical question that students might try to answer using these letters. As an appendix, your report must include a printout of each annotated and transcribed letter in Tropy. When developing their report, students should consider the following.

* The background and character of the letter writer.
* The nature of any relationships.
* The historical situation and context.
* Any information missing from the writer’s observations.
* What historical details can we learn from the correspondence?
* What are the limits of correspondence as historical evidence?

**Suggested Assessment Rubric:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **Minimal** | **Fair** | **Good** | **Exemplary** |
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Tropy Interpretative Note Content | No note or cursory information.  No contextual analysis.  Does not attempt to identify basic characteristics of the source. | Brief summary note without historical contextual analysis.  No explanation of meaning and usefulness of the source.  Basic description of the source with errors. | Substantive summary notes that place documents in a broader historical context.  Explains the meaning and usefulness of 1-2 documents.  Describes most of the document elements correctly. | Substantive summary notes that place documents within a broad historical context.  Explains the meaning and usefulness of all the documents.  Thoroughly and accurately describes all the document elements and demonstrates use of the collection finding aid. |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Tropy Note Metadata | No metadata. Demonstrates little to no use of collection finding aid. | Collection title and one other metadata element. | Collection title and two other metadata elements. | All relevant metadata elements. |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Document Evaluation and Critical Thinking | No substantive analysis.  Reiterates document information at face value. | Makes an attempt at a substantive analysis.  Reiterates document information and accepts the validity of information without substantiation. | Provides a substantive analysis.  Reiterates document information and accepts or questions the validity of information with some substantiation. | Provides a thorough, substantive analysis.  Reiterates document information but validates information by citing external sources, such as the collection finding aid, a published source, or additional information from the collection. |