



IS IT THE ARCHIVES THAT WRITE HISTORY?

TEACHER RESOURCE AND GUIDE



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



It is the archives which write History?

STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

This workshop is best delivered at an existing archives facility for ease of access to materials and for the ability to see how existing archives are arranged and managed. Schools often have their own archives. Most boroughs have an archive facility and most areas will likely have one or more specialist archives – for example Brixton has the Black History Archives, The Canal & River Trust archive is based at the National Waterways Museum in Ellesmere Port and Dover hosts The Country Music Archive. Be sure to contact your local archive to arrange the visit and ideally a tour of the archives themselves. If you are in London The Bishopsgate Institute is a centre of excellence and has a focus on protest and social history. The chief archivist Stefan Dickers conducts an outstanding tour. Try wherever possible to find links beforehand with you and your students to the archive you are visiting as this will increase the personal experience and increase knowledge gained and retained.

Workshop format can be adapted to students of all levels. We delivered this workshop first to a wide range of people, most our retirement age. Our second experience was with master's level students and archive staff.

The workshop is suitable for KS2 and KS3, Modern History and Geography. This is envisioned as a 2-3 hour session at an archive so a tour will be possible.



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

1. WELCOME - Name registration and agenda handout

2. ICE BREAKER

- Ask people to write a statement on a name sticker which they don't agree with and ask them to defend their statement to others in the group through casual conversation. An example might be; 'It is the lack of sun which causes skin cancer' or 'All roads lead to Rome'. 'Archives are for people who want to live forever and can't handle death'. Through 5-10 minutes of mingling let people get to know each other.

INTRODUCTION

General discussions led by workshop leader/classroom teacher.

- **Why are we here?** Hopes for the workshop? Specific things you would like to learn which we can try to include in the workshop.
- **Reflection on archives** – discussions could include; who is it we think are missing from the archives, what are independent archives, is there a relationship between the ego and archives and the idea of history. Are archives an attempt to have a life after death? Do archives contribute to the valorisation of Heroes and Heroines over communities? Is the archive structure and search format a changing the way we experience and understand knowledge?

- **Do archives centralise or decentralise knowledge?** What is the role of digital archives? Does digitalisation increase or decrease security and longevity of materials? What would happen if the digital system broke down?

AIMS OF THE WORKSHOP:

1. **Demystify the idea of archives** so people are aware they are not only for the 'rich and famous' that they can and should be for everyone. There is no reason for anyone or any idea to be missing from the archives. It is important for you to be just as much a part of history as of organisations such as Comic Relief or Apple Computers, for example.
2. **There is no ideal archive**, there are no expected norms. An archive can be whatever seems appropriate to the person who wants to create one.
3. **Become familiar with the methods of preserving archives.** There are certain ways of using archives which increase the longevity of them.
4. **To go away confident in creating their own archives** and to encourage others to do the same. The box represents the start.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF ARCHIVES

Organisations often used archives as a form of document control without seeing the benefits of creating it as a historical archive. However there are many benefits to this:



Did you know: Archives originated as tools for working organisations to increase awareness and preserve information as proof of or against something.

- Helps you record your own history to give yourself a fair chance to tell it without external bias
- Give you better control of your documentation and where they are
- Having your own archives means it is easily accessible for last minute research, lesson learned
- As a leader strives to get people working together productively, communicating the history of the enterprise can instil a sense of identity and purpose and suggest the goals that will resonate. <https://hbr.org/2012/12/your-companys-history-as-a-leadership-tool>

Building company ethics and uniting people: ” according to The historian and philosopher David Carr, “gets its sense from the background of comparable events to which it belongs....Discovering or rediscovering the story, picking up the thread, reminding ourselves where we stand, where we have been and where we are going—these are as important for groups as for individuals.” Knowing the history of a group to which we belong, in other words, can help us see events, and ourselves, as part of a still unfolding story and of something larger than ourselves.

Examples of how archives are being used:

http://www.managingbusinessarchives.co.uk/getting_started/exploiting_the_archive/case_study_valuing_our_past

- (<https://hbr.org/2012/12/your-companys-history-as-a-leadership-tool>)
- pick out 3 examples of companies who used their history



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



In terms of the labels: We inform them to use this as a way to create conversation amongst each other as well as a way for themselves to understand that companies can be seen in various different ways but archiving will give them the best chance to portray themselves in a neutral way.

STEP 2: ARCHIVE TOUR WITH ARCHIVIST

Through a tour you will get see real life examples of the diversity of materials and people that have contributed to the archives. Also the quality of independent archives in the archive ecosystem etc.

Things to think about:

1. Is there a typical archive?
2. How did the materials get from the organisation to this bunker?
3. If you were Stef what would you prioritise/collect in your own bunker – if you were a chief archivist.

STEP 3: OBSERVATION OF MATERIALS

CONVERSATION IN GROUPS

Looking at Archives: On each table, there is a set of archival documents we would like you to look at with your group and discuss. (This will need to be pre-arranged with the archivist). Random 3D and 2D documents as a way to see what can be included in an archive and how they have different meanings in and out of a contextualised archive.

Consider: what is the archive about?

Who put the archive together?

How does the archive represent the organisation?

What's interesting?



What materials have been collected?

Does the document have an identified source? (Date, location, publisher?)

What was the intended purpose of the document/collection?

Leads onto:

What materials can we put in the archives?

What purpose the archives materials serve? How documents can be manipulated or use in different ways. Shows the vulnerability of the archives

what do you think your organisation should collect?

In summary you can see that anything can be collected as material of the archives. But you just have to start.

STEP 4 – GROUP CONVERSATION - DIGITAL VS PAPER ARCHIVING

- Physical files will last longer than people and won't get lost in the world of internet – when you scan stuff it can go missing/ not be scanned/miss something.
- You can't hack and change physical archives / protection from accidental deletion
- Offline data storage enables you to store an unlimited amount of data
- Your organisation can get lost amongst bigger/more recognised organisations how you worked? your ethics can help other organisations in the future.
- Materials are catalogued together in the archives – putting materials online can take the document out of context.



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



- You cannot physically touch an object that was created if it's only a digital copy e.g a banner
- Gives the opportunity for sponsors to understand you better.
- Learning lessons from best practice that occurred in the organisation
- Solution – very good independent cataloguing system which can deal with many languages and many different ways of searching/understanding things. (Again the centralisation of information and knowledge etc of Google etc is a very bad thing)

LEARNING RESOURCES ON AI AND ARCHIVES DOWNLOAD

.....

STEP 5: ESTABLISHING YOUR OWN ARCHIVE

INDIVIDUAL TASK and the GROUP DISCUSSION

- The decision of what to keep and what to not keep: in the activity could write what will you not keep?
- Who will have control of archiving the organisation/ male/female/protected groups/ a group effort/ director founder? Remember archives are voices of those who created them. Who will write them?
- The order that our archive is organised in will provide a different interpretation of your history. How do you think you will start to organise the objects in your archive?
- What are the key milestones of your business so far? Draw a timeline.
- Who/what has the organisation been influenced by? What could/ should these be collected?

Some things to think about: What can you easily miss? What are the aims of your organisation? And what are your core values: What is the purpose of your archive? (When, how and by whom will it be used?) As we discussed earlier archives can be made for several reasons but it is important to set a key aim so that it is easier to collect what is needed. E.G. you could be recording how your organisation is organised, the history of the people who worked at your organisation, how your organisation was ordered hierarchically. Recording funny things that happened working there?

STEP 6 - LETTER TO A FUTURE GREAT GREAT RELATIVE

Final exercise – Picture if you can, a future relative, coming in to an archive with the specific aim of trying to find information about you or your organisation. They came as they recently learnt their great great grandmother/uncle/etc once did *something* about *something* and it's kept in an archive in east London - 300 years ago had deposited something in the archive.

Write a short, perhaps two paragraph letter, addressed specifically to them, saying why you made an archive and what you hope they might learn from your archive.

