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Illinois Council of Social Studies



Learning with Lincoln: A teacher institute highlighting Abraham Lincoln

Amy Wilkinson

Teaching with Primary Sources Program
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE) is one of many educational consortiums that house a national grant program, The Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS), formerly Adventure of the American Mind. The SIUE TPS program began serving K-12 educators in 2002 by offering various professional development opportunities to promote the use of digital primary source collections found at the Library of Congress Web site. This article will offer information and resources about a professional development initiative, which highlights President Abraham Lincoln using the digital collections found at the Library of Congress Web site.

About the Institute

In the summer of 2007 and 2008, SIUE TPS partnered with Eastern Illinois University Teaching with Primary Source program (EIU TPS) to offer the “Learning with Lincoln Institute” at their respective sites. The institute involved a twenty-two hour commitment including five meetings over the course of one year. The goals of the institute were to promote collaboration with colleagues to discuss similar topics, deepen participant’s content knowledge surrounding the life and times of Abraham Lincoln through research at the Library, and identify effective practices in using primary sources during classroom instruction. All participants were required to create and implement a standards-based, inquiry driven activity using the Library’s primary sources.

In order to create more visibility and to promote the Learning with Lincoln Institute, the EIU TPS program applied for an endorsement from the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission (ALBC). The ALBC was established by Congress in 2000 and their web site hosts a variety of resources for a national audience to celebrate Abraham Lincoln and his legacy. This web portal includes links to resources such as lessons, timelines, podcasts, and reading lists for children. Other links within the site leads to other endorsed projects, upcoming events, and ideas of how to celebrate the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial in one’s own school or community, <http://www.lincolnbicentennial.gov>.

The Councilor: The Journal of the Illinois Council for the Social Studies
2009 (1)

1



Why Abraham Lincoln

On February 12th of each year, schools and programs within the state of Illinois recognize Abraham Lincoln's birthday. After all, those residing in Illinois do live in the "Land of Lincoln". So, why all the added commotion over the upcoming celebration of Abraham Lincoln's birthday during the 2008 / 2009 school year? Well, Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809 which makes this February 12th, 2009 no ordinary yearly celebration, but a bicentennial celebration of President Lincoln's birth. According to the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial 2009 Web site on Abraham Lincoln's Legacy:

Lincoln is commemorated in music, poetry, and sculpture. His words are quoted by poets and politicians. His face appears on stamps, coins, and currency. Mountains, cities, highways, and schools bearing his name dot the land.

He felt his most enduring achievement was the Emancipation Proclamation – "the one thing that would make people remember that he had lived."

Indeed, Lincoln's legacy is most alive in our continuous search for freedom, equality, and opportunity.

(Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, n.d., para. 2 till end)

Abraham Lincoln's legacy, which highlights his character, ambition, and accomplishments, is an important part of American History. In addition, the Library of Congress has digitized a wealth of resources surrounding Abraham Lincoln and the people and events of his time for anyone to access and investigate at no cost as long as they have an Internet connection. As the Abraham Lincoln bicentennial approaches, it only makes sense to offer a professional development opportunity for teachers to promote new discoveries about Abraham Lincoln and his impact on Illinois and American history.

Learning through Collaboration

Participants from both sites met together on the first day at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois. The initial meeting allowed educators from different areas to collaborate and share what they knew about their topic(s) of interest relating to the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. Identified topics included personal life or life and times (culture), professional life (politics), slavery (people and culture), Civil War (conflict), assassination, and reconstruction. Activities during the institute served as models for teachers to use with students in the classroom.

The first activity during the development mirrored a "hook" or "initial activity" within a lesson. Participants already submitted topic interests when applying to the institute and had prior knowledge about some aspect of Abraham Lincoln and his times.

The Councilor: The Journal of the Illinois Council for the Social Studies
2009 (1)

2



In order to engage the participants and also tap into their existing knowledge, they viewed a theater experience together at the museum and then independently explored the museum exhibits of artifacts. As participants reconvened, they created a list of keywords including names of people, places, events, and objects surrounding a common topic including new information or knowledge from the museum experience. After creating a group list, the groups rotated to “add to” or “add a question” to existing key word lists until each group reached their original list. This allowed participants from both sites an opportunity to work collectively in sharing what they knew about Lincoln and his times.

The Library of Congress American Memory Web site offers an exploratory option to browse primary sources by keyword and primary source format. Therefore, each group was asked to consider what types of sources to investigate for more information pertaining to their topic. For example, the topic “civil war” could include letters, newspaper articles, artifacts such as clothing or weapons, photographs, etc. Small groups then shared their list with the entire group. The facilitator compiled the lists of topics with key words and source types for participants to use as a searching tool. The keyword and source identification activity using primary sources was initially observed in a professional development experience at the Northern Virginia Teaching with Primary Sources program.

Deepening Historical Understanding

In order to understand the importance or significance of a primary source, it is best to understand its historical context. The institute provided several ways to deepen participants’ content knowledge pertaining to the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. Offering a list of books as references, such as *Lincoln* by David Herbert Donald, *Abraham Lincoln: A photographic story of a life* by Tanya Lee Stone (for younger readers), and *Lincoln: A pictorial history* by Edward Steers, Jr. have been welcomed and used when researching a topic during the institute. Participants used the books to learn more about specific names of people, places, and events by accessing the index in the back of the book. As mentioned earlier, visits to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library and other Abraham Lincoln historical sites within Illinois both offered rich “physical” experiences to explore and learn more about President Lincoln’s times.

Searching deeper into the Library of Congress’ digital collections pertaining to Abraham Lincoln was an important goal within the institute. Participants were required to have prior experience in using the Library's web site through the Teaching with Primary Sources program or have had a considerable amount of personal experience searching the site. Prior experience with the site in conjunction with the key word and format activity helped facilitate a more advanced research experience.

As mentioned earlier, there are several digital collections that can be accessed online highlighting Abraham Lincoln personally and professionally. The Abraham Lincoln Papers which were closed to the public until 1947 includes such treasures as:

The Councilor: The Journal of the Illinois Council for the Social Studies
2009 (1)

3



correspondences and letters to and from family, friends, political associates, political figures, and general public and organizations, the draft of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Second Inaugural Address all created from 1860 to 1865.
(Library of Congress, n.d.)

Other digital collections such as America's First Look into the Camera: Daguerreotype Portraits and Views, 1839-1864, By Popular Demand: Portraits of the Presidents and First Ladies, 1789-Present, Civil War Treasures from the New York Historical Society, and Selected Civil War Photographs Collection have photographs and portraits of Abraham Lincoln, his family, and other political figures during his time.

Collections such as An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broad­sides and Other Printed Ephemera, "We'll Sing to Abe Our Song!": Sheet Music about Lincoln, Emancipation, and the Civil War from the Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana and The Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress have sources that illustrate the social and political culture during his time through publications and non published works. All other digital collections, including the ones named above can be found in a web guide for Abraham Lincoln housed in the Virtual Programs and Services Web Page at the Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/presidents/lincoln/memory.html>.

In addition to the digital collections at the Library, the program invited speakers from the university community to serve as content experts. On the second day of the institute, Professor Stephen Hansen from the Department of Historical Studies at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville opened a personalized round table discussion about specific issues surrounding the life and times of Abraham Lincoln according to participants' interests. Participants were encouraged to take notes, write down questions, unknown vocabulary or terms and names to better understand the sources they have seen at the Library of Congress Web site and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois. Specific primary sources from the Library's web site were also available for viewing during the speaker's round table discussion which added richness to the overall conversations and connections in learning about the life and times of Abraham Lincoln. Some example sources include letters written to and from Abraham Lincoln and caricatures found within the Library's digital collections which are of high quality for easy downloading.

Effective Practices

Effective practice refers to the use of primary sources in classroom instruction to provoke inquiry and increase student's critical thinking and understanding of a topic. Understanding the historical context and background of a source or group of sources is an important step in being able to choose which primary sources to use during instruction. Elizabeth Ridgway, Director of Educational Outreach at the Library of Congress, has

The Councilor: The Journal of the Illinois Council for the Social Studies
2009 (1)

4



participated as an expert speaker to assist participants' understanding of how to integrate primary sources. Participants were urged to consider choosing sources that would do the following:

- gain the interest of their students
- consider student's reading levels
- consider the length of the source
- provide a balance in points of view
- provide a variety of sources (published, unpublished, visual, audio) for corroboration
- consider the sensibility of use within the curriculum plan

Library of Congress (2008)

Creating an effective primary source activity that is standards-based and promotes student inquiry where historical thinking skills were learned and applied was the next goal of the institute. Participants were encouraged to use the "Using Primary Sources Quick Start" created by the Library of Congress to assist in their creation of a student activity. After choosing several sources by theme, participants were asked to consider how students will be engaged with the primary sources by considering the following questions:

- How will students' prior knowledge be accessed on a particular topic?
- Will students question who created it and why?
- Will students be encouraged to think about their personal response and thoughts to the source?

After creating a student activity, upon reflection participants were to ask the following questions:

Does the activity promote student inquiry by encouraging students to:

- Speculate each source, its creator, and its context while making relations to what was happening during a particular time period?
- Identify biases or stereotypes?
- Apply critical thinking and analysis skills to primary sources by having students summarize, or offer reasons and specific evidence to support their conclusions or identify questions for further investigation and create a research plan?

Library of Congress (2007)

Locating a speaker who possessed content expertise on Abraham Lincoln and K-12 educational experience was essential in offering a professional development activity that created dynamic discussions on studying and teaching about the life and times of Abraham Lincoln using primary sources. Assistant Professor, Jason Stacy from the Department of Historical Studies at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville introduced strategies in

The Councilor: The Journal of the Illinois Council for the Social Studies
2009 (1)

5



teaching with primary sources by having participants create an effective document based question based on a set of primary sources according to their topic of interest. It was also required that participants identified an example student activity that went along with the document based question and the primary source set. This was a challenging exercise to accomplish over night but a well received learning experience according to the participants' evaluations. Identifying a theme and question for a set of sources meant participants had to understand the historical context of each source, how they interconnected and the importance of each connection. As I observed participants searching the Library's digital collections, they would immediately investigate the 'who', 'when', 'where', 'why', and 'how' to better understand the primary source. They would also consider how a source related to what they knew and how it did or did not connect to other sources they found under the same topic or theme.

The participants then shared their set of primary sources, document based question and proposed student activity. The follow up was such an important piece in having participants make sense of what they created through discussion of content and pedagogy in harmony. Only with a skilled speaker with extensive knowledge of creating document based questions, paired with a specialization of content expertise of Abraham Lincoln and his times, could this activity been so successful.

In conclusion, offering a professional development full of 'hands on' experiences, expert speakers, and collaboration with colleagues on a specific topic or theme can fuel educators and give them an opportunity to share ideas, expertise, and background knowledge to create exciting and enriching student activities. The activities and experiences during the institute engaged and deepened participants' searching experience when investigating primary sources using an ever growing, vast web site such as the Library of Congress on a topic that many educators highlight, reference, and teach regularly. Join educators and historians in celebrating Abraham Lincoln by tapping into the Library of Congress digital collections surrounding the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, accessing the Learning with Lincoln Institute web site for resources and example activities, and of course, visiting the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission Web site for national celebrations and resources in sharing Abraham Lincoln's legacy.

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The Councilor: The Journal of the Illinois Council for the Social Studies
2009 (1)

6



Library of Congress (2007). Using Primary Sources as a Quick Start. Retrieved October 1, 2007, from <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/preview/primarysources>.

Resources

Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, <http://www.lincolnbicentennial.gov/>

Learning with Lincoln Institute, <http://www.eiu.edu/~eiutps/lwli/>

Eastern Illinois University Teaching with Primary Sources, <http://www.eiu.edu/~eiutps>

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Teaching with Primary Sources,
<http://www.siue.edu/education/tps>

Library of Congress Web Site, <http://www.loc.gov>

Abraham Lincoln: A Resource Guide (Virtual Programs & Services),
<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/presidents/lincoln/>

American Memory, <http://memory.loc.gov>

Primary Source Set: Abraham Lincoln,
http://memory.loc.gov/learn/community/cc_lincoln_kit.php

Teaching with Primary Sources, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/>

Northern Virginia Teaching with Primary Sources,
<http://www.primarysourcelearning.org/tpsnva/index.shtml>

