



Mapping Unknowns—Bard College

Thinking Historically Through Writing: Mapping California

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Grade: High School/College

Subject: Teaching History through Primary Sources

Time Required: one 90-minute session

Overview

This workshop provides teachers with sequences of activities that encourage students to analyze visual media (maps, photographs, newspaper front pages, political cartoons, etc) using a “noticing” protocol developed at the Bard Institute for Writing and Thinking. It can also help students build familiarity and confidence searching for primary documents in the LOC digital archives. This workshop was part of an introductory workshop called “Thinking Historically through Writing” held over the course of five full days at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY.

LOC Sites Consulted

Survey of CA+NV

<https://tile.loc.gov/image-services/iiif/service:gmd:gmd436:g4360:g4360:ct011999/full/pt:25/0/default.jpg>

Bird's eye views of California towns and cities

Fresno, Oakland, Santa Barbara:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1JCsHbA-b5TPx1iqBH_UIEVkgkAuKEcxp5ICEpzOpFi8/edit#slide=id.g1cd10da4be7_0_16

Native Californian homes and structures

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ISOw7DAYNvleBy1QOIGia8quIWIM8qB_WHrCB7keJLs/edit#slide=id.p

Objectives

This activity is intended to help students:

- build familiarity and confidence with searching for photos and other materials in the LOC digital archives
- analyze visual media (maps, photographs, etc) using a “noticing” protocol developed at the Institute for Writing and Thinking
- generate questions and claims about the complexities (e.g. narratives, biases, lacunae) present within any primary document
- encounter and reflect on a set of interdisciplinary writing-to-learn practices
- articulate their own personal thoughts, feelings, reflections, and conclusions in response to a collection of historical documents
- understand the often invisible histories that remain present within a place.

Procedure

Introducing the Activity

We will be looking at maps of California from various decades and “writing to learn” about what we see, what we can’t see, and what our observations and questions suggest about our mapmakers' intentions and the possible audiences for these maps.

The Sequence of Activities

1. Begin with a three-to-five minute freewrite.
2. Project or share the first primary document, a survey map of California and Nevada created in 1866. Ask students to take a few minutes to look it over.
(4')

Survey of CA+NV:

<https://tile.loc.gov/image-services/iiif/service:gmd:gmd436:g4360:g4360:ct011999/full/pct:25/0/default.jpg>

3. Please write in your notebooks in answer to these questions: What are this map's values? What are its priorities? What does it believe in, what does it take for granted? (5')
4. Let's read aloud as a group this selection from Jill Lepore's *These Truths: A History of the United States* (NY: W.W. Norton, 2018). (Project on screen or distribute as a handout.) Lepore writes, "To write something down doesn't make it true. But the history of truth is lashed to the history of writing like a mast to a sail." She also says, "To write something down is to make a fossil record of a mind."
5. Please write in your notebooks: What is this map "making true"? What can we infer, or deduce, about the minds and intentions of those who created it? (5')

Dialectic Notebooks Activity

I'd like to use this map as a launching-off point to tell a story about California. I'm going to post/email you three URLs, which will lead to a suite of images and documents. To begin, I'd like us to just spend about five to ten minutes with the materials, scanning through them, seeing what strikes you. Let's try to do this in silence.

1. Bird's eye views of California towns and cities

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1JCsHbA-b5TPx1iqBH_UIEVkGkAuKEcyp5ICEpzOpFi8/edit#slide=id.g1cd10da4be7_0_16

In particular these three cities:

Fresno
Oakland
Santa Barbara

2. Native Californian homes and structures:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ISOW7DAYNvleBy1QOIGia8qulWiM8qB_WHrCB7keJLs/edit#slide=id.p

3. Read silently from this selection from "Five Thousand Years" by historian Jaime de Angulo (from *The Jaime de Angulo Reader*, Turtle Island Press, 1979).

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1VGPTKa7h6sZFM3gBL_WNZxLuOMDHOZ-SsZBTKCH_wmVY/edit

4. Now we're going to move to one of the most popular IWT practices, dialectical notebooks. Here's one version of how it works. Open your notebook so that you see two pages. Draw a line from top to bottom on each side, so that you have 4 columns. You are going to write in the first column.

Go back through what you wrote in response to the **Survey Map of CA and NV**, and pluck out a sentence or two where you feel like you're getting at something interesting or important. That's going to go into the first column. And now, pass your notebook to the person sitting next to you, and they'll write in column two, bringing in one of the other documents we have just viewed into conversation with the map. Then they'll pass it again, and the person next to them will bring in a third text or image, to further complicate them. And then, notebooks will be returned to their owner. The owner of the notebook will read through what everyone has written and try to synthesize everyone's comments in the fourth column. You might even consider this a thesis statement answering the question: what is the story these things tell about California?

5. Let's hear a few people read aloud what they wrote in the FINAL column. (5-10")
6. Process TALK:
 - Did anything strike you from what you saw written on your notebook, or reading through other student's notebooks?
 - What did you notice about engaging with these texts? How did your own thinking change as you worked with these materials?
 - What did you notice about how you encounter these things? Does evidence mean more in a piece of written text, in a photograph, a map?