



Early Black Boston Digital Almanac: Working with Digital Tools

Unit Summary: This unit is intended to provide an introduction to digital tools and showcase their value for literary and historical analyses. Students will engage with digital platforms and ask themselves -- what can the digital allow me to do and how can I use it to tell a more diverse history of Boston? This unit seeks to give students and teachers an introduction to the ways in which we can use digital tools to tell past histories that engage with the contemporary moment, as well as promote accessibility and collaboration in the classroom.

Learning Goals

- Students will become familiar with a range of digital tools and online projects
 - In addition to learning to navigate the Early Black Boston Digital Almanac website. Students may be able to:
 - Define key terms like digital humanities, almanac, archive, open access, etc.
 - Learn to use digital tools like Wordpress, Google Maps, Story Maps, ArcGIS
 - Learn to create digital exhibits and consider issues of critical making and audience engagement
 - Connect the digital humanities and social media to understandings of history and narrative today.
- Students will be introduced and learn how to use citation and its importance in scholarship
 - As well as the mechanics, students will gain an appreciation of the connections of citation to notions of voice and social justice.
- Students will learn how digital platforms can be used to diversify and decolonize information in order to make it more accessible.

Massachusetts State Standard:

[Note: Because teachers have autonomy to choose what activities and primary sources they engage with, these standards could apply based on the area you chose to focus on]

- WCA (Writing Standards)
- USI.T1: specifically point 5
- USI.T3: specifically points 3 & 4
- USI.T4: specifically point 2
- USI.T5: specifically points 5, 7, & 8
- USI.T7: specifically points 3 & 4

Exhibits (featured on the EBBDA site and these exhibits are focused on this unit):

- Because this unit focuses on digital tools -- any exhibit can be used.
- The following exhibits focus on specific digital tools:
 - Mapping:
 - Phyllis Wheatley
 - Digital Transcription
 - Black Women's literary history
 - Digital Timelines
 - An Uneven Spread: Race, Space, and the Growth of the Modern University

Below we include a range of themes, discussion questions, tools, exhibits, and activities. Please pick and choose what works for your classroom as this curriculum is designed and built upon flexibility and accessibility. There are multiple points of entry for educators.



Digital Tools & Skills:

- Creating digital archives
- Digital exhibit creation & curation
- Storymap
- Interactive Digital Mapping
- Digital Timelines
- Digital Transcription
 - OCR (Optical Character Recognition)
 - Text Encoding Initiative (TEI)
- Canva
- Videos
- Podcasts

Possible Themes & Curricular Concepts:

- Digital humanities
- Decolonization
- Accessibility
- Diversity
- Collaboration
- Narrative
- Citation
- Social justice

Glossary Terms:

- **Digital Humanities:**
 - The intersection of digital tools with humanities – which is traditionally thought of as not being linked to the humanities
 - Examples include:
 - [Early Black Boston Digital Almanac](#)
 - [Black Digital Humanities Projects & Resources](#)
- **Almanac:**
 - an annual calendar containing important dates and statistical information such as astronomical data and tide tables¹.
 - Inspired by Benjamin Banneker’s almanacs published between 1792-1796 and Benjamin Franklin’s “Poor Richard’s Almanack,” published between 1732 and 1758, which contained stories, poems, sayings, and serialized stories, in addition to calendars, maps, and data about astronomy, astrology, and the weather [the **EBBDA** aspires to be similarly inclusive in terms of its material and exhibits. Unlike its inspiration, however, **EBBDA** is completely open-access.]
- **Archive:**
 - a collection of historical documents or records of a government, a family, a place, or an organization; the place where these records are stored²
 - “digital copies of non-digital original materials, often comprised of materials (many of which are publications) located in different physical repositories or collections, purposefully selected and arranged in order to support a scholarly goal”³

¹ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/almanac>

² https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/archive_1?q=Archive

³ <http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-2/archives-in-context-and-as-context-by-kate-theimer/>



- reserve the context of materials
- Acknowledge the violence and hierarchies of the archive
- **Open access**
 - Free access to scholarly material
 - This opposes the traditional subscription model where readers have to pay a subscription (usually via libraries).⁴

Overall Discussion Questions:

- What is the relationship between digital tools and history?
- How can digital platforms be used to reimagine history and challenge the ways it is traditionally taught?
- What is the relationship between digital tools and social media?
- How can we use digital tools to look at past histories and relate them to the contemporary world?
- What is citation and why is it significant?
 - How does it manifest on a digital platform?
- What are some ways students can be intentional about whom they cite?
- How can digital tools be used to tell a more diverse history of Boston?

Additional Activities:

- **Site Visits:**
 - **Goal:** These virtual site visits allow students to directly engage with digital archives and websites focused on Black culture:
 - The following local site(s) resonate and connect to the topic:
 - [Decolonize the Archive](#)
 - [Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938](#)
 - [The Colored Conventions Project](#)
 - [The Early Caribbean Digital Archive](#)
 - **Skills:** research, critical thinking, and analysis
 - **Consider the following questions for each site visited:**
 - How did you navigate to and within these sites?
 - Who created the site?
 - Where is it hosted?
 - How does it differ from engaging with physical spaces?
 - What feature did you appreciate the most?
 - What did you like about the digital platform?
 - Compare the numbers of websites -- think about why the top returning websites mostly revolve around white history
 - Why is this information so hard to come by?
 - Strategies that these sites have to use to make themselves more appealing
 - How are these websites presenting history?
- **Create a Website Proposal:**
 - **Goal:** Students will recognize gaps in information about Boston's early history.
 - **Activity:** Students will conduct a search of websites regarding Boston's early Black history.

⁴[https://www.openaccess.nl/en/what-is-open-access#:~:text=Open%20access%20is%20a%20publishing,subscription%20\(usually%20via%20libraries\).](https://www.openaccess.nl/en/what-is-open-access#:~:text=Open%20access%20is%20a%20publishing,subscription%20(usually%20via%20libraries).)

- Students will look at 3 sites of their choosing write notes about the following for each site:
 - Which sites that come up
 - the purpose of the site
 - The intended audience
 - the information being reflected.
 - Then students will write a proposal about a website they would create about early Black Boston.
 - In this proposal, students will consider
 - the site's purpose
 - the intended audience
 - areas of focus as in the aspect of Boston's history they would engage with
 - how they would engage or present with this data on your site and whom they chose to cite
 - Please include at least 2 sources you would use to launch this site
 - **Potential Preliminary Activity:**
 - Students should reflect on the following websites and think about what ways these websites are engaging with history.
 - [Decolonize the Archive](#)
 - [Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938](#)
 - [The Colored Conventions Project](#)
 - [The Early Caribbean Digital Archive](#)
 - **Skills:** Creativity, research, critical thinking, and analysis
 - **Questions to Consider:**
 - What are you interested in creating this site about? Why?
 - Are these sites missing critical information about Boston Black history? Why do you think that is?
 - What are the negative effects of technology (if you think there are any)?
 - As you do research, try to be conscientious about your sources
 - Consider who wrote the source, where it appears, and how it appears
- **Transcribing & Writing Histories:**
 - **Goal:** Students will gain some familiarity with digital platforms and an appreciation for the material print culture of the 18th century.
 - **Activity:** Students will transcribe Massachusetts-based runaway slave ads from Freedom on the Move (<https://freedomonthemove.org/#about>) in order to engage with the text on a more precise level.
 - Go to Freedom on the Move site
 - Choose 3 runaway slaves from the Boston/Massachusetts area.
 - Transcribe the ad (either by hand on paper or on a google doc)
 - For each ad, note the intended audience, purpose, reliability of the source, year, authors, where is this being advertised
 - In addition to transcribing, please write a reflection on the process.
 - Consider the following questions in addition to the reflection questions below for inspiration, but feel free to write beyond that
 - What stood out the most to you? Why?
 - What are some common themes? Did you learn anything new about what it means to be a runaway slave?

- **Skills:** critical thinking, research, data analysis, analytical research, historical interpretation/synthesis, digital engagement
- **Questions to consider:**
 - How did you feel about transcribing?
 - Describe the process
 - Of all the texts you transcribe, what stood out the most to you? Please explain why?
 - Do you feel that you gained a greater appreciation for the text?

● **Create a Story Map:**

- **Goal:** Students will gain an appreciation for digital tools and how they can be used both within and outside of the classroom.
- **Activity:** Students will create a [story map](#) of an early Boston event, person, or topic in order to engage with digital tools by combining texts, interactive maps, and interactive media/ platforms.
 - Watch this tutorial on story maps
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X33ud7RYZfg>
 - Reference [this page](#) for any additional quest
 - In order to begin thinking about Boston’s histories and the ways it intersects with space and place
 - This is an example of a story map created about Phillis Wheatley:
<https://ebbda.northeastern.edu/moira-callahan-mapping-wheatley/>
 - Please use at least 2 primary sources text (which could range from written text to images to quotes and so forth)
 - Write a brief reflection of the process afterward.
 - Please reference the reflection questions below for inspiration, but feel free to write beyond that
- **Skills:** critical thinking, research, data analysis, analytical research, historical interpretation/synthesis, digital engagement
- **Questions to consider:**
 - How did you find the process of navigating the story map?
 - What did you like/dislike?
 - How did this experience enhance your knowledge of the material?

● **Create an Exhibit for the Early Black Boston Digital Almanac:**

- **Goal:** Students will engage with the digital humanities and conduct primary research.
- **Activity:** Students will create an exhibit for the Early Black Boston Digital Almanac based on an aspect of early Black Boston they have engaged with throughout the unit - this could range in focus from activism movements to desegregation to the legacies of enslavement. [If you are looking for inspiration on the range of digital exhibits you can pursue, please look at other EBBDA exhibits for inspiration or check out [the Black Digital Humanities Projects & Resources](#) link
 - Please reference the “create an exhibit” tab on the site for more precise instructions, tips and tricks.]
- **Skills:** critical thinking, research, data analysis, analytical research, historical interpretation/synthesis, digital engagement
- **Questions to consider:**
 - What topic do you want to focus on?
 - What tips and resources can you use from the other exhibits?
 - How do you learn best? Please find a way to include those learning techniques including that in your own exhibit.



- Visual Videos
 - Create Powerpoint via google slides or office
 - [Google Slides Instructions](#)
 - [Office Powerpoint Instructions](#)
 - Record presentation via Zoom or Vimeo
 - [Zoom Instructions](#)
 - [Vimeo Instructions](#)
- [Canva](#)
- **Other Important Resources:**
 - [Black Digital Humanities Projects & Resources](#)
 - [Teaching Hard Histories](#)
 - [White Spaces by Tobin Miller Shearer](#)
 - [The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House by Audre Lorde](#)

- **Text Pairings:**

- **Pairing #1**
 - *I Shimmer Sometimes Too*, Porsha Olayiwola
 - *Collection of Phillis Wheatley Poems*, Phillis Wheatley
 - *The Age of Phillis*, Honorée Fanonne Jeffers
- **Pairing #2**
 - David Walker's Appeal
 - Declaration of Independence
 - The Combahee River Collective
- **Pairing #3**
 - Black Panther Archives
 - Black Lives Matter Movement
- **Pairing #4**
 - Speeches by Maria Stewart
 - Speeches Martin Luther
 - *The Triumph of Conscience Today*, Regine Jean-Charles