

LEARN NC

Digital Textbook Project: North Carolina History

LEARN NC's "digital textbook" for 8th-grade North Carolina history provides a new model for teaching and learning. It makes primary sources central to the learning experience, using them to tell the stories of the past rather than merely illustrating it. Special web-based tools help students learn to read those sources and ask good questions of them. And because it's on the web, this textbook relies on multimedia whenever possible to supplement or even replace text.

What's in a "digital textbook"?

A MODULAR APPROACH

standards-driven

Designed for North Carolina teachers, the textbook is organized both chronologically and by the goals and objectives of the state's Standard Course of Study. It is divided into modules, each of which stands alone and covers a discrete portion of North Carolina history. Each module is divided into chapters, and each web page consists of a single-topic article or primary source. Although arranged sequentially, each page is also designed to be read and used on its own.

flexibility for the teacher

This modular approach means that a teacher does not have to substitute our online textbook wholesale for a printed book. Teachers can use individual pages or modules to supplement their existing curriculum. They may also customize the textbook, substituting articles and primary sources relevant to the interests and needs of their students.

PRIMARY SOURCES

new ways of using primary sources in the classroom

Primary sources are typically used in K–12 classrooms in one of two ways: as side activities, using brief excerpts and focused questioning, or as the basis of open-ended research projects. This textbook takes a different approach, using enhanced primary sources to tell important parts of its main story.

To help students read primary sources, we've developed special online tools. In the body of the source material, some words, phrases, and sentences are highlighted. Students can "mouse over"

highlighted text to view specific, detailed comments. Sometimes these comments are simple definitions of an archaic word or expression. They may also provide detailed historical background like that in a regular textbook or on side topics that may interest students.

online tools to build inquiry skills

The comments frequently invite the student to ask the kinds of questions of primary sources that historians ask. As students read these sources, analyze them, and discuss them with classmates, they will grow more comfortable working with primary sources and develop their own approach to reading them.

guidance for the teacher

We're also developing educators' guides, "process guides" for working with primary sources, and professional development for teachers implementing all or part of the digital textbook in their classrooms.

ARTICLES

many voices, not just one

Not all aspects of the past can be told easily through primary sources, so much of this textbook consists of articles that tell stories or explain concepts. They include not only essays intended for students but newspaper and magazine articles and materials developed by museums and historic sites. To show students the many ways of thinking about the past, they're written from a variety of perspectives and in a variety of voices. We've also selected articles that explain the process of exploring the past — how we know what we know, and what we still don't know.

history as a process

IMAGES AND MULTIMEDIA

Unlike print, the web creates no incremental cost to publishing images. As a result, we're able to publish thousands of photographs, illustrations, and maps. We're also able to integrate audio and video directly into the textbook. To keep costs down, we take advantage of the millions of images already licensed for public use on the web.

GLOSSARY

Every textbook has a glossary, but ours is more like an integrated dictionary. More interesting subject matter often requires a higher level of reading, and to scaffold students to that level we've provided definitions of hundreds of words that aren't usually found in secondary texts. Definitions are available with a "mouse over" for ease of access. A full glossary is also provided at the end of each module.

FURTHER READING

Every page of the textbook provides links to related resources on LEARN NC and on the web — resources that expand on the topics discussed in the textbook but that couldn't be published within the format of the textbook. They include slideshows, video, "virtual field trips," popular articles, and primary source collections, and they may address related topics in other curriculum areas, such as science. Teachers may assign them to students or use them for their own background reading.

A BROADER COLLECTION

The modules of our "digital textbook" are just one means of accessing what will

**virtually unlimited
images**

**integrated audio
and video**

**building
content-area
reading skills**

**taking advantage
of resources
already on the web**

**exploring by topic
or timeline**

**materials already
digitized**

**a single access
point for teachers**

**readable online to
keep costs down**

**printable versions
of modules**

**downloading to
CD-ROM**

be a massive collection of resources for teaching and learning about North Carolina's history, culture, and environment. Teachers and students can also search that collection directly or use a timeline to find events and topics of interest and look up related resources.

RELYING ON PARTNERS

A tremendous quantity of primary source material has already been digitized by libraries and museums, and vast new digitization efforts are underway. The purpose of these efforts is to make resources available for scholarly and educational use, and so we've been able to build on the work of many partners. We add value by providing historical commentary, collecting key materials in one place for teachers and students, and drawing teachers' attention to existing collections.

ONLINE AND OFFLINE

This web-based textbook is intended to be read online, and we've taken care to design it to be as easily readable as possible. We know, though, that sometimes teachers and students will want — or need — to read and work offline. We'll provide a PDF edition of each module that provides all of the content of the web editions, including images, glossary terms, and commentary — everything except audio and video.

We also recognize that internet access will be an issue for many students, both in school and at home. To help solve that problem, we're working on a downloadable version of the textbook that can be saved to a hard drive or burned to a CD.

Explore for yourself

Learn more about LEARN NC's Digital Textbook Project and explore our collections and modules on North Carolina history by visiting us at <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/projects/history/>. A password is required to view content still in development. For more information or a guest login, please contact David Walbert, Editorial Director, at dwalbert@learnnc.org.