

## The Challenges of Primary Sources, Collaboration, and the K-16 Elizabeth Murray Project

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IN RECENT YEARS, the use of primary sources in the history and social studies classroom has been increasingly promoted as a necessary and welcome practice, one designed to improve the quality of history education and to encourage student interest and engagement. Although some K-12 educators have been wary of adopting the use of primary sources, many others have enthusiastically responded to the call, incorporating a wealth of such sources in their lesson plans. In the process of exposing students to the raw material of history, teachers have invited and encouraged students to “do” history as they read, evaluate, and interpret such materials. The emphasis on primary sources, however, has not been matched by a corresponding stress on the tools and context needed to utilize them successfully. In short, teaching with primary sources raises pedagogical problems that few proponents of their use acknowledge: the inappropriate, superficial, or decontextualized reading of documents. This article offers one response to this challenge: the creation of frameworks for understanding primary sources that enable educators and students to interpret them in a sophisticated manner. We argue that such an effort works best when K-16 educators collaborate to incorporate historians’ specialized knowledge with K-12 teachers’ pedagogical expertise. Further, we believe that the endeavor can

**The Elizabeth Murray Project**  
A Resource Site for Early American History

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**Welcome to the Elizabeth Murray Project**

Who was Elizabeth Murray? Is she best described as a self-made businesswoman, a female Benjamin Franklin? Or would it be more accurate to call her an ordinary, extraordinary woman? While her life centered on her family, her choices and actions put her in the midst of political conflicts and debates over women's roles.

This biographical resource site attempts to answer such questions through an exploration of important themes in early American history, with an online collection of documents and images, as well as curriculum materials for history courses at the elementary through university levels. The [National Endowment for the Humanities \(NEH\)](#) has provided generous support for this project.

A brief introduction is in order. Born in Scotland in 1726 and orphaned by 1737, Elizabeth Murray was a geographically and socially mobile woman who moved throughout the British Atlantic world. At 22, she settled on her own in Boston, where she ran a successful shop.

"I HAVE ACTED MANY ROLES IN LIFE...." ELIZABETH MURRAY  
APRIL 22, 1775

Mrs. James Smith (Elizabeth Murray), By John Singleton Copley, 1769. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Figure 1: Screenshot from *The Elizabeth Murray Project* website.

prove particularly useful when it pursues a biographical approach to studying the past and takes as its focus the life of a single, non-elite individual. And finally, we think the most effective means of making available such materials—particularly atypical primary sources—is online.

In an effort to develop accessible, credible, and useful primary sources and curriculum materials, several professors and K-12 history educators in Long Beach, California, have been engaged for the past several years in the time-consuming process of creating, teaching with, and questioning the use and presentation of primary sources online. Their work has focused on an eighteenth-century Boston woman shopkeeper, Elizabeth Murray, who left behind a rich documentary record which captures both the burgeoning consumer revolution of the Atlantic world and the political and personal conflicts of the American Revolution. With support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH); California State University, Long Beach (CSULB); Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD); and other institutions, the team has produced “The Elizabeth Murray Project: A Resource Site for Early American History” (<http://www.csulb.edu/elizabethmurray>). That project has prompted this essay, which explores the uses and abuses of primary sources in the classroom, the ways in which historiographical context can improve students’ understanding of documents and abilities to do history, and the role of collaborative K-16 projects in teaching the American past, specifically the lives of women and ordinary people during the era of the American Revolution.

### Who was Elizabeth Murray?

Born in Scotland in 1726, Elizabeth Murray was the youngest daughter in a well-connected if not wealthy family of Anglicized Scots, who lost both parents by the time she was eleven and who journeyed to America at thirteen.<sup>1</sup> She came to North Carolina for the first time in 1739 in the company of her oldest brother, James Murray, who had migrated a few years before to seek his fortune there as a merchant and planter. The small legacy Elizabeth had received from her parents' estate was invested by James in the purchase of three enslaved men, whose hiring out and ultimate sale he oversaw. After living with James in North Carolina, England, and Scotland, where James returned in the 1740s to seek a wife, Elizabeth Murray made the striking decision, when they next returned to America, in 1749, to settle in Boston on her own. Then twenty-two, she determined to try her hand at shopkeeping, selling imported fashionable goods to colonial consumers eager to emulate the styles of London. For over a decade, she kept shop successfully, reliant initially on her brother's credit, but growing increasingly self-sufficient over time, even taking a business trip on her own to England in 1754 to select goods she thought would best suit her New England clientele. She also married and was widowed in the 1750s. After remarrying in 1760 to James Smith, an extremely wealthy, childless widower thirty-seven years her senior, Elizabeth Murray retired from shopkeeping, imbued with what she characterized as a "spirit of independence."

Throughout the 1760s and up until the eve of the Revolution, Elizabeth Murray remained active in the world of commerce, setting up several young women in business as shopkeepers, including both nieces she brought from England and local young women whom she befriended. After James Smith's death in 1769, Elizabeth Murray traveled again to England and Scotland, and then married for a third time just weeks after her return to Boston in 1771. In both her second and third marriages, she had prenuptial agreements that guaranteed her significant legal independence from the restrictive laws of coverture and preserved her control of her wealth and resources. Finally, in the 1760s and 1770s, she found herself and her family caught up in the turmoil of the Revolution, with the conflict ripping at the fabric of friendships and loyalties. British troops housed in property belonging to her were involved in the Boston Massacre, and the American army took possession of the Cambridge house in which she was living after the Battle of Lexington and Concord. Both sides suspected her of complicity with the other, and the rebels named her in the press as an enemy to the country. While this very brief summary cannot do justice to Murray's life, it highlights some of the remarkable and fascinating features

of her experience: migration and mobility in both economic and geographic terms, the birth of a consumer society, the legal and social position of women in eighteenth-century Anglo-America, and the civil and domestic conflict of the Revolutionary era. She was, in short, an extraordinary, ordinary woman, an individual whose experiences encompassed a range of historically important movements in the eighteenth century.

### **Using an Everyday Person to Connect with Students**

Increasingly central to debates over history education has been the goal of bringing to life individuals typically left out of the historical narrative. Closely related to the question of investigating the lives of average Americans is the question of using “average” documents. The use of documents too often concentrates on “great documents.” There are a number of reasons for this practice. A concern to cover state standards is undoubtedly one. Part of the tendency likely has to do with what is available. The priority for reproducing documents online and in the classroom falls most heavily on the famous. This allocation of resources to publishing the words of the elite, who occupied positions of power and influence, makes sense up to a point. Yet without abandoning these seminal documents, students need to be exposed to the kinds of documents that make up the bulk of historical inquiry and that illuminate the everyday lives of average Americans. In the process of encountering and interacting with less famous documents and gleaning information from them, students develop critical thinking skills and experience the excitement of the new.

As a woman whose life is largely unknown today, Elizabeth Murray falls into the category of those non-elite individuals whom historians and history teachers have tried to bring to the fore in the past few decades. Social history, devoted to recovering and analyzing the experiences of the anonymous and ordinary people left out of older histories, has inspired students and scholars while becoming a lightning rod for controversy about the content of history education in the schools. In the culture wars of the 1990s, the National Standards for history provoked a major battle when critics charged the authors with downplaying famous Americans in order to elevate the lives of nonwhite males. Accounts of the debates that followed, written by those who spent years working on the standards, make for fascinating reading.<sup>2</sup> Suffice it to say here, without rehashing that conversation, that participants in the Elizabeth Murray Project firmly believe that the lives of ordinary Americans must be included in the telling of the nation’s history. Not only did they make up the bulk of the human experience statistically, but they exercised crucial agency—including, for example, in the non-importation and non-consumption movements central

to an understanding of the American Revolution. Such developments inform a number of the K-12 lessons on the site. (See, for example, the fifth-grade lesson on “Colonial Boycotts and She-merchants,” as well as the eleventh-grade lesson on “Revolutionary America: Boycotts,” or two other high school lessons on “The Consumer Revolution.”)

The outcry from critics about how multiculturalists have hijacked history textbooks does not hold up in light of the content of most high school texts. Most of these texts still fail to incorporate in a substantial, integrated manner much of the scholarship of the last few decades that has focused on subjects other than white males. Women, for example, appear in sections tacked onto preexisting textbook structure, and the material about them is often quite bland. At roughly fifty words, the following selection is the longest discussion of women in the colonial and revolutionary eras in the popular high school textbook used in many school districts:

When men marched off to fight, many wives stepped into their husbands’ shoes, managing farms and businesses as well as households and families. Hundreds of women followed their husbands to the battlefield, where they washed and cooked for the troops—while some, including Molly Pitcher, even risked their lives in combat.<sup>3</sup>

It seems perhaps only too telling that the one woman mentioned by name in this account was not in fact a real person. “Molly Pitcher” was the name used to characterize the actions of many women, some of whose names we do know, who aided soldiers on the battlefields of the Revolutionary War. The likely model for this figure was Mary Hays McCauly, who was at her husband’s side during the Battle of Monmouth, and whose carrying of pitchers of water earned her the nickname by which she and other women who assisted the troops became known. Or perhaps it may have been Margaret Corbin, another woman who aided the war effort on the battlefield.<sup>4</sup> Why not name and make use of the flesh-and-blood women and men whose lives and stories provide riveting insights to the past?

For the overwhelming majority of people who do not live famous lives, it is perhaps the lives of other ordinary people and their struggles which may provide the greatest points of connection with the past. In their illuminating study, *The Presence of the Past*, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen demonstrate the myriad ways in which average Americans actively engage in some aspect of reflecting on the past, usually in a way that expresses some kind of personal connection.<sup>5</sup> Barbara Franco, who has worked with museums for thirty years, commented in a recent *Journal of American History* “Interchange” that audience research conducted at one museum “showed that people were better able to engage in critical analysis of history after they had made an emotional connection to people

or events of the past. Rather than thinking of emotion and reason as two separate tracks, we came to understand that emotional engagement often preceded critical analysis and understanding.”<sup>6</sup> But the problem of recapturing the history of the non-elite is a difficult one. One possible solution, if the historical record is extensive enough to allow for it, is a biographical approach. As biographers know, the narrative of one person’s life has not only a relatively tidy structure, with an obvious beginning, middle, and end that follows the central figure from birth to death, but the life cycle of an individual also has obvious moments of inherent drama.

There are potential pitfalls with this approach. One is that it reinforces students’ pre-existing framework of history as essentially narrative and may exaggerate agency at the expense of structural trends over which individuals have little or no control. Historians who point to this tendency make a valid point. Commenting on the style of history most laypeople embrace and pursue, Roy Rozenzweig worries that “popular historymakers who emphasize the experiential and the firsthand may sometimes underestimate larger structures of power and authority ... Historical narratives that start (and sometimes end) with the personal cannot readily take account of categories like capitalism and the state—categories, I would argue, that are useful to more than just history professionals.”<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, a narrative approach that engages students’ interest can be a vehicle for reflecting on the larger structural features of a particular era. In the Elizabeth Murray Project, the sources and lessons based upon her life seek to use one woman’s experiences to address a number of larger issues: gender, transatlantic trade, consumption, popular protest, and wartime loyalties, to name a few. Furthermore, the contrast between individual, narrative history and impersonal, structural history may be overdrawn. Historian Tom Holt, taking his cue from philosopher Paul Ricoeur, has argued that history is “fundamentally and inescapably narrative in its basic structure, even when it is not reported in narrative form. Time is one of the essential dimensions that distinguishes history from most other studies of human behavior ... There is a beginning, a middle, and an end. In history something is always developing, breaking down, emerging, transforming, growing, or declining.”<sup>8</sup>

Another possible pitfall in pursuing a biographical approach is that, in encouraging people to identify with a historical figure, one runs the danger of presentism. Instead, educators have to teach the past—and those who peopled it—carefully, attending to the similarities as well as the differences. As Stanford Professor of Education Sam Wineburg puts it: “How do we navigate the tension between the familiar and the strange? How do we embrace what we share with the past but remain open to aspects that might startle us into reconsidering what it means to be human?”<sup>9</sup> Careful investigation requires a kind of distance from the subject that allows one

to reevaluate cherished beliefs. Historian Bernard Bailyn characterizes the members of his profession in this manner: “[We] keep our distance from the past, from the stories we tell, knowing that facts may be uncovered that will change our stories, other viewpoints may turn us away from what we now think is relevant and other ways of understanding may make us reconsider everything.”<sup>10</sup> Sometimes, concern about the danger of presentism reflects a commitment to “objectivity” that prizes distance from the subject under investigation as a guarantor of accuracy. This kind of objectivism belies the intense relationship that professional historians and laypeople alike share with some part of the past. While this attachment may lead to presentist distortions, it also has the potential to inspire careful, contextual understanding of the past.<sup>11</sup>

A third pitfall is the possibility that students will see Elizabeth Murray as normative for colonial American women. Those who teach with biographies must encourage students to attend to how one person’s experiences might be exceptional. In an important sense, this issue is inescapable. The dialectic between the particular and the universal is intrinsic to the study of the past. On one hand, Elizabeth Murray cannot be made to speak for anyone but herself. Her particular life is unique, unrepeatable, and—in important ways—atypical. It is students’ exposure to her unique experiences that enables them to grasp the contours of a particular woman’s life from two centuries ago. At the same time, however, Elizabeth Murray was very much a woman of her age, whose understanding of her own experiences, expectations for others, modes of interactions, and decisions belonged quite distinctively to the eighteenth century. In some regards, her life suggests some of the outer limits of what was possible for women in terms of economic and geographic mobility in the eighteenth century. In this way, her experience can still shed indirect light on the lot of less “extraordinary, ordinary” women.

### **Primary Documents and Historiographical Context in the K-12 Classroom**

A major goal of the project was to use primary documents related to Elizabeth Murray and the time in which she lived in an effective manner. This, in turn, meant making lessons that were both interesting and methodologically thoughtful. The pedagogical problems the use of primary sources raises for history teachers informed the efforts of the project members. As the project evolved, a number of objectives began to emerge—albeit perhaps implicitly—from that goal:

- to imbed documents in a meaningful, historiographically informed context.

- to use that historiographical context to frame lessons around major questions or problems so that students could grapple with documents and issues in a discipline-based approach.
- to connect with students' understanding and interest by using the life of an average or previously unknown person as a window into larger historical trends using documents students would not encounter elsewhere.

Many state standards, like those of California, theoretically require teaching with primary sources. But it is difficult to know whether teachers embrace this requirement, as there is no way to assess their use of documents. The California state exam in History-Social Science, which often drives instruction, does not require students to interpret documents in any substantive way.<sup>12</sup> Some teachers—especially on the elementary and middle school levels—continue to teach without documents, often reasoning that documents are too difficult for students to understand or too time-consuming to use. On the other hand, many teachers embrace the use of documents as a sort of panacea, often in a pedagogically naïve way.

At numerous K-12 history conferences in the last few years, the pedagogical centrality of documents has been almost ubiquitous. Many teachers argue that through the use of documents, students practice the discipline of history because studying documents is what historians do. This simple premise is tremendously—and deceptively—appealing to teachers who yearn to engage the interests of their students.<sup>13</sup> But too often, teachers provide students with documents in isolation and expect the documents to “speak for themselves.” As historian J. H. Hexter puts it, “The historian who stands by, waiting for the record of the past to speak for itself, will wait a long, long time. The record will indeed make noises, as it were, but even the decision to construe these noises as speech requires the act of the historian.”<sup>14</sup> Teachers are mistaken in assuming that utilizing primary documents in instruction *ipso facto* generates discipline-based inquiry. What results instead is that students read a document as simply another source of information, another textbook. However, as Wineburg cautions, documents come “not to convey information” or “to set the record straight.” Instead, they are “slippery, cagey, and protean . . . Texts emerge as . . . social interactions set down on paper that can be understood only by reconstructing the social context in which they occurred.”<sup>15</sup>

While K-12 students' “factual” approach to documents stems in part from their still-developing cognitive processes, this approach is abetted by a faulty assumption on the part of instructors. Many teachers too readily assume a close correspondence between the activity of historians and that of students. The reality is that the differences between the ways professional historians use documents and the ways teachers often use them with students are as important as the similarities. Extensive exposure to



secondary literature precedes any historian's investigation of documents. Consequently, historians do not approach documents in isolation but as texts embedded in rich historical and historiographical contexts. Their investigations of primary sources take on meaning in the context of these ongoing debates.

K-12 teachers cannot reasonably expect to place students in the position of genuine historians, who have read hundreds of articles and monographs related to their subject. Creating disciplinary activities without creating a disciplinary epistemological context will not generate genuine historical thinking in students. Bob Bain argues that “[i]n embracing the sensible strategy of having students do history to learn history, teachers focus on the trappings of the activities—the behaviors—without considering the thought processes that underlie all disciplinary action. Clearly, history students can mimic behavior. They can read a document set without engaging in the thinking that characterizes the behavior . . . Engaging students in some legitimate disciplinary activity without restructuring the social interaction or challenging students’ presuppositions may yield only ritualistic understanding. The problem for practitioners is to design activities that engage students in historical cognition without yielding to the tempting assumption that disciplinary tasks mechanically develop students’ higher functions.”<sup>16</sup> The major study of learning by the National Research Council, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*, seconds this observation, concluding that the common assertion that generalized teaching methods are applicable to all subjects is a dangerous myth.<sup>17</sup> Rather, “expert teachers know the structure of their disciplines, and this knowledge provides them with cognitive roadmaps that guide the assignments they give students, the assessments they use to gauge students’ progress, and the questions they ask in the give and take of classroom life. In short, their knowledge of the discipline and their knowledge of pedagogy interact.”<sup>18</sup> One step teachers could take in the direction of creating a disciplinary epistemological context would be to read a few major historiographical interpretations of a particular topic and use them to frame historical questions for classroom inquiry. In this way, students would more easily recognize the ways that historians marshal evidence to make a particular argument, usually an “answer” to an ongoing question in the field.

The connection between historiographical context and the examination of primary sources was illustrated by an address by T. H. Breen, whose scholarship was crucial for the development of the Elizabeth Murray Project, which he delivered to readers of the AP U.S. History exam in June, 2004, in San Antonio, Texas. Breen dealt with some of the themes from his recent book, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, focusing on the role Lockean ideology played in the lives of non-elite men and women who provided

the backbone of non-importation resistance to Britain.<sup>19</sup> While there was some discussion of the sources he consulted and the methodology he used in interpreting them, the bulk of the discussion centered on the significance of the argument he built from the documents. More specifically, discussion focused on the ways in which his argument challenges the reigning orthodoxy of republicanism and/or civic humanism as the essential framework for understanding American protest. The documents upon which Breen's interpretation was based took on meaning as support for a particular position in an ongoing historiographical discourse in one particular field of study. The implication seems clear: documents are never just free-floating bits of information waiting for their meaning to be discovered; their significance derives from the questions historians ask about them.

For the Elizabeth Murray project, eleventh-grade teacher Neumann decided to write essays offering historiographical context for questions posed for the lessons as a way of challenging students to engage with primary sources in a more sophisticated manner. For example, in considering the constraints that gender placed on women for the "Gender and Opportunity in Colonial America" lesson (available online under the high school lesson plans section of "Teaching Resources" at <<http://www.csulb.edu/elizabethmurray>>), Neumann used Cleary's biography of Elizabeth Murray—which situates Murray's life in the midst of several historiographical trends—and a few seminal works to create a brief historiographical essay that students and/or teachers might use before reading about Murray's life. Material came from Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *Good Wives* and from an earlier article by Cleary on women shopkeepers in colonial Boston.<sup>20</sup> As part of the collaborative process, Neumann and Cleary discussed drafts of this background essay and determined that legal issues needed fuller treatment. In revising the material, Neumann found Marylynn Salmon's *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* particularly useful and drew on Salmon's findings to strengthen the essay.<sup>21</sup> For lessons related to boycotts and women's role in these protests, Neumann turned to T. H. Breen's "Baubles of Britain" and Linda Kerber's *Women of the Republic*. A later grade eleven lesson that Neumann created on the consumer revolution of the middle third of the eighteenth century is informed by Breen's *The Marketplace of Revolution*, Richard Bushman's *Refinement of America*, and John J. McCusker and Russell Menard's *The Economy of British America*.<sup>22</sup>

### **Framing Questions for Interpreting Primary Sources**

The closely related next step was to use the arguments present within the historiographical discourse to frame a good, complex question for students

to investigate. Asking the right question may be as important as choosing the right documents. Perhaps too frequently in the rush to jump into a rich document, teachers do not contextualize the document enough to provide students with the tools to understand its full significance. Consequently, some of the potential involved in the document is lost. A good question provokes students to reflect on the complexity of historical circumstances. After outlining in the brief background essays some of the religious, political, and legal constraints that women faced, Neumann posed this question: Given the constraints that women faced, how did Elizabeth Murray attempt to live an independent life as a single woman and shopkeeper in colonial Boston? The question attempts to locate Murray's experiences in the context of the gender conventions of the time. Implicit is the idea that gender is a social construction that affected individuals and to which they reacted. By asking how Murray attempted to live an independent life, the question assumes that not all women accepted existing gender conventions and that (some) women may have had a measure of agency in pressing the boundaries of social conventions. Of course, these implications will not be at all obvious to students. It is the task of the teacher as a mediator to tease out and unpack the central, stated question, and to point out how the other questions flow from the overarching one.

After pushing students to reflect on historical complexity, teachers should remember the cautions issued by Wineburg and Bain and challenge students to read documents in a methodologically thoughtful way. In his grade eleven history classes, Neumann encourages students to recognize that all documents provide some useful information—sometimes in unexpected ways—while all documents also have inherent limitations. Early in the academic year, groups of students examine different kinds of documents and are asked to indicate on a handout what kinds of information a particular document can provide as well as the limitations of such a document. So, for example, faced with a letter from James Murray to his sister Elizabeth Murray—there are numerous letters reproduced in the archive—some students said that while it might reveal something about family relationships, such a document cannot demonstrate that all people at the time—especially those who left no written records—shared the same beliefs. This effort is a modest one to help students to think of documents as potentially useful pieces to a puzzle, not simply as “facts.”

Students examining documents in the secondary classroom need some kind of cognitive tool to guide their analysis, and various tools have been created: Wineburg proposes sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration<sup>23</sup> and the UC Irvine History Project uses the “Six C’s” of content, citation, context, connections, communication, and conclusions.<sup>24</sup> One popular model, AP PARTS, springs from AP history courses, where use of

primary sources has been a staple for years. Students examining documents in the secondary classroom can benefit from this mnemonic developed by the College Board as a guideline for asking questions of documents (the AP PARTS guide works well in non-AP classrooms and can be easily adapted for other grade levels).<sup>25</sup> It bears emphasizing that teachers need to model the use of this (or any similar mnemonic) to students through the questions it poses; otherwise it simply becomes a formula students will use to continue reading documents as texts that provide “information”—imitating the activities of historians, without engaging their thinking, as Bain warns. A is “Author,” the first P is for the “Place and time” where the document was created, and the second P is “Prior knowledge.” Here, students should consider how background knowledge about the document might aid them in making sense of it. A is the “Audience” to whom the document was directed and R is the “Reason” it was created. These two items serve to remind students that documents are human constructions with particular purposes—not simply “facts”—and as such must be read critically and—depending on the motive—perhaps suspiciously. T is “The main idea” of the document. Drawing attention to this element helps students avoid losing sight of the forest for the trees. After a close reading of the document, students need to step back and consider its larger message. The easiest way to do this is to force students to express the main point of the document in a sentence or two. This task is more challenging for students than it might seem, with students wanting to retell the entire document, rather than summarize its essence.

Finally, and most importantly in the AP PARTS model, S stands for “Significance.” Students must be pressed to relate a document back to the larger question. For example, examining a 1745 engraving of Boston Harbor by James Turner, some of them noted the unlikely presence of climatically suspect palm trees and the exaggerated church steeples that loom over the skyline. These counterfactual elements might make them cautious about how much credence to give this document. Nonetheless, they also recognized the ways in which the engraving conveys the busy-ness and prosperity of the port and its environs. What, then, is the potential significance of this document for the central question about Elizabeth Murray and her attempt to succeed as a single woman shopkeeper? The engraving helps students see why busy Boston, with its many wharves and ships, might seem an appealing place for a single woman to settle, take up business, and have a reasonable hope of succeeding. Thus, for our purposes, the engraving’s significance derives from its ability to illuminate part of the story of Elizabeth Murray’s success.

A good question should also force students to consider the complexity of evidence and to provide nuanced answers. In the case of the gender

lesson, after asking how Elizabeth Murray attempted to live an independent life, the lesson poses the question of how successful she was in achieving her goal. Some students quickly provide a triumphalist account of Elizabeth Murray beating all the odds and succeeding on her own. A typical student response, written in about ten minutes at the end of the lesson, reflects this perspective:

EM was very successful for her time. She was able to make a business and start advertising in newspapers. When she faced hardship in her buissness [sic] she took a trip to London to make sure she was getting quality goods.

Pressing students to consider the *extent* of her success challenges them to avoid simplistic either/or conclusions. In considering the financial and family resources at her disposal, as well as the personal sacrifices her business endeavors demanded, students generally provided more nuanced responses:

She got a lot of prior knowledge from her fatherly brother who served as her creditor. He lent her money & used his good reputation to ensure that merchants in London would extend her credit for the merchandise they provided her. She always responded assertively to the challenges she faced. For example, when her good [sic] were “unfashionable,” she went to London to buy the goods herself so she could make more money. However, she put business above family, but this dedication helped her success.

In general, students recognized that, though Murray ultimately became prosperous, a generous benefactor to the rest of her family, and a respected member of Boston society, her early success was underwritten by her brother’s financial backing and good name. In addition, some of her early capital came from her brother’s selling of the slaves he had purchased for her with the small bequest she had inherited from her parents, an unfortunate denial of freedom to others from someone who insisted on freedom for herself. Ultimately, in the lesson described above, most students came to recognize that any evaluation of Murray’s “success” must be based on the standards of eighteenth-century society, not those of the twenty-first century, because of the way the lesson was embedded in the context of late-colonial gender patterns.

As a variation on the gender in colonial America grade eleven lesson, Neumann asked students how Murray’s life might help them understand the experiences of other women at the time. Below are some unedited sample responses students wrote in the ten minutes allotted for the exercise:

Her experiences show that it was possible for a woman to create her own business, during a time when women had limited rights & freedoms. However, the location could greatly affect a woman’s access to starting a business. For example, if she was settled on an isolated farm, rather than

the city, it would be almost impossible to establish a successful business. Another factor is the support of family members. Many women might not have had the access to both financial & emotional support if they did not have a husband or brother. During this time period, men held most of the power, which allowed them to assist their wife or sister in setting up a business.

Overall, many women probably didn't have the ideal conditions that Elizabeth Murray had, such as a reputable brother and a supporting location, so much of their lives were spent under a probably more strict male, and most probably on a demanding farm with no rare [sic] opportunities for even setting up a store to start a business.

Elizabeth Murray's experience represents the extreme of the opportunities women had in the colonial era. While she was able to become successful and start her own business, most "average" women were not. She achieved what was very rare for women at the time and was like the "outer edge" of what was possible. Women at that time could not own a business, nor were they respected if they ran one. Murray also had advantages other women did not. She had a good amount of money from her brothers to buy supplies and rent a shop. Most women would not have had the luxury of possessing that amount of money, so it would be nearly impossible for them to open a shop.

It seems that despite Elizabeth's unique experiences, she can be used successfully by students to understand the experiences of women more generally. In sum, crafting a question that addresses the complexity of historical circumstances, that encourages methodological awareness in grappling with sources, and which generates nuanced responses should be the goal of history teachers.

### **Remarks on Partnerships and Primary Sources**

There is currently substantial interest in K-16 partnerships in history education. This interest is evidenced in the efforts of the NEH to promote such linkages, TAH grants, various articles in the OAH newsletter, and in Kenneth Jackson's 2002 presidential address to the Organization of American Historians, in which he urged historians to "tear down the barriers that currently divide college professors from classroom teachers."<sup>26</sup> This renewed call for collaboration is but the latest wave in a series that has swept through the country over the last several decades.<sup>27</sup> Success will require careful examination of the conditions that make for productive partnerships. In a recent article in *The History Teacher*, TAH participants Timothy Hall and Renay Scott analyze the strengths and weaknesses of partnerships and professional development workshops, concluding that "primary source workshops" provided the most effective means for de-

veloping “classroom tested lessons and materials that reflect and teach both the content and structure of the discipline.”<sup>28</sup> Like many professors involved in K-16 partnerships, they have found that their expectations of K-12 teachers needed adjusting, that they had failed to taken into consideration teachers’ concerns at the outset. Anticipating that participants in workshops they organized would be eager to read the books and articles they recommended, they discovered that teachers “expressed dissatisfaction at not being given classroom-ready materials which they could put to immediate use.”<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, teachers wanted these summer workshops to generate classroom applications. As a result of such feedback, Hall and Scott revised their program to integrate teaching methodology and lesson design much more thoroughly into workshops emphasizing historical content and investigation. While they characterize the results of their efforts as uneven, what is most striking is the underlying theme: the gap between university and K-12 approaches to the discipline and teaching and the need to bridge that gap with an awareness of what each group values and needs. How secondary school teachers approach the discipline and their expectations for collaborative TAH grants is the subject of another recent *History Teacher* essay. In “Changing Secondary Teachers’ Views of Teaching American History,” Rachel Ragland reports that changing attitudes stemmed from two guiding principles: “working directly with historians on content knowledge, and working with teacher educators on applying this knowledge to the secondary history classroom.”<sup>30</sup> Developing classroom-ready materials based on current scholarship seems an important component of the process.<sup>31</sup>

### **A K-12 Perspective on Collaboration, by Dave Neumann**

The multi-year collaboration on the Elizabeth Murray Project was a productive one that offers insight into K-16 partnerships, including the Teaching American History grants. It is important to note that this collaboration originated in a larger long-term relationship between the History/Social Science Office of Long Beach Unified and the History Department of California State University, Long Beach. The capstone program for the single-subject credential program (from which many new history teachers are recruited by the district) is taught by various history, rather than education, faculty. The relationship between LBUSD teachers and CSULB history faculty extends beyond credential coursework. New teachers hired by the district attend mandatory professional development training the first three years of their career, some of which is taught by history faculty.

When the district was awarded its first TAH grant, a number of historians partnered with teachers and presented to veteran teachers at afternoon

workshops. Genuine respect between many college faculty and K-12 teachers has grown out of this relationship. Both parties recognize they have something to learn from the other. In a recent article in a history education newsletter, two top grant consultants urged college faculty preparing professional development proposals that they “must respect the work of precollegiate teachers and be willing to accept them as partners in teaching American History. Condescension (however subtle) by your partners can wreck your program.”<sup>32</sup> Discussion of the value of these types of partnerships usually assumes that historians offer content expertise while receiving pedagogical strategies from teachers. For example, in his OAH presidential address, Jackson urged his colleagues to “admit that good high school teachers ... could teach us many things about pedagogy and about content as well.”<sup>33</sup> But a different comparison of expertise might be more accurate and more conducive of egalitarian partnerships. Both teachers and historians are experts at constructing historical knowledge for a particular audience—a student audience for teachers, and a peer audience for historians. Each has a challenge in constructing and presenting that knowledge: historians wrestle with imperfectly preserved archives and shifting historiographical interpretations, while teachers must continually assess and engage the shifting understanding and interpretations of their students. Historians and teachers can meet as peers as they explore the common problem of creating historical knowledge.<sup>34</sup> Patricia Cleary has been an excellent exemplar of this collaborative attitude, accessible and ready to learn, welcoming input and suggestions on her ideas and work. She empathized with the challenges of teaching high school students, in part through engaging with my students. She came to Wilson High School to co-teach with me to see firsthand how teaching high school differs from teaching at the college level. She made several presentations to fifth-grade teachers as well. Historians need to be willing to explore with teachers how to take the sophisticated knowledge and frameworks that they employ in presenting historical knowledge to peers and adapt it for a student audience.

#### **A University Perspective on Collaboration, by Patricia Cleary**

For historians teaching in universities, working with K-12 teachers on collaborative projects is an opportunity, a challenge, and a humbling experience. After authoring a biography of Murray, I anticipated that the time I had devoted to studying Elizabeth Murray’s life had drawn to a close. Instead, I pursued an unanticipated opportunity to revisit the materials to disseminate her scholarship to new audiences: in particular K-12 teachers and their students. As a result of being partnered with Dave



Neumann and Meri Fedak (a fifth-grade teacher at Kettering Classical Elementary in LBUSD) in professional development workshops before the Elizabeth Murray project and then working with them on the website, I gained an appreciation for entirely different classroom environments and sets of pedagogical goals; I also learned a great deal about good teaching practice. Throughout lengthy discussions on how and what to teach about eighteenth-century American history to fifth- and eleventh-grade students, I repeatedly confronted the challenge of communicating complex ideas and processes with clarity and in a way that engaged students with different levels of interest, learning styles, and ability.

Sitting in on K-12 classes and assisting in teaching them on occasion, I witnessed the dedication that Neumann brought to his classroom and the teaching skills he possessed and worked hard to hone. Accustomed to dealing with university students who choose to attend courses of interest to them, I became acutely aware of the complex juggling act that Neumann had to perform: he approached his lessons with the consciousness that each class meeting had as its goal specific skill development, content mastery, fulfillment of state standards, and engagement with the material—to say nothing of the challenges of classroom discipline. I am positive that my own teaching of university students has improved as a direct result of what I have seen in my project colleagues' classrooms and learned from them in discussing and revising lesson plans for the Elizabeth Murray website. Neumann's views on the need for academics to communicate more effectively are no doubt shared by countless university students.

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In sum, it seems that collaborative efforts in history education offer a way forward. When they work well, they enable their adherents to combine the best practices in pedagogy with the interpretive insights of scholarship. In turn, this process offers a solution to the conundrum of the primary source. By developing historical background and historiographical materials to accompany individual documents, historians and K-12 educators can create the necessary context for interpreting evidence in an analytically sophisticated manner. Further, a focus on the life and experiences of a single, non-elite individual, such as Elizabeth Murray, provides the opportunity to pursue this goal in a meaningful way by developing a richly textured framework. By designing ready-to-go lessons around central questions—with downloadable sources, background essays, and application exercises—the Elizabeth Murray Project team members have tried to create a resource site for fellow educators that brings the analytical sophistication, creativity, and excitement of the discipline of

history into the history classroom. In the end, they hope that this project will join with many others in helping K-12 educators to capture pre-collegiate students' interest in the past, a strange, exciting, and yet not entirely unfamiliar place.

### Notes

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1. These details are summarized from Patricia Cleary, *Elizabeth Murray: A Woman's Pursuit of Independence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

2. Linda Symcox, *Whose History? The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 127-156. See also Gary B. Nash, Charlotte Crabtree, Ross E. Dunn, *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000).

3. This passage is significantly shorter than one published in earlier versions of this textbook. Gerald Danzer, et al., *The Americans: Reconstruction through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 2006), 61.

4. See Carol Klaver, "An Introduction to the Legend of Molly Pitcher," *Minerva: Quarterly Report on Women and the Military* 12, no. 2 (1994): 35-61; Emily J. Teipe, "Will the Real Molly Pitcher Please Stand Up?" *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives and Records Administration* 31, no. 2 (1999): 118-126.

5. David Thelen and Roy Rosenzweig, *Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

6. Quote by Barbara Franco in Robert Begiebing, et al., "Interchange: Genres of History," *Journal of American History* 91 (2004): 581.

7. Thelen and Rosenzweig, 187.

8. Tom Holt, *Thinking Historically: Narrative, Imagination, and Understanding* (New York: College Board, 1990), 12-13. Holt's argument, it should be noted, is dependent on Paul Ricoeur, (translators Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer) *Time and Narrative* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984). Historian Peter Burke complains that characterizations such as Ricoeur's "dilute the concept of narrative until it is in danger of becoming indistinguishable from description and analysis," in "History of Events and the Revival of Narrative" in Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1993), 233-234.

9. Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), 17.
10. Bernard Bailyn, "Considering the Slave Trade: History and Memory," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Series, LVIII (2001), 249-250.
11. In his *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998), educational philosopher Parker Palmer develops the contrast between an object-centered or objectivist approach to knowledge and a subject-centered approach that implies a close relationship between the knower and the known. See especially Chapter 5.
12. California State Content Standards are available online at <[www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/](http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/)>. The state's "Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills" for Grades Nine through Twelve indicate that students should "collect, evaluate, and employ information from multiple primary and secondary sources."
13. In the interest of full disclosure, Dave Neumann would like to admit his own previous embrace of teaching with documents as an inherent good, without regard to thoughtful reflection on their use.
14. J. H. Hexter, *The History Primer* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 76-77.
15. Wineburg, 67.
16. Robert B. Bain, "Into the Breach: Using Research and Theory to Shape Historical Instruction" in Peter N. Stearns, et al., eds., *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
17. John Bransford, et al., eds., *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 2000), 163.
18. *Ibid.*, 155.
19. T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
20. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Knopf, 1982); Patricia Cleary, "'Who shall say we have not equal abiltys with the Men when Girls of 18 years of age discover such great capacitys?': Women of Commerce in Boston, 1750-1776" in Conrad E. Wright and Katheryn P. Viens, eds., *Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community, 1700-1850* (Boston, MA: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1997).
21. Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).
22. John J. McCusker and Russell Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1776* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).
23. See the website Historical Thinking Matters, which Wineburg co-directs at <<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org>>.
24. "The 6 C's of Primary Source Analysis," The History Project, University of California, Irvine, <[http://www.humanities.uci.edu/history/ucihp/wh/6cs\\_Primary\\_Source.pdf](http://www.humanities.uci.edu/history/ucihp/wh/6cs_Primary_Source.pdf)>.
25. *AP Vertical Teams Guide for Social Studies*, College Entrance Examination Board.
26. Kenneth T. Jackson, "The Power of History: The Weakness of a Profession," *Journal of American History* 88 (2002): 1311.
27. See Symcox, 9-24.
28. Timothy D. Hall and Renay Scott, "Closing the Gap between Professors and Teachers: 'Uncoverage' as a Model of Professional Development for History Teachers," *The History Teacher* 40:2 (2007): 257.
29. Hall and Scott, 260.

30. Rachel G. Ragland, "Changing Secondary Teachers' Views of Teaching American History," *The History Teacher* 40:2 (2007): 219-246, quotation 220.
31. Hall and Scott, 257-263.
32. Allan Damon and Betty B. Franks, "Preparing a Professional Development," *History Matters!* XVI (2004): 7.
33. Jackson, 1311.
34. This perspective has been shaped by University of Michigan Associate Professor of Education Bob Bain through many personal conversations.