

About this "digital textbook"

LEARN NC's "digital textbook" for 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 you 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.

The sections that follow will tell you what to expect from this textbook and how to get the most out of it.

Primary sources

Reading a single narrative book can give you the impression that history is just one story — a list of names, dates, and events to be remembered and put in the proper order. Narrative structure — that sense of what happened and when — is important in history, of course. But telling just one story leaves out the experiences of a lot of people, and it's those personal experiences that make the past (like the present) so interesting.

Our solution is to let the past tell its own story whenever possible, by bringing primary sources front and center. *Primary sources* are sources about the past produced by people living at the time — such as letters, diaries, newspaper articles, photographs, drawings, physical artifacts, and even (as we get closer to the present) audio and video recordings. By exploring primary sources directly, you can be your own historian, and write your own story about the past.

READING PRIMARY SOURCES

Documents from the past can be difficult to read, though. People writing letters, diaries, and newspaper articles assumed a certain amount of background knowledge on the part of their readers — background knowledge that a student today won't have about that foreign time and place. That's why a traditional textbook gives you a straightforward story first, and saves the primary sources for later.

To help you make sense of these sources, we've provided two kinds of comments.

General comments

First, look in the right-hand column of the page to find general comments on the source. These will tell you how the source fits into the bigger picture and give you a sense of what to think about or look for as you begin reading.

Specific comments

Then, as you read, you'll note that some words, phrases, and sentences are highlighted. When you move your mouse over highlighted text, a comment will appear. (This requires that your browser have Javascript. Otherwise, you can simply click on the highlighted text to go to the comment.)

Sometimes these specific comments are simple definitions, explaining a word or phrase that we no longer use. They may also provide detailed historical background such as you'd find in a regular textbook. In many cases, they invite you to ask the kinds of questions of primary sources that historians ask. As you read these sources, think about the comments, and discuss them with your classmates, you'll grow more comfortable working with primary sources and develop your own historical methods.

Articles

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 you 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.

IMAGES

In the left-hand column of these articles you'll find photographs, maps, illustrations, and other images that relate to the text. You can click on these images to see them full-size. To learn more about what the image illustrates or about where it came from, you can click "About the photograph."

Glossary

Every textbook has a glossary, but ours is more like an integrated dictionary. We want you to read "real" history written by and for adults, and to help you we've provided definitions of hundreds of words that aren't usually found in secondary texts. Words with a dotted blue underline (such as megafauna) are defined; you can move your mouse over them to see a quick definition, or click them to go to the full glossary.

Further reading

Every page of this textbook has a section in the right-hand column labeled “Learn More.” Here, you’ll find 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 included in this format. They include slideshows, video, “virtual field trips,” and popular articles. Your teacher may ask you to read them, or you can explore them at your own pace.

Printing

Coming soon

You may find that you’d prefer to read offline, on paper — and we certainly understand. Some of the functionality of this online edition can’t be copied to paper, of course, but a PDF version will be available soon for download and printing.

Help us improve!

If you enjoy this textbook or have comments or criticisms, please tell us what you think! Use the contact form available from our website to send us an email. Because this textbook is on the web, we can — and will — make improvements every year, and who better to help us than the students who are reading it? A short note about what you liked or didn’t like or a suggestion about what we could do differently will help future classes of students. Just tell us your first name or initials, your grade, and what county you live in (or state, or country if you’re outside North Carolina).

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