What's in the November Newsletter from the TPS Journal?
See all TPS Journals at http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/archive.html

Learning Activity – Elementary Level
Students explore reasons why influential patriots like Patrick Henry and George Mason opposed the U.S. Constitution during the ratification process, and consider the need for the Bill of Rights. Students become historical detectives, using historical thinking strategies to investigate primary sources for evidence, search for clues to analyze and finally "crack the case".

Learning Activity – Secondary Level
Students think like historians to understand arguments in favor of and against President Wilson’s proposed League of Nations as part of the 1919 Congressional battle over the Treaty of Versailles. Intended for use within a larger unit of study about the end of World War I and its legacy, students practice historical thinking strategies as they read and listen to the speeches for insight into the Senate’s rejection of the League of Nations.

Upcoming Events

TPS Tech Tuesday Webinar
Topic: ThingLink to Women’s History, Part 1
November 13, 2012

TRETC Regional Conference
Wednesday, November 14, 2012

Using Primary Source Informational Text – Literally! – Professional Development Session with Holly Diehl and Linda Muller
November 28, 2012

Ways to earn Act 48 hours in your classroom
Lesson Plan Field Testing
Oral History Projects
National History Day Preparation
Co-teaching with Primary Sources
Teacher Professional Development

Lesson Plan of the Month

The First Thanksgiving
A Lesson Plan developed by educator Ms. Kindell Smith

Here is your personal invitation to the first Thanksgiving! The journey begins with our maiden voyage to a brand new world; which you will see in a PowerPoint presentation to the left. Students will view primary source pictures that depict traditions associated with Thanksgiving. Students will view a Thanksgiving timeline which will explore "First Thanksgiving through the years". Students will participate in activities that enable understanding of the history of Thanksgiving. To view the PowerPoint presentation, please click the image.
Tell us about the first time you tried using primary sources in the classroom.
I first began by using the U.S. Constitution for a lesson that led students on a scavenger hunt, finding information in the document related to given scenarios. Looking back, I now realize that this lesson only required students to locate and identify information in the Constitution, rather than encouraging them to practice historical thinking skills like close reading of the document and thinking about its point of view and the time period.

Based on your experiences, how do you use primary sources to encourage historical thinking in students?
My current teaching focuses much more on helping students to develop historical thinking skills by reading or interpreting primary sources. I encourage students to consider a lot of questions about each primary source they encounter. For example, now if I were to teach a lesson about the Constitution, I would require students to think about who wrote the document, when it was written, the perspective of the author, what is missing from the document, and what the writing can tell us about the time period. For homework, I might assign the Library’s Creating the United States Constitution Interactive for students to further explore the antecedents of some of the document’s critical phrases and principles and identify additional primary sources for investigation.

What advice do you have for teachers who have never tried teaching with primary sources?
Don’t be afraid! When students have the skills to interpret the documents I find that they enjoy it. See full article at http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical_thinking/spotlight.html

What is Historical Thinking?
It would be easy to conclude that historians simply know more about American history than high school students do. But this isn’t necessarily the case. Beyond highly specialized areas of concentrations, even doctoral level historians don’t possess factual knowledge about every topic. What historians do have is a “historical approach” to primary sources that is often taken for granted by those practiced in it. However, this approach unlocks a world closed to untutored readers.

For example, before approaching a document, historians come prepared with a list of questions – about author, context, time period – that form a mental framework for the details to follow. Most important of all, these questions transform the act of reading from passive reception to an engaged and passionate interrogation. If we want students to remember historical facts, this approach, not memorization, is the key.

Teaching Students to Think Historically
How can teachers help their students to begin thinking like historians? Teaching a way of thinking requires making thinking visible. We need to show students not only what historians think, but how they think, and then guide students as they learn to engage in this process.

Consider introducing students to several specific strategies for reading historical documents: sourcing, contextualizing, close reading, using background knowledge, reading the silences, and corroborating.

See full article at http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical_thinking/article.html