

Classroom Project Ideas

An Adventure of the American Mind - Colorado

Below are twenty-five ideas for student projects using American Memory and other primary source collections. Remember to begin with objectives and essential questions. The projects (and fun) begin later!

1. Design a scrapbook of articles on a theme, time period, or geographical location. Include captions as if you were living during that time.
2. Collect articles from one newspaper from a single year. Create a series of vignettes to be acted out in the manner of Thornton Wilder's Our Town.
3. Make a thematic photographic exhibition complete with captions and a background essay.
4. Find artifacts and texts about a famous person. Write a letter to that person incorporating information from the primary sources.
5. Create a "Biography in a Box" filled with student-made artifacts that the famous person might have carried or used.
6. Send an e-mail message to a famous person asking for more specific details about an event or time period. Request an e-mail reply from a classmate. The reply should be based on primary and secondary research.
7. Design a Web page to display a primary source analysis of an article or issue.
8. Memorize and present an editorial, poem, or announcement from a historic document.
9. "Walk in the shoes" of an early reporter by writing a short play or interview based on an article or oral history interview. Play the role of the reporter.
10. Make a three-dimensional museum exhibit or diorama that illustrates an event or local happening.
11. Write and illustrate a children's book about a historical event based on a primary source. Search for pictures in American Memory, or draw your own "old-time" pictures.
12. Reenact a scene from a primary source with a world, national, or local focus.
13. Create a society column based on local news in a historic newspaper.
14. Write a "Dear Abby" advice column that reflects concerns of the time.
15. Write a letter to the editor responding to an event in a primary source document. Refer to the original document, of course.
16. Design a two-dimensional display of pictures, ads, and articles that represent a particular time period.
17. Dress up as a historic person and present a dramatic interpretation of an event or situation in that person's life. Use period music.
18. Draw an advertisement for a product today using the style and words of past advertisements.
19. Set up a classroom museum with handmade artifacts, copies of newspaper articles, explanatory notes, and knowledgeable tour guides.
20. Search for a famous person's name and make a timeline of primary sources that, taken together, explain that person's impact on history.
21. Make a collage to compare and contrast advertisements from yesterday and today.
22. Pick an event from the past, and try to discover how the citizens of Colorado or the United States learned about it. Who first reported the event? What were the opinions of the newspaper publishers? What proof of local reaction can you document?
23. Pick a tourist destination (Pike's Peak, Denver Mint, Rocky Mountain National Park, Mesa Verde, etc.) and locate items that would help early tourists. Create a travel brochure.
24. Search for evidence about early ethnic groups, immigrants, or Native Americans. Be sure to use search terms from the time period. Look for bias in language. How have attitudes toward these populations changed or remained the same?
25. Find a political cartoon. Research why it was published and what opinion it represents, and try to infer why it was funny, ironic, sarcastic, or timely.