

Documenting Your Experience: Creating a Primary Source

People across the globe are feeling varied effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this semester, the historic (though unwelcome) moment we find ourselves in has affected each of you in different ways.

In this class you have come to understand the importance of primary sources for historians. These documents and artifacts are the basis for historical evidence and deeply influence the trajectory of topics, arguments, and understandings of the past. Because we are living through an unprecedented event, this assignment asks you to document your experiences in what will become a primary source for future generations to better understand this moment. You will also be reflecting on your experiences/primary source, and the historical methods you have learned throughout this course. You will not be graded on your specific experiences but rather how much *effort and creativity* you put into your assignment.

This project asks you to do something creative and reflective. You may create a textual source, but do not limit yourself to text (remember the various types of primary sources we interacted with this semester). Think of this assignment in the vein of an un-essay—an assignment that gives students a way to creatively interact with class themes and learning outcomes, where *students choose the medium* in which they feel they can best present their ideas. Lastly, your source will also become a genuine part of documenting the pandemic, as we each donate our sources to the [Journal of the Plague Year](#) Covid-19 archive.

1. Choose How You Present Your Experiences

You are free to present your experience how you would like. Think about your skills and career goals; what will be useful for you? Do you like writing? Are you a musician, an artist, or a computer programming extraordinaire? Do you want to be a teacher or healthcare worker? Any of these could influence what you decide to do. What you produce and how you present it are entirely up to you. See examples of projects for an “unessay” assignment [here](#) and [here](#). (Some of these are crazy ambitious, so remember these are just here for inspiration.)

Some examples:

- Journal entries
- Sketches, photography, or painting
- Drawing a comic
- Oral history interviews with friends and family
- Poetry and Music
- Write a play
- Short stories (real or imaginary)
- Recording Audio or video log
- Fiber arts- knitting, cross-stich, weaving
- A series of BuzzFeed style listicles
- Create a board game
- Lesson plans for different educational levels
- Mixed media art

2. **Include a 2 to 3-page document with your source explaining:** *why* you chose that option, how it best expresses your experiences during the pandemic, and how what you have created is a *primary source*. Reflect on what you think future researchers and students could learn from a source like this, and how this relates to the work we have done in this class reading and analyzing both written and visual primary sources to understand the past.
3. **Share your source with the Journal of the Plague Year Archive:** Upload a picture, video, or audio clip of your source and relevant info about it to the JOTPY archive via the “[Share your story](#)” page. Include the hashtag #UWECHIST172 in the hashtag field. You do not have to upload your 2-3-page statement (unless you prefer to).

While this is not a steadfast requirement of the project, I want to encourage all of you to donate your primary source to the archive. However, I do not want you to censor yourself in this opportunity to process and reflect upon our current moment—if you create something that you feel is too personal, remember that you may donate it anonymously. If you decided to share your work with the archive, include a screenshot of your submission when you upload your project.

4. **Turn your project in online:** upload a picture, video, or audio clip of your work + your 2-3-page explanation of your source to the assignment link on Canvas + screenshot of submission to JOTPY. (You can also embed your picture or video in an MS Word doc w your explanation).

Due: by 12 PM on Thursday, May 21, 2020. Please feel free to turn your project in sooner if you would like. Assignment counts for 15% of your final grade.

Grading (borrowed & paraphrased from Emily Suzanne Clark’s [unessay grading criteria](#))

A experience: This constitutes a critical and active engagement that shows insight and creativity and demonstrates time and effort devoted to creating something thoughtful. The chosen medium works persuasively with the design and polish. The project’s structural and formal elements productively serve the core concept of the experience. An A project comes with a clearly stated explanation of how your document describes your chosen experience.

B experience: This meaningfully engages the event and shows an effort to creatively evaluate the information with some degree of clarity. It reflects some time, effort, and forethought. The chosen medium works with the presentation, but some additional design forethought would have helped. The project’s structural and formal elements serve the core concept of the project. The project includes some explanation of how your document describes your experience.

C experience: This shows some engagement with the event but it is unsustainable, uncreative, and inconsequential. It fails to develop a critical and reflective perspective. The chosen medium does not work with the presentation. The project identifies a vague connection between the chosen experience and presentation and thus fails to offer a clear thesis statement. Both it and the explanation will appear to be thrown together at the last minute.

D or F experience: This lacks any serious effort to accomplish the assigned task. The idea and execution are ill-defined, lack focus and clarity, and contains no main argument.