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## Local History: Exploring What's Just Outside Your Door

May 17, 2012 by [Danna Bell](#)

Have you ever explored the history that took place on your own doorstep?

I have a huge passion for local history. It started with hearing stories about my grandfather, who was the first African-American police officer on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. It continued to grow through college, graduate school and through one of my first archival positions where I helped preserve and provide access to several local history collections for the District of Columbia Public Library's Washingtoniana Division.



[\(//www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94506121/\)](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94506121/)

Group of school children in front of statue of George Washington, Washington, D.C.

Usually teachers in history and social studies classes focus on national or international events. But what about the history of the neighborhood where the students live? When teachers encourage students to learn about where they live and perhaps link their community to a larger event, they can see they are part of a larger story. Students can understand that they are a part of history and that they make history every day.

Start a local history lesson by finding a primary source from the Library of Congress that connects to a local event. [Chronicling America \(//chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/\)](http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/) and the [Prints and Photograph Online Catalog \(//www.loc.gov/pictures/\)](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/) are two great places to search. Use the [primary source analysis tool \(//www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html\)](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html) [loclr=blogtea](#) for students to describe what they see from a picture or in a newspaper article, note anything that they recognize or other connections they make, and ask any questions they may have. Students can brainstorm where they can go to locate additional

information that can answer their questions.

The Library of Congress has many other resources to help your students learn more about the history of their community.

- [Local History: Mapping My Spot](#)



[\(//www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008678868/\)](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008678868/)

Students from 6th Division public schools, Washington, D.C., looking at an exhibit of fine prints in the Library of Congress

(<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/mapping/?loclr=blogtea>) uses panoramic maps from the Library's collections to help students begin to learn about their neighborhood and to find the important structures near their home. This lesson is especially suitable for younger grades.

- [Creating a Primary Source Archive: All History is Local](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/local/?loclr=blogtea) (<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/local/?loclr=blogtea>) encourages students to develop an exhibit that documents their community's history.
- Consider using the lesson [Oral History and Social History](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/using-history/?loclr=blogtea) (<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/using-history/?loclr=blogtea>) for students interested in collecting oral histories within their communities. After students analyze oral histories created during the Great Depression, this lesson provides guidance on creating their own oral histories.

What strategies and other Library resources have you used to encourage students to explore local history?

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## 2 Comments

1. **Jose Luis Hernandez**

*May 18, 2012 at 1:18 pm*

I had the opportunity to visiting the first primary school in St. Augustine, Florida,.....it's a small an quiet place.....my tourist visiting was in July/'79.....I have a great memories of my tour

2. **Tessie Tapiador-Sagadraca**

*August 29, 2017 at 7:02 am*

This material truly add color to the paper I am conceptualizing....Teaching Local History Precedes National History. Thank you Ms. Danna Bell

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