

CASE #31

Graduate Student-Curated Exhibits: A Study

AUTHOR

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES ENGAGED FROM *[GUIDELINES FOR PRIMARY SOURCE LITERACY](#)* BY THIS CASE STUDY

- 2A. Identify the possible locations of primary sources.
- 2B. Use appropriate, efficient, and effective search strategies in order to locate primary sources. Be familiar with the most common ways primary sources are described, such as catalog records and archival finding aids.
- 2D. Understand that historical records may never have existed, may not have survived, or may not be collected and/or publicly accessible. Existing records may have been shaped by the selectivity and mediation of individuals such as collectors, archivists, librarians, donors, and/or publishers, potentially limiting the sources available for research.
- 3A. Examine a primary source, which may require the ability to read a particular script, font, or language to understand or operate a particular technology or to comprehend vocabulary, syntax, and communication norms of the time period and location where the source was created.
- 3B. Identify and communicate information found in primary sources, including summarizing the content of the source and identifying and reporting key components such as how it was created, by whom, when, and what it is.
- 4A. Assess the appropriateness of a primary source for meeting the goals of a specific research or creative project.

- 4C. Situate a primary source in context by applying knowledge about the time and culture in which it was created; the author or creator; its format, genre, publication history; or related materials in a collection.
- 5A. Examine and synthesize a variety of sources in order to construct, support, or dispute a research argument.

CASE STUDY LOCATION The Poetry Collection, University at Buffalo
Buffalo, NY
<https://library.buffalo.edu/pl/>

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Introduction and Institutional Context

Instruction in Special Collections has never been more in demand or innovative, and many Special Collections instructors and disciplinary faculty are looking for greater student engagement with rare and archival materials. Student-curated exhibitions are an important outgrowth of this current trend. A student-curated exhibit not only allows students to expand their understanding of a subject area, but it also allows them to develop a deeper understanding of Special Collections and primary source literacy.¹ When curating exhibits, students must not only become experts on their objects, but they must also take into account the larger context in which an object exists, make selection decisions based on an overarching argument for a general audience, and understand and address gaps in the historical record: all key aspects of primary source literacy. While such instruction opportunities are high-impact, facilitating a student-curated exhibition requires a different approach from the more typical one-shot sessions in collaborating with disciplinary faculty. The rewards can be higher, but the challenges are greater and the impact on staff time and library resources is significantly increased. Any semester-long class is a complicated machine, as is any exhibition, and the two together require careful planning and communication to go smoothly. As Special Collections staff at the University of Michigan have noted, while experiential learning opportunities like student-curated exhibits are an “exciting trend, meeting these demands can be challenging.”² The goal of this case study is to provide a framework for others facilitating student-curated exhibits, either as part of a class project or an independent activity.

This case study joins the small body of scholarship on student-curated exhibitions. The semester-long project grew out of conversations with a faculty member in the English Department around our shared interest in promoting Black poetics through Special Collections materials; the class’s in-person exhibit was curated out of the resources of the Poetry Collection, one of the Special Collections libraries at the University at Buffalo (SUNY-Buffalo), a print and archival collection that serves as library of record for twentieth- and twenty-first-century Anglophone poetics. The University at Buffalo is an R1 university and the flagship campus of the State University of New York system, with an enrollment of approximately 32,000 (approximately 20,000 undergraduates and 12,000 graduate students). Its English Department houses the Poetics Program, founded in 1991 by poets Charles Bernstein, Robert Creeley, Susan Howe, and others, which is well-known as a center for the study of contemporary avant-garde poetry.

¹ For recent case studies, see Colleen Hoelscher, “Constructing History: A Student-Created Public History Exhibit Using Omeka.” *Society of American Archivists: Case Studies on Teaching with Primary Sources* #11 (Dec. 2019): https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/TWPSCase_11_Constructing_History.pdf; Rhia Rae, Molly Castro, and Annia Gonzalez, “Teaching the History of Higher Ed through Primary Sources and Digital Exhibits.” *Society of American Archivists: Case Studies on Teaching with Primary Sources* #26 (Apr. 2024): <https://societyofarchivists.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/FilesSite/EaLFu6ut98hDm64GFayyMOYBEkUGON56IDkj1FKcfg2kmA?e=g1BoxW>.

² Sigrid Anderson, Kristine Greive, Juli McLoone, and Jo Angela Oehrli, “Collaborative Curation: Best Practices for Student Exhibits with Large Classes.” *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 23.2 (Fall 2022): 55.

Relatively little scholarship addresses graduate student education in Special Collections, partly because one needs specialized archival resources at the same institution as the topic of study, and, depending upon the strengths of an institution's Special Collections and disciplinary departments, there may not be sufficient overlaps to support this type of specialized research. Happily, the University at Buffalo has disciplinary strength in contemporary poetics that is complemented by the resources held by the Poetry Collection. Still, the needs of undergraduate and graduate learners are different. As a disciplinary faculty and Special Collections librarian collaborator team put it, "graduate students are highly motivated learners for whom collaborative learning, while beneficial, is not as crucial as for undergraduates"; moreover, graduate students are interested not only in the content of the course but also its social and historical context, including the context of Special Collections.³ Working with graduate students, then, offers an expanded opportunity to encourage students to think not only about primary sources but also about the institution of "the archive," the people who work within it, and the labor that allows it to function. As the goal for many humanities graduate students is either further graduate study (if currently at the master's level) or an academic career, course-integrated instruction at the graduate level, particularly high-impact activities like exhibition curation, provides a unique opportunity to grow a skillset that can be beneficial on the job market and in their next position.

While working with graduate students necessitated adjusting instruction sessions to their specialized needs, it also required adjusting course design. In the Poetry Collection, student educational engagement is typically limited to one-shot visiting class sessions, with some graduate classes having materials on reserve on a class cart for students to use independently in the reading room. Given the context of this class (graduate student learners curating an exhibit), the learning objectives were manifold: students needed to be able to identify locations of primary sources through different search strategies; examine primary sources, including summarizing them for a general audience and determining their appropriateness for exhibition purposes; contextualize and position their selected primary sources among the larger constellation of exhibited materials; and understand the broader opportunities and limitations of archival resources and how repositories are formed.

Virtually all instruction sessions held in the Poetry Collection are handled by one staff member, the associate curator, and primary research access is coordinated between the two curators and the Special Collections assistant, whose responsibilities also include supervising the reading room. With limited staff devoted to educational activities, engaging in a semester-long course exhibit was a substantial commitment of resources. For those doing double-duty as instructor and exhibition installer, this article will hopefully provide a guide forward and help others avoid pitfalls.

³ Ann Schmiesing and Deborah R. Hollis, "The Role of Special Collections Departments in Humanities Undergraduate and Graduate Teaching: A Case Study," *Portal: Libraries and the Academy* 2.3 (2002): 475.

Narrative

Comprising thirteen MA and PhD students, “Black Writers and the Archive” was a graduate-level course taught in the Department of English at the University at Buffalo in the spring semester of 2023. While the class met primarily in its regularly scheduled classroom in the English Department’s building, it often met in Special Collections, and, in preparation for the final assignment—a class-curated exhibition in the Special Collections’ temporary exhibit space—students were expected to engage outside of class time with a class reserve cart of preselected materials.

The course grew out of one-shot sessions previously taught by the associate curator for the professor in her Black Memoir courses, and conversations between them about what a course that was more integrated into Special Collections might look like. Planning began the previous spring, where the associate curator gave suggestions regarding course readings, activities, and materials in the Poetry Collection that would be relevant, as well as related materials in the holdings of University Archives, which is a separately administered collection that shares a reading room with the Poetry Collection. The professor, having little experience designing course sessions with primary source materials or researching in the Poetry Collection, and no experience in exhibit design, leaned heavily on this advice. Consequently, librarian involvement was significant, reaching every aspect of the course:

Syllabus: In preliminary conversations about the shape of this course, the associate curator suggested to the professor many readings that then became the heart of the syllabus (see Appendix 1 for readings suggested by Special Collections). The scope of these readings reflects not only important viewpoints in critical archives studies but also emphasizes to a class of English graduate students the value of the fields of archival and library science. Readings ranged from books to peer-reviewed articles in libraries and literary journals to poetry and blog posts to other more informal venues. Conversations around Black archives are vital and ongoing, and the best place to read the most important developments is often not in traditional publication venues.

Readings focused specifically on Black archives but also archival issues writ more broadly, focusing on topics of particular concern to literary archives, to provide students with a contextual framework for understanding the Poetry Collection and peer repositories. A larger goal of these readings, of course, was to provide students with the scaffolding to think about literary archives in a new way, one grounded in perspectives from people working in Special Collections. For instance, one of the associate curator’s recommended readings was Amy Hildreth Chen’s *Placing Papers: The American Literary Archives Market*, which led to the professor inviting Chen to visit the class virtually to discuss her research on literary archives in the twentieth century.

Class visits: Over the course of fifteen class meetings, the class visited the Poetry Collection three times and University Archives twice. Additionally, the associate curator visited the class in their regularly scheduled classroom once. In other words, 40% of class meetings were led by members of Special Collections. Both the first and last meetings were held in the Poetry Collection.

During the first session, the associate curator gave students an overview of Special Collections policies, how to use the catalog and finding aids database, how to find born-digital materials and digital collections, and how to work with materials. The goal of this session was to provide students with an introduction to archival research, although they primarily worked with the pre-selected class cart curated for them by the associate curator.

Additionally, this first session included an active learning activity that paired students with objects (both print and archival) from the Poetry Collection. Students were guided through an analysis of their object, introducing them to the basic concepts of bibliographical and archival research. After individual analysis, students were paired or grouped together to discuss the larger themes that emerged from looking at objects in conversation. The goal was to see how different materials in the collection converse and how knowledge can be built by looking for networks, patterns, and dissimilarities between items. The activity concluded with students sharing out what they had discovered, allowing everyone to learn about each object and allowing the associate curator to ask questions or provide more context as needed. Materials selected illustrated Black poetic creativity across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and included different formats (artists' books, audio/visual material, first editions, anthologies, little magazines, and book objects) and archival materials like successive manuscript drafts, notebooks, and correspondence. The aim was to expose students quickly to the wide range of materials they could encounter in the Poetry Collection and to get them thinking early about visual formats, since that is an important aspect of curating an exhibit. See Appendix 2 for a lesson plan and worksheet for this session.

The associate curator organized a second visit to Special Collections for the class to hear colleagues in cataloging and archival processing speak about their jobs and the intellectual labor that goes into their work. The goal was for students to have a deep appreciation for all facets of work in Special Collections, not just public-facing roles like a curator, and to understand the complex issues that catalogers and archivists think through when processing materials.

Class cart: The materials from the class cart were almost exclusively derived from the initial class session described above, and these became the materials with which the students worked throughout the semester. The professor requested that one book that had been previously recommended to her, *Lorna Simpson Collages*, as well as a few more materials from the archival collections, be added. Thirteen print materials and eleven archival objects were preselected; see Appendix 3 for a list. Having preselected materials meant that logistically, handling requests was much less of a burden on Special Collections staff, which was beneficial with a large group. Students were asked to work with the cart weekly, although not all did, and were asked to make an appointment with the Special Collections assistant before arriving since the reading room has only six tables and must accommodate researchers from the campus community as well as visiting scholars from around the globe, although not all did. The class cart became the basis of the class exhibition, with few students choosing to select materials for the exhibit that were not already on the class cart.

Exhibition: As part of the preparation for the exhibition, the associate curator visited the class to discuss how to develop and design an exhibit. Since neither the students nor the professor had designed or installed an exhibit before, it was important to cover the basics as well as high-level

considerations. First, students were asked to think about the last exhibit or two that they had visited, and when it became clear that no one had visited an exhibit in recent memory, the associate curator suggested two free and accessible options on campus: the UB Art Galleries and the new exhibition in Special Collections. This resulted in another class visit to Special Collections, where a colleague who helped curate that exhibit discussed the process of putting it together.

This session was lecture-based, and the associate curator discussed how to develop a concept and story or argument for the exhibit, especially within restrictions. Students were asked to think about audience and how the physical placement of their objects in cases along with the written apparatus of labels would guide a visitor through their collective narrative. They were also encouraged to think about promotion and publicity, as well as interpretation, as installing the exhibit is only the first step: it needs to have an audience to live. Finally, the associate curator shared with them strategies for promoting exhibits, including events, tours, and publications. See Appendix 3 for a lesson plan for this class.

Students were responsible for selecting materials (one to three items) and the page to which they wished the materials to be open and for writing a 250–300-word exhibition label. There were eight cases split among the thirteen students, so they also needed to think about how their selections worked within the larger context of their case (as all were sharing vitrines) and the exhibit.

Installation and opening: The associate curator and professor agreed to have an opening reception for the exhibition, where students could invite friends and family and celebrate with a small catered event. Special Collections helped the professor contact university catering to set up an afternoon tea-time service. University catering arrived a half-hour before the event, and students welcomed visitors for an hour reception.

Due to a variety of factors, the associate curator installed the exhibit. Students designed the layout of their cases, selecting items, placement of materials and labels, and how items would be displayed. The associate curator then created supports where needed and arranged the materials as described. This ensured the safe handling of our materials as well as expedited the process. The exhibit was open for one month.

Results

The opening was exciting: students were proud to show off their work to family and friends, talking about “their” archive. The ownership and agency they felt in the Special Collections space was everything we aim for with public outreach and instruction. Alongside the exhibit opening, the class also published a catalog, *Shifting Tides: The Past, Present & Future of Literary Archives*, a collection of astute essays based on their exhibit labels and experience working in the archives. One student argues that her selection, an artist’s book printed on index cards titled *Thirty-nine Questions for White People*, disrupts “the expectation that 1) art and archival holdings are merely static objects to be viewed by attendees and 2) that audience members’ affective responses to these objects are to be felt in isolation, unquestioned and unheard by contributing artists and archivists. When white

viewers are asked directly about their whiteness and Black literary holdings, they are forced to reflect more meaningfully on their own physical and metaphorical ‘presence’ in the archives.”⁴

Over the course of the semester, students became very curious about how archival repositories are created, who selects materials, and what materials are not collected and/or do not survive, all key questions when working with Black archives. They also became very sensitive to art displayed in the reading room and in particular to the paintings of James Joyce and his family permanently installed above the temporary exhibit area. (The Poetry Collection holds the world’s largest and most comprehensive Joyce collection.) As they write in the preface to the exhibit catalog, “Despite our desire for these paintings to be covered for the duration of our short exhibition, the visually complicated relationship between our archival finds and the [paintings]...offers a potentially productive mode of observing how the white gaze continues to interrupt and destabilize Black presence in the institutional space.”⁵

While a formal assessment was not conducted due to time constraints, the following fall, two students (one of whom had been in the Black archives class) asked to curate a pop-up exhibit for a transgender poetry and poetics symposium during the spring 2024 semester. The associate curator met with them in mid-December to discuss their ideas as well as a timeframe and expectations, with the goal of the exhibit being installed by the last week of March. Unlike the class exhibit, the role of Special Collections staff in facilitating this exhibit was much less involved, in part because the graduate student curators were able to apply lessons learned in the previous class. Working directly with the students helped streamline the process, as did working with only two students rather than thirteen. That said, by implementing some of the lessons learned during the class exhibition project—particularly making clear the expectations about what Special Collections could and could not do and relying on the students to drive the content of the course so that the associate curator’s intellectual labor did not overshadow theirs—the entire process became much smoother.

Lessons Learned

As rewarding as the final event was, there were many difficulties along the way. One difficulty was that Special Collections staff were not in the classroom with the students the majority of the time and consequently joined conversations at a point where the response could only be to deny a request, resulting in disappointment. This happened, for instance, when discussing how to install the exhibit: two weeks before the installation deadline, students requested that the Poetry Collection create, in addition to the physical exhibit, a digital exhibit of digitized and born-digital materials, which was outside of our capacity due to staff resources and the exhibit deadline. Another difficulty was operating in the role of co-instructor in everything but name; the labor of

⁴ Kaitlyn Liu, “Naima Lowe: Thirty-nine [39] Questions for White People (2013),” *Shifting Tides: The Past, Present & Future of Literary Archives*. Buffalo: [no publisher], 2023. Np.

⁵ Scholars for the Preservation of the Black Literary Archives, “Note on the Exhibit Space,” *Shifting Tides: The Past, Present & Future of Black Literary Archives*. Buffalo: [no publisher], 2023. Np.

this class was done primarily by one member of Special Collections staff, for whom instruction is one among many responsibilities, and the time demanded was beyond what had been anticipated.

Clear, written communication and a strong prior relationship with disciplinary faculty is vital to the success of a class such as this. Even with the best communication, however, things can go awry. It may be worthwhile, therefore, to have both the professor and students fill out an exhibition contract, in line with professional museum standards. It is also worth capping the number of students. There were thirteen students in this course, which made logistics challenging. Finally, clear communication about financial resources and what Special Collections can and cannot support is vital: establish before the start who will pay for the design and printing of exhibit labels, posters, or publications.

Appendix 1: Course Readings and Class Cart List

Course readings adopted from Special Collections staff recommendations:

- Bambara, Toni Cade. "'Realizing the Dream of a Black University' and Other Writings." Ed. Makeba Lavan and Conor Tomás Reed. *Lost and Found, The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative* series 7 number 2 (Fall 2017).
- Braddock, Jeremy. *Collecting as Modernist Practice*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.
- Caswell, Michelle. "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight against Symbolic Annihilation." *The Public Historian* 36.4 (2014): 26-37.
- Chen, Amy Hildreth. *Placing Papers: The American Literary Archives Market*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2020.
- Cloutier, Jean-Christophe. *Shadow Archives: The Lifecycles of African American Literature*. Columbia University Press, 2019.
- Farmer, Ashley. "Archiving While Black." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 64.39 (Aug. 2018): B17.
- Fraser, Alison. "Creating the Twentieth-Century Literary Archives: A Short History of the Poetry Collection at the University at Buffalo." *Information & Culture: A Journal of History* 55.3 (Fall 2020): 252-270.
- Helton, Laura. "On Decimals, Catalogs, and Racial Imaginaries of Readings." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 134.1 (2019): 99-120.
- Hochman, Barbara. "Filling in Blanks: Nella Larsen's Application to Library School." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 133.5 (2018): 1172-1190.
- Kim, Eunsong. "Appraising Newness: Whiteness, Neoliberalism and the Building of the Archive for New Poetry." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1.2 (Summer 2017): np.
- Philip, M. NorbeSe. *Zong!* Wesleyan University Press, 2008.
- Robertson, Tara. "Digitization: Just Because You Can, Doesn't Mean You Should." *Tara Robertson*. Mar. 20, 2016: <http://tararobertson.ca/2016/oob/>.
- Spahr, Juliana. "Gender Trouble." *Boog Reader* 8 (2006).
- Tai, Jessica. "Cultural Humility as a Framework for Anti-Oppressive Archival Description." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 3.2 (Fall 2020): np.
- Young, Kevin. *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness*. Graywolf Press, 2012.

Class cart selections curated by the associate curator:

Periodicals:

- Dhana: Creative Writing* 1.1-7.1, 8.1 (1971-1977, 1981).
- Fire!!* 1.1 (Nov. 1926). 1982 reprint.
- Umbra* 1.1-1.2, no. 5 (1963-1963, 1974).

Books:

- Brown, Sterling A., Arthur P. Davis, and Ulysses Lee, eds. *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes*. Arno Press, 1941.
- Franklin, Krista. *Under the Knife*. Candor Arts, 2018.
- Kearney, Douglas. *The Black Automaton*. Fence Books, 2009.
- _____. *There Are Sharks in This Poem*. Fence Records, 2011.
- Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Albert and Charles Boni, 1925.
- Lowe, Naima N. *Thirty-Nine Questions for White People*. Danger Dot Publishing, 2013.
- Morrison, Toni. *Five Poems*. Silhouettes by Kara E. Walker. Las Vegas: Rainmaker Editions, 2002.
- Philip, M. NourbeSe. *The Book of Un*. Container Press, 2018.
- Walcott, Derek. *The Caribbean Poetry of Derek Walcott & the Art of Romare Bearden*. Limited Editions Club, 1983.
- Williams, Tyrone. *Trump l'Oeil*. Hostile Books, 2017.

Archival Materials:

- Gwendolyn Brooks correspondence to the Poetry Collection and notebook for *Annie Allen*
- Countee Cullen correspondence to the Poetry Collection
- Langston Hughes correspondence to the Poetry Collection and manuscripts for "Let America Be America Again"

Appendix 2: Lesson Plan and Worksheet

Lesson plan:

- Intro to Special Collections
- How to develop archival research questions/projects
 - Different kinds of projects one can do here:
 - Coursework, orals, dissertation
 - Teaching
 - Research proxy
 - Editorial and creative projects
 - Explore the collection expansively—follow up on leads, trace connections, don't get stuck on a singular focus
 - The archives are not very rewarding if you go in looking to “prove” something
 - Don't forget about the variety of materials—archival but also print
 - Starting from a question about a poet, poem, book—what do we have in the collection? First editions, first appearances, other bibliographically significant editions. What do we have in the archival collections? Is their publisher represented, friends, the poet themselves?
 - Genetic research (how a poem evolved over composition)
 - Publication history
 - Communities of writers
 - Starting from a broader question (materiality, theory based)
 - Too broad and it's hard to get traction
 - For ex., “Black poetics” is just too broad
 - Instead, start to impose limits (time period, geographic region, community of writers, publisher, etc.)
 - Share their research questions
- How to find materials in the catalog/finding aids
- Start at the Policies webpage
 - Good place to start for any institution
 - Links to the finding aids and catalog, and, at the bottom, for copyright information
 - Poetry Collection webpage: search manuscript collections
 - Collections tab: “all” shows the complete list, unprocessed and processed
 - The finding aids database has only the processed collections
- Finding aids
 - Search across all finding aids in a repository
 - Search terms are usually a name or title (of a poem or book)
 - Depending on what I'm looking for, I find it helpful to filter by “Archival Object” unless I'm looking for an entire collection. Examples:
 - Give two examples: one of a poet whose collection is in the Poetry Collection, one of a poet who has materials across collections but no named collection. Show collections processed at the item level and at the box level, and collections with born-digital materials

- Usually you will have just one side of the correspondence, and it will not be the person the collection is named after
 - We won't necessarily have everything, for a variety of reasons
 - Another repository may have a different part of the collection
- Digital Collections
 - Hear@Buffalo [audio collection]
- Catalog
 - Switch to the catalog tab, enter search term (name, title, keyword)
 - Filter and lock by UB Special Collections
 - Different types of print formats
 - How to get to digital recordings
 - Cutter system
 - Different formats
 - Different locations
 - Subject headings
 - Notes/local notes/format
 - How to see serials
 - Requesting via Delivery+ [interlibrary loan]

Worksheet:

BOOKS, ANTHOLOGIES, AND LITTLE MAGAZINES

Provide the title, author or editor(s), publisher, place of publication, year of publication, and volume/issue number (if applicable).

Describe the cover: is there a dust jacket? What, if any, design or illustration is on the front? Is there any other textual information, and if so, what is it?

Describe the back cover. Are there illustrations, writing, advertisements? If yes, briefly describe.

Front matter. Is there an acknowledgements page, and, if so, where have the poems been previously published? If there is an introduction or preface, who wrote it?

If your book/periodical includes illustrations or other prominent visual decorations, pick a page and analyze it. Who is the artist? What is the relationship between text and image, poet and artist?

What are questions you would like to ask of your book/anthology/little magazine? These could be things you aren't familiar with—a name, for instance—or more investigative queries.

Find your partner/group:

- *The Negro Caravan* and *The New Negro*
- *Under the Knife, Thirty-nine Questions for White People*, and the Douglas Kearney publications

- *Trump l’Oeil* and *The Book of Un*
- *Umbra*, *Fire!!*, and *Dhana*
- *Five Poems* and *Caribbean Poems*

Compare what you have discovered. Have the poets published in similar places? Are there other overlaps (such as publisher, people writing blurbs/introductions, etc.)? What do these similarities tell you about poetic community?

Pick one or two things to share with the larger group about your publication.

ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

Provide the box/folder number, letter date, author, and addressee for the letter.

Why is the poet writing this letter? What have they included with it?

What does the poet have to say about how they compose poems?

Provide the box/folder number and title for the poem.

If you have “Let America Be America Again”: read the first stanza across four drafts, and then read the final typescript. Note at least three major differences (word changes, omissions, line breaks, etc.)

If you have the “Annie Allen” notebook: read the notebook draft of “When my dears die” (“Children of the Poor” part 5), and then read the first edition. Note at least three major differences (word changes, omissions, line breaks, etc.)

What does reading the manuscript drafts with the final or published copy tell you about the poet’s process? What new information have you discovered in light of looking at the original manuscripts and letters?

What are questions you would like to ask of your archival materials? These could be things you aren’t familiar with—a name, for instance—or more investigative queries.

Compare what you have discovered. Are the poets writing for a similar reason? Have they described their work in similar or dissimilar ways?

Pick one or two things to share with the larger group about your archival materials.

Appendix 3: Lesson Plan for Exhibits

Think about the last exhibit or two that you've been to. What was your relationship to the topic? (I.e. was it an exhibit about a topic you know well, or one you don't know at all?) Write down 2-3 things that worked well, in your opinion. Write down 2-3 things you would have changed, and why.

Did you have anything to write down? If not, what are some local, free, accessible exhibit spaces you can visit?

Some of the things I think about when putting together an exhibit:

- Concept
 - Why this exhibit?
 - Usually something predetermined (conference, anniversary): how to make that my own?
- Story/argument and an overview/selection of the materials
 - This is announced via your title.
- Audience
 - Who is going to come see this exhibit? Peers, general public, scholars, students?
 - What types of materials will be interesting to someone looking at an exhibit? This might be different from the types of materials that are interesting to look at as a researcher or in a class.
 - Exhibits are a good way of introducing new audiences into your collection as they are curated selections that highlight aspects of the larger library that may be unknown.
- Written narrative and physical layout
 - Genre of the exhibit label
 - Who's the audience and what's their expectation?
 - Different genre than a paper: more accessible.
 - Not a lot of space to write: what is essential information?
 - Secondary research is essential for context and support of the argument.
 - Case labels and exhibit statement
 - Each case has a label that discusses the items in it, and there is also usually an exhibit statement that a visitor reads first, introducing them to the exhibit as a whole.
 - Answer: why these items and how do they together tell us more about the overall story/argument for the exhibit?
 - 250-300 words, plus a title for the case and a list of items. In the field, they are usually 50 to 250 words.
 - Think about the times that you visited an exhibition. How much text did you want to read? What was useful for you?
 - Six questions adopted from the "Writing Exhibit Labels Handout"⁶ regarding visitor experience and item contextualization and background

⁶ Anderson et al: 69-70.

- Conversation between items in a case and conversation between the cases
 - How does the eye travel around the exhibit area, and how does it travel around the case?
 - How does a case contribute to the overall argument of the exhibit?
 - What items introduce your topic and what items flesh it out?
- Promotion/publicity and interpretation
 - Installing the exhibit is just the first step! It still doesn't have an audience. How will you market it, promote it, share it?
 - How will you interpret it to a visitor? What can you add to what is already in the cases and activate it for someone who has never experienced these materials before?
 - An exhibit is a three-dimensional written and oral scholarly artifact
 - How can you present the materials so that they are exciting and accessible? What are people going to respond to?