



PRESERVATION EDUCATION CURRICULUM



NORTHEAST
DOCUMENT
CONSERVATION
CENTER

CLASS 2 LESSON PLAN

Context for the Cultural Record

Taking It Further—Beyond the Primary Lesson

Additional Topics for Discussion

The additional topics described below could be the subject of classroom discussion and activities if more time is available, or they could be incorporated into the primary lesson as desired, depending on the instructor's interests and background. Topics and activities are divided according to the three main parts of the primary lesson, and additional readings for students (upon which the discussions/activities are based) are provided.

Part I: The Importance of Context

- Although Febvre and Martin's *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800* deals with the printed book, their concerns with cultural context transcend this physical medium. In the following quotation there are two statements whose importance for today's "cultural context" should be explored. "[The printed book] rendered vital service to research by immediately transmitting results from one researcher to another; and speedily, without laborious effort or unsupportable costs, it assembled permanently the works of the most sublime creative spirits in all fields."

Activity: Discuss the following issues.

1. "Immediately transmitting results from one researcher to another" sounds a lot like e-mail and electronic publishing. How valid is scholarly communication that takes place in this transient medium?
2. "It assembled permanently the works of the most sublime creative spirits in all fields" certainly describes the ability of the World Wide Web to bring together and publish writers and "creative spirits" of all disciplines in an inclusive venue. But what about "permanently"? How long will these works last? How are "cultural contexts" maintained in this environment? Consider the question of dependence on the "artifact" and "original object" for verification and authority.

Part II: Physical Aspects of Context

- In *Scribes, Script, and Books: The Book Arts from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chapter 9: Codices Manuscripti: Books Written by Hand), Arvin discusses in some detail the relation of picture and text in Western manuscript tradition, a tradition that carried over into the printed book.

Activity: Have the class compare the styles and purposes of picture and text in manuscript and book design to the "look and feel" of electronic productions, particularly Internet productions.

- Discuss Tanselle's belief (expressed in *Libraries, Museums, and Reading*) that form and content are one, that the content is dependent on the physical artifact for meaning.

Activity: Have the class debate this in relation to the growing dependence on digital surrogates for rare and fragile materials.

Part III: Preservation of Context

- Lavender's "Preservation Education for the Library User: The Special Collections Perspective" discusses the problems faced by conservators trying to treat historical publications and establishes methods for teaching readers how to handle this fragile material.

Activity: Create a handout for researchers explaining the criteria for consulting fragile rare "original" objects, the problems of using these materials, and the proper methods of handling them.

Activity: Develop a one-hour presentation for library staff on the criteria for adding "historical context" materials to special collections and on the conditions for transfer of these materials from the main stack areas.

Suggested Further Readings for Students

The Importance of Context

Febvre, Lucien, and Henri-Jean Martin. *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800*. Translated by David Gerard. London and New York: Verso, 1990. *L'Apparition du livre* first appeared in 1958. Especially relevant are "Preface" and "The Book as a Force for Change."

One of the most important modern studies to analyze the historical relationship between printing and culture, its sociological emphasis laid the foundation for contextual scholarship. "[The printed book] rendered vital service to research by immediately transmitting results from one researcher to another; and speedily, without laborious effort or unsupportable costs, it assembled permanently the works of the most sublime creative spirits in all fields."

Physical Aspects of Context

Avrin, Leila. *Scribes, Script, and Books: The Book Arts from Antiquity to the Renaissance*. Chicago: American Library Association; London: British Library, 1991. "Chapter 9: *Codices Manuscripti: Books Written by Hand*."

A learned yet lucid account of the design and production of manuscripts from the medieval period leading up to the invention of printing. It discusses text, illumination, materials, production, and physical format.

Tanselle, G. Thomas. "Libraries, Museums, and Reading." Sixth Sol M. Malkin Lecture in Bibliography. New York: Book Arts Press, Columbia University School of Library Service, 1991.

Tanselle is a highly respected bibliographic scholar who represents one important, but extreme, view of the value of original documents. This short paper presents his belief that "every 'copy' of every printed edition" is unique as an artifact and should thus be preserved for study of the past. It also develops his theory that language is intangible and thus the only "reality" is the physical format itself. In other words, there is no distinction between form and content, a view that goes against most

library preservation programs today that distinguish between conserving the “artifact” (i.e., the physical embodiment) and “preserving” the content (i.e., the text and images) in any appropriate medium.

Preservation of Context

Lavender, Kenneth. “Preservation Education for the Library User: The Special Collections Perspective.” In Jeanne M. Drewes and Julie A. Page, eds. *Promoting Preservation Awareness in Libraries*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997, pp. 263–79.

This article establishes the history of the book as one of the most influential contexts for preservation of special materials, especially popular culture publications. It discusses the problems for conservators trying to treat this type of historical publication and establishes methods for teaching readers how to handle this fragile material.