

Starting Conversations with Students about Personal Spending, Investing, and Stewardship with Historical Receipts

Lee Ann Potter

Among the Papers of Abraham Lincoln at the Library of Congress are hundreds of receipts, including the elaborate one featured on p. 73. Dated April 15, 1861, it includes a sketch of the National Monument to the Forefathers along with three signatures—those of the architect, the Treasurer of the Pilgrim Society, and the Collecting Agent. It certified that the newly inaugurated President Abraham Lincoln had contributed \$10 to the Fund for Erecting the Monument to the Forefathers.

Within the Papers of Alexander Graham Bell at the Library of Congress, a receipt, also on p. 73, dated June 12, 1876 (five months before Bell received his patent for the telephone) recorded that the Boston Society of Natural History had received the inventor’s \$5 initiation fee.

Receipts are also in the Papers of Frederick Law Olmstead, the landscape designer who was the architect of New York City’s Central Park. One dated January 21, 1879, featured on p. 74, indicated that Olmstead had paid his \$5 annual dues to the New York Horticultural Society.

And in the National American Woman Suffrage Association collection, a Membership Certificate for Anne Fitzhugh Miller dated February 15, 1900, documented that “having paid Fifty Dollars,” she was a Life Member (see p. 74). Miller was a well-known philanthropist and suffragist from New York State, who died eight years before the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women the right to vote, was ratified.

Finally, the Papers of Rosa Parks

include receipts for donations she made to her church and to the Detroit Chapter of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), as well as the one featured with this article on p. 74. It was for paying the \$1.50 poll tax in Montgomery, Alabama, on January 21, 1957—a month after the end of the year-long Montgomery Bus Boycott, which followed her arrest for refusing to give up her seat to a white person.

Receipts for personal expenses such as these—for initiation fees, annual and lifetime membership dues, taxes, and donations—can provide starting points for conversations with students about a wide variety of economic topics from personal spending to investing, to stewardship, and more. They can also inspire interest in conducting original research.

Begin by asking students generally about their personal spending habits, and perhaps those of their family members. Lead a brief discussion about how they decide what to purchase and what organizations and causes they contribute to with their own money.

Next, divide students into five groups.

Assign each group to conduct brief research on one of the following individuals and their circumstances (i.e., occupation, residence, marital status) to the extent possible, for the month and year provided:

- Abraham Lincoln, April 1861
- Alexander Graham Bell, June 1876
- Frederick Law Olmstead, January 1879
- Anne Fitzhugh Miller, February 1900
- Rosa Parks, January 1957

Then, provide each group with the featured receipt related to the individual they researched. Remind them that a receipt serves as proof of money spent. Invite student groups to:

- discover how much their individual spent and for what purpose (students may choose to research the value of the expense in today’s dollars, or relative to the average annual income at the time spent and the cost of other items);
- characterize the expense as either an initiation fee, annual or lifetime

continued on page 76

THE NATIONAL MONUMENT TO THE FOREFATHERS



National Monument to the Forefathers.

That Abraham Lincoln has contributed
\$10.00

to the Fund for erecting the Monument to
THE FOREFATHERS AT PLYMOUTH.

Samuel Greenough
Architect



M. Stoddard
Treas. of the Pilgrim Society

Pilgrim Office April 15-1861

Rosewell H. Dickerson Collecting Agent

BOSTON SOCIETY OF NATURAL HISTORY.



BOSTON, *June 12,* 1876.

RECEIVED OF

Prof. A. Graham Bell

Five Dollars,

the INITIATION FEE as a Resident Member of the BOSTON SOCIETY OF NATURAL HISTORY,

L. Foster,

FOR THE TREASURER.

Payments received by E. PICKERING, Treasurer, 8 Merchants' Exchange, or by S. H. SCODDER, Secretary, at the Museum.

Edw. Burgess

26
 NEW YORK HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY.
 New York, Jan. 21st. 1879
 Received from Mr. J. L. Olmstead -
 Five Dollars, Annual dues for the year 1879
 \$ 5 -
 J. H. Young
 TREASURER.
 De Lacy & Willson, Printers, 64 & 66 John St., N. Y.

"WOMEN ARE CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES, ENTITLED TO ALL THE RIGHTS, PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES GUARANTEED TO CITIZENS BY THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT."
 NATIONAL AMERICAN WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION
 OF THE UNITED STATES.
 Miss Anne Fitzhugh Miller
 having paid Fifty Dollars is a LIFE MEMBER of this
 Association, entitled to the rights and privileges thereof.
 No. 53.
 Elizabeth Lady Lupton
 Honorary President
 Susan B. Anthony
 President
 Harriet Taylor Upton
 Treasurer.
 WASHINGTON, D. C., February 15, 1900.

For Collection Period Beginning Oct. 1, 1956 and Ending on Feb. 1, 1957
 POLL TAX RECEIPT
 COUNTY OF MONTGOMERY, ALA., 5-21-1957 N^o 2425
 RECEIVED OF Rose Louise Parks Male Female
 Dollars (\$) 1.50
 For Poll Taxes at \$1.50 per year for the following years: 1956 (✓) 1957 ()
 District No. _____ Precinct No. This Year 5N Precinct No. Last Year _____ Color Cal
 Countersigned By John Druas State Comptroller. _____ Tax Collector



Meghan Ferriter

Figures leave traces behind as they move through history. In the case of digital collections at the Library of Congress, they might also leave a bit of change on the table. Student volunteers can find evidence of economic activity as they transcribe handwritten and typed correspondence in the newly launched *By the People* program. Budgets, salaries, purchases, costs of international travel, and more lie within the primary sources of the Library of Congress digital collections.

By the People invites the public to volunteer online to transcribe and tag digitized Library of Congress collections on <https://crowd.loc.gov>. The project will continuously add new materials for volunteers, who range from lifelong learners to students. Individuals and full classes of students can contribute to the Library of Congress while also gaining new skills, such as parsing primary sources, reading cursive, and critically assessing the past. The transcripts created on *By the People* help anyone trying to search, read, or access handwritten and typed documents that computers cannot accurately translate into text without human intervention. *By the People* transcriptions will make these collections keyword-searchable and more amenable to accessibility technologies, such as screen readers used by people with low vision.

The transcription campaign in *By the People* are selected from across Library of Congress collections and represent the diversity of the Library's treasures. Today students can choose from selections in the papers of Mary Church Terrell, letters to Abraham Lincoln, Clara Barton's diaries, or read through Branch Rickey's now-fully-transcribed baseball scouting reports. They can also see how people earned and spent money in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Help students find currency—or at least bills, budgets, and businesses—with these *By the People* case studies.

Encouraging Entrepreneurial Women of Color

Civil rights and women's suffrage advocate Mary Church Terrell encouraged women of color to go into business for themselves—especially evocative in a time in which Madame CJ Walker was building a cosmetics enterprise and women found business opportunity during the First World War. In an undated speech for the Women's Fraternal Business Association, Terrell observes:

There was never a time more opportune than this to impress upon our women the necessity, the desirability and the advantages of going into business for themselves. Before the war women here and there proved

beyond the peradventure of a doubt that they had talent and sticktoitiveness and grit enough to run a shop successfully or even to manufacture on a small scale.

Working through some of Terrell's handwritten correspondence and typewritten speeches, students might consider who had the means, opportunity, and courage to become an entrepreneur in the mid-twentieth century. <https://crowd.loc.gov/campaigns/mary-church-terrell-advocate-for-african-americans-and-women/speeches-and-writings/mss425490572/mss425490572-3/>

Presidential Purchases

Even in Abraham Lincoln's day, a lawyer's office had to be assembled on a budget. In the *Letters to Lincoln* projects, students will encounter correspondence and official documentation. This includes the everyday expenses of his Springfield, Illinois, law practice, for which he was busy making decisions at the start of May 1849. While reviewing transcriptions, students can investigate whether Lincoln negotiated on the price to purchase a set of law books ordered from Cincinnati (<https://crowd.loc.gov/campaigns/letters-to-lincoln/1840-1849-marriage-family-politics-and-law/mal0029400/mal0029400-1/>). The next day, on May 2, 1849, Lincoln was invoiced from St. Louis for just over 7 yards of Brussels carpet. Students can compare the rate of \$11.60 to the price of carpet today but they may have to search more pages more deeply for clues to the carpet pattern. <https://crowd.loc.gov/campaigns/letters-to-lincoln/1840-1849-marriage-family-politics-and-law/mal0030200/mal0030200-1/>

Big Business of Baseball

Then there are the contract offers and player salaries in Branch Rickey's scouting reports. By the mid-twentieth century, professional baseball was already big business. Rickey's long experience managing books and player development for baseball gave him room to assess a recruit's potential against the club's resources. Students can also explore the professionalization of athletes, race-based inequity, and the increasing salaries of baseball players—where labor, history, and social identities meet on the field. <https://crowd.loc.gov/campaigns/branch-rickey-changing-the-game/scouting-reports/mss37820005/mss37820005-11/>

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About the Featured Sources

If you try these suggestions, or a variation of them, with your students, tell us about your experience! During the second week of April, the Teaching with the Library of Congress Blog at blogs.loc.gov/teachers will feature a post tied to this article and we invite you to comment and share your teaching strategies.

All of the receipts featured in this article are in the Manuscripts Division at the Library of Congress and are available online. Many, many others in these and other collections are also available. Search the Library's website at loc.gov on terms such as "receipt," "receipts," "payment," and "donation" for a variety of examples. Featured in this article are:

Receipt for Contribution to Fund, Abraham Lincoln Papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833–1916: Plymouth Massachusetts Monument Society to Abraham Lincoln, Monday, April 15, 1861; www.loc.gov/resource/mal.0908000/?sp=1.

Poll Tax Receipt, Rosa Parks Papers: Miscellany, 1934–2005; Receipts; 1957. www.loc.gov/item/mss859430323/.

Receipt from Boston Society of Natural History, Alexander Graham Bell Family Papers 1834–1974. Series: Subject File, MSS51268: Folder: Honors and Awards, June 12, 1876. www.loc.gov/item/magbell.20800101/.

Life Membership Certificate for Anne Fitzhugh Miller, February 15, 1900. National American Woman Suffrage Association of the United States, Miscellaneous Documents. www.loc.gov/item/rbcmiller001370/.

Receipt from the New York Horticultural Society, Frederick Law Olmsted Papers: 1975 Addition, 1821–1924; financial papers; bills, receipts, etc., January 21, 1879. www.loc.gov/resource/mss35121.

membership dues, a tax, or a donation;

- determine whether the expense was voluntary or required, and what it enabled;
- consider how the expense reflected the interests or values of their individual; and
- discuss to what extent the receipt contributes to their understanding of their individual.

Ask a representative from each group to share a description of their receipt and their conclusions with the class.

If time allows, encourage students to conduct additional research on the organizations and programs that their individual supported. For example, challenge them to find out if the monument that Lincoln supported was ever built; whether the organizations that Bell, Olmstead, and Miller belonged to still exist; and what poll taxes were and whether they still exist.

Finally, lead a class discussion about spending, investing, and stewardship. Remind students that stewardship is the acceptance of responsibility to shepherd and safeguard something of value to others. Ask students to consider how personal spending can be an investment that generates social benefit dividends, and the relationship between such dividends and the larger concept of stewardship. 🌐

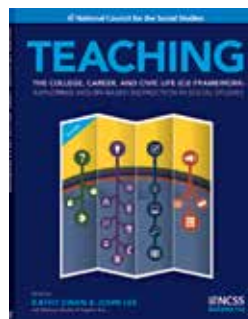
LEE ANN POTTER is the Director of Learning and Innovation at the Library of Congress. For more information on the education programs of the Library of Congress, please visit www.loc.gov/teachers/.

Teaching the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

Exploring Inquiry-Based Instruction in Social Studies

NCSS Bulletin 114, 156 pp.

Edited by Kathy Swan and John Lee, with Rebecca Mueller and Stephen Day



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