



# PRESERVATION EDUCATION CURRICULUM



NORTHEAST  
DOCUMENT  
CONSERVATION  
CENTER

CLASS 2 LESSON PLAN

## Context for the Cultural Record

### Resources for the Teacher

#### The Importance of Context

Belanger, Terry. "Descriptive Bibliography." In Jean Peters, ed. *Book Collecting: A Modern Guide*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1977, pp. 97–115.

This article is one of the very best and most approachable introductions to the field of analytic bibliography. This term encompasses historical, descriptive, and textual bibliography and concerns the "whole study of the physical book." Director of the Rare Book School at the University of Virginia, Belanger is at the forefront of bibliographic scholarship today.

McCorison, Marcus. "Statement on Preservation." *Abbey Newsletter* 14, no. 5 (1990): 84–85.

This is a brief statement from the President and Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society on the importance of retaining "physical evidence": "But the object itself consists of cultural evidence, exhibiting as much about the traditions of the period and place in which it was produced, and, in some instances, the object is of greater moment than its content." It recounts scholar Cathy Davidson's visit in 1984 when she gazed in awe at the collection of diverse copies of *Charlotte Temple*, "each one embodying/reflecting/creating its own history of the book in American culture."

Nichols, Stephen G., and Abby Smith. *The Evidence in Hand: Report of the Task Force on the Artifact in Library Collections*. Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2001. Especially relevant are the "Executive Summary," "The Problem," "The Artifact in Question," "States of the Artifact 1800–2000," and "Summary and Recommendations."

Lengthy and detailed, this is a seminal document in the discussion of the importance of intellectual "context" and the care and maintenance of library collections. It uses its considerable authority to establish the crucial importance of the artifactual value of primary resources in *all* formats.

Oram, Richard W. "The New Literary Scholarship, the Contextual Point of View, and the Use of Special Collections." *Rare Books and Manuscripts Librarianship* 8, no.1 (1993): 9–16.

Oram advocates the positive effect of the shift away from scholarly emphasis on canonical literature and traditional exegesis: "On the other hand, it could be argued that thematic and wide-ranging collections centered on a historical or literary period will receive more attention and be of more value to the investigators of the future, for these collections contain precisely the resources which scholars will turn to for contextual studies of literature."

Tanselle, G. Thomas. "Reproductions and Scholarship." *Studies in Bibliography* 42 (1989): 26–55.

A thorough study detailing the problems arising from using surrogates in place of the original object. Although Tanselle's analysis is not recent enough to include the digital world, it lays the intellectual foundation for consideration of all "reproduction." His cautionary statements about the unreliability of photocopies and facsimiles apply even more broadly to the lack of "fixity" with digital surrogates. "The essential fact that one must come back to is that every reproduction is a new document, with characteristics of its own, and no artifact can be a substitute for another artifact."

Walker, R. Gay. "The Book as Object." *Abbey Newsletter* 11, no. 1 (January 1987): 4.

Winkler, Karen J. "In Electronic Age, Scholars Are Drawn to Study of Print." *Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 14, 1993): A6-A8.

This excellent overview of the emergence of the field of "book history" discusses many aspects of its scholarly purview, describes the work of several important scholars, and presents a basic bibliography.

### **For Further Study**

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 the "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**

British Library. "Publishers' Bookbindings." *Aspects of the Victorian Book*.  
[http://www.bl.uk/collections/early/victorian/bind\\_thu.html](http://www.bl.uk/collections/early/victorian/bind_thu.html)

A very good Web site at the British Library, detailing the design and production of publishers' bindings during the 19th century. It covers both binding styles and book production.

Foot, Mirjam M. *The History of Bookbinding as a Mirror of Society*. London: British Library, 1998. The 1997 Panizzi Lectures.

This is a good, concise introduction to the study of the relationship of bindings to culture by one of the most eloquent scholars of the field. Such aspects as style, design, cost, materials, and readership are discussed in relation to the "context" of publishing: "[The bindings'] condition can hint at whether they were meant for study or for show, as a source of knowledge or of aesthetic joy, as furniture or as treasured possessions to be displayed with pride, as a manifestation of personal vanity or a secret obsession."

Frost, Gary. "A Brief History of Western Bookbinding, Without One Mention of Decoration." *Abbey Newsletter* 2, no. 4 (February 1979): 39–43.

Perhaps the best short introduction to the history of book structures, giving explanations and

examples from the third to the 20th century. The discussion is helped immeasurably by Frost's clear illustrations.

"Hand Bookbindings from Special Collections in the Princeton University Library: Plain and Simple to Grand and Glorious." Princeton University Library, 2004.

[http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual\\_materials/hb/hb.html](http://libweb5.princeton.edu/visual_materials/hb/hb.html)

Very possibly the best Web site on the history of binding, this discusses the design and structure of bindings from the Middle Ages to the present. Good attention is paid to the relationship between book and audience.

"Publishers' Bindings Online, 1815–1930: The Art of Books." University of Alabama, 2005. <http://bindings.lib.ua.edu/index.html>

This significant collection of over 4,000 decorative bindings in the University of Alabama's and University of Wisconsin's collections provides images and essays that place the history of book-binding within a historical context. The project also provides an excellent list of resources, including a "Glossary of Publishers' Bindings-Related Terms" and a "Master Bibliography of Print and Online Resources."

"Victorian Bookbinding: Innovation and Extravagance, 1820–1910." University of North Texas, 2000. <http://www.library.unt.edu/rarebooks/exhibits/binding/default.htm>

Originally an exhibition in the Rare Book Room of the University of North Texas Libraries, this Web exhibition emphasizes the relationship between bookbinding inventions and design, including discussions of period aesthetics, aspects of publishing, and the intended audience.

### **For Further Study**

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, something 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

Cloonan, Michèle Valerie. "W(h)ither Preservation?" *Library Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (April 2001): 231–44.

Cloonan's article offers a refreshingly candid look at the current trends in preservation programs, which, because of the emerging problems of electronic formats, emphasize only technical aspects and solutions. "Preservation must be approached not only as a set of technical solutions to technical problems but also as a more complex concept that includes social dimensions." Cloonan thus establishes a wider "context" for preservation decisions and activities.

Nichols, Stephen G., and Abby Smith. *The Evidence in Hand: Report of the Task Force on the Artifact in Library Collections*. Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2001. Especially relevant are the "Case Studies," "Principles of Good Stewardship," "Best Practices for Preservation of the Artifact," and "Strategies for Specific Formats."

These sections offer practical applications based on the intellectual inquiries in the sections discussing the importance of context and artifactual value.

Stewart, Eleanor. "Special Collections Conservation." In *Preservation: Issues and Planning*, edited by Paul N. Banks and Roberta Pilette. Chicago: American Library Association, 2000, pp. 285–306.

Stewart discusses both the broad perspective of the intellectual preservation of the cultural artifact and the role of the conservator in making decisions and carrying out treatment plans. It is thus a good combination of the theoretical and the practical. "[The conservator and the curator] each has the obligation to ensure the object survives for as long as possible and with as little alteration as possible."

### For Further Study

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. 263–279.

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.