Where are they?

Online Resources from the Library of Congress

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The Library of Congress holds more than 126 million items in hundreds of languages and formats. Over 7 million digitized items from these holdings are available online for users worldwide. These can be found in three major areas within the Library's website.

AMERICAN MEMORY (memory.loc.gov) is an online archive of more than 120 collections important to America's heritage. The collections contain primary source documents, maps, photographs, films, and sound recordings that reflect the collective American memory. This virtual treasure trove of unique personal items (e.g., old records, letters with exquisite penmanship and arcane language, clothing, keepsakes, or sepia photographs) is a snapshot of America's past.

EXHIBITIONS (www.loc.gov/exhibits) are digital versions of exhibits physically on display at the Library. The exhibits vary in subject from American architecture, culture, politics, and historical events to international culture and history, with individual items especially selected as relevant to the exhibit's theme.

GLOBAL GATEWAYS (international.loc.gov/intdlhome.html) builds on the American Memory model by presenting multimedia collections in collaboration with international institutions. With the broad theme of common borders, these bilingual presentations offer maps, documents, photographs, and print materials of parallel exploration and settlement and the meeting of cultures in the Western Hemisphere.

The search process can be complicated. Thus, to aid in using this gold mine of Americana, there are numerous search tools—some obvious (Search the Library of Congress web pages, American Memory Search and Collection Finder) and others not so obvious (Learning Page, Today in History). All have value, depending on the needs, preferred method of searching, and time available.

The Library of Congress Website Search (www.loc.gov)

The homepage of the Library of Congress contains an open box in the upper right corner for searching web pages across the entire site. A search here will retrieve complementary information, but not individual items or bibliographic records within the Library's online databases. For example, a search on Pearl Harbor will retrieve a webcast on oral histories following the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, but will not retrieve all of the digital material about the subject. (For digital items, move to the American Memory Search mentioned below.)

For locating materials in Exhibitions or Global Gateways, go to the respective homepage and use the open search box to search web pages only within that site.

Search American Memory Collections: All Collections (memory.loc.gov/ammem/mdbquery.html)

This searches basic information (caption, date, author, notes, etc.) on most items in the collections. Use this for specific names or subjects (e.g., Benjamin Banneker or *Titanic*), but NOT for broad topics (e.g., Civil War) or famous people such as George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. Resist the temptation to try this first! For those new to American Memory, go directly to the Learning Page for search tools and tips. For those who must jump in immediately, use the Collection Finder (below) for manageable results.

Collection Finder, American Memory (memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/finder.html)

Here the collections are grouped in several ways. Select "List All Collections" to see an alphabetical list of all the collections. Select "Show descriptions" for details about each collection. Use the search box to search all collections or select a grouping and search only those collections within that group. To further narrow a search, use the box on the left of each collection title to uncheck those not relevant to the topic. This will make the search smaller and more specific, and the response time will be faster.

The Learning Page (www.loc.gov/learn)

The main page of the Learning Page has a search box in the upper right corner that searches the website for content of specific interest to educators, such as lesson plans.

Pathfinders on the Learning Page (memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/start/gs_src_path.html)

American Memory's search pages can yield hundreds (even thousands) of items—which can be both daunting and time consuming. Pathfinders group the collections into five basic categories: Events, People, Places, Time, and Topics. The Pathfinders make it easier to browse through the collections to get a quick sense and to narrow the number of collections pertinent to a specific subject.

In addition to the Pathfinders, every section of the Learning Page has helpful ideas and links into the collections. For example, try:
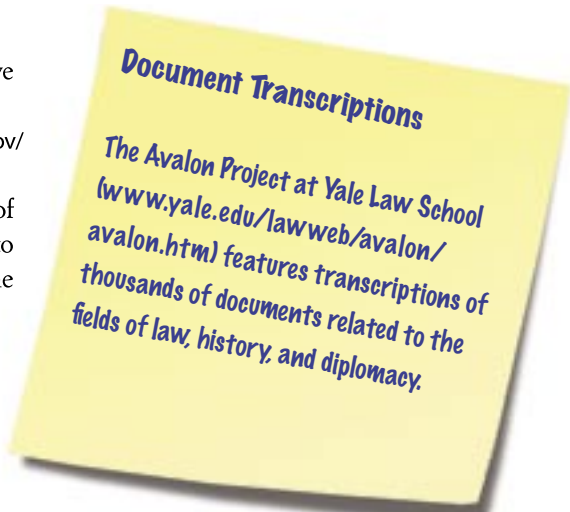
Quick Tips

In a hurry? Need a lesson or a few well-chosen resources?	1. Learning Page homepage for lessons, features, or activities 2. Today in History Archive for primary sources.
Checking for resources for an upcoming project?	1. Pathfinders for topics and collections 2. Learning Page homepage for lessons or activities 3. Collection Finder for collections and items 4. American Memory Search
Just browsing?	1. Collection Finder 2. Collection homepages and special presentations 3. Learning Page Collection Connections
Doing research?	1. Collection Finder 2. Collection Connections 3. Individual collection search tools and indexes

Ten Collections with easy-to-use search features:

African American Perspectives, 1818 – 1907	Keyword search; subject and author indexes
America from the Great Depression to World War II: Photographs from the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and Office of War Information (OWI) Collection, 1935-1945	Keyword search; subject, creator, and geographic indexes
Built in America: Historic American Building Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, 1933-Present	Keyword search; subject and geographic indexes
Inventing Entertainment: Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies	Keyword search; title and subject indexes. Descriptive notes for each film enhance retrieval.
Map Collections, 1500-2003	Divisions by subject, plus keyword search; geographic, subject, creator, and title indexes
Photographs from the Chicago Daily News, 1902-1933	Keyword search; subject and name indexes
Selected Civil War Photographs	Keyword search; subject index
The Stars and Stripes: The American Soldiers' Newspaper of World War I, 1918-1919	Keyword search; date and issue indexes
Touring Turn-of-the-Century America, 1880-1920	Keyword search; subject and geographic indexes
Voices From the Dust Bowl, 1940-1941	Keyword search; song text, audio title, photographs, and performer/interviewee indexes

- Features & Activities (memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/features)
Interactive presentations highlighting curricular themes with direct links to items in many collections.
- Collection Connections (memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/collections)
Presentations containing in-depth information about each collection and direct

links to items, plus keywords to retrieve additional similar items.
- Community Center (memory.loc.gov/learn/community)
Theme-centered presentations of Learning Page resources with links to primary sources throughout the Library's website.

Document Transcriptions

The Avalon Project at Yale Law School (www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/avalon.htm) features transcriptions of thousands of documents related to the fields of law, history, and diplomacy.

Today in History Archive (memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/archive.html)
The archive searches the 365 days of the Library's "Today in History" website. Use this for broad topics (e.g., Civil War) or for potentially out of scope topics (e.g., chemistry or ice cream). Each essay has primary sources from the Library's collections with direct links to more.

With so many resources and entry points to choose from, most educators want to know what works best with students. American Memory Fellows' lessons offer suggestions:

1. Introduce a research project with an activity that establishes the context and develops vocabulary for searching.

2. As part of the activity, brainstorm synonyms for searching; perhaps interview someone knowledgeable of the topic for vocabulary, names, or concepts. Remember—language in the collections reflects the timeframe of the collection (Search on "automobile" not "car" in America From the Great Depression to World War II.).

3. To introduce American Memory, plan an activity that uses only one collection. (Choose one of the easy-to-search collections mentioned in this article.) Remember, Selected Civil War Photographs contains more than 1100 images, and it's a small collection!

4. Build on this experience with a focused activity on a specific topic that allows research in more than one collection to gain familiarity with the characteristics of different media formats and timeframes.

One final thought: Be open to serendipity. These materials were collected by individuals who made personal choices in their selections. From a Civil War soldier's slipper pattern to a suffragette's rally ribbon, from the draft of the Declaration of Independence to the inaugurations of presidents, from images of hometowns to foreign lands, the Library's online primary source materials await discovery.

However, searches provide temporary lists. Like other web search engines, "bookmarks" will not save these lists. Note the collection name and identifying words that describe an item if you want to find it again. Instructions for finding the permanent URL to bookmark are on the Learning Page. 🔊

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