



Decoding Histories Inquiry Kit
Teacher Guide



Introduction

Decoding Histories engages K-12 educators and students in exploring the importance of reading and writing in cursive in order to understand written materials from the past. Through close examination of cursive writing, students develop literacy skills and critical thinking skills while uncovering stories embedded in primary sources.

The Georgia Historical Society is excited to offer this “Decoding Histories” Inquiry Kit. This inquiry-based resource includes activities designed to meet the Georgia Standards of Excellence for English Language Arts and Social Studies. Supporting the importance of reading and writing in cursive, this resource highlights how the use of archival materials deepens historical inquiry and strengthens literacy skills.

The contents of the Inquiry Kit are a series of Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) inquiry-based strategies and activities designed to help teachers guide students in reading and writing in cursive, exploring a curated set of primary and secondary sources.

Through the Inquiry Kit students connect with the past through direct interaction with primary sources. When students slow down to read cursive and explore authentic sources, they begin to see history not just as dates and facts, but as lived experiences of real people.

This kit includes lesson plans for elementary and secondary teachers to explore unique primary and secondary source sets, accompanied by relevant and engaging cursive writing practice worksheets. Also included is a digital crowdsourcing opportunity for teachers and students.



Why Cursive Matters

In a world where digital tools dominate, teaching cursive can feel old-fashioned. But it remains a powerful bridge to the past. Cursive is more than handwriting; it is a skill that builds confidence, strengthens the brain, and opens doors to historical understanding. Here is why it matters in today's classroom:

Fine Motor Skills and Cognitive Benefits

Learning cursive helps students develop fine motor skills by engaging different parts of the brain than print or typing. Research shows that students who write by hand, especially in cursive, often retain information better and think more critically.

- Bergland, Christopher. 2020. "Why Cursive Handwriting Is Good for Your Brain." *Psychology Today*. October 2, 2020. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/202010/why-cursive-handwriting-is-good-your-brain>.
- Ose Askvik, Eva, F. R. (Ruud) van der Weel, and Audrey L. H. van der Meer. 2020. "The Importance of Cursive Handwriting over Typewriting for Learning in the Classroom: A High-Density EEG Study of 12-Year-Old Children and Young Adults." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (11). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01810>.

Makes Historical Documents More Accessible

Much of history was written in cursive, from letters and journals to speeches to government records. Without the ability to read cursive, these sources remain locked away and disconnected from today's learner. Teaching students to decode cursive empowers them to access history firsthand.

- Heubeck, Elizabeth. 2023. "More States Require Schools to Teach Cursive Writing. Why?" *Education Week*, November 16, 2023, sec. Teaching & Learning, Curriculum. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/more-states-require-schools-to-teach-cursive-writing-why/2023/11>.
- Maloney, Wendi. 2019. "Crowdsourcing Helps to Unlock the Mystery of Cursive | Library of Congress Blog." Loc.gov. January 23, 2019. <https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2019/01/crowdsourcing-helps-to-unlock-the-mystery-of-cursive/>.

Supports Curriculum Standards

Cursive instruction supports the Georgia Standards of Excellence. It builds foundational writing and reading skills while deepening students' ability to engage with primary sources. By integrating cursive into social studies, educators meet academic goals while giving students a deeper and more meaningful learning experience.

- Legoas, Miguel. 2025. "Should Students Go back to Learning Cursive? Georgia Schools Say 'Yes.'" *Savannah Morning News*. June 25, 2025. <https://www.savannahnow.com/story/news/2025/06/25/georgia-department-of-education-brings-cursive-to-schools-2025-2026/84348437007/>.

The Importance of Primary Sources

Primary sources are the heart of historical inquiry. They bring students face-to-face with the voices, experiences, and decisions of the past. From handwritten letters to photographs, primary sources help students become investigators of history.

Authentic Connection to Past

Primary sources offer a direct line to the past. Instead of solely reading from a textbook, students interact with materials that were created by real people who lived through the events being studied. This makes history feel more relevant and personal.

Builds Critical Thinking Skills

Working with primary sources challenges students to think like historians. They must analyze, question, and interpret. Moving beyond memorization, students learn to weigh evidence, consider multiple perspectives, and develop their own informed conclusions.

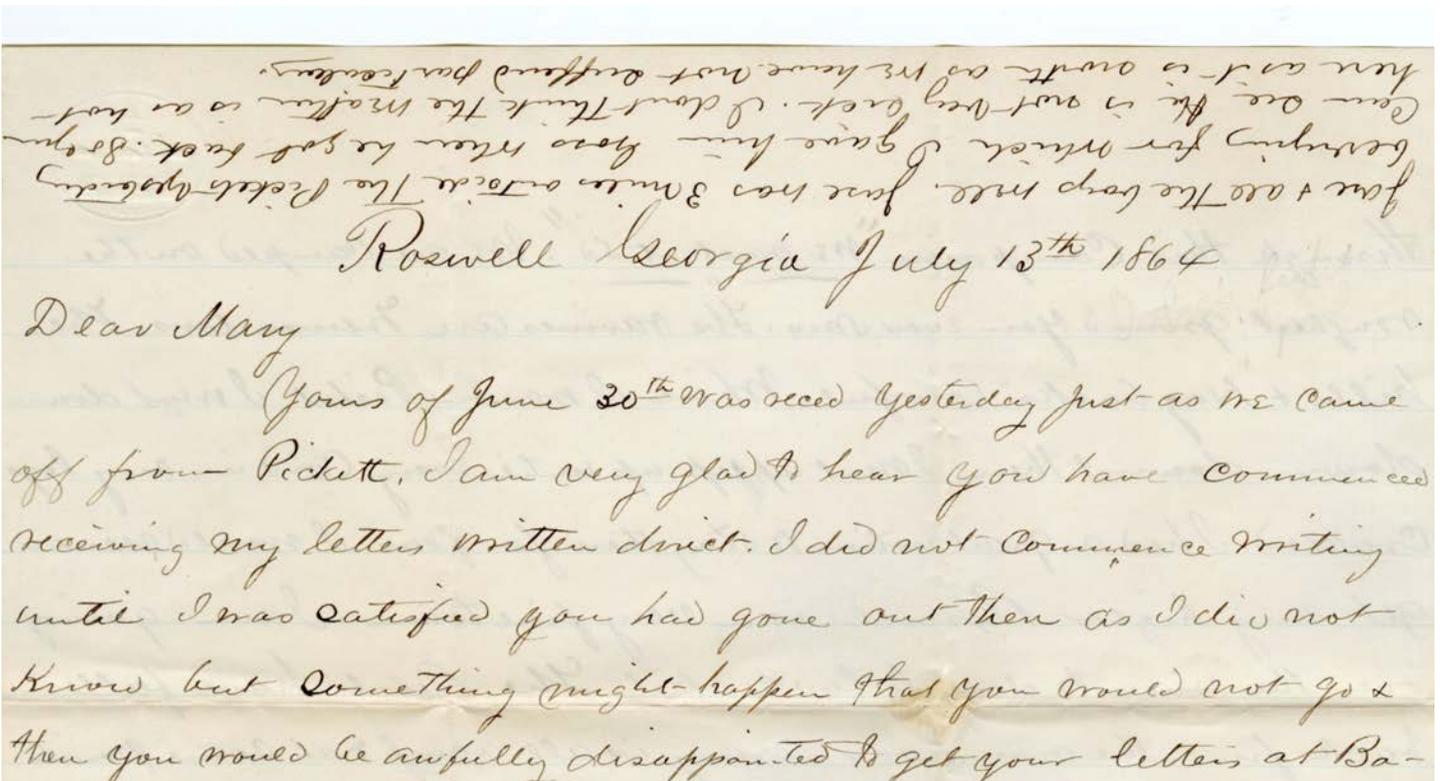
Encourages Active Engagement

Primary sources naturally spark curiosity. Students want to know what happened, why it matters, and how it connects to their world today. This kind of hands-on learning encourages discussion, collaboration, and inquiry. It empowers students to become active participants in their learning.

Teaching Cursive Through History

This section offers four ready-to-use lesson plans that blend cursive instruction with historical thinking. Designed to help students build handwriting skills while exploring the past, each lesson uses authentic documents and engaging activities to make history hands-on.

- Lesson 1 – [Write Like a Historian](#) (Grades 6-12)
 - Primary Source: [GHS 1703 - United States Constitution draft](#)
- Lesson 2 – [Letters Through Time](#) (Grades 6-12)
 - Primary Source: [GHS 2351 - Anne Mintz collection of Girl Scouts Troop 1 records](#)
- Lesson 3 – [Recipes Rediscovered](#) (Grade K-5)
 - Primary Source: [GHS 0361- Hardee family papers](#)
- Lesson 4 – [Transcribe Like an Archivist](#) (Grades K-5)
 - Primary Source: [GHS 2864 - Peyton Anderson papers](#)



Can see this is not very good. I don't think the matter is as bad
him and is over so we have not enough for reading.

four + see the copy here. You have 3 miles outside the Pickett's Agency
beginning for which I gave him - how near he got back. 80 yds

Roswell Georgia July 13th 1864

Dear Mary

Yours of June 30th was reced yesterday just as we came
off from Pickett. I am very glad to hear you have commenced
receiving my letters written direct. I did not commence writing
until I was satisfied you had gone out then as I did not
know but something might happen that you would not go &
then you would be awfully disappointed to get your letters at Ba-

Classroom Resources

Bring Decoding Histories to life with free downloadable resources designed to support cursive instruction and historical thinking in any classroom:

- [Decoding Histories Alphabet Chart](#)
- [Decoding Histories Alphabet Practice](#)
- [Decoding Histories A-Z Daily Cursive Handwriting Practice](#)

Join the Work: Digital Crowdsourcing

Invite your students to become historians in action. Through the Georgia Historical Society's [digital crowdsourcing platform](#), teachers and students can help make history more accessible by tagging historical photos and transcribing handwritten archival documents.

This platform gives students a chance to apply their cursive skills while contributing to real-world research. Whether working individually or as a class, participants help preserve Georgia's history and ensure more people can access these important stories.

Getting involved is simple. Check out our [digital crowdsourcing page](#) for more information and the step-by-step guide.

Title	Academy of Black Culture, Inc. records
Collection Number	GHS 1425
Record Type	collection
Record Level	Collection
Dates	1968-1971, undated
Repository	Georgia Historical Society
Creator	Academy of Black Culture, Inc.
Organizational History	The Academy of Black Culture, Inc., an 'incorporated non-profit neighborhood organization' grew in conjunction with the Savannah Model Cities Cultural Center. The Model Cities Program was one part of President Johnson's Great Society and War on Poverty campaign, initiated on November 3, 1966 under the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Act. Nationally, Model Cities ended in

[+ Suggest Changes](#)

