

Your Digital History

Introduction

- Most people have a digital "self" of some kind--whether it's created through a phone, tablet, computer, camera, or gaming system, any one of those devices is packed with traces of who you are and what you do. These traces can come from your social media presence and the content you add to them, apps or games you've downloaded, photos you've taken and shared, messages you've sent, and much more. These resources are primary sources much like the diaries and photos created decades ago that we study today, but for most people this information will not survive to be studied by students and historians.

Materials Needed

- Each student will need to select one device they use that creates or shares digital content. This can be a camera, phone, computer, tablet, gaming system, TV, or other electronic device.

Preparatory Work

- If desired, prime students for this activity using the Library of Congress activity titled, ["Lincoln's Pockets"](#), in which students examine a de-contextualized set of items that are revealed to be items that were in Abraham Lincoln's pockets on the night of his assassination.

Instructions

- Ask students to select one device in their life that creates or shares digital content. Divide them into small groups or pairs to discuss the following questions:
 - i. What the device?
 - ii. How do you use this item in your everyday life?
 - iii. Why did you pick this device?
 - iv. What story do the apps, images, saved game data, or other information on this device tell?
 - v. What should historians know about this item? Is this item significant in contributing to an understanding of the present day?
 - vi. Based on the digital content on the device only, what would a historian 100 years from now understand about your daily life and activities? What questions would they have?
 - vii. Based on the physical object only, how do you think a historian 100 years from now would guess that this item was used? What questions would they have?
 - viii. Do you think historians in 100 years will be able to understand the average person without knowing their digital activities? How might they understand your life without that information?