WebQuest: Digital Archives at the Harry Ransom Center

The Harry Ransom Center is among the nation’s finest research libraries and a place of unlimited discovery.

The collections assembled here document the work of some of our finest writers and artists and provide unprecedented access to the creative process while also helping us understand the historical moment out of which this work emerged.

In collecting and preserving this record, the Ransom Center is engaged in important cultural stewardship. We share these resources with students and teachers, with an intellectually curious public, and with scholars who come from across the nation and more than 25 countries to conduct research that simply could not be carried out anywhere else. Even as we support these present uses, we are mindful that we also hold these collections in trust for future generations who, for years to come, will visit here to advance this ongoing work.

from the Harry Ransom Center Director’s Note

Luckily for us, several of the incredible collections described in the Director’s Note quoted above have been digitized and published online for public perusal: welcome to the Harry Ransom Center Digital Archive! To continue our exploration of what, how, and why we archive, choose two of the collections available for digital viewing at the link above and check out what’s inside. Use the questions below to guide your investigation.

For each collection, answer the following questions on your own paper:

1. Of whom or what is this an archive?

2. How did the HRC acquire this collection? Who compiled it, and/or who was the previous owner?

3. What sorts of things are in this archive? Describe the contents — be specific and detailed.

4. What item(s) in this archive interest you the most? Why?

5. What might you and/or a researcher be able to learn by spending a lot of time digging around in this archive?

After you have thoroughly answered the questions above for two HRC digital archives, discuss the following in a short paragraph:

Archives are evidence of humanity’s desire to gather artifacts of our own lives, and the lives of those who have impacted us. Why do you think we are compelled to do this? Support your assertions by referencing the digital archives you’ve just explored, our class discussion on social media and other casual archiving processes, and your own prior knowledge.