

## A story of blended learning

### **A new generation of feminist scholars**

[www.trust.org/trustlaw/blogs/100-years-of-international-womens-day/a-new-generation-of-feminist-scholars/](http://www.trust.org/trustlaw/blogs/100-years-of-international-womens-day/a-new-generation-of-feminist-scholars/)

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I am the librarian at Bard High School Early College in Queens, New York, where my students speak 34 languages, from Albanian to Urdu to Tibetan. And I'm proud to say that these bright, culturally diverse students are learning about feminist history—some as early as 9th grade. I had to wait until graduate school to become a feminist scholar with the kind of research opportunities my youngest students have now.



My students read primary source documents about slaves and suffragettes on the Library of Congress website. They stream videos of labor activists through the Women's History Archives of Smith College. They find Eleanor Roosevelt's letters, and listen to Virginia Woolf's voice in a BBC recording—on YouTube! Multimedia archiving and the digitization of documents present exciting new opportunities for learning about women—famous and ordinary.

Sometimes, when I'm talking with students about the limitlessness of women's history resources, the opportunities for under-represented women to have their stories finally told, I'll find myself overcome with emotion. "Calm down, Miss," a student once said with a smile. "Don't hyperventilate."

But how can you not hyperventilate? My students, many of them first-generation Americans and the first in their families to attend college, are doing real research. They are doing the research that was previously restricted to scholars who possessed letters of introduction, invitations, and appointments. My students and I have none of these things. We are in a public school during a recession. And yet, we are true researchers.

In the morning, students knock on the library door, begging to be let in. "We open in five minutes!" I call. I savor the first five minutes of the day alone with my coffee cup and my own research. Currently, I am researching Berenice Abbott, the WPA photographer known for her "Changing New York" photographs of the city. Her work is among 700,000 archived materials in New York Public Library's Digital Gallery.

You don't have to live in New York or own a library card to access the Gallery. Like Google Books—which also digitizes historical books—the Gallery is available to anyone with an internet connection. All you need is five quiet minutes in the morning with your coffee cup—or four, depending on the day.

Today I will only have four minutes. Students are rapping on the door, pounding harder. They want in, and come barreling through.

“Morning, Miss!” “What new books do you have?” “Can I use a laptop?” “Can I borrow headphones?” “How do I embed video in PowerPoint?” “Where are the Shakespeare plays?”

After a few frenzied minutes, everyone settles into different sun-drenched corners. Our school is housed in a former factory that once produced Chiclet gum and cameras. Sun pours through huge windows, bouncing off the concrete pillars. In the distance, an elevated train groans and rattles.

I circle the room, peeking over the students' shoulders. One student is reading Emily Dickinson's poems. For an English project, she must research what Dickinson would have eaten for dinner, and create an historically accurate dinner menu. In minutes, we access New York Public Library's Digital Gallery and find a 19th century menu from a restaurant in Boston (close enough to Amherst, Mass, where Dickinson lived). Another student raises his hand. He needs help adjusting the volume on his computer so he can listen to interviews with former slaves on PBS's website.

After borrowing the student's headphones and listening to the crackly song of a woman who must be 100 years old, I exclaim, “Amazing!” The study of women's history has never been so alive. We are the luckiest feminist scholars of any generation.

*Don't hyperventilate, Miss.*

