

The Award Winning

**Jimmy Carter Library & Museum**

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

## **Curriculum Guide: The President's Travels**



Unit 13 of 19:

### **Our Documents**

441 Freedom Parkway, Atlanta, GA, 30312 | 404-865-7100 | [www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov](http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov)



This exhibit at the Carter Library and Museum allows visitors to see the stacks, our repository of approximately 27 million pages of President Carter's White House materials, ½ million photographs, and hundreds of hours of film, audio, and videotape.

# Our Documents

**Our facility is unique, in part, thanks to the abundance of original documents on display.**

Many exhibits include a document or documents that explain a particular facet of the event or time period being described.

While some students will have trouble reading or comprehending the specialized jargon of some documents, others will be fascinated to see the “real thing.” Remember that photographs are primary source documents; even the youngest students can access these documents. The activities on the following pages are designed to help students learn more about the documents they see at the museum.



## GPS:

**Information Processing Skill #6:**  
Identify and use primary and secondary sources.

**Information Processing Skill #8:**  
Identify social studies reference resources to use for a specific purpose.

## Are Presidential papers more interesting than anyone else's?

The Presidential Records Act of 1978 established that the Archivist of the United States would gain control over presidential records once presidents leave office. Nearly everything that presidents record is saved. For examples, look at President Carter's handwritten notes from Camp David, or Mrs. Carter's handwritten calendar located near the **Day in the Life** exhibit.

For students, this makes for an interesting discussion, as modern Americans throw away (or recycle) many pieces of paper every week. As "ordinary" Americans, what do we choose to save? Do we save calendars, to-do lists, and other daily information? Or do we only keep those pieces of paper that are legally or sentimentally significant?

Further, how have computers changed this for us? While our grandparents might have saved all of their letters, few modern Americans keep copies of all of their email correspondence. What does this mean for future generations? Is electronic communication going to hinder future research? Finally, how has electronic storage and transfer changed our **access** to information, since more people have access to records, and it is not as necessary to



## The Importance of the Presidential Libraries

Until President Franklin Delano Roosevelt donated his Presidential Papers to the Federal Government, no organized system existed to preserve presidential records. In fact, until the Presidential Records Act of 1978, the President's papers were considered his personal property! As a result, many records dating prior to FDR have been lost, or donated to a wide variety of institutions.

Modern presidents have established Presidential Libraries to provide public access to presidential records, and to preserve their presidential legacies for future generations.



## The Daily Diary

President Carter transcribed an annotated version of his daily schedule each day of his presidency. The Carter Library has made these daily records available [online](#), and they provide fascinating insight into the daily happenings at the White House.

In addition, the Day in the Life exhibit allows visitors to experience the wide variety of events in an "average" day at the Carter White House. It gives visitors a real sense of the speed with which the President must be willing to change direction and mindset.



## Choose a document.

While visiting the Carter Museum, have students select one document that is displayed. They should answer the following questions, and be ready to discuss their answers after returning to school. If teachers prefer, the entire class can study a selected document or group of documents, and compare their answers.

Who created this document?

**1.** What was the purpose of the document when it was created?

Who would be most likely to use this document today? How would they use it – for what

**2.**

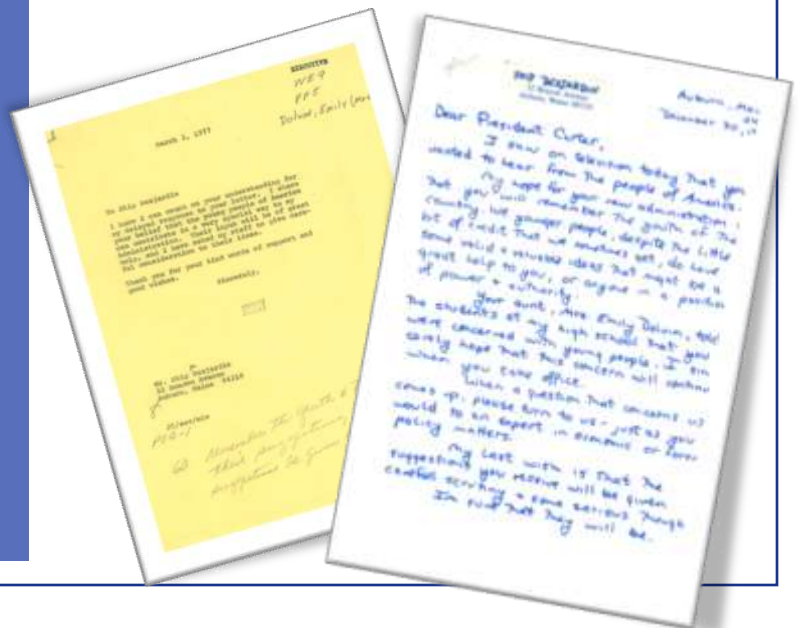
Will this document be useful in the future? How would you expect it to be used? By whom?

**3.**

{Younger students can complete this activity by using a photograph, and discussing the questions with a teacher or chaperone.}

## How do we use documents?

- After visiting the Museum, have students brainstorm a list of the types of documents they saw in the exhibits. Then, in a separate column, have students generate a list of types of documents that they create or see created – photographs, calendars, letters, report cards, newspapers, etc.
- Discuss which documents are found on both lists. What types of documents do students create (or see created) that are similar to documents created by Presidents?
- As an extension, students can keep a running list of documents created in the classroom over the course of one week. How many of these documents are similar to the documents created by Presidents?



## Interacting with the Carter Library's Documents

When students visit the Carter Museum, they can view the Library's stacks through the window behind the Day in the Life multimedia exhibit. Only a portion of the Library's 27 million documents is visible in their archival boxes.

In front of the window are three interactive stations, where students can identify specific Library documents that will aid researchers completing projects about three different topics: U.S. relations with China, the Iran hostage crisis, and Carter's energy policy.

If possible, students should work through these stations with a group of fellow students so that they can discuss the different document options presented, and decide which documents are most likely to answer the presented questions.

Teachers can connect this experience to classroom work by asking students to predict what sort of document might be useful to help answer a given question about Carter's presidency. Students can also use the Library's website to find certain documents that have been scanned by Library staff: <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/>. (Note that **many** document collections are not available online, and that some document collections still contain classified information.)



This image, from the Carter Library's holdings, shows President and Mrs. Carter with their daughter Amy on the White House's South Lawn in 1977.



## The Document Drawers

Younger students will enjoy "pulling" boxes of documents from the wall facing the window showing the stacks. Each of these drawers contains a document from the Carter Presidential Library's holdings.

In particular, students might like to see the plans drawn by President Carter for his daughter Amy's tree house. They may also be intrigued by the "top secret" classified document authorizing support of Afghan fighters working to overthrow the Soviet occupation.

## An easy-to-create graphic organizer:

Have students trace their hands on a blank sheet of paper. Then, have them label each finger with one of the following – who, what, when, where, and why. On the palm, they can include ‘how.’ Students should select a document, and use this organizer to analyze it quickly. Teachers can have these organizers prepared for students to use while visiting the Museum, or provide copies of documents to students to use after returning to school.



## Helpful Links:

-President Carter’s Daily Diary:

<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/diary/>.

-Documents available from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library:

<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/>.

-Document analysis worksheets from the National Archives and Records Administration: <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/>.



## Varying Opinions

Not every document will include a flattering portrayal of the president. When analyzing a document, it is important to recognize the perspective and point of view of the person or organization that created the document.

When researching an issue or event, it is important to consider multiple perspectives, particularly for answering subjective research questions.

Finally, students should remember that time can play an important role in changing opinions – the view 20 or 200 years after an event is quite different from a contemporary view.