

**“It’s News to Me!”  
Teaching with Colorado’s Historic Newspaper Collection  
Model Lesson Format**

**Lesson Title:**

Spelling Bee: A Cultural Mirror

**Subject(s) and Grade Level(s):**

American History or Language Arts, Grades 4-12

**Focus of Lesson:** A brief explanation of what students are to learn in this lesson (content and/or skills). What is the purpose of the lesson?

In this lesson, students will explore the rich history of the spelling bee in Colorado and the nation through [Colorado’s Historic Newspaper Collection](#) and other primary sources related to the topic. In particular, they will investigate the ways in which newspaper accounts of spelling bees mirror the cultural values of their time. Throughout the lesson, students will develop their skills in searching historic databases, retrieving primary source information, and asking critical questions of the content.

**Standards Assessed:** Which standards will you be assessing in this lesson? Identify the content area, the standard number and any key components or benchmarks that are applicable.

**Information Literacy Standard 2:** The information literate student evaluates information critically and competently.  
**History Standard 2:** Students know how to use the processes and resources of historical inquiry.  
**History Standard 2.1:** Students know how to formulate questions and hypotheses regarding what happened in the past and to obtain and analyze historical data to answer questions and test hypotheses.  
**History Standard 2.2:** Students know how to interpret and evaluate primary and secondary sources of historical information.  
**Reading and Writing Standard 4:** Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.

**Assessment:** Explain the assessment. (Include the formal 'assessment assignment' and any forms, worksheets, etc. in the Materials Section)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Students will analyze five articles on the topic of spelling bees from <a href="#">Colorado's Historic Newspaper Collection</a>.</li><li>2. After reading two articles about a 1908 national spelling bee won by an African-American girl in Cleveland, Ohio, students will write a letter to the editor of a historic newspaper using the style and vocabulary of the time and expressing an opinion about the accuracy or bias of one of the original articles.</li></ol> |  |
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**Standards Addressed:** Which standards will you be addressing (but not assessing) in this lesson? Identify the content area, the standard number and any key components or benchmarks that are applicable.

**Information Literacy Standard 1:** The information literate student accesses information efficiently and effectively.

**Information Literacy Standard 7:** The information literate student contributes positively to the learning community and to society and recognizes the importance of information to a democratic society.

**History Benchmark 2.3:** Students apply knowledge of the past to analyze present-day issues and events from multiple, historically objective perspectives.

**History Standard 3:** Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time.

**Reading and Writing Standard 1:** Students read and understand a variety of materials.

**Reading and Writing Standard 6:** Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

**Time:** The number of class periods required for the lesson as well as the length of class period.

Total 4 class periods of ~45 minutes each.

**Materials / Teacher Preparation Section:** List the technology, handouts, chart paper, text resources, etc. needed to complete the lesson. Include what you need to do to prepare ahead of time for your students to complete the lesson.

**Lesson planning document:**

[Teacher Lesson Plan Guide](#), introductory information, suggested daily plans, questions for use with historic newspaper articles, suggestions for further inquiry.

**Technology needed:**

Computers with Internet access for students to work in pairs, networked printer, technology support for functions in [Colorado's Historic Newspaper Collection](#).

**Handouts:**

[Student Lesson Guide](#) with introduction, links, guiding questions, search instructions, daily schedule.

[Historic Letter to the Editor Rubric](#)

**Text resources:**

Optional secondary sources on the history of public education in America.

**Possible Procedures:** Enumerate the procedure teachers can follow to teach the lesson to students. Provide the URL for the digital primary sources that you will use.

**Class 1:**

Introduction to Keyword Searching and Article Analysis

Introduction to Colorado's Historic Newspaper Collection. Students will learn to search by keyword, display newspaper articles, scan for basic content, record unfamiliar vocabulary, and perform basic analyses of five articles.

**Class 2:**

Advanced Analysis and Questioning Techniques

Select one article from the 1908 Cleveland spelling bee for whole-class analysis (vocabulary, evidence of bias, purpose, inferences regarding social or cultural climate). Generate follow-up questions for historical research.

**Class 3:**

Following Historical Leads

Based on questions about the Cleveland Journal article in Colorado's Historic Newspaper Collection, read and discuss two follow-up articles from the Cleveland Journal in *The African-American Experience in Ohio, 1850-1920*, a collection accessible through the American Memory gateway of the Library of Congress. (See Teacher Lesson Plan Guide for specific instructions.) Discuss how a spelling bee, however simple a cultural activity it may have been, mirrored the social and political climate of 1908.

**Class 4:**

Assessment of Learning

Write a letter to the editor of the Cleveland Journal using the style and vocabulary of 1908, targeting specific points made in one of the articles studied, and taking a stance for or against the ideas of the writer.

Potential Learning Resources:

Colorado's Historic Newspaper Collection

Collaborative Digitization Program

Search All Collections of the Collaborative Digitization Program

Denver Newspaper Agency Newspaper in Education Program

Scripps National Spelling Bee

The African-American Experience in Ohio, 1850-1920

American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940

Created by Mary Johnson, Media Specialist, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

# Historic Newspaper Document Analysis

Student Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

1. Fill in the basic document information below.

Title or headline of document	
Date of newspaper	
Name of newspaper	
Location of newspaper	
Name of author (or N/A)	

2. In the table below, identify the elements of a good news article in your document.

Who	What
When	Where
Why	How

3. In the table below, write 1-4 vocabulary words with which you are unfamiliar either in meaning or in historical usage. Write what you *think* they mean in your document.


4. Short Answer. Based on your document, what can you infer about the social or political climate of the time? Do you detect any specific viewpoint or bias?

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5. Based on your document, write two questions with potential for follow-up research.

a. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

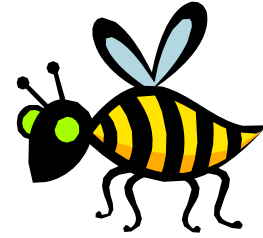
**Historic Letter to the Editor Rubric  
Spelling Bee: A Cultural Mirror**



	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Basic</b>
<b>Analyzing Perspectives</b>	Consistently identifies and takes a stance on points of agreement or disagreement with article.	Identifies but does not take a clear stance on points of agreement or disagreement with article. Lacks conviction.	Ignores or makes up points of agreement or disagreement with article. No clear stance.
<b>Connection to Newspaper Article</b>	Writing is supported by evidence or quotes from article.	Writing is inconsistently supported with evidence or quotes from article.	Writing is unrelated to article; opinions are unsupported.
<b>Historical Accuracy</b>	Multiple examples of phrasing and vocabulary consistent with time period.	Some evidence of historically accurate phrasing and vocabulary from the time period.	Little or no use of phrasing or vocabulary from the time period.
<b>Conventions</b>	Correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.	Mostly correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.	Grammar, spelling, and punctuation need extensive work.
<b>Historical Newspaper Document Analysis</b>	All five analyses carefully and thoughtfully completed. Questions (#5) require high levels of critical thinking.	Five analyses mostly completed; some items missing. Some questions (#5) lack high levels of critical thinking.	Lack of effort evident in analyses; missing major portions. Questions (#5) missing or basic yes/no or one-answer questions.

# Student Lesson Guide

## Spelling Bee: A Cultural Mirror



### INTRODUCTION

Nearly every elementary and middle school in Colorado holds a spelling bee each year and sends its winners on to a regional competition. Regional winners go on to Denver for the [Colorado State Spelling Bee](#), sponsored by the [Rocky Mountain News](#). They compete for the honor of traveling to Washington, D.C. to join top spellers from across the nation in the [Scripps National Spelling Bee](#). The winner of the national bee becomes an instant celebrity, appearing on national talk shows and news broadcasts and winning scholarships and other prizes.

Colorado schools have held spelling bees for well over a hundred years. In an article in the *Greeley Tribune* from March 31, 1892, students at the “Normal” school (now the University of Northern Colorado) took part in “an old-fashioned spelling bee.” What can Colorado’s Historic Newspaper Collection tell us about something that was already “old-fashioned” in 1892? What can historic newspaper accounts teach us about spelling bees as newsworthy local and even national events? In what ways did spelling bees mirror the social and political issues of their time?

### LESSON OUTLINE

This lesson will require four days of computer use, small group work and discussion, and writing:

Class 1- Introduction to Keyword Searching and Article Analysis

Class 2- Advanced Analysis and Questioning Techniques

Class 3- Following Historical Leads

Class 4- Assessment of Learning

By the end of this lesson, you will know how to do a keyword search in [Colorado’s Historic Newspaper Collection](#) (CHNC), navigate the database, analyze historic newspaper articles, ask high-level questions to guide further primary source research, and take a stance on issues of importance to Americans one hundred years ago as reported in the newspapers of the period.

### STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS

Class 1- Introduction to Keyword Searching and Article Analysis. Location: Computer Lab.

1. Your teacher or library media specialist will demonstrate a simple keyword search and basic navigation tools of [Colorado’s Historic Newspaper Collection](#).
2. Your teacher will explain how to use the [Historic Newspaper Document Analysis](#) handout to record information about the newspaper, identify the elements of a

- good news article, record unfamiliar vocabulary, make inferences about the social or political climate of the time, and generate questions for further research.
3. With a partner, you will log on and repeat the demonstrated “spelling bee” keyword search of [all](#) publications in the collection. Browse the list of results, and select five articles to analyze using the [Historic Newspaper Document Analysis](#) handout. One partner will navigate the database, and the other will record the analysis on the handout. Trade places with your partner each time you begin the analysis of a new article.
  4. There will be time built into Class 2 to complete the five article analyses.

#### Class 2- Advanced Analysis and Questioning Techniques

1. After a review of Class 1, the entire class will read and discuss a 1908 article that includes a report of a national spelling bee (“Educators at Cleveland,” *Fairplay Flume*, Fairplay, Park County, July 3, 1908).
2. The class will discuss features of questions that lead to higher-level, quality research. Look at the questions that you and your partner wrote based on the previous day’s article analyses. Are your questions silly and simplistic? Are they truly researchable? Do they seek to extend knowledge? Do they suggest lines of inquiry from both primary and secondary sources? How could they be improved?
3. After discussing quality questions, the class will generate potential questions for further historical research based on the 1908 *Cleveland Journal* article.
4. Use the remainder of the class period to finish the previous day’s analysis handouts and to improve research questions (#5 on handout). If you finish early, continue to explore the navigation tools or do additional keyword searches.

#### Class 3- Following Historical Leads

1. As a class, select one of the best student questions about the 1908 Cleveland spelling bee for extended historical research.
2. Log on to the [American Memory](#) collection called [The African-American Experience in Ohio, 1850-1920](#). Select “Search by Keyword,” enter Marie Bolden in the Search Descriptive Information box, select the drop-down “Match all of these words,” and click on “Search.”
3. Read the following two articles from the *Cleveland Journal*:
  - [Marie C. Bolden, Champion Speller](#)
  - [They Were Contaminated](#)
4. Referring to the [handout of basic analysis techniques](#), analyze the two articles orally with your partner. Focus especially on higher-level inferences about the social and political climate of 1908.
5. In preparation for tomorrow’s activity, think about how you as a 1908 reader would react to the two articles.

#### Class 4- Assessment of Learning

1. With your partner, complete and turn in all five “[Historic Newspaper Document Analysis](#)” handouts.
2. Individually, write a draft of a letter to the editor of the *Cleveland Journal* reacting to one of the articles from yesterday’s discussion. Use the style and vocabulary of the time. Identify and respond to specific points made in the article. Take a stance for or against the ideas of the writer, and react to the accuracy or bias of the article.
3. Before and also during the writing of your letter, refer to the rubric for your “[Historic Letter to the Editor.](#)”
4. Proofread and compare your draft to the rubric.
5. Due Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Teacher Lesson Plan Guide

## Spelling Bee: A Cultural Mirror



### INTRODUCTION

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Colorado schools have held spelling bees for well over a hundred years. In an article in the *Greeley Tribune* from March 31, 1892, students at the “Normal” school (now the University of Northern Colorado) took part in “an old-fashioned spelling bee.” What can Colorado’s Historic Newspaper Collection tell us about something that was already “old-fashioned” in 1892? What can historic newspaper accounts teach us about spelling bees as newsworthy local and even national events? In what ways did spelling bees mirror the social and political issues of their time?

### DAILY PLANS AND PROCEDURES

Class 1- Introduction to Keyword Searching and Article Analysis

1. Introduce students to [Colorado’s Historic Newspaper Collection](#). Briefly explain the program based on the following information from the CHNC Web site:

Colorado's Historic Newspaper Collection (CHNC) contains historic newspapers that have been digitized and made accessible via the Internet. The collection currently includes 86 newspapers published in Colorado from 1859 to 1928. Newspapers come from 46 cities and 34 counties throughout the state, and they were published in English, German, Spanish, or Swedish. CHNC contains over 291,000 digitized pages from these newspapers, and new material is added once a month. CHNC uses Olive Software's ActivePaper™ Platform, which was designed specifically for providing access to digitized newspapers. CHNC is a joint endeavor of the Colorado State Library, the Colorado Historical Society, and the Collaborative Digitization Program (CDP).

2. Demonstrate how to search CHNC by keyword. For details about searching by keyword as well as other search hints, go to the [CHNC Homepage](#) and click on the “Quick Guide to Using CHNC” link . You don’t have to be an expert in searching CHNC, but it is helpful to read the Help screens in case students ask specific search questions. Your school librarian also has expertise in searching online databases, so you should always consider a classroom/library collaboration

when working with CHNC.

3. Demonstrate a simple keyword search of All Publications. To begin the demonstration, go to [Colorado's Historic Newspaper Collection](#), click on "Search Colorado's Historic Newspaper Collection," and select the correct connection speed if that choice appears. If a message appears that "your web browser environment is not fully supported," you will still be able to perform keyword searches. Click on "Click here to enter Colorado's Historic Newspaper Collection."
4. Choose the tab "Search All." Enter "spelling bee" in quotation marks for a phrase search, and click "Go" to search the default newspaper, the *Akron Weekly Pioneer Press*. How many articles are displayed? What are their dates? Can students make any other quick observations about the Results list?
5. Go back to the "Search All" tab. Keep the "spelling bee" search, but this time select the box for "Search All Publications in the Collection." Click "Go." How many articles are displayed? Continue to scan and make observations about the results list.
6. Display one short newspaper article. Note the underlined keywords. Demonstrate the various functions of the drop-down menus.
7. Show students the basic article analysis handout, which they will use as a form to summarize content, record unfamiliar vocabulary, and record information about the newspaper.
8. At the end of the introduction, pairs of students will log on and repeat the "spelling bee" keyword search of all publications in the collection. They will select five articles to analyze using the article analysis handout.

## Class 2- Advanced Analysis and Questioning Techniques

1. Review the previous day's learning. What did students learn about historic newspaper articles? Did anything strike them as humorous? Different from today? Difficult to understand? What inferences can they make about spelling bees as a reflection of cultural values and expectations?
2. Select a 1908 article ("Educators at Cleveland," *Fairplay Flume*, Fairplay, Park County, July 3, 1908) for a more advanced whole-class analysis. After repeating the basic analysis from the first class, lead a discussion of higher-level questions based on the third and fourth paragraphs (spelling bee) and the sixth paragraph (Indian school exhibit).
  - Can you describe how the spelling bee was set up? How did it differ from today's "spelledown" approach? Is it possible to have two winners today?
  - Why do you think the writer added the term "colored" after the name of

Marie Bolden?

- Why do you think Marie Bolden received “repeated cheers from all parts of the big theater?”
  - According to the sixth paragraph, what was the purpose of featuring an exhibition from an Indian school?
  - What particular words show evidence of bias by today’s standards?
  - What inferences can you make regarding the social or cultural climate of America in 1908?
  - What follow-up questions might lead to more in-depth historical research?
3. Ask students to write their own follow-up questions based on either the spelling bee story or the Indian exhibition story. Ask them to work in small groups to discuss what makes a strong historical question. Which written questions would lead to further worthwhile research, and which ones would not? Why?

[Note: Students might need help generating strong follow-up questions based on primary sources. Explain that the quality of historical research always depends upon the quality of the questions. Are their questions silly and simplistic? Are they truly researchable? Do they seek to extend knowledge? Do they suggest lines of inquiry from both primary and secondary sources?]

### Class 3- Following Historical Leads

1. Select one of the best student questions about the 1908 Cleveland spelling bee for extended historical research. Have students log on to the [American Memory](#) collection called [The African-American Experience in Ohio, 1850-1920](#) to extend their searches for Marie Bolden. Note that American Memory does not handle phrase searches in quotation marks. Simply enter Marie Bolden in the search box, and select the drop-down “Match all of these words.” This will find Marie Bolden as well as Marie C. Bolden.
2. Ask students to read the following two articles from the *Cleveland Journal*:
  - [Marie C. Bolden, Champion Speller](#)
  - [They Were Contaminated](#)
3. Again, ask students to complete a basic analysis of each article, but this time, ask them to do it orally with their partners. Encourage students to move to higher-level questions about the social and political climate of 1908. How would students react if these articles were published today?

### Class 4- Assessment of Learning

1. Complete all five “[Historic Newspaper Document Analysis](#)” handouts.
2. Write a letter to the editor of the *Cleveland Journal* reacting to one of the articles from yesterday’s discussion. Use the style and vocabulary of the time. Identify

- and respond to specific points made in the article. Take a stance for or against the ideas of the writer, and react to the accuracy or bias of the article.
3. Students will be assessed according to a "[Historic Letter to the Editor](#)" rubric.

### Suggestions for Further Inquiry Learning

1. Students may extend their research by generating questions based on the following sentence from the original article: "Real war dances are given, the object being to show a contrast between savagery and what might be accomplished under comprehensive governmental supervision of the education of Indian children."
2. Instead of writing a letter to the editor of a historic newspaper from a 1908 perspective, students may write a letter from today's perspective after doing research into civil rights, racism, and school segregation. This approach emphasizes History Standard 3: Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time.
3. Younger students may stage an "old-fashioned spelling bee" after researching turn-of-the-century education, clothing, and school buildings through historic newspaper articles as well as photographs. Spelling words from their historic newspaper readings would be included in the bee.
4. During the period of the school's spelling bee, show the documentary "Spellbound." In addition to research about spelling bees through primary sources, students may look at spelling bees today through current sites of sponsoring newspapers as well as the Scripps National Spelling Bee Web site. How have the competition and its participants changed over time?