As a class, go to the American Heritage Center’s website at http://www.uwyo.edu/ahc/

Take a look at the description of the AHC you see there.

Some questions to consider:

- **What is a “repository”?**
  - Answer: A repository is a location for storage, many times for safety and preservation. An “archival repository” like the American Heritage Center is a place where “archives” are stored and preserved.

- **What are archives?**
  - Answer: Letters (well, now emails), photos, diaries, and other materials accumulate over the life of an individual, or even an organization. Archives are those materials that have been selected (by an archivist!) for permanent or long-term preservation because they are of enduring value.
Where might archives be in my own life?
- Family photos, letters your relatives or their friends wrote to each other, professional papers of your parents, a diary kept by your great-grandfather, an oral history you might do with one of your relatives. These are some examples you might have in your own family.

Now, look on the left side of the web page and click on “Research Services.” On the left, click on “How to Use the Archive.”

If you like, you can spend some time on the “How to Use an Archive” page exploring the types of collections held at the AHC. Otherwise, click on “Digital Collections.”

So, what’s a “collection”?
Remember the papers we referred to that are in your family? Say your family wants to donate those materials to an archival repository like the American Heritage Center. If those materials are right for the AHC and we acquire them, that set of material becomes an archival collection that will most likely be named for your family and kept together as one group. The Melville Family papers, for example. If the papers
belonged to an organization, it could be something like The Buy and Large Corporation records.

In order to focus the students’ search, have the students look through the pre-defined list of collections. From there, provide a list of specific collections to review (suggested list below). If you see a collection in that list that fits a topic you’re teaching, have all the students click on that one.

Here are some collections in that list that are more manageable by middle and high school students:

- Charles J. Belden Collection (photos of western ranch life)
- John Stephen and Frances Jennings Casement Papers (building the Transcontinental Railroad)
- Nellie Tayloe Ross (Wyoming governor and first female governor in the U.S.)
• Richard Throssel Photographs (photographer of the Crow Indians in the early 1900s)

Clicking on the collection’s title will bring up the “inventory” to that collection.

What is an inventory? The inventory lists the contents of the collection, box by box—it’s a lot like a table of contents.

Collection inventories will show students how primary source materials are typically arranged within the boxes that make up the collection. Items in the inventory that are highlighted in blue are available online—students can click directly on a link in the inventory to see the folder or item that has been digitized.
Each student or student group can answer a specific question about a collection of your choosing or a collection the student(s) has chosen. See examples of potential activities below:

**Sample Activities**


- In the inventory John Stephen and Frances Jennings Casement papers, see if you can find where it states John’s type of employment. What is it? Next, in the inventory, click “January – March 1869” and look for a letter from John to his wife Frances dated February 8, 1869. What does John have to say about the Union Pacific Railroad? (there’s a transcription on the left side of the web page if you can’t read the writing).
• Who was Nellie Tayloe Ross and why is she an important figure in U.S. politics? Look at the inventory to her papers and click on “Governorship for Nellie Tayloe Ross.” Find a letter from the year 1924 with the identifying number of ah00948_000945. Who wrote this letter to Nellie Tayloe Ross? What is the letter about? What county is the writer referring to?

• Look at the entry for the Richard Throssel photographs. What Native American tribe did he photograph and when? Look at ten of Throssel’s photographs. Do you think his depiction of the Crow people is realistic or romanticized? Explain.

Please contact American Heritage Center archivist Leslie Waggener if you have any questions about the assignment or if you have suggestions. lwaggen2@uwyo.edu or 307-766-2557.