

# Hacking Hemingway: Cracking the Code to the Vault, a Co-Laboratory

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## Abstract

Who owns Hemingway? The commodification of this literary icon is questioned by a new initiative that asks teens to re-vision Ernest Hemingway as represented by his sister, mother, school friends, and young self. Partnering with the Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park, with whom the library shares unique stewardship of the Hemingway Archives, Oak Park Public Library has begun a participatory digitization initiative that includes the Illinois State Library and its Illinois Digital Archive, and Oak Park School District 97 to position teens as digital curators. After months of negotiations, never-before-digitized Hemingway artifacts will be situated within local contexts by teens in Hemingway's hometown; challenging lines of traditional scholarship. The Hemingway Archives have been housed in the library's museum-grade vaults over a decade, limiting access to the humanities scholarly community; until now. The project focuses on Hemingway's Oak Park: birth-young adulthood (1899-c.1919) with an emphasis on everyday experience; ending with his return after World War I.

**Keywords:** Hemingway, Digital, Youth, Participatory, Literacies, Archives, History

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## 1 Introduction

Surveying existing digital Hemingway collections, those from the Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park (EHFOP) are notably absent; not even appearing in online bibliographies. The online exhibits currently available of Hemingway's childhood (e.g., National Portrait Gallery) are fragmented and incomplete. The premier companion Hemingway Collection within the J.F. Kennedy Presidential Library, while including Ernest Hemingway's childhood, does not mention his "twin" sister Marcelline's artifacts and individual childhood items (some listed below). The EHFOP's Marcelline Sanford Hemingway Collection richly compliments and extends existing open-access collections. Using digital humanities research tool Voyant to visualize metadata of the J.F. Kennedy Hemingway Collection for the Hemingway childhood collection artifacts, we see where there are gaps, even by this premier corpus. Key is the neglected voice of the diverse, lived experience of Oak Park youth and their perspectives on Hemingway's Oak Park of just over 100 years ago. In Oak Park Public Library's (library) "Hacking Hemingway: Cracking the Code to the Vault" project, funded by the Illinois Secretary of State's Office with the Illinois State Library (ISL), we collectively ask: "What insights might 21st Century Oak Park, Illinois young learners have? What might Hemingway childhoods look like curated through today's students' eyes and digital prisms?" Nearly 900 middle school students are poised to be Learners as Curators of never-before-digitized Hemingway family childhoods, across digital-isms of class, race, and generations. The library is taking on an unusually robust role as facilitator, expanding on its traditional position of archive. Key is its negotiating an institutional identity by building a learning continuum from formal to informal, teen to scholar, K-12 to advanced graduate library and information science (LIS) students: a transformation being documented as practitioner research. Participant-researchers include graduate library and information science (LIS) students with specializations in digital learning, leadership studies, and archives.

### Invisibly Visible Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway is both ubiquitous and invisible. As one Oak Park school district educator put it, "He is like Lincoln: when you grow up here, you don't really see him as a human, but an icon. You lose touch..."

This project reclaims Hemingway's humanity by focusing on his early years, before the many constructed Hemingways were burnished. The library seeks to strip away the layers and allow students to have a less-mediated encounter; allow students to curate their own online exhibit of simply Ernest as brother, son, student, teen, boyfriend, teen soldier, Illinoisan, and Oak Parker. Thus, why we want to take the ideals of open access digital archiving to their next iteration: students and teachers collaborating as Digital Curators, playing in--and creating--a virtual history sandbox that engages critical thinking and information technology fluencies. Given the need for robust digital curriculum that emphasizes participatory, inquiry-based learning, the project neatly arcs the learning continuum from tweens and teens to expert scholars.

Hemingway remains at the forefront of American, global literature; and EHFOP's one-of-a-kind items require preservation and access. "If not now, when? If not us, who?" are apt to ask in this case. The Hemingway Collection items are a part of a contextualized project- and inquiry-based learning continuum, with target audiences of: (1) middle school Learners as Curators and educators, with the intent to culture year-to-year Language Arts Common Core, social studies Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) learning standards, ISTE/NETS digital fluency standards, and addressing the school's pilot iPad learning initiative objectives that may be adapted by other Illinois schools; (2) Hemingway scholars both in the United States and international communities; and (3) the informal learner in Illinois (and globally) who has as-yet not had access to these items.

To those who may wonder if middle school is a best-fit, may we recall that "A middle school Joan Didion taught herself to type by copying out paragraphs of Hemingway and never shook the sounds, the arcs, the rhythms of those phrases from her ear" (Heller, 2012). One can suggest that it is in exactly middle grades when young teen identity emerges and with which middle child-hood tweens wrestle. Who better to curate these items than Oak Park public school students: those perhaps most closely allied to the Hemingways' childhoods? As for the scholarship his life and works have inspired, "Although people often assume the strongest, most enduring authors are those whose work is taught in universities, it's actually the...school canon that's the best marker of cultural esteem and literary immortality. Hemingway is perhaps the one English-language writer other than Shakespeare every...school student in this country reads...(his) genius rests...in the way he used language to capture...a thread of experience as it wavered through time. His writing, at its best, was a way of coming to terms with disorder..." (Heller, 2012). Therein lies an apt description of this project, where Hemingway's digital ephemera are made alive again across time, inviting reflection on those similar themes of a world disordered abroad and/or at home in the 21st Century. As an inquiry-based and iterative process, specific tools will be defined by the teaching-learning community, but will use participatory design principles for digital curriculum that will be utilizing these primary source digital artifacts of Hemingway children childhoods, moving beyond Library of Congress' Teaching with Primary Materials model to learner-centered curation. We take as our position that archive construction privileges communities of users over others by definition (Huvila, 2008); and participatory design theory grounded in youth informatics requires pointed, inclusive effort in practice (Fisher et al. 2014). We challenge too-easy generational definitions of youth/teen identity as an "app generation" (Gardner & Davis, 2013). The informal-to-formal connected learning model is well-documented (Ito et al., 2013), and Hacking Hemingway is informed by these digital successes.

The Hemingway Foundation-vetted items approved for digitization:

- Marcelline Hemingway's Baby Scrap Book by her mother Grace Hemingway (1898-1900), envelope attached with her baby lock of hair (Fig. 1)
- Envelope addressed to Santa written by young Ernest Hemingway "From Ernest. Mr. Santa Claus snow st. greenland" (sic)
- Marcelline Hemingway's Christmas Day Autograph Book (1909)
- "Bee Vee 1915 Diary" by Ernest: "Hull House car fare", "Jackson Park .63"" "Library book .06 overdue", "Sunday School .05", "Allowance .15", "Fishing Tackell \$1.00" (sic) "
- Ernest Hemingway "Account Book" (1914), with his drawings: "owe mama"
- Ernest Hemingway Memoranda Notebook: "Some of the fellows I like best, are..." and "The fellows I hate are.." with drawing

- Note Ernest wrote “god helps those who help themselves but god help him that cops this book Shakespeare !!” (sic)
- “My Golden School Days” senior year memento scrapbook of Hemingways' by classmate Virginia Reed (1917)
- Letter welcoming Ernest home from WWI by “a girl”: “My Dear Mr. Hemingway. Of course I'm a girl, otherwise I would not be writing on this 'baby pink'. Don't try to find out the writer of this impulsive note...” (Feb. 4, 1919)
- Ernest letter to Ray Olsen, Peoria, IL , with 1917 image of Ernest, (a friend) and Ray Olsen in OP letter sweaters addressed from Mayo Clinic where he was receiving shock treatments: “It was worth going to Rochester to hear from you, kid. Will be out of here soon...”
- Ernest “Shot Gun Club” and “Trap Shooters Club” with hand-written nick-names: “Senor Ernest de la Mancha y O'Brien”
- Manuscript version of Marcelline Hemingway's book about their childhoods
- Family Photos (500 includes war and his return; images from Illinois, vacations to Lake Walloon, Cook County Forest Preserve)
- Famous “Dear John Letter”, by nurse Agnes Von Kurowsky to Ernest, considered to be the end of his young adulthood. She is believed to have been the model for the nurse in “Farewell to Arms”, (March 7, 1919)
- Additional Ernest Hemingway items from his high school years: 6 photographs and 36 pages of hand-written homework.

## 2 Conclusion

In the end, it is less about humanizing Hemingway as humanizing learning. Validating lived literacies is as much of an epistemological choice as necessity in 21<sup>st</sup> Century digital library development. Digital inclusion and access are twin, core drivers, using the vehicle of learning across a continuum to extend and amplify. Areas of Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math (STEAM) can be not only introduced, but measured by partnering for formal school assessment; aligning with code.org, IMLS 21st C. Skills, and educational innovation with Partnership for 21st C. Skills. By intentionally connecting with the school's pilot iPad learning initiative and imbedding year-long project-based learning within the International Baccalaureate curriculum with an emphasis on participatory design, there is ample opportunity to build what educators call “slow learning”: where meaningful inquiry is permitted and encouraged. Formative reflection by teachers, librarians, and students are expected in the 21st Century Connected Learning modelled by such stellar projects as the MacArthur Foundation Digital Media Hub work with the Chicago Public Library. With these teens in this West Side of Chicago corridor, we ask, “Why not us? Why not here? Why not now?” Collaboratively we answer, “Us, here, now, together.”

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Fig. 1, Most items in the Hemingway Collection are fragile, making digitization a delicate process. These pages from Marcelline Hemingway's baby scrapbook, created by her mother Grace in 1898, exemplify the challenges: multiple pages, images, hair locks, pressed flowers, and adhesives. (Courtesy of the Ernest Hemingway Foundation of Oak Park.)