The Bigmouth Billy Bass Source Scavenger Hunt



1. **Where in the scaffolding for the unit does this activity appear?**

This activity occurs during the third week of unit 1(2/3 on the annotated syllabus) as students begin working on how to find sources and verifying their credibility. This assignment is meant to give them practice in evaluating the credibility of online resources. In this way, this activity invites students to see some of the drawbacks of a simple Google search and why other ways of researching (such as through the KU library or Wikipedia) might be more trustworthy. Such reflections will naturally give students insights in how to approach the research for the Object Essay at the end of the unit.

1. **What approach will you take to the activity and why did you choose this approach?**

In general, this activity follows approach 1 in that it is a new activity, though it is not fully replacing the existing activity for the day but incorporating it into a different framework. The activity scheduled for 2/3 on the annotated syllabus is the “Wikipedia Activity”, which involves the class discussing how to use Wikipedia as a source and then looking for sources on their objects. My activity enfolds this into a larger activity about looking at popular sources via search engines, where the students or I bring up Wikipedia as part of this process, which naturally leads to a discussion of how they can use it as a research tool.

I decided to take this approach since the day was pretty heavily focused on discussion with the emphasis on the “Writing a Narrative of the Research” prompt and the discussion over AI biases. I wanted to give the students a chance to exercise a different set of skills by practicing research prior to doing it for their own projects. I also wanted to set up some later discussions of Search Engine biases for the students through showing them some of the limitations of just Googling and object like Billy. The revelation of those limits, I hoped, would effectively set up the rest of the week with the discussions of the KU library databases and Wikipedia more effective research options.

1. **Detailed description of the activity:**

Prior to the activity beginning, I scaffold it by reemphasizing to students that, for the object essay, they need to include outside sources. I then ask the class why I am asking them to include sources in their papers, writing the answers on the board and discussing their responses with them. When I taught this, the responses tended to center around the sources giving accurate, trustworthy information about their object.

I then ask the class how we verify if a source is trustworthy, again writing their answers on the board. These answers tend to encompass a wider range of reasons than the previous question. Some of the responses my students provided included looking at the URL (.com versus .edu), the ethos of the author, the notability of the publication, and the possible bias of the article. After the class has shared their responses, I bring up some answers they have not mentioned (for example, one of my classes did not bring up the URL, so I brought this up to them and asked how the URL might reflect a source’s reliability).

Once the discussion ends, I divide the class into groups of 3-4 and explain we will be doing a source scavenger hunt, where each group will look up sources about the Big Mouth Billy Bass. Since most students have not heard of the Big Mouth Billy Bass, I play them the following video of the Bigmouth Billy Bass singing “Take Me to the River”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkYZ4wTBd8g>

After watching the video, I explain to the students that I want each group to find me the following:

* + 1 Fact about how Billy works
  + 1 Fact about how Billy was invented
  + 1 Fact about Billy’s cultural impact or legacy

I stress that I want these facts to come from sources the students think are trustworthy and could potentially work for an Object Essay. I also inform the students that I will be asking them questions about their sources afterwards, so keep to keep their tabs open for future reference. Other than this, I give them no instructions about how to look for their sources since I want this to be as close as to what they would naturally do when looking up information on their own.

After giving the groups about 10 minutes to assemble their facts, I ask each group to share what they learned and where they learned it from, writing their responses on the board. I typically pause after each source is shared and ask the group why they think that source is trustworthy, and we have a brief conversation about their evaluation and the positives and negatives of that particular source. Some of the sources students have drawn upon for this activity include Wikipedia, Google AI Overview, HowStuffWorks, the American Historical Association, and Medium blogs.

For instance, when Wikipedia gets mentioned, I ask the class if Wikipedia is a trustworthy source that they could use on their papers. After listening to their responses (which tend to be varied, though more negative about using it in a paper), I explain my positive feelings about Wikipedia and how they should see it as an excellent resource by drawing on its list of resources for their research, walking them through some of the examples on the Billy’s page.

After collecting the facts and sources, I ask students to discuss the following questions in their groups before sharing their answers with the class:

* How did you begin looking for your sources?
* Did you rule out any potential sources as you searched? Why?
* What about the sources you selected made you feel like they were trustworthy?
* Did your sources conflict over any information? If so, over what?
* Did you note any biases in your sources or searches? If so, where?

After going over their responses to these questions, we conclude the activity. I then spend the rest of class discussing some of the weaknesses in AI as a research tool for finding sources and some of the biases inherent in a simple Google search. I conclude by explaining to the students that, in the following class, we will explore avenues like the KU Library that offer effective alternatives to the Google search.

1. **Detailed description of what you observed as the students completed the activity:**

In general, the students seemed to respond well to the activity. I was anticipating a stronger interest in Billy as an object (they did not appear to find it as hilarious as I do), but they were pretty quick in finding their sources and had several good insights about why some of their sources were reliable while others were not.

When I initially asked them what makes a source trustworthy, the response was somewhat muted, but, during the activity, when I asked them why a particular source might or might nor be trustworthy, they had much more detailed answers, so having the more hands-on activity appeared to help them better articulate their thoughts about sources.

With any activity where students are encouraged to do research on their own, the students would at times get distracted, but I would usually just give a reminder about the time they had left, and this would tend to get them back on task.

Finally, they seemed to find the facts they uncovered (such as Queen Elizabeth II’s love of Billy) generally interesting and seemed excited to share some these.

1. **Reflection on the activity**

I created this activity because I wanted to couple some of the discussions we would be having about AI and Search Engine bias with an activity that showed some of the pitfalls of just doing a Google search and provide students with some initial feedback of how they could know if a source was valid or not. I selected a common object so that we could have a conversation that touched on broader questions of how to verify sources. My hope was that the object would bring this conversation about sources more to life for the students and allow them to be creators of knowledge in the classroom both about Billy and how to find sources, which I think was largely successful.

I would teach this activity again. I would consider shifting the assignment to occur after discussing some of the weaknesses of AI and Google searches rather than before so that the students can better look for those weaknesses within the searches they are doing about Billy.

Also, while I love Billy, I might select a different object that’s more familiar to the students to see if that connects with them better. I might also give the students a selection of objects and have them vote on what they would like to research to give them more control over the class.

1. **Advice to a teacher who is considering adapting your activity for their class.**

One thing I did not do prior to teaching this assignment was a detailed look at the first few pages of results from Googling Billy, so I had to do a lot of thinking on my feet when a student mentioned a source I was less familiar with. As such, I would encourage teachers to look through the first few pages of Google results about their object to see what sources the students will likely bring up and check if those sources would fit the requirements of the Object Essay.

Obviously, any object will work for this assignment. I do think selecting an object the students are a bit less familiar with (as opposed to something like an iPhone or a car) is helpful as they are practicing source evaluation while also learning new information about an object, which hopefully makes it more interesting. Of course, if a different object is selected, the teacher would likely need to adjust the kinds of facts the students are asked to find, though I would suggest asking them to find no more than 3 regardless.

It is also helpful for the teacher to prepare some remarks based on the sources the students are likely to offer (for example, I had a quick blurb about Wikipedia ready to go whenever someone mentioned it) and then being ready to highlight any sources the students do not mention that might be relevant. For example, if no one had mentioned Wikipedia, I would have pulled up the Wikipedia article on Billy and asked the students if they felt it was a verifiable source before going into the discussion on how to find sources via Wikipedia.