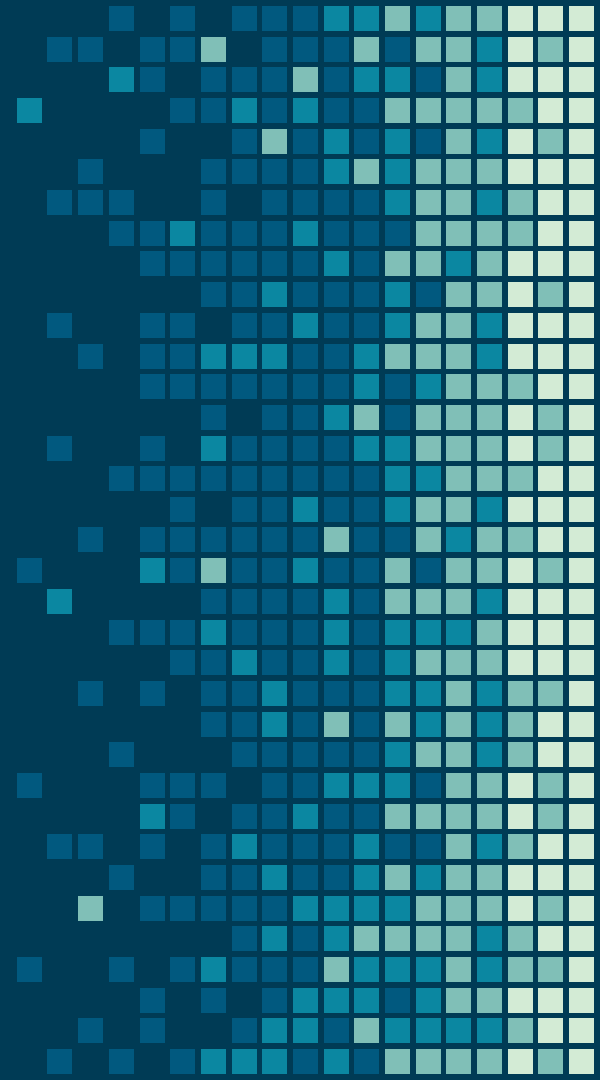# Digital Humanities and the Secondary Classroom

Jessica DeSpain, Associate Professor
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville
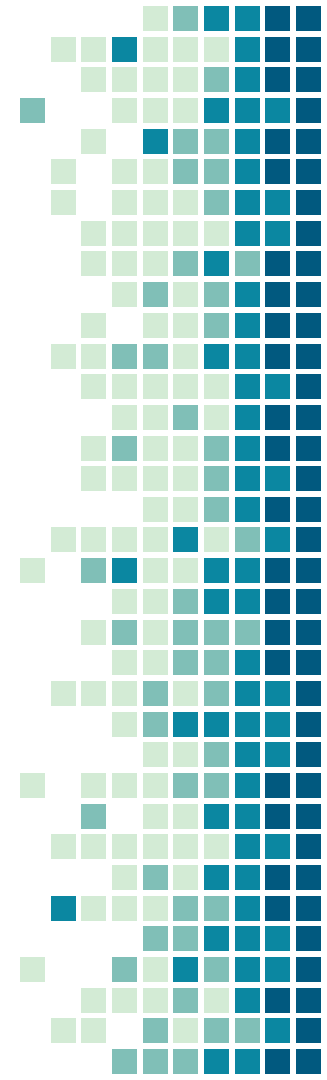
How do you DH?

| Create dynamic scholarly archives or use digital tools to analyze languages, literature, images, spaces, and periods | → | Consider the cultural use and meaning of technology in addition to using it as a method of analysis and publication | → | Collaborate using interdisciplinary methods |

Archival Projects

Allison Booth, *Collective Biographies of Women*

Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price, *The Walt Whitman Archive*

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, *In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience*
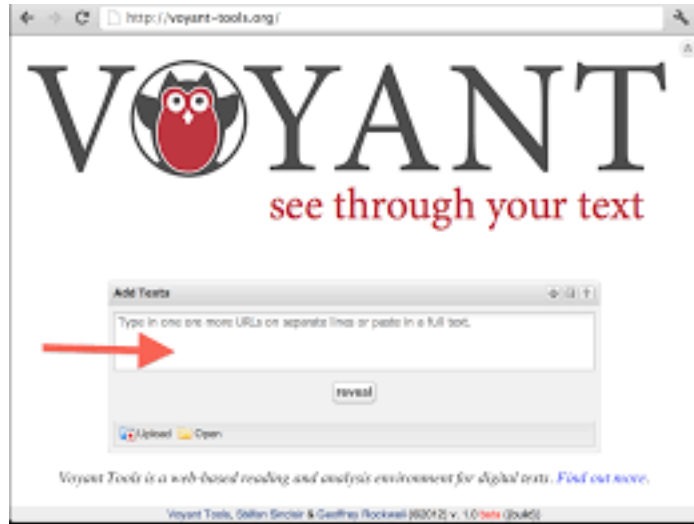
Geography, Space, and Place

Ken Price, et al., *Civil War Washington*

Shane White, et al., *Digital Harlem*

Mining Texts

Visualizing Data

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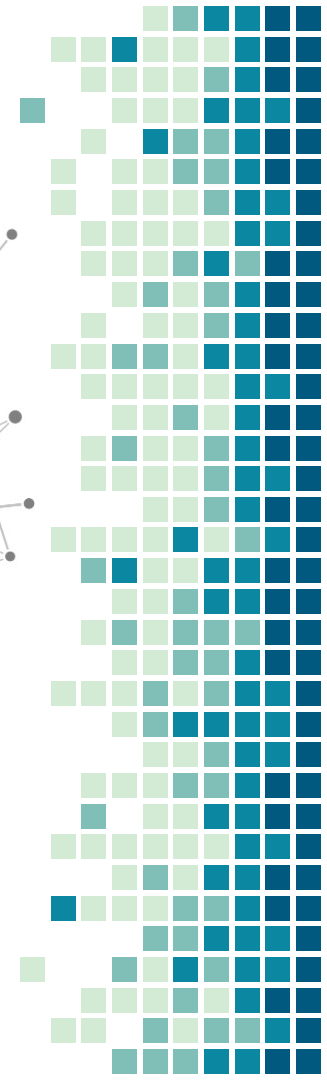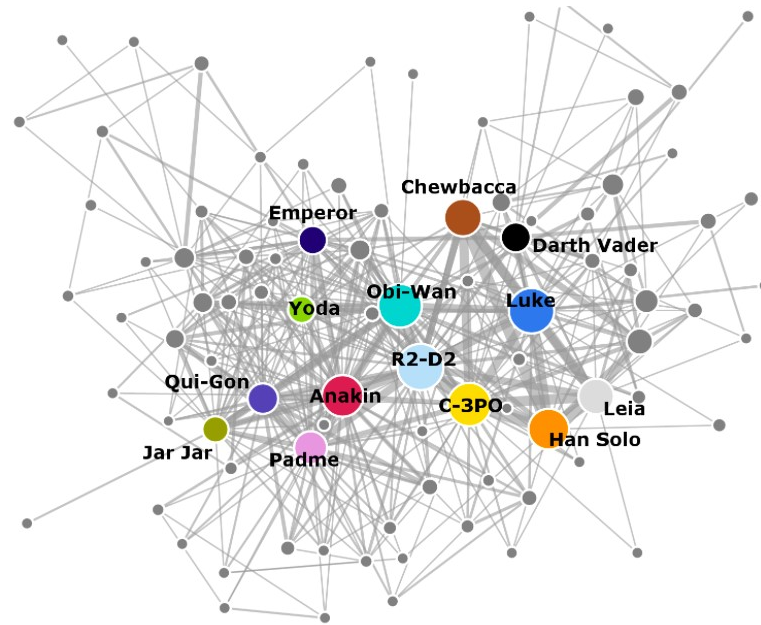
DH with Middle & High School Students

Conversation Toward a Brighter Future 2.0
digital storytelling project about age
and intergenerational relationships
Funded by National Endowment for the Humanities
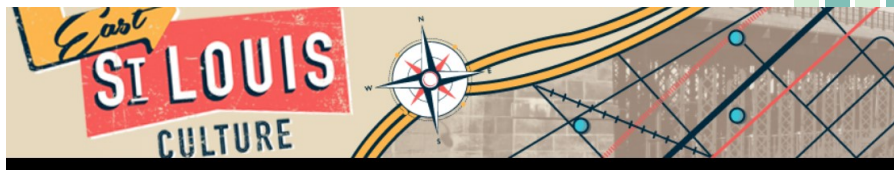
Digital East St. Louis
Engaged a team of middle school students in a
project about the history and culture of their city
Funded by National Science Foundation

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DH Pedagogy Basics

1. Encourage tinkering, building, and experimentation
2. Environment, assignments, and assessments invite risk and consequent failure
3. Project structure includes collaboration, student contribution, and attribution of student work
4. Infrastructure is accessible to students with a variety of abilities
5. Curriculum uses technology to re-evaluate content or examines technology itself as content

Tinkering

- From the *Oxford English Dictionary*:
  Tinker, v. "To work as a tinker; to mend metal utensils (and hence *gen.* any material objects), esp. in a clumsy, bungling, or imperfect way."

- From Rachelle Doorley, *tinkerlab.com*:
  "Tinkerer: one who experiments with materials and ideas to fully understand their capacities, and who further iterates on their learning to find better solutions to current problems."

- From Jentery Sayers, 2011:
  "Embracing tinkering's inexpert, tactical, and situational experimentation lends itself well to introducing students of literature and language to otherwise unfamiliar modes of learning."

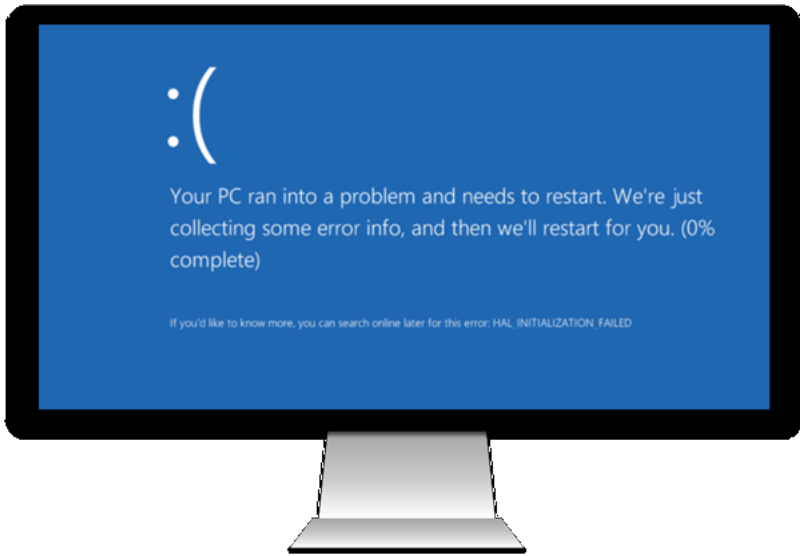# Why Tinker?

1. Tinkering encourages inquisitiveness by addressing how things work and how they are constructed in a social context—you might also term it "looking under the hood."
2. Tinkering is necessary for technological literacy to develop.
3. Tinkering is focused on process and continual self-correction rather than a finished product.

Why Failure is an Option

- Time required to complete a DH project is difficult to delimit. Students may not finish within the confines of the class or ever…

- Students are new to DH, and they need to practice with a safety net.

- Finding ways to allow for failure challenges student notions about the value of taking risks and challenging hypotheses.

Inviting Risk and Embracing Failure

- Describe the classroom and its activities as a studio, lab, or makerspace
- Describe the class itself as an experiment
- Share failure narratives
- Include reflection of process in assignments
- Reward process as opposed to finished products
- Incentivize peer evaluation
- Be flexible about schedule and assignments
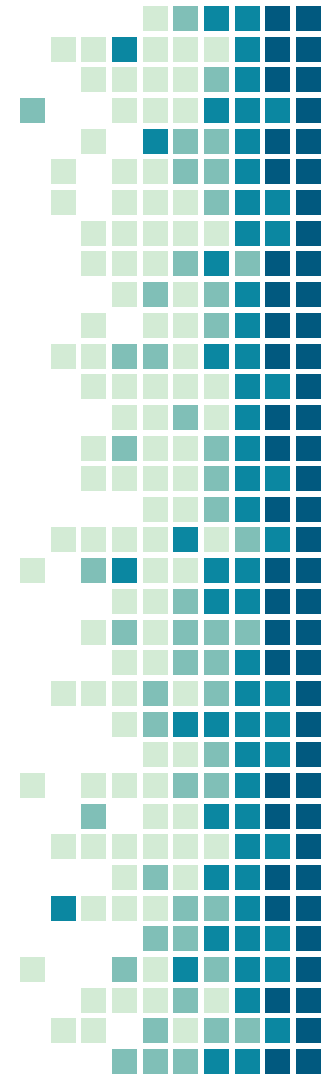
Establishing Autonomy

- Establish a workflow

- Keep all tutorials accessible in one online location (e.g. Google Drive), and encourage students to rework them

- Involve students not just in the work, but in its methodological and theoretical underpinnings

- Let students choose their role based on their interests

- This should go without saying, but back everything up!

THANKS!

You can find me at:

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