

How do we go from knowing nothing about a topic, to knowing something?

In the beginning there is a word. Search the word in book, journal, and magazine databases that you have access to.

trenton

From the word comes other words. As you learn more and orient yourself to the topic, pick up and collect other words, concepts, related terms, broader terms, narrower terms, names of people and places. Write these words down. Note variant spellings. Play with your topic. Be creative and loose with your notion of what the topic is as it morphs into a new topic or a facet of the original topic.

urban urbanization industrialization city	colonial
pottery industry pottery potters	
labor unionism rubber strike	
George Washington crossing Delaware	civil religion myth hero
Economic decline	collective memory
urban decline	Battle of Trenton
daily life	Legends
	image

And the word becomes controlled vocabulary. List Library of Congress Subject Headings and Database Descriptors.

Trenton (N.J.) -- History	New Jersey (Trenton
Trenton, Battle of, 1776 - use for "Washington crossing Delaware"	
Trenton (N.J.)	Call #s F144 E241.T7
Trenton (N.J.) History 20th Century	myths and symbols
Working class -- New Jersey -- Trenton -- History	National Self Image
Washington, George 1732-1799	Washington, George Delaware River
Washington, George 1732-1799 - Legends - manuscripts	Washington, George (image)

Perform keyword searches with boolean operators and truncation. Perform subject searches with controlled vocabulary. Begin to develop a point of view or focus on a facet of the topic.

Trenton and Washington	Washington and crossing and (myth or mythology)
Trenton and (urban? or cit?)	George Washington and (myth or mythology or memory)
Trenton and decline	George Washington biography - letters sources
Trenton and suburb?	(George Washington and not carver) and (myth* or memory or hero* or self image)
Trenton and battle	
Washington and crossing	

↓ compare ↓
 subject | Washington, George | or etc
 American History & Life

What is the shape of the literature on this topic?

Books

The Crossing - Howard Fast E241.T7F7

Portrait of patriotism: Washington crossing the Delaware ND237.L6H8

George Washington: The Man behind the Myths O ILL

George Washington: The Making of an American Symbol E312.S39

The Invention of George Washington 1988 O

Stryker, Willem S - Continental Army at the crossing of the Delaware River E241.T7593
Journal Articles

America
HISTORY
&
Life

"Crossing the Delaware with Larry Rivers and Frank O'Hara: The Post Modern
Hero at the Battle of Signifiers" Word & Image 1986 2(1):27-32

"Epic, Parody and National Identity: George Washington in Nineteenth Century
American Humor" Bergmann, Linda S. Studies in American Humor 1995
3(2):1-22

Popular Magazine Articles

Wilson

* Did Washington's wisecrack tip the balance? "Fast, Howard Americana v20 Dec 1992

"The Christmas crossing Jacoby, Jeff" Reader's Digest v157 no 9/44 Dec 2000 p80-5

"Trenton and Princeton" Snow, Richard F American Heritage v38 Dec 1987 p26+

"The weather of independence" Ludlum David M Weatherwise Nov/Dec 98 vol 51 p38

"Washington's Crossing: The Turning Point. American History Illustrated 1972 6(10) 14-24
* Primary + secondary sources

Ebsco
Am Hist & Life

Primary Sources

Thompson,

Washington along the Delaware: the battles of Trenton and Princeton as told
by the men who were there and through Washington's own
official dispatches. TCNJ - E241.T7T46
Thomas Paine - essay - The American Crisis

How will you use this information to plan a lesson?

Lesson - Washington crossing the Delaware - Myth, Reality and American Identity

or - assign as a term paper or exam question

or - Washington crossing represented in art

or - trip to Wash crossing or museum, read primary sources