Focus Groups with JLS Students

April 19, 2001: interviewing about research
When you are given a topic to research where do you begin?
• Form research groups, then subtopics are chosen
• Sometimes a group leader emerges and chooses the topics for each student or as they
  are researching, they divide topics by what they find the most of individually
How do you know where to begin?
• Mr. C gives them some books or they go to the library, but for the most part they go
  online
• Unanimous that they would much rather go online then go to a book, “it never has the
  info they are looking for”
Where do you look for information?
• Google, Britannica, ask jeeves, beyondbooks.com
• Go to the library, but the public library is better than the school library
What kinds of sources to you use?
• Website that have summaries of the information
How do you organize the information you find?
• Organize it as the website/source has done so
• Are usually just summarizing so don’t pay attention to the organization of it all, that
  part is hard for them
• Outlines are not enforced in the history class, but sometimes students do them; they
  do know how to do them, but for some students they don’t make sense as an organizing
  tool
From the sources you find how you do pick the information you want to use? What do
you pick to use and to not use? Why do you exclude certain pieces?
• Leave out details that are unimportant to the topic, don’t want to hear the “story”
• Always get conflicting information, but usually just chose one

Doing Research
What frustrates you about doing research?
• A lot of ads come up on the internet and get in the way of their work
• Too much to chose from, corroborate, just want a few sites to go to
• Hard to find good sites online, lots of travel sites on history subjects: confusing
• Conflicting reports, dates, inconsistent history
What don’t you like about doing research?
• A lot of information to cipher through
• Takes a lot of time
• Not always interesting
• Library isn’t good here
What do you like about doing research?
• Developing the teaching lessons for the rest of the class
• Using visuals and images to enhance their report
Where could you use help?
• Bolded information to help determine what is important info to pull for their research
• Sites to look at that aren’t text heavy; rarely spend time looking at those sites
Do you think History is fun? Interesting?
• Not really, but do like the lessons they do with each other in class

**Historian Terms**
Can you define Sourcing? Can you define Contextualization? Can you define Corroboration? How do you think the authors of your textbook determined what to include?
• We did not ask these questions, other than a few terms such as “source” and “context”. Said they knew the words, but not with regards to history research.
• If they are having problems, they ask the teacher for guidance
• Students don’t tend to do any triangulation or corroboration for sources, etc.

**Usability Testing: April 20, 2001**
Working with Valley of the Shadows, students walked through the site to try to find information for their report on Washington DC trip.
• Metaphor for museum/library was recognized
• Use of primary documents seemed slightly more valuable in reality rather than in conversation
• Students enjoyed using the simulation to better understand how the war was fought; there were lighted battlefields that showed the progression of the northern army to the south
• Students said they would use the site to help develop the lesson for students re: north and south
• Needed a little more help with the searching, should lead the students a little more, didn’t necessarily have the correct information with which to search