

How To Set Up Your Own TwHistory Reenactment

Tom Caswell and Marion Jensen

Not long after TwHistory was created we received an email from a teacher interested in reenacting parts of the Cuban Missile Crisis with her Cold War History high school class. She wanted to know how to set up a Twitter reenactment. So we have created a "how to" guide to share with others.

The technology we are currently using for the TwHistory project is fairly simple, and we hope to make it even easier as time goes on. Everything but the web hosting is free. Most of the time spent involves researching the events, which is where the real learning happens. We recommend a shared Google Spreadsheet or wiki page for compiling all the Twitter messages, or "tweets" for each historical figure involved. Here are the three basic elements to set up a TwHistory reenactment project:

1. Setting up your Twitter "character" accounts:

Think of your reenactment as a play, and make a list of all the characters you will need. Each of these will need a separate Twitter account, and each account requires a different email address. So you will need several different email addresses to register multiple Twitter accounts. (If you use Gmail, there is a trick to get around this problem. You can fool Twitter into thinking you are using a different email address by adding "+1" or "+sometext" to your Gmail address. An example would be yourname+jfk@gmail.com. So if you have 10 Twitter characters you need to set up, you can register one as yourname+1@gmail.com and then register another one with yourname+2@gmail.com, and so on. Gmail will ignore the + and everything after it. You will get a confirmation email for each account you set up to your normal Gmail account (yourname@gmail.com.) Before you get started you will also want to set up a main Twitter account and then use it to follow each of the Twitter characters in your reenactment. I called mine "[HistoricTweets](#)." but you can call yours after the reenactment you are doing. This account will be necessary for step 2. Don't follow any other Twitter accounts with this account (other than your characters) and don't tweet from the project Twitter account or those tweets will show up as well. (It's a little tricky to erase an accidental tweet, since it involves digging into the MySQL database to find and delete the entry.)

2. Archiving Tweets on a single web page:

Creating an archive is not a necessity, but it's nice to be able to show all the tweets in one place. Your tweets will of course be available via Twitter, but we recommend a separate archive because Twitter can be slow and unreliable at times. Before you can do this part you will need a web hosting provider that can support PHP and MySQL (most can). Something inexpensive like [BlueHost.com](#) is fine. I used a free program called Twitster to capture all the tweets. Setting up Twitster is easier than setting up a WordPress blog, so if terms like PHP and MySQL are somewhat familiar to you, then you can probably do it. Download Twitster (<http://plasticmind.com/twitster>) and set it up using the project Twitter account and following the instructions in the README.txt file (included below). Be sure to leave the hash tag field blank in the setup wizard so that all tweets from anyone you follow with the project account will appear on your Twitster page. The tweets show up with the newest ones first, and there's not much you can do about that unless you are a programmer. You will find an example at: <http://TwHistory.org/gettysburg/>

From the Twitster Installation Guide:

1. Upload the Twitster files into the directory you want to use. (e.g. <http://mysite.com/twitster/>)
2. Bring up that location in your browser. Twitster will bring up a setup wizard the first time you access it. NOTE: You may need to make your Twitster directory writable (777) so the wizard can create your configuration file. For security's sake, once you run the wizard, you should delete setup.php and set the main directory permissions back to something safer, like 755.
3. Fill in the setup form. Leave the hash tag field empty if you want to display all the tweets for those you are following. Click "Set Up Twitster". You're done!

3. Scheduling Tweets:

Being able to schedule tweets ahead of time is very useful, especially if you are reenacting an event with many characters tweeting around the same time. The best free tweet scheduler program I have found is called TweetMaster (<http://www.twtmstr.com>) It was developed by a fellow contributor to the TwHistory.org project, and now it seems to have a few extra bells and whistles. This app lets you schedule tweets down to the minute, so recreating an event like the Cuban Missile Crisis could be really exciting (especially when events happen in rapid succession). The other thing I like about this app is that you can set up multiple twitter accounts into groups for easy tweet scheduling. I highly recommend testing whatever timed tweet app you decide to use with a couple test accounts. That way you know what it can and can't do for you.

We hope this guide is useful to others who want to create TwHistory reenactments. If you are interested in creating a TwHistory reenactment with your students, we recommend you look at Carla Federman's Cuban Missile Crisis materials as an example. Please let us know if you are doing a Twitter project so we can link to it from TwHistory.org.