EVERYDAY LIFE IN MIDDLETOWN MEETS VOYANT-TOOLS
By Maren Orchard

When you hear the word *diary,* a particular genre of writing comes to mind:
Confessional.
Personal.
Intimate.
You perhaps picture your twelve-year-old self writing in your favorite notebook or wondering where your sister hides her diary. Or maybe, if you're of a certain generation, you picture the Disney Channel classic *Read It and Weep.* In 2019, we can also think about how a diary is different from social media and the ways in which it is performative. Still more, when writing for EDLM, we are thinking about audience. Who will read our day diary, and what will they learn about everyday life and about Muncie as our community?

The EDLM day diaries are named intentionally to elicit this response. They are personal diaries— particular to the individual and written in response to an open prompt to share thoughts, feelings, and actions. They're also an archive and a way of looking at everyday life and at a community through the eyes of the people living it. The diaries exist in this space as contemporary, engaging documents as well as being documents created for reflection, to look back on. These functions reflect part of everyday life theory which considers the importance of ways of thinking about time in the sense of the everyday, our life times, and beyond.

Beyond thinking about how the diaries will be used, in the present or in the future, we think, too, about how they exist individually and as an archive collectively. By the very nature of our project, we suggest that there is importance in the particular—to the story of the individual. But by developing an archive of the particular, focused on one place, on one community, EDLM suggests a collectivity of the human experience. "We all brush our teeth in the morning," as Pat Collier would often say during the original 2016 seminar. (Or perhaps you don't—I think the experience of *forgetting* to brush your teeth in the morning is just as common.)

The everyday is also a political space. Even in the example of brushing your teeth in the morning, there is an assumption about ability and about access to a standard of hygiene. Or perhaps, if you turn often to Twitter or Facebook, you see political debates online and among friends and family. In that way the EDLM project seeks to "shed light on the commonalities between us in these politically divisive times, and the real differences between our daily experiences." The diaries weave together such political commentary with musings on the merits of exercise and deliberations of whether to eat a salad or a sandwich for lunch and the associated mental and social rewards for making such a decision.

Perhaps this brief introduction has convinced you that these diaries have both contemporary and future value to better understand the present and to, through future readings, better understand the past. My intention in beginning this digital history project was to address the

former of these two aspects of the diaries and to produce content for the [Everyday Life in Middletown project](#). I wanted to find a way to make the EDLM day diaries visually engaging in some new or creative way to encourage community members to engage with the website, using digital tools and digital visualizations to analyze the diaries. Regardless of the visualization piece, I was excited to try doing "distant reading" on a body of documents which are intended to be read both for their unique particularities and their collective impression. Distant reading is typically done with a digital text analysis tool to allow a researcher to identify tendencies or themes in a body of text. I wondered what themes would emerge as I began interpreting the diaries from a new vantage point.

In doing this project, I returned to theory.

My process began by developing a method to analyze the EDLM corpus with [Voyant-Tools.](#) I quickly realized that I needed to be thinking about the diaries creatively as a single body and as individual items. I decided to focus on three corpuses, using EDL theory and past conversations with the EDLM team about how to think about the day diaries— by author, by day, and collectively:
- 1 corpus by a single author, including each day
- 5 separate corpuses, separated by day
- 1 corpus including all 146 EDLM diaries

This method proved interesting for thinking across the diaries in a multidimensional way, recognizing their unique attributes and the particularities of certain authors and certain days (Super Bowl Sunday compared to a Saturday in December or a summer weekday) as well as having the entire body to compare them too.

My next effort required defining a list of "stopwords" to apply to my corpuses. A list of stopwords, when applied in Voyant, filter out certain frequent words which might obfuscate major themes. Common stopwords are, for example, "the" and "and" due to their repetition and lack of content. I applied two methods to determine my list of stopwords, including either as many or as few words as possible. In the end, I accepted the automatically generated list with only a few modifications. My final list included 483 stopwords.

My most notable change to the stopword list was to remove first person pronouns so they would be included in my analysis
I, MY, ME
While an argument could be made that these words are used so frequently that they are obvious, I preferred instead to acknowledge their primacy and importance in the diaries by including them to emphasize the individuality and self-focus of most all the diaries.

With these pieces in mind, I organized my corpuses and prepared to interpret Voyant's findings While I found Voyant to be challenging and less intuitive than I hoped, as an emerging digital/ public historian, I was pleased by its accessibility and easy, online access. I encourage anyone

interested in digital history or textual analysis to play with Voyant and see what kind of findings emerge from your exploration!

Continue to follow my blog posts to learn how I used Voyant to further explore the EDLM diaries, to learn more about how the particular and collective interact, and what advantage there is to using a digital tool to doing this kind of reading!

FINDING YOUR QUESTION: USING VOYANT TO IDENTIFY THEMES
By Maren Orchard

When identifying themes in a body of text, there are some different approaches to take. If you've been following EDLM for long or if you spend any time thinking about everyday life theory, you might know some of the themes we've been working with since the 2016 project— still visible on the original website in the form of insight essays. Themes include: work, time, and weather.

These themes are evident from doing close readings of the diaries, but I wanted to pursue another way to identify and analyze themes. *I used Voyant as my approach to finding new ways of thinking about themes in the EDLM diaries.* While the tool takes some time to get used to, there are some particularly quick features which yield interesting interactions with your corpus, if you know what to look for.

Most people are familiar with word clouds, a common kind of digital visualization. For this reason and to approach using Voyant with the EDLM diaries with a basic but eye-catching way of doing a distant reading, I first worked with the word cloud feature. This tool identifies and visually represents the number of times a word is used in the diaries. Depending on the corpus, this can be in an individual's diary, across all 146 diaries, or on a single day.

I uploaded the following corpuses to Voyant to see how themes emerge differently in each set using the word cloud digital visualization:
- 1 corpus by a single author, including each day
- 5 separate corpuses, separated by day
- 1 corpus including all 146 EDLM diaries

I kept stopwords consistent and set the limit of words to include to 45.

This word cloud represents the 45 most used words from [Diarist A06](#). From this representation of their contributions to the project, we see the importance of the individual through the frequent use of *I* and *my* which we see across all of the diaries. What's interesting about this finding is learning what **relationships** are important to diarist A06—dad, boyfriend, mom, sister, family. We can also learn what else is relevant to their life—dogs, coffee, pet, house, school. We can also ascertain a bit about what she was **doing** on these days—work, dinner, computer, aide, care, laundry. These words don't tell us who A06 is when they exist in the abstract, but we begin to gain a picture of *how she spends her days.*

This exercise doesn't introduce us to a diarist, but maybe it would encourage a reader to dig deeper into their diaries. To investigate why they talk so much about their computer. Does their work involved sitting at the computer? Do they write their diaries on the computer? Is that how they spend their leisure time? Questions begin to take form about who this person is and how they spend their time in a way which doesn't reveal detail but sparks curiosity.

The next word cloud introduces us to a specific day: [February 4th, 2018](#).

What was happening on February 4th? From this word cloud, we see that the diaries are still being written prioritizing personal experiences—me, my, and I are emerging again as the most used words. **Who else is important?** *People* as an abstract. *Husband* and *kids* and *family* are also frequently occurring terms. What does that mean about our diarists? Are they often parents or perhaps married? Do they write more frequently about the people in their lives? The fun feature which emerges from this word cloud and reflects assumptions made by the EDLM team in selecting this day is that our diarists were interested in Super Bowl Sunday. Terms including *game, watch, football, Sunday, night,* and *watching* all reveal the frequency with which diarists were talking about the big event that day. Weather is of concern, indicated by the common use

of *snow.* Accessing and reading into the diaries from this day reveals that snow was slowing folks down on their way to Super Bowl parties or otherwise leading to anxiety about driving. Diarist A16 was worried about her kids driving on messy roads, but at 7:30PM says, "Roads were not too bad after all."

This final word cloud shows the most common 45 terms across the entire 146 diary corpus. This exercise demonstrates how the abstraction of so many diaries erases the details of any one individual. **But what can we learn?** The individual is still the most important aspect of the diaries— *I'm, my, I, myself,* and *me* are all used frequently. *Work* and *time* are both terms we cite as themes throughout the diaries. Seeing them emerge as common words across the corpus provides another way for us to demonstrate the importance of themes in the diaries. Our diarists talk a lot about the *morning* as well as *night, bed,* and *day.* As opposed to the word *bad* (used 101 times) the more common word is *good* (used 379 times) which might mean our diarists write more positively than negatively or that they find more creative ways, using more varied words, to talk about the negative parts of their day.

Between these word clouds, the clearest picture emerges from the corpus of one individual and of one day, but they all serve as an interesting starting point or thread to follow into the diaries.

In the next blog, I'll talk about less commonly used words that are still important to the **community** as well as looking at a tool within Voyant to look at the context in which a term is used to get a better sense of ***the way diarists are talking about something*** rather than just providing evidence that they are talking about it.

NOT JUST THAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT IT, BUT HOW:
A DEEP DIVE INTO THE EDLM DIARIES
By Maren Orchard

We're back again with more distant reading with Voyant on the importance of Everyday Life!

EDLM day diaries often have unstated commonalities which aren't obvious just from doing a distant reading with Voyant. But with an awareness of the project and experience with reading the diaries, it's possible to use Voyant to do a deep dive of the diaries to investigate a topic of interest. I wondered how diarists think about Muncie and specifically how they talked about some of the themes in my previous blog. [link once live] Using this approach reveals some surprising ways that the community members think of the city, of themselves, and of everyday life.

Muncie is not one of the most common terms, yet almost all of the diaries are written in relation to the city. In the full 146 diary corpus, Muncie is mentioned by name 142 times and as Middletown 26 times. While the *number* of times Muncie is mentioned isn't significant, I wondered if the ways diarists talk about the city would be revealing about the community. To accomplish this, I used the collocates and in context functions in Voyant on the full diary corpus, to see what people were saying about Muncie.

This screenshot represents some of the results using the context function. To read the chart, notice the "Document" lists the name, in these cases the diarist. I've searched the term *Muncie,* so Voyant has sorted through the diaries to show me which ones use the term and the context in which it appears.

	Document	Left	Term	Right
⊞	34) A_2...	savings account, my days in	muncie	are officially numbered; it is
⊞	34) A_2...	the way those folks serve	muncie	. I have nothing to contribute
⊞	35) A_2...	are hoping to come to	muncie	for my son's soccer senior
⊞	35) A_2...	hospital and head straight to	muncie	. They will be a few
⊞	37) D_5...	18AM: I drive through downtown	muncie	to the McDonalds on Madison
⊞	39) C_4...	will drive my daughter to	muncie	Central on my way to
⊞	39) C_4...	of the best views of	muncie	, it's frustrating when car traffic
⊞	41) D_5...	eight years we've lived in	muncie	I have worked as both
⊞	41) D_5...	during our second year in	muncie	. There are a lot of
⊞	41) D_5...	the swelter, as do I.	muncie	stinks of rotting garbage in
⊞	41) D_5...	once since we've been in	muncie	, a year ago, from a
⊞	42) A_0...	my 18 years working in	muncie	qualifies me as an EDLM
⊞	55) C_4...	Backstory: I have lived in	muncie	for almost 10 years. In
⊞	55) C_4...	fiance,) who is also from	muncie	, had been living in the

Highlights from this exercise included language both positive and negative that reads differently out of context. A sense of the city emerges, for all of its pains:

> *...my days in Muncie are officially numbered...*
> *... Muncie stinks of rotting garbage…*
> *...the news in and about Muncie is very discouraging and sad…*
> *… even the food deserts in Muncie…*
> *… off to the UU Church of Muncie. Felt the usual helpless despair…*
> *... make my move out of Muncie. The day surely will come…*

And for all of its joys:

> *...are blessed to live in Muncie and to be a part…*
> *...the way those folks serve Muncie. I have nothing to contribute.*
> *...the magic that made Muncie the "Magic City"...*
> *… I hope Muncie found a path forward…*
> *… we moved back to Muncie after a 42 year absence…*
> *...Great to be in Muncie and able to get home…*

Other mentions of the city by name were in reference to organizations like the Boys and Girls Club or the city school system. Using the collocates function, I was able to read what words were commonly mentioned alongside *Muncie.* The chart provides an interesting visual representation of these relationships.

	Term	Collocate	Count (context)
☐	muncie	i	34
☐	muncie	my	23
☐	muncie	drive	7
☐	muncie	years	6
☐	muncie	community	6
☐	muncie	school	5
☐	muncie	it's	5
☐	muncie	home	5
☐	muncie	year	4
☐	muncie	side	4
☐	muncie	living	4
☐	muncie	live	4
☐	muncie	civic	4
☐	muncie	central	4

While words like *I* and *my* aren't surprising due to their frequent use in the corpus, words like *community, school, home,* and others create a more positive sense than the in context reading.

Further down the list, where the word recurrence counts are lower are words like *poverty, restaurant, and rehab.*

What does this reading say about the ways diarists relate to the city? How is the EDLM project capturing this community? What would someone reading this archive in 50 or 100 years think about this community? These functions of doing a distant reading allow a reader to zoom out, away from the minute to minute to gain an impression of a space and of a body of text. It creates a reason to look deeper. If you're unfamiliar with Muncie, you might wonder why the word *civic* so often appears nearby. If you are aware that Muncie Civic Theater is a popular theater in town, you might wonder what production so many people were interested in going to see. These are all reasons to dive deeper into the diaries and to think in new ways about the Muncie community and the value of understanding everyday life. Using this function could also yield interesting results for thinking about themes.

Sure—we know that *time* is influential in our everyday life, but how do our diarists think about the ways they're spending it or talking about it?
Home, reading, morning, don't, sleep, meeting, talking, energy.
If we're always evaluating our days and our activities in relationship to time, the ways we talk about those activities are important. Revealing which words are most often found in relation to the word *time* leads us to think more collectively about our common experiences of time, and perhaps our collective frustration with a long running meeting.

Perhaps the beauty of the way diarists talk about time is the way it stretches into something surreal, both in our control and beyond it— with joy and with sadness. Our awareness of the way time affects our day seep into the diaries in strange and entertaining ways. The following are screenshots of *time* in context including the full paragraph, accessible by double clicking the phrases:

Document	Left	Term	Right
roam over the acre area in front of			
3) A33 …	so as not to waste	time	sitting. 7:40 AM I
3) A33 …	Bill Cosby and other one-	time	national leaders and celebrities, such
3) A33 …	is usually late but this	time	he arrived early to return
3) A33 …	It's active much of the	time	with finch vying for a
4) A09 …	remains quiet for a short	time	, then complains about the news
4) A09 …	movies and enjoy some alone	time	. 3:00 Volunteer meeting is
4) A09 …	know that we changed the	time	due to the game and
4) A09 …	that I will not get	time	to be alone in my

is my work. Somebody is sick and they need somebody to come in. FUCK!!!!! It is Super Bowl Sunday and I know I will not get anyone to go in. I end the conversation with the student and head to Anderson. I am totally disappointed that I will not get time to be alone in my house. 5:00 I arrive at the waiver home I work in. Everyone is in good spirits. One of my clients requires 100% care. He is a big guy and two people are needed to help move him. He has cerebral palsy and curvature of

Document	Left	Term	Right
4) A09 …	would have lost my "alone	time	" anyway. I have my nose
4) A09 …	the commercials and the half	time	show. Two of the guys

This diarist (A09) is writing on Super Bowl Sunday and complaining about having to spend *time* with people.

Document	Left	Term	Right
,	,	,	,
4) A09 …	the commercials and the half	time	show. Two of the guys
4) A09 …	really saying anything. 8:30 =	time	to put my client to
4) A09 …	radio and enjoying some "alone	time	". 10:30 I start into
4) A09 …	my love of the half	time	show and Justin Timberlake. They
5) E_54…	in only one eye this	time	so he gets a short
5) E_54…	since the food has had	time	to move down the pipeline
5) E_54…	Finish setting up, just in	time	for the event to start

grab a flat-cart. Walk back out to my car and unload my gear. Then get a regular cart and put my dog in it. While I'm setting up, he stays safely in the car.

10:15am – Start unpacking and organizing my area.

10:45am – Finish setting up, just in time for the event to start at 11am.

11am – The first person arrives with the dog. They get their Santa picture taken and I talk to the dog mom, hand her a business card and ask her questions about her dog and give him a doggie treat.

11:15am – 12:45pm

E54 is writing about preparing for work, revealing their relationship to *time* in real context, rather than as an abstraction.

	Document	Left	Term	Right
⊞	6) E_52...	making. Christmas isn't a great	time	of year always – even when
⊞	6) E_52...	up, deflates motivation, purpose. Each	time	I woke up- I anxiously
⊞	7) C_45...	make the best of quality	time	with the teenagers. We also
⊞	7) C_45...	small items or just quality	time	spent together. Finally by 9
⊟	7) C_45...	routine again, hopefully with more	time	to savor the "small stuff

with mixed reactions, it makes me feel good to see the kids placing value in small items or just quality time spent together.

Finally by 9 pm on a now-soaking night, we are in the car and ready for home. Tomorrow, we'll begin the routine again, hopefully with more time to savor the "small stuff." That's always my goal, anyway

	Document	Left	Term	Right
⊞	8) B_37...	minute apart for a long	time	. Very hard to concentrate on
⊞	8) B_37...	been recorded for the last	time	. She wants an end to
⊞	8) B_37...	p.m., I find a little	time	for some guitar playing. That's
⊞	9) Dece...	shift and missing critical family	time	and insurance costs jumping. My
⊞	9) Dece...	last buyout was the only	time	that she was adamant that
⊞	9) Dece...	new jobs at the same	time	could cause us to be

C45 is thinking about spending *time* in a way which would make their life more joyful, thinking about how to live a better life through their experience of *time.*

	Document	Left	Term	Right
⊞	63) A_1...	the schedule for a long	time	. I find the boys at
⊞	63) A_1...	intentionally brought them in this	time	because it's become increasingly clear
⊞	63) A_1...	and we (as always) spent	time	rehashing our favorite scenes and
⊞	64) A_0...	household chores till it is	time	to leave for the day
⊞	65) A_0...	still a lot. The next	time	B asks me when I'm
⊟	65) A_0...	think this is the first	time	that I've named my feelings

his family. Ha!

· I'm also sad to see this picture, because it makes me think of the last ultrasound picture I saw – M&J. She was so excited – I was so excited. If I'm grieving that loss, I can't imagine what they're going through. I think this is the first time that I've named my feelings as grieving though. That's totally what it is. I'm grieving for my best friend and for the life and future they would have had, but I'm grieving for myself to an extent to – for the loss of a godchild, for the loss of a future

	Document	Left	Term	Right
⊞	65) A_0...	this is really the first	time	we've wandered into the "friend
⊞	65) A_0...	strange moments, though. The first	time	I called JS by her
⊞	65) A_0...	much – this is the first	time	I've spent any time in
⊞	65) A_0...	first time I've spent any	time	in Denver, and it's definitely

This diarist (A07) is commenting on a moment in *time* as a landscape for an emotional contemplation.

How we spend our *time* is how we spend our life. How we think about time can influence who we think about our life. There are meta moments, too, when diarists are contemplating their diaries and contemplating EDLM. Many of our diarists find that writing these day diaries helps them think differently about their everyday, about their time, and about their community.

- *...in a world awash in sadness and morality by decree. Then I remember it's EDLM Diary Day. Better get up and record the dream…*
- *I was fully planning to finish this diary for Sept. 17th, however, after work, my family had a health emergency and I had to help deal with that. It involved trying to help calm down the member, then taking them to the ER and being there in the middle of the night, etc. Very personal stuff…*
- *...I can envision this diary page being used against me… However, I refuse to believe in this possible future, just as most people now refuse to admit the possibility of every likely unpleasant future. This mass denial may be the defining folly of my time.*
- *...I don't normally keep a diary: I'm a slow writer…*

- *..this is where I say goodnight (10:20pm). It's the end to another day of diary writing.*

[Join us](#) and volunteer to write day diaries as well as taking another look at the [day diary archive](#), available online. Tell us what stands out to you and what you'd like to see in future blog posts!