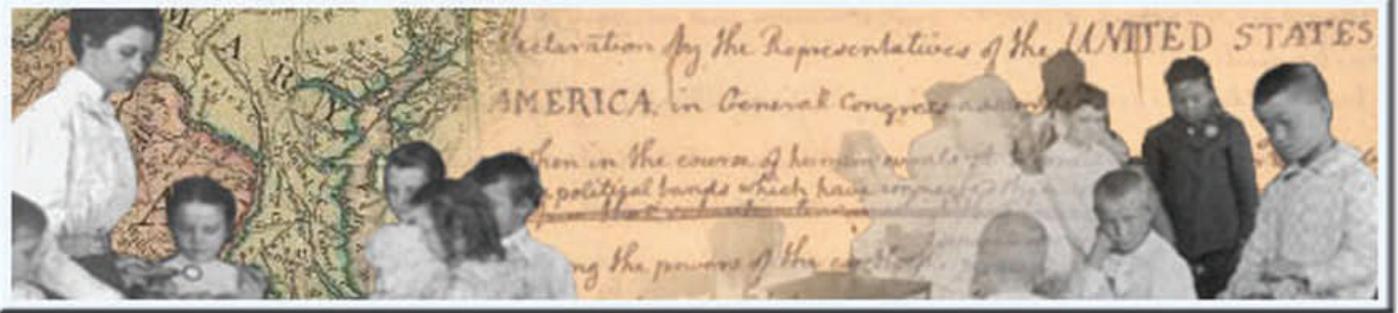




Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly

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This Issue's Theme:

Teaching Historical Thinking Using Primary Sources

This issue explores how teachers can use primary sources to help students develop historical thinking skills.

Sourcing, contextualizing, close reading, corroborating, and other habits of professional historians help K-12 students understand the past as more than just static events and dates. History becomes personal and relevant to students when they use historical thinking strategies to interpret primary sources, guided by their own inquiry and analysis.

This issue presents strategies and resources for teachers to help students begin thinking like historians using digitized primary sources from the Library of Congress Web site. As Sam Wineburg, a professor of education and of history at Stanford University, writes in this issue's feature article, students need historical thinking strategies not only to interpret content in the classroom but also to think critically about information they receive from countless sources in their daily 21st century lives.

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Teaching with Primary Sources

The Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) Program works with universities and educational organizations to offer professional development that helps teachers use the Library's digitized primary sources to deliver effective instruction.

Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly provides information and materials that support this goal.

For more information about Teaching with Primary Sources or to identify a TPS consortium member in an area near you, please visit the web site at <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps>.

Thinking Like a Historian

by Sam Wineburg

Historical Thinking: Memorizing Facts and Stuff?

When I recently asked Kevin, a sixteen-year-old high school junior, what he needed to do well in history class, he had little doubt: "A good memory."

"Anything else?"

"Nope. Just memorize facts and stuff, know 'em cold, and when you get the test, give it all back to the teacher."

"What about thinking? Does that have anything to do with history?"

"Nope. It's all pretty simple. Stuff happened a long time ago. People wrote it down. Others copied it and put it in a book. History!"

I've spent nearly 20 years studying how high school students learn history. Over the years I've met many Kevins, for whom the life has been sucked out of history, leaving only a grim list of names and dates. When confronted with the term "historical thinking," many students scratch their heads in confusion, stumped by an alleged connection.

Historians as Detectives: Searching for Evidence Among Primary Sources

The funny thing is that when you ask historians what they do, a different picture emerges. They see themselves as detectives searching for evidence among primary sources to a mystery that can never be completely solved. Wouldn't this image be more enticing to a bored high school student? It would, and that's one reason why thinking like a historian deserves a place in the American classroom, the sooner the better.

To historians, history is an argument about what facts should or shouldn't mean. Even when historians are able to piece together the basic story of what happened, they rarely agree about what an event means or what caused it. Historians argue about the past's meaning and what it has to tell us in the present.

But, you may ask, if history has already happened, what's there to argue about? Plenty. Was the American Revolution a fight against tyranny or an attempt by the well bred to maintain their social status? Was the Cold War really a conflict of democracy versus communism or a struggle between two superpowers for dominance?

Divergent opinions swirl around these questions and other matters of unsettled history – opinions that get students talking, and thinking, and learning. But while everyone is entitled to an opinion, not every opinion deserves to be believed. In history, a persuasive opinion is one backed up by evidence.

What is Historical Thinking?

It would be easy to conclude that historians simply know more about American history than high school students do. But this isn't necessarily the case. Beyond highly specialized areas of concentrations, even doctoral level historians don't possess factual knowledge about every topic. What historians do have is a "historical approach" to primary sources that is often taken for granted by those practiced in it. However, this approach unlocks a world closed to untutored readers.

For example, before approaching a document, historians come prepared with a list of questions—about author, context, time period—that form a mental framework for the details to follow. Most important of all, these questions transform the act of reading from passive reception to an engaged and passionate interrogation. If we want students to remember historical facts, this approach, not memorization, is the key.

Teaching Students to Think Historically

How can teachers help their students to begin thinking like historians? Teaching a way of thinking requires making thinking visible. We need to show students not only what historians think, but *how* they think, and then guide students as they learn to engage in this process.

Consider introducing students to several specific strategies for reading historical documents: sourcing, contextualizing, close reading, using background knowledge, reading the silences, and corroborating. Each strategy is defined below, followed by teaching ideas.

Sourcing: Think about a document’s author and its creation.

Select a historical document, such as a diary entry, letter or memo, and provide students with copies. Model for students how to scan the document for its attribution, often at the end, as a first step instead of reading the text from beginning to end. Demonstrate how to begin questioning the source by posing questions to the class: Who created this document? When? For what purpose? How trustworthy might this source be? Why?

Contextualizing: Situate the document and its events in time and place.

Encourage students to brainstorm the document’s historical context, piecing together major events, themes, and people that distinguish the era or period in which the document was created. List students’ responses for the class to add to and refer to during close reading.

Close reading: Carefully consider what the document says and the language used to say it.

Teachers can model this strategy with a brief (90 seconds) “think-aloud” while reading the document to students. Try to verbalize every thought that comes to mind, no matter how trivial, as you try to make meaning of the document’s account. For example, you may notice interesting words or phrases (“I’ve never heard that expression before”), consider contextual clues about time, place or people (“Hmm, that may be a reference to...”) or question facts, opinions and perspectives (“I wonder if that’s what really happened?”).

Using Background Knowledge: Use historical information and knowledge to read and understand the document.

Encourage students to practice this strategy by pausing to ask as they read: What else do I know about this topic? What other knowledge do I possess that might apply?

Reading the Silences: Identify what has been left out or is missing from the document by asking questions of its account.



The philosopher. Created by Antonio da Trento, 1508-ca. 1550, artist. Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress.

After reading the document, ask students to think about what they did not hear. Prompt class discussion with questions: What is the document's author not mentioning? Whose voices are we *not* hearing in a particular document or historical account? Which perspectives are missing?

Corroborating: Ask questions about important details across multiple sources to determine points of agreement and disagreement.

Ask students how they could proceed with this historical investigation: What questions arise, after careful reading and interpretation of the document? What other primary sources might corroborate or refute this interpretation? Have students discuss their responses in pairs and then share with the class.

You can also apply these strategies to reading textbooks. Textbooks offer an interpretation of history, but none gives us the final word. For example, textbook authors try to combine perspectives but they can never escape the fact that textbook is written by people living in a particular time and place. As such, textbooks record our contemporary (and unrecognized) assumptions, biases, and blind spots. One way to teach for historical thinking using a textbook is to have students compare its story of a historic event with evidence from primary sources. Another idea is to compare a current textbook's account of, say, the Spanish-American war with a textbook version written fifty or hundred years ago. Get students thinking with this question: "If history already happened, why does it keep changing?"

Any teacher's goal (and his or her students' goals) in reading and thinking like a historian should be to treat with skepticism any account that claims to present a full story of the past. Achieving this goal requires students to:

- Question the source
- Evaluate the evidence it offers for its assertions
- Read and consider the source more carefully than any historical account read before.

Why Teach Students to "Think Like Historians?"

Students need to be taught to "think like historians" not because they will become professional historians but precisely because most won't. The goals of school history are not vocational but to prepare students to tolerate complexity, to adapt to new situations, and to resist the first answer that comes to mind.

When a video uploaded from a cell phone in Tehran can be transmitted to San Francisco in half a second, history reminds us to start with basic questions: Who sent it? Can it be trusted? What did the camera angle miss? There's no shortage of forces telling students what to think. In this daily avalanche of information, students have never been in greater need of ways to make sense of it all.

Kevin's right: Without thinking, history is meaningless. But when you add thinking, especially the specific skills of "thinking historically," the past comes to life. In the end that is what reading, and thinking—and I would add, teaching—like a historian is all about.

Sam Wineburg, Stanford University, is the author of *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*, winner of the 2002 Frederick W. Ness Award for the "most important contribution to understanding the liberal arts" by the American Association of Colleges and Universities. He also directs the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) program at Stanford University. Learn more at <http://sheg.stanford.edu>

Research and Current Thinking

For each issue, Teaching with Primary Sources Consortium members submit summaries of and links to online resources—articles, research reports, Web sites, and white papers—that provide research and current thinking relating to the theme. This Research & Current Thinking focuses teaching historical thinking using primary sources.

Benchmarks of Historical Thinking Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness. Historians' research and teachers' experience joined to define historical thinking by identifying key concepts, provide strategies promoting concept development and publish tools to assess students' ability to demonstrate historical thinking.

Can Ten-Year-Olds Learn to Investigate History as Historians Do? VanSledright, B. *Organization of American Historians Newsletter* (2000) The author contends "children should learn history with greater fidelity to the craft: analyzing primary and secondary sources, drawing inferences from sometimes thin and inconclusive data, plunging deeply into historical contexts, and creating narratives about the past."

Digital History Reader features two content areas, U.S. and European History. Appropriate for secondary students, each module includes an introduction with objectives and historical questions, historical context, an archive of documents with guiding questions, an assessment, conclusion, and list of related resources.

"Historical Scene Investigations was designed for teachers who need a strong pedagogical mechanism for bringing primary sources into their classroom." Fourteen "cases" build skills in historical thinking.

Historical Thinking Matters "A website focused on key topics in U.S. history designed to teach students how to critically read primary sources and critique and construct historical narratives." Resources are divided into three areas: student investigations, why historical thinking matters, and teacher materials and strategies.

I Can Do This: Revelations on Teaching with Historical Thinking Burenheide, B. *The History Teacher*, 2007. Learn "three aspects of historical instruction. The learning and use of historical knowledge, positioning of the student in historical study, and assessment of student learning while they are 'doing history.'"

National History Education "is designed to help K-12 history teachers access resources and materials to improve U.S. history education in the classroom." Sections include History Content, Best Practices, Teaching American History Grants, Teaching Materials, Issues & Research, and Professional Development.

Picturing Modern America 1880-1920 contains interactive exercises designed for students with teacher guidance and organized into three categories: Image Detective, Investigations, and Exhibit Builder.

Reading Like a Historian Curriculum The Stanford History Education Group's curriculum provides lessons that engage students in historical inquiry. "Each lesson revolves around a central historical question and features sets of primary documents modified for groups of students with diverse reading skills and abilities."

Reading and Rewriting History Wineburg, S. and Martin, D. *Educational Leadership*, 2004 "The ability to judge quality of information published and importance of Internet in departing knowledge to the students is described. The awareness among the students about topics in history and ability to discuss the topics show that they are well-informed readers, writers and thinkers."

Teaching Historical Thinking Drake, F. *ERIC Digest*, 2002. "...Samuel Wineburg has conducted empirical studies to compare the way historians think about primary and secondary sources with the thinking processes of high school students and teachers. This digest addresses Wineburg's conception of historical thinking and its application to the teaching and learning of history in schools."

To access links to the resources cited above please visit the online version of this edition of the Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly online at <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly>.



Grammar school children gathered around a table doing woodworking projects while teachers watch nearby in a classroom. Library of Congress. Photographs from the Chicago Daily News, 1902-1933. American Memory.

Learning Activity - Elementary Level

HISTORICAL SCENE INVESTIGATION THE U.S. CONSTITUTION: "I SMELT A RAT"

Overview

In this activity, students explore reasons why influential patriots like Patrick Henry and George Mason opposed the U.S. Constitution during the ratification process, and consider the need for the Bill of Rights. Students become historical detectives, using historical thinking strategies to investigate primary sources for evidence, search for clues to analyze and finally "crack the case."

Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- describe the historical context surrounding the ratification of the U.S. Constitution;
- recognize that initial opposition to the Constitution led to the addition of a Bill of Rights; and
- use evidence from primary sources relating to the ratification process to discuss the reasons for opposition to the Constitution among patriots like Patrick Henry and George Mason

Time Required

Two class periods (90 minutes)

Grade Level

5 - 6

Topic/s

Government, Law

Subject/Sub-subject

U.S. History

Standards McREL 4th Edition Standards and Benchmarks

Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective.

United States History

Standard 8. Understands the institutions and practices of government created during the Revolution and how these elements were revised between 1787 and 1815 to create the foundation of the American political system based on the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Language Arts

Standard 7. (Reading) Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts.

Credits

Adapted from the Historical Scene Investigations Web site's *The U.S. Constitution: "I Smelt a Rat" Case*, created by Kathleen Owings Swan, Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education at the University of Kentucky and Mark Hofer, Associate Professor of Educational Technology at the College of William & Mary. This case was developed with support from the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Eastern Region coordinated by Waynesburg University.

View and Print the complete learning activity:

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical_thinking/pdf/elementary_activity.pdf



Scene at signing of the Constitution of the United States. Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

Learning Activity - Secondary Level

WHY DID CONGRESS REJECT THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS?

Overview

In this activity, students think like historians to understand arguments in favor of and against President Woodrow Wilson's proposed League of Nations as part of the 1919 Congressional battle over the Treaty of Versailles. Intended for use within a larger unit of study about the end of World War I and its legacy, students practice historical thinking strategies as they read and listen to the speeches for insight into the Senate's ultimate rejection of the League of Nations.

Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- describe the historical context surrounding Wilson's League of Nations proposal;
- recognize that the Senate ultimately rejected the League of Nations; and
- use evidence from speeches delivered by Senators Gilbert Hitchcock and Henry Cabot Lodge to discuss the arguments for and against the League of Nations.

Time Required

Two class periods (90 minutes)

Grade level

9 - 12

Topic/s

Government, Law; Presidents

Subject/Sub-subject

U.S. History

Standards McREL 4th Edition Standards and Benchmarks

Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

United States History

Standard 21. Understands the changing role of the United States in world affairs through World War I.

Language Arts

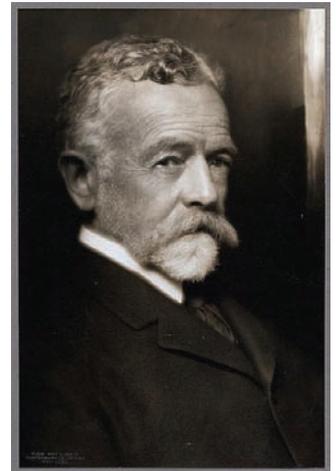
Standard 7. (Reading) [Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts](#)

Credits

Bradley Fogo and Abby Reisman, Ph.D. candidates at the Stanford University School of Education. For her dissertation, Abby directed the *Reading Like a Historian* Project in San Francisco

View and Print the complete learning activity:

http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical_thinking/pdf/secondary_activity.pdf



Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing right] / Pirie MacDonald, Photographer-of-Men, New York. Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

Teacher Spotlight



**Valerie
Ziegler**

In each issue, we introduce a teacher who participated in Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) professional development and successfully uses Library of Congress primary sources to support effective instructional practices.

This issue's Teacher Spotlight features Valerie Ziegler, a social studies teacher at Lincoln High School in California's San Francisco Unified School District. Valerie is in her sixth year of teaching social studies at the eleventh and twelfth grade levels. The TPS program at Stanford University nominated Valerie for her effective classroom use of primary sources to teach historical thinking. In this interview, Valerie discusses teaching strategies and her favorite Library of Congress online resources.

How did you learn about the Library of Congress TPS Program?

Through my work with Stanford University's Reading Like a Historian program. [*Editor's note: The Stanford History Education Group administers Stanford's Reading Like a Historian program as well as the Library's TPS program at Stanford University.*]

What motivated you to participate in the TPS program in your local area?

The leadership at Stanford recommended the program to me as a way to improve my teaching. I was looking for ways to use primary sources that went beyond simply reading and

responding to questions. I also wanted to use a variety of sources, more than are provided with the textbook. Lastly, I was looking for ways to make my course more rigorous. I want students to be inquisitive about history and to want to know more.

Tell us about the first time you tried using primary sources in the classroom.

I first began by using the U.S. Constitution for a lesson that led students on a scavenger hunt, finding information in documents related to given scenarios. Looking back, I now realize that this lesson only required students to locate and identify information in the Constitution, rather than encouraging them to practice historical thinking skills like close reading of the document and thinking about its point of view and the time period.

Based on your experiences, how do you use primary sources to encourage historical thinking in students?

My current teaching focuses much more on helping students to develop historical thinking skills by reading or interpreting primary sources. I encourage students to consider a lot of questions about each primary source they encounter. For example, now if I were to teach a lesson about the Constitution, I would require students to think about who wrote the document, when it was written, the perspective of the author, what is missing from the document, and what the writing can tell us about the time period. For homework, I might assign the Library's Creating the United States Constitution Interactive for students to further explore the antecedents of some of the document's

critical phrases and principles and identify additional primary sources for investigation.

What are your favorite resources available on the Library of Congress Web site? Why?

I use the American Memory site a great deal. I have had a lot of success in the classroom using primary sources of different formats from the Library's Voices from the Dust Bowl: The Charles L. Todd and Robert Sonkin Migrant Worker Collection. Sound recordings as well as newsletters documenting the everyday lives of people in the Depression-era migrant work camps provide real opportunities for students to get unique insight into what life was like in these camps and in California during the Depression.

What advice do you have for teachers who have never tried teaching with primary sources?

Don't be afraid! I was worried that students would find using primary sources to think like historians to be boring, but just the opposite occurred. When students have the skills to interpret the documents I find that they enjoy it. As students build historical knowledge, they empowered by their ability to analyze and place primary sources in historical context. Once I began using historical documents regularly in my classes, it inspired me to create new lessons and to find additional primary sources. I have even begun to do my own historical research, something that tends to get lost in the craziness of lesson planning. I have found that collaborating with coworkers to create and share primary source-based lessons has greatly improved my teaching.