

Teaching History and Literacy

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This chapter will:

- Provide a rationale for history teachers to teach students the literacy of their discipline.
- Discuss what students need to know about history to read it well.
- Discuss research and practice regarding the teaching of disciplinary literacy during the study of history.
- Provide examples of discipline-based literacy strategies and routines that will help students understand and think about the ideas in their history texts.

The case for teaching literacy in history class

Each time we ask historians how much time they spend reading and writing, we are told that they do these things *all of the time*; and anyone who has studied even one topic in history understands that making sense of the past requires intense reflection on the written word. Yet, history teachers often face a particularly knotty dilemma—they have students who, even though they may know how to read, struggle with their history textbook and resist reading it (“Boring!”). Further, when teachers try to introduce historical documents to students such as the Constitution or a Supreme Court decision, the archaic language and the unfamiliar way the text is organized is a source of even greater difficulty. The teachers’ plaint: “Why hadn’t these students learned how to

read in elementary school? And if they can't read, shouldn't the English teachers be teaching them?"

But reading literature isn't the same as reading history or math or the texts from any other subject area. The disciplines each have different ways of communicating knowledge; perhaps a consequence of the unique kinds of knowledge they create and the different standards they have for determining what is worth studying. An English teacher usually won't know enough about history to be able to teach students what to understand and think about history when reading historical texts; nor do they typically engage in such reading themselves. Too, as students move through the grades, the material they read becomes increasingly complex, abstract, and more specifically enmeshed within a disciplinary focus.

Students may start out in third- or fourth-grade reading literature, science, and social studies materials equally well. And, why not? The texts are different, but they are not that different—and this is especially true of the science and social studies texts, and of other informational texts, too. However, by ninth-grade disciplinary reading issues usually become evident. The texts become increasingly sophisticated as students advance through school, but they also become increasingly specialized. Fourth-grade history and science texts may not be that different, but by ninth-grade they are as if from different planets – the purposes, language (both vocabulary—the words and the nature of these words—and grammar), page formatting, organizational structures, relationships of prose to graphics, role of the author in interpretation, degrees of precision, nature of critical response, and so on, all differ markedly. The problem is compounded by the fact that disciplinary materials for older students are less likely to address content of which students have much prior knowledge. Even if reading is being taught in the English Language Arts class (and often it is not), that instruction probably won't provide sufficient

support to allow students to succeed in reading increasingly complex history, science, or math texts.

It is no wonder then, that when students can't read the textbook, history teachers often eschew the texts in favor of lectures, photographs, and video, or end up having the better students read the text aloud, a page or a paragraph at a time, with the teacher interspersing explanations of what each of these text segments said. After all, these teachers are expected to teach students about the Civil War or the Columbian Exchange – they will be tested on it. It should be no surprise that the committed teacher is going to make sure the students get the historical information, even if they can't or won't *read* history.

Unfortunately, this obvious solution to the problem doesn't help students be better readers of history, and, in the long run, it does them a great disservice. The kind of reading one needs to learn to do in history is fundamentally at the heart of college readiness, and it is also needed if students are to become members of an informed citizenry, with a clear understanding of their present. The major job of the history teacher is not to tell students the information from the history books, but to enable students to make sense of this information in a sophisticated and appropriate –to the discipline of history— manner.

In college, history is mandatory; but students are also usually required to learn the history of their major fields of study. For example, in psychology classes, students may be expected to learn the progression of the field of psychology from its beginning to the present, and the same is true in the sciences, education, and many other fields of study. Understanding the roots of a discipline helps one understand the nature of the discipline. Students in college are usually expected to learn this history without much reading support or guidance. College classes are not likely to read the text aloud a paragraph at a time with the commentary of the professor.

Making decisions about who to vote for or what positions to take on issues like gay marriage or global warming— a basic responsibility of citizens— requires the kind of reading practiced by historians who confront issues by considering evidence drawn from multiple documents, often representing different or even opposing perspectives. In the last election, citizens were bombarded with multiple, opposing messages from various candidates, political parties, and special interest groups, and the process of weighing them—deciding which messages were significant, evidence-based, and corroborated—is very much like the processes used by historians when they read history. But this activity depends on the initiative of citizens themselves; there won't be a teacher there to tell them what the texts say or ordering other citizens to read the texts aloud for them.

Digging into the past in any endeavor helps one better understand and operate in the present. In the workplace, for example, if an individual knows how the current situation got to be the way it is, he or she may have a better idea about how to change it. Knowing our family histories can help us understand more about ourselves. Yet, digging into the past takes initiative and must be done, once again, without a teacher's support. Thus, by the time students get through high school, they should be *independent* and sophisticated readers of history.

Because of the wide adoption of the Common Core State Standards for the English Language Arts (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of the Chief State School Officers, 2010), the notion that students in history classes should be *readers* of history has, perhaps, never been more apparent. Perusing these standards, one realizes that there are not only literacy standards for English Language Arts classes, but there are also reading and writing standards for History/Social Studies, Science, and technical subjects. Why? Quite frankly, these issues weren't the first things on the minds of the common core standards writers. However, as they learned of the distinct challenges of reading in different subject areas, they were convinced

that they had to include these more specialized uses of literacy if they were truly to enable students to be college and career ready.

The common core reading standards for history/social studies indicate that students must learn to read single history texts for understanding (e.g., “Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas”), but they also expect students to read multiple texts and genres and to make comparisons and connections across them, (e.g., “Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources”). Furthermore, students must be able to weigh the quality of this historical evidence and then use such evidence to support their own arguments (e.g. “Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media [e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words] in order to address a question or solve a problem”).

To help students learn to read history in these ways, we call for an instructional focus on the discipline of history itself. We recognize that students are challenged in many ways when reading history, but argue that, although most history teachers do not know how to teach reading per se, they do possess a great deal of implicit knowledge as to what it takes to read history. History teachers can support students’ reading not by teaching phonics or general reading comprehension strategies, but by imparting the kinds of thinking needed to interpret the past. If students have a framework for thinking about the information they are reading, they will be more likely to understand it.

What do students need to know about history to read it well?

We thought deeply about what students needed to know about history to read history well during a Carnegie-funded study of expert readers in history, chemistry, and mathematics (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Shanahan, Shanahan & Misischia, 2011). We asked historians to think aloud about their reading processes as they read a variety of materials over a period of time, both individually and in a focus group that included history teacher educators and history teachers. To help us interpret these response, we drew on Sam Wineburg's seminal study (1991) in which he asked historians and high school students to think aloud while they read multiple documents about a single historical event, and we reviewed the work of our colleagues who have written about history processes (e.g. Lee, 2005). As part of Project READI*, an Institute of Education Sciences funded Reading Comprehension grant, Cyndie Shanahan, and her colleagues have further refined our understanding of what it means to understand or know history.

Wineburg found marked differences between historians and high school students: Historians engaged in processes that helped them think about the ideas, whereas high school students merely tried to gather facts and remember them. The historians used three processes not common among students: (1) they *sourced*—they thought about where the information came from, who the author was, who published it and when, relative to other documents, was it written; (2) they *contextualized*—they looked at when the writing was produced and thought about the historical conditions or contexts under which it was written; and (3) they *corroborated*—unlike the high school students, they noted the agreements and disagreements across texts, ascribing greater confidence to information that could be corroborated.

The historians in our study engaged in these same processes, and spoke quite eloquently about the approaches they used when reading, and the interpretive decisions they made. For example, one historian, while reading two documents revealing different perspectives on the

question, “Was Lincoln the greatest president?” recognized the name of the author of one of the texts, and said,

I saw, oh...I don't know him very well, but he [the author] is part of a right wing group of southern conservatives who is a secessionist. I'm not sure that the best model for thinking about Lincoln as a president is one that comes from a racist. So I have my critical eyes up a little bit, so it's a bit of a stretch to be friendly to, so I wanted to make sure to read it fairly.

The historian was sourcing, but he was doing more than just noting who the author was; he was evaluating a potentially biased perspective and his own stance regarding it; that, in fact, is why historians engage in sourcing, because they recognize that all documents will be influenced by the authors' perspectives, limitations, and biases, and to read history well, one must recognize such influences on the historical picture that emerges from the documents. That is, this historian took into account what he knew about the author's perspective (in this case a biased one, according to him), but he also reserved judgment until he had read the author's argument, trying to avoid just imposing his own bias—another important history reading skill or insight.

An author's perspective is one of those important things to think about when reading or viewing history, whether the genre is a textbook, popular history text, document, film, or artifact. But historians also try to determine what perspectives, data, or sources may have been left out. The historians with whom we worked strongly recommended that history teachers help their students think about those whose voices are not being heard in the historical record. Are women's, Native Americans', or Vietnamese perspectives being omitted? Why?

Thinking about context is also a much more nuanced process than just noting a time period. Another historian in our study had the following to say about a book he was reading on African safari parks (his particular interest):

One thing I'm kind of looking at carefully when I read this kind of text is a kind of a periodization. In other words, is what they're talking about earlier than I, is the evidence they're giving earlier than what I would have guessed or is it later than I would have guessed or does it fit into the way I'm already thinking about the topic? Or does it contradict that and kind of push my chronology back a little bit? Uh, that's one thing I think about. And this is about African safari parks in Europe and the US and this is post-world war II, so it's the sixties, and so, one thing I try to do is locate when this started.

This historian was trying to get a sense of how particular passages he was reading fit into his own understanding of the chronology of African safari parks. As he stated, each time he read something new, he tried to place the information in a time frame and he weighed his own prior knowledge about what was happening at that time with the new information. This is a particularly difficult process for students to engage in, because they often don't have much knowledge about the periods they are reading about. Nevertheless, teachers can provide such information and can scaffold students to think about it with such teacher support.

In addition to inclusivity or exclusion, historians evaluate a text's coherence. Are there gaps in the story or in the logic? Are events out of chronological order? Does the story make sense? What claims is the author making about the information, and what evidence does the author present to back up those claims? Are they coherent or contradictory? Often students are asked to read narrative history and they tend to view such text as just a series of ill-connected stories. Historians relate such stories in a way that supports an argument and showing students how to make connections among these events can help them to uncover the argument. In all of these processes used by historians, logic and reason are at the forefront, and they are always engaging in evaluation.

I do notice the relationship between argument and evidence and does the evidence he's using, the kind of evidence he's using, does it reinforce the argument for me or does it muddy the argument? So I guess I am kind of evaluating, at the same time, while a political read is my primary read, I'm also doing a little bit of a stylistic read in the sense that I'm looking at how he's using evidence to reinforce his argument and if it's working, if I think it's working.

Historians study change over time. But they use frameworks to guide that study. Perhaps they are interested in the political ramifications of an event (note that the historian above liked to focus on a “political read”), or the social, economic, artistic, religious, or technical causes and consequences of an event, or perhaps they are interested in the interplay of several of those frameworks that impact change over time. For example, consider historical accounts of the Little Rock Nine, the group of African American high school students who spent a year in what up-to-then had been an all-white school in Little Rock, Arkansas, until Governor Faubus used a loophole in the state law to close the school. The integration of Central High School was impacted by politics (e.g., Dwight Eisenhower used his presidential powers to send in federal troops; some say Faubus’ resistance was just to protect his own political power, and not because he was racist) and legality (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* was the impetus for integration and Faubus used state’s rights as a legal argument for resistance). However, these events in turn were affected by social (e.g., Civil Rights Movement, KKK) and even technical (e.g., advent of televised reporting) influences. By thinking in terms of frameworks, historians can sharpen their analysis of change over time.

In addition to these frameworks, historians classify systems such as governments, like feudalism or monarchy; they think thematically (exploring, for example, “processes of migration,” “expansion and retraction of rights,” or “changes in economic systems,”) and they interpret the

relationships among events. Just because a series of events is chronological doesn't mean that the relationship is causative, or just because an author tells about events in a particular sequence, does not necessarily mean that the events occurred in that order. Time sequences may reveal causation, but they also may be simply due to coincidence or chance (and what may appear to be a time sequence can be the result of the author's choices rather than actual chronology).

Historians have varying theories of history. Some historians, for instance, operate from the belief that history is a story of progress; while others think that history is a documentation of social decline. Some believe that history is fueled by the great men (and women) that lead it; others believe it is fueled by the hopes and desires of the masses and that the so-called "great men" respond to the movements, like corks on the water. Note what one historian said as he read an article about Lincoln:

Um, and then, my response is first of all, I'm always kind of very suspicious and weary of the kind of "great man in history" approach, so I'm looking kind of carefully at how the author is embedding this argument. In other words, are they trying to undermine that great man in history, are they addressing the problem and dealing with the problem or are they letting the problem just kind of fester without addressing it? Um, so I'm looking carefully at how they're kind of wording and locating the individual in history.

This historian was reading to determine what theoretical stance the author may have had.

All of the considerations about history just discussed are based on a set of assumptions or beliefs about historical accounts historians espouse. The nature of historical inquiry leads them to these beliefs. Unlike scientists, who rely on systematic descriptions of observed phenomena and experimental evidence, historians must rely on the study of primary (documents and artifacts) and secondary sources (e.g. the works of other historians) that are already in existence and which

they must uncover through inexact search processes. Whereas scientists, after an experiment that yields significant results, can predict with a degree of certainty what will happen in the future given similar circumstances, historians can make no such prediction. Scientists can determine probability, given evidence that is tightly constrained; historians can only hope to determine *plausibility*, given evidence that is incomplete, often contradictory, possibly biased, and inconclusive. Because of that, historians are always aware that historical accounts consist of different interpretations or approximations of the past — not of the truth, and they know that one’s interpretation of history is always contestable; much of history is about argument. Events aren’t significant unless claimed to be so, and an interpretation of significance could be based upon flawed or incomplete evidence. They understand that each interpreter of an event has a point of view and a historical context from which he or she studies the past (for example, during the first half of the Twentieth Century, historians were particularly unkind to the memory of the “Radical Republicans” who worked to end slavery in the U.S., but since the advances of the Civil Rights movement, these individuals are now viewed much more sympathetically). Given these limitations, historians recognize the need to be critical in determining the trustworthiness of any particular story of history.

The big idea here is historians see *everything* in history as argument—consisting of a series of claims about the past and a presentation of evidence for that claim—even if it is written as a story or narrative. Read, for example, the following excerpt from a history textbook:

Their [bus boycotters] victory would inspire a new mass movement to ensure civil rights for African Americans. A series of local struggles to dismantle segregation—in the schools of Little Rock, in the department stores of Atlanta, in the lunch counters of Greensboro, in the streets of Birmingham—would coalesce into a broad-based national movement at the center of American politics. By 1963, the massive

March on Washington would win the endorsement of President John F. Kennedy, and his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, would push through the landmark Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act (Farragher, Buhle, Czitrom, & Armitage, 2009, p. 1009).

This text follows a chronological account of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. That the historian chose this particularly well-known event as THE event inspiring a new mass movement is his interpretation—a claim he makes presumably on the basis of evidence. Was it the very first nationally televised action by those seeking integration? Did he base the claim on the interpretations of other accounts? Historians would be asking those questions rather than reading passively just to find out what he claimed.

The problem is that most historical accounts students read in class are from textbooks that tend to report history as a grand narrative. History in such books is told as an unfolding, chronological story through which historians make implicit rather than explicit claims and bolster these claims with implicit rather than explicit evidence. To muddy the water, history texts contain numerous corroborated facts. World War II ended in 1945. Columbus sailed in 1492. To students, such historical accounts seem like true, cut-and-dried accounts of the past, and, thus, don't think about the information very deeply. People's motivations, the relationship of one event to another, the level of significance, that is, what was causative and what was merely coincidental—these are interpretations, hidden from students if they are not taught to pay attention to them.

While students accept the truth of what is presented to them in a history class, historians use these various insights about historical processes and the nature of evidence and argument, to guide their reading. They approach a text seeking clues to the source and context even before beginning to read the text itself. When they do read the text, they seek clues that will help unmask an author's perspective or bias, the nature of the argument or claim and the quality of the evidence. Historians continue to evaluate these things as they read, and based upon their

judgments of a text's trustworthiness, they determine their own stance towards the information. This process is very different from the typical way history text is read in secondary classrooms, where the main purpose of reading is to find out what happened and to memorize the important names and dates. The first is an active engagement with the text and a joining into an ongoing argument; the second is a lonely, passive repudiation of engagement. We argue that helping students to read like historians will lead to higher levels of engagement and, ultimately, a better understanding and use of history.

Other considerations in the reading and writing of history

Functional linguists have studied the differences among texts in different subject areas, including history (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2008). They find that sentences in history are unique because of their heavy emphasis on intention. History sentences are often about historical actors, their intentions, motivations, and goals, and the tactics they use to accomplish or attain these. Such sentences would be very out of place in a science text, where the idea of the writing is to suppress ideas of intention. Atoms do not choose to move; they are acted upon or implicated in scientific processes—if there is heat they move more, if there is not much heat they do not. In history, the sentences that describe the actors' goals and tactics also include information about time and place. Consider the following sentence: "One year after the Little Rock Nine integrated Central High School, Governor Faubus shut down further attempts to integrate by abruptly closing the Little Rock, Arkansas public schools." In this sentence, time is construed as "one year after...."; place is construed as "Little Rock, Arkansas;" and the actor clearly is Governor Faubus. The goal that he acts toward is "to shut down further attempts to integrate" and the manner in which it is done or his tactic is "by abruptly closing the Little Rock, Arkansas public schools." Fang and Schleppegrell suggest that teaching students how to read history sentences can increase their

basic understanding of history by keeping them focused on the historical purpose of such syntactic constructions. They also note that, whereas science text is filled with vocabulary that is technical in nature (e.g., mitochondria, eutrophication, osmosis), the challenge for history readers is not so much grasping the technical vocabulary, which is often borrowed from economics, sociology, or other social sciences, but making sense of general academic vocabulary, which can be quite daunting. Note the following excerpt from a high school history textbook: “Dr. King’s prophetic speech catapulted him into leadership of the Montgomery bus boycott—but he had not started the movement. When Rosa Parks was arrested, local activists with deep roots in the black protest tradition galvanized the community with the idea of a boycott,” (Farragher, Buhle, Czitrom, & Armitage, 2009, p. 1008). Students may have difficulty with “prophetic,” “catapulted,” “activists,” and “galvanized,” none of which would be considered discipline specific or a technical word. Additionally, given that history is an argument, vocabulary in historical accounts often carries ideological baggage (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012)—it matters whether one writes of *affirmative action* or *reverse discrimination*; *protestors* or *agitators*; *the Civil War* or *the War Between the States*. Part of reading history is interpreting the perspectives evident in the choices of words, not just the word meanings.

To determine the difficulties historians expected students to confront in reading history, we asked the historians that we were studying about this. They mentioned that the reading of historical documents could be challenging for several reasons. First, language has changed over the years. If students are reading old documents, they will find that the vocabulary and style of writing will be unfamiliar to them, and thus, will provide a challenge. Note the following excerpt from Ensign Jeremy Lister, a British Officer who writes an account of the night of Paul Revere’s ride (retrieved from

<http://www.nps.gov/mima/forteachers/upload/Ensign%20Jeremy%20Lister.pdf>):

I immediately offered myself a Volunteer in the room of Hamilton and was [ac]cepted of when I immediately returned to my lodgings to equip myself for a march, and met the Company on their way through the town in order to embark in boats to cross the bay above Charlestown, when we was just embarking, Lt. Col. Smith wish'd me to return to town again and not go into danger for others, particularly Hamilton whose illness was suppos'd by everybody to be feign'd which 'twas clearly proved to be the case afterwards, but wishing much to go, for the Honor of the Reg't thinking it would be rather a disgrace for the Company to March on an Expedition, more especially it being the first, without its compliment of Officers, therefore my offer was [ac]cepted.

Even though the document is written in a rather informal style, familiar or modern conventions of spelling, sentence endings, and phrasing are missing.

Also, documents may be written in "legalese," or have some other arcane style. Note the language of the 13th Amendment: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." (Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html).

The meanings of vocabulary words can change, too, over years, or words may be dropped from common usage. Students may not know what "gilded" means just because it is not used much anymore. They are often appalled when reading a document from the first half of the 1900s to read what is now considered a pejorative term, "negro," and they make assumptions about the users of such terms. They lack what Lee (2005) refers to as "historical empathy," or the ability to interpret text in light of the time in which it was written (most likely because they do not have background knowledge to know what it was like then). This lack of historical empathy may not be

related to vocabulary, but can be about other social conventions. For example, students, in a lesson observed by the second author, analyzed a photograph from the 1880s of a family on a porch. Nobody in the photograph was smiling. They inferred that they were angry about the Native Americans nearby, not understanding that the convention for these pictures at the time was “no smiling” due to the long exposure times needed to make such photographs.

Such interpretive challenges can and should be the focus of instruction. It is incumbent upon those who teach history to read texts before having students read them, to note areas of potential difficulty, and to have ways ready to help students overcome these difficulties if they do, indeed, occur.

Research and practice of history literacy

In another chapter in this volume, the research regarding the teaching of reading and writing in history is explained as it relates to the reading of multiple texts. This research can be referred to in relation to both topics because, as the historians that we studied said, reading more than one text and reading in different genres is essential to history. With only one text, there is no way to determine whether another source’s perspective might have led to a different interpretation of the past. Also, when historians study the past, they use primary source documents and artifacts to guide their interpretations, not relying merely on single secondary texts written by other historians. The historians we studied were so adamant that more than one text be used that they suggested that, if nothing else were available, at least another textbook should be introduced for the purpose of comparison/contrast. Too, if students *never* encounter two or more contradictory interpretations of an event, they will *never* understand what it is to be engaged in historical inquiry. At the heart of that inquiry, as mentioned in the last section, is the idea that history is not the uncomplicated story, and the “truth” about the past can never be

known fully. The past can only be understood as an interpretation of the often competing narratives of individuals and groups who come from different perspectives.

To summarize the research on teaching history literacy, there is growing evidence that students as early as fourth grade and through college can be taught to read as historians do, and that such reading increases students' understanding history and the depth of their engagements in reading, and leads to higher levels of reading comprehension and better writing of historical arguments (Hynd-Shanahan, Holschuh, & Hubbard, 2004; VanSledright, 2002a, 2002b; Wolfe & Goldman, 2005; De La Paz, 2005, Monte-Sano, 2011; Monte-Sano & De La Paz, 2012). For example, one study found that developmental community college students, when asked to engage in sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration while reading a history unit, wrote significantly better essay test answers (more detail, better use of evidence, better organization) than students who were taught general reading strategies (Leahy, 2010). In one of the most recent studies, Reisman (2012) simply had teachers insert lessons on reading historical documents and writing about history into their existing units. Over the course of the study she found that students taught these things did significantly better on measures of historical thinking. Furthermore, these students transferred the thinking strategies they learned to the study of current issues, showing that reading like a historian prepares students for the kind of reading required for civic engagement and participation. These students even did better on tests of factual knowledge and general reading comprehension.

The field of history, in terms of research and instructional practice, has gone further down the path of disciplinary literacy than other fields of study, perhaps because historians have been so articulate about what it means to read in their field. There are a number of resources available for teachers tied to historical topics usually studied in school. These resources can help teachers support their students in history reading and writing. For example, the Reading Like a Historian

website (<http://sheg.stanford.edu/>) and the Teaching History website (teachinghistory.org) provide materials, primary source documents, instructional routines, and graphic organizers that students can use to read, write, and think critically about history, and The Teaching Channel (teachingchannel.org) has video clips of classrooms engaged in “Reading like a historian.”

In addition, there are major efforts underway to study the teaching of historical thinking in relation to reading and writing. For example, an Institute of Education Sciences research project, Project READI, is studying the development of students’ ability to understand and write arguments specific to history, science, and English literature in grades 6-12. This project recognizes that the nature of argumentation differs across these three fields. In history, claims are often embedded in description and narration whereas they may be more explicit in explanations of history. In these three kinds of argument, there are different conventions for the presentation of evidence, and the warrants, or the linkages between the evidence and the claims, are often not explicitly stated and must be inferred. For students to read history text for their implicit arguments, they cannot use the same strategies used by students reading science texts. In Project READI, the history team is studying a middle grades and high school teacher as they infuse reading and writing instruction into their existing instructional practices. These teachers are teaching students to source, contextualize, and corroborate, to recognize claims and evidence in historical texts, looking for a source’s interpretation of the relationship among events and their significance, and to use textual evidence in their own writing. They are also helping their students understand that reading historical texts closely in this new way—as historians do—requires a level of engagement and persistence they may not have previously applied to their reading of history, but that provides greater rewards. Both teachers have reported high levels of engagement with the reading and writing tasks.

How should we teach the literacy of history?

Change students' ideas about what history is. The biggest challenge in teaching students to read history is their abiding distaste for it. Students resist reading history often because they find it boring or because the texts are challenging and don't seem to be worth the effort. These students need to have their conceptions of history as no more than a tedious compendium of past names, dates, and events, disrupted. We need to change students' beliefs about what it means to read history, before trying to teach them the historians' reading and writing routines.

Teachers can do that by providing students with contradictory texts, perhaps two texts showing authors' differing perspectives (a British account of Paul Revere's ride and an American version of it), or differing uses of evidence (primary vs. secondary sources or one source vs. several sources). Focusing attention on such differences makes a point: Accounts of the past are often based upon incomplete and contradictory evidence. A teacher can help students *come to their own conclusions* that their history textbooks or the historical movies they watch or the stories they have grown up memorizing about history (e.g. stories about George Washington) are more uncomplicated and straightforward than history could possibly be.

There are other ways to begin the process of reading like a historian. In Project READI, one unit taught by history teachers started with photographs. Students analyzed the photographs in relation to a question, "What caused the conflict between the Native Americans and the settlers in the Black Hills?" The photographs included some contextual information such as the date they were taken so they could be placed in chronological order. Students made inferences that they would later confirm or disconfirm and asked questions that they would later answer through their reading. Reinforced in this lesson

were several ideas about history reading—chronology is important, but it is not the same as causation; historians make hypotheses about the past based upon the evidence they have; historians use artifacts such as photographs as well as texts to construct their interpretations; and understanding of history is a process of inquiry into the past. We learned from that initial lesson, however, that even when using photographs, students lacked enough background knowledge to do much contextualization. Thus, in subsequent lessons we provided them with a short anchor text that set the stage for the question, and that support seemed enough to improve their subsequent inferences. The big idea here, though, is to help students see what history really is.

Teach students the processes historians use. As students dig into primary and secondary texts and artifacts, teach them to engage in:

- *Sourcing:* Have students find out about the author and think about what perspective that author may have—even before reading a text. Include at some point a discussion about whose perspectives are missing. That discussion could lead to further inquiry.
- *Contextualization:* Support students' ability to contextualize by asking them to notice the date, and if they don't know anything about that time period, help them find out about what was going on then. Guide them in making inferences about why an author wrote as he or she did. One strategy that combines sourcing and a kind of contextualization is called *SOAPStone*, a mnemonic that stands for Source, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Subject, and Tone. In using this mnemonic, students not only have to think about the author's stance, but about when it was written (the Occasion), who it was written to (audience), why it was written (Purpose), and what the writing

was about (Subject). As students read, they confirm or disconfirm their hypotheses about an author's perspective based upon what the author says and the way he or she says it (Tone).

- *Corroboration:* Especially when using multiple texts, students should be engaged in comparison and contrast—looking for corroborated evidence and evidence that is unique or contradicted. Students can make comparison contrast charts to keep track of this kind of information.
- *Historical Frameworks:* Students can be given the task to look for political, economic, social, or legal (etc.) tactics. Then they can be asked to reason about the interplay of these different frameworks to answer questions such as: What tactics did Governor Faubus use to keep Central High School from being integrated? What kinds of tactics did civil rights activists use successfully during the 1950s? How did these change in the 60s? One way to help students to reason using historical frameworks is a graphic organizer called a pattern organizer (See Appendix 1). This organizer provides a visual way to display information using the frameworks.
- *Evaluations of coherence:* Help students notice when large parts of a chronology are missing or out of order, or when the reasoning doesn't quite match the evidence. During an observation of middle grades classes, a teacher was instructing students to engage in history discussions. He had assigned roles so that one student looked into the source of the material; another considered the context, and so on. As they read several texts about Custer's Last Stand from different perspectives, they noticed that events were out of chronological order in the textbook version. The way these

events were placed made it seem as if one event led to another, when, in actuality, that could not have happened. The students were outraged and ended up writing the publisher about what they had discovered.

- *Argumentation:* Help students see claims and evidence in different genres. A teacher recently had students watch a PBS documentary on the Freedom Riders. They watched for a short while and wrote down what claims and evidence they heard. Then they talked with a partner to compare notes, turning to watch a few minutes more. This was interesting to them—more interesting than taking notes on names and dates, and provided insights about how documentaries pose their arguments. Later, the teacher had a discussion with them about what decisions the documentarian was making, and was surprised at the sophisticated ways in which the students were thinking. Textbook narrations are usually full of claims without sufficient evidence, whereas popular history books often have the sources of evidence noted in some way. These different traditions of interpretation of the past can spark high-level conversations about claims and evidence in history.

Also, if students are reading to answer a historical question, having a multiple text comparison-contrast chart can provide them with the fodder for writing their own essays. Ask students to put the guiding questions on top, with the name of the different texts going down the side. As students read these texts, they enter whatever evidence they found to answer the guiding question. When they are finished reading, they make their own claims based upon their thinking about the trustworthiness of the source and

it's presentation of evidence. The chart, then, becomes a large part of the planning support for student essay writing.

- *Arcane vocabulary and structure.* Teachers should create a climate for reading that honors struggle and the ability to problem solve. To truly read like historians, students must be able to really dig into a text, understanding it at word and sentence level as well as more conceptually. In a sense, students are reading the texts like detectives, looking for clues to an authors' perspective, claim, evidence, and tone, and placing the text within a larger group of texts to get a more in-depth and complicated view of the past. Students must learn to do this independently, but they will need support initially. The big struggle for teachers here is to support them when they have difficulty *without telling them what the text means*. If students struggle with a key vocabulary term, lead them to try different ways to get to the meaning themselves before simply telling them. Ask questions to lead students to higher levels of thinking. In Project READI, a high school history teacher admitted this was the hardest thing for her to do. Like most history teachers, she *loved* her subject matter, and got so excited about it that she wanted to tell them all about her insights before they had a chance to have any of their own.
- *Relationships among events.* As mentioned, events can be in chronological order without having a cause-effect relationship. Some events have multiple causes and some events have multiple effects. Some events are simply coincidental. These relationships are the interpretations of historians, and students acting as historians can make inferences about them. Another

graphic organizer we use with narrative history is our History Events Chart (See Appendix 2.) in which students not only summarize each of the historical events reported in the narrative, but then have to explain the connections between the events. Thus, fifth-graders while reading a chapter on the American Revolution had to read the chapter and then summarize the five sections of the chapter: the fall of Fort Ticonderoga; the Battle of Bunker Hill; the Second Continental Congress; Washington takes command; and the British leave Boston. Initially, the students assumed it was just a chronological ordering of events, but as they examined the evidence they started to discern an argument in the series of “stories.” They decided that the author was making an unstated claim about the importance of unity in a war and that the munitions of one state could not be used to fight the British in another without someone (Washington) being in charge of all of the states; quite a sophisticated reading for a group of 10- and 11-year-olds.

Conclusions

The fundamental idea of disciplinary literacy is that not all texts are read or written in the same ways; that each discipline has its own rules of evidence and ways of using of language. The only way students are likely to learn to be literate in these specialized disciplinary ways is by a kind of apprenticeship that brings them into participation in the discipline rather than as just an observer or a consumer of what the disciplines produce. If students are going to be sophisticated readers of history, they need to understand what it is that historians are trying to do, and they need to be introduced to basic ideas such as the nature of vocabulary in the history or the ways the sentences work or how narratives serve as implicit arguments or why we need to think about

authors as we read. Research shows that engaging students in reading history in the ways historians do is beneficial both for history learning and for civic engagement.

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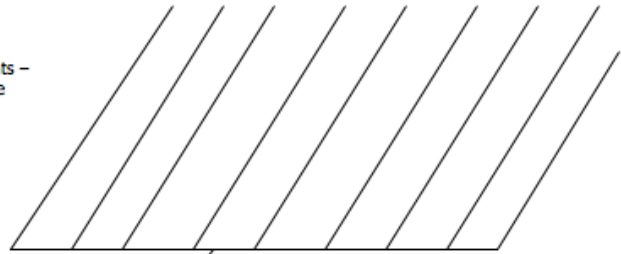
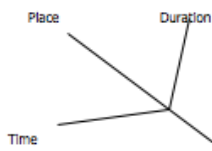
Appendix 1

Pattern Organizer

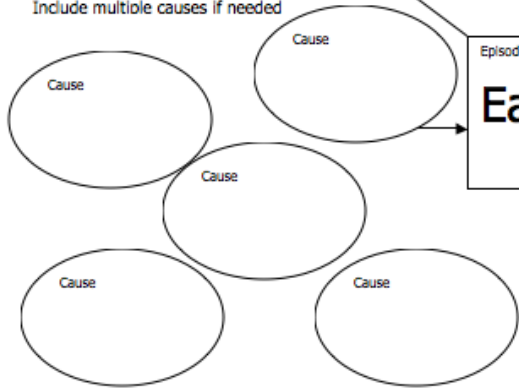
Name _____

Episode Pattern Organizer For: Early Cold War

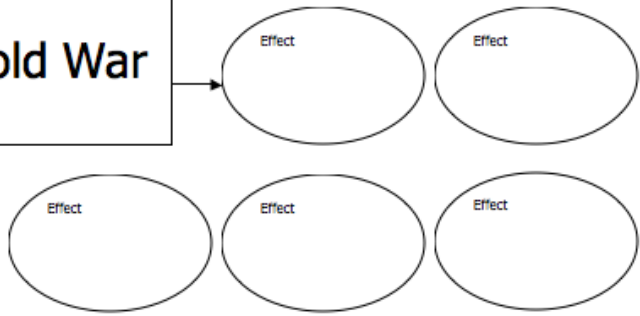
Identify the sequence of events –
in order related to the episode
and the cause/effect



Include multiple causes if needed



Include multiple effects if needed



Identify all people involved in web form

Appendix 2

History Events Chart

Event	What happened?	Who?	When?	Where?	Why important?
Connection:					
Event	What happened?	Who?	When?	Where?	Why important?
Connection:					
Event	What happened?	Who?	When?	Where?	Why important?
Connection:					
Event	What happened?	Who?	When?	Where?	Why important?
Connection:					
Event	What happened?	Who?	When?	Where?	Why important?
Author's argument:					