

Social Studies department philosophy: to help students develop a better understanding of themselves and the world in which we live.

Teaching US history is quite exciting! Since the story involves all sorts of people, I teach it as a story: protagonists, plot, rise and fall of tension, heroes and heroines, some in search of self-interest, others were and are interested in liberty and justice for all. I rolled local history and current events in with U.S. history. I also used the story study web instead of an outline to create a story before each test. Students were taught how to connect ideas and use questions to help them understand how the topics connected rather than simply memorizing terms.

While I used a textbook, I did use 2 other texts plus quite a number of articles that I found or wrote. One book I found useful for authentic material was *Ordinary Americans*. I used four threads (not necessarily in any particular order though if I had to rank, I would rank worldview as #1):

1. **Content** –obviously the foundation piece. Where does one start and end? How much depth is given to the student to facilitate understanding of the time period? Should chronology be followed or a thematic approach? Due to the brain development of concrete to abstract thinking during this time of maturation, I chose a chronological approach as most kids need a one-step-in-front-of-another approach.
2. **Connections**--- how does one topic connect with another? Themes: Freedom, Rights, Voice (For example: how would the people in the colonies define Freedom? Is it any different than those in the Civil War? How about Immigration, the 1920s? and so on...) Who is telling the story and who's point of view is not included?  
Within the idea of connections:
  - a. communities---where is the person/group from? How does that impact their point of view?
  - b. Culture—and the elements of that culture: music, customs, religion, beliefs, language, food, clothing and so on
  - c. ALWAYS connect one unit to another. I take questions and use them throughout the course such as: Is this action rule by law or rule by mob? What right is being exercised? What is our role as a country in this instance? What values are reflected?
3. **Controversy** --using multiple perspectives to bring out nuances of history. This also provokes varying opinions if you scaffold your questions. Values will clash so some prep has to occur so that students understand that the loudest voice doesn't have the strongest argument—it's just loud so turn the volume down. Think about the quiet student as well to bring their POV along and develop confidence. How easy it is to sway people one way or another if they are not sure of what they value and want to go along with the popular view. No "taxation without representation" is one phrase that I used to bring that out as we studied what was stirring people during that period. We looked at how media was/is used to build and sway support—such as the woodcut from Paul Revere showing the Redcoats at the Boston Massacre. I would show that on the classroom screen and ask what do you see here? What do you think happened?

Eventually I would ask: Are the British soldiers guilty of murder? They shot into a crowd of unarmed civilians and 5 were killed. If you say “yes”, go to one side of the room; if you say no, go to the other side. Talk among your groups as to why you chose that answer. If the sides are about even, I then line up opposing sides to face off and *explain* not yell to their partner why they think what they do. We did this technique earlier in the course and throughout the year.

One other reason for the use of controversy is that it helps kids express an opinion. Look carefully at the content you have before you. What provides tension? Government and its role in providing for the people—tension; tension between generational views---Victorian grandmothers and granddaughters 20's flappers; tension from peers; (I used the neighbor bump technique to decrease the anxiety of a student speaking in front of others. Then I went to small groups and then to large class.)

4. **Worldview**—values and character—or (more narrow) POV—Point of View; as we get to WW II we see that the Nazis' used time to help them breakdown the foundation relationships of the family. Everyone was going to meetings or activities at different times, coming home at different times, being inundated with propaganda at different places and times. Eventually the values of the people were either changed or the people conformed to new morals and principles due to fear and uncertainty. Fear and uncertainty play a role—so there you have a thread--from Mary Dyer to the end of the course. Emotions can run very strong when people feel their opinion is being threatened; some kids will shut down so watch for that and be aware if there is a “ganging up” on one or just a few. Having said that, emotions and experience will often be a person's “truth” rather than fact. That is one reason why opinions must be brought out to the light and examined. I found that students also wrote with more conviction, writing longer essays when their emotions were engaged.

Just a note here about values. We in education transmit values by how we treat our colleagues, students, others. The content we choose, how we engage the students, the controversies addressed all reflect values. We have to keep that in focus. Personally, I try to help the student form their value foundations by showing them content and controversies that bring out values —and in many ways—show how difficult it is sometimes to do choose the higher moral ground yet seeing the benefits. Knowing what you value is a critical component of life as propagandists will continually assault the senses through fear, cunning arguments, violence to sway our students to their way of worldview.

I took the students back to the Mary Dyer story and then through each unit to see how we wove values in through the course. What is important to you—their POV. It shapes what they value. If they aren't sure about what values are important to them, then they place themselves in jeopardy for being led by the person that is confident into a place where they don't want to be. So, talking about what they value is important. Obviously, those may change in priority. Is honesty a life value? Caring about others? Instead of asking how your day was, ask who did you

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help or how were you helped today? Be intentional about values and character: honesty, freedom, citizenship, caring for others, self-care. Your POV will help to determine that.

What follows is just a brief sample of each topic including some questions. I scaffolded my questions to move from simple or obvious answers to more complex.

For example:

\*Colonists: Lots of substance here: I showed a drawing of Mary Dyer being led to the gallows but did not say what was going on or who she was. I simply asked the students to describe what they saw on the screen. After the response, I asked, “Are ideas dangerous?” one of the opening questions. We then read an article about Mary Dyer and had some questions to answer for homework. Next day: Mary Dyer Quaker v. Puritans; do the Puritans have a right to protect them from a threat that is not physical but an idea like Quakerism? Does Mary have a right to believe whatever she wants? Following many other questions, I got the kids to “stand in the picture”. Picture is on screen—same one as the day before but now they know the story behind it—where would you be and who? Mary? Soldier? Bystander? Not there? I then use a pretend microphone to “interview” who they were and why they were there. I sometimes pitted the soldier against the “not there” person. Was the “not there” person dangerous? Should they be investigated? Does the soldier think it is right to hang Mary? True to form—create controversy by posing one character against another. They have to justify their positions through their answers and so on.

John Adams represented the Redcoats accused of murder in the Boston Massacre—is it rule by law or rule by mob? Again, I used photos projected on a large screen and had kids “stand in the picture” as the character they most identify with. This again brings the student into a position where they must choose and justify their choice.

\*Colonies continued: Beyond Mary Dyer and the Boston Massacre, I used the movie John Adams to highlight tarring and feathering of those who opposed John Hancock. Great scene on the boat Hancock owned that highlights British official trying to do his job of inspecting cargo and Hancock diverting attention from his boat to the larger issue of British taxes. John Adams and cousin Sam are watching this unfold and John asks Sam some poignant questions—I stop and have the students respond to his queries. And it brings up rule by law or rule by mob which is a key question I use in every unit I teach. Same with controversy over Stamp Act, French and Indian War and so on.

\*Revolutionary War (when the students have to place themselves along a continuum—are you willing to stand up for what you believe though it will cost you family, friends, fortune), During the lead up to the war during the Stamp Act—will it be rule by mob or rule by law?; they then can physically see who believes differently from them and that it is ok to have different beliefs—maybe—unless you are headed for war. When does protest turn into rebellion? Again, I used scenes from the movie John Adams—attack on Lexington-- to go along with this

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BUT stopped and created questions to create “what do you think happened? What should John do?” and so on.

\*Constitution: what would they be willing to spend time and money on-- budget—what gets the most money—military or general welfare of the people or domestic tranquility, who decides? Should birthright citizenship be repealed? Again, can use neighbor bump and scaffolding questions, two opposing viewpoint lines... Let’s say a student has a particular opinion, if you have an opinion, don’t agree with that side, I then ask the student to take that particular viewpoint and pose arguments against their own viewpoint with another student. That way it forces them to see another side.

\*Manifest Destiny: How do we treat the Natives during our movement westward, the issue of slavery—does everyone have a voice—a chance to express an opinion without fear of reprisal; does everyone’s opinion count? One of the topics is Andrew Jackson’s forced removal of the Cherokees. As the students read information about it, and we discuss, I put 3 sheets of paper around the room: Go, Fight, Stay. I have the students imagine they were Cherokee, choose what they would do, and then go to stand by the sign that represents their choice. These questions lead into the Civil War issues...of slavery, states’ rights, federal law and of course back to values. Rule by law or rule by mob? If you don’t like the law, how does it get changed?

\*Civil War: Is everyone entitled to their own opinion? What would make you fight against a friend? Lincoln’s electric cord speech (Civil War); if you believe everyone is entitled to their own opinion, what about the slave? Whose opinion has priority? The slave owner has the natural law on his side—do you respect that (and his opinion), or do you fight to free the slave? If you agree that slavery is wrong, how far will you go to stop it? How would you change the law when one side wants to leave? If you decide to fight, are you now violating your principle that everyone is entitled to their own opinion? Have you crossed the line from protest into rebellion? How does federal and state law clash in this instance? Is there a moral law that you can ascribe to or is that just your opinion? Showed *Glory!* for movie night.

\*Immigration: How does music, method of dress, traditions, habits, play a part in either bringing people together or separating people? Who determines what ethnic groups and races and how many immigrants get in, should illegal immigrants have access to health care? Education? Who decides? Who pays? Current events can play a role here.

\*WWI: We are now on world center stage. What is the role of the U.S. in the world (WW I), that is—is the US the policeman of the world, its caretaker? Should we get involved? Why? Are our values in danger? (Goes back to Mary Dyer –are ideas dangerous?) What responsibility does the US shoulder? And I refer back to Lincoln’s electric cord speech; Should you be able to protest against the war during war or does that cross the “line”? Who bears the burden of paying for the cost of destruction? I used the movie *The Lost Battalion* stopping and posing the questions from time to time—would you surrender now? Is it worth it? What would you say to the general at the end?

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\*Roaring 20s: a response to the intervention of the US into world affairs and now we isolate to a degree. Did we ignore the growth of some ideologies that would prove to be a challenge to us later? While some people fell into the idea “anything goes” how do you keep your standard of behavior when the rest of the world is changing theirs (1920s)? Where and how do you draw the line when it seems everyone is doing whatever they want—particularly when it comes to unchaperoned dating, buying on credit, shorter skirts, looser morals, jazz music –and drinking illegally? What does blatantly disregard the law do to breakdown the mores of society? Is that dangerous? What values changed and how did that affect society? Were all aspects of society affected by the new morals—farmers, miners and so on. I used the quote by F. Scott Fitzgerald about the “more my friends were in touch with the times the more they drank. They were hard and languid at 21...” showed movies like *The Untouchables* for movie night.

\*Great Depression 1930s—students may be able to relate to feelings of many in depression: alone, uncertain, desperate, grief, hungry, loss. What is the role of the government in this case? Review the Preamble. How much help is too much? Is the government supposed to bail everyone out? Money? Some great movies here including clips from *Grapes of Wrath*, *Cinderella Man*.

\*WW II: Goes back to questions raised in WW I; when do we intervene? Appease? Keep a watchful eye? What is our role now? Do we always have to help? What are the criteria for doing so? Do we drop the atomic bomb? How do we treat those accused of war crimes? Lots of movies here. What if we just followed a containment policy (as we would in Korea and Vietnam) with Hitler?

\*1950s: Murrow—don’t confuse dissent with disloyalty—McCarthy; who is willing to stand up and speak out now? How do we do so? When does protest cross the line into rebellion? The 50s were sometimes called the Gray Decade as everything was matching so to speak—Levittown, suburbia, women’s fashion as well as men and their suits, children and what TV programs were watched—how did the media influence values?

When strikes and violence occur, I refer back to questions/statements such as rule by law or rule by mob, when does protest cross the line into rebellion?

1960s

When does protest cross the line into rebellion? How are the 60s and the 20s similar? Were the 60s a protest against the “sameness” of the 1950s? the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s had the 3 C’s in common—Cold War, Civil Rights, Communism... presidents had to deal with Domino theory for example which influenced foreign policy decisions in Korea, Vietnam... So much controversy here that I won’t take time to list it. There are lots of places to stop the students and ask questions about media, drugs and alcohol, protests and so on.

It is imperative to refer to these questions again and again which helps to make connections for the students so that he or she is not simply memorizing for a test; instead, he or she is making connections from one unit to the next AND their own lives. Ask them to make connections from previous units to current. Ask them to think about themes that hold units together. Democracy and a constitutional republic depend on citizens who think independently, question authority, and willingly work together for the betterment of all. **If you have room hang at least one picture and one question that represents each unit of study so the student and teacher can constantly refer back and forth to make those connections.**

Consider themes of Freedom or whatever theme you may choose

Using photographs: I used refrigerator boxes as portable screens for the pictures

1. Add ambiance to the classroom setting
2. Use photographs for freeze frame—have kids “be in” the photo and then step out to describe the situation, then step back in. Can also use the photos to have them stand in and then interview them as to why they are there
3. Choose two photographs from the unit that you think define the topic—describe/present
4. Look at how the photographer set the scene. What was included and why.

Using material culture:

1. Students get a “feel” for the object
2. Provides understanding of the time period in a way that pictures or written materials cannot—for example an iron—weight and texture, shirt collars, shuttle for weaving, yokes, gas mask, helmets, postcards, uniforms, tools, bathing suits, hair care products like curlers. Don’t have a lot of space in classroom? Use bins to store the various objects if space isn’t available to display them but bring the objects out to show—clothing like aprons, household items, cameras, school –things like cassette tapes, 8 track tapes, CD discs can bring about the topic of changes in technology. An old iron that is made out of iron, plus an iron with a removal wooden handle, a more modern iron can be used to show change as well as how the change affected the life of the consumer. Can get you into planned obsolescence and so on—jobs, factory settings, work week and so on. Can use many different items and each will be able to make a connection to what is being presented and show change over time.

Using music

1. Music of the time period gives the student a different perspective as they listen to the lyrics—many times the lyrics reflect what is going on in the time period. Students should have the opportunity to not only hear the music but read the lyrics of selected songs to see how they reflect the times, and SING! *A Taxing We Will Go* is just one of the songs I used in the beginning of the year. Songs all the way through moving West—*Red River Valley* and *Oh Susanna!* to Civil War songs--*Eating Goober Peas*, *Battle Hymn of the Republic* and various songs that go along with each unit. 50's, 60's is great

2. resources for songs. I used *Southern Man* as an introduction to Civil Rights and *Sweet Home Alabama* to show how the two are connected. The song *Ohio* represented Kent State Massacre and all the protest music of the 60s we played and sang the tunes as we traversed through civil rights and Vietnam war protests. I created sing-along sheets for each unit. I didn't have a great voice but made a joyful noise. I used quite a few movie clips during this time as well. I played *Hamburger Hill* (navigating through the language as best I could) to show some of the tragic moments of Vietnam. I also used *Letters Home from Vietnam*.
3. If possible, students can also learn the dances of the times. The Virginia Reel fits across various time periods as does other dances. Steps to the Charleston are comparatively easy to teach and learn. The jitterbug of the 1940s, 1950s is also fun to do.
4. Music playing when they come into the room helps them to "feel" the time period, reorients them from where they were to a new environment. It can be used to "pick up" the mood or create another mood. And again, show the lyrics.

#### Using movies

1. I used movies throughout the course to illustrate various situations—battles, dilemmas and so on. I did not usually show more than 15-20 minutes during any class period.
2. I had movie nights—Friday night get-togethers to show full length stories—all based on actual events. Colonial/Revolutionary War: *Last of the Mohicans*, *Patriot*; Civil War *Glory!*; Immigration: *Far and Away*; WW I: showed *Lost Battalion* in pieces throughout several class periods illustrating various aspects of the war but it could be done as a movie night, 1917 as well; *Untouchables* for the 1920s; 1930s *Cinderella Man*; 1940s *Swing Kids*, *Midway*, *Escape From Sobibor*, *Greyhound*; 1950s to 1970s *The Help*, *Forrest Gump*—most Vietnam movies have unsuitable language, *Hamburger Hill*; *Bridge of Spies*

#### Using Living History Days

1. LH Days were days when the students would dress appropriate to the era being studied, have a lunch with era appropriate menu (Metz did an awesome job with that), and there would be music and an activity with each. (During class we danced, sang, played games or I showed them a demonstration such as how to start a fire or we "loaded" muskets--stick guns--and learned how to march.)
  - a. Colonial Day had a dressed-in-the-era blacksmith, Revolutionary War dressed living historian, farmer who did corn shocking, colonial era medicine, herb stand, colonial games. The historians would be arranged in a large circle on the back field and the students would move in groups every 20 minutes or so around the circle. A dance would follow along with playing 9 Men's Morris with each other or grandparents, colonial lunch and then dismissal (1/2 day).
  - b. Immigration Day—I used US international students as "Ellis Island" officials and sent our students through stations—mental abilities, doctor examinations, questions and so on. This was done in January during school day. Ate lunch in the Atwood Foyer.

- c. Roaring 20s day—The students dressed in flapper costumes, boys in vests and hats; after school watch silent movie for 15-20 minutes such as Charlie Chaplin, then released to gym to play volleyball, badminton or the Mural Room to play board games or cards. Munchies were provided in the Mural Room.
- d. Happy Days, Happy Daze, Happy Days? 1950s—1970s in early May after school. Pizza and munchies and appropriate music. Tug-of-war, hula hoops, limbo rock, 3 legged races and so on. 3:30 – 4:45.

#### Using memorization

1. Although panned in some academic circles, I used memorization pieces to:
  - a. Instill continuity in the student between various pieces such as Preamble to the Constitution and the opening paragraph in the Declaration of Independence. I refer to them throughout the year.
  - b. Memorization helps to provide a foundation for the student that they not only know the piece but understand its meaning such as the Pledge of Allegiance which I have them start to recite as I recite the Pledge from the late 1880s with my arm raised straight out (original salute. When it was taken by the Nazi regime, flag salute was changed to over the heart.) We talk about how we can say words from memory, but people were and are willing to put their life on the line—give their life—for those words. Why are these words particularly important?

#### Using primary sources

1. I used primary sources from *Ordinary Americans*, photos, documents, and documentaries to bring out the personal stories. We then matched those stories to what others said in the textbook, larger overview articles as individuals can well be skewed one way or another. I tried to give both sides of an event at times to have students think about perspective—from Columbus through Vietnam.
2. I tried to keep the primary source materials to 2 pages max.

#### Study Skills

1. My mantra was “eat with a spoon, not a shovel.” Study a little bit each day, review with “study buddies” in the morning when you get to school. TALK the material OUTLOUD rather than in your head so you know what you are speaking. Use active notetaking—circle words in articles, write questions in the margins so you can refer back to those when studying. Circle/number the answers to the questions you ask.
2. Avoid Quizlet as your go-to, as handwriting the material out first helps the memory then go to Quizlet. Handwriting flashcards also means that you can spread them out on a table before your assessment and put them back in order. You can also make connections with them in different way—chose one and then the cards that go with that person or event.
3. You can use a graphic organizer or web, or an outline; I prefer the web as you can see the material all on one page to make connections. Anticipate the questions—



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4. who, what, when, where, why, how and write out the answer to your question BEFORE the test. It helps to connect the material.
5. Use John Greene Crash Course website, Digital History website, Oversimplified for more help.

## Using current events

1. I used current events as they fit in with questions asked (see above).

## Using local history

1. Our Wyoming Valley has connections to every time period from colonies through Vietnam. There is a website text for local history as well as a DVD.
2. Students are genuinely surprised at how people, places, moments in time played a role in our region/nation's history. Wherever you are located, check out the local history—local historical organizations, cemeteries, street names, monuments. This helps kids make connections to the local area. Our school is in a small town setting and we could walk the neighborhood. We could see how the houses were built in Levittown style, talk about banks redlining during the 1950s, wonder about the size of front porches—yes—that's a thing. The garage door opener made a difference in the intimacy of a neighborhood as you no longer had to get out of your car and see your neighbor and talk to them on their porch. How does the neighborhood reflect the architecture of the time period being studied? What about the infrastructure? Is it growing or declining?

## Using archaeology

1. I used a "cardboard dig" using 4 refrigerator sized boxes to introduce the course as to how the "story" begins for the US. I laid out the cardboard with gridlines on them and then put artifacts in certain areas. The dig idea is based on having the students use the inferential skills to examine clues and make a hypothesis regarding where the site is located, what the occupants did for a living, what the time frame is. More questions are posed for the process part of what might have made it through 200 years and what would have deteriorated.
2. Students are asked to write a hypothesis using the evidence they see; they are also asked to write a story based on the people who lived there as if the student was a participant.

## Using Trips/Speakers

### Speakers

I had up to 10 speakers per year depending on the class and time—snow days, etc. Colonial Day had five at once—blacksmith, farmer, Revolutionary War living historian, medicine/herbs during that era, colonial games; Civil War, WWI, WWII, Vietnam combat medic and so on. Each speaker was required to involve the students in their presentation. I never allowed a speaker to simply lecture. I tried to vet each speaker before I invited them into the

classroom to be sure they had the personality to not only present well by appropriately engaging the audience.

Trips were usually voluntary after school or on weekend days EXCEPT for the 2-day class trip to Washington D.C., and 1 day Ellis Island (occurred after immigration Day). We went to local history sites: archeology dig in Ransom as part of the battle of Wyoming field trip that also included the Forty Fort Meetinghouse, battle site, Denison House, Queen Esther's rock and so on. We also visited Stegmaier Mansion in Wilkes-Barre, Father Murgas room now in King's College on the Square, and before it was demolished, the Huber breaker in Ashley. We went to Forty Fort cemetery as part of the battle of Wyoming tour and visited the Hollenback cemetery on its own. We also went to the Luzerne County Courthouse and toured there. We also visited local monuments on the way where we stopped to read inscriptions. With the exception of the 2 school all class trips, the local trips were paid for by a grant I received. Sometimes the kids bagged snacks and/or I charged them \$5 or so for pizza which we picked up along the way.

Since our school was located within a small town, we could walk around the sidewalk and look at the houses—the size of porches and talk about how people used to sit on their porches and talk to neighbors for example. Then you can ask how the garage door opener interrupted that routine and the consequences of that. You could look at the size of houses, or the architecture as well. We could see illustrated before us “Levittown” type of houses. This is part of teaching with using HISTORIC PLACES. Names of streets were another way to connect students with local history, environment, and so on. We had local officials come to class to talk about their role in the community. Garbage pick-up, sewer and water lines, the role of judges and police—all were positioned to answer questions.

I hope this helps you. I realize you may have questions that need more time spent in the “digging”—how were scaffolding questions posed? How does the teacher “time” questions?

How is silence used to create tension? What scenes from the movies were used to create or set up questions?

I am willing to spend time discussing any of the above. Each one can be expanded upon for sure. I kept my notes in large binders for each unit with what I did day-by-day often divided into segments. That is probably too much detail for most people, but I always felt better having a plan and then deviating from it rather than have no plan especially if I was targeting specific skills, content and so on. I often used HOT questions—higher order thought questions. Those are listed on google search.

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Every teacher has their own style and have found materials and techniques that seem to inspire their students. I continually searched for new and fresh ideas to grab attention and hold interest. This has been a description of how I organized my time with them. I offer it as a yet another tool in an educator's toolbox.

I also used techniques like neighbor bump, freeze frame, continuum lines, yes/no get out of your seats, and so on in the above descriptions that probably deserve more explanation. Other ideas I used were triads, quads, events like Stock Market game during the 1920s; projects were used but minimal as I preferred more daily interaction. Other courses seemed filled with projects, so I went in a different direction. There were other ideas I used but this document is lengthy enough.

If you would like to go further, let me know.

All glory to God,

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