

## **HISTORY IS INTERPRETATION**

### **HISTORY IS NOT WHAT HAPPENED BUT WHAT**

### **HISTORIANS/PEOPLE SAY HAPPENED**

### **TEACH STUDENTS THE COMPLEXITY OF HISTORY**

I was inspired this summer by William Freehling's challenge to help students see the complexity of history. This is my primary objective for the year. My method for accomplishing is to have students identify the different voices and points of view in any given era of history. I am presently reading Stephen Oates' the *Whirlwind of War* which exemplifies this very method of presenting history. His cast of characters is representative of a cross section of American society at the time; they are excellent examples of the different points of view prior to the Civil War. I want to help students see that their text book is homogenized history that takes all the different points of view of an event and summarizes what happened. My objective is to pull these distinct voices out of the era and show the students how complex history really is.

The method by which I hope to introduce this concept is through a contrived incident which students can relate to in their present lives. A student will be coached to TM during class. Our school allows our students to have phones on their person during class. I will then erupt in anger, say I am confiscating *all* phones, and ask students to put them in a box I have for the purpose: The expectation is that students will be outraged and cry 'unfair'! I will then intervene and ask students to get out a piece of paper and write down what happened and what their point of view is about what has happened (see attachment

#1). I will tell them they will be graded on clarity of point of view. I will have my own piece already written with my point of view clearly stated (see attachment #!). We will then read a sampling of the students' statements. Hopefully they will have very clear and strong points of view on the situation. Hopefully my point of view will contrast starkly with the students' point of view. I will collect the papers and check for clarity of expression in their point of view. The lesson learned will be that there were two very clear and opposing points of view on this event with clear student ownership of one of the points of view. The summarizing activity will be to write what happened as a textbook would write it. This will give them a feeling of the differences between the views of primary source eyewitnesses and secondary source textbook writers. This will also set the scene for the next day's activity which will be an introduction to Reconstruction. Papers will be collected and checked for factual information, point of view and homogeneity of textbook writers.

Since the students study the Civil War at the end of sophomore year I plan to review the war very quickly by discussing day one what the causes of the war were and on day two what the results were for the nation (See attached PRIMES summarizer). It is on the second day that we will do our exercise on TMing. On day three we will divide the class into four groups which will include approximately five students: 1) Radical Republicans, 2) defeated Southern leaders, 3) freedmen, 4) moderate Republicans. The larger groups will help all students to feel comfortable exploring this concept of point of view. Each group is charged with devising a plan for what the nation is to do to reunite itself. The students will focus on four issues:

1. What each group wants for itself
2. What to do with freedmen;
3. What to do with defeated southerners some of whom fought against the Union
4. How to reincorporate the South into the government

Each group will present its positions on the four issues in a 'big paper' presentation. Then we will reform the groups into groups of four: one student from each of the different points of view and see if they can come up with a plan that will satisfy each of the different members. (See attachment #3) At the end of the unit on Reconstruction we will revisit the issue of how well the textbook reflects the complexity of history. Hopefully that will be an interesting discussion.

The next unit we study is the Gilded Age which does not include imperialism. So far in the class we have highlighted student vs. teacher points of view. Then we took generic groups during the post war era and highlighted their points of view. For the Gilded Age we will take and become specific individuals that actually existed at the time. The groups will be smaller than those for Reconstruction: two students maximum. The time period is perfect for finding important individuals who had specific points of view on the developments of the day: Rockefeller, Sitting Bull, William Jennings Bryan; Edison, Pullman, Debs, Gompers, "Big Bill" Haywood, "Mother Jones", Chinese/Irish worker on the rail road (the only generic people) Jane Addams, Tweed, Thomas Nast. This is a preliminary list of names and they cut across most of view points of the day. We use the acronym PRIMES for discussing historical issues (Political, Religious, Intellectual, Military, Economic, Social). For this exercise each group will focus on the political, economic and social events of the Gilded Age. The students will be asked to fill in the

'Generic Rubric' for their assigned individual (See attachment #4) This rubric requires them to know two other individuals and their point of view. The product may be a newspaper headline and introductory paragraph to the article, an editorial, or a campaign poster. The product ideas are endless and rubrics will be developed to match the project. The products will be presented to the class and then there will be a subsequent class discussion where different groups differ/debate with each other regarding their clashing points of views on events.

In each unit throughout the year there will be a different point of view exercise, moving from groups to individuals and back again. For the unit on Imperialism we might be representatives of different foreign countries and regions of the US. For WWI we might take people of different ethnic backgrounds and parts of the country. For the Progressive Era we might become rich and powerful individuals who actually existed vs. exploited individuals. We will reach the point by the 20's, the end of the first semester, where each person is responsible for one person's point of view on specifically assigned issues of the day.

At the end of the first semester I will reassess and see if my goals are being accomplished. I want to teach the complexity of history and how to write cogently, another of Freehlings goals for high school students I will tweak the rubrics and exercises depending on the response in the classroom. Ask me about it next year!

TEACHER POINT OF VIEW – Attachment #1  
ON CELL TMIing

I am furious! I am frustrated! I can NOT believe that student was texting in my class. How disrespectful. I am sick and tired of students coming into my classroom and texting someone s/he just saw five minutes ago. As a result students are continually distracted, don't learn what they are supposed to and consequently get lousy grades which they or their parents then complain to me about. I won't have it. It is WRONG to have cell phones in the class room and I am going to go to Mr. Conrad and demand that the students not be allowed to have phones on the school campus.

STUDENT EVALUATION OF INCIDENT

	PA	PE
<b>FACTS:</b> what exactly happened	30	
<b>POV:</b> How do I feel about what happened?	40	
<b>TEXTBOOK:</b> How would a textbook writer relate what happened?	30	

## RECONSTRUCTION VOICES - Attachment #3

Who am I?

	PA	PE
What are my group's goals after the Civil War?	20	
What are we going to do with the Freedmen?	20	
What are we going to do with the defeated Southerners?	20	

What is our plan to reunite the nation: 1.  2.  3.	20	
What problems arose in our second group which included all 4 points of view? 1.  2.  3.	5	
Why will it be difficult to reunite the nation? 1.  2.  3.	10	
Evaluation of textbook: What included?  What left out?	5	

**GENERIC RUBRIC – Attachment #4  
POINT OF VIEW**

**Who am I?**

	<b>PA</b>	<b>PE</b>
<b>What is my point of view on this event/period in history?</b>	<b>25</b>	
<b>Why?</b>	<b>25</b>	

<b>How do I <i>agree</i> with another person/group of this period and why?</b>	<b>25</b>	
<b>How do I <i>disagree</i> with another person/group of this period and why?</b>	<b>25</b>	