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ABSTRACT

Prior to their first curriculum unit (on history and the work of historians) in an American history course, three classes of fifth graders stated what they knew (or thought was true) about history and what they wanted to learn about it. After the unit, they reported what they had learned. In addition, a stratified sample of 10 students was interviewed concerning the details of their thinking about several key subtopics. The data indicated that most of the students entered fifth grade knowing that history has to do with the past, although many of them harbored the misconceptions that history was limited to the exploits of famous or important people or to events that occurred long ago. The students did not know much about how historians work, tending to confuse them with archeologists. They also did not appreciate the degree to which history is an interpretive discipline. Most were at a loss when asked why they study history or how history might help them in their lives outside school. Following the unit, the students' knowledge of and thinking about history had become notably more sophisticated. Even so, certain misconceptions still persisted in some of the students and all of them still had difficulty understanding how they might use historical knowledge in their lives outside of school. (Author)

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FIFTH GRADERS' IDEAS ABOUT HISTORY EXPRESSED BEFORE AND AFTER THEIR INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

Jere Brophy, Bruce A. VanSledright,
and Nancy Bredin

Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects

Institute for Research on Teaching

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Abstract

Prior to their first curriculum unit (on history and the work of historians) in an American History course, three classes of fifth graders stated what they knew (or thought was true) about history and what they wanted to learn about it. After the unit, they reported what they had learned. In addition, a stratified sample of 10 students was interviewed concerning the details of their thinking about several key subtopics. The data indicated that most of the students entered fifth grade knowing that history has to do with the past, although many of them harbored the misconceptions that history is limited to the exploits of famous or important people or to events that occurred long ago. The students did not know much about how historians work, tending to confuse them with archeologists. Nor did they appreciate the degree to which history is an interpretive discipline. Most were at a loss when asked why they study history or how history might help them in their lives outside of school. Following the unit, the students' knowledge of and thinking about history had become notably more sophisticated. Even so, certain misconceptions still persisted in some of the students and all of them still had difficulty understanding how they might use historical knowledge in their lives outside of school.

FIFTH GRADERS' IDEAS ABOUT HISTORY EXPRESSED BEFORE AND AFTER THEIR INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

Jere Brophy, Bruce A. VanSledright, and Nancy Bredin[1]

Current theory and research on subject-matter teaching emphasize the importance of teaching school subjects for understanding, appreciation, and application, not just knowledge memorization and skills practice. Drawing on neo-Vygotskian theorizing and work on knowledge construction, conceptual change, and situated learning, educators have been developing methods of teaching school subjects in ways that connect with students' existing knowledge and experience and engage them in actively constructing new knowledge and correcting existing misconceptions. Progress is most evident in mathematics and science, where rich literatures have developed describing what children typically know (or think they know) about the content taught at their respective grade levels. Curriculum developers can then use this information as a basis for developing instruction that both builds on students' existing valid knowledge and confronts and corrects their misconceptions.

The potential for applying similar concepts and methods to curriculum development appears to be at least as great in social studies as in other school subjects, but realization of this potential cannot occur until a significant knowledge base is developed describing children's knowledge and misconceptions about the social studies content commonly taught at each grade level. The authors have initiated a program of research designed to address this issue by interviewing elementary students before and after each of their social studies units.

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Procedures

The interviews are constructed in consultation with the students' teachers so that they address not only the major ideas typically emphasized in teaching the topics commonly taught at each grade level but also the key ideas that these particular teachers emphasize in each of their social studies units. The preunit interviews develop information about the knowledge and misconceptions about unit topics that students possess even before instruction in the unit begins. Thus, the preunit data provide information about what students know (or think they know) about a topic via information acquired in earlier grades or through reading or out-of-school experiences. The postunit data show how the students' knowledge and thinking about the topic have changed in response to the instruction and learning activities they experienced during the unit. These data identify the aspects of unit instruction that were most salient to the students, the degree to which knowledge gaps were filled in and misconceptions were corrected, and the degree to which certain misconceptions have persisted despite exposure to correct conceptions during the unit.

As the first step in a program of research that eventually will encompass the full K-5 range, we have begun interviewing at the fifth-grade level. Fifth graders are generally more knowledgeable and easier to interview than younger students. However, they usually have not been exposed to history as a discipline or to sustained, chronologically organized instruction in history prior to their fifth-grade American history course. They possess bits and pieces of knowledge about the past (Native Americans, the Pilgrims and the first Thanksgiving, Columbus, presidents and other famous Americans, and smatterings of state history), but they usually have not yet studied systematic, chronological history. Thus, although they are relatively sophisticated learners, fifth

graders usually enter their American history course with very little systematic prior knowledge.

The students that we have been interviewing are typical in this respect, as in most others. Their school district's curriculum guidelines and adopted elementary social studies series both follow the expanding communities framework that focuses on the self in kindergarten, the family in first grade, the neighborhood in second grade, the community in third grade, the state and region in fourth grade, and the United States in fifth grade. The teachers do not always rely heavily on the adopted textbooks and accompanying worksheets and activities suggestions, but they do follow the district guidelines and teach the topics traditionally emphasized within the expanding communities framework that has been called the de facto national curriculum in elementary social studies (Naylor & Diem, 1987).

The interviewees are a stratified sample of fifth graders who attend an elementary school located in a working-class/lower middle-class suburb of Lansing, Michigan. All of the students are white, as are the vast majority of their classmates. The sample includes five boys and five girls. Within each gender group there are two high achievers, two average achievers, and one low achiever, based on academic achievement in fourth grade. Because we could interview no more than 10 students due to resource limitations, we weighted the sample toward higher achievers in the expectation that this would yield more substantive responses.

Students were interviewed individually in quiet rooms outside of their classrooms. Interviews required 15-30 minutes. They were tape recorded and later transcribed for analysis, using pseudonyms to preserve the students' anonymity. The preunit interview was done in the spring of 1990 when the students were still in fourth grade. This initial interview focused on the

first fifth-grade unit on history and the work of historians, although it also included questions on the other fifth-grade units (on Native Americans, the explorers, the colonies, the American Revolution, westward expansion, and the Civil War). Thus, it provided information not only about the students' knowledge of history and historians but also about their knowledge of American history through the Civil War. Findings from the interview as a whole are presented in Brophy, VanSledright, and Bredin (1991). The present report focuses on the students' knowledge and thinking about history and the work of historians, comparing the views they expressed as fourth graders in the Spring of 1990 with the views they expressed following their first fifth-grade history unit in the Fall of 1990.

In developing questions for the interviews, we focused on two overlapping sets of ideas: (1) the unit topics and associated key ideas traditionally taught in fifth-grade American history courses, and (2) the major goals and key ideas emphasized by this particular fifth-grade teacher. Thus, although our primary interest was in seeing how representative students would respond to questions about commonly taught curriculum topics, we adapted the questions to the particular curriculum that these students would experience. The teacher's intended goals and content emphases were taken into account in selecting questions to be included in the interview, and her knowledge of what transpired as the unit progressed was included in interpreting the findings.

The students' fifth-grade teacher was Mary Lake (pseudonym), whose approach to teaching American history has been described in a detailed case study (Brophy, 1990). Mrs. Lake's teaching is noteworthy for her use of children's literature and her own storytelling and explanations, rather than a textbook, as the major source of input to students; her emphasis on depth of development of key ideas rather than breadth of coverage in selecting and representing

content; her use of several devices designed to help students focus on key ideas and structure their learning around them (e.g., introducing and closing units with KWL exercises; displaying key terms, organized within "people," "places," and "events" categories, on a history bulletin board; and creating, reviewing, and then posting story maps that summarize and connect the key details of important historical episodes); and emphasizing cooperative learning activities and extended writing assignments over worksheets and short-answer tests. Her major social studies content goal for the year is to teach students about the establishment and development of the United States as a nation. In addition to providing information through stories and explanations, this includes keeping track of developments by locating them on time lines and maps.

Mrs. Lake's first unit is designed to introduce students to history and the work of historians. Key concepts include the following: primary and secondary sources; artifacts (showing examples from each period); the work of historians and why their job is important; time lines and chronological order; the students' personal histories (helping them to realize that they do have personal histories that began on their birthdays and that these can be documented using artifacts, photos, and information from primary and secondary sources); and United States history (helping the students to realize that, just as they have histories as individuals, the United States has a history as a country that they will be learning about during the year). To give the students an opportunity to apply some of these concepts, Mrs. Lake has them develop information about their own personal histories. The students interview their parents and other relatives, collect artifacts (birth certificates, photos, baby books, newspapers from their birth dates, etc.), and then organize their information by creating a time line that identifies noteworthy events in their lives to date and illustrates them with photos, documents, or other

artifacts. This direct experience in acting as historians by investigating their own lives and summarizing key information along a time line is intended to help students understand the reconstructive and interpretive nature of history as a discipline, the process of tracing development through time, and the uses of information sources and time lines.

KWL Findings

We begin our presentation of findings with the KWL data collected at the beginning and end of the unit. KWL is a technique, based on schema-theoretic views of reading comprehension processes, for promoting learning by helping learners to retrieve relevant background knowledge and learn with metacognitive awareness of purpose and accomplishment (Ogle, 1986). Learners fill out KWL sheets in two steps. As they are about to begin study of a topic, they write down what they already Know (or think they know) about the topic and what they Want to learn about it. After completion of the unit, they describe what they Learned about the topic. The KWL exercise encourages students to approach a topic with a sense of purpose and metacognitive awareness. It also generates useful diagnostic and assessment information about the students' knowledge of and interests in the topic prior to instruction and about which aspects of what they learned are most salient to them following instruction.

For this first unit, the KWL sheet instructed students to tell what they knew about history and what they wanted to learn about it. These KWL data were available for three classes totaling 80 students because Mrs. Lake teaches three sections of history (and three sections of language arts).

What the Students Knew About History

Table 1 summarizes key features of the students' responses to the first section of the KWL sheet, in which they stated what they knew (or thought they

Table 1

What Students Said They Knew About History
as They Began Fifth Grade

	Boys (N = 44)	Girls (N = 36)	Total (N = 80)
A. How they defined history			
1. Gave general definition only	11	9	20
2. Gave general definition plus examples	11	16	27
3. Gave examples only	18	10	28
4. Didn't know or gave irrelevant or incorrect answer	4	1	5
B. Whether They distinguished 'history" from the past generally			
1. No qualifications: history as (study of) the past	8	8	16
2. Time qualification: history as events that happened long ago	8	9	17
3. Importance qualification: history as famous or noteworthy people or events	11	12	23
C. The examples they cited			
1. Indians/Native Americans	10	8	18
2. George Washington/first president	6	9	15
3. Famous people (kings, presidents)	6	7	13
4. Wars (unspecified)	5	8	13
5. Pilgrims	6	4	10
6. Columbus	2	5	7
7. Particular wars (Civil, WWI, WWII, French and Indian)	3	3	6
8. Lincoln	4	1	5
9. How people lived prior to electricity, engine power, etc.	1	3	4

knew) about history. Section A of the table indicates that 75 of the 80 students gave generally correct responses defining and/or giving examples of history. Of these 75 students, 20 confined themselves to a general definition, 27 gave both a definition and some examples, and 28 gave only examples. The latter response, which is less developmentally advanced than responses that include general definitions (Estvan & Estvan, 1959), was made by 18 boys but only 10 girls. In addition, four boys but only one girl did not know or gave irrelevant or incorrect answers. Thus, the majority of the students entered fifth grade with a generally correct sense of what history means, although the girls communicated a more accurate knowledge.

The more conventional definitions equated history with the past ("History is a part of time--the past, not the present"), sometimes adding examples ("History is like in the past, like Christopher Columbus"). Sometimes this core idea was stated imprecisely ("It is stuff that already has been done"), and sometimes it was elaborated with noteworthy precision ("History means yesterday or back to when dinosaurs lived. History will add on every time a day passes. History means everything that happened in the past").

Section B of Table 1 indicates that only 16 students (20%) confined themselves to unqualified definitions of history as the past or the study of the past. More typically, students qualified their definitions by specifying that history refers to people or events that were particularly *important* (mentioned by 23 students) and/or from *long ago* (mentioned by 17 students). Levstik and Pappas (1987) also found that fourth graders tended to distinguish "history" from the past in general by specifying that history refers to *important* events that happened *long ago*.

These findings indicate that most children enter fifth grade knowing that history is about the past. However, they tend to project a mythic quality to

it, viewing it primarily as stories about very famous people in the very distant past (Egan, 1989). Most do not yet realize that history also includes the very recent past and the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Section C of Table 1 lists the more commonly cited examples. Levstik and Pappas (1987) reported a tendency among fourth graders to cite wars, tragedies, or disasters as examples, but this tendency was less noticeable in our KWL responses. Thirteen students did mention wars (unspecified) as examples of what history is about. Also six others mentioned particular wars; several mentioned Lincoln's assassination; and various individuals mentioned the atomic bomb, Custer, and Hitler. Most responses, however, concerned events in early American history that had been emphasized in social studies units in earlier grades on Native Americans, the first Thanksgiving, pioneer life, or Columbus Day. Also, many of the responses concerned inventions (cars, baseball) or individuals who attained prominence for nonmilitary accomplishments (Betsy Ross, Ben Franklin).

Surprisingly, girls mentioned wars more often than boys did. However, this difference disappears if the boys' total is augmented by their greater tendency to mention individuals or events associated with wars (Paul Revere, Custer, Hitler, the atomic bomb).

Girls were more likely to mention themes connected with everyday family living or historical people or events of particular relevance to women. Among specific individuals named, Betsy Ross was the only woman--mentioned by three girls but no boys. In addition, three girls but only one boy spoke of history as being about how people lived their everyday lives prior to key inventions; one girl mentioned women getting the right to vote as a key historical event; another girl mentioned the Ingalls family; and another girl mentioned family history as an aspect of history.

Most of the responses were conventional definitions or lists of examples. The following responses were unusual but worth noting because of what they reveal about the mind sets of fourth graders:

Boys

> The Indians didn't have stereos and CD players and stuff like that.
>
> I know about the name Pontiac, a fort. They were playing a game and they let the Indians in.
>
> Famous presidents who invented things. [Note conflation of presidents with inventors as categories of famous people.]

Girls

> It was a long time ago. The Native Americans had to give up some of their land.
>
> Long time ago. Cars and trucks and go-carts. People didn't have lots of money.
>
> I learned a lot about Chippewa Indians. I learned about how they sew, get rice, how they fish and how they cook and what they eat and what kind of animals they have.
>
> History is about America and what happened in the past. It's about George Washington and the way to George Bush.

What the Students Wanted to Learn

Table 2 summarizes students' responses to the second part of the KWL sheet, in which they stated what they wanted to learn about history. Most students named one or more specific things, although several did not respond and 15 said that they wanted to learn "everything," "a lot," or "all about" history but did not mention anything specific. Among students who did mention specifics, 21 wanted to know more about wars and 18 more about presidents. Other popular topics were Indians, dates of specified events, how people lived in the past, explorers, and inventors.

Given their limited background knowledge, many students had difficulty answering this question. In addition to the ones who failed to respond or who

gave generic "I want to know everything" responses, many students simply mentioned historical topics that they had been exposed to in earlier grades (Indians, Pilgrims, presidents, explorers, inventors), without identifying new topics that they wanted to learn about. Some mentioned only a single, very specific item of information (what year George Washington became president, who sewed the first American flag). The majority of the most interesting and thoughtful ideas are included among the less conventional responses quoted below.

Boys

1. How did history start? Why do we have history? Why did they call history history?

2. What was the first school ever made and who made it?

3. I would like to know more about sunken ships.

4. I want to learn more about dinosaurs and Mother Nature.

5. Early U.S. history, Columbus, the Boston Tea Party, Paul Revere. Early African and Asians history, early explorers. Why things were what they were. Who invented things?

6. History about California. What made the Grand Canyon? When did California become a state?

7. When they put the faces on the mountain and a coin?

8. What started the wars? Why did people take prisoners?

9. Why did people have war? Why Hitler has so much power over people?

10. Who made history? Why did they make history?

Girls

1. Who was the first man in America? Was there really cave men and dinosaurs? When was history first discovered?

2. What year was Michigan a state? Was it one of the first 13 states?

3. How people survived when $15.00 was a lot of money. Could they make peace just by talking it out?

Table 2

What Students Said They Wanted to Learn
as They Began Fifth Grade

	Boys (N = 44)	Girls (N = 36)	Total (N = 80)
A. General Categories			
1. Wars	12	9	21
2. Presidents	10	8	18
3. Everything/a lot/all about history	8	7	15
4. Indians	2	10	12
5. Dates (of specified events)	7	3	10
6. How people lived in the past	3	7	10
7. Explorers/discoveries	6	0	6
8. Inventors/inventions	3	1	4
9. Pilgrims	0	3	3
B. Specific vs. Unspecified Wars and Presidents			
1. Mentions wars in general	5	5	10
2. Specifies a particular war	7	4	11
3. Mentions presidents in general	3	7	10
5. Specifies a particular president	7	1	8

4. People who lived long ago. Who were the presidents? What kind of things happened? How did they run businesses? How did the people farm?

5. I would like to know if you had to do something famous or interesting to be in history or if it is just the way people lived and did things a long time ago. Or both? I'd like to learn about famous people.

6. How people lived. What people ate for food. How people traveled.

7. How people a long time ago lived and took care of themselves and how they got food.

8. Why there were wars and why people are hostages. Why men had to be in the army. And women can't have jobs.

9. Why did they fight at the time? What did the Indians do to the Pilgrims that made them mad? Why they invented the museum.

Most students' interests ran to facts rather than explanations. A few mentioned "why" questions (mostly about war), but none expressed curiosity about how historians gather and interpret information. Most topics were from American history and thus situated within the last four centuries. A few students mentioned prehistorical times or the dawn of history, but none mentioned ancient civilizations, the Greeks or Romans, or any aspect of medieval or religious history.

The findings suggest additional gender differences that complement those already described. The girls tended to mention more generic categories of historical topics and to express more interest in the everyday lives of ordinary people. In contrast, the boys expressed more interest in particular events and in learning about the accomplishments of famous (male) presidents, explorers, and inventors.

What the Students Reported Learning

At the completion of the unit, Mrs. Lake returned the KWL sheets to the students so that they could report wh· they had learned. A few stated that they had learned "all about history" or learned that history is about topics

such as Indians or inventors, but most responded with one or more of the elements summarized in Table 3. The data in the table are based on responses from 76 students, not 80, because 4 students were absent.

Many students responded by looking at the history bulletin board where the key words for the unit had been posted and then copying these words on their KWL sheets, either listing the words alone or adding definitions. This accounts for the high totals in the categories in Section A of Table 3. Typical responses resembled the following:

> I learned about a time line. I learned what oral history is, interview, history, artifact, archeologist, secondary source, primary source, historian.
>
> I learned that an artifact is an object from a long time ago. And I learned more about my own history. I also learned that a primary source is a first-hand experience and a secondary source is a second-hand experience to something.
>
> We learned about artifacts and archeologists. I learned about secondary sources and primary sources.

The responses listed in Section B of Table 3 were more spontaneous than those based on Mrs. Lake's key word list. Many of these mentioned having developed information about their own personal histories and/or collected artifacts from their childhoods in the process of doing so. Girls were more likely than boys to mention this aspect of the unit, although in general, the boys' and girls' responses to this part of the KWL sheet were much more similar than different. A few responses were noteworthy for their completeness or the quality of their insights:

> I learned that there's a lot more to history than just wars and famous people.
>
> I know that historians put things in chronological order and a newspaper is a secondary source.
>
> I learned history is more than what I thought. It can be about you, it can be told in oral form which is out loud or chronological order. It's

Table 3

What the Students Reported Learning About History

	Boys (N = 42)	Girls (N = 34)	Total (N = 76)
A. Responses Reflecting Mrs. Lake's Key Words			
1. Time lines/chronological order	26	19	45
2. Artifacts	20	25	45
3. Primary and secondary sources	16	18	34
4. Archeologists	12	8	20
5. Historians	7	8	15
6. Oral history	8	7	15
B. Other Responses			
1. I learned about my own history	5	8	13
2. I enjoy history/class is fun	3	5	8
3. History is about the past	3	4	7
4. I collected artifacts from my own history	1	4	5
5. History is happening right now	2	2	4
6. History is not just famous people or wars	4	0	4
7. I learned about interviewing	2	0	2

also about wars, Indians, explorers, presidents. History isn't just famous people because I'm not famous b t it can be about famous people.

I learned many vocabulary words like time line and artifact. I also know what they mean. I learned about my personal history and dug some neat artifacts. I also got to use a computer which was fun. I also learned about primary and secondary sources. I also learned what a time line is and how to make one. I had a fun time in social studies this lesson.

I learned about time lines. I learned that history can bring back memories and things that you did not even know. I learned that history can be fun. I learned more about archeologists. I learned about oral history and primary and secondary sources and I learned about other peoples and artifacts. I also learned that I want to be an archeologist!

I learned about artifacts, time lines. We learned that artifacts are something that you find from a long time ago like bones, pans, plates, parts of maps and things like that. We made a time line from the day we were born to 1990. We learned that a primary source is something that you saw and you write about. We learned that a secondary source is when I write about George Washington.

Other responses were less satisfying. Some were humorous, deliberately or otherwise (oral history is "something passed down from the mouth"; oral history is "history told to someone with vocal chords"; "we learned a lot of words that I can't spell"; "I learned that if you don't turn in your work, you will get in trouble"). Several responses indicated confusion in distinguishing between the work of historians and the work of archeologists or in defining or distinguishing between primary and secondary sources ("A primary source is something handed down. A secondary source is something your p. rents saved for you from when you were a baby"). Finally, a few responses indicated that misconceptions had persisted despite the instruction that took place during the unit:

That history happened a long time ago. History are made by people, events, places, that were important.

I learned that history is famous people and the way people lived a long time ago.

In summary, the KWL data indicate that most of the students entered fifth grade with vague but generally correct ideas about history and some smatterings

of information about Columbus, the first Thanksgiving, various famous Americans, and aspects of Michigan history, but little or no knowledge about history as a discipline and no systematic, chronologically organized knowledge of the details of American history. Because so many of the students relied so heavily on the posted key words in responding to the "L" part of the KWL exercise, their responses cannot be used with much confidence as measures of how much they learned during this first unit. However, these responses at least suggest that most of the students had picked up some useful vocabulary, acquired a clearer conception of history as chronologically organized narrative based on a variety of sources and artifacts, and learned that history includes the everyday lives of ordinary people in the recent past in addition to famous people or important events that occurred long ago.

Interview Findings

Having described the responses of three classes of students to the KWL instrument, we now turn to the findings from the interviewing of the subsample of 10 students (see Appendix for interview questions). Their responses to various pre- and postunit questions will be presented in pairs or groups arranged to contrast the students' entry level knowledge and thinking with their knowledge and thinking after exposure to the unit. Highlights of the findings are shown in Table 4, in which the students are grouped by gender, and within gender by achievement level.

The high achievers (Jason, Tim, Teri, and Sue) generally spoke succinctly and to the point when they knew or thought they knew an answer but said little or nothing beyond "I don't know" when they did not. In contrast, the average (Mark, Brad, Helen, and Kay) and low achievers (Ned, Rita) tended to be more verbose. Usually, however, their lengthier responses were not qualitatively

Table 4

Summary of Students' Responses to Pre- and Post-Unit Questions About History and the Work of Historians

	Jason	Tim	Mark	Brad	Ned	Teri	Sue	Helen	Kay	Rita	Boys	Girls	Total
Gender	M	M	M	M	M	F	F	F	F	F			
Achievement Level	H	H	M	M	L	H	H	M	M	L			
Post 1. What were the most important things you learned?													
Primary and Secondary Sources	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	1	5
Time lines/chronological order	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	2	5
Artifacts	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	2	5
Oral history/interviews	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	3	4
Archeologists	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	3	4
Historians	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2
Inventions	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Pre 1. What is history?													
Refers to the past	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	3	5	8
Happened long ago	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	5	7
Noteworthy people or events	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	3	4
Post 2. What is history?													
(Study of) Past	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	5	10
Happened long ago	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	3
Pre 2. What do historians do?													
Study or teach history	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	3
Post 4. What do historians do?													
Study history/find out about the past	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	4	3	7

Table 4 (cont'd.)

Post 3. What do archeologists do?													
Dig for artifacts/things from long ago	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	5	10
Pre 3. How do historians get information?													
Artifacts/digs	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	2	4	6
Books	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	3	5
Interview living witnesses	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	2	4
Post 5. How do historians get information?													
Books, newspapers	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	4	4	8
Interview living witnesses	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	4
Artifacts, digs	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2
Pre 4. How do historians settle disputes?													
Get more or better information	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	4	2	6
Sift evidence, then decide	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	3	4
Consult authority	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	2
Post 6. How do historians settle disputes?													
Get more or better evidence	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	3	4
Sift evidence, then decide	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	3
Consult authority	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Pre 5. How could you decide what to believe?													
Sift evidence, then decide	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	3	4	7
Consult authority figure	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	4	5

Table 4 (cont'd.)

Post 7. How could you decide what to believe?													
Get more or better information	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	3	4
Sift evidence, then decide	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Consult authority	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
Vote or survey	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Pre 6. Do you have your own personal history?													
Immediate yes	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2
Eventual yes	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	4	2	6
Unsure or no	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	2
Post 8. Do you have your own personal life history?													
Immediate yes	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	4	4	8
Eventual yes	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Unsure or no	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pre 7. Does the country have a history?													
Yes	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	5	10
History began at discovery	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	3	4	7
Country began via war or Constitution	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Post 9. Did the United States have a birthday?													
Yes, 4th of July	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	5	10
Pre 8. What is this and what does it tell us?													
Knows function of candlestick	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	5	10

Table 4 (cont'd.)

Post 12. What are artifacts?													
Things from the past	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	5	10
Specifies "dug up"	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	3
Mentions artifacts from own early life	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	3	4
Post 13. What can artifacts tell us?													
How people lived, what they did or used	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	3	4	7
Post 11. Are primary or secondary sources better?													
Primary better than secondary	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	3	5	8
Primary is first-hand account	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	3	5
Pre 9. What is this and what does it tell us?													
Knows function of time line	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	5	10
Pre 10. Why study history?													
For a job	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2
So you will know it	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	5	8
Specific life application	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	2	4
Post 14. Why study history?													
For a job	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
So you will know it	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	2	3	5
Mentions specific life application	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Pass tests in school	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	2
Doesn't know	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2

Table 4 (cont'd.)

Pre 11. How could history help you in life?

Doesn't know	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	2	4
So you will know it	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	3
Specific life application	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	1	3

Post 15. How could history help you in life?

For a job	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	2
So you will know it	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	3
Mentions specific life application	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2
Pass tests in school	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Doesn't know	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	2	3

better than the high achievers' briefer ones. They simply took more words to say essentially the same thing that the high achievers said more economically. These findings may be related to those of Estvan and Estvan (1959), who noted a tendency for children being interviewed about social studies topics to take less time to respond, speak with more facility, and use fewer words, yet produce a greater number of ideas, when talking about familiar rather than unfamiliar topics. A second reason for the lengthier responses of the average and low achievers was that they usually were more willing to speculate if they were not sure of their answers. However, these speculations often yielded naive misconceptions, conflations, or even extended narratives that combined accurate information with misinformation and fanciful or imaginative elaborations (VanSledright & Brophy, 1991).

Self-Report of What Was Learned

Post-Question #1: You recently finished a social studies unit on history. What are the most important things that you learned in that unit?

This was essentially the same question that the students had responded to in filling out the "L" portion of the KWL instrument. Even though the interviews were conducted outside of Mrs. Lake's classroom, so that the students could not scan the history bulletin board for the posted key words, their answers to this question were very similar to their responses to the "L" section of the KWL sheet. That is, they tended to enumerate things that they had learned, mostly things included in the key word list.

Brad: We learned words like historians and artifacts and secondary resources and primary resources and what they mean.

Sue: Well, about history and artifacts, things archeologists dug up and inventions and time lines and stuff.

The high and average achievers all named several items but the two low

achievers only named one item each. Otherwise, there was nothing noteworthy about the responses to this question.

Questions About History and Historians

> *Pre-Question #1: Next year in social studies you will be learning about history. Do you know what history is? (If students do not know or answer incorrectly, prepare them for the next questions by telling them that history is the study of the past--of who were the people who came before us and how they used to live back then.)*

Ned made no response and Brad guessed that history dealt with nature or wildlife. The other eight students gave generally correct responses indicating that history concerns people or events in the past.

> *Tim*: It's stuff that happened a long time ago that's real good.
>
> *Sue*: It's about what people did for our country a long time ago and the wars and stuff like that.
>
> *Kay*: People who explored or found things and started things like who found Michigan or something or explored it . . . people long ago who traveled across the world.

Of the eight students who responded generally correctly, seven specified that history refers to events that occurred *long ago* and four specified that history refers to *noteworthy* people or events.

Post-Question #2: How would you define history? What is history?

Following the unit, all 10 students gave generally correct answers indicating that history has to do with the past. Also, all 10 now gave general or abstract definitions, whereas previously several of them had given examples. Thus, their responses were shorter, yet both more precise and at a higher level of generality (cf. Estvan & Estvan, 1959).

Only three students still said that history refers to events occurring *long ago*. Furthermore, two others said, in response to probes, that history can refer to any time in the past. No student still specified that history

refers to *noteworthy* people or events. Thus, the students had acquired a more precise notion of history and most had cleared up some prior misconceptions.

> *Tim*: Something that happened in the past. [A long time ago?] It could be a second ago.
>
> *Sue*: Things that happened in the past.
>
> *Kay*: History is long ago. It tells about the people in our past.

Pre-Question #2: What do historians do? (If students do not know or answer incorrectly, prepare them for the next question by telling them that historians study and write about history--that they are the ones who write the history books.)

Six students could not answer this question, one guessed "famous people like George Washington," one said people who teach history, and two said people who study history. Thus, although most of the students were familiar with history, most were not familiar with the term "historian" prior to the unit.

Post-Question #4: Who are historians? What do they do?

Seven students gave correct or generally correct answers to this post-question. Of the rest, one knew that historians dealt with the past but confused them with archeologists, one had no response, and one guessed "people that have died in the past." Two of the three students who failed to answer correctly were the two low achievers.

> *Jason*: Historians study history. They study artifacts. [Why? What are they trying to do?] Find out what happened. [Where do they get their information?] From books.
>
> *Mark*: They study history and they study about it and tell people about it. [How do they tell people about it?] In museums.
>
> *Sue*: I don't know. They study history. [Do they write books about it?] No.
>
> *Helen*: Historians are the people that study history, not underground. They find the stuff that's left above the ground, like an arrowhead. They look for artifacts and primary sources that they might have left over in the past.
>
> *Kay*: They read and find out about the past.

Rita: They try to put the puzzle back together . . . they take the artifacts and they have more and they try to put them together. One digs and one puts the thing together.

In talking about how historians do their work, four students gave generally correct answers (they read and study artifacts); four others gave partly correct answers but emphasized physical artifacts and confused historians with archeologists; and the other two didn't know. Besides mention of digging and artifacts, confusion with archeology was apparent in Mark's response indicating that historians communicate their findings to people through museums.

Two implied misconceptions were that physical artifacts, rather than written or printed materials, are the "stuff" of history and that historians work by reconstructing artifact puzzles rather than by constructing accounts from various (primarily written) sources. Mrs. Lake noted that archeology and the concept of artifacts appeal to students because of their concreteness--students can understand digging and looking for things. Also, she has them bring artifacts from their own lives in connection with their time line/personal history assignment, and these tend to be physical artifacts such as baby toys and blankets, not books. Even so, she was surprised that the students had not acquired clearer notions of how historians work and how this differs from the work of archeologists. She was confident that these confusions would clear up, however, because more would be said about historians and their work as the school year progressed.

The students' tendencies to confuse historians and archeologists might have been exaggerated by the fact that the following question preceded the question about historians in the postunit interviews.

Post-Question #3: Who are archeologists? What do they do?

All 10 students answered correctly that archeologists dig for things that tell us about the past. Four students specified that archeologists look for

artifacts from *long ago*, and in this case, the specification is correct. All five of the boys, but only one of the girls, used technical terms (artifacts, fossils) to describe the material dug up by archeologists.

> *Tim*: They're people that dig up artifacts and stuff from the ground. [Why?] So they can find stuff out from history.
>
> *Ned*: They're scientists and they study fossils and stuff they dig up from the ground.
>
> *Sue*: People who find things from a long long time ago and they dig them up and look at them and see how long ago they were.
>
> *Kay*: Archeologists dig and find things from long ago.

Pre-Question #3: How do you think historians do their work--how do they find out about what happened and decide what to write?

Nine students (all but Ned) responded to this question. Their answers were generally sensible but frequently confused historians with archeologists. The higher achievers tended to emphasize interviewing and library research, whereas the lower achievers tended to emphasize physical artifacts and archeological digs.

> *Jason*: Go looking for it where early people were. [Where would they look?] Library. Think about it and write what they think.
>
> *Brad*: They find bones and fossils . . . things they left behind and some people that still lived a little bit later. [What about them?] Some people that could live kind of longer than the others, they might be able to live long enough to pass on a story or give something that they had to people and those peopie pass it on to historians.
>
> *Sue*: Maybe people back then wrote books about these people that saved their country or something, so they read some of the stuff that the people wrote and then wrote it in a book with a whole bunch of other people.
>
> *Kay*: They find symbols and stuff in the woods or on the ground . . . like old cabins or something or old stuff that they used to use.
>
> *Rita*: They'd try to dig something up that they could use to find out, like dinosaur bones . . . or they'd read the writing on the walls, like some Indians write on the walls and they'd read books to find out more . . . they could talk to people that are older.

These answers elaborate the trend seen in the previous question, indicating that the students did not know much about historians and tended to picture them working by digging up physical artifacts rather than by interviewing witnesses or reading written records. Five students mentioned books as written records, but none mentioned newspapers or diaries. The girls generally had more to say than the boys, typically mentioning at least two different sources that historians might exploit (usually living interviewees, books, or physical artifacts).

Post-Question #5: How do historians do their work--how do they find out about what happened and decide what to write?

Again, nine students (this time all but Rita) responded to this question. The students now showed much less confusion between the work of historians and the work of archeologists. Eight students indicated that historians would get information from books or other written sources, four mentioned interviewing living witnesses, and only two mentioned archeological evidence. Even here, Mark suggested that historians would look at artifacts that archeologists gathered (thus distinguishing between historians and archeologists). Only Sue suggested that historians might look at things that they dug up themselves.

Jason: They could look at the books.

Brad: I think they go from place to place and ask people what they know about the past and try to learn things from people and books and other things.

Sue: Maybe things they dug up or things they studied from other people.

Kay: They read and find out about the past.

Rita: I don't know.

Answers to this question were briefer than they were in the preunit interviews, and differences by achievement level or gender are no longer evident.

Rita's "I don't know" answer is surprising and disappointing given the richness (although not always correctness) of her answer to Pre-Question #3.

Although the students distinguished more clearly between archeologists and historians in the postunit interviews, they still tended to picture historians as interviewing people and working from primary sources more than they really do. They possessed a clear sense about archeologists digging up artifacts from long ago and about historians interviewing people who are still living or reading accounts from the very recent past, but they were vague about the kinds of sources that historians would use to learn about what occurred prior to the 20th century. Although eight students mentioned books and two mentioned newspapers, none mentioned diaries, letters, public records, or other written sources of information. Perhaps they did not yet realize how long written records have existed or the variety of such records that are available to historians.

Questions About Conflicting Interpretations

On both sets of interviews, the students were asked about how historians might resolve disputes and how they (the students themselves) might decide what to believe when they encountered conflicting historical accounts. Unsurprisingly, given their vagueness about how historians gather information, the students had difficulty with these questions.

> *Pre-Question #4: Sometimes historians disagree about what happened in the past, why it happened, or what it all means. When they disagree, how can they decide what is right?*
>
> *Jason*: People that wrote it, they look at it, they might not have enough equipment so then the person reads it with all the equipment, they might think, "We have more equipment so we can think better."
>
> *Mark*: They could read a book and if they think that it's wrong, they could read different books and see if they said something else and see if they agree with that one. [What if they seem to disagree?] They can go to some other museum and see what they say.

Sue: They can go to somebody who knows what the answer is.

Kay: They go exploring, both of them, and show each other what their proof is and see which one's right, maybe.

Rita: They'd talk to other scientists and try to see how they think and they'd try to work it out . . . like they'd take it to a judge or something, a judge that's higher than these scientists but that's a scientist judge. Someone that all of them trust and they'd know that he'd tell the truth . . . he'd listen to both sides and try to work it out.

Most of the students appeared to believe, at least implicitly, that one could arrive at a "right answer." In part, this was because they were thinking mostly of "existence proofs" (such as proving that King Arthur actually existed)--questions that could be answered yes or no--rather than thinking about more subtle matters of interpretation of the causes or meanings of known events. This again indicates some confusion of history with archeology, as well as a lack of knowledge about what historians try to do and how they work.

The students' expectation that a right answer could be reached also implied faith either in an authority figure who knows everything about the subject or in science and scientific methods (Note Jason's faith in better scientific equipment to provide better answers or at least help one to think better). Related beliefs appeared in the students' notions about archeology. For example, they "knew" that scientists can use "machines" to date artifacts, even though they knew nothing about how this process works. Mrs. Lake reported that these students are "steeped in technology"--that they are familiar with and accepting of the notion that "if there's a problem, get better machines to fix it." She added that students are still trusting of adults at this age. Given that they believe that adults control machines, she did not find it surprising that the students would look to a benevolent authority figure or a trustworthy machine for resolution of conflicting historical interpretations.

Rita's response to this question exemplifies the tendency for certain students (especially Helen and Rita) to construct detailed narratives when answering some of our questions. These narratives usually were delivered with confidence and included at least some accurate elements, but they also frequently included naive misconceptions, conflations (e.g., of history with archeology), or imaginative but fanciful elaborations. For analysis and additional examples of these phenomena, see VanSledright and Brophy (1991).

Post-Question #6: Sometimes historians disagree about what happened in the past, why it happened, or what it all means. When they disagree, how can they decide what is right?

This question produced a variety of responses, most of them correct or at least sensible. One student could not respond and one still spoke of taking the matter to an authority figure for resolution. The remaining responses, however, showed more awareness of the need for dialogue, reasoning, and interpretation, as well as more recognition that often there is no definitive right answer to be achieved. Four students spoke of getting more or better information, one spoke of using some kind of debate or reasoning process to develop a sensible interpretation, and three mentioned attempts to reach an answer through voting or some form of compromise or accommodation of conflicting views. These responses were more sophisticated than those that still assumed that a right answer could always be found but less sophisticated than responses that recognized room for differing interpretations that cannot be resolved definitively.

Jason: They write down what they think is right.

Mark: They might take a vote.

Sue: Maybe if they already dug the thing up, maybe they could research on that. [How do they know what's the right story?] I don't know.

Kay: They can look it up or just prove it by going where you found it, the information. If you found something in a different state you could maybe take people there and prove it.

Rita: They just put it together and then they . . . just put it together. Some historians have different ideas.

Pre-Question #5: What about you--what if you were reading about something in history that you were interested in and found that different sources disagreed? How could you decide what to believe?

As with Pre-Question #4, the students' answers here were sensible but tentative, suggesting that they lacked clear and confident ideas about what to do. Responses included looking it up in a definitive source (implying a right answer), splitting the difference to reach a ballpark estimate, trying to decide for oneself what makes the most sense, looking for a preponderance of agreement among the majority of sources, or asking a parent or teacher.

Jason: Look it up. [Where would you look?] Whatever they were talking about, like shuttles, volcanoes, etc.

Brad: I could look in other books or I could decide by myself. [How?] I'd see what I think would be most real or believable.

Sue: I'd either ask my teacher or ask a person who studies history and stuff and back when it happened.

Kay: Well, maybe the thing that made more sense or the book that explained more about it or you could ask somebody who really knew.

Of the nine students who answered this question, seven spoke of trying to decide for themselves after gathering additional evidence and five spoke (in addition or instead) of consulting an authority (an encyclopedia or a parent or teacher) to get "the" answer. The boys mentioned books but not people as information resources, but four of the five girls spoke of asking a parent, a teacher, or "somebody who really knew." This may be a manifestation of more general gender differences in cognitive styles and preferences for individual versus social problem-solving contexts. In addition, Mrs. Lake interpreted it

as part of a general tendency for girls to talk more about school at home than boys do.

> *Post-Question #7: What about you--what if you were reading about something in history that you were interested in and found that different sources disagreed? How could you decide what to believe?*

Responses to this question were just as varied as they were prior to the unit and not much more confident. However, more of the students now realized that you cannot necessarily find a definitive source or reach final agreement on everything. Also, none of the students now mentioned asking parents or teachers, although several mentioned finding more definitive reference sources or living witnesses.

> *Jason*: I'd look in another book. [What would happen if you looked at another story? Then what would you do?] Look and see what's the same.
>
> *Brad*: I'd ask a survey. I'd put it in a newspaper or something and I'd ask a lot more people and I'd see what it comes to and if I got more of one than the other, I'd go with that.
>
> *Sue*: I'd find a few more and see what they say about it. [Where would you get this information?] You could probably find it in the library or you could ask someone.
>
> *Kay*: I'd probably go look at it and see if it's true. I'd go there and see or maybe they'll prove it to me in a book or something.

Responses to Post-Questions #6 and #7 indicated that the students had become more sophisticated about historical sources but remained understandably unsure about what they would personally do to resolve uncertainty when they encountered conflicting accounts. This suggests limits to the feasibility of trying to use original sources with elementary students in ways that attempt to get them to engage in sophisticated historical reasoning. Students would need information about some of the decision rules that historians use in estimating the credibility of conflicting accounts, followed by application activities using documents that had been selected with the students' levels of background knowledge and cognitive development in mind.

Questions About Personal History and the Country's History

Pre-Question #6: Do you have your own personal history or life history? . . . When does it begin? (What was the first day of your life history?)

Tim and Rita immediately answered "yes" to this question and stated that their personal history began on the day that they were born. The other eight students initially said "no" or were unsure, although all but Helen (who continued to be confused by her perception that history is about *ancient* events) eventually gave at least partly correct responses following probing. Several students seemed thrown by the notion of someone writing a history of them, and at least one (Jason) initially misunderstood the question to be "Has your personal life history been written?"

Jason: No. I just have my work that my mom saves. [Stuff from school?] Yeah. [That's your life history?] Yes. [When do you think it first started?] When I was born.

Teri: No. [If somebody wanted to write about you, could they do that?] I don't care. [I mean, would there be something to write about? Could they write the history of Teri?] Well, I guess so. [What would be the first day of your life history?] When I was born.

Sue: No. [You don't? Why do you say no?] I don't know. [If somebody wanted to write a history of Sue, could they write one?] I don't know. [Is there anything to write?] I'm a swimmer. [If somebody was going to write your history, when would it begin?] Probably last year. [How come last year?] That's when I started really doing stuff and getting into sports. [If somebody wanted to write your total, complete history, though, even if it wasn't interesting, where would they start?] Probably when I was born.

Helen: What do you mean by that? [I'll put it this way. Do you have a life history?] I'm not really into that much. I like history, but it's not my life. [Let me see if I can rephrase that. You're how old?] Ten. [So from 10 years ago until now, there's all of that time. Is that like history, a history of your life?] I wouldn't say so. That's 10 years. History's gotta be more than that.

Three of the four students who answered Pre-Question #1 by specifying that history referred to *noteworthy* events in the past (Sue, Helen, and Kay) had difficulty with Pre-Question #6. Kay initially denied that she had a

personal history because she didn't think that anything in her life was noteworthy enough to qualify as history, and Helen maintained this perception even after several probes. Sue initially suggested that a history of her life would begin not on her birthday but when she started accumulating sports accomplishments.

Helen's "I like history, but it's not my life" is our favorite quote from these interviews. We are not sure whether this was an ambiguously worded statement of the idea that nothing in her life as yet has been significant enough to qualify as history or, as we prefer to believe, it was a precocious expression of *fin-de-siècle* ennui!

Post-Question #8: Do you have your own personal life history? . . . When did it begin?

Most of the earlier confusion in response to this question had disappeared by the postunit interviews. Eight students immediately answered "Yes" when asked if they had a personal life history and went on to note that it began on the day they were born. Jason was still confused in the same way that he was in the preunit interview. If he had understood the question as intended, he probably would have responded like the other eight students did (although he may still have thought that life events are history only if they get committed to paper in a written account). Teri remained confused both about the notion of herself as a subject of history and about whether such history would begin at birth or would only chronicle noteworthy accomplishments such as winning a spelling bee at school. Even she, however, eventually agreed that she did indeed have a life history. It is interesting that the only two students still partly confused about this question were high achievers.

Jason: No. [Why don't you have your own personal life history?] I don't really like to write. [You were born 10 or 11 years ago and since you were born up until right now, is kind of like your history. So when did it begin for you?] Ten years ago.

Teri: No. [You don't have anything that went on for you in the past?] No. [When did your life history begin?] When I made the school spelling bee. [How about when you were born?] I guess so.

Sue: Yes, in 1980.

Helen: Yes. [When did it begin?] 1980 when I was born.

Pre-Question #7: What about our country--does the United States have a history? . . . When does that history begin? (Did the United States have a birthday--a day that was its first day as a country? . . . When was that?)

Nine students said yes to the initial question; Teri responded correctly after some initial confusion. Thus, in contrast to their answers to Pre-Question #6 concerning their personal histories, all of the students knew that the country has a history. Five of them immediately stated that the country's history began when the land was discovered, and two others implied this same response. Thus, in the preunit interviews 7 of the 10 students verbalized what would ordinarily be considered the correct response (at least from the Eurocentric point of view)--that the country's history started when the New World was discovered by Europeans. Two students were confused or didn't know, and one said "when the world was born." From another point of view, the latter is also a correct answer.

Jason: Yes. [When do you think that history began?] When America, the world was born. [When's your birthday?] February 23rd. [When's the United State's birthday?] When they signed the Constitution. [Do you know when that would be?] No.

Tim: Yeah. [OK, when does that history begin?] When it was founded, when people discovered it. [Does the country have a birthday?] Yeah. [Do you know what day it was?] No. [What happened that day that made it a country?] The Constitution . . . it's not the Constitution. Let me think. I think the British and the English battled over it and the English won . . . it was the English colonies and then it turned into the United States.

Teri: I don't know . . . a long time ago . . . I think it was in the 1700s or something like that. [Does the country have a birthday?] Yeah, but I don't know when it is. [Do you know what happened that made it a country?] I guess it was when there was some people and I can't remember

what country it was called but they were trying to find a shorter way to China so they went a different way instead and they found America.

Helen: Yes. [Does it have a birthday?] Yes it does. On Columbus Day. [Tell me a little bit about Columbus and why we say that.] People say that Columbus first landed in America and named it but really what I think is another person, I can't remember his name, he found it first . . . I think he was a pirate or something and he sailed to America and named it that. After his name. It had American in it . . .

Kay: Yes. [When does that history begin?] I think when the United States was discovered and people found it. [Does the United States have a birthday?] Yeah. [What can you tell me about it?] It's called Earth Day, I think.

Surprisingly, no one mentioned the Fourth of July as the nation's birthday. Elementary students learn about Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, and other holidays in the early grades, but apparently July 4th is not included among these holiday units because it occurs in the summer. In response to the birthday question, five students did not know, two said when the Constitution was signed, two said when the land was discovered (counting Helen's "Columbus Day" response here), and one said Earth Day. Although the Fourth of July is traditionally called the nation's birthday, it should be noted that the "discovery of the land" and "signing of the Constitution" responses are just as valid, if not more so, from other perspectives.

Several answers displayed bits and pieces of (not always correct) history that the students picked up elsewhere. Mark and Teri knew that the land was discovered by people looking for a shorter way to China, but Mark thought that they were French. Tim knew that there was a war (although he thought that the English defeated the British) and that the English colonies turned into the United States. Helen knew (from watching an episode of the "Chipmunks" cartoon show!) that Columbus was not the first to discover America and that America was named after Amerigo, but she thought that Amerigo was "a pirate or something" who got here two years before Columbus. Rita started to answer from her

Michigan history learned in fourth grade, but then realized that this was not relevant to the question. In general, the students' responses indicated that they knew that the country was part of a new world discovered by Europeans, but not much else. This underscores Mrs. Lake's point that they are being introduced historically to the country as such for the first time in fifth grade.

The students' vagueness and confusion about the events leading to the establishment of the United States as a nation also reflect the trends that McKeown and Beck (1990) found in fifth graders who had studied American history through the colonial unit but had not yet studied the Revolution. These fifth graders were vague about the colonies, their relationship with England, and how they became an independent country. If they mentioned that a war was involved, they were likely to be confused about the combatants and to conflate elements of the Revolutionary War with elements of other wars, especially the French and Indian War. They also did not know much about the Declaration of Independence or the role of the concept of freedom in motivating and explaining the Revolution.

Post-Question #9: Did the United States have a birthday--a day that was its first day as a country?

All students immediately answered yes to this question and went on to name July 4th as the date, either immediately or after probing. Thus, whereas no student mentioned July 4th in response to Pre-Question #7, all of them supplied the conventional response concerning the country's birthday during the postunit interviews.

Although students now knew the July 4th date, they did not know the year of the Declaration of Independence. Of seven students specifically asked, four did not know and the others guessed 150 years ago, 1792 and 1942. The latter

response appeared to be a conflation with the 1492 date associated with Columbus.

Jason: Yes . . . July 4th.

Tim: Yes, Fourth of July. [Do you know what year?] 1792.

Teri: Yeah, July 4th.

Helen: Yes. Independence Day, the Fourth of July. [Do you know what year?] 1942.

Kay: Yes. Fourth of July. [Do you know what year?] I'm not sure.

Post-Question #10: Do you know how it got to be a country? (Probe)

Although Mrs. Lake introduced the American history time line that stretched across the front of her classroom and made brief mention of some of the key events involved in the establishment of the country as an independent nation, she did not conduct sustained in uction in the American Revolution during her initial unit. Consequently, the students' answers to Post-Question #10 were almost as varied as, and only somewhat more informed than, their answers to Pre-Question #7. Three students knew that Americans fought for freedom from England, three knew that there was a war but did not know or gave wrong answers about who was involved, one mentioned the signing of the Declaration of Independence, one simply said "It became a state" but could not explain further, and two could not respond. All three of the students who gave the first answer were boys, and in general the boys seemed better informed on this topic than the girls.

Jason: That's the day we became free from England. [Why did we become free on that day? What had been going on?] They were bossing us around so we decided to fight them. [Who's we?] The Americans. [What happened?] We won.

Tim: It was when we wrote the Constitution. [What was that all about?] We fought off the English. [Why?] They were like invading. They wanted our country. [Who won?] We won. [Why were the English trying to boss us around?] They wanted to get to China and they found this and tried to take over.

Mark: I don't really know. [What were we before this birthday?] We were a few states and then it kept on growing. [Why do we call it Independence Day?] Because the Declaration of Independence was signed. [From whom?] I'm not sure but it might be the people who signed it.

Brad: There was only a little bit of the United States and most people lived on the east coast. The little bit was the U.S. and another part of it in the center, I forgot what that was called and it was divided by the Mississippi River. I think one of them was called the English Channel. [Why do we have Independence Day?] It's the first day America became America after they won the war to win all the land. [Who were the wars fought with?] The British. We were kind of being cheated. Once we won it, all of our land, that's how the United States became the United States on the Fourth of July.

Ned: I don't know. [How did we get to be this country? What were we before our birthday?] Settlers. [Who was in charge?] Themselves. [What happened on July 4?] They had a War of Independence.

Teri: I don't know.

Sue: The Europeans were looking for a shorter way to China and they thought they'd just go the other way and find a shorter way. [Did people live here?] Yes. [How did it become the United States?] I don't know. [We call Fourth of July Independence Day. Why?] Everyone celebrates being free. [Free from whom?] Slavery.

Helen: [The United States became a country in 1776. What was it before that?] Just an island. Columbus came in 1942. [Actually Columbus came in 1492]. I get them mixed up. [What was going on in this country before Independence Day?] A war. World War I. I think it was the British and the French fighting. The English and Americans fought and the Americans won. The colonists lost because they had a lot of people that were slaving but they got more slaves than they had and all of them got together and they beat the colonists.

Kay: We had a war I think. It was World War I, I think. [Actually, we called it the Revolutionary War. We call it Independence Day. Independence from what?] I don't know. [What were we before Independence Day?] Just a discovered piece of land. [Who were the Americans fighting?] The French. I'm not sure. [Do you know who was in charge of this country?] The Indians.

Rita: [Why did the United States have a birthday?] So it could become a state. [What was it before that?] It was just there. [Who was in charge?] Nobody. They did what they wanted to do. [What happened on the birthday?] It became a state and the government decided laws and stuff.

Only Jason, Mark, and Ned provided responses that were both substantively correct and free of incorrect elements. Brad had the correct general idea but

thought that the United States won all of its land in the original Revolutionary War. He also located the English Channel somewhere in America. Tim also had the correct general idea about fighting the English, but he thought that the war was between English invaders and Native Americans who were already living on the land when the English discovered it. The girls' responses were vague or confused. Rita recognized the implications of formation of government and laws but confused nation with state and really did not know who was here or what was happening at the time. Sue knew about Europeans discovering America but not much else. Kay knew that independence had been achieved through a war but did not know who fought it or what was involved. Helen made some correct statements (the United States became a country in 1776, the English and Americans fought and the Americans won) but embedded these in a rambling and mostly incorrect series of statements that included refutations of the parts that were correct (Columbus came in 1942, the British fought the French, "All of them got together" to beat the colonists, who were slavers, etc.).

One consistent gender difference in children's literary interests is that boys are more interested than girls in stories of conflict and war. Perhaps this is why the boys were better informed than the girls about the Revolutionary War. We are not sure, however, why this difference appeared so clearly in responses to Post-Question #10 but not in responses to Pre-Question #7. The questions were phrased differently, and perhaps Post-Question #10 was phrased in ways that "pulled" more war content than Pre-Question #7. Or perhaps the boys simply noted and remembered more of this information from the little bit that Mrs. Lake said about it during the first unit.

Helen referred to the country as an island. Mrs. Lake interpreted this term as simply a substitute for the term "continent" that Helen could not re-

member at the moment, rather than as conflation of the discovery of what is now the United States with the discovery of the West Indies by Columbus.

Most students seemed vague or confused about who the Americans were. Ned knew that they were settlers and Brad and Rita appeared to have generally correct ideas. With the others it is harder to say, except for Kay, who said that they were Indians. Mrs. Lake believes that conflation with information picked up in fourth-grade units on Michigan history explain some of these responses. The influence of residuals from early holiday units and especially from fourth-grade Michigan history units could be seen throughout the interviews. It became more prominent as the pre-unit interview progressed, often producing conflations or other incorrect responses.

Questions About Historical Artifacts and Sources

Questions in the preunit and postunit interviews were not parallel in this section because students had not been exposed to the terms "artifacts" or "primary and secondary sources" prior to the unit. We wanted to ask about these concepts, however, because they are important in understanding the work of historians and because Mrs. Lake emphasized them in the first unit. Prior to the unit, the students were shown an artifact (an old candle holder with candle inserted) and asked what it was and what it might tell us about the people who used it. They also were shown a time line (marking key events in a person's life and in world affairs between 1950 and 1985) to see if they would understand its function and be able to read it correctly. Following the unit, they were asked about artifacts and about primary and secondary sources.

> *Pre-Question #8: (Show candle holder) . . . Do you know what this is? (Explain or clarify for student as necessary.) What does this tell us about the people who used it?*

All 10 students immediately, confidently, and correctly identified the artifact as a candle holder and then went on (in response to probing) to explain that people needed these to carry candles around with them in the days before electric lighting.

> *Tim*: Candle holder candle, lantern . . . they took it with them so they could see where they were going . . . because if it was dark they couldn't see. They didn't have electricity back then.
>
> *Brad*: A candle and a candle hol(r . . . so they could see where they were going. Because we have lights in the buildings. [How come they didn't?] Cause they weren't smart that far back and they didn't know that much.
>
> *Helen*: It's an ancient candle. Let's say about 100 years, 200 . . . back then they didn't have any light bulbs where they can just pull a thing and a light would pop on. All they had was candles and the sunlight. When the sun was down they had to use a candle. When the sunlight was up, then they didn't have to worry about it . . . they didn't have lanterns and light bulbs and stuff like that. [Who would have used something like that?] Lincoln, maybe. Washington. Albert Einstein.
>
> *Rita*: A candle holder. . . . In the olden days, they didn't have electricity. They were smart but they weren't as smart as us because we can learn more things because we have computers and stuff. They didn't have electricity so they had to make something so they could see in the dark so they made this.

Post-Question #12: What are artifacts? (Probe for definition or examples)

All 10 students supplied generally correct responses indicating that artifacts are physical objects from a particular time or place that can be used to infer conclusions about the people who used them. Besides the items mentioned in the following response excerpts, examples included bones, old books, baby cards, and statues or pieces of buildings from long ago.

> *Tim*: Something that was part of history and dug up. We had to bring artifacts like a blanket when we were little. Stuff like that.
>
> *Brad*: They are things that were at the scene like an arrowhead that could be something that was at the war. It was at the war and it's an artifact. It's something that was at the place at the time.

Helen: Something you can hold in your hand, something I had from 1980 that I could bring in to show somebody. It would be like the bracelet that has your name. It's proof that I was born on a certain day.

Rita: Things that historians found from the past.

Only three of the students specified that artifacts are dug up from under the ground, indicating that most of them realized that most artifacts never were under the ground in the first place.

Post-Question #13: What can artifacts tell us about the people who used them?

Three students could not answer this question. The other seven gave responses that were brief but sensible and correct as far as they went. Various students said that artifacts can show us that particular people existed and tell us something about how they lived. A few recognized that the meanings or uses of artifacts must be interpreted.

Jason: What they used, how they lived.

Brad: They could study it and see how old it was and sometimes there might be a blood spot on a weapon or something but it wouldn't narrow it down because it could be fighting or hunting.

Helen: Depends on what it is. Like an arrowhead. It tells us that they had arrows for weapons and it might even tell you how long ago they were alive.

Kay: It tells us what they liked and what they did.

Rita: They tell us that they were there. [What else?] What they used and sort of how they lived.

Post-Question #11: Historians talk about primary and secondary sources. Is it better to have information from primary sources or secondary sources? Why?

Eight students said primary sources; Jason and Ned said secondary sources. Ned could not respond to follow-up probing, but Jason provided an interesting rationale: He said that secondary sources are better because the information is written down (presumably he thought that primary sources were

all oral). Ironically, Tim gave the opposite rationale for favoring primary sources, observing that "people could just write down anything."

Of the eight students who favored primary sources, only four unambiguously indicated that a first-hand observer is preferable to a second- or third-hand source. Helen had this same general idea, but she thought of a primary source as a quote from an observer that is printed in a newspaper and a secondary source as just a rumor.

> *Jason*: Secondary sources . . . cause it's written down. [Any other reason why you think secondary scurces are better? . . . What are primary sources?] I forgot.
>
> *Tim*: Primary . . . because it's like somebody told it to you instead of writing it down. [Why is that better?] People could just write down anything . . . I don't know. [Does it have anything to do with whether people were there or not?] Yeah, sometimes people have seen it and there's proof that they've seen it, like pictures and drawings. [Can you tell me the difference between primary and secondary?] One is written down or drawn and one is like a picture or something that proves that it happened.
>
> *Mark*: Primary. Primary source comes from someone or something that was there and secondary source might be like a newspaper that just heard about it. They just wrote something about it.
>
> *Brad*: Primary source . . . a primary source was at the scene so it would know specifically what happened.
>
> *Teri*: Primary because secondary might exaggerate and make up things. [What's a primary source?] It's true and whoever was telling it was there.
>
> *Sue*: Primary. Primary is first-hand account on what happened. Secondary source is like reading it in the newspaper.
>
> *Helen*: Primary source . . . I don't know what a secondary source is. [What do you think a primary source is?] Like a newspaper telling about something, the people that were there and they could put it in the newspaper and tell what actually happened. [What is a secondary source?] You heard about it. You weren't there. It's like a rumor. You heard it from somebody else.
>
> *Kay*: A primary source . . . a primary source is something that was from the past. You could learn more about that object or thing that's from the past than just reading a book that you don't even know if it's right. [Can you give me an example of a primary source?] Like a journal from a

president. [Journals aren't secondary sources, are they?] No. A secondary source is something written right now.

Rita: Primary source . . . because it's first-hand.

Tim, Helen, and Kay gave confused or contradictory responses. Tim initially said that people could write "anything" down, implying that verbal reports are accurate but written reports are not. Later he shifted to the idea that a secondary source is either written or drawn (but constructed by a person and thus open to bias or distortion), whereas a picture or artifact is objective proof. Helen gave a newspaper report as an example of a primary source and a verbal report (albeit one from a person who was just passing on what he or she had heard rather than seen directly) as an example of a secondary source. Kay defined a primary source as something contemporary from the time involved and a secondary source as something written in the present about the past.

The students had picked up the idea that some sources are more credible than others. However, only four of them gave succinct and precisely correct definitions. The other six remained confused about the definition or examples of primary versus secondary sources.

Looking back, the students were clearer about artifacts than about primary versus secondary sources. This was part of the larger pattern of being clearer about the work of archeologists than about the work of historians. Also, Mrs. Lake noted that she showed a number of artifacts and had students bring in artifacts for their personal history assignment, whereas she said less in this initial unit about primary and secondary sources. She re ed that artifacts are concrete and appeal to the students' sense of wor whereas primary and secondary sources are more like abstract definitions that the students have to learn as vocabulary words.

Pre-Question #9: (Show time line illustration) . . . This is a kind of illustration used in teaching history. Do you know what it is called? (If necessary, give the name time line. Then ask: What information does a time line give?)

None of the students had any trouble reading the time line or understanding its illustrative function, although they called it by different names. Four called it a time line, three a scale, one a life line, one a history line, and one a graph. We find it interesting that all three students who called the time line a "scale" were girls, although neither we nor Mrs. Lake can explain this difference.

Several students mentioned prior experience with time lines at school, although in reading rather than in social studies. One of their teachers had introduced time lines as a way to help them keep track of events in reading stories.

Mark: A time line. I've seen it in different books and my brother drew one for school . . . it tells what happened in a certain year about a certain subject maybe.

Ned: A graph . . . they keep track of how history goes and stuff. [How can you tell?] Cause it's 1950 to 1985.

Sue: A baby scale, a life scale. For when they started kindergarten and vacation in Mexico, begins college, maybe it's a life scale. [It's called a time line. What kind of information does a time line give you?] About when they started things and where they went at certain times and when they began a job or something.

Kay: A history line or . . . I remember this. We did this in reading. [It's called a time line. It could have been called a history line too. What kind of information does a time line give you?] It tells you parts of a year or parts of the time until it goes on with your life and tells you what happens in each year, maybe. It tells what happened.

Questions About the Value of Learning History

In both interviews, students were asked why they thought history was taught in schools and how it might help them in life outside of school. Most of them found it difficult to respond to both questions on both occasions.

Pre-Question #10: Why do you think they teach history in school--why do they think you should study the past?

Concerning the students' trouble answering this prequestion, Mrs. Lake noted that they didn't know much about history yet and so were grasping at straws. Eight students basically said that history is taught "so you will know what happened in the past," indicating belief in the value of learning about the past but without saying much if anything about why this might be important to know. One suggested that you might need the information for school, and three suggested that you might need it so that you would not be embarrassed if someone asked you for the information and you did not know it.

Jason: To get a good job. [How would history help you get a good job?] If you wanted to work as a teacher.

Tim: So you'll know more about yourself.

Brad: So we could learn about what happened . . . because if you didn't know what happened in history, it'd be the same thing as not knowing what would happen now. You'd have to know what happened in history to know what would happen in the future.

Sue: So you the children can know about the important people back then and what they did for our country and maybe how famous they were because they were a president or something. [Why is it important to know that?] Because if somebody comes up and asks you what's the first president, you want to tell them and you would want to know. [Why would you want to know?] Because I'm sure that those people that were important back then would want people to know now what they did for people.

Kay: So you know how the people in the past, what they did, like they didn't have electricity or heat or anything . . . so you might know a little bit more about before you were born or before your parents were born and it tells us about a long time ago that you didn't know about and told what you used.

Two students thought that learning about history might be good preparation for jobs, but when probed, one could mention only being a history teacher and the other could mention only teaching history and being a historian. No one suggested a way that knowing history might help you in any other job.

However, four students stated or implied more general reasons for learning history than simply acquiring the specific knowledge taught. Brad suggested that learning history would help you to understand current events and predict the future, and Tim stated directly that learning history would help you to know more about yourself. Helen and Kay implied this same idea in stating that it would be helpful to know about the similarities and differences between your life now and your ancestors' lives in the past. Also, Sue's last idea is interesting and touching: People who did great things in the past would want modern people to remember and honor them for it, and we should.

Post-Question #14: Why is history taught in school--why do they think you should study the past?

Even on this post-question, most students still talked only about learning the specific information without giving good reasons as to why it might be important to know. Four of them basically said "They teach it so you will know it," two others spoke of learning it in order to get good grades at school, one to get a job as a historian, and one to avoid embarrassment if people ask you historical questions.

Jason: Education . . . in case you want to become a historian. [What if you didn't want to become a historian?] So you'd get good grades on your report card.

Tim: I don't know.

Brad: If you know more about the past you can probably project something about what's going to happen in the future because way back in 1950 they didn't have a lot of electricity and computers and as they grow they gain more and in the year 2,000 they're going to have a lot more computers and machines that can do more things.

Sue: So if you're digging somewhere and you find something, you might want to know what it is. [Any other reasons?] I don't know.

Kay: So you know more about your past and it tells you about the people who fought wars. Because you know stuff about your life or your time line. [How does it help you?] It just tells you what your relatives did.

Many of these answers were disappointing regressions from answers to Pre-Question #10. Brad still talked about the value of historical knowledge for projecting into the future, and Kay at least hinted about knowing the past as contributing to self-knowledge; however, Tim now said that he didn't know, and Helen spoke only about passing tests in school. The only new idea was Sue's notion that historical knowledge might help you to recognize artifacts that you discovered on your own.

Mrs. Lake did not place much emphasis on the value of learning history in her initial unit, so we did not expect the students' responses to Post-Question #14 to be strikingly better than their responses to Pre-Question #10. These regressions were not expected, however. They are doubly troubling because Mrs. Lake's history teaching is notable for her projection of enthusiasm for the subject and her attempts to make it interesting for the students. Perhaps there is an inevitable loss of intrinsic interest in an area of knowledge once students begin to study it as a school subject.

Pre-Question #11: How might learning about history help you in life outside of school, either now or in the future?

Students were thrown even more by this preunit question than the previous one. Four simply did not know and could not respond even after probing. Three suggested that history knowledge might help you in a job, at school, or at times when you wanted to be able to answer questions that others might ask you.

Just three of the students gave answers that at least hinted at good reasons for studying history. Brad and Tim gave general knowledge/cultural literacy responses, suggesting that knowing about the past might help you to understand or learn better today. Sue suggested that studying the past might help you to recognize weaknesses or injustices that could be changed by passing new laws to correct them. Even these responses represented tentative

hypotheses rather than confident knowledge, however, and they were a long way from clear recognition that history might give one perspective on personal identity or help one think through citizen action decisions.

> *Tim*: If you were reading a book or something and you heard of this one guy, you might know about him.
>
> *Brad*: I don't know . . . might help you know how you got here and how everything else got here.
>
> *Sue*: Cause maybe if someone wanted something back then, maybe you could help them with doing it today. Maybe it was easier . . . if someone wanted a law in the country and it's still not here now, then maybe someone could carry it on and ask the people to make a law about that. . . . People that were important back then may have done something for our country like slaves, there are not slaves anymore, so somebody might have wanted the people not to be slaves so now there's no slaves.
>
> *Rita*: It'll help you get your job . . . my mom's a housewife right now but she's going back to school. She had to learn history just because she had to learn history. It's like you have to learn something just because you have to. [Did you ever think that somebody decides what you have to?] Yeah, the president decides. [I was just wondering what you think their reasons are, because they must believe it's important.] It is. It is important.

Taken together, the students' responses to Pre-Questions #10 and 11 indicated that most of them found history interesting and were looking forward to learning about it but had not yet come to understand that historical knowledge could be useful in living one's everyday life or thinking critically as a citizen. Rita's "I don't know why we study it, but it must be important" purview typified that of most of her peers.

> *Post-Question #15: How might learning about history help you in life outside of school, either now or in the future?*

Ned, Teri, and Rita could not respond to this postquestion. The other seven students produced a variety of responses, although once again they had trouble identifying any uses for history outside of school.

> *Jason*: Your kids. [What do you mean?] If they had a test to study for, you could help them. [What other reasons?] A job . . . a teacher.
>
> *Tim*: Maybe it tells stories.

Mark: Like if you went to some museum and you saw something and you might wonder what it was and if you knew, you'd know and wouldn't have to keep on looking for it. [How else?] Maybe for in high school if you had a test on it.

Brad: If I know about history I can think of things and say, "This was a couple of years after I was born, so it's about eight years old." That part I studied in history and it was here, history can help you know things and if you see things you know what it is.

Sue: Jobs. If you got a job as a historian and you didn't know anything about history, then . . . if people didn't know what history was, you could tell them what it meant.

Helen: If you had a question or if you found an actual artifact you could know that this arrowhead was from the Native Americans and you know what the Native Americans were. [How would it help you to know all that?] I don't really know.

Kay: I don't know. Some people think it's real interesting to know about their lifetime and they look it up and stuff. Another thing might be making something for somebody and you might want to make a time line.

Mark, Brad, and Helen gave cultural literacy responses indicating that knowledge learned in school would help you to recognize and understand things encountered elsewhere (although in two cases the examples given were archeological artifacts). Brad and Kay saw at least interest value in knowing about important historical events that were linked to events in their own life times. In a childish way, they may have been groping with concepts such as identity or situating oneself in time and place. Tim's response could be interpreted as hinting at the notion that historical stories might have implications for decision making in one's own life, but it is more likely that he is just quoting Mrs. Lake here (she frequently observed to the students that history tells stories).

Kay produced the farfetched notion that knowledge of how to make a time line might be useful if you ever wanted to make one for somebody else. Besides being charming, this is instructive as an example of the lengths to which the

students had to go in order to come up with any uses for history outside of school.

Discussion

Data for this study came from students attending a single suburban school in the midwest that serves a predominantly Anglo population, and only 10 students were interviewed in depth. However, the community's socioeconomic status indicators and the school's adoption of conventional social studies curriculum guidelines and materials (following the expanding communities structure for organizing and sequencing content) make these students generally representative of incoming fifth graders in contemporary American schools. If anything, they might be expected to be slightly above average in relevant background knowledge, mostly because the sampling plan called for interviewing four high achievers and four average achievers but only two low achievers. In general, then, these students' knowledge and thinking about history are probably representative of the knowledge and thinking about history that can be expected of incoming fifth graders in most American schools.

The students' responses communicated an interest in history and possession of bits and pieces of historical information. They had well-organized and mostly correct ideas about differences in the conditions of everyday life between the "olden days" and the present, although most were vague about the reasons for these differences. Rather than talking about industrialization of the economy and accumulation and diffusion of inventions and cultural knowledge, they spoke of modern people being smarter or richer than their ancestors. Most of the students appeared to view history as a collection of facts that might be interesting to know rather than as a subject for systematic study or personal reflection. Except for the few who had begun to wonder why people go

to war or do some of the things that they do during wars, the students had not yet begun to appreciate the potential of history for developing personal wisdom or insight into the human condition.

The data indicated that most of the students entered fifth grade knowing that history has to do with the past, although many of them harbored the misconceptions that history is limited to the exploits of famous or important people or to events that occurred long ago. Partly for this reason, they had trouble appreciating the notion that they themselves have personal histories. The students did not know much about how historians work, tending to confuse them with archeologists and to picture them as working with excavated artifacts rather than written documents.

Many of the students thought of history as an exact science that would establish facts unequivocally. They did not appreciate the degree to which history is an interpretive discipline, and they had difficulty imagining how either historians or they themselves might attempt to resolve conflicting accounts. They had generally accurate information about life in the "olden days" before electricity and engine power, but they had only vague notions of the time lines involved. They knew that the country had a history but did not know much about it. Most were at a loss when asked why they study history or how history might help them in their lives outside of school.

After they experienced Mrs. Lake's introductory unit on history and the work of historians, the students' knowledge of and thinking about history had become notably more sophisticated. Most of them now understood that the study of history encompasses everything about the past, including the everyday lives of ordinary people in the recent past, not just ancient times or the exploits of the famous. They knew that they themselves had a personal history, having portrayed key events in their lives along a time line. They were less prone to

confuse historians with archeologists, as well as more aware of the range of sources that historians use to develop their interpretations. Whereas none of the students named July 4th as the nation's birthday prior to the unit, all of them did so following the unit (although none of them correctly identified the year in which the Declaration of Independence was signed).

Along with these indications of learning, the data included findings that provide cause for concern. The students failed to generate clear ideas about why they were learning history or how such learning might help them in their lives outside of school, and some of the postunit responses indicated that certain confusions or misconceptions persisted in some students despite the instruction they had received. Some of them still believed that history refers exclusively to events that occurred long ago, confused archeologists with historians, failed to appreciate that history is an interpretive discipline, or could not define or distinguish primary and secondary sources adequately.

The data suggest the need for teachers to help their students to appreciate the value of history as a subject of study. In particular, we recommend stressing two advantages to historical study that did not even occur to most of the students we interviewed. First, although it also has social science aspects, history is one of the humanities and thus is worthy of study as such: It can enhance one's quality of life. Learning about and reflecting on history can enhance one's sense of identity by helping one to "place oneself" within the broad sweep of the human condition. Experiences in this area can be powerful for individuals of all ages, but especially children who still have a strong potential for experiencing awe and wonder at aspects of the human condition that they become aware of for the first time. They also can learn to appreciate the history that is all around them and to enjoy reading about history and visiting historical sites.

A second major advantage to studying history is its value as citizen education. A good working knowledge of history will include a great deal of information about how individuals and nations have handled various decision-making situations that recur periodically because they are part of the human condition. Armed with knowledge about the probable trade-offs involved in various courses of action (based in part on knowledge about the outcomes that these courses of action have led to in the past), students will be better prepared to make good personal, social, and civic decisions.

If students are to gain the benefits of these two potential advantages of studying history, they will need to learn to appreciate history's interpretive nature. This is a relatively sophisticated concept that the students we interviewed had difficulty understanding. However we believe that they can be made to understand it, at least at their level of cognitive development. Like all humans, children constantly interpret the events of their lives as they attempt to make sense of them. This includes historical events that they encounter in learning about the past in the classroom. Children might be made more appreciative of the interpretive nature of history through activities that engage them in historical interpretation.

For example, after studying information about history and what historians do, children might be asked to write accounts of the previous day's lesson and then share those accounts publicly. Differences in perspective, emphasis, and even ostensible facts would begin to emerge as various students' accounts accumulated, providing opportunities to discuss what is involved in interpreting events. Related concepts such as bias, distortion, or primary and secondary sources could be introduced in the process of noting and seeking to resolve discrepancies. The teacher could connect this process with accounts of how historians do their work, the difficulties they encounter with conflicting

interpretations of events, and the decisions they must make in determining what to include in their accounts and how to check their accuracy. Throughout the rest of the year, the notion of interpretation (the students', the teacher's, and the historian's) could be interwoven as a consistent theme of historical study.

In this manner, students would begin to develop critical thinking abilities and a sense of reflection about their own storytelling and that of others. This developing reflective sense would connect with students' developing sense of the processes involved in making decisions about personal and civic policy issues, and these insights could connect with their growing awareness of the judgment responsibilities of citizens in a democracy (Engle & Ochoa, 1988). Development of a disposition to be reflective in studying history would also help students to begin to appreciate and value its interpretive nature (rather than continuing to be frustrated when no clear-cut "right answers" are forthcoming) and to use it as a source for developing their own ideas about the nature of the human condition.

The students that we interviewed remembered facts and stories better than abstract concepts and definitions. Memory support devices such as Mrs. Lake's posting of key words apparently helped them to remember these words, but not necessarily to grasp their meanings with understanding, appreciate their significance, or use them in relevant application situations. Additional experience in acting as historians, or at least periodic exposure to conflicting historical accounts followed by critical discussion and decision making, would make these concepts more concrete and applicable for the students.

Fifth graders can begin to understand and appreciate the interpretive nature of history by considering such issues as the disputes over who discovered America or the contrasting views of King George and of the American rebels

concerning the events leading up to the Declaration of Independence (see Wineburg & Wilson, 1991, on this point). Still, the students would remain limited in background knowledge and readiness to act as historians in authentic ways when confronted with discrepant accounts. Consequently, activities requiring them to do so may be limited in feasibility and cost effectiveness for fifth graders, compared to activities that focus on developing initial ideas about key historical themes and events. Although it is important to introduce fifth graders to history as a discipline and teach the subject in ways that its disciplinary practitioners would consider valid, it may be best to build basic knowledge and appreciation and to concentrate on the citizen education aspects of history rather than on its knowledge generation aspects in teaching the subject to fifth graders.

The students tended to conflate information learned in their fourth-grade Michigan history unit with their thinking about the colonization of the New World and the development of the United States as a nation. This raises questions about the wisdom of studying state history in fourth grade prior to studying American history in fifth grade. For a discussion of this issue, see Brophy et al. (1991).

Some interesting achievement level and gender trends appeared in the findings. Higher achieving students generally showed both more entry-level knowledge and more complete learning about the topics addressed in our interviews, although these differences were not as large as they tend to be with subjects that students have been studying for several years. There also were occasional interesting exceptions to the general trend, such as the fact that the two students who remained somewhat "thrown" by the notion that they have their own personal histories, even after instruction on the topic, were two of the four high achievers.

The gender differences were somewhat more extensive and suggestive of instructional implications than were the achievement level differences. In thinking about history, the boys tended to focus on great men and events, whereas the girls tended to focus more on family themes and conditions of everyday living. Students of both genders need to develop better appreciation of the fact that history is not just about famous individuals and events but also about changes in human customs, culture, and conditions of everyday living that have resulted from discoveries, inventions, and diffusion of knowledge. They also need more exposure to information about specific females, as Mrs. Lake is providing to her fifth graders.

Conclusion

Along with related data reported by Levstik and Pappas (1987) and McKeown and Beck (1990), our findings indicate that entering fifth graders are interested in history and already in possession of some accurate knowledge of the past. However, such children are vague about the interpretive nature of history and about the work of historians, and they need assistance in developing initial ideas about historical topics and in correcting various conflations and misconceptions. We believe that it is possible to address these problems and teach American history to fifth graders in ways that emphasize understanding, appreciation, and application to life outside of school, but that doing so will require helping the students to see the value of history as a humanity and as preparation for citizenship, not just as miscellaneous facts to be memorized in case someone ever asks.

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Appendix

Pre- and Post-Unit Questions

Pre-Unit 1 Interview Questions

History and Historians

1. Next year in social studies with Mrs. Teacher you will be learning about history. Do you know what history is? (If students do not know or answer incorrectly, prepare them for the next questions by telling them that history is the study of the past--of who the people were who came before us and how they used to live back then.)

2. What do historians do? (If students do not know or answer incorrectly, prepare them for the next question by telling them that historians study and write about history--they are the ones who write the history books.)

3. How do you think historians do their work--how do they find out about what happened and decide what to write?

4. Sometimes historians disagree about what happened in the past, why it happened, or what it all means. When they disagree, how can they decide what is right?

5. What about you--what if you were reading about something in history that you were interested in and found that different sources disagreed? How could you decide what to believe?

6. Do you have your own personal history, or life history? . . . When does it begin? (What was the first day of your life history?)

7. What about our country--does the United States have a history? . . . When does that history begin? (Did the United States have a birthday--a day that was its first day as a country? . . . When was that?)

8. (Show artifact). . . Do you know what this is? (Explain or clarify for student as necessary.) What does this tell us about the people who used it?

9. (Show time line) . . . This is a kind of illustration used in teaching history. Do you know what it is called? . . . (If necessary, give the name time line. Then ask: What information does a time line give you?)

10. Why do you think they teach history in school--why do you think you should study the past?

11. How might learning about history help you in life outside of school, either now or in the future?

12. Our country is in the part of the world called America. At one time, American was called the New World. Do you know why it was called the New World?

13. Who were the explorers? . . . What do you think explorers did?

14. Who discovered America? (If student says Christopher Columbus, ask if anyone else discovered America before he did.)

15. At first, the only people who lived in America were the Indians. Do you know where Indians came from or how they got here?

16. For a long time, the Indians were the only people who lived in America. But then some other people came and started colonies. Do you know what colonies are?

17. Who lived in these colonies back then--who came to America and why did they come? (Probe for as many different groups as the student can name, asking in each case who the people were, where they came from, and why they came.)

18. (If necessary) One group that came to America was called the Pilgrims. Have you heard of the Pilgrims? . . . Who were they, and why did they come?

19. Who owned the American colonies back then? What country was in charge? (If students do not know or answer incorrectly, tell them that England was in charge then.)

20. So for many years the American settlements were English colonies, but later they became the United States. Do you know how that happened?

21. (If necessary) . . . Have you heard of the Revolutionary War, or the War for Independence? (If yes: What do you know about that war?)

22. Have you heard about the Civil War? (If yes: What do you know about that war?)

23. Have you heard about wagon trains, or the frontier, or the pioneers? (Allow child to make an initial statement and then probe about each of these three terms. Without asking directly, determine if the child has some knowledge of westward expansion of the nation from an east coast base.)

Post-Questions for Unit 1

1. You recently finished a social studies unit on history. What are the most important things that you learned in that unit? (Probe to exhaustion)

2. How would you define history? What is history?

3. Who are archeologists? What do they do?

4. Who are historians? What do they do?

5. How do historians do their work--how do they find out about what happened and decide what to write? (Probe to exhaustion)

6. Sometimes historians disagree about what happened in the past, why it happened, or what it all means. When they disagree, how can they decide what is right?

7. What about you--what if you were reading about something in history and found that difference sources disagree? How could you decide what to believe?

8. Do you have your own personal life history? . . . When did it begin?

9. Did the United States have a birthday--a day that was its first day as a country?

10. Do you know how it got to be a country? (Probe)

11. Historians talk about primary and secondary sources. Is it better to have information from primary sources or from secondary sources? Why?

12. What are artifacts? (Probe for definition or examples)

13. What can artifacts tell us about the people who use them?

14. Why is history taught in school--why do they think you should study the past?

15. How might learning history help you in life outside of school, either now or in the future?