

Using Fiction to Teach American History in Middle School: Affects on Student Engagement

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Abstract

This research highlights the effects of using literature and relevant curriculum to teach history in grade levels 6 through 8, and analyzes how students respond when learning complicated themes and events through the medium of historic fiction. Specifically, my research seeks to inform secondary educators concerning the use of the narrative and corresponding curriculum as a tool to teach history. Additionally, my research explores how the use of literature in the social science classroom affects student engagement, comprehension and builds student connection to the material.

Research information was collected over a 6 month period on a literature based American history unit. The data collection methods included interviews with teachers involved in the implementation and instruction of the unit, student surveys and reflection response sheets, observations in the classroom, observations of written work, and analysis of the final project presentation.

Findings indicated that over the course of the narrative based project the students developed a deep emotional connection to their historic subjects and a measurable understanding of the time period. Students were able to analyze historic events, contextualize complex historic issues and draw their own conclusions about the content and material. In addition to these forms of student observable engagement, students showed a mastery of many skills including, oral presentation, drafting, writing in the first person, working cooperatively and reading for comprehension.

Chapter 1 Introduction

When I began researching and compiling information to create an informed research proposal, I focused my efforts on studying team teaching and the implementation of interdisciplinary curriculum. In my first year of teaching at a medium sized public high school I observed that most teachers implemented their day to day instruction in a vacuum. I describe this phenomenon of “teaching in a vacuum” as educators that plan and implement curriculum independently of other disciplines and who execute their daily lessons without any cross-curriculum integration or support. I felt that team teaching and interdisciplinary instruction were to areas of education that could combat the phenomenon of “teaching in a vacuum” and would be valuable areas of the educational arena to research.

After reading case studies and research concerning team teaching and interdisciplinary curriculum, I felt that my field of study was too broad and that to truly address the issues of interdisciplinary curriculum in an original way, I needed to focus my research on the practical implementation of a cross-subject program of study.

The idea of incorporating fiction into history instruction is an interdisciplinary approach to teaching. The boundaries of the subjects of English and history are blurred when using literature in the social science classroom. Using fiction in history class is essentially applying the discipline of English to teach historical concepts. Another issue that aided me in formulating my revised thesis question was the low percentage of literate adults in the United States and the decline of reading among students and adults across the board. According to a National Assessment of Adult Literacy 2003 report, only 29 percent of United States adults could perform reading tasks at a “Basic” level, which is defined as only being about to perform simple, everyday literacy activities (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2003). A further 14 percent

performed at a “Below Basic” level, which is defined as demonstrating only the most simple and of literacy skills (USDE, 2003).

While conducting my student teaching I observed the inability of many pupils to grasp complex historical themes and concepts from textbooks. Lastly, in my experience students often referred to textbooks as “boring” and complained about textbook based reading assignments which, in today’s standards focused curriculum, often drive instruction.

I observed early in my first year of teaching that student reading of text-based assignments was low. According to a report compiled by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, in 2004 only a third of 13 year-olds read daily outside of school (USDE, 2006a). Additionally, 40 percent of 13-year-olds reported spending less than one hour on homework per night (USDE, 2006a).

With these observations and statistics in mind, I wondered how I could increase student reading and involvement with historic content. I wanted to find a way to make history more real to my students, as well as increase in-class and out-of-class reading. I wanted instruction to be less about dates and wars and more about connecting to a different time period and understanding history on an emotional, as well as academic level.

During my own middle school experience I studied World War II and the Holocaust. I was interested in history and was especially drawn to this time period, but it was not until 8th-grade, when I went to Washington D.C. and visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, that I felt a true connection to history. I was moved beyond words at the stories, videos, artifacts and first person accounts that I saw that day. I cried with despair at the injustices of the Final Solution and rejoiced at survivors’ hope and optimism. For the first time in my life history became real.

Unfortunately, not every student has the opportunity to visit Washington D.C. or even go to local museums. Years later when I started teaching history I wondered how I could breath life into the subject and give students the opportunity to truly connect with the past, making the history about more than dates, governments, wars and politics. I wanted to know if historic fiction could engage students and if students would be better able to grasp and analyze complex time periods through literature. I also sought to understand how students would respond, in terms of retention, comprehension and emotional connection, when allowed to read historical fiction in addition to textbooks.

Statement of Problem

Teaching multifaceted historic concepts and thematic events in history without relating the material to other courses lacks a comprehensive approach, and does not provide the adequate schema for contextualization. Many courses, especially in the social sciences, cannot be adequately explained and explored without touching upon multiple disciplines. However, with today's standard based educational policy there is little room in terms of time and resources for cross-curricula collaboration.

One of the underlining purposes of social science instruction is to aid students in becoming active, informed citizens. McGowan, Erickson and Neufeld (1996) state, "Civic competence demands that students not only know the facts, concepts and ideas necessary to participate in civic affairs, but that they understand the process through which they came to know these things and why a citizen should know them" (p. 204). Memorization of names, dates and other historic facts are important, but a deeper understanding of the material, one where students can synthesize information and analyze events, is critical to a balanced, well-rounded education in history. Moreover, history is more than a series of dates, names and wars.

History is the story of humanity and the decisions, events and lives that make up that story. History is our past and it helps us, as members of a common society and as citizens within that society, understand the world we live in. Understanding our past informs the decisions we make in contemporary society.

Beyond this crucial need to understand our past so we can better comprehend society today, young students also need a context for conceptualizing spans of time. Over the course of my teaching experience I observed that students had a hard time relating to the past and had trouble putting events in a cohesive timeline. Over the course of teaching American history I witnessed a child explaining, “slavery happened a really long time ago, like when dinosaurs were around.”

Beyond my personal observations concerning a young student’s perception of time, dominant developmental psychology theory explains children’s stages of development and why younger students have difficulty contextualizing abstract ideas. According to Piaget, children between the ages of 7 and 11 are just beginning to grasp analytic skills, a crucial component to studying history (Gardner, 2000).

Research on children’s time perception has also found that elementary and middle school aged students have certain limitations on their ability to contextualize events over large spans of time (Zaccaria, 1978). These limits in the cognitive ability necessary to grasp timelines make historical concepts a challenge for younger students. Students’ need age appropriate ways to relate to history. In order to comprehend and analyze history, students need prior knowledge and schema; they need a context for understanding history that goes beyond purely factual information.

Single subject curriculum in the social sciences relies heavily on textbook based instruction, the majority of which is purely factual and lacks a narrative. In practice this curriculum cannot be adequately explored without touching upon multiple disciplines. However, with today's standard based educational policy, cross-curricula collaboration is a challenge. Teachers are often pressed for time and do not have room in their schedules to prepare for their classes, let alone meet with other teachers to plan and discuss collaborative teaching efforts, such as those necessary to bring literature into the social science classroom. Additionally, with today's standard based instruction many teachers find it challenging to address all the grade devised standards required in the school year. Lastly, adding the reading and teaching of historic fiction into the mandated history curriculum could eat up precious time dedicated to addressing those standards which are the basis of many of the standardized tests that measure academic achievement.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine how integrating literature into social science curriculum affects students' ability to understand and emotionally connect with the material. Specifically, I analyzed students' use of the narrative in the social science classroom in the hopes that other educators can use this information in the future to enlighten their teaching practices relating to interdisciplinary curriculum. Through this research I hope to inform instructors' methods of teaching history through literature and help other teachers incorporate the narrative into their social science curriculum, ideally fostering deep learning, active engagement and an emotional connection to the past.

Research Question

How does incorporating literature into middle school social science curriculum affect student engagement in terms of an emotional connection to the material? In my 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade classrooms I implemented, with the help of my team teachers, a semester long, literature-based, American history curriculum unit focusing on exploring historic subjects through the narrative. I observed students throughout the unit, graded benchmark projects, interviewed my fellow teachers and collaborators, crafted and analyzed student surveys and response questioners, and recorded observations from the students' culminating presentations. Through these various forms of data collection I documented the experiences of the students involved with this project in term of engagement and connection to the material.

Theoretical Rationale

The foundation of teaching history based on developmentally appropriate material (i.e. the narrative) for a child's stage of cognitive thinking and ability, rests in the field of psychology. Jean Piaget's work in child development and his theory of the different stages of cognitive development informs teaching practices and sheds light on the type of information children can process during different stages of development.

According to Piaget's stages of development, the young school aged child is able to deal with concepts, such as amount and time, as long as these concepts are encountered in a concrete and tangible form (Gardner, 2000). The adolescent student is further able to reason abstractly about the same concepts in words or through the manipulation of logical symbols (Gardner, 2000). Even though this work has been challenged and refined since its introduction, many educators follow Piaget's theories for developmentally appropriate stages of instruction.

Teaching history through socially relevant historic fiction and literature is also supported by Piaget's constructivist theory of education, which holds that people learn through their own understanding and prior knowledge. According to constructivist theory, learning is not achieved through memorization and repetition, but through involvement and interaction. More specifically, constructivist learning activities are characterized by, "active engagement, inquiry, problem solving, and collaboration with others. Rather than a dispenser of knowledge, the teacher is a guide, facilitator, and co-explorer who encourages learners to question, challenge, and formulate their own ideas, opinions, and conclusions" (Abdal-Haqq, 1998, p. 2).

Constructivism in the classroom does not follow the traditional textbook based approach to learning, but follows a different model of learning that is centered on critical thinking, prior knowledge, schema and contextualization. Using literature to teach history employs a constructivist approach and emphasizes learning in context and supports student synthesis of information.

Kolb's experiential learning theory (Smith, 1996) also supports teaching history through the narrative. According to experiential learning theory, learning is conducted through firsthand experience and incorporates direct contact with the information learned. This approach supports teaching history within the context of the narrative, which employs interacting with historic subjects, if even on a fictional level, and encourages a greater degree of direct contact and with the material. Utilizing history lessons that encourage contact with realia, role playing, and engagement through historic fiction, relies heavily on the model of experiential learning.

Lastly, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (2000) supports the process of teaching history through literature. Gardner proposes that there are multiple types of intelligences beyond the linguistic and logical-mathematical types of intelligences, which are often stressed in the

traditional educational model. These multiple intelligences are; spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalistic, intrapersonal and interpersonal. These different types of intelligences lead each student to have distinct learning styles.

Using textbook based, single subject curriculum to teach history is a model of instruction that assumes all students have the same learning style and focuses on one type of intelligence and one type of learner. Incorporating an interdisciplinary approach by using literature in the social science classroom broadens the method of instruction and caters to more types of intelligences and, subsequently, different learning styles.

Assumptions

As I began my research I realized that my analytical lens was filled with assumptions concerning the use of literature to teach history. My assumptions include the following; teaching history through literature is more costly than teaching history through traditional methods, students are more interested in reading fiction than textbooks, teaching history through literature takes more planning time than traditional methods, and teaching history using non-fiction is as effective as teaching history through traditional methods.

Background and Need

A review of past research conducted concerning students' perception of time and their grasp of sequence of events has help me understand the need for teaching history through developmentally appropriate mediums. Zaccaria (1978) found that 1st-graders time span for thinking about events is only one week. By 3rd-grade the time span had lengthened to a month and by 6th-grade students time span widened to a year. Subsequent research has pointed out that this does not mean that students prior to 7th-grade cannot think or remember events beyond a

year, but that they need specialized instruction in order to think historically and put information in a linear order (Barton and Levstik, 1997).

This specialized instruction could come in the form of constructivism based instruction. Barton and Levstik (1997) support teaching history through constructivism when it is aligned with a student's cognitive developmental stage and highlight how there is a need for specialized instruction which is more diverse and comprehensive. Their research addresses how students in grades 5 through 8 internalize and interpret historic time periods and ideas. They found that some groups of students are marginalized in American history, which is often dominated by the "white male" perspective and leads diverse students to be unable to reconcile their history within the history presented to them in traditional curriculum.

The researchers interviewed 48 students in 5th through 8th-grade and asked them open ended questions concerning their ideas about history. They also presented historical pictures with captions and asked students to discuss and pick eight of the pictures to place on a timeline of the past 500 years according to importance. The students were interviewed in groups to increase participation. The subjects were from diverse backgrounds and they conducted the interviews in inner-city and rural schools. The researchers also asked probing questions about the students' choices and analyzed the recorded interviews afterwards to draw conclusions. They found that students' interpreted history through their own cultural lenses and that it was difficult for students to understand areas in history for which they had no contemporary context. This research suggests that the framework by which history is transmitted is very important to how students, in this case a diverse population, understand and reconcile the past. Moreover, this research illustrates how literature and non-fiction can play a role as a framework in the teaching and learning of history.

In other research Levstik (1995) focuses on how using the narrative as a cultural frame for historic events can be a powerful tool for understanding and explaining the intricate story which is history. She states that in the historic novel, “an author holds a magnifying glass up to a piece of history, providing humanizing details often left out of broad survey history texts” (Levstik, 1995, Translating Knowing into Telling section, para. 2). It is these “humanizing details” that add context, schema and social relevance, especially for the younger student.

Levstik states that, in essence, the narrative is a tool that can be used to “transform chronology (a list of events) into history (an interpretation of events)” (Levstik, The Discourse of Disciplines or Domains section, 1995, para. 1). This highlights the critical role that the narrative can play in terms of transforming dates and events into information that can be analyzed, criticized and evaluated. Additionally, Levstik (1995) divulges that the historical narrative can act as a sociocultural frame and explain how people feel about history, how people lived their daily lives, what they wrote and how they spoke. Her research also explains how the narrative can be used to convey details that are often missing from standardized textbooks. The level of detail used to convey an engaging story in historic fiction goes above and beyond the level of detail included in textbooks. The additional degree of detail in narratives allows the reader to imagine themselves in the story and puts the fact, names and dates, into a cultural context.

In this research, Levstik (1995) constructs a persuasive argument about how the narrative can benefit social science curriculum. She explores how the narrative functions in the social science classroom and how young students interoperate the narrative in comparison to more traditional methods of instruction. Her research highlights that the narrative approach to history helps students put past events into moral and cultural contexts. Much of this literature solidifies that teaching history through the narrative is beneficial to students.

There are a plethora of studies which highlight that the use of non-fiction to teach history helps comprehension, contextualization and combats the conundrum of time conception, and the linear placement of facts. I am not arguing that using historic fiction in the social science classroom has advantages, this is established. I am exploring how using the cross-curriculum approach to teaching history through literature effects students' connection, engagement and understanding of the material. The need for my research lies in the fact that there seems to be a disconnect between the theoretical research and the practical implementation of using literature to teach history. I am interested in the engagement level of the students when the cross-curriculum approach of using historic fiction is used in the classroom.

Prior research shows that time conception and appropriate social context are areas that challenge students of history, especially those at the middle school aged level of cognitive development. Therefore, the need for literature based instructional methods which, through the narrative, help student put events into a cohesive time span and give context is necessary.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Historical Context

Students often muse that history is “boring” and centers on the memorization of dates and names. In fact, students routinely identify history as their least favorite subject in school (Murray, 1997). Much of student distaste for the discipline of history lies in the method of instruction. A review of literature showed that early social science educators and researchers were more concerned with content and the organization of curriculum than with building critical thinking, analytic skills, and acquiring deep learning through history. Their approach to teaching history looked at the discipline as a set of facts that needed to be transferred to the students (Dulberg, 2005).

Dulberg (2005) explains how misinterpretation of developmental theory and research in the 1960s and 1970s used Piaget’s theories to support that history should not be taught to young students as they have not yet reached the developmentally appropriate stages to process, understand, and synthesize the information. Subsequent research has shown that many of these research methods were flawed and that Piaget’s stages of development were misinterpreted as being finite instead of fluid. Dulberg (2005) explains that “Piaget’s developmental theories have often been misunderstood as being about ‘age-determined stages,’ meaning that a child can only perform a certain task when she has reached a particular age. In actuality, developmental theory merely describes ‘age-related stages’ ” (p. 516).

In summary, some educators interpreted these early studies to mean that students cannot process nor contextualize historic information until later adolescence. Further research has shown that this is an erroneous assumption and conversely, developmental stages substantiate the benefits of applying developmental learning theory to history instruction. Likewise, students’

active participation when learning history is an amalgamation of shared experiences which can be further experienced through reading fiction.

Review of the Previous Literature

After a thorough evaluation of the literature I categorized my review into three sections. These sections include; Benefits of Using Literature in the History Classroom, Strategies for the Integration of Fiction into the History Curriculum and, lastly, Trends in Literacy. The first section, Benefits of Using Literature in the History Classroom, discusses various studies conducted that support the belief system that literature based social science instruction is beneficial to the student and helps with contextualization, memory and engagement. The second section of my review, Strategies for the Integration of Fiction into the History Curriculum, looks at literature surrounding the practical implementation of teaching history through fiction. The concluding section, Trends in Literacy, reviews current educational movements relating to an interdisciplinary approach to social science curriculum.

Benefits of Using Literature in the History Classroom

McGowan, Erickson, and Neufeld (1996) provide an academic analysis of the argument that literature is a powerful tool to teach children concepts in the discipline of social science and to promote civic responsibility. The authors examined research on teaching history to grade level students through the use of the narrative and fiction. The authors also explored the common conception among many academics and teachers that the use of fiction in the classroom is beneficial to student learning. While many educational researchers have addressed the benefits of using literature in the history classroom, there is insufficient practical research on literature based history instruction which offers practical direction to teachers. The authors highlighted previous research on this topic, stating that trade books are more engaging and foster

more imagination, compared to textbook only instruction. Additionally, McGowan et al. (1996) proposed that text-based only instruction lacks deep analysis in terms of getting the students to think critically about history and simply promotes regurgitation of terms and facts. Because of this, the states of Arizona, New York and Wisconsin have added literature into their state standards for the social sciences.

Classroom lessons which use descriptive historic literature enable students to link past and present events, allowing them to conceptualize change over time (McGowan et al., 1996). The use of multicultural literature in the social sciences helps students become more compassionate, show increased sensitivity to the human condition and develop in general a better understanding of historic concepts. The authors identified the shortcomings in current research and speak directly to the need for additional studies in the field. Lastly, the authors emphasized that research exists documenting the benefits of using literature in the social science classroom as it relates to literacy (i.e. improving reading skills), but not the actual learning and internalizing of historic concepts.

Levstik (1989) explored the historic narrative in terms of “truth finding” and how using historical fiction helps students to understand right and wrong and to develop historical judgment. The narrative guides the reader to identify with a certain perspective and helps to raise moral issues that further the readers search for truth finding. The narrative also allows readers to view history as interpretative. For example, Levstik (1989) cites a middle school aged student who explained, “[The textbook] just says that Americans were right, but it doesn't tell you exactly why they were right, or why the British fought” (p. 117). This student expressed that the textbook alone lacked a moral framework. This research exemplified how the narrative,

which employs detail, voice, and original perspective, can fill a gap and create a meaningful framework.

Nawrot (1996) explained the value of historical fiction and outlined the benefits of teaching history through literature. Nawrot (1996) sites prior research and claimed that students who are taught history through literature retain more information, connect with characters, gain schema, are more interest in the material and are more motivated to ask questions. He concluded that while teaching history through fiction is not the most efficient way to teach, it is the most effective and it give background for historical events that help students relate to and understand the past.

Strategies for the Integration of Fiction into History Curriculum

Fuhler (1991) discussed how utilizing the narrative in the middle school classroom can increase student motivation and promote deeper understanding of, and connections to, historic subjects and events. Fuhler's research was based on a review of previous literature and from a case study within his own classroom surrounding teaching the Civil War through literature. This is one of the few instances where I found practical research based on curriculum implementation. Fuhler's findings were exceptionally persuasive as they relate directly to the real world classroom setting.

Fuhler (1991) concluded that the narrative is a strong tool which helps students make connections with events in the past, is easier to understand then traditional texts, fosters critical thinking, and help students experience the trials and tribulation of historic characters on a authentic level. This allows students to critically assess their opinion and to identify the "right" and "wrong." Fuhler's work outlined the fundamental importance of literature in the social science classroom and its effect on the learning process.

Fuhler's method, which drew on solid research and is put to the test in his own classroom, not only employed sound research and study practices, but is very similar to my own research focus. I have drawn from Fuhler's in-class experiences and his insights helped me shape my own research methods, and build my own curriculum. Fuhler (1991) stated that the strength of the historic novel lies in its ability to, "provide the reader with insight into the human condition," and that its use, "encourages the students to weigh and assess the dilemmas and choices that people have faced through out history" (The Rational for Change section, para. 1). In his study Fuhler (1991) also gave practical examples of novels that could be used in the middle school classroom and methods on how to scaffold material. For example, in a unit on the Civil War, Fuhler (1991) recommended for the intermediate reader the historic novel, *Charley Skedaddle*, while the advanced reader could use the book *The Red Badge of Courage* to understand the realities of war in the 1800s.

Turk, Klein, and Dickstein (2007) also made a strong case for integrating literature in history classrooms and offer strategies for implementation. Their research stated that using literature to teach history benefits the students by promoting increased student motivation and performance, encourages multiple points of view, increases critical thinking, and helps student retain content.

The strategies that the authors offered to integrate literature into the social science curricula included; era driven literature, asking essential questions that can be answered through the literature and using identity driven literature. The authors concluded that incorporating fiction into history classes is beneficial to students. The authors also offered examples of literature which could be used to teach certain time periods in history. For example, for the era driven approach of instruction a novel such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* could be

used to explore the roaring 1920s or Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* could be a tool for an in-depth analysis on the Red Scare and the HUAC investigational of the 1950s. They argued that, "the use of fiction in history classrooms can serve as a potent vehicle though which to adhere to time constraints in addition to city and state content standards for social studies and literacy with simultaneously providing student with an enriching and thought provoking experience" (Turk et al., 2007, p. 401). This is a provocative statement as most educational research agrees that using literature is in theory, if not in practice, a method that requires additional time and preparation.

While the authors offered many sound examples of literature based curriculum they do not offer their own in-class research that shows the benefits of this type of instruction, nor did they address any of the obstacles or disadvantages concerning teaching history through literature. However, the strategies and methods for implementing fiction into the social science curriculum offers insight on teaching history though fiction and will inform my research with practical suggestions for curriculum.

Trends in Literacy

Research conducted by the Arts Educational Policy Review (2008) highlighted reading trends among teenagers, young adults and adults in the United States. The report took a quantitative look at how much, how often and what Americans are reading. The report also compared this data to prior data and showed declines in overall reading, comprehension, and the sharp decline in the reading of literature. The research study came to many interesting conclusions that informed my research including that recreational reading increases academic performance. This study also analyzed aggregate data to show the decline in reading scores among school aged children over the past 10 years. This quantitative data identifies trends in literacy and supports the need for literature in the classroom. This study is comprehensive and

combines statistics compiled by various agencies on reading and literacy into readable charts and diagrams.

Spring (2002) explores in detail the history of politics in education and how politics dictates educational policy, what is taught in schools, how subjects are taught, and how student success is measured. Spring gives background on why our current education system relies heavily on standardized content and standardized testing, and sheds light on why certain content is emphasized. Spring explains how certain shareholders, including big business and the government, mold and shape our educational policies. Spring's work takes a comprehensive look at the educational system in the United States and how it is inexplicitly intertwined with society and is highly politicized. This work has informed my research by helping me understand the background as to why our current education system is so heavily focused on content standards and why standardized testing is so highly valued. Stringent content standards and reliance on standardized test scores for funding are road blocks for teaching through the predominantly literature based instructional approach. Spring's work informed some of the bias I have encountered in my research in terms of practicality of fiction based history instruction.

I have found Spring's work to be comprehensive and based on educational policy and state and federal laws relating to education. Spring also relies heavily on primary source quotes from people close to educational policy including superintendents, officials in the Department of Education and various governmental officers.

Administrative Records

No study of social science curriculum would be complete without researching the current history-social science curriculum outlined by the California Department of Education. As part of No Child Left Behind [NCLB] educational law passed in 2001, standardized curriculum for

grades K-12 was mandated in the California public school system (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2002). In its simplest terms, the state standards for history-social science are a laundry list of the curriculum in grades K-12 in the California public school system must be taught in each grade level.

The California Standardized Tests and Reporting system, commonly referred to as the STAR test, is administered every year in the public school system in California and tests to the curriculum and content outlined in the California state standards. The STAR test scores are utilized to ascertain student achievement and, in part, to identify struggling schools and to give or take away resources as outlined by NCLB.

This system of accountability places high importance on the results of the STAR testing and, inevitably on the California standards themselves. There is a strong possibility that the NCLB system of benefits and rewards, including funding, assistance, and resources, based on test scores, encourages teaching to the STAR test or at very least teaching to the material that is on the tests. This is not necessarily a bad thing. As outlined in the introductory paragraph of the History-Social Science Standards of California, the standards seek to “emphasize historical narrative, highlight the roles of significant individuals throughout history, and convey the rights and obligations of citizenship” (California Department of Education [CDE], 2009, Introduction section, para. 1). It is positive that the standards, while highly emphasizing content based curriculum, recognize the importance of the historic narrative or the story which is history. However, the challenges of the content standards, which students must be taught within the school year, are so detailed and plentiful it is hard to imagine where narrative instruction fits in.

The California state standards are broad, far reaching and include a vast range of many historic time periods per grade level. For example, the information outlined in the standards for 7th-grade history included, but was not limited to:

- 1) Analyze the causes and effects of the vast expansion and ultimate disintegration of the Roman Empire.
- 2) Analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Islam in the Middle Ages.
- 3) Analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of China in the Middle Ages, analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the sub-Saharan civilizations of Ghana and Mali in Medieval Africa.
- 4) Analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Medieval Japan.
- 5) Analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Medieval Europe.
- 6) Students compare and contrast the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the Meso-American and Andean civilizations.
- 7) Analyze the origins, accomplishments, and geographic diffusion of the Renaissance
- 8) analyze the historical developments of the Reformation.
- 9) Students analyze the historical developments of the Scientific Revolution and its lasting effect on religious, political, and cultural institutions.
- 10) Students should analyze political and economic change in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries including the Age of Exploration, the Enlightenment, and the Age of Reason (CDE, 2009, Grade Seven section, para. 1).

The above 10 units of study outlined above 7th-grade history are further defined by at least six, and in some cases 10, subsections of additional requirements and learning objectives. There is not one mandated book, fiction or otherwise, listed anywhere in the 7th-grade standards.

The sheer volume of standards that need to be addressed within the 7th-grade school year is daunting. In my personal teaching experience, it was challenging to fit the entirety of that material into one year of curriculum in a meaningful or explorative manner. The amount of material outlined in the standards raises the issue of sufficient instruction time. Teachers may not have ample instructional time to address all the standards, let alone any additional information, such as the use of the historic narrative, which was mentioned in the introduction to the history-social science state standards, but missing from the 7th-grade mandated instruction content. It should be noted that while public schools in California are required by law to address all the standards outlined in the California State Content Standards, according to section 1120A. of NCLB, participation of students enrolled in private schools, is not required (USDE, 2005). This means that curriculum in the private sector is up to the discretion of the school and the teachers. Additionally, NCLB does not specify in what modalities the teachers must utilize to teach the content, which effectively leaves significant room for interpretation and varied forms of instruction.

According to the CDE the standards “serve as the basis for statewide assessments, curriculum frameworks, and instructional materials, but methods of instructional delivery remain the responsibility of local educators” (CDE, 2009, Introduction section, para. 3). This means that while using fiction in public middle school social science curriculum is not forbidden, because of time constraints teaching through historic narratives could be challenging.

Special Collections

The National Council for Social Studies or the NCSS is the largest organization in the United States focused solely on social studies education. The NCSS was founded in 1921 and today has members in all 50 states and in 69 countries worldwide. Their mission is to “Provide leadership, service, and support for all social studies educators” (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2010, para. 1). The NCSS defines social studies as, “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence” (NCSS, 2010, para. 1). To accomplish this, the organization focuses on the education and promotion of many different disciplines under the social science umbrella including; anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, sociology, and the humanities. This intergraded approach is delivered through a multitude of mediums. The NCSS offers lesson plans, professional development sessions, local chapter support, mentorship, curriculum instruction, standards based curricula development tools, an online teacher library and multiple publications. I contacted the Northern California chapter, the California Council for the Social Studies, which is located in Chico California, to ascertain information concerning access to their trade tools and other instructional resources. Members of the NCSS have full access to all their materials, newsletters, online libraries, instructional material, history articles, and publication archives, which include academic articles and research. As a member I also have opportunities to attend their workshops and professional development sessions.

I accessed their publication, *Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People*. This publication, compiled yearly by a NCSS book review committee, specializes in selecting reading material for students that, “emphasizes human relations, deals with a diverse population, is sensitive to a broad range of cultural experiences and have a high literary quality” (NCSS, 2009,

p. 2). This publication is invaluable for finding age and grade appropriate narratives to incorporate into the social science classroom. For each book on the list there is a detailed description of the content, information on the historic theme, a reading level, and the standards it addresses. I utilized this resource help find appropriate historic narratives for my students' fiction based project.

The NCSS promotes the discipline of social studies in a plethora of ways and they have many tools which help educators develop students' critical thinking skills through a literature and history based interdisciplinary approach. The NCSS also organizes professional community meetings locally by where members of the NCSS meet regularly to discuss relevant topics within the discipline, exchange information, and offer advice and mentorship.

Statistics

After conducting extensive research concerning statistics relating to teaching history through fiction, I have determined that there is a gap in the research in terms of data relating to the success of literature based social science instruction in the United States. And while there have been no broad reaching studies documenting the implementation and success of literature based social science instruction in California schools, there is a plethora of statistics surrounding reading and history test scores.

By comparing statistics, which I obtained through the CDE and the United States Department of Education in the areas of reading and history, I have establish preliminary information concerning the level of reading and history content proficiently among 8th-graders and have been able to recognize areas for growth. The need and relevance for my research focused on literature based instruction helped me understand how this work can fit into the broader social science curriculum.

Reading & History

According to the U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Science's 2009 report card on reading, around 32 percent of students nationally performed at or above proficient level (USDE, 2009). Proficient is defined as 8th-grade students that are, "...able to provide relevant information and summarize main ideas and themes...make and support inferences about a text, connect parts of a text, and analyze text features and fully substantiate judgments about content and presentation of content" (USDE, 2009, p. 23). The report also showed that the availability of books in the home was closely associated with student performance at a proficient or above proficient level. Over 85 percent of 8th-graders at or above proficient level reported having more than 25 books in their home (USDE, 2009). In the area of history, the most recent assessment report conducted in 2006 shows that only 17 percent of 8th-graders performed at proficient or above proficient level (USDE, 2006b, p.10). Proficient in the case of historic content was defined as the student being able to "explain the significance of people places events ideas and recognize the connections between them...explain the challenges and perspective associated with a diverse population...communicate ideas about historic themes while citing evident from primary and secondary sources" (USDE, 2006b, p. 25).

Content covered on the history assessment for 8th-grade included, but was not limited to; placing colonial events on a timeline, naming the goals of MKL Jr., critically evaluating frontier life, identifying the causes of the Civil War, interpreting a map of the colonial economy, identifying slave states, identifying the role of Susan B. Anthony in the suffrage movement, interpreting the Gettysburg Address, explaining relations between colonies and Native Americans, and identifying the impact of the cotton gin (USDE, 2006b).

These statistics showed that a much greater percentage of students were achieving above proficient scores in reading compared to proficiency scores in history. The data shows that while 32 percent of 8th-graders were at a proficient level only 17 percent were reaching the proficient level in history. This data showed that the introduction of reading could be complementary to aiding students in achieving a greater level of achievement in history. While more research needs to be compiled, it is possible that students' skills sets pertaining to reading could be applied to the discipline of history in order to deepen their understanding of historic content and analysis and increase comprehension.

Chapter 3 Method

Description of Method

I employed qualitative design using interviews, surveys, student reflections and in-class observations to collect data on a semester long literature-based social science unit called *Bloodlines*. Over the course of the past instructional year at the middle school where I am a head humanities teacher, the humanities team and I developed the literature based *Bloodlines* unit to deepen student learning of American history. The time period we focused on for this unit stretched from colonization through reconstruction. The *Bloodlines* unit included a scrapbook project and reading of historic fiction (for the scrapbook assignment sheet see Appendix A), creating original poetry (for the poetry and culminating performance assignment sheet see Appendix B) and a culminating performance (for the student generated introduction to the performance and samples of the original poetry see Appendix C).

The curriculum for the *Bloodlines* unit was developed by the humanities department, which included myself, who instructed both English and history, and two other teachers; one who taught history and one who taught English. A portion of the curriculum was expanded on from previous years' materials. As a humanities team we created many new components to the curriculum including a new and original scrapbook assignments, and a culminating presentation of individual and group poetry.

While American history is taught at the 8th-grade level in most public middle schools, as outlined by the CDE, at the school where I teach and am conducting my research, curriculum is taught on a 3-year rotating cycle where all grade levels participate in the year long curriculum rotation. For example; over the course of a 3-year period students will receive American History (year 1), Western Civilizations (year 2), and Asian Studies (year 3). Therefore, all middle school

social science standards are covered within the 3-year rotation. For this study I focused on the American history curriculum year. The *Bloodlines* unit was created with four essential questions in mind. The questions included; 1. What is the American voice? 2. Who's in charge? 3. What are the outcomes of "E Pluribus Unum?" and 4. Are those outcomes productive or destructive for society and for the individual?

Every student in the middle school was assigned a subject that played a pivotal role in American history from the colonial times to the turn of the 20th century (for a complete list of historic subjects see Appendix D). After the students were assigned their subject, which were diverse in ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status and gender, they were responsible for choosing a historic narrative to read about their subject. The students chose teacher approved narratives, historic fiction and literature, in addition to their history textbooks, to complete their scrapbook assignment. This included, but was not limited to; *The Fifth of March* by Ann Rinaldi, *Rivers to the Streams, Streams to the Sea*, by Scott O'Dell, *Tituba of Salem* by Ann Petry, *My Brother Sam is Dead* by James And Chris Collier, *Across Five Aprils* by Irene Hunt, Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain, Louise May Alcott's *Little Women*, *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and *Lyddie* by Katherine Paterson.

For the first section of the unit the students created an original scrapbook. The scrapbook contained first person journal entries, student generated photos, captions and mementos that documented important events in their historic subject's life. Students read a fictional novel about their subject and wrote weekly journal entries in the vain of their subject. They wrote in the voice of their subject and added analysis of major live events, trials and accomplishments. The

students also added relevant mementos, pictures and realia to their scrapbooks over the course of the assignment and as they progressed their reading of historic fiction.

For the second section of the project, teachers put students into three groups under the themes of hope and innovation, justice and inclusion, and leadership and rule of law (see Appendix D). The students in each group created original poetry that addressed their group theme. After they created their poetry they worked with other group members to find connections between their characters and create original dialogue between the two characters. This connection between pairs of historic characters was referred to as “connective dialogue” and consisted of students in-character having discussions about the themes of leadership and rule of law, justice and inclusion or hope and innovation, through the medium of poetry.

The last component of the three-part assignment was the culminating performance. For the performance piece students acted in-character and read their original poetry, connective dialogue and themed group-pairing introductions to around 150 family, friends and teachers.

Sample and Site

My research was conducted at a small, independent, K-8th school in Marin County California. The total student population of the middle school is 70 children, all of whom participated in the interdisciplinary literature based unit and read literature, narratives, and fiction as part of their history curriculum over the course of the school year. The middle school student body is composed of 6th, 7th and 8th-graders with 23, 22, and 24 students in each grade respectively. The students range from 11-14 years old. The gender is 40 percent males and 60 percent females. There is a mixture of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Most of the middle school students live in Marin County, with a small percentage commuting from San Francisco. The sample of students is taught history and English by a team

of three teachers who all hold California credentials within their subject. The team works together as part of the school's interdisciplinary humanities department and many of the classes were team taught. The students received a total of 6 history and 6 English classes per week. This is a sample of convenience as I am a head humanities teacher at the school and I teach history to the 7th-grade and English to the 8th-grade. As I helped develop the curriculum for the school year, wrote the unit plan for the culminating project, and helped choose the narratives that the students read throughout the course of the year, I am very familiar with the students, the other teachers within the program, and the curriculum we used.

Ethical Standards

This study adheres to the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association in the protection of human subjects used in research. Additionally, I completed the Dominican University of California application for the Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects. The application was submitted to the program director for review and received approval. The study was also submitted to IRBS and #8208 and #8212 were approved.

Access and Permissions

I am a teacher at the school where I drew my sample population and conducted my case study. Additionally, I worked closely with the students and the two other teachers within the humanities department over the course of the school year. I was allowed complete access to relevant student information and school resources. I had access to the participants in the program, curriculum development and the participating teachers themselves. This included weekly curriculum development meetings with my fellow teachers, team teaching sessions, and

daily work in a direct teaching environment with the students who participated in the unit. My fellow team teachers graciously agreed to be interviewed in as part of my research and gave me countless insight and information concerning teaching through the use of fiction. Both of the other humanities instructors in the department are 20- year-plus veteran teachers and are recognized by the state of California under the terms of NCLB as highly qualified teachers.

Data Gathering Strategies

My research consisted of interviews with fellow teachers, distributing open-ended surveys to the students, observations of the students in class, students work and observations during their culminating performance. I created self-reflections and project analysis worksheets for the 6th, 7th, and 8th-graders concerning their historic subject, and the literature that they read concerning their character. The questions ranged from asking them their level of emotional connection to their character, their motivation to complete assignments, their level of assignment completion, how they felt about the work they produced, if they were engaged in the project and how much they enjoyed. I also developed interviews for the team humanities teachers that included questions on perception of student engagement, their in-class observations, and implementation of methods of teaching social science through literature.

Analysis Approach

Data was reviewed and analyzed for trends and patterns. After the unit was completed I employed a qualitative approach to data collection where I interviewed fellow teachers that worked on the unit project with me, completed in-class student observations and distributed student feedback surveys. These three methods of data collection allowed me to analyze the unit in terms of student engagement and in turn allowed me to examine how literature effects

student engagement in terms of an emotional connection to the material. I anticipate that my curricula unit, observations and research will further the teaching of history through the narrative, and will continue to promote deep learning, emotional connections and student interest in history.

Chapter 4 Findings

I broke down my findings section into four distinct areas of data collection. These are; student reflection surveys, interviews with participating teachers, in-class observations on their experiences and culminating performance observations. Each area of data collection and reflection focused on different sections of the literature based history unit in order to generate a holistic view of the affect on student engagement.

Student Reflection Surveys

The students were not assigned their subjects per say, but were allowed a measure of choice when we first set out assigning roles. The humanities team chose the charters that were to be represented in the project by a plethora of criteria. This criterion included; characters that represented a gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity, characters that were alive between colonial times through progressivism, and characters that fell in the California state curriculum standards. The teachers gave students an opportunity to identify their top three choices of a subject and final assignments were made with ability, grade level and personality considerations in mind. By the time the historic subjects were assigned to the individual students they already had a certain amount of curiosity, if not investment, in their subject. The first part of the project was the creation of an original scrapbook that chronicled their subject's major life events, feeling, happenings and important life shaping experiences. To compose these scrapbooks the students were assigned works of historic fiction on their characters. They were tasked with reading a narrative about their character, supplementing that reading with fact-based instruction tools, such as in-class lectures, textbooks and other research materials.

The survey that I distributed after the completion of the unit project asked the students a variety of questions. Questions 5 and 6 of the student survey asked, "Did you feel an emotional

connection to your character” and “In what ways did you feel connected to your character.” After tabulating the responses and breaking them into categories, I found that 37 out of 50 students reported feeling an emotional connection to their characters. Nine students reported feeling no connection to their historic subject. Of the nine students, three noted that while they did not feel an emotional connection per se, they recognized similarities and differences between their lives, feeling, and opinions and the lives and opinions of their character.

A student whose subject was Confederate Civil War General Robert E. Lee stated, “I felt a connection where I saw his perspectives and beliefs. I saw things that the book described. When I was writing the middle of my poem I saw things in his perspective.” This student refers directly to the literature that he read and noted that the reading, combined with the original poetry he wrote as his subject, allowed him to actually see the things that were described in the text and create a mental picture of the past.

According to a 7th-grade girl who was assigned the character Frederick Douglass, “I empathized with him and I felt like I connected with him and got into his person...I could feel his longing, sadness and hoping for freedom.” It is important to note that this student used the words “empathized” and “feel” to describe her connection with her subject. This type of language relays a deep level of emotional attachment and compassion towards her subject.

In his survey a 7th-grade male student commented, “I feel as though Mark Twain is a part of me now and as time progressed from the scrapbook project to the *Bloodlines* performance I felt Mark Twain’s spirit combine with mine.” The student added, “Me [sic] being in his shoes made this project fun.” Again, this student utilized emotional language to express his investment in his character.

“I could understand the way Luisa [May Alcott] thought, though I did not always agree with the way she thought, I could see WHY she thought it,” 6th-grade girl. This student showed a profound level of analysis and connection with her character. She recognized that her belief system was different from Alcott’s, yet she could synthesize the motivations behind Alcott’s actions and reconcile those actions with her personal values.

A 7th-grade female student commented, “I felt and still feel a very strong emotional connection to my character. Because of this connection I was able to get really into this project, putting in full effort to express my characters beliefs and understand them too...Thomas Jefferson was a quit person who liked to express his ideas in his writing. He was very accepting, intelligent, bubbly and fun to be around. His ways inspired me to reconfirm that one doesn’t have to be the most outgoing, loud person to be successful. I am very happy I was given him as my character and given the opportunity to truly connect with someone in American history who helped build the ideas for the place I now live.” This student strongly identified with her subject and could relate to him on a personal level. She identified with Jefferson’s personality traits and related those traits to her life. Additionally, this students recognized how her character’s personal beliefs contributed to a larger context, which in this case was the “the place I now live” or in simple terms, contemporary American society.

When asked if he had an emotional connection to his subject a 6th-grade boy who was assigned Thomas Pain wrote, “I felt his need for a revolution and equality. I understood him and felt bad for him as he was unnoticed in his life.” The student’s comment that he “felt bad” for his character shows knowledge of Thomas Pains trials and tribulations (content) and empathy with what Pain went through (emotional connection).

An 8th-grade girl who was Abraham Lincoln wrote, “I ended up crying when he died. He did so much and helped so many people. I just somehow understood some of the things he was going through.” The student’s confession demonstrated her attachment to her character and the degree to which she could feel for Lincoln.

A 7th-grade girl who’s historic subject was a Civil War soldier said that while she felt an emotional connection to her character she was not exactly sure why, “We didn’t share anything in common, but after writing in his point of view I started to feel as if I was a soldier with a concerned mom not knowing if I will come home.” While this 12- year-old girl expressed her confusion at feeling like she was embodying her character while realizing that she had nothing in common with a teenage boy soldier alive in the mid-1800s. The interesting part of her comment was that after reading about a soldier in the fictional novel, *Across Five Aprils*, she felt as a young soldier in the Civil War might have felt, concern for their mother who did not know if they would ever return.

Even the students that did not report feeling an emotional connection to their character did so on what, in some cases, seemed to be a level of moral disagreement. “There is no way that I can connect with this person on any level. He is not an inspiring or heroic person and should not be emulated by anyone. My draw to this person was his twisted outlook on the world and to explore how this person and why he acted in such a terrifying way,” 8th-grade boy answering the question on emotional connecting to his subject, Major General George Custer. While this student did not feel like there was an emotional connection to his character, through his narrative, poetry and research, he grew to understand Custer and form his own analysis and opinions on Custer’s actions. The student admits there was a “draw” to the subject, even though it was not an emotional connection. This student looked critically at General Custer and came to

his own conclusion that he was not a valiant war hero, but a person that has a “twisted outlook” and acted in a “terrifying way.” This is especially significant because in my observations, while it is not always the case, teenage boys tend to exonerate history’s war heroes and do not look at their actions in terms of morality and justness.

The surveys highlighted that students can feel disconnected from subjects that they perceive as being unmoral or “bad.” However, a student who was assigned Robert E. Lee (a historic subject often vilified for being the head of the Confederate Army) demonstrated that there was still a deep level of engagement with his character. The student noted that the narratives he read allowed him to go deep into Lee’s personality and understand the motivations behind his actions. The student noted, “He was a great general and he loved Virginia. He didn’t drink or smoke or swear. He was not reckless, but a southern gentleman, he didn’t really want to go to war but he felt a duty to the place where he was from.” This quote exemplifies the nature of the deep understanding of their characters which allowed students to go beyond simple fact and question causation in history.

Teacher Interviews

Interview #1

The purpose of this interview was to obtain professional insight and observations on the integration of literature based methods of teaching into the history classroom as it relates to the *Bloodlines* unit. This interview was conducted in person at a coffee shop near the school where we teach (C. Mohan, personal communication, November 2, 2010). Mohan, is a veteran teacher at MHS and has been teaching English for over 20 years at a variety of grade levels. Mrs. Mohan holds a California state teaching credential in English, a master’s degree in English and a master’s degree in creative writing. Mrs. Mohan is an interregal part of the humanities team

and helped to develop the *Bloodlines* curriculum. She was also responsible for 6th and 7th-grade English instruction over the course of the project. Mrs. Mohan graded scrapbooks, observed in the classroom, was integral in the daily instruction of the unit and was present for the final presentation. Beyond her pivotal role in the narrative based literature project, her vast experience concerning English instruction to middle school students and her expertise in curriculum development helped me better understand and analyze my data results.

1. What kind of additional preparation is needed to teach using an interdisciplinary approach, as utilized in the *Bloodlines* unit vs. the single discipline approach?

You need time to team teach and pair with colleagues in the other disciplines. Integrated project-based learning takes a lot of coordination, meeting of the minds, consensus and ample prep time. There are other things too, like resources, access to materials, books, and in-service days. But number one is time; paid prep time.

2. Over the course of the *Bloodlines* unit in what ways did you observe the students' emotional connection to the material?

Through class discussion and the poems they wrote, it was strongly evident that they turned in a creative, emotive product. They collaborated to find connections between their subjects and others historic subjects. This connection was very evident through the revision process. For example, if I got a draft of a poem in the voice of a millworker from 1870, and my revision comment were, 'I don't understand her struggle,' the revised poem showed hardships that they were against, struggles in their lives, and actual content. This showed they were able to synthesize content inspired, but not dictated, by teacher questions. The same can be said for performances. When I would say, 'I need to feel from the tone of your voice what you are expressing what your subject went through,' they could do it. It showed that they could

demonstrate what their character felt. In the scrapbook project we asked very specific questions, and they could answer those questions about their characters' influence, events in their lives, turning points, etc. When I came back and said, 'I need more,' the students came back and did it.

3. What learnings do you think the students took away from this project?

They learned research skills, how to do active reading, reading with attention to particular details, analysis skills, connecting reading and historical context, historic contextualization and application. For example; they learned about history and then they would apply what they knew into a new narrative. And they did a lot of synthesizing and analysis. Also, they used revision and drafting skills, oral presentation skills, dramatic skills, different forms of presenting, and group skills to make connections between their characters and other characters. They did a lot of writing and they learn how to structure writing and how to fabricate a personal narrative.

4. How time intensive was this project compared to "traditional" instruction?

Aside from the prep that we did to invent and reinvent the unit curriculum the time is circumscribed in the schedule. What takes time is the preparation. There's normally not as much whole team group prep, and the nature of the time that we spent working together was more intense, because of the open ended nature of the project and because of how taxing the material was. It's very different from, 'let's do a spelling sheet,' it's more about the quality of instruction and work then the time spent, per say.

5. How did the students demonstrate deep learning through this type of instruction?

I think the kids could identify more with this unit than with just a text and that comes from the time they put in to their historic subject. It comes from writing in the first person, forcing them into the 'I' voice, doing deep research, and writing a poem through their subject's perspective.

6. What do you think is the role of fiction in this type of curriculum?

I think fiction helps, it's like a bridge from the imagination into real life. In fiction things like sensory language, interior monologue, dialogues and point-of-view bring the reader in. Specific details are the element of fiction that brings people and events into the realm of human life and nature.

7. From what you observed throughout this project, why do you think that fiction in particular made for deeper learning?

I suspect that when the students read fiction they felt closer to the subject. It is my experience that kids feel closer to fictional accounts, which is funny because they are fake. However, when authors write fiction it is their job to render a complete reality. Their job is to suspend disbelief by creating a solid believable world. The job of the non-fiction writer is very different, it is not as complete. And I think that by not filling in all the blanks, but letting the facts stand for themselves, there are holes. If there are holes your reader falls through and you lose them.

The interview with Mrs. Mohan brought to light many areas of team teaching and teaching history through fiction that I had not explored on my own. Mohan thought that the most important component to a successful team teaching project, such as *Bloodlines* which combines history and English instruction, was preparation time. Time to plan, practice, develop and work through curriculum with your fellow instructors was invaluable to the success of the cross-curriculum, and eventually the success of the unit. I was surprised that Mrs. Mohan did not think that, instructionally as least, the interdisciplinary curriculum took more time to complete. She did say however, that the instruction and work time was more intense than traditional instruction, such as a work sheet or questions and answers workbook.

The viewpoint of an experienced English teacher was invaluable for understanding in what ways teaching history through fiction deepened a student's engagement with the material. Mrs. Mohan's theory that the students were more engaged with the material and because of the time spent on this project and because of the nature of the fictional works they read. Mohan explained that fiction is a richer medium and the imaginative nature of fiction leaves for less "holes" in the writing, which in turn keep a reader, especially children, more engaged.

Interview #2

The purpose of this interview was to obtain professional insight on the integration of the narrative and other literature based methods of teaching into the history classroom. This interview was conducted in person in one of our shared classrooms at the school where we teach (E. Anderson, personal communication, November 11, 2010). The subject, E. Anderson, holds a California state teaching credential and has been teaching for over 30 years. Mrs. Anderson was a pioneer in employing the use of fiction in her middle school curriculum and has been teaching history through fiction for many years. Mrs. Anderson was one of the original authors of the *Bloodlines* curriculum unit and was an integral member of the revision and creation of the curriculum I used in my research. She also was responsible for 6th and 8th-grade history instruction. Mrs. Anderson's vast experience with employing fiction to teach history, her expertise in history curriculum development and her personal observations will help me understand the effect that teaching through fiction has on student engagement.

1. How does the narrative support instruction in the social science classroom?

The narrative, whether it be historic fiction, a play, or a literary novel, allow kids, especially middle schoolers, to relate to the feelings in history and the reasons for why things happen.

They[middle schoolers] are very interested in the relations of people, which is what there are concerned about in their own social world, so when you allow them to focus on motives, actions and outcomes, it hooks the child into the history and encourages the love of a historical period. This in turn opens up their willingness for the factual content.

2. Can you give me an example?

If the kid is deeply involved in a fictional novel on, let's say Ann Boleyn, but it's a love story, that might turn into an interest for the Tudor time period and they become curious as to why Henry VIII wanted a son. This leads to questions about the monarchy and religion, and all of a sudden they are exploring content. The downside of this, and of teaching to the novel in general, is that when teachers try to teach history using fiction only they may ignore the larger flow of history. For example, you can become narrowly fascinated with Henry VIII or with court intrigue and you miss the bigger picture. There's much more to history than what any one book can portray. To combat this, the novel needs to be peppered with other things. History has to lead the choice of the narrative not the other way around.

3. Does it take more or less teacher time to implement interdisciplinary fiction based projects?

It is way more time consuming, way more planning time is necessary. To plan a really good unit takes days and days. When you are working with a teammate it takes a little less time, but you need to allow for the planning time between the two teachers and that is a really hard thing. There are so many things in the life of a teacher, discipline, parent relations, school events, grading. Team-teaching interdisciplinary projects takes more time by its nature, it's creative, it's original and you can't get that out of canned curriculum. But it's worth it, like any other creation there is a real sense of purpose and you, and the students, become the expert in it.

4. What are the skills that you observed students mastering through *Bloodlines*?

In *Bloodlines*, when the kids were working on connective dialogue, they were also learning affective organizational skills. When you had kids in *Bloodlines* that were working together to figure out a partner poem, they learned how to suggest material, compromise and work together. They also learned tactful communication, patience, the skill of tenacity, decision making, and the ability to listen to another person and their point of view. While these were affective skills, they also learned the content, research skills, the analytic skills of identifying motives, reading comprehension and basic language skills, like where to use quotation marks.

5. How did you observe students connection to their historic characters and content in *Bloodlines*?

I was surprised at how deeply connected and attached they got to their characters. Logan, who wasn't the most enthusiastic history student, became extremely involved in Buffalo Bill and the Pony Express. To this day Izzy is still quoting Thomas Jefferson. Maddy, who is one of the most emotionally guarded students I have taught, fell in love with Clara Barton and expressed her feelings willingly in her scrapbook and her poetry. They became deeply connected to their characters and understood what their problems symbolized in our society today. For example, Shayna understood that Harriet Tubman was a symbol of self-actualization, as evident in her poem, and Nick got that Thomas Jefferson was a conflicted between rational equality and the reality of exploitation of slaves.

6. In what ways did you observe students level of engagement in the *Bloodlines* unit?

The *Bloodlines* engagement was very typical for this type of project. I have done 30 or more of these types of projects. At first kids are unsure, and then it becomes their world, and they get on board. But the quality of the *Bloodlines* products were unique.

7. Why do you think that was?

It has to do with the environment, has to do with time, ownership of the material and the fact that by nature you become involved with the content, and by being involved you become motivated. Also, because the students know that they would be performing in front of a real audience they become more motivated to show off their knowledge.

8. Do you think that students showed more engagement in this type of curriculum than textbook based only instruction?

With interdisciplinary literature based projects what is being asked is to hear the voice of the child. When you are doing a text-based instruction only, it is not in the student's voice, but in the voice of someone else. With text only instruction mastery becomes about clever regurgitation, not authentic voice. Even if there is a creative element with text-based instruction kids are getting credit from doing what they were told. With a project like *Bloodlines* there is authentic individual discoveries, there is a true "ah ha" moment. The content is not new, but they discovered it organically.

According to Mrs. Anderson, through *Bloodlines* the students learned content and affective skills, while developing an emotional connection with their historic subjects. Mrs. Anderson observed that students who do not normally show engagement in history, such as the student who played Buffalo Bill, demonstrated enthusiasm, interest and motivation to learn about history. She also shed light on the reasons why students who engaged in literature based curriculum showed an increased amount of engagement and investment in learning. Mrs. Anderson's reflections on literature based projects show how they have the ability to relay meaningful content which promotes analytic thinking, and encourage the utilization of practical affective skills. Affective skills are one area of narrative based instruction that I did not expect to play such a prominent role in the learning process. Literature based projects, especially the

Bloodlines unit, support a learning environment that lends to the collaborative process and fosters affective skills that are sometimes lacking in textbook only instruction.

The perspective of such an experienced social science teacher also lead me to realize that while the narrative is a strong tool in the history classroom is must be supported by a diverse set of pedagogical tools. While a teacher would be remiss to simply teach from the textbook and not bring in the narrative with its rich detail, that same teacher would also do the students a disservice without supporting that narrative with substantial context and factual content.

In-Class Observations and Student Work

I recorded a variety in-class observation over a 3 week period while the students were crafting and practicing their original poetry written as their fictional character. I observed that when they expressed the journey of their historic character through poetry the students took the assignment very seriously and seemed to be especially invested in their product. For example, many students wrote five or more drafts of their poetic verses, even though they were only assigned to three drafts.

In additional to multiple drafts of their original poetry, the students showed their investment in the project when working with their partners to create connective dialogue that would be used as transition pieces between characters when performing their final works of poetry. In their themed groupings they were tasked with putting themselves in a performance order and with creating original dialogue between the characters situated on either side. The dialogue explained how the character would have possibly have related to each other. For example, the students who were assigned George Washington and Harriet Tubman, two characters in the group of leadership and rule of law, traded stories about their characters lives. They then found similarities and differences between how their subjects would feel about the

topic of leadership and rule of law, and wrote connective dialogue in the medium of poetry to explain their feelings. The two students, with minimal teacher direction, were able to have incredibly complex discussions about the abstract ideas of leadership and rule of law, as their historic characters. They came to the conclusion that while George Washington was a gallant military leader and a hero to many, he helped perpetuated the same repression of black Americans that the colonists felt under the British by allowing slavery to continue in the newly formed country. This type of deep understanding and dialogue was repeated until the students had put themselves in a final performance order and had written connective dialogue with at least one other character.

Another example of engagement was the interactions I observed between a pair of students representing Sitting Bull and Sam Houston. The two 8th-grade boys talked about conflicts over land ownership and who should be considered “American.” The students drew their own conclusions about America’s policies toward Native Americans and expressed the injustice of forced relocation. A 6th-grade and 7th-grade student pairing of Sally Hemings and Susan B. Anthony spoke about women’s rights and at one point Susan B. Anthony even tried to incite Hemings to leave Thomas Jefferson and stand up for black women. Two students in the grouping hope and innovation, a muckraker and a Chinese immigrant, discussed the government’s obligation for safe working conditions.

The types of interactions I observed were authentic and were the product of much preparation and background work. The students were invested in their characters and knew a lot about their characters lives. Through their reading of fiction and the scrapbook project, they obtained a voice for their character that was the product of analyzing the decisions their character made and the motives behind their subject’s actions. This meaty foundation and the platform of

open dialogue allowed the students to organically explore and come to informed conclusions about American history.

Culminating Project Performance Observations

I was part of the *Bloodlines* unit from a tactical level from the inception of the project. I taught the curriculum in my 7th-grade history class and my 8th-grade English class. I provided edits for every draft of their poetry and I was present for every rehearsal for their performance reading. When the night of the performance arrived and I could stand back and be part of the audience. For the first time I observed the students through a different lens and noticed aspects of interaction with the material and each other that I had not previously observed.

On the night of the final presentation, the students took great care in their performance pieces. An audience of about 150 family and friends came to watch on the night of the show. The students were allowed one self-made accessory that represented their character. The authentic accessories the students created showed how deeply they understood their characters. Instead of choosing to represent their characters with unoriginal clichés, almost all the students choose to represent their subjects with subtle expressions of their personalities or of the events in their lives. For example, the student that was assigned Abraham Lincoln did not choose a beard or a top hat, but instead choose to recreate a copy of the Gettysburg Address as her prop. Another student who was assigned Mark Twain made and held a portrait of his beloved deceased daughter Susy Clemens, instead of the more obvious wild white hair or mustache.

When the students performed they memorized their poetry and connective dialogue by heart. They showed reverence and respect for their characters by using appropriate inflection in their voices, emphasizing certain words and staying in character for the entire performance. They spoke with passion and conviction. Some audience members were moved to tears and

many commented that they were shocked to learn that the poetry the students performed was completely original and not a script that was simply memorized.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Summary of Major Findings/Comparison of Findings to Existing Studies

The research and subsequent curriculum I implemented was a long and complex project peppered with teachable moments, laughter, instances of frustration, and student discovery. When I began my research I had an idea that teaching history through fiction would be fun and interesting, but I had no idea that the students, myself, and the other teachers, would become immensely involved and dedicated to the project and the individual historic characters. I faced challenges with the students, with other member of the staff and with the school schedule, simply to be able to spend so much time and energy on one unit. But the culminating performance was spectacular and our humanities team and the students were recognized by the co-Head and Head of school for our hard work and dedication to *Bloodlines*. Throughout this research and project I learned that historic fiction is a powerful tool, but one that needs to be balanced with other materials and modalities of instruction. I found that with proper support even young students can contextualize and analyze complex events in history, while having a really good time doing it.

This research project began by reading past research and publications on teaching history through the narrative and the incorporation of fiction into social science classrooms. One of the reasons that I was so drawn to this particular field of study was that after completing a thorough literature review I still had questions regarding teaching through the narrative in a truly interdisciplinary manor. I felt the need to create my own study to answer these questions. Previous findings had solidified that students benefited from learning history through literature, but I wanted to go one step further and explore what that looked like in the classroom.

My research was aligned with much of the research I reviewed concerning teaching through the narrative. As many previous studies found that teaching through the narrative had benefits to student learning, I too discovered that the students exhibited substantial engagement, investment, connection to the material and very high scores on class work, scrapbooks, and their final performance pieces. My research additionally answered questions I had including; the degree of engagement the students had with the material, what that engagement looked like, and how students applied what they learned about their historic character to larger themes in history. I found that the best method of incorporating fiction into the classroom was to give the students a fantastic story and then support them while reading the historic fiction with many other methods of instruction that built up to a larger goal/unit project. Moreover, through daily observations, my research indicated that middle school students can form strong emotional connections with the past and display empathy and compassion for historic subjects.

Limitations/Gaps in the Literature

It takes time, administrative support and funding to implement this type of interdisciplinary team-taught curriculum in the classroom. Unfortunately, the current education system is lacking many of these resources. Without extensive numerical data that substantiates that this type of instruction leads to higher test scores and significant increases in student engagement, school policy implementers will be reluctant to mandate this type of instruction. To further prove how beneficial this type of instruction is, more quantitative research will need to be conducted on a wide scale. This future research will need to compare test scores of students taught through a purely text-based approach vs. the literature based interdisciplinary approach and those scores will need to be compared. While I do not recommend a textbook only approach

to teaching history, this type of research may be necessary to prompt policy makers to add teaching history through the narrative in social science state standards throughout the country.

Implications for Future Research

My research, and other academic research which highlights the benefits of teaching history through fiction, will continue to promote narrative based social science instruction. States including Arizona, New York and Wisconsin have incorporated some form of literature based units into their social science curriculum standards, which shows the growing importance put on this type of instruction. Additionally, as interdisciplinary instruction continues to pick up momentum in the field of education, I believe that there will be a natural pairing of literature and history instruction. Moreover, this research hints that using the narrative, while being an effective tool to create an engagement with history, could also be a way of promoting reading in and outside of the classroom, ultimately raising literacy rates in our schools. While more research needs to be completed to substantiate this statement, it does highlight how beneficial incorporating fiction into the social science classroom can be and emphasizes the holistic nature of interdisciplinary instruction.

Overall Significance/Conclusion

To quote a 7th-grade student who participated in the literature based interdisciplinary curriculum I created and implemented as part of my research, “I feel as though Mark Twain is a part of me now...As time progressed from the scrapbook project to the *Bloodlines* performance I felt Mark Twain’s spirit combine with mine.” The compassion, understanding, admiration and care for a subject in history from this 12-year-old boy is moving. When I embarked on this research I wanted to understand if the narrative and corresponding curriculum could help

students achieve a more empathetic connection to people of the past. I wanted to know if a narrative framework would help students conceptualize history on a more significant level than simply the memory recall capabilities needed to regurgitate dates. The above quote proves that historic fiction is a very powerful tool which can help students understand and relate to the past.

Over the course of the unit the students experienced a connection to history on a deeper level than what I have observed is achieved through fact based rote memorization of events and dates. They analyzed events and started to understand causation. They questioned the motives behind action that many people have assumed in the past are “good” and “brave” and “right.” They thought about the status quo and what it meant to be a Native American during relocation or a Confederate soldier during the Civil War. They questioned the statement, “all men are created equal,” and were angered by the hypocrisy of those words when looking at them through the eyes of an Irish immigrant, a suffragette, or a slave.

This curriculum offers ideas for other educators and a framework for implementing historic fiction into their own social studies classrooms. The research I conducted substantiates the argument that deep learning, an emotional connection to history and intense engagement can be achieved in the middle school social science classroom. I hope that my research can act as a model for other educators that would like to create an emotive response in their students and help them to identify causation within historic events, question facts, synthesize their own conclusions and participate in the type of analytic thinking often reserved for the high school or university classroom. My research has proven that the middle school aged student is capable of tremendous amounts of comprehension, critical thinking and curiosity that can be fostered through historic fiction and other interdisciplinary curriculum.

Over the course of the *Bloodlines* unit I witnessed students making real connections to history, expressing their ideas, thinking critically about why things happened, questioning motives of the individuals involved, analyzing morality and grappling with larger more abstract historic concepts. I have no doubt that the narrative, with its detail and storybook quality, helped my students divulge deeper into the content than they would have been able to do with textbooks alone. The projects and assignments that scaffold the historic fiction they read helped them analyze the fiction and apply facts they had learned to create a bigger and more comprehensive picture of American history.

While my research has highlighted the deep emotional connection students can achieve, it has also emphasizes that fiction and textbook based instruction are not mutually exclusive, but are really two parts of the curriculum pie that support each other and together make a whole. Fiction based curriculum was the modality by which my students explored the American history content and I believe historic fiction allowed for a high level of student engagement and deep emotional connections. But just as historic facts are dry and less meaningful without a narrative, fiction can be abstract and vague without concrete facts. The two go hand and hand in the history classroom.

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Bloodlines

Scrapbook Assignment Sheet Breakdown

Part One – Due Nov. 30th

Find Book
Read first chapter or first 20 pages
Fill out research sheet
One journal entry
One photo
One memento

Part Two – Due Dec. 14th

Read up to the mid point in the book (half the book should be completed)
Write one letter to a friend
Two Journal entries
One photo
Two mementos

Part Three – Due Jan. 6th

Read $\frac{3}{4}$ of your book
Write one letter
Write one journal entry
One photo
Two mementos

Part Four – Due Jan. 21th

Finish book
Write one journal entry
One photo
Two mementos

Part Five – Due Jan. 27th

Design cover for your journal
Write presentation note cards

Presentations – Feb. 1 & 2

Bloodlines	Name _____ Scrapbook Project Note Taking
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Scrapbook Note Taking Assignment Sheet

As you read your book(s) and material for the scrapbook project, it is important that you take notes. In order to collect information on all the topics needed to complete the journals and letters, please organize your notes in the following way. For each topic listed below create a separate index card. At the top of each piece of paper write the topic, the title of the material you are reading and related bibliographical information. If you are using just one book you don't need to include this information on each sheet. As you find information on a given topic, record the idea/quote on the page and include the page number. Take a moment to explain the importance of the information.

You may use additional note taking methods as you research your subject. We will show you varieties of way to record information. Be prepared to show your notes during the project and present the notes with your final product.

Topic Headings for Note Taking

- struggles
- triumphs/contributions
- impact on history
- character/personality traits
- feelings, beliefs, points of view
- changes the subject goes through
- decisions
- major life events
- realizations/reflections
- settings/places of importance
- other topics specific to your subject

Humanities	Name/Character _____ Bloodlines Presentation - Spring 2010
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Appendix B

*It is Bloodlines time!**Students Will*

- Understand overarching themes such as the quest for justice and equality that have helped to define the national experience
- Interact with and interpret those themes based on chronologic considerations and the cultural experiences of different subjects in history
- Explore many major events and personalities of US history
- Experience and practice creating several poetic forms

Essential Questions of the Unit

- What is the American Voice?
- Who's in charge?
- What are the outcomes of "E Pluribus Unum?" Are those outcomes productive or destructive? (for society? for the individual?)

Enduring Understandings

- certain events, especially constitutional issues, which resonate throughout American history to both our pride and our shame
- American history includes diversity of experience, background and opinion
- different factors, including money, land, politics, culture and individual personality affect the outcome of history
- compassion for people whose experience is very different from your own is possible and valuable

*Tasks to be completed in the Unit:***Step 1:** March 8th to March 15th

Learn various forms of poetry. The forms to be introduced include; ode, sonnet, manifesto, rant, prose poetry, free verse, and pantoum.

Step 2: March 8th to March 15th

In class and at home, write poems using the forms assigned. Different forms may be introduced to different grade levels.

Step 3: March 8th to March 17th

Confer with your teacher during class time to decide which form most suits the student's assigned historic character (i.e. Would Jefferson write a "rant"?).

Step 4: March 12th to March 22nd

Write initial draft of the historic character poem using the form that has been agreed upon in Step Three. Poem should include:

- sensory detail that helps illustrate the experience of your character and bring that character's historic period and experience "to life"
- thoughts and beliefs your character's has about the larger themes of justice, inclusion, and hope
- information about your character from your scrapbook, subtly woven into the text of the poem

- figurative language that includes similes, metaphors, and personification

Step 5: March 15th to March 22nd

Workshop and revise poems with feedback from grade-level partner and teacher.

Consider the following factors:

- clarity of vocabulary/ precision of word choice
- phrasing and rhythm
- expressive language, diction and voice
- historical accuracy
- requirements listed above in step four

Step 6: March 23rd to March 24th

Integrate your poem through connective dialogue with other poems in your grade-level group. This will be completed with teacher guidance and approval.

Step 7: March 29th to April 2nd

Incorporate your grade-level group's performance with the other grade levels to create a multi-grade level performance piece (with teacher guidance and approval).

Step 8:

- Rehearse and memorize your part by April 5th
- Full cast rehearsals occur on April 5th and 6th
- Dress Rehearsal with 4/5 invited and teachers/administrators/selected parents April 7th

Step 9: April 7th

Perform for impressed and awestruck parents/friends/adults from 6:30 to 8:30. Audience fills out feedback forms about student creations and presentations.

Step 10: April 8th and possibly the 9th

Perform for each other with teachers using assessment rubrics.

Room A of Cast A performs for Room B of Cast B likewise Room B for Room A

Room B of Cast A performs for Room C of Cast B etc.

Room C of Cast A performs for Room A of Cast B etc.

Appendix C

BLOODLINES

Introduction and Selection of poetry from the final presentation

Bloodlines - Introduction

Student #1: We're going to take a moment to explain to you what *Bloodlines* really is and what we are learning from this assignment.

Student #2: So...what is *Bloodlines*? It's a project where the entire middle school is involved. We've spent the last couple of months researching, writing, and preparing to present this to you. In November we began work on the scrapbook portion of this project...the project that drove our parents crazy!

Student #1: Every student was assigned a person who played a part in creating American society. We had to research his or her life and think about how each individual affected America. In doing this, we used many levels of thinking. These include: **comprehension**, which is – understanding a topic, **application**, which is – applying knowledge to a project, and **analysis**, which is being able to explain why something happens the way it does.

Student #2: In the U.S. the average middle school Humanities curriculum tends to focus on recall and comprehension levels versus what **we've** done **here** at MHS.

Student #1: We are so cool...

Student #2: You might be wondering who thought up these levels of thinking.

Student #1: Well thanks for asking...there was a professor and researcher from the University of Chicago who developed a framework to explain how students learn and retain material and skills. His name was Benjamin Bloom and his framework is called Bloom's Taxonomy.

Student #2: Why, yes, I've heard that the more students use the top levels of thinking, the more they retain the material. According to Bloom, the highest levels of thinking are analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Student #1: You bet-cha, in fact, these are the levels of thinking we used in *Bloodlines*. For example, we **analyzed** the information that we researched about our character. Then, we studied different forms of poetry like odes, sonnets, and manifestos and **synthesized** our research to redirect it into a single poem. Finally, we **evaluated** the research to express our character's beliefs in the poems we wrote.

Student #2: How true! When we had to imagine and empathize how our historical characters might have felt, we used our creative, synthetic, and evaluative thinking. Which are the hardest levels of thinking according to Bloom. And me...

Student #1: As we already said, the average middle school Humanities curriculum tends to focus mostly on "comprehension and recall," which are considered necessary but lower levels of thinking. The thought-process we use in *Bloodlines* isn't usually used a lot until high school and college, but we're using them now!

Student #2: No wonder I thought it was hard...Our teachers believe the more you think about something, the longer you will remember it. The "recall" level of thinking, includes things like memorizing dates and information, and most likely, will be forgotten shortly after. When using the "critical" level of thinking, you will remember the information much longer and will be able to apply it to your like in the future.

Student #1: During *Bloodlines*, we defined the true meaning of "E. Pluribus Unum." It's a complicated idea that has had wonderful and hurtful outcomes depending on how it was interpreted. Out of many, One. Out of many lives, one country.

Student #2: So that you all for coming and enjoy the show everyone!!! And now to begin....True to Our Words.

Introduction Poem - True to our Words

Who inhabits this land?
What red liquid circulates through its heart?
Red rivers of words,
Streams of consciousness,
Rush through our veins.

Feel the current of our ideals.
Drink in the promise of equality.
Stand under the waterfall of opportunities.
Follow diversity to where salt and fresh water meet.

Our forests provide a canopy of justice.
Our moon is hope glowing in a deep dark sky.
We have breathed a sense of self into the scarlet stream
And now our lives pulse with magnitude and possibility.

Trains of thought travel from distant stations to a common
destination
Transport notions to words to vital actions.
Our leaders climb sheer slopes,
Carve trails and footholds for others to follow.
Unrelated, we find the thread, the lifeline
the bloodline
Like tributaries streaming toward a common center.
Like roots embracing a new fertile land.

We are remarkable.
We are radiant.
We are E pluribus Unum,

Out of many, one.

Written by: 6th and 7th-grade students

7th-grade

**Phyllis Wheatley
Ode to Paper**

Your golden color pulls my quill closer
My ebony fingers hold it lightly
It hovers over your thin surface
So delicate, my words burn through you.
You are home to my poetry.

As I write you become heavy.
Heavy like a handkerchief after a long weep
Absorbing every tear that falls from my face.
Heavy with words, uncomfortable to hear.
“On Being Brought From Africa to America” or “ On The Death
Of A Young Lady of Five Years of Age”
George Washington has held you in his hands, praised you
for your moral expression – though my ebony fingers were the
creator
Oh paper
I have engraved my knowledge onto your face,
Share my treasure.
Teach the children of this child nation
Tell of my struggles so they may learn: “That the creator has made
them all of one blood the African shall be as the American and the
black as the white.”

7th-grade

Mark Twain
Ode to My Books

When I was made, I was filled with miracles,
Miracles like the sky, the blue and the gray,
Miracles that let me do wondrous things.

I was gifted with the miracle of writing,
The ability to make any imaginary story,
Come true and have any fantasy become,
reality.

If it weren't for my books,
I wouldn't be this clever old man,
That sits in his office made of never ending wood,
With the typewriter made of coal,
Or my mind that is made of juice,
Telling me about that starving boy on the side of a decaying road,
midnight darkness surrounding the whole, broken limbs and trees
swaying in the dirty wind,
Telling me what wrinkles really are, places that indicate where smiles
have been,
Telling me where my adventures took place on the exhilarating
Mississippi,
Telling me when the little boy known as Huckleberry Finn finally got
his way,
And telling me why a person of such great spirit and passion has so
much on the inside, yet so little on the outside.

My books are made,
With only the finest hand-picked thoughts and memories,
The darkest midnight ink,
And the knowledge of beginning.
Middle,
End.

The pages are bonded,
With the dust that brings,
You into the world of the character,
The world with whatever I dreamt of,
In my old creaky-wooden-board of a mind,
And soul. I value the hard leather and pitch-back text that makes up
my books,
I value the musty, "never-been-read" smell of my books,

I value the sound of the flipping pages and the mathematical formulas
that make up literature,
I value the fruity taste of knowledge,
I value the silky, calming texture of fantasy,
But even my five senses,
Can't recognize,
The world beyond.

As I near the end I cherish the moments,
I give thanks to my creators,
For they made me who I am,
I appreciate what inspires this little old man,
To do what I love,
To do what I please,
But in the end,
They typewriter slows,
And, I close the book,
That gives me life,
And scares,
Death.

6th-grade

**Eli Whitney
Poem**

Calloused, old hands
Experienced, only the best
Their hands are worked and worked
Never allowed to rest

Backs breaking, bleeding and bleeding
Hands aching, each and every day
Adroit, their hands mold the cotton
As I the creator, would sculpt clay

Although my life is nearly complete
My pockets filled with wealth
The burden of my perfect sanity
Is gone, fleeing with my health.

The cold touch of my monstrous gin
A haunted memory
Torturing their helpless kin
All because of me.

6th-grade

**Muckraker
Poem**

In times of distress
When you suffocate in despair
The world is working against you
And all that you stand for
One thing can save you...
Justice.
The angel reaching down from the heavens
The only way out
Justice.

But for those of you whom justice does not knock on your
doors
You must work.
Work for low pay
For long hours
In grueling conditions.
Your only warmth
Is a bloody cow carcass
Stick your feet into it, before the chemicals eat at your flesh.
But I bear witness to this
I am a journalist!
I will not let your cries go unheard.
The word must know.
You must hope.

Justice.
The bane of all things wrong
The balance must be kept
Justice will save you.

6th-grade

**Anne Hutchinson
Sonnet**

They denied me from every church,
and told me my way of religion was wrong.
Now I am speaking to God looking at a birch.
No one notices me, no one hears my song.

My children are the only people who listen.
It's cold here in New Amsterdam. I'm left all alone.
My husband is gone which leaves just a memory.

I was never powerful, always low.
God is disappointed. I might as well leave
For God just thinks I'm full of woe.
Perhaps now it is time to grieve.

Now all that is left is a teardrop in my eye
Knowing that soon I will die.

8th-grade

**Abraham Lincoln
Manifesto**

When does war go too far?
When the bodies lying dead outnumber those of the breathing?
When violence is our first and last?
Or is it when we are confused about what we are fighting for?

When South Carolina succeeded
And the reality of a civil war became apparent,
I believed in despair

When the first rifle fired
And the first man fell,
I believed in grief

When I read the Gettysburg Address,
I saw the faces of those mourning have renewed determination
And I believed in hope

When General Lee surrendered
And the Union sang hurrah,
I believed in relief

When I felt a cold bullet bore into my head
And everything went black,
I believed in pain, and then in bliss

For I know my purpose has been fulfilled and I have made my
mark on this Union
I brought justice to those who could not bring it to themselves
I allowed a new generation of people to be included as American
citizens
More importantly, I was a father, a husband and a friend
And now, I believe in liberty for eternity

8th-grade

Thomas Paine
Manifesto

You should live in a country where you can speak your mind.
Never back down when asked to give your opinion, but support it with logic and reason.
You should always be willing to put your life on the line for freedom.
Do not take the British rule to be your own.
These are the times that try men's souls.
The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will,
in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country;
Our government should be controlled by many,
Not by a single tyrant.
Monarchy will always result in tyranny.
Abhor it and never let it regain power.
Let your own voice be heard above the ramble of politicians.
Remaining silent will not help your cause.
Find voices to be the bearer of your thoughts and carry them forward.
I will give you support with my words on a page,
And they would be more powerful than you could imagine.
I will launch your message of democracy of freedom and let it be heard.

8th-grade

Thomas Jefferson
A Time for Revolution

It is time for injustice to end
Taxation and tariffs
For justice is a pure bliss and with these they are tainted

It is time for fairness to be shared
To be governed by tyrants does not grant that equality
For fairness is a reflection of equality and with tyranny that
reflection is shattered

It is time for morality to become a state of being
With aristocratic rule morals are reversed
For morals are an ideal and with upper class government these

Ideals are tarnished

The freedom of a people is at stake
Their liberty lies at the very feet of injustice
It is time for a declaration of independence
For freedom, liberty and independence are all in-alienable rights
And these rights cannot be taken away by anyone but God himself
It is time my friends for a revolution.

8th-grade

Frederick Douglas
A Story of Injustice

When I was owned
When my arms and legs were parts to be sold
I was not a man
Under the whip

When my arms and legs were parts to be sold
I taught myself justice
Under the whip
And created a mind

I taught myself justice
As my thoughts evolved
And created a mind
Willing to share

I rose above the water
And stirred the nations conscience
As I shared
My story of injustice

7th-grade

**Union Soldier
Poem**

Confederates
Why did you attack us at Fort Sumter
Now you are like swarming bees
And I
A young soldier
Am the one to feel your powerful stings
Remember
We were once united
A family
A nation
We don't agree on slavery
For you
Slaves must toil in the fields
Helping you reap the profits of cotton
Your God
For me slaves must walk the streets of freedom
Heads held high
Like your Confederate soldiers
Before a battle
Different ideas need not tear us apart
Without you
The Union will shatter
Like a rain drop once it hits the ground
And without the Union
You will not survive
Like every house burned down
During the march across Atlanta
But you won't have a community to restore you
You will keep burning
And when you are only ash
And we are only a puddle
We will remember when we were once united.

6th-grade

**Irish Immigrant
Free Verse**

Picking up a fork and sinking your lips into a warm and buttery potato,
That is a miracle.

Stepping on the hard wooden deck of hope, but to some the coffin boat,
crossing the sea of fears and dreams,
That is a miracle

Running up to your ma and da after not seeing them for too many weeks to
count, and into an embrace that has been a dream,
That is a miracle.

Looking at the tired and worn out faces of immigrants, knowing they are still alive
knowing hope is still alive,
That is a miracle

Stepping on to a new world, waiting in Ellis Island's endless line, seeing life from
a different perspective,
That is a miracle.

Getting off this wondrous bridge to a new experience, stepping on safe ground,
instead of a daring, rocking boat, not at all reliable,
That is a miracle.

Working, worshipping, dancing, eating, schooling, all knowing the future will be better,
That is a miracle.

6th-grade

**George Washington
Pantoum**

I hear the cries of dying men on the battlefield and wince. I am not a heartless man.
The black cloud of death sweeps them up in its sweet embrace, freeing them from their misery.
The strike of death's lightning is the thunderclap of justice, bringing rains of victory polluted
with blood.
The Continental Congress will cheer as I cry over the men I knew and lost. Freedom comes with
a price.

The black cloud of death sweeps them up in its sweet embrace, freeing them from their misery.
I know that he who hold then axe of justice can chop the wood to build a nation, but why must I
bear it to destroy the forests?
The continental Congress will cheer as I cry over the men I knew and lost. Freedom comes with
a price.
I blink back tears at the back of my eye, but stop myself and let them flow. These brave men and
comrades are worth a few tears.

I know that he who holds the axe of justice can chop the wood to build a nation, but why must I
bear it to destroy the forests?
Yes, I have carried this tool before, and yes, I have used this edge, but that doesn't mean that I
enjoy it. There is no person who enjoys pain.
I blink back tears at the back of my eyes but stop myself and let them flow. These brave men
and comrades are worth a few tears.
I hear the cries of dying men on the battlefield and wince. I am not a heartless man.

6th-grade

Native Indian Manifesto

In Ohio in 1765 all I can think about is war. All I feel is the loneliness of my heart. But as I search for my family the beating in my chest fades away, going to where I see it no more. These encouraging signs have me trust that I will find my mother and sisters. Maybe they are close by as these signals suggest. Maybe if I am brave enough my family will again be with me.

When I walk down the path to our village all I can see and smell for miles is the burning smoke of our once thriving houses. They have fallen, screaming signs of ugly war.

That day my soul was bitter, but my view was beautiful. The dawn skies were a delicate shade of peach. The flow of the river was sailing down as I walked.

After the war, with the comfort of my family beside me, I believe I changed. I was a man. I had been brave and went on a journey to save the people I loved most. Now I was a man, I would have been scared to even talk to The Great Warrior, yet he ended up helping me find my family.

I believe in justice that does not live in this land. I believe in Mother Earth. I believe in the Iroquois land. I believe in the road to equality.

8th-grade

Harriet Tubman
Free Verse

What is Hope?

End the torture and you will see
Put down the cracking whips and will see
Let my people go and you are sure to see

What is Liberty?

Leave go of my shackles and you will see
Hold on to what I say now and you will see
Keep these soft words and you will see
Let my people go and you are sure to see

What is Freedom?

Treat me equal and you will see
Release these rusty, old chains and you will see
Let my people go and you are sure to see

7th-grade

**Robert E. Lee
Manifesto**

During the war I believed only in winning, but not in fighting, not wars or deaths.

But when I walk through these war-torn battlefields, I believe in mercy for these poor soldiers.

When I walked through a street on a snowy December day, my nose red from the cold, I believed in sitting near a warm fire, with my wife, Mary, and my children.

On April 9th, on a humid day, when I walked into Appomattox, I believed in friendship between the North and the South.

When the leader who sewed the North and South together issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1st, 1863, I believed my heart skipped a beat.

Near the cemetery near my hometown, I believed in the fallen soldiers who so desperately fought their cause. I believed in death, in sadness, in mourning.

When I was in Pennsylvania, near Gettysburg after the war, I believed the words that the Peacekeeper said. No one can consecrate this ground, only the soldiers who died here can.

On a clear day in July, I saw two African Americans running freely in a race, and I smiled at them – I believed that we are all equal.

When I walked across a park in Arlington, Virginia, my hometown, on a hot summer day, I believed in a cold glass of water.

In death I believe we shall be equal no matter what race, ethnicity or belief.

8th-grade

Samuel Houston
Pantoum

Cherokee, your strength could lift a mountain
You can command without complacency
Your bravery runs through me like a stream
Here in Baker's Creek, Tennessee

You command without complacency
Do you follow your heavenly laws?
Here in Baker's Creek, Tennessee
I believe in Oo-lo-te-ka's honesty and integrity

Do you follow your heavenly laws?
Iliad, Cherokee guide to life has trained me and made me
knowledgeable
I believe in Oo-lo-te-ka's honesty and integrity
Cherokee your strength could lift a mountain

8th-grade

Sitting Bull
Free Verse

Our tribe was so peaceful, calm in our practices
Years of tradition, passed down through many
We lived in harmony with nature and our surroundings
We took what we needed, nothing more.
The Black Hills were our religious lands
Called *Paha Sapa* for their luscious dark forests
We worshiped them, cared for them
Our lives were tranquil, our lives were placid
Then the greedy came
In search of gold and riches
We were relocated against our wishes
What happened to freedom of speech and religion?
Our ancestors discovered this land
Now it is being grasped from our hand

6th-grade

**George Washington
Manifesto**

Mother Augustine, took me out into the fields, taught me childhood
My father, his cherry tree, taught me faith

Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, the wielding of the rifle taught me trust
Young Martha, when we were first together, she taught me love
Promoting me to the general of the Continental Army, all of us ready to fight, taught me loyalty

Cannons blasting, rifles popping, the battle cries and raging death, the medics tending to the
gunshot wounds, taught me war
Men marching, rifles by their sides all night long, mounted at their posts, taught me perseverance

Fireworks everywhere, General Howe, defeated, food, drinks, and huzzahs from the crowd,
taught me independence
Martha, coming to visit me in my post-war state, accepting of everything, taught me true love

Up at the podium, hundreds of people listened to my voice, ready to help each other, taught me
leadership
Those are the rules to be a good leader, a good father, and a good person, that, taught me
everything I need to know

8th-grade

**Sacagawea
Pantoum**

Take a look at nature
Watch my fellow Shoshones enjoy their lives
Our traditions go from generation to generations
See as my brother and sister walk hand in hand with the Great Spirit
Watch my fellow Shoshones enjoy their lives
Who are these new men, bringing their laws, their skin like snow?
See as my brother and sisters walk hand in hand with the Great Spirit
Though I am a woman, I must protect my tribe with dignity
Who are these new men, bringing their laws, their ski like snow?
These white men bring their new ways encroaching west
Though I am a woman, I must protect my tribe with dignity
I must lead my people out of confusion, but what is leadership? A worthy gift?
Perhaps only a meaningless title?

8th-grade

**Harriet Tubman
Poem**

White man's laws are prison cells
Locking dreams away
And that is where hope's murderer dwells
In darkness he will forever stay
I am told that the laws are fair
But I'm chained here as I weep
And plan the day that I do dare
Take freedom's hand and leap
But I know that law is what I make it
And that this bondage needs to change
And I will be the first candlelit
To help the colored, crazy, and strange
I'm living by my own rules and I'm just fine
But Lady Justice is not a friend of mine

6th-grade

**Benjamin Franklin
Pantoum**

The thick, musty aroma of old English walls clogs my nose
Courage's rough hand pats me on my shoulder
Justice is the burning letter in my pocket
Freedom is the British gate opening as the King approaches, and in
Pennsylvania men eagerly await for the outcome

Courage's rough hand pats me on my shoulder
Why must the King disagree with me?
Freedom is the British gate opening as the King approaches, and in
Pennsylvania men eagerly await for the outcome
My knee bends to hit the cold, smooth floor, I am humbled in front of this powerful leader

Why must the King disagree with me?
His power over the colonies is great, and he is greedy to keep it
My knee bend to hit the cold, smooth floor, I am humbled in front of this powerful leader
The thick, musty aroma of old English walls clogs my nose

7th-grade

Susan B. Anthony
Poem

This is my right, women will follow,
They say women writing on ballots is not right,
But my fellow Americans, do you not know?
Women of America pick up your banners and fight.
For the women who sin,
For the women who always fail,
Our voice speaks what is within
To only great avail
I am not wearing this sash to lose, so why listen to what some of
our men say?
Since when am I the theatre of the absurd?
While our leader's flag dwindles away,
My call for justice will be answered.
We women may all cry,
But our rights will never die.

6th-grade

**Sally Hemings
Sonnet**

Sir, how could I love you more?
Your work is done without a thought of me.
My heart's released when I walk through your door.
But love alone, that will not make me free!

Your lips at times may speak soft words of care.
Yet there are ways your hands do not reflect
Your precious sounds that touch the dreams I dare.
My life goes on in labor and neglect.

If I were free, our love would not be less.
These shackles don't permit the thoughts I wish.
The thoughts of love and freedom I confess,
As I remain at work, your clothes to stitch

Although I cannot be your legal wife,
Please treat me like your love for all my life.

Appendix D

A	Justice & Inclusion	Hope & Innovation	Leadership & Rule of Law
	<p>1.Irish Immigrant – Ava 6^t Ann Hutchinson- Kate S. 6th</p> <p>Chinese Immigrant – Sabrina 6th</p> <p>2.Alcott – Julia 7th Fredrick Douglas – Lotus 7th</p> <p>3.Sitting Bull – Sam 7th Thomas Jefferson - Izzy 7th Abigail Adams – Greer 7th</p> <p>4.Abe Lincoln - Christina 8th Thomas Paine – Peter 8th</p> <p>5.Civil War Solider – Tom 8^t Gen Custar – Ben 8th</p>	<p>1. Donner Party – Arthur 6th Edison – Lauren 6th</p> <p>2.Eli Whitney - Preston 6th Muckraker – Nick S. 6th</p> <p>3.Immigrant Chinese – Emma 7th Mark Twain – Dean 7th</p> <p>4.Daniel Boone – Devin 7th Pioneer – Charlotte 7th</p> <p>5.Rachel Marsh – Sara 7th Phillis Wheatly – Simone 7th</p> <p>6.Pony Express Rider – Logan 8th Clara Barton – Maddy 8th</p>	<p>1.George Washington – Sam 6th Susan B. Anthony – Skye 6th Iroquois – Alina 6th</p> <p>3.Robert E. Lee – Zac 7th Native Indian – Natalie 7th</p> <p>3. Sitting Bull – Alec 8th Sam Houston – Stephen 8th</p> <p>4. Sally Hemings – Elena 8th Harriet Tubman – Shayna 8th</p> <p>5. Sojourn Truth – Molly 8th Ben Franklin - Matt M. 8th</p>
B	<p>1.Abe Lincoln – Alex 6th Alcott - Jacqui 6th</p> <p>2.Irish Immigrant - Sophie 6th Thomas Paine – Angus 6th</p> <p>3.Civil War solider – Jessica 7th Sacagawea – Alex 7th</p> <p>4.Thomas Jefferson – Nick 8th Gen. Custer – Matt S. 8th</p> <p>5. Fredrick Douglas – Miller 8th Thoreau – Calvin 8th</p>	<p>1.Rachel Marsh – Rowan 6th Edison – Dea 6th</p> <p>2.Phillis Wheatly - Millie 6th Daniel Boone - Aidan 6th Clara Barton – Taylor 6th</p> <p>3.Donner Party – Eli 7th Mark Twain – Danielle 7th Pioneer – Kieu 7th</p> <p>4.Eli Whitney – Matt K. 7th Factory Worker – Jazzy 7th</p> <p>5.Millworker – Camille 8th Muckraker – Jackson 8th</p>	<p>1.George Washington – Leo 6th Sally Hemings – Sheriel 6th Ben Franklin – Sophia 6th</p> <p>2.Ann Hutchinson - Haley 6th Abigail Williams - Emilie 6th</p> <p>2.Robert E. Lee – Chase 7th Susan B. Anthony – Angelina 7th</p> <p>4.Harriet Tubman – Sonya 8th Sacagawea – Audrey 8th</p> <p>5. Belle Boyd – Maya 8th Revolutionary war participant - Dylan 8th</p>