

# READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

## Reading and Responding Like a Historian Video Transcript

### **LeRoy Votto:**

If you're only reading secondary sources, you become kind of a passive observer of, sort of, history that has already happened. So if you could actually read the primary sources, then you have a sense of being there. So this is day four of our investigation of the abolitionist movement. We started with William Lloyd Garrison and his 1829 Park Street Church address. And then we also looked at David Walker, African-American abolitionist. In the last couple of days, we've been reading Wendell Phillips' philosophy of the abolition movement.

### **Student:**

Taking what I read and what I annotated, I kind of based off the text whether I thought his argument would have, like, appealed to me, and, like, whether I would have been, if I didn't believe in what he was saying, whether it would have struck me in a new way, and I might actually see his perspective and might soon, like, agree with it. Personally, I think his argument was very compelling. So, yeah, I liked it.

### **Votto:**

We're going to look at a document from the 1837 Women's Abolitionist Meeting. We're going to read some of John C. Calhoun and probably another South Carolinian to understand the pro-slavery side of the argument. So, you know, what we'll have at the end of this two-week period is a deep understanding of the abolitionists through the primary sources. And then the students will be able to write about the abolitionist movement. Writing is a way of getting them to understand the topics more deeply, one at the time, and then a bigger essay at the end. When you read something at the beginning that's the very first time you've even encountered these ideas, this kind of language, this kind of context, we will sometimes go back to some of the earlier documents because, as they read more, they understand. I'm trying to build meaning. One document on top of another.

### **Student:**

There's no sort of, like, "Okay, so here's where we've been. Now we're going to go here." They just sort of talk about that.

**Votto:**

That's interesting, what would you like to have had them say?

**Student:**

I think they did right in saying that, like, they've done a lot of good, but I also think they should have acknowledged that it's been 20 years and the number of slaves have just increased and increased.

**Student:**

You could either go into legislation and actually try to get the laws changed, or you can go into the South and actually, like, talk to people instead of just... Talking to people in the South, which obviously would take more than just talking, but...

**Votto:**

What do you think?

**Student:**

Well, like, especially since the South was the main problem, I think, like we said before, they should have gone to the South instead of stayed up in the North and trying to talk to the people who were basically... who weren't the problem, you know?

**Votto:**

That's an interesting point. So you think they're just staying up in the North kind of in safe country? Even though they're criticized in the North and they're kind of blacklisted, but at least they feel that they're more or less physically safe.

**Student:**

Yeah, I mean, if the North only had 64 slaves...

**Votto:**

It's really important at this stage of their lives to be able to have ideas about ideas, and to give voice to their ideas, and to give voice to something that's sort of intellectual. You know, to find the words to talk about ideas and issues.

**Student:**

So I think, in that case, they're pretty, like, brave. Because they're going against what everybody else is believing. But at the same time, they could, like, push further.

**Votto:**

I want them to be historians. You know, if you're in science classes, you're not watching the science teacher do the experiments. I mean, you're actually being a scientist.

**Student:**

"The press, the pulpit, the wealth, the literature, the prejudices, the political arrangements, the present self-interest of the country, are all against us."

**Votto:**

Okay.

**Student:**

I think what he's trying to say is that they're compromising, like, the integrity of the cause and they are... They're actually hurting the people they're trying to help by compromising and not, like, being strong in their convictions.

**Votto:**

I think you really get a tremendously rich education in how argument is structured, in how it's presented. I think you really learn the beauty of language and the power of language. It's just so much fun to read these documents. You feel like you're there. You feel like you know these people, you know? You feel what they believe's at stake. You sort of feel their passion, you know? You feel their anger, their frustration, their joy. You know? You know, and you can see their warts, too.