

READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

Reading and Writing in History Video Transcript

Student:

I think, the significance of the wheel. Of, like, spinning it, saying, "This is what we're going to do next."

Student:

Right here, this is a good thing, that he brought into the violence of the French Revolution.

Student:

Oh, right, that's a good one.

Heather Lattimer:

For many, many years, it was thought that literacy was essentially something that happened in English class. You need to be able to read and write and communicate effectively, and in order to do that, you need literacy skills. But not just general literacy skills, literacy skills that are specific to the discipline.

Miroslaba Velo:

Let's start with document A. Casey, who wrote this document?

Casey:

Jackson.

Velo:

Okay, the author is Andrew Jackson.

Chauncey Monte-Sano:

It's very difficult to separate the ways of thinking in a discipline from the literacy practices in it. The texts that students read, the texts that students create, all have ideas about their discipline embedded in them. The new social studies state standards are very supportive of this kind of approach. It frames social studies as an inquiry process.

Student:

What evidence from the text you have read support this claim?

Student:

In the article, it says, like, Belgium was neutral. It didn't really want the Germans to pass through. But during this time, because a lot of... like, the countries were just trying to take over territory, they didn't really care and just passed through anyways. Like, that is a main cause.

Student:

So, I kind of disagree with what Elijah said, because I think nationalism, like our moderator said, is the most, you know, important one.

Lattimer:

The more that kids can dig into real materials that are the materials... not the textbook, necessarily. The textbook can be a great reference source, but if you look at what people do beyond K-12, it's very rare that we'll rely on a textbook. We'll bring in all kinds of other materials and try to make sense of this.

Andrea Gambino Rhodes:

We're taking a look today at what factors positively and negatively influence a society. And for today, we're going to be looking at that from the framework of the Industrial Revolution. We will read and annotate primary and secondary sources.

Lattimer:

What you'll see in a history classroom that is effectively implementing the literacy standards are the students with multiple texts -- maybe a couple of primary source documents, maybe a couple of secondary or tertiary documents, that they're looking at. And they have some questions and the questions will ask them to read that text closely. They'll ask them about sourcing of that text. They'll ask them to really grapple with and think about, "All right, well, if there's two contradictory texts, which one is more credible, and why?" And to then make arguments about the meaning of that text.

Monte-Sano:

The big concept that is very important in history is evidence-based reasoning or evidence-based argument that, for any conclusion they come to, students should ground their conclusion in the evidence that's before them.

Student:

He also just used, like, really strong metaphors. Like, on page seven when he was talking about, like, slavery as, like, the South...

Monte-Sano:

And in going through that process, students can be often more engaged and interested in the history they're studying, because it's not just somebody else's history, it's them asking questions and deliberating about the evidence that they have and coming to their own conclusions that are grounded in that evidence.

Velo:

Now we're going to have our green toolkit. It lets us know how we analyze documents. So here, in order to analyze it, we've got to do four things. We've got to source it. Step two is, you contextualize. And then the third step is, you actually read the document. You've got to figure out, "What is it saying?" And the fourth step is, you want to corroborate. So what I'm going to have you do right now is, I'm going to have you source document A, and you can do this with a partner, okay?

Student:

You want to talk to the Congress so...

Lattimer:

We've given them the tools of how to look carefully at information, how to look carefully at ideas, and then gradually released and taken away those tools so that they can do it on their own. They'll be more successful in figuring that out on their own.

Student:

I think that it's important that it's just sparking the conversation and making them pick a side so that they no longer can ignore this terrible thing that's going on. They have to face it and they have to live with themselves picking one side or the other.

LeRoy Votto:

They're making us talk about something...

Lattimer:

We need to provide kids, wherever possible, with the opportunity to do something that they find to be meaningful. At the end of the day, it's, what are you going to do with that information? And they need to be given tasks that approximate, wherever possible, real tasks that people would do outside of school.

Steve Lazar:

When you read writing by historians, these are phrases historians are using all the time. Because explaining cause and effect is one of the main things we do

when we write about history. So, next step is to try to apply this to Crimea. So, two questions up on the board. I want you two working together, talking through it, before you write it down, okay?

Student:

So, what is one thing that caused the current situation in Crimea?

Student:

Well, there's a lot of Russians in Crimea, so they want to be part of Russia, which is...

Student:

Like, citizens?

Student:

Yeah.

Monte-Sano:

Even though students might develop concepts about history specifically, they're also developing skills that apply to the present. It's not just for people who are going to become Ph.D.s in history. And I think that's an important part of history and social studies that this kind of approach offers. They also are learning ways of reading analytically where they're asking questions and interacting with the text and developing their own conclusions. They're learning discussion skills a lot of the time. They're also learning to write, often.

Lattimer:

They need to be effective in communicating, regardless of what their future interests are. They need to be able to explain their thinking, not only because it's going to help them in the future, but it's also going to help them to be better thinkers and learners today across the disciplines.

Student:

Was it a speech that he gave to the Congress? Because he wanted to show that he had the right to take their land, so...

Monte-Sano:

In social studies and history in particular, the support for evidence-based decision making that is a part of an inquiry approach to history and social studies, where one asks questions, where one reads and analyzes different texts and comes to one's own conclusion, that really supports a lot of aspects of civic life that I think we value in this country.