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History is already a subject based on words and interpretations. Many historians look at situations differently and write different variations on the same event. When you bring history into the classroom, students are forced to interpret these historians and the teacher and hope to understand the general idea of the events. According to Monte-Sano, “When teachers assign reading and writing in history classrooms, the focus typically involves basic reading comprehension and summary of information. (Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). The article Beyond Reading Comprehension and Summary: Learning to Read and Write in History by Focusing on Evidence, Perspective, and Interpretation by Chauncy Monte-Sano focused on one History teacher and his unique specific literary instruction. The study discusses the current Benchmarks of Historical Thinking project in Canada. They define six concepts that are essential to understanding history, which include: establish historical significance, use primary document evidence, identify continuity and change, analyze cause and consequence, take historical perspectives, and understand moral dimensions of history (Seixas, 2006).

The study discusses research on literacy in history classrooms, especially in adolescents and research on literacy across content areas. According to the study, literacy research in history emphasizes reading far more than writing or particularly the intersection of historical thinking and writing. There is often little content in content area research, but rather an emphasis on literacy strategies that cut across content areas. (Monte-Sano, 2011) He observes and does a case study on Mr. Lyle and his classrooms’ growth in evidence-based historical writing. He eliminated textbooks, which I personally found a bit unusual, but he also replaced them with documents, which adds a whole new dimension in the classroom. I would say the students were happy about not having a textbook, but had more handouts than the expected. In Mr. Lyle’s classroom, teaching historical thinking – specifically evidence use, perspective recognition, and interpretation – advanced student’ historical writing (Monte-Sano, 2011).

The students’ writing became stronger as he took pre- and post-instruction writing samples from his students. The pre-instruction samples served as the baseline for Mr. Lyle’s students’ writing. While the sample size was not enormously large or over a long period of time, I thought the study was done well. It came across different teaching strategies for his students’ growth. Mr. Lyle asked for students’ interpretation and then wanted evidence. This allows for students to gain insight into their own minds while using factual evidence. Demonstrating writing interweaves with reading. There is an obvious relationship. In the case of history, reading and writing are important and vital into understand the events. Each student will have a slightly different interpretation of history, even when they are given the same material.

This article inspires me to teach history more of a hands-on approach than straight lecture. Allowing students to grow as writers and as interpreters will help them later beyond the subject of History. Students will learn more about themselves if they understand their baseline or where they are starting off at in the beginning of the unit. It’s a type of KWL chart but without the W. There were three teaching strategies used in the study: annotating primary source readings, regular informal writing prompts that focused on historical perspectives followed by writing prompts that called for a synthesis of major issues, and feedback focused on evidence use and accuracy of interpretation.

I do believe that this author has a valid point in the study. Reading History and understanding it are two separate issues. Teachers need to find ways to bring the subject of History to life and this author found a great way to make learning interesting, while also raising grades. Students must feel that they are in the time period and can think outside the proverbial box and outside the classroom. I don’t believe it is truly possible to get rid of textbooks for a classroom, but to experiment with a unit like this would be something to try. I would try this type of teaching when it came to the topic of the wars post-World War II. Between the Korean War and Vietnam War, there were questions raised on whether America should even be there. Allowing students to look at both sides allows them to make a decision on their own. To start off the unit with a prior knowledge paper or activity, at most one page, and then returning at the end of the unit to find out how far they have come with their arguments and insights.

Reference:

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