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Philosophy of Teaching Statement

While some people think that the study of history is about memorizing dates, names, and facts—essentially history trivia—my pedagogy is motivated by a desire to address broad themes and big questions as creatively as possible, particularly stressing the idea of perspective by incorporating primary sources as a core portion of my instruction. When students leave my classroom, I expect that they will be able to critically examine historical events and figures from multiple perspectives. In doing so, my students should be able to talk about the past in a way that respects historical complexity while still making it relatable and understandable.

To accomplish those goals, my teaching style especially leverages primary sources. In addition to written documents, my classes also incorporate works of culture (paintings, photographs, etc.) to help students get a glimpse into an unmediated past. In my current position, my U.S. history classes use three different document reader books (Dollar and Reichard's *American Issues* and Bell et al.'s two-book *Eyewitnesses and Others*). This means that somewhere between a third to one-half of my instructional time is spent supporting students in their analysis of primary sources. When students directly engage with past peoples, they understand our nation's history on a much more visceral level than a typical textbook could ever provide.

Beyond our work with primary sources, my teaching style mixes a variety of engaging methods, including, but not limited to, lecture, Socratic-style questioning, class discussions, and group work. I typically arrange the desks in my room in a U-shaped pattern to encourage discussion and decenter myself from seeming like an omnipotent vessel of knowledge. Students should be able to see their colleagues and interact with them, helping each other to create knowledge instead of being told it. I do believe that lecture has a place in the history classroom. But, we historians tend to lecture too much (a 2015 survey by education scholar Grant Wiggins found that history teachers lectured more than any other discipline, and that we did it, on average, for well over half of the class period). My classes, therefore, try to involve students as much as possible, believing that merely disseminating knowledge does not guarantee learning.

In that vein, I intend for my evaluations to facilitate student learning and not just measure it. Shorter, more frequent essays provide students more opportunities to practice constructing historical arguments and narratives, especially employing primary sources. But I also require longer works, especially research projects. This year, for example I am partnering with our school librarian on a history and coding research project where groups of students make a phone app that offers historically based interpretations of various art works. In addition to the app, the assignment culminates in an interpretive essay linking art, history, and the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship.

In many ways, that is ultimately what my U.S. history teaching is about—trying to help students engage with the past in order to determine what it means to be an American. That answer has changed over time. But with a healthy supply of primary sources and interpretations that respect historical complexity and multiple perspectives, my students will hopefully be able to answer what being an American has meant in the past and today.