

Content Area Literacy in a History Classroom: A Qualitative Case Study

Justine Yuki Bagasbas

ED-363: Reading in the Content Area II: Middle School

Stevenson University

Content Area Literacy in a History Classroom: A Qualitative Case Study

Table of Contents

Disciplinary Literacy in History	2
Literacy Fieldnotes	8
First Day of Placement	8
Political Spectrum Lesson.....	12
DBQ Introduction Lesson	15
Testing + DBQ Continuation	20
Writing the DBQ Response	25
Teacher Interview: Final Paper	29
Final Presentation	36

Disciplinary Literacy in History

Introduction

Disciplinary literacy (DL) is a concept specialized and discipline-focused skills necessary to understand the various subjects taught in schools. It is a part of a model of literacy

progression, in the form of a pyramid, proposed by Shanahan and Shanahan (2008). The level of specialization in literacy skills increases as one progresses higher up the pyramid. Literacy progression in a student starts with basic, highly generalizable literacy skills, like decoding and recognizing high-frequency words. As students slowly master these basic skills, they start to develop intermediate literacy skills. This is when their literacy skills become more sophisticated and less generalizable to every content area but not connected to a specific discipline like math or history (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). At the tip of the pyramid are DL skills. DL skills require specialized knowledge, and ways of thinking, reading, and writing. DL skills are not to be confused with content area literacy skills and shouldn't be used interchangeably. Content area skills differ from DL skills by the scope in which these skills can be used through various subjects in schools.

The rise of DL can be credited to Shanahan and Shanahan's research in 2008 which shed light on the importance of DL skills in a student's academic success. Higher literacy rates are tied to success, yet in adolescents, the most recent assessment data by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2024) suggest they are not improving (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). These skills are important in equipping students with the proper knowledge to understand different disciplines, as well as preparing them for the real world. DL skills differ in every subject. In mathematics, a student uses specialized reading, writing, and critical thinking skills to analyze word problems. Students are also expected to produce an equation, using symbols unique to mathematics, to solve those problems. Meanwhile, in history, students use specialized skills to analyze historical documents that encourage them to think like historians. Disciplinary literacy, especially in history, is vital to improving a student's understanding and developing their critical thinking. However, the development of a student's disciplinary literacy skills

depends on whether they have a strong foundation of reading skills. In this essay, I analyze tensions regarding DL in history, describe the three main DL skills, and recount personal experiences with DL.

The Importance of DL in History Classes

The expectation for students to automatically have disciplinary-focused skills in all disciplines because they have basic reading comprehension and writing skills is unfounded. Following the progression of literacy proposed by Shanahan and Shanahan (2008), literacy skills naturally build off one another. A student is unable to progress higher up the pyramid without having mastery of beginner literacy skills. It is unfair for secondary content area teachers to expect students to retain these content area skills from elementary to high school, without consistent instruction in these topics. So, if teachers do not acknowledge the role they play in the continuous instruction of content area skills, it promotes unrealistic expectations of students. Without these fundamental content area skills, students will not be successful in developing DL skills in their classes.

Elementary school teachers hammer down on the basic and intermediate literacy skills to ensure that they're ready to learn more intensive and specific skills used in each subject (Dobbs et al., 2016). However, Secondary teachers are not exempt from the job of guiding students on how to read, write, and think in their specific discipline. This can be a challenge due to how secondary subjects are taught and how the curriculum is structured. In an article written by Dobbs et al. (2016), researchers collaborated with teams of content area high school teachers in the Boston area, to help them adopt DL strategies in their classrooms. They found that many content area teachers refused to incorporate general reading strategies in their classrooms due to

not having enough room in the curriculum or having a disconnect between those strategies and content area goals. Consequently, the teachers ran into trouble when they found that their students were not at the level as readers to start learning disciplinary-related skills. Without strong foundational skills like decoding and basic comprehension, students would struggle to even understand the significance of the text before they can analyze it. This led to the re-teaching of intermediate literacy skills to successfully implement the DL skills they wanted to teach their students.

As students advance through school, the difficulty of discipline-specific texts increases, while reading instruction decreases, causing a disconnect between a student's reading ability and the expectations of their teacher (Bain, 2012). Creating a social studies curriculum that is both engaging for students and encourages historical thinking has proven to be difficult. A study done by Duhaylongsod et al. (2015) found that during the creation of the middle school history curriculum, researchers were faced with difficult trade-offs that had them picking between student engagement and the depth of historical thinking required by the curriculum. In the end, they found that to develop DL in history with middle school students, teachers must start with engagement. They highlighted an activity that they used to engage middle school students called "Reader's Theater." This activity makes historical concepts more accessible to students through their easily digestible fictional scripted scenarios that middle schoolers can relate to. This systematically moves students towards DL, highlighting the fact that students are unable to learn DL skills without first having strong foundational reading skills or introduction to the subject of history itself.

DL Skills in History

Students will be wholly unprepared to read, write, and think in their history classes if they're only equipped with general content area skills. There are three main DL skills used in history classes: contextualization, corroboration, and sourcing (Bain, 2012; Duhaylongsod et al., 2016; Monte-Sano, 2010; Shreiner & Zwart, 2020). When students utilize all three historical DL skills, they can critically think and analyze events to come to their own conclusion. Wineburg and Reisman (2015) stated in their journal article, "Disciplinary Literacy in History: A Toolkit for Digital Citizenship," that the goal for teaching these skills was not to make students better historians, but to help them be better informed citizens.

Contextualization is a valuable skill that students use when analyzing a source and its contents. Oftentimes, there is a disconnect between a student and history because they lack the skill to contextualize the source. They need to understand how to give context to a historical event to understand its significance, impact, and motivations. Without this trained skill, students won't be able to understand why learning about history matters due to the lack of connection between them and the source. According to Shreiner and Zwart (2020), students require a high level of "historical" and "cross-cultural" empathy to properly contextualize historical texts when making claims about past events. Without high levels of historical or cross-cultural empathy, students will continue to view past actions/events through a modern perspective, rather than situate themselves in the context in which the historical event occurred. This ensures that they understand the motives behind the actions in history that they originally thought were illogical (Wineburg & Reisman, 2015).

In an article by Chauncey Monte-Sano of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Maryland (2010), Monte-Sano proposes a descriptive framework for adolescents' historical writing using qualitative analyses of student written responses that

identify trends that reflect how high school juniors use evidence in their historical writing. A characteristic of historical writing highlighted in the analyses was corroboration. Corroboration is the ability to use multiple sources to support a claim which increases the historical narrative's completeness. Corroboration was used as a benchmark for evidence of use in historical writing in students. Monte-Sano identified whether students synthesized evidence from multiple sources to support a claim and found that students had varying levels of corroboration. Having the ability to corroborate evidence implies that a student recognizes the historical context and perspectives of the source and can distinguish between relevant and irrelevant evidence supporting their claim.

Sourcing has students critically examine the author and question their background, credibility, and biases. It is critical for students to question the author's motivations when analyzing the source to determine the validity of the source's content. Wineburg and Reisman (2015) brought an example when eighth-grade teachers failed to source one of the documents they included in a written exam where students had to support whether the Holocaust was real or a hoax using evidence. One of these "credible" sources that was provided stated that the diary of Anne Frank was fake. Many students found that this was the most convincing evidence and wrote that the Holocaust was a hoax. If the teachers had checked the author, they would've found that it was written by a Holocaust denial group. Additionally, had the students been taught how to source, they wouldn't have blindly used the evidence provided and would have questioned the author's motives and biases. Sourcing is not only used when analyzing historical documents but can be used when browsing through news articles. This ensures that students don't thoughtlessly believe everything they see on the internet.

Personal Experiences

When I was in middle school, my eighth-grade history teacher spent significant time teaching us the importance of all three DL skills to be successful in his history class. It wasn't until I learned DL skills that I realized *why* my middle school teacher created whole lessons to practice these skills. He knew of the importance of fully grasping these skills and how much it would benefit us all in higher education and eventually entering society as working adults. I can attribute my love for learning history and my desire to be a middle school history teacher to know how to utilize these three skills in class. It helped me truly understand and enjoy making connections between historical events across different time periods.

In my field placement at Raven Middle School, my school mentor, Teacher A, focuses on teaching these three skills to her students. As all her students are in 8th grade, she believes that preparing them for high school history classes by developing their DL skills is extremely important. During my time with the students, I have observed how their DL skills are flourishing. The way they discuss history using prior knowledge and information from various sources is extremely impressive. They don't even know that the skills that they are slowly developing are in fact DL skills that will aid them in higher education and in their life.

Conclusion

DL skills are crucial for students to fully understand historical texts and the importance of being knowledgeable in an increasingly connected world. The three highlighted DL skills that develop a student's historical thinking—contextualization, corroboration, and sourcing—also develop a student's critical thinking. Having these three skills allows students to become independent thinkers who can analyze not only historical sources but what they see in everyday life from society. Additionally, they aid in the enjoyment of history itself, as students are more

likely to be curious about history if they have the skills that allow them to explore and inquire about different historical topics.

Literacy Fieldnotes

(09/02/2025-11/04/2025)

First Day of Placement, 09/02/2025, 8:15 AM to 3:00 PM, Raven Middle School

It is 8:15 AM at Raven Middle School and students are walking to their first period classrooms. Today is a B Day, meaning Teacher A only has three classes, a first period, third period, and a fourth period. Teacher A is standing in her doorway waiting to greet each of her students as they walk in. She told me that she explicitly told her students to greet her before they step foot into her classroom, otherwise she will hold them back if they do not. One student attempted to walk into the classroom, completely disregarding Teacher A's instructions. In response, Teacher A called out their name, grabbed their shoulder, and instructed them to take a step back, make eye contact, and give her a formal greeting (and one to me as well). This interaction happened a couple more times, some students giving a very quick "Good Morning, Teacher A" before stepping into the classroom, with a few students stopping right in front of Teacher A and loudly greeting her.

Once all the students were inside, Teacher A had to run down to the office to make a quick announcement on the dress code as it was the second week of school, yet students weren't following the rules. Most students were following the directions Teacher A had on the smartboard. These instructions were called, "Do Now." The "Do Now" instructions directed students to sit in their study groups, grab their social studies workbook, copy today's objective, and to take out their homework.

Teacher A's first period class is a standard 8th grade U.S. History class. The students weren't learning any content during class when I was observing, instead, they were reading chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the book titled, "Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You," while filling out their reading journal. The reading journal had students write questions they had about the chapter, a connection they made with another text or the world, and a quote that resonated with them. The reading journal is an example of a "during-reading" strategy that we learned about in class and teachers can give students to encourage deeper thinking and ensure reading comprehension. Since the students are in the standard class, Teacher A had an audiobook version of the book playing while students read along. This is another example of a "during-reading" strategy. With students who may struggle with reading comprehension, having an audiobook version playing while they read is extremely helpful. Before the students read, Teacher A went over how to complete the reading journal, and once she felt comfortable that all students fully understood how to fill it out, they started reading.

After the three chapters finished playing, Teacher A gave them time to finish up writing their final thoughts so they could move on to the discussion. Students are expected to participate in a discussion using their own questions about the chapters but also Teacher A's questions about key concepts and ideas from the chapters. This discussion was meant to deepen their understanding of the chapters and prepare them for the reading quiz. Teacher A told me that if the students participate in the discussion, they shouldn't be worried about the reading quiz at all. Students engaged in the discussion, and I barely had to intervene to get them to start talking.

Teacher A's next class went through the same process that I detailed. They are also an 8th grade U.S. History standard class but during the discussion, talked a lot more. During this class, Teacher A told me to observe the different study groups, which student was taking the initiative

and which student was the “weak link.” Teacher A refers to a student that doesn’t participate in discussions or engage with their study group as the “weak link.” The students did a great job in getting through the questions, talking, sharing their ideas, and also bouncing their ideas off of each other. However, there were some students who stood out to me as they were their study group’s main speakers or their “weak links.”

Teacher A’s last class of the day is her only GT class in a B Day. They were a significantly larger class than her two previous classes. The GT students were farther along in the book as they are expected to read and fill out their reading journal for homework. This week’s homework was to read chapters 11 and 12 and fill out their reading journal to be ready to read chapters 13, 14, and 15 in class. Teacher A asked the whole class whether they completed their homework and to answer her honestly. Half of them revealed that they didn’t complete their homework, so she gave them about 10 minutes to catch up before they moved onto the other chapters. When the 10 minutes finished up, Teacher A went right into the reading. She still had them listening to the audiobook version to help with comprehension. However, one student complained to Teacher A that she had already finished these chapters and was already ahead. *There is a difference in reading motivation between her standard classes and GT class.* Teacher A validated the student’s feelings but told her to just read along to get a better understanding and fill out her reading journal if she hadn’t already. Her GT class went through the same process of reading, filling out the reading journal, and having the discussion at the end. They also had a reading quiz they were expected to complete during class time as well.

Teacher A’s first and third period standard classes participated in an activity that her GT class didn’t do. For their warm-up, they went over their map homework and worked as a team to earn stamps. The map activity had them using longitude and latitude to find the coordinates of

state capitals. Learning how to read a map is something not commonly taught in schools. As a result, students don't know where states are in the U.S. or how to navigate the world without relying on GPS and their phones. This is an example of disciplinary literacy in history because students learn skills that aid in their ability to think geographically in terms of historical events. I do wonder why she didn't have her GT classes doing the map activity, but I think it is because they are expected to understand how to read one already.

This day wasn't completely focused on content-area or disciplinary literacy skills. However, Teacher A had mentioned that as the department chair for the social studies department, she and her team make it a point to vertically teach to make sure students are better prepared for their higher-level classes and for high school. This can be seen in the emphasis that she places on asking questions, making connections, and participating in discussions. While these strategies are not overtly disciplinary literacy related, they strengthen the foundation of a student's disciplinary literacy skills and prepare them for higher education.

Political Spectrum Lesson, 9/30/2025, 8:15 AM to 3:00 PM, Raven Middle School

Today is an A Day, so Teacher A only has two classes during 2nd and 3rd period. Since she doesn't have a first period on A days, she usually asks another social studies teacher if I can observe their class. Today, she placed me with Teacher B, who is the school mentor of another intern, Peer A. Teacher B teaches 7th grade history, and his first period class has around 30 students. Today's lesson is on the spread of Islam, which Teacher B said, "was a pretty boring one for the kids." He started off class by having them look at a map, infer what caused the spread of Islam in the Middle East to Europe, and type up their response on Schoology. He reminded the students to think back to last class and remember what they learned about Islam and the

religion's followers. To ensure students were engaged, he told me that he hands out a Champion's Belt to the student who gains the most likes on the discussion board. The students were not using any disciplinary literacy skills as the goal of the warm-up was to engage students and have them recall information about Islam.

The bulk of the lesson was notetaking. Teacher B was excited to have extra help, because he could split the class into three groups, and Peer A, Teacher B, and I would each lead a group in taking notes from the reading. The reading was 4 pages long, which is why Teacher B wanted to split the class into groups in the first place. He thought that it would be challenging for the students to take notes on that much information. The section of the reading that I was tasked with going through with the students was straightforward. This made taking notes easy for the students because it was all facts about the Caliphs responsible for spreading Islam. I was worried that they weren't at the level of distinguishing relevant information from irrelevant information when taking notes. Which is why I just told my group of students what notes they should be writing about the Caliphs. This took away from the development of the students' disciplinary literacy skills because they weren't making the effort to find important information from the reading. Rather, they were waiting for me to tell them what to write. This would definitely create a dependency on their teacher and hinder their ability to take notes independently.

Once the first period finished, I returned to Teacher A's class. When she also returned from her own observation of another teacher, she told me the plan for the day. I knew from her email the day before that she planned for me to teach her third period, after watching how she taught her second period. The lesson for her two classes was on political spectrum and how it can be used to evaluate the colonists' increasingly violent actions towards British policies. Before she got into the lesson, she went over the assignment that the students were supposed to

complete last class, when she was unexpectedly absent. During the review on colonist reactions on British policies, one student, Student E, blew me away with an inference she made on the colonists' actions. She displayed incredible levels of critical thinking, contextualization, corroboration, and sourcing. Skills that I have read about in articles by Bain (2012), Duhaylongsod et al. (2016) Monte-Sano (2010), and Shreiner and Zwart (2020) about the importance of disciplinary literacy in history. Student E told Teacher A that she thought the colonists were taking it too far (in reference to tarring and feathering tax collectors) because she inferred that the colonists weren't doing these acts of violence out of necessity or fear, but for intimidation and humiliation. She was recalling information from what she read and her background knowledge to come to her own conclusion. When Student E finished voicing her opinion, Teacher A and I looked at each other in awe. We were 2 months into the school year, and already Teacher A's students were showing signs of developing disciplinary literacy skills.

It was now my turn to teach the lesson during Teacher A's third period. Her third period is always a little hard to keep engaged because they have lunch in the middle of the period and come back hyper and distracted. I am always grateful to Teacher A for calming the students down and getting them ready to learn. In time, I hope to be able to manage the classroom on my own. Teacher A introduced the political spectrum to her students through a fictional scenario on Raven Middle School's dress code policy. She wanted me to use this hook for her third period class because it worked very well with her second period class. The scenario was that the Assistant Principal wanted to implement a new policy that required *all* 8th graders to wear pink until the end of the school year in support of Breast Cancer Awareness month. Many students were confused as to why this was being implemented, with a few having very strong opinions about the proposed policy. Once most students shared their thoughts, I had them look at their

classwork for the day. Activity 2 on the classwork had them circle the reaction they would most likely have towards the new policy and justify their choice. What we didn't tell them was that each of these reactions corresponded with different positions on the political spectrum. Most students were liberal, moderate, or conservative, with only one or two students being radical and reactionary. When it was revealed that their reactions coincided with a political position, I explained the differences between the positions. I spent too much time explaining how the reactions they chose were related to the political spectrum. When they tried to apply their understanding of the political spectrum in Activity 3, they were too caught up in my explanations. I had to bring them back together as a class and re-explain the concepts to clear their confusion. This helped a little bit as the students were finally able to complete the activity.

After the third period, Teacher A and I reflected on what happened during class and our general thoughts. We primarily reflected on the mistake I made with pacing her third period class and about Student E's response during the second period. Teacher A never explicitly tells her students the skills that she is slowly developing in her students. Today, her students displayed the fruits of Teacher A's labor. Student E's response during class made me look forward to hearing how the rest of the class would sound when talking about history as the school year goes on. I am very excited to see how much the students' disciplinary literacy skills have developed by the end of the semester. Additionally, today's class taught me the importance of pacing during a lesson and identifying the gaps in the students' learning and knowledge.

DBQ Introduction Lesson, 10/21/2025, 8:15 AM to 3:00 PM, Raven Middle School

Today is another A Day, so Teacher A only has her 2nd and 3rd periods. We had a meeting with Dr. Borns during 1st period, so I didn't observe another teacher's class, like I usually do. After the meeting, Teacher A briefed me on what the students would be doing in class. It was

DBQ day! I was extremely excited to see how Teacher A was going to instruct the kids on how to approach DBQs and see students using the three disciplinary literacy skills (sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating). While she was briefing me on the process of teaching the skills to tackle a DBQ, she told me how important it is to teach your students “skills instead of history.” Whenever we’re off on a period, Teacher A always emphasizes being a facilitator in her classroom to promote longevity in teaching. She believes developing their skills to analyze, read, write, and talk about history is vastly more important than lecturing about historical facts and events during class. I was looking forward to seeing how developed the students’ disciplinary literacy skills were.

Teacher A’s 2nd period is a GT class of 20 students. They’re an amazing group of students who are always eager to learn and constantly blow me away with their responses. Today’s class objective was to evaluate how revolutionary the American Revolution was to other demographics from that time (women, African Americans, Native Americans). To reach this objective, the students were going to be writing a response to a DBQ with the essential question: “How revolutionary was the American Revolution?” The DBQ was entirely online, which surprised me because I had to handwrite everything for my DBQ when I was still in high school. I expressed this to Teacher A, and she told me that BCPS pays for an extremely expensive program to have DBQs entirely online, but they are amazing. The program that they were using was called “DBQ Online,” and students were able to access it through specific classroom codes. It is a program that high school students use as well, so it is great that the 8th grade students are able to have access to it and get used to the different features. There were many technical difficulties with the Chromebooks during the beginning of the lesson which frustrated students.

Many of them had to constantly ask for help or if they could get a new Chromebook because their screen would constantly freeze.

Teacher A started off the DBQ lesson by going over expectations for annotations, how to annotate, and how to use the features on the program. She reminded the students that her instruction on annotations now is going to set them up for success in high school. She told them that their high school teachers will expect them to already know how to annotate and will not take the time to *help* them annotate documents during class. This is similar to a document that I read when researching disciplinary literacy in history for my essay. In that research article by Dobbs et. Al (2016) titled “Layering Intermediate and Disciplinary Literacy Work: Lessons Learned From a Secondary Social Studies Teacher Team,” they stated that many high school teachers expected their students to already have the ability to source, contextualize, and corroborate by the time they get to high school. However, their belief was unfounded because they found that many of their students were unprepared to develop their disciplinary literacy skills. The first document that they went through together was a photograph of angry colonists trying to take down a statue of King George III using rope. Teacher A guided them through the process of looking at sources. First, look at the title of the source. Second, read the description of the source. Finally, analyze the source. In all these steps, highlight words, phrases, or parts that stand out to you, or you have questions about. She also had the students determine if the source was a primary or secondary source, and if it was a radical or conservative perspective. On the document, she had her own annotations and questions for students to answer in orange sticky notes that gave the students an idea of what they should be looking for and how they should be annotating. She told the students when they were responding to the questions in the sticky notes to change the color of the sticky notes, so she knows which annotations were created by them.

After this first document, she went over to the second document. This one highlighted the changes in percentages of wealthy representatives in Congress in Northern and Southern states. She went through the same process but focused on asking students to give her the answers, instead of giving *them* the answers. I thought she did an amazing job with ensuring students weren't just going straight to annotating but looking at every part of the source.

She cold-called some students and asked them how they knew the source was a primary or secondary source. This made me a little nervous because I don't usually like cold-calling students because they might be too anxious to answer in fear of being wrong. However, Teacher A's gentle but firm prompting and encouraging completely wiped away any of my nervousness. It's amazing to see how students are open to taking risks in her classroom because she's fostered a safe learning environment. Before the students started working independently, Teacher A went over a background essay with them and asked the students this question: "How would life after the American Revolution for women, African Americans, and Native Americans change?" This was a call back to the essential question of the DBQ, which they were introduced to in the beginning, and to the objective of class today. Additionally, the background essay informed students that the rest of the documents were going to be about the three groups of people that aren't always talked about in the American Revolution.

After Teacher A finished the first two steps of a GRR model ("I do" and "We do"), she sent them off to the last step of the model, the "You Do." During this step, I made my rounds in the classroom. I answered clarifying questions, helped students who were confused, reminded them of how to properly annotate, and observed how developed their disciplinary literacy skills were. The first skill that I observed was contextualization. There were two instances that I observed students contextualizing the sources they've read. The first occurrence was with

Student A when Teacher A asked them, “How would life after the American Revolution for women, African Americans, and Native Americans change?” Student A responded by saying that the experiences of women wouldn’t change and they would not benefit from the American Revolution because the revolution wasn’t meant for them. It was simply meant to gain independence from Great Britain. The second time I observed a student contextualizing the source they were annotating was when Student B made an incredible observation. The source (Document 5) that he was looking at was a map that showed the dates of when each state abolished slavery from 1777 to 1865. The students were expected to label every source as radical or conservative based on their interpretation of the source. Student B absolutely blew me away when he told Teacher A that he would “take it a step further and say [this source] is Reactionary because a Civil war happened as a result of [the abolition of slavery throughout the states not happening at once].” When he said this, Teacher A and I looked at each other with wide eyes. We were amazed by how he was able to connect the source with the historical context that he was already familiar with.

The second skill that I observed was corroboration. There was only one time I saw a student corroborating sources. Student C raised her hand to ask me to clarify the meaning of the dates on the map of the same source Student B was looking at. I directed her to the description of the source and read it out to her. She then asked me if Document 5 says that New York abolished slavery on a certain year (I forgot what year) then she can infer that the next document about the experiences of African Americans *is* a valedictorian speech from a free black man who graduated from a university in New York. I didn’t have the heart to tell her that that information was already given to her in the source description. However, I was happy that she was making inferences by corroborating her sources.

The last skill that I observed students using was sourcing. I had to tell multiple students to *read* the sources *completely*. Many of the answers to their questions about the documents are already on the documents, but they missed it. For example, a lot of students were confused about when the sources were created or what the sources were about because they completely skipped over the source descriptions. During my rounds, I was relieved that I checked on this one student because her interpretation of the text was completely wrong. Student D believed that Document 5 was telling her when states were *established* rather than when they *abolished slavery*. I believe that sourcing is the skill that most students are still struggling with, compared to contextualizing and corroborating. They don't read the source completely, which takes away from their understanding of the source and engagement with it because they start analyzing when they're still lost. Though, I completely understand their struggles because it was something that I used to do all the time in high school in my AP US History and AP World History classes. However, I believe that with continuous reminders of what their first steps of looking at a source should be, the students will start getting the hang of it. Since I am going to be teaching social studies to middle school students, once I graduate from college, I think at the pace these students are going at now, they will be experts at sourcing by the end of the year.

References

Dobbs, C. L., Ippolito, J., & Charner-Laird, M. (2016). Layering Intermediate and Disciplinary Literacy Work: Lessons Learned From a Secondary Social Studies Teacher Team. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 60(2), 131–139.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44011363>

Testing + DBQ Continuation, 10/28/2025, 8:15 AM to 3:00 PM, Raven Middle School

Today is the first time that I will be interacting with my B Day students after a few weeks of only having placement on A days. My B Day students are a diverse group of students. Periods 1 and 3 are both standard classes with small class sizes, but the classroom vibes are quite different. Period 1 is quiet, while Period 3 is very energetic and eager to learn. Finally, period 4 is my only GT class on B days and they are a large group of 30 students. I've found that with my GT class, they only need a little guidance or support because of how independent they are with completing assignments. In this fieldnote, I will focus on my observations on my two standard classes.

During first period, a few students had to finish their test, so the rest of the class finished working on annotating the rest of the documents on the DBQ. Teacher A asked me if I could work one-on-one with students who struggled on the test and those who were struggling with annotating the documents. I still floated around to help other students but the two students that I worked with the most were Student F and Student G. According to Teacher A, Student F and Student G *struggled* during their test and so she was a little worried if they were annotating the documents correctly. I sat with them at their table and asked them what document they were annotating right now. They weren't on the same document, so I decided to start working with Student F first. One of the annotations required by the students was to label whether the source was a "primary" or "secondary" source. They would also have to support their choice of label by underlining or highlighting evidence in the source that led to that answer. I asked her "Is this source primary or secondary?" and I noticed how unsure she was when I asked her that question. She replied, "It's secondary." At first, I was caught off guard, but I managed to school my expression and calmly asked her, "How do you know? Show me where you found evidence of it being a secondary source." She zeroed in on the source description and pointed at the date, which

said “1776.” Instead of telling her she was wrong, I asked her, “What was happening during 1776?” She looked a little confused as to why I wasn’t telling her she was right, so I continued to ask questions so she could recognize her mistake. Finally, her eyes lit up and she said, “OH! 1776, I thought it was like 1996.” I laughed it off and told her it was fine but reminded her that 1776 *was* almost 300 years ago.

After labeling the source as primary, students must then write one to two annotations on the source. Document 7 is letter from Abigail Adams where she emphasizes the importance of equal rights for women. Student F had already highlighted sentences and phrases, but she didn’t annotate them. I reminded her that they needed to highlight *and* annotate whatever they highlighted. We explained why phrases or sentences jumped out to her and what she thought it meant. Student F did a fairly good job understanding the document and annotating; she just needed me to ask her some scaffolding questions. However, Student F struggled a lot with aligning her annotations to what she wanted to label the source as showing a degree of change that was “radical” or “conservative.” Her annotations focused on how the degree of change for women during the American Revolution was conservative, but her summary of the document said it was radical. I had to work with her very closely and correct her to ensure her annotations and claims were consistent and aligned. Since I worked with her to annotate Document 7 step-by-step and in-depth, she was able to get started on Document 8 independently. I felt a sense of fulfillment after seeing her gain confidence in her annotations and responses. Throughout my one-on-one work with her, I tried to be intentional with the questions that I asked her. That was probably the hardest part of trying to help Student F out. I didn’t want to give her “yes/no” questions, but I also didn’t want to give hard-to-understand questions that would just confuse her even further. I found that she struggled with contextualizing the source and understanding the

implications of it in the context of the time. I was so happy when I checked in on her, and she was on the right track. It felt like my intentionality and hard work were all worth it! By the latter half of first period, she could annotate the Document on her own, and I could circulate the class to help other students.

Teacher A has one more standard class, which is her 3rd period. She requested that I do the same as 1st period and work one-on-one with students who are struggling with annotating the DBQ. During 3rd period, I worked with multiple students: Student H, Student I, and Student J. I found that these students had the same struggles as Student F. However, they had a better understanding of how to contextualize the source. Student H, like Student F, needed guidance on *how* to annotate the source. As I kept working with him, I could see how he was slowly getting the hang of it, until I eventually didn't have to sit next to him but would just occasionally check on him. I noticed during class how open the students were to ask *me* for help, rather than Teacher A. This made me extremely happy because I feel like they are starting to trust me and *know* that I am here to help.

One of the students who raised his hand was Student I. When I asked him what he needed help on, he just told me he didn't know *what* to annotate on Document 8. It was a chart that showed statistics of women before and after the American Revolution. I was honestly not prepared for this type of question because in my mind, it is so obvious what they need to annotate and highlight. However, I believe that because the evidence was shown in an alternate way other than a regular text, the students struggled to understand the source and annotate it. I approached Student I's question the same way as how I prompted Student F. I first asked him what the source was about or showing us (I hoped they would be able to acknowledge the title of the source rather than say they didn't know). Once he responded, I went through each of the

statistics with him. The statistics were broken into different sections. The first section was on the percentages of illiterate women, white or black, and how it decreased after the war. The second section was when states abolished primogeniture, allowing first-born daughters to receive inheritance. The third section was on when states started allowing women to vote or be representatives in legislature. Finally, the last section was showing the more than a century long difference between the ratification of the U.S. Constitution and the 19th Amendment. Student I I didn't know how to put meaning behind the percentages, dates, and numbers. Which is why my questioning process focused on making sure he was *actually* reading and analyzing the source, while thinking about the time and implications of the experiences of women during that time. He understood how to annotate the source quickly, so I left him alone to work independently so I could check on the other students.

The next student that needed my help was Student J. He had the same problem as Student I with not knowing how to annotate the same source, Document 8. Once I went through the same process that I did with Student I, but what I found with Student J was that his contextualizing skills were far more advanced than Student I's. For Student I, I had to give him hints when I asked him questions about historical connections/implications about women in America. With Student J, I asked him what the years between the ratification of the U.S. Constitution and the ratification of the 19th Amendment showed us and his response blew me away. He didn't need any form of prompting and just gave me a very well thought out answer. He told me that it shows that the people in power didn't care about women back then and even now because it took so long to ratify the 19th Amendment.

This was a very fulfilling day because I was able to work closely with a group of students that I normally don't get the chance to work with. Additionally, it was extremely rewarding to

see students have that lightbulb moment and gain confidence in themselves. By the end of class, I was running out of students to work one-on-one with! I am so excited to see how much more these students will grow and develop their skills and I look forward to working with them again soon.

Writing the DBQ Response, 11/04/2025, 8:15 AM to 3:00 PM, Raven Middle School

Today was an A Day, so I was free during first period to finish assignments while I waited for second period to come. Today's classes were purely focused on writing up their DBQ responses to the question: "How revolutionary was the American Revolution?" Teacher A told me that she was going to be going through the writing process, step-by-step, to ensure the students understood what exactly she wanted them to write. I have never had the chance to read the students' writing, so I was really excited to be a part of their writing process.

After the students in Teacher A's 2nd period got settled down, she told them that the entirety of class would be dedicated to working on their DBQ response. She had them open the DBQ Online website so they could use their annotations of the documents to construct their response. The first writing model that she showed them was the thesis. She wanted them to write their thesis exactly how she had the model. The thesis had them arguing that some or all minority groups (African Americans, Women, and Native Americans) experienced either radical or conservative change during the American Revolution.

For the purpose of following along to get the hang of writing a DBQ response, Teacher A had them first write about African Americans and how they experienced a radical change during the American Revolution. However, I believe that Teacher A wasn't super clear about the fact

that they were only *following along*, and their response didn't have to be exactly what Teacher A had on the board. Many students were getting confused about what exactly they were doing. Some raised their hands to ask me if it was okay that they wanted to say that African Americans experienced conservative change rather than radical change because they thought they *had* to say they experienced radical change in their response. During my rounds around the classroom, I had to clarify to a lot of students that Teacher A was only showing a model; it was not *required* for them to make their response exactly like hers. One student, Student A, struggled a lot with the fact that Teacher A started off the thesis about African Americans because she started off *her* thesis talking about Women. She looked extremely bothered by this fact, so I tried my best to reassure her that how she approached the response was completely acceptable. I had to reassure her twice. I thought this was an interesting reaction towards a thesis model because it gave me an insight into how some students could feel towards being constricted to a model during class.

After going over the thesis, Teacher A went over how to write a topic sentence. She showed them two ways to write their topic sentences, a simple and advanced way. The simple topic sentence was straightforward: "African Americans experienced (Radical/Conservative) change during the American Revolution." While the advanced topic sentence required the students to put their opinion in their writing: "Due to incremental abolitionist laws, African Americans experienced (Radical/Conservative) change during the American Revolution." She allowed students to copy the topic sentence model down exactly but prefaced that if they choose to go down the simple or advanced topic sentence route, they *must* keep their topic sentences consistent throughout.

Teacher A then modeled how to introduce a quotation from a source. She told the students that instead of, "In Document 6, (insert quote here)," which is how the students usually

write, she wanted the students to include a brief description of the source like, “In Document 6, a valedictory speech from a free black man in 1819.” This is one of the areas that students struggled with when they had to do the same for Document 5. It was particularly hard for them to describe Document 5 because it was a map. The students were used to describing texts, so they were stumped when they had to try and describe Document 5. I had multiple students ask me for help because they didn’t know how to describe it. This requirement when introducing sources proved to be a struggle for students when they had to describe Document 8 which was a chart of statistics on women before and after the American Revolution. Again, students struggled because it was unfamiliar to them and unlike the usual texts that they had to cite.

Introducing quotations wasn’t the most challenging part of writing their DBQ response; it was backing up their evidence with historical reasoning. Teacher A wanted them to write one sentence presenting their opinion on the amount of change a minority group experienced and the other sentence to use their historical knowledge about the implications of the radical/conservative changes that minority groups experienced. Rather than explaining why the quotes were important to supporting their claim, multiple students tended to just explain what the quote was saying. When I was in middle school, I also made the mistake of paraphrasing the quote and always got points off for it. I had to tell multiple students that when Teacher A and I already understood what the quote was saying, there was no need for them to re-explain it to us. What we want is for them to use their understanding of history to explain why this specific quote was so significant to their writing. I could see the cogs working in the students' heads when I explained it to them. When I checked back in on them, I could see the progress in their writing. They weren’t all the way there, but through consistent repetition, I believe they will be able to become more proficient writers!

While the students were crafting their responses to the DBQ, I observed one of the students, Evan, putting his head down while Teacher A modeled the writing process. I was worried so I went to check in on him. When I asked him what was wrong, he told me that he didn't want to get his Chromebook out to write because Teacher A wouldn't stop talking, so it was distracting him. I was surprised by his response because I wasn't expecting him to outrightly complain about Teacher A. I came up with a compromise of having him take out his Chromebook to at least get started with the assignment. I wasn't able to see Teacher A and him interact while I was making my rounds. Apparently, Teacher A had a conversation with Student K because she also saw him disengaged from class. She said that Student K is an extremely advanced writer, which is why he was getting frustrated with how slowly Teacher A was going through the writing process. She had to explain to him that while he doesn't need support when writing, the other students do. When I was doing my rounds to check in on students, I noticed how focused Student K was in writing his DBQ response. He didn't raise his hand to ask for help or to ask any clarifying questions. When I finally had the opportunity to check in on him, I was blown away by his writing ability. It was incredible to believe that he was only an 8th grader when his writing was on par with some of my peers' writing. By the time class ended, Student K, who started writing his response later than his classmates, was farther along in his response than they were.

There were two other students that impressed me with their outstanding writing skills, Student L and Student B. They both had no problem with transitioning between writing about different minority groups. Additionally, they weren't struggling as much in writing about their historical reasoning as the other students. If anything, they were more worried about their word choices and style of writing, rather than the actual content of their response. This class period

really opened my eyes to the wide range of students in the GT program. The GT program was a culmination of students who were good at school, Honors students, and Advanced Placement students. It was hard to find a good standard for activities and the rigor of the class when the abilities of students vary so greatly. This class was also one of the first times that I had students specifically ask me for help or just have me look over their responses. I am looking forward to learning more about how to handle situations with students like Student A and Student K as I continue to spend my time with this group of students.

Teacher Interview: Final Paper

11/23/2025

Introduction

Through my interview with my School Mentor, Teacher A, I learned about her and her teaching background, beliefs, and values about literacy, what literacy practices she uses, and her experiences with professional development. I have had the amazing opportunity of getting to know Teacher A and observing her teaching in a classroom. She is an 8th grade U.S. History teacher at Raven Middle School for both Standard and Gifted Talented (GT) classes; as well as the Social Studies Department Chair of Raven Middle School.

Teacher Demographics

Teacher A has been a teacher for 29 years and has worked in three middle schools; Raven Middle School is the third middle school that she's worked in. Raven Middle School is a Magnet school with various magnet programs including a performing arts program, visual arts program, STEM program, and an advanced languages program. She says that Raven Middle School has

“really nice children” and “staff that’s willing to work.” Additionally, she describes Raven Middle School as the easiest middle school that she has had to work in, and she has worked in two others.

When asked if she had a mentor during her first year of teaching, she said she did not, and it was “very challenging to go at it alone.” She explained that she did not have great lesson planning skills but had good management skills. This made it even harder because “the kids were ready to listen, but [she] did not know what exactly to say [in class].” This just made me realize how fortunate I am to have her as my mentor. Her teaching and management styles are exactly how I want to run my future classrooms. I have learned so much from her already and every time I am at placement I discover something new about myself, about her, and about the education system. During my field placement last semester with Teacher C, Teacher C also emphasized the importance of having a mentor. Their years of experience and constructive feedback will be extremely valuable.

Teacher A is a black woman who unlike most of her students, who are also black, had a West Indian/Caribbean upbringing. Her cultural upbringing differs from her students because she did not grow up with African American cultural values. She stated that her ways of discipline and her boundaries look different than some teachers. Additionally, the school that she attended in high school was a predominantly white school; There was only about “10 black people in [her] graduating class.” This made her college experience at Morgan State University more eye-opening; It made her realize how rough she had it in high school as Morgan State is an HBCU and she was surrounded by black people. What she has found throughout her years of teaching is that “the students who have cultures different than [her] seem to connect with [her] pretty

easily.” She has never really changed herself or how she acts, which has worked very well in fostering amazing connections with her students.

Beliefs & Values about Literacy

I believe disciplinary literacy skills are essential to social studies because of the class's nature. Teacher A has the same belief. She said that “to just be literate but not have the skill sets needed for that particular discipline, gives you an entry point but doesn’t always help you.” I read an article while researching Disciplinary Literacy in class, “Layering Intermediate and Disciplinary Literacy Work: Lessons Learned From a Secondary Social Studies Teacher Team” (Dobbs et al., 2016). The article details the exact problem that Teacher A describes; Basic literacy skills are an entry point to understanding a subject area on a surface level. Which is why she believes in “heavily integrating” disciplinary literacy skills in as many lessons as she can. Additionally, Dobbs et al. (2016) stresses that consistent instruction on basic literacy skills should continue after elementary into secondary education. This topic caused our conversation to derail a bit. We both agreed that students should have constant opportunities to improve their comprehension and discussion abilities. Skills like corroborating, contextualizing, and sourcing are skills that they will need to use in their daily lives.

The next two questions that I asked her were about culture and representation in her classroom. I first asked her how she represents different identities in her classes. Since she teaches U.S. History, it is difficult to connect it to the various identities present in her classroom. However, depending on the content that she is teaching, she tries to pivot to add context that may be relevant to students. One example she brought up is her Hispanic students’ reactions to the annexation of Texas. They are always surprised by the audacity of America during this event. Additionally, although she does not usually have East Asian students, she still believes it is

important for students to understand the contributions of Chinese immigrants on the West Coast to the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. She applies this to several types of groups in America, as she wants her students to be aware of the roles that they played and their significance.

The second question that I asked focused on the role that culture and identity play in literacy learning. Teacher A took a little time to think about this question but responded saying that it “gives you the perspective that you might look at different ideas through.” An example that she gave was if someone were a part of the LGBTQ+ community and read a story, the impact of the story would not be the same as someone who is not a part of the community. Culture and identity shape your perspective. She also warned of the dangers of not being sensitive to the various cultural backgrounds students may have. If one does not consider them, they may find themselves in a situation that was not planned for where kids are upset by a lesson that was taught, even if it was not their intention.

Literacy Pedagogies & Practices

One of the first things Teacher A told me when I first started my field placement was how discussion-heavy classes were. In every single class of hers, GT and Standard, the students are always discussing what they have learned and sharing their opinions with their peers. However, fostering dialogue and discussion between students in the classroom is easier said than done. When I asked Teacher A how she does it, she chuckled because she knows how difficult it is to get students to talk to one another. She affirmed that it is not easy and a lot of teachers will try to just tell students to talk, but it takes time to be able to release students freely like that. As the Department Chair of the social studies department in Raven Middle School, she works very closely with her teachers to ensure that students know that discussions are expected in class. By

the time they get to her classroom, she benefits from their previous experiences, and the students are more comfortable. However, when she was not the Department Chair, she had a specific way of incrementally teaching her students the “art of conversation.” First, students will know from when they first start class that there will be an expectation for discussion through the study groups that she puts them in for the quarter. Second, she starts it off with very intentional conversations. On a slide, she includes conversation topics she brings up one by one, while circulating the classroom to hear student responses. Teacher A acknowledged that these are not “real” conversations, but having the students hear their voices in group settings is extremely helpful to getting them used to talking. The students are also previously assigned numbers so when Teacher A instructs students who were assigned the number one, they are the only one who should be talking while their group listens. This ensures that the students are learning how to listen but also allows her to hear them and give feedback to each student. Lastly, she would start asking questions that *forced* them to interact with each other. However, she would always make sure they knew what types of things are expected to be discussed for each question. The most important part of fostering this type of classroom environment is to never stop so the students know there are expectations, it becomes routine, and it becomes easy for them.

Discussion is one of the literacy practices that has influenced her teaching the most. It is an essential skill in society. The way you speak to others can either open doors or shut them. The other practice that has influenced her teaching the most is annotation. Teacher A is a person who will need to read something more than once and takes notes for the information to stick.

Annotation is such a valuable skill to have because it makes students feel more comfortable starting conversations about topics during class. Both of us have noticed how the students are

slowly starting to find their own style of annotations. Which is extremely exciting as some of them have asked Teacher A if they can just annotate by asking questions or creating hashtags.

The last question that I asked Teacher A about her literacy practices is whether she prefers to have students work collaboratively or independently. Teacher A stated that she prefers a mix, as most of the time that is what is going on in her classes. She believes that kids “need that sustained quiet to be able to form their own thoughts.” However, sometimes when a student is “not genuinely curious about a topic, it’s hard, so discussing it with a group before [they] set off on [their] own is helpful to get [their] thoughts together.” I love this approach because hearing your peers’ perspectives aids in crafting your own opinion about topics as it acts like a baseline.

Professional Development

The last set of questions that I asked Teacher A were about professional development. I first asked her about what aspects of literacy that teachers will need to consider, to prepare students for their futures. She said that “teachers need to focus more on discourse literacy.” She acknowledged that it is not a new aspect of literacy, “but it does not get the focus that it needs.” It is an essential skill that many researchers, including Leslie Duhaylongsod et al. (2023) in a research article titled, “Talk is Literacy,” have long since stressed the importance of teaching it due to it supporting or improving student comprehension. What I loved about Teacher A’s response is that she considers the increasing social awkwardness seen in the younger generations. Which is why she believes focusing more on discourse literacy will support the communication skills of secondary students. Additionally, she claims that reading comprehension “continues to be the greatest barrier to understanding for our students.” This reminds me of when I had my first field placement with another teacher at Raven Middle School, Teacher C. I started the spring

semester last year, and Teacher C and I talked about how much the 6th graders were struggling with comprehending “Animal Farm” by George Orwell. So much so, that Teacher C wanted to take it out of the GT curriculum. Reading comprehension does not have to be a problem. If consistently taught from elementary to middle to high school, it will help students be prepared for when they go out into society.

Raven Middle School uses a great high-quality program related to literacy within the Social Studies Department called the Think like a Historian protocol. Teacher A stated that it helps students to “understand that you have to approach different disciplines with diverse skill sets.” Disciplinary literacy skills for math classes will not be transferable to English classes because of the specificity of those skills. Which is why it is so important to have students recognize the many skills they are employing in their classes and what makes each of those skills unique from one another.

Conclusion

I enjoyed interviewing Teacher A because it gave me a better insight into who she was as a person and her values as a teacher. It was extremely interesting to hear her answers because her beliefs were identical to mine. I enjoy teaching Social Studies so much *because* I was taught the required disciplinary literacy skills in Middle School, which made my learning experience more enjoyable. These are skills that I also use in everyday life when consuming literature or watching the news. Additionally, learning about how intentional Teacher A is about everything in her classroom just amazes me. Her years of experience are so valuable to my learning experience as a future teacher, and I cannot wait to learn more from her.

References

- Dobbs, C. L., Ippolito, J., & Charner-Laird, M. (2016). Layering Intermediate and Disciplinary Literacy Work: Lessons Learned From a Secondary Social Studies Teacher Team. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 60(2), 131–139.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44011363>
- Duhaylongsod, L., Al-Adeimi S., & Reisman, A. (2023). Talk is literacy. ASCD, 81(4).
<https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/talk-is-literacy>

Appendix

Interview Questions

- **Teacher Demographics**
 - How long have you been a teacher?
 - Did you have a mentor during your first year? What was that like?
 - How would you describe the school you currently teach in?
 - How did your upbringing compare to that of your students? How does your racial/cultural identity compare to your students?
- **Beliefs & Values about Literacy**
 - Do you think literacy is essential in your subject area? How/Why?
 - How do you represent different identities in your classes/through your curriculum?
 - What role do you think culture and identity play in literacy learning?
- **Literacy Pedagogies & Practices**
 - How do you foster dialogue and discussion between students in the classroom?
 - Do you prefer to have students work collaboratively or independently? Why?
 - What literacy practices or experiences have influenced your teaching the most?
- **Professional Development**
 - What new aspects of literacy will teachers need to consider to prepare students for their futures?
 - What literacy practices/skills do students struggle with the most in your subject?
 - Does your school have any innovative or quality programs or initiatives related to literacy?

Final Presentation

Final Project: Teacher Interview

Justine Bagasbas
ED-367

My Interviewee

Teacher A
*Social Studies Department Chair
Raven Middle School*

Teacher Demographics

Has been teaching for 29 years; Raven Middle School is her 3rd middle school

Didn't have a mentor during her first year

She is a black woman and majority of her students are black

Beliefs & Values about Literacy

Being literate ≠ Having disciplinary literacy skills

She tries to add relevant context to historical events to relate it to students

Culture and identity changes the way you view things

Literacy Pedagogies & Practices

Dialogue is extremely difficult to foster in a classroom

Be intentional and consistent about how you integrate it into classrooms

Collaborative and independent work are both valuable!

Professional Development

Discourse literacy isn't new but should be focused on

"Reading comprehension continues to be a barrier to student success"

Think Like a Historian Protocol

Conclusion

Disciplinary literacy skills are extremely important, and it is up to teachers to consistently, continuously, and intentionally integrate them into our lessons. This ensures that a student's learning experience, both now and in the future, are enriched.