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Theory to practice: Textbook analysis in the social studies classroom.

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Applying educational theories to daily practice can pose challenges for many teachers who find themselves limited in time and resources. The purpose of this article is to provide educators with a lesson plan and strategies that allow for the practical application of textbook analysis in a middle grades classroom. Through examination and comparison of different historical sources, students are able to conduct an analysis of text that will reveal potential biases and consistent themes while remaining engaged.

In recent years it seems that doing more with less has become the new normal in education. While the challenges associated with decreases in funding and increases in class sizes are widespread, students are also thriving in this time of “scarcity.” The combination of technology and best practices has led to a generation of educators who are innovative and are developing lessons that are research-based, personalized, and standards-driven. As an educator, I was encouraged by the gains made in our profession as teachers began to take a serious look at the methods and materials used in the past and find new ways apply them in the present. In spite of my excitement, I remained realistic and the difficult truth was that many teachers lacked support and were struggling with lesson development. In speaking with my colleagues, I heard time and again that while research and suggestions given sounded great in theory, they were not practical. Challenge accepted. I wanted to find a way to model the process for my department and ultimately, create something that was research-based and useful in the classroom.

Inspiration Provided

Inspiration struck a few months ago when I was asked to review an unpublished manuscript, now published in this special issue. The premise of this piece, co-authored by Dr. Charles Elfer (Clayton State University) and Dr. Scott Roberts (Central Michigan University), related conducting textbook analyses using the Salzburger narrative as a basis [Editor’s Note: This article is the first in this issue]. Most students of Georgia Studies will learn about the Salzburgers as part of the tale of Georgia’s colonization. Escaping religious persecution from the Catholics in Salzburg, located in present-day Austria, the Protestant group was offered refuge in the colony of Georgia. In most textbooks, the Salzburgers are depicted as productive and successful farmers with a rich history that can still be found in the southeastern part of the state.

It is said that the winners write history. If we believe this to be true, then as educators we must consider the possibility of bias in the information used to instruct our students and, more importantly, prepare students to detect and discern this potential influence. In their article, Elfer and Roberts (Roberts & Elfer, 2015) explained the process of their research and shared an analysis that demonstrated how the Salzburger summary provided in texts sometimes differed depending on author and time of publication. The authors noted that while most aspects of the Salzburgers remained consistent, textbooks published in the early 20th century often focused more on the less positive inclusion of the Catholic involvement in the Salzburger narrative. For example, Roberts and
Elfer (2014) cited palatable anti-Catholic sentiment associated with the reincarnation of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States and such bias was noticeable in texts published around this time.

**Theory to Practice**

Text analysis is critical to learning and has been studied extensively (Degler, 1964; Duran & Null, 2009; Wasburn, 1997). While much information related to text analysis and its importance was provided in the Elfer and Roberts’ piece, a recurring theme throughout the manuscript was the concept of bias and the potential for historical narratives to be influenced positively or negatively by author bias. Considering the source is more than a social studies skill, it is a much needed life skill. An element of historical thinking is to question multiple sources, but essential to critical thinking is the ability to validate information and listen to multiple perspectives. Teachers frequently read information that is of interest to them and inspiring but too often that is where the process ends. The missing step is turning theory presented through research and scholarly articles into practical and applicable classroom experiences.

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, I developed a lesson plan with the aim of transforming quality research into best instructional practice. Wanting to make the lesson generalizable, the focus was not on the specific topic of the Salzburger narrative, but rather how a student in an upper elementary or middle grades classroom could conduct their own text or resources analysis regardless of the topic of study.

**The Lesson Plan**

This lesson titled, “Consider the Source: Analyzing & Comparing Informational Resources” is developed for use in an 8th grade Georgia Studies classroom. While it is presently designed to be used in correlation with the study of the German Salzburgers and their role in the colonization of Georgia during its Trustee period, the strategies presented address crucial Common Core skills including comparative thinking and reading, and writing to develop higher order thinking (Silver, Dewing, & Perini, 2012). As such, the lesson can be adapted for use with other historical topics outside the study of Georgia history or the Salzburgers.

“Consider the Source” helps make cornerstones of social studies, like text-analysis, accessible to the classroom teacher, whether they are first-year or veteran teachers. The lesson provides clear objectives, essential questions, vocabulary, and easy to follow, step-by-step procedures making lesson planning easy and effective. Strategies used are grounded in research and provide teacher-created background reading and organizers that will aid educators in instructing and students’ in understanding bias detection and the potential of influence on the validity of information. The hope is that with “Consider the Source: Analyzing & Comparing Informational Resources,” teachers will be able to work with students to use the strengths and weaknesses of multiple text and media sources to compare information and use critical thinking to make judgments regarding the consistency of historical content across differing mediums.

**References**


**About the Author**

**Heather MacKenzie** is the Instructional Coordinator for Social Studies and World Languages for Henry County Schools in Georgia, a position she accepted after 13 years as an elementary, middle, and special education teacher. In addition Heather works as a consultant and curriculum developer for the Georgia Humanities Council. Her research interests include civic education, the integration of literacy and social studies, and the practical application of educational theory to engage students. She can be reached at hezmac18@gmail.com
Introduction: It has been said that the winners write history. Dr. Scott Roberts and Dr. Charles Elfer explored this theory when they conducted a textbook analysis that focused on the Salzburger narrative in middle level Georgia history textbooks. Based on research conducted in the field of text-analysis, this historical inquiry provides students with an opportunity for historical inquiry of the Salzburger narrative from the resources available in their Georgia Studies courses.

Overview: In this lesson, students will analyze historical evidence in order to test the theory of potential bias and influence of current events on story of the Salzburger settlement in colonial era Georgia. Using a variety of available secondary sources, students will analyze information pertaining to the Salzburgers for commonalities and differences. In the end, students will make generalizations and text-supported judgments to argue what, if any, bias exists among sources used for educational purposes in the Georgia Studies classroom.

Suggested Grade Level: Eighth Grade

Time: 90 minutes (This does not include time needed for the evaluation, which may be completed for homework or assigned separately should additional time be needed)

Standards:
- NCSS Theme 1. Culture
- NCSS Theme 2. Time, Continuity, and Change
- NCSS Theme 3. People, Places, and Environments
- NCSS Theme 5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- NCSS Theme 6. Power, Authority, and Governance
- NCSS Theme 10. Civic Ideas and Practices
- SS8H2 The student will analyze the colonial period of Georgia's history.
  b. Evaluate the Trustee Period of Georgia’s colonial history, emphasizing the role of the Salzburgers, Highland Scots, malcontents, and the Spanish threat from Florida.
- ELACC6-8RH1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- ELACC6-8RH2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- ELACC6-8WHST1: Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.
  b. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources.

Information Processing Skills –
- Compare similarities and differences.
- Identify and use primary and secondary sources.
- Identify social studies reference resources for a specific purpose.
- Draw conclusions and make generalizations.
- Check for consistency of information.
Connection to C3 Framework
This lesson asks students to participate in all four dimensions of the NCSS C3 Framework.
(Dimension 1)-Students begin by analyzing texts about the Salzburgers in order to develop questions and a research focus about the information found in the accounts of the community. (Dimension 2)-Students then work on searching for other sources in order to create a fuller representation of the Salzburgers (Dimension 3)-During the research process, students will be gathering and evaluating resources in order to answer their questions. (Dimension 4)- A critique of an informational source will be completed. In this critique students will demonstrate in written form, their determination of the reliability of the source by comparing its features with other sources on the same topic.

Materials/Resources:
- New Georgia Encyclopedia
  - Salzburgers - http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/salzburgers
- Georgia Stories

Teacher Note: The resources listed below are based on popular offerings for Georgia Studies courses. If one of the publications listed is not available to your school, the lesson can be completed using the sources already provided by your district. Additionally, excerpts from sources used from the study, which the lesson is based on, may be found in the appendix and may also be used for the lesson or for extension purposes.
- Georgia, Its Heritage and Its Promise – Clairmont Press
- Time Travel Through Georgia – Georgia Voyager Publications
- Digital Textbook for iPad available from Georgia Public Broadcasting

Materials to be copied:
- Handout #1 – Reading Sheet: Consider the Source: Analyzing & Comparing Informational Resources
- Handout #2 & #3 – Source Analysis Sheets for Note-Taking and Comparison (These may be copied front/back to save paper)
- Optional – Copy of the Evaluation Rubric

Vocabulary:
- Bias
- Persecution
- Piety
- Primary Source
- Protestant
- Reliability
- Secondary Source

Useful Resources:
- For educators who perhaps need a refreshment or tutorial on how to teach students how to think like a historian, an instructional video (approximately 35 minutes) may be found at http://teachinghistory.org/best-practices/using-primary-sources/25226.
Essential Question(s):
- What consistencies exist among text and visual resources regarding the Salzburger narrative? Differences?
- How do current events and public perception influence historical content and curriculum?

Objectives: Students will -
- Understand that secondary sources have the potential to be biased.
- Analyze secondary sources for potential bias as well as for consistency of information.
- Draw conclusions regarding the validity of information related to the Salzburger narrative and develop text-supported arguments for their conclusions.

Procedures:

Step One -
1. Explain that today they will become historical detective and use their skills of inquiry and investigation to learn about the Salzburgers and their impact on colonial Georgia. To do this, they will be examining multiple secondary sources related to this group of settlers. However, before they begin reading the different sources, they must first complete a quick “detective” course in which they will learn how to analyze information from different sources.
2. Provide each student with a copy of Handout #1 (Consider the Source: Analyzing & Comparing Informational Resources). Based on the learning styles and needs of your class, you may choose to read this handout as a whole group or individually. The purpose of this sheet is to acquire some foundational information regarding informational sources and how to compare and contrast information gained from them.
3. After reviewing Handout #1, discuss the questions given at the bottom of the sheet. Suggested answers are given below:
   a. How can bias influence accuracy of information? Bias can influence the reliability of information by being selective of what is shared; Readers may not get the “whole story” or left with a single-sided impression of history.
   b. How do secondary sources compare to primary sources? Secondary sources are written after the period of study while primary sources are written or created at the actual time of study; Secondary sources are usually someone else’s interpretation of history.
   c. What inquiry skills should you use when comparing informational sources? When comparing sources you should look for potential bias by examining the sources (Who produced the information? When? What was occurring at the time of publication that may have influenced what was written?). Additionally, look for consistency of information across multiple sources.
4. Teacher Note: There are a few options for completing the activity portion of this lesson. These options, determined by the learning styles and needs of your class, are explained below –
   a. Students may work in pairs or individually and you may assign the specific sources to each pairing or individual.
   b. Students may work in pairs or individually and you may allow students to choose from the available sources.
   c. You may choose to set-up stations. This would be most effective with partners or small groups. Set a timer and allow students to rotate through each station to complete their note-taking sheet. *If you select this option, it is recommended that you set up your class in advance to maximize time.
Step Two –
1. Using one of the options above, students will complete the activity portion of this assignment.
2. Begin by providing each student a copy of Handout #2 (Source Analysis – Note-Taking Sheet) and allow students to complete using informational resources about the Salzburgers and their settlement in the Georgia colony. * Even if students work in pairs, each individual should be accountable for his or her own notes.
3. As students are investigating by examining the materials, it is suggested that you facilitate by circulating and prompting the students with questions to deepen their thought process. For example –
   a. What do you think the author is saying?
   b. Why do you think that?
   c. How do you know this?
   d. Can you tell me more?
   e. What questions do you still have?

Step Three–
1. Having read/viewed multiple informational sources on the Salzburgers, students will now use Handout #3 (Source Analysis – Comparing Sources) to check for consistencies and omission of information across sources. This sheet will be used for the Evaluation component of this assignment.
2. Teacher Note: As with the note-taking sheet, each student should be responsible for his or her own analysis. You may choose to have them complete this portion alone, or allow them to discuss the sources but record the responses to the prompt independently.
3. Upon completion of the source comparison sheet, bring the whole group back together to address any questions they may have about the assignment. This is also an opportunity for you to gauge understanding by having students' share any discrepancies in information they noted through their investigation.

Step Four –
1. To conclude the lesson, students will use the information gathered from their investigation and analysis of multiple sources to complete the evaluation. The objective of the evaluation is for students to draw conclusions, based on gathered information, regarding the impact of the Salzburger narrative.
2. To fully achieve the purpose of this lesson, the assignment should be revisited after all evaluations are scored, to discuss the differences in student responses. What was the overall consensus regarding the sources? Was information consistent or was something missing?

Evaluation:
- In her 2012 publication of Fifty Authentic Assessment Strategies, Sandra Schurr explained that critiques are used to identify and analyze positive and negative components of a product or service; these critiques in turn articulate if the product or service is effective or of quality. Through this lesson and the activities associated, students have been given the opportunity to examine multiple sources of information and make judgments regarding their reliability. To measure the students’ level of understanding, a critique of an informational source will be completed. In this critique students will demonstrate in
written form, their determination of the reliability of the source by comparing its features with other sources on the same topic.

- Student directions and a scoring rubric have been included in the appendix of this lesson plan.

**Extension:**

- Using the same procedures, students may conduct a similar inquiry of other groups of settlers listed in the standard, including the Highland Scots and malcontents.
- Assign individuals an excerpt from one of the sources used in the study [that this lesson is based on] to compare to one of the classroom sources used in this lesson.
Consider the Source! Analyzing and Comparing Informational Sources

"If it's in a textbook it must be true!" Is this always the case? Are you sure? Think about it: When was the last time you heard a rumor? What about the scandals on television that eventually turn out to be false? Although non-fiction text or media is intended to disseminate factual information, as critical thinkers we must always consider the source.

What are Secondary Sources?

Do you use textbooks in your classroom? How about nonfiction books from the library for research? If so, then you have used a secondary source. Secondary sources are sources that were written after the event they are describing.

Primary sources, first-hand sources, include documents or artifacts that were created during the period of the study. Although information can be gained from both sources, information used in secondary sources are usually a summary, analysis, or interpretation of a primary source. Because of this, they are susceptible to author bias. Readers seeking information from secondary sources employ a few techniques to identify potential bias. Furthermore, using more than one informational source will offer multiple perspectives to your learning.

Potential for Bias

The term bias refers to statements in which group, or way of thought over another. Bias is opinion. In our own way, we all demonstrate selective of their words, tone, or the information they choose to share. However, they must be cautious in their writing to avoid interjecting their own bias. They do this by supporting their claims with facts and logical reasoning.

Readers can check for bias by asking themselves, “what impression does this leave me with?” Or, “what information may be missing?” Locating the date of publication will also offer insight to the source. For example, informational sources published at the time of WWII could present information pertaining to Japanese immigration negatively. Using prior knowledge can be very revealing to your investigation.

Searching for the Truth

When trying to determine the reliability, or trustworthiness of a source’s accuracy it helps to activate your inquiry skills. You can do this by comparing sources for consistency of information. Are the same facts repeated across multiple sources or do you notice discrepancies or gaps in the information? Thinking like a historian will require you to examine multiple sources of information and interpret them for meaning. Remember—historians ask questions! They do not just learn, they actively think!
Source Analysis — Comparing Sources

Directions: Select two of the informational sources previously analyzed. Use the prompts below to compare the similarities and differences in information.

Sources Being Compared: ___________________________ & ___________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consistency of Information</th>
<th>Contradicting Information</th>
<th>Potential Bias?</th>
<th>Opinion of Source Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What information was noted in both sources?</td>
<td>What information was provided in one source but not the other?</td>
<td>Putting the sources in the context of author/publication, was any potential bias detected? What?</td>
<td>Based on your analysis and comparison, do you find these sources to be accurate or reliable? Why or Why not?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MacKenzie, H.
Consider the Source: Be Critical!

Have you ever read a book, seen a movie, or tried a new restaurant because someone you know recommended it? Recommendations are a form of critiques. Critiques, good or bad, can be useful in making decisions. You recently completed a task in which you compared sources of information to learn more about _______________________. Now is your chance to select one of those sources and write a critique of your own!

Use the checklist below to help formulate your critique.

___ Select one of the informational sources analyzed for this assignment
___ Was the information helpful? Why or why not?
___ Was the information reliable or consistent with other sources?
___ How did the source compare with other sources of information?
___ Would you recommend this source to someone trying to learn more about the given topic?

On the lines below, write a review addressing these points. Remember to state clearly whether the source is reliable and support with evidence from your reading.

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