

SAMPLE SUMMER INSTITUTE REFLECTION 1

This week has truly been enlightening, informative, and motivational for the teaching of not only Virginia Studies, but history in general. The two fieldtrips were particularly advantageous for me being a new Virginian and teacher of Virginia history. The three most interesting topics for me this week include Mount Vernon and the life of George Washington, the “real” story about the early documents, and the intricate workings of slavery in Virginia, the United States, and even in the world. Mount Vernon was fascinating to me, because I felt as though everyone from the newest teacher to the most seasoned teacher could gain insightful knowledge. Our guide was helpful in providing us with going to place that most visitors would not be allowed to go and telling us stories to help our own narratives of the first president’s home and way of life. The early documents lecture by Rosie Zagarri was interesting to me, because the speaker helped me understand the social/political background for the reasons why the documents were written. I also appreciated the way she discussed in detail the various types of governments that were instrumental in eventually creating our own type of government for the United States. I now understand how the monarchy of England led people to want the total opposite, a confederacy, but then eventually led to the republic that we have today. The lecture about slavery by Adam Rothman was a prime example of how to teach even a college course using primary sources. Through his use of primary sources in various mediums, I gained a clearer vision of how slavery progressed over time. Something that really sticks with me is the discussion he had about how slavery was not a static institution, but was a dynamic, changing thing which is not simply depicted by large plantations, runaway slaves, and whippings. I also found interesting the way he talked about Africa and the way slave trading was already a big part of their society even before the English started the transatlantic trading.

The readings this week were very well applied in our discussions and fieldtrips. In particular, the American Indian treaty was very beneficial to me in understanding the way that native people were completely disregarded and came out on the raw end of the deal. My thinking on this topic has changed, because I now recognize the huge need for native people to feel identified, recognized, and validated even after 400 years.

Through this week’s lectures, fieldtrips, and interactive strategies workshop, I am excited about getting back into the classroom to try out many of the new ideas. The workshops will enhance my teaching of Virginia studies immensely by encouraging the use of primary sources in all lessons, using authentic experiential activities to help my students be inside the history itself, and by using an interactive notebook.

This week and the entire summer institute have been very beneficial to my own understanding of how to study, teach, and understand Virginia History. Three things that particularly stuck out to me this week were the trip to Harper’s Ferry and the lectures on Jim Crow and Civil Rights. The trip to Harpers Ferry was a great way to experience the story of John Brown. I knew little about his story before going there, and I walked away from the day feeling informed with practical strategies that I could use to teach the story to my students. I would have liked to have a bit more guided tour of the rest of the park so that I could use the information for any future fieldtrips that I may take my students on. Dr. Hamner’s lecture about the Civil War was eye-opening to me, because I feel like I have a much better picture of what was the mentality of the South. Being raised in the

Midwest, I was never really exposed to the other side of the story. I now understand how states' rights played a huge part in the war. A very intriguing fact that cemented this concept was the fact that Lincoln's name was not even on the presidential ballots in the South, yet he still won. If I were a Southern state, I would feel as if my vote had absolutely no say in the overall democracy of the United States. As Hamner talked, I began to see how the complicated and intricate political and economical factors of the war unfolded. The readings that Hamner assigned will be useful in my own understanding of the daily life of a Civil War soldier. Yet, I think I could use parts of the reading source to portray how unpleasant the war really was for the soldiers in comparison to what they thought they were signing up for.

Dr. Wendi Manuel-Scott's lectures on Jim Crow and Civil Rights were fabulous in portraying the underlying struggles, oppression, and long history of resistance in African American history. I was mortified at the immense suffering and oppression that blacks went through, but realized how many people simply do not want to remember that time in history, even though it wasn't that long ago. I appreciated how Dr. Manuel-Scott applied what is happening today with racial/ethnic discrimination to what was happening to the African Americans. I feel as though I have a much better understanding of how Jim Crow came into existence, but also understand it as something more than just laws. Jim Crow was a system with de jure and de facto consequences. It was fascinating to hear of the Southern etiquette "laws" and I find it so hard to wrap my mind around how people could treat others that way in the country that I live in today. Another thing that I took away from the lectures was how the Civil Rights Movement did not just pop up in the 40's and 50's with Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. There was a long history of resistance, unnamed activists, and forms of revolt throughout the black community. I saw how amazing it was that African Americans overcame their immense struggles and have survived today to be successful, professional, and vital parts of the society. This time period is often very uncomfortable for me to talk about, but by being better educated about the personal stories, effects of resistance, and overall hope that came out of the struggles, I can teach it to my students with an elevated level of confidence. I think this week's workshops will improve my own teaching by transforming how I present information to students. Students like to problem-solve a mystery and puzzle things together, so I am going to try to give my students various primary documents about each topic in order for them to piece together and formulate their own knowledge about history based on the evidence. Particularly in touching subjects like slavery and Jim Crow, primary documents provide concrete, real evidence of what the time period exuded and not my personal interpretations on it. A very exciting strategy that was demonstrated this week was the Life In A Box technique. I love this idea because it allows the students to piece together a person's life based on primary documents. I will also use more music and lyrics in my teaching of Virginia History this year. Through the use of songs like "John Brown's Body" and "Dixie," my students can compare and contrast the Northern and Southern views on slavery and war. Dr. Manuel-Scott also provided us with many resources in the form of online websites, quotes, and photographs that can, again, allow the students to work together to form opinions and questions about the time based on real primary documents.

SAMPLE SUMMER INSTITUTE REFLECTION 2

The Summer Institute reminded me why I became a social studies teacher in the first place. It brought together the things that I love about learning and teaching history: knowledgeable presenters with fascinating research and stories, opportunities to dig into the past by looking at primary sources, the chance to interpret, evaluate, and form opinions; historical debate and critical thinking, visits to historical sites, and connections to the present and future. The week helped to refocus my attention on some of the ideals and beliefs that are important to me as a history teacher. In this ideal world, my classroom is a place where every student is engaged all the time, using critical thinking skills to interpret primary and secondary sources, make conclusions, and thoughtfully debate those conclusions. Clearly, in the real world, I am constantly struggling against the barriers to this ideal: insufficient class time, students who struggle to read, lack of the appropriate resources, and the constraints, demands, and pressures of the SOLs, just to name a few. While I do my best to engage students and use a variety of instructional methods, I certainly have found myself bogged down by time constraints and the pressure to impart the “essential knowledge” dictated by the SOLs. During the institute, I found myself stepping back from those pressures to consider how I can create more of an overlap between my ideal classroom and my real one.

For me, the most beneficial part of the institute was the exposure to numerous resources. Each presenter had something useful to share and got me thinking in different ways about how to use these resources. Professor Kelly’s exercises in evaluating websites were a great way to get us thinking about what types of resources are available and how to evaluate them. I appreciated his practical, hands-on approach, and thought that the exercise of comparing websites for content, reliability, and bias was one that I could use with students on a scaled-down basis, maybe by only evaluating a couple of websites. I also thought that Dr. Censer’s thorough lecture on the Civil War era was punctuated well by the websites she shared. I thought the Valley of the Shadow letters, especially those relating to the Freedmen’s Bureau, would be a great window into this time period for my students. It also ties back in with what we learned from Dr. Berlin about approaching the study of slavery through the moment of emancipation. I was also thrilled to see the Harper’s Weekly site with all the political cartoons, as these can sometimes be hard to find. The online resources provided to us were extremely helpful; it’s just good to have a place to start rather than searching aimlessly, which can be time-consuming. I think it would have been even more helpful if we had been allowed more time to explore the websites more fully during the presentations. I also thought that the resources provided by the National Archives, both in the building and on the website, were exceptional.

The other resources I found intriguing were shared in the presentations of Professor Smith, Professor O’Malley and Professor Errico. I have a habit of focusing on text-based resources when I think of primary sources – letters, diaries, newspapers, and other print materials. I loved that their presentations incorporated so many visual and audio resources as well: political cartoons, photographs, advertisements, movie clips, presidential tapes, interviews, and music. These types of images are what will really grab students and pull them into history by making these time periods vivid and alive. Who

could not connect to the emotions of Harry Truman after his daughter is blasted by the press, or be struck by the contrast in a photograph that shows migrant workers during the Depression camping out under a cheery billboard? These sorts of human connections can be the “hook” that we talked about being necessary to engage students in learning history. I only wish that I could use more of these resources – I only teach U.S. history to 1877, so obviously primary video and audio clips aren’t available. These presentations did encourage me, however, to use more images in addition to text-based primary sources.

I also thought that many of the readings were beneficial and thought-provoking. I enjoyed having a deeper look at our topics, and being focused in on the time period before the presentations each day. Through the readings, I was reminded of the importance of presenting balanced perspectives when teaching history, and trying to avoid falling into the traps of the easy, commonly-accepted answers and interpretations. I found this especially in the article about the Lincoln Memorial and the Civil Rights Movement. I thought it was provoking in its examination of how people have co-opted memories, symbols, and even historical figures to construct a certain meaning or belief. My students, I’ve noticed, so willingly accept these simple ideas and broad conclusions: Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves; Dr. King completed the struggle for civil rights. This reading and discussion certainly will prompt me to encourage students to be more nuanced and sophisticated in their understandings of these issues by looking at other figures from the period, including everyday people. This theme of multiple perspectives and interpretations was also brought out in the readings and lecture about women, the American Revolution, and the Constitution, as well as in our discussions of the evolving definitions of citizenship. The workshops and readings provided me with some helpful ways to incorporate that theme with my teaching.

By the end of the week, I felt as if I were brimming over with new resources, historical knowledge, and enthusiasm. I am excited at the prospect of incorporating some of these resources, methods, and historical understandings into my classroom. I still don’t feel like I have all the answers on how to do that, and I know that the pressures of time and SOLs will still be there. But it was good to live in this “ideal” world for a week because it renewed my passion for history and its teaching, and inspired me to take steps toward that ideal.

SAMPLE KEYNOTE LECTURE REFLECTION

It was a huge pleasure to have the renowned and Pulitzer Prize winner, Mr. Rhys Isaac discuss the changes of Virginia from 1740-1790. Mr. Isaac enlightened us to his book, *The Transformation of Virginia* and the great wealth of primary sources that are used to help portray Virginia history accurately during this time period.

The central themes throughout the lecture dealt with the three main cultures in Virginia, which are English, African, and Native American. Mr. Isaac explained how the Colonial Williamsburg Museum portrays each culture and even highlights important events in all people's history through dramatizations over a two-day visitor's program. I found it very interesting, when in his book, Rhys Isaac wrote "The waters of Powhatan and Pamaunk became the rivers James and York....." and "...by their calendar was the year of the Lord 1607." By these statements, Isaac makes it clear that his point of view is not only from the English perspective, but can be fully aware of the perceptions of the Early Americans as well. He explained how the Indians would have been unaware of the English way of counting years and I found that interesting to ponder. It is amazing how the English claimed the land and changed the culture of America for centuries to come.

A key point that Mr. Rhys Isaac made was about the importance of Christianity and the Great Awakening on Virginia history. I found myself wondering about how that whole topic can be left out of our teaching of Virginia history, yet is truly critical in understanding the motives and decisions that were made throughout. Is there a way that fourth graders can comprehend and apply the understanding from the knowledge of Christianity's affect and yet we, as teachers, not be crossing a line of religious teaching? My thinking on this topic has expanded and I, if nothing else, am thinking about how to work with religion as a thread of history instead of simply ignoring its existence.

I feel that I can apply the knowledge and resources from this lecture into my classroom by using numerous primary source ideas, consistently emphasizing the culture of all peoples in Virginia's history, and by expanding my own understanding of all motivations behind history's events. Some primary sources that I will definitely be using in the future include the "Jumping of the Broom" picture for discussions about slave life and the picture of the "Rifleman" which depicts an English soldier in partial Indian garments. This picture describes the desire of the colonial Americans to show and prove their "Virginianess" in a time when revolt and rebellion from the mother country was a highly debatable issue. Overall, after the keynote lecture, I have walked away with a new understanding of perspective and appreciation for all cultures who affected and contributed to the Virginia we know today.

SAMPLE HISTORICAL FILM SEMINAR REFLECTION

Dr. Rothman is a great lecturer and presented the information in an interesting and captivating way. His deep understanding of the historical background of the period was impressive. He welcomed all questions and seemed to always have a thought-through and well-prepared answer for whatever questions came his way. To me, that seemed to validate his authenticity and overall ability to tackle such a heart-wrenching and shameful time in America's (and the world's) history. The Slavery in Film lecture was an incredible eye-opening experience for me, not because I wasn't aware of the horrific events that happened during slavery, but because I felt slavery through our discussions and viewing of the movie clips.

Through watching the three movie clips from *Amistad*, *Beloved*, and *Glory*, I gained an immense understanding of the desperation and agony that cursed slavery and every human spirit that survived it. In our discussions of *Amistad*, I found it so interesting to hear Dr. Rothman reiterate how America was not the only country selling and utilizing slave labor. As we start to see America's slavery in the bigger slave system of the world, it is a little easier to see the viewpoint of the business side of how it all worked. Yet, still unforgivable, I think it is important to teach the students to analyze and create their own opinions and conclusions about a topic. By giving them all the facts, like how Africans sold other Africans, it opens their minds to possibilities and they stop just taking the teacher's word or the textbook's interpretation as the ultimate truth. Through *Amistad*, I also picked up some authentic details that will be beneficial in telling the students about the Middle Passage and slavery in general such as how they buttered the Africans on the sale block, the horrific environment of life in the Middle Passage, the disorientation that the slaves must have been feeling, and the economic perspectives and calculating that the slave owners depended on. Without getting too graphic but still using these and other details, I think that I can better portray the historical context to fourth graders.

In the clip of *Beloved*, I was taken aback by the ultimate desperation and feelings of hopelessness of a runaway slave mother. I knew that going back to be a slave would not have been what any slave wanted, but to kill your own babies, rather than let them be taken into slavery is beyond desperation. It was interesting to hear the main character describe how going to Heaven would be better than slavery even if that meant being murdered by your own mother. I recognized that even within a fairly accurate portrayal of slavery, the white man's tears spoke a thousand words, because it showed that the writers/directors still wanted to keep the perception of the slave owner as human and the black character as inhuman or barbaric. In such a small moment, many stereotypes and social perspectives were told. In the *Beloved* scenes, in particular, I felt slavery at its worst and the images have stuck with me for days after. Perhaps we need to feel and see the truth about slavery instead of placing it in a neat little package and saying "yes, it was a bad period, but we know better now..." It is time to face the horrible truths and make sure nothing as unjust and horrific happens again in our future.

To use film as an analytical way for studying the past, there are several things that Dr. Rothman discussed that should be considered. The first is accuracy. Like any source,

determining accuracy is of utmost importance in effectively analyzing and using the source for deepening understanding of the historical event. If the source has half-truths or falsehoods, a skewed view and even stereotypes spring up. It has been often when movies do just this. Another thing to consider when analyzing a film is how the history is being framed in the story. How does the framing itself shape the message to the viewers? The most important point that I got from the lecture was understanding the deeper historical truth of these videos and any historically based movie in general. The way a movie draws you in with the sounds, music, and visual representation of humanity, speaks louder than reading words from a textbook. In my class, I wish to use videos in a new way and although, I can't use the videos we watched in the lecture with my fourth graders, I believe the techniques and analytical thinking skills can be applied to any film representing historical content.

SAMPLE BOOK REFLECTION 1

This was one of my favorite books that we've read for TAH. I thought that, given the length of the book, it would be tedious to complete, but it turned out to be a quick and interesting read. I found *The People and The President* to provide an excellent historical context for the events of the 1930's and 40's, as well as a fascinating personal look into the lives of Americans during these tumultuous times. It also provided a great example of how primary sources can enrich our understanding and teaching of history.

Not having taught these time periods, I definitely don't feel like an expert on these topics. But I enjoyed considering these events from the political circumstances surrounding Roosevelt as he made decisions and brought those decisions to the American people in his Fireside Chats. The Levines included information such as advice from Cabinet members and poll numbers that helped the reader understand where Roosevelt was coming from. The letters showed that, while FDR was wildly popular, he didn't always get it right when determining what Americans would support, such as his court-packing plan and his universal military training plan for after the war ended. The letters included in the book showed the wide range of opinions about FDR, and I was impressed by Americans' willingness to evaluate decisions and proposals as individual acts. Ardent Republicans who couldn't stand FDR sometimes wrote to say that they agreed with something he said, and passionate Democrats who idolized him sometimes skewered his proposals. That seems a striking contrast to many of our political debates these days, in which so many people are just no longer willing to listen to the other side or question the efficacy of their own side.

I was intrigued by the variety of people who wrote to the President, and their diverse reasons for writing. Black, white, women, men, young, old, rich, poor, educated, and working class: all felt that they had some stake in communicating with FDR. In this day and age, it's hard to imagine the power of a man's voice over the radio, but the letters truly gave me an appreciation for the dramatic effect these chats had on people.

Many people expressed that this was the first time they felt they had a president who represented their interests and seemed to get such hope and courage from listening to the President's words. People also seemed to believe that FDR was interested in what they had to say, from their suggestions on policy decisions to personal pleas, such as the letter from Mrs. George Plack, requesting \$52 to help get baby chicks (p. 76). She addresses the president as "Dear Friend," another writer simply calls him "Frank" because he feels that FDR is so close to the people of the U.S. (p. 449). I was also fascinated by the number of people who made specific suggestions for policy changes, including the farmer who provided a long list of solutions to economic problems (p. 145). In particular, I was surprised at the number of women who wrote in with policy ideas and strong opinions. Certainly, the angry letters were the most entertaining. Many people did not hold back their rage and disgust, and made some pretty strong disparaging statements about the president and his ideas. I enjoyed the contrast between the letters of praise and letters of outrage.

One thing that struck me as I read this book was the number of connections to issues facing the nation today. We are still very much dealing with issues of presidential power, civil liberties vs. security, what it means to be patriotic, concerns over public discourse on policy issues, debates about the worthiness of a war, and American isolationism vs. interventionism. It seems like this book could be used in classrooms to make connections with these current events, as well as its more obvious uses for teaching the Depression, World War II, and the value of primary sources.

SAMPLE BOOK REFLECTION 2

I must admit that I had a difficult time getting into the first few chapters of this book, and so I was surprised when it suddenly became fascinating to me. The drama of the courtroom scenes, and the way that Goodman wove together these stories with the larger history of the era, were extremely compelling. One of the most striking aspects of this book for me was the concept of “voices”, something we are always asked to consider in our reflections on books and seminars. This was probably the best example we have had of the power of giving a voice to such an array of people and perspectives. I really appreciated that Goodman not only gave a voice to so many different people, but also reflected the complexities, conflicts, and contradictions within individuals. Textbooks often try so hard to make history neat and easily understood. This was a great reminder that history is messy, complicated, and at times quite depressing!

Before reading this book I only knew the basic outline of the Scottsboro story, so this book certainly changed my understanding of the event and the time period. In particular, the role of the ILD in the defense of the boys was new to me. I was surprised to learn that the NAACP was so reluctant to get involved with the case at first, though it certainly made sense that they did not want to associate themselves with the ILD. I didn't realize that the communist party had so many followers in America, though I guess it makes sense given the economic conditions.

Of course, always on our minds is how our new understanding of the topic will inform our teaching. I thought this book was hugely valuable in helping the reader understand some of the hardships and desperation of the Great Depression. It also provided a great opportunity to consider Reconstruction from several years down the road and in some ways see why it was such a failure. Not only the people's perceptions, but also the academic scholarship on the topic, were for so long owned by the white southern perspective on Reconstruction. The great moment of hope and promise that existed during Reconstruction could not overcome the lasting bitterness and racism that pervaded the South. Many in the South chose violence as the way to quell their fears about what freedom and equality for African-Americans would mean to them. The legacy of that violence and hatred is haunting. I appreciate that this book provided such an in-depth look at race relations in the intervening years between Reconstruction and the modern civil rights movement. These relationships are often overshadowed by the major world events of the first half of the twentieth century. But these years are obviously crucial in understanding the depth of the impact of race, justice, and equality in America.

One aspect of this book that I struggled with throughout was the role of sexual politics in race relations. Clearly, racism and segregation in the South cannot be separated from white southerners' perceptions and fears about sexuality and the dangers of black men being around white women. That painful reality cannot be avoided, yet also seems an inappropriate topic to broach with students. With older students, should it be addressed? If so, how?

Goodman provides a rich, multi-dimensional view of these events by sharing the voices and perspectives of so many. How do we as teachers decide which voices to include in our teaching? How do we paint a comprehensible narrative while also portraying many voices?

SAMPLE RESPONSES TO BOOK REFLECTION 2

1. Your questions:

How do we as teachers decide which voices to include in our teaching? How do we paint a comprehensible narrative while also portraying many voices?

Sarah, you ask two scary questions. Well, actually, the answers are scary because in two words, they mean: professional accountability. Before even choosing what voices to include in our teaching, we have to be knowledgeable enough of all the voices. If reading *Scottsboro* has taught us anything, it's that there are more voices than we ever realize! [i.e. the role of the communists or sexual politics]. Of course, how many voices do our students really need to hear anyway, heh? I guess one approach to teaching history has been don't ask, don't tell. By that I mean, don't ask yourself what the other "voices" are and you don't need to tell them to the students. Instead, we'll just keep on teaching from the same voice as we always do. (I'm thinking of myself here who just taught the Spanish-American War according to the S.O.L.'s that basically leaves out the voice of the Filipinos and others as well.)

The solution, I say with the sneer, is group work! group work! group work! Have the groups each take a voice and speak for it. That of course comes back to professional accountability. We need developments like this one to force us to learn the voices that we don't yet know about so we can be able to steer our students to the "voices." In defense of the S.O.L.'s though, they seem to be trying to give voice to others, such as the Native Americans (barely) in the Westward Expansion movement and the two perspectives of racial equality between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois to name a couple examples.

2. It is kind of an overwhelming question, isn't it? I definitely like the idea of using group work as the avenue to consider the different voices. And you're right, the standards are to some extent mindful of "other" perspectives. I think one area that is still lacking is the voice of everyday, regular people. The standards focus on the big names of history, and the other important, meaningful and in-depth voices are drowned out by the commonly understood characterizations of our more famous leaders. (Like we've talked about with Washington, Lincoln, and King.) I guess the challenge is to weave those voices into the story in a more concrete, tangible way. Your group work suggestion is a great start. I think it's a great opportunity to get students to do this kind of thinking -- to wade through all these voices and come up with a clear picture or idea is very sophisticated thinking, and certainly our students need more practice with it.
3. Ahh, you're so right. We need to talk about the regular people's voices. Howard Zinn wrote a book called *A People's History of the United States* and I think that it somewhat gives voice to such a perspective. I think, and I could be mistaken, that he tends to be more critical of the U.S. as well, rather than your typical "America is awesome" type of textbook.
4. You're right - Zinn does talk more about "regular people." Our AP classes here actually used that book for a summer assignment and we're going to try and use it more throughout the year. He is a bit controversial, though since he's more of a Marxist historian. It was a good book to use for those students, though because they were able to learn 1) about people other than the big names, although he talks about them, too...and 2) that historians have different perspectives and interpretations on past events instead of just seeing events that just happened and everyone views in the same way.