

Performing Primary Sources

Jeffrey Clay Joyce

Introduction

My wife and I were headed to Tybee Island, Georgia this summer and were passing the time by listening to David Hackett Fisher's *Washington's Crossing*. (Actually I was listening, she was sleeping; go figure? The book begins by delving into the painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware River done by American artist Emmanuel Leutze (inset). The painting was, of course, done to depict the famous events at the pinnacle of the American Revolution. It was this event that led to the most significant victory for the Continental army over a group of German Hessian mercenaries, and was one so sweeping that it helped convince the French to side with the Americans, an alliance that was to be the most important insurance of American independence.¹ Most of this history I already knew.



What I did not know was that the painting was by a German-American immigrant who moved to Europe in 1848 and conceived the painting as a means for encouraging a revolutionary spirit and nationalism in Europe. Painted in 1848 in Düsseldorf and then redone in 1850 after a fire destroyed the original, it was brought to America in that year and was an instant hit. Northerners saw it as a tribute to the creation of the Union, and more importantly, as a symbol of freedom, since there is an African figure helping propel the boat (Leutze himself was an abolitionist). Southerners saw the painting as a symbol of liberty, and praised it for reflecting the Confederate cause. It was later bought by a private collector and given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.² It has since become iconic in both the American neoclassical artistic tradition and, if I may have the liberty to say, as a conduit for the study of early American history.

What I find most intriguing here is that given ordinary circumstances and given an ordinary audience, we might argue that the interaction with this painting would produce something quite different than the context of its origins that I have just illuminated. So say, for instance, that we are at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington DC (where one copy of the painting hangs) and we come upon this work. It would not be odd for the average American to think that since an American did the painting that it was meant to perhaps join the volumes of work exacerbating American nationalism. Or at the very least that it was to

support the heroic model of American historiography, since the date of the painting was 1851 and not in and around the time of the revolution. Maybe we could even derive, if we had some background in history, that given the timing of the painting, it was painted to distract Americans from the growing sectionalist sentiments during the ante-bellum period. A careful eye might suggest that the painting isn't realistic at all; the event took place at night and the flag being carried by James Monroe is not the flag that existed during the time of the victorious venture across the icy river. We might debunk the piece altogether suggesting that it would have been impossible for Washington to stand as he appears and thus this piece falls into the annals of over-stimulated Americanism writ large for patriotically obsessed and naïve. Obviously, all of these perspectives can have a certain level of validity, but what makes them valid and how does that translate into student understanding of sources like these in American history? More importantly, how can I sift through the myriad perspectives one might find in the average primary source and make sense of them to my students? And can we find a way to help them do that for themselves?

Rationale and Background

I teach in the arts magnet school here in Charlotte where there is a very diverse population of students who have all, through a portfolio/ performance admission process, shown great interest in some form of the arts. Our kids are very creative and do quite well in social studies and English, but tend to be on the downside of the testing scale with regard to math or science. Having said that, over the twelve years I have taught AP US History, my students have had terrible difficulty in dealing with primary sources. My course is very popular, and I tend to have very close to half of the junior class in the advanced placement classes, which presents its own set of problems when one considers the general preparedness of 16-year-olds for the challenges of higher education. Nevertheless, we march on through the year knowing that at least half of those students will not pass the AP exam. Part of this, as you all know, is their unwillingness or inability to dedicate the time, but the other is my fault. I have not done a very good job at teaching document based writing and hope this unit will be a stepping stone for dealing with some of my shortcomings as a teacher. In short, I do not think that I have done enough to help my students learn how to analyze and use primary sources appropriately in their writing.

In the Advanced Placement United States history course syllabus there is an explanation of what skills and knowledge students are to have in order to be successful on the exam. They must understand how to analyze primary sources and then use those sources to write a coherent essay on a given subject. They must be keen to understand historiography and be able to methodically peruse the primary sources that they are given, and by way of analysis, prove that they have a higher sense of what those documents have meant over time. In the end, they

must show that they have become somewhat familiar with the practice of an historian.

More particular is the need for students to show competence on the Document Based Question (DBQ) portion of the test. It is an essay question that has approximately ten very short documents attached. Students are asked to react to the DBQ prompt and use both the documents and their knowledge of the historical period in constructing their response. This, of course, is not easy. So if we now put together the complication illuminated in the introduction (multiplicity of perspectives) and the difficulty for students in developing the proper skills for the test, what are we teachers to do? Part of that problem is what I want to tackle in this unit.

So in this curriculum unit plan I want to consider a number of things that might be done to help students to deal with primary sources. First, I think it will be important for them to recognize how documents reflect a historical moment. Whether the source is a journal entry from George Washington or a photograph of a bomb shelter, it can say a number of things that we must consider (as I considered the Leutze painting). So in this unit I will create a rubric that students can use upon first encountering a document as a means for analysis.

Then I want to have students engage in “performing history” through documents. This is where the unit gets creative. My plan is to have students first analyze documents and then in groups create live performances that essentially bring the history to life. This will include a brief description of the analysis and then an interpretation done through performance. The great hope here is that by engaging sources in a wholly new way that students appreciate not only the content of the source in question but how it fits into the historical scheme of things.

Next, and more pointedly, since the topic of the seminar that helped to produce this unit deals with the theatre, I will emphasize the possibility of using **plays as primary sources**. In the end, I will give teachers several options as to the kinds of activities they might use with their students (I will also give some suggestions later in the unit on the use of other types, like visual art and film). I should add that I think this can be useful for students in all classes of kids across the disciplines.

Strategies and Activities

Analyzing Primary Sources

Historians judge documents using a couple of common rules. First, they must determine when, where, and by whom the document was produced. The reliability of the source is often considered by the proximity of its creation to the subject in

question. The closer the source is to the time of the historical occurrence, the better the source is deemed to be. However, it is also true that historians believe no source to be without bias. Every author, painter, photographer, or journalist has some intrinsic need to produce something that will perhaps slant the meaning of a given historical moment to suit their perspective. Thus, historians spend a great deal of time researching, reconsidering, and speculating about internal bias before they draw conclusions about a source or a set of primary sources.³ So our rubric for judging primary sources will need to include these elements and may contain a series of questions something like this: (see **appendix A** for a full rubric and an example).

What is the time period of the document? What do you as the student know about this period in American history and how does this document fit with that knowledge?

Who prepared the document? What do we know about the author?

Is there a discernible bias in this piece? Is there argument in the piece? What word choices, statement, questions, or examples reflect bias and/or argument?

Given the time period, why might the author have chosen to write as they have?

If not a written text, what does the visual text or artifact (map, graph, painting, or photograph) tell us about the time period? What seems to be the point of view of the creator? What leads you to make this assumption?

Performance from Sources

As was mentioned previously, the College Board exam asks students to, when writing a response to the DBQ, both analyze the documents when reacting to the prompt and to use their background knowledge of the period in question, to write an essay that shows historical competence. Here is how we might work on that skill. Let's say that students were given the following hypothetical prompt and this document:

Assess the validity to which slavery played an integral role in bringing on the American Civil War. Use the document and your knowledge of the period to complete the essay.

“The people of the State of South Carolina, in Convention assembled, on the 26th day of April, A.D., 1852, declared that the frequent violations of the Constitution of the United States, by the Federal Government, and its encroachments upon the reserved rights of the States, fully justified this State in then withdrawing from the Federal Union; but in deference to the opinions and wishes of the other slaveholding States, she forbore at that time to exercise this right. Since that time,

these encroachments have continued to increase, and further forbearance ceases to be a virtue.

And now the State of South Carolina having resumed her separate and equal place among nations deems it due to herself, to the remaining United States of America, and to the nations of the world, that she should declare the immediate causes which have led to this act.”⁴

Students should recognize almost immediately that this is the secession agreement of the assembly of South Carolina after the election of Lincoln in 1860. In fact, on the test they would be given the date of the document and a reference to its authors. From this I can imagine students putting together a dramatic scene that includes Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, members of the South Carolina legislature, and even former slaves like Frederick Douglass to get a fuller perspective on the issue in question. Now neither am I an actor, playwright, or director nor have I ever written any dramatic prose; but as students at an arts magnet school, my students are perfectly suited to this task. So here is what I am going to ask them to do:

- Analyze the document using our primary source analysis rubric.
- With a clear understanding of the historical time period create a dramatic scene that includes all the members of your group playing a single or multiple parts.
- Make sure that the scene runs for at least 5 to 7 minutes.
- Make sure that the scene gives the audience a wider picture of the historical situation alluded to by your document.
- Make sure that your document is somehow made of use to the scene.
- Feel free to do flashbacks or short monologues.
- Be sure that your characters accurately reflect the characters of the time.
- Include your interpretation given the direction of the prompt...in a way your scene should be a dramatic argument, much like an essay would be.

In this case, the scene that my students would develop should represent an argument to the validity of the prompt; how instrumental was the issue of slavery in bringing on the Civil War. In other words, their dialogue would attempt to lead the audience to believe either that the issue of slavery was of great importance or that it was merely a part of a bigger more complex problem. The scene could include arguments from Lincoln during his famous debates with Stephen Douglas. It could include speech material from Frederick Douglas. It could include material from southern newspapers about Lincoln or the issue of slavery as a whole. Perhaps, dialogue could rise from abolitionist materials like *the Liberator* by William Lloyd Garrison. Maybe excerpts from the famous Dred Scott case Justice Roger B. Taney helped levy (see **appendix B** for an example of dialogue appropriate to this exercise).

But the use of performance as a way to engage our history through primary sources does not need to stop there. An alternative to having them develop their

own scenes would be to use plays as primary sources and ask them to perform those particular scenes that are especially pertinent to the historical period being studied. Plays are fiction yes, but that does not eliminate their potential for giving us important historical questions to consider given that they are written often times to allow readers and performers to broaden their perspectives on history, and it certainly does not imply that they have no historical relevance since they are obviously part of our history. In fact, I would argue that it is a powerful educational experience to have empathy for the people you are studying. If asked to perform, students through their roles must become those people in order to perform them. Not only does this differentiate the classroom activity for students (something we hear often in education today), but it also creates an opportunity for students to understand the perspective of the people of a given historical era. So I think that the value of this type of activity is that it provides an additional insight and connection to material uncommon in the classroom.

***Inherit the Wind*-A consideration of a play as a primary source**

Inherit the Wind was written by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee in 1955 to critical acclaim and has been a staple of the theatrical world since that time. It is admittedly a fictional tale but one that is closely related to the events of 1925 surrounding the infamous Scopes Monkey Trial in Dayton, Tennessee; it is perfect for the purposes of this unit because it deals directly with a historical event that students will be familiar with and it represents a primary source for the time it was written. So let's do the analysis of this primary source and perhaps create a means by which we can help our students do the same with this and other potential sources.

1. The History- In 1925, John T. Scopes was arrested for violating a Tennessee law that forbade the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution either in conjunction with or in place of the teaching of creationism. Scopes violation of the law and his subsequent arrest was concocted by several organizations including several newspapers, groups of lawyers, church groups, and the ACLU working in conjunction in an effort to make this case a referendum on the larger philosophical argument being waged in American society between modernists and traditionalists. Clarence Darrow was at the time the most prolific lawyer in the US and had made a name for himself just before the Scopes trial in the Leopold and Loeb case. The two defendants in that case, in premeditated fashion, killed a schoolmate just to see if they could get away with it. In many minds, Darrow allowed them to as they were put in an asylum and not in a prison. He was the first lawyer to use the discipline of psychology to assist him in making an argument that swayed the jury to believe that the two boys were insane and thus less culpable for their apparent crimes.

Darrow agreed to defend Scopes while his good friend William Jennings Bryan agreed to represent the State. Bryan was a Populist candidate for President

twice around the turn of the century and served as Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson. He was a pacifist and a religious fundamentalist. His most famous speech came in the 1896 Democratic convention where he built a religious metaphor around the continued use of the gold standard that he proselytized as being a golden “crown of thorns” thrust upon the heads of the common working man, one that he esteems to be a mighty hindrance to any hope for their prosperity.⁵

The Scopes case itself drew enormous amounts of attention to the small town of Dayton. The historical record, however, suggests that most of the arguments waged during the trial were about procedure than discussion of the crime or its purported philosophical underpinnings. Both sides became notorious for writing lengthy arguments for the press, waging a sort of national war of editorials rather than concerning themselves with the fate of Mr. Scopes. In the end, Darrow agreed that his client had broken the law, effectively levying a guilty plea, a terribly preposterous thing to do at **the end** of a trial. Historian Edward Larson in *Summer of the Gods* tells us that Darrow stood before the court and told the jury to bring back a verdict of guilty, that it was the only logical choice because he had indeed broken the law. Darrow, of course, realized that statutes could only be overturned by a Supreme Court action, and he was hopeful that that would be the fate of this case. Scopes was found guilty and fined \$100, a verdict that would later be overturned on a technicality of courtroom procedure. Bryan and Darrow continued their argument in the newspapers. But Bryan died shortly thereafter in a hotel after he'd returned to Dayton to make his 'grandest' and most 'triumphant' argument for Christianity. Larson goes on in his book to describe how the argument in Scopes has propelled itself well into the modern day (he discusses, among other things, the current debate over intelligent design).⁶

2. The Play-*Inherit the Wind* is about Bertram Cates (representing John T. Scopes) who is jailed for teaching evolution in the local school. As Cates' trial approaches it becomes common knowledge that Matthew Harrison Brady (Bryan) will come to town to prosecute the young teacher and that Henry Drummond (Darrow) will show up to his defense. The town has become a carnival of traveling preachers and newspapermen. In the play the town seems to be very one-sided about the case, as there are scenes dedicated to religious meetings and rallies. Only the seemingly atheist and heartless journalist E.K Hornbeck takes on the role of the foil, although there are a few students of Cates portrayed in the play that gather in his defense. There is a love interest for Cates, Rachel, who just happens to be the daughter of Reverend Brown, the fundamentalist minister and pious leader of the town. The court scenes too are very one-sided. Brady dominates the conversation ignoring standard courtroom procedure. Drummond desperately tries to bring expert testimony about science and religion to the attention of the jury but is barred from doing so by a slew of sustained Brady objections. The climactic moment of the play occurs when Drummond asks Brady to take the stand as a religious expert and then with the clever cunning of a lawyer, by way of circuitous logic, paints Brady as a hypocrite. Brady admits that

the Bible can be open to interpretation. This is counter to all previous arguments he'd made about the fundamental nature of the text. The courtroom is in utter silence as Brady tries to scream his way out of the corner he has painted himself into. He then keels over and dies in the middle of his last useless rant.

There are other dramatic nuances that might be worth mentioning. The play begins with Rachel having a short conversation with a boy; his innocence symbolizing, it would seem, the apparent question before us; what will be the philosophical landscape that is inherited by our children? Rachel and her father are torn apart because the Reverend believes Cates and his followers to be damned while Rachel tries to find a middle ground for understanding and pleads with Cates and her father to find room for compromise; the writers seem to be begging us as a society to do the same as Rachel draws upon the empathy of the audience. There is an obvious strain building in Brady's wife as she first watches her husband develop major anxieties over the trial, even as he seems to be friendly to and fond of Mr. Drummond. We might deduce that the authors want us to recognize some fallacy in placing so much faith (no pun intended) in the "powerful" men in our society. And I think there is a telling metaphorical moment when Drummond recalls getting a rocking horse as a child that he'd coveted for some time only to find out that the cost to his family was too much for a play toy that fell apart, as he ruefully admits, too soon. 'All that glitters is not gold'... Any or all of these might be ripe for student analysis as they sink their teeth into this one!⁷

3. The play as a primary source- I think we are left with an equally perplexing situation in dealing with *Inherit* as we were with *Washington's Crossing*. The play is written about an incident that occurred 30 years before, and is supposed to be a fictional account although it is clearly very close to the actual events. The question for the instructor is going to be whether or not to use this play as a source for understanding culture in the 1920s or is it a play that we use to discuss culture in the 1950s? For the sake of expediency and clarity I will let the reader decide how to deal with that and suggest that either of these is plausible. For my unit I am going to suggest you use it as a primary source for the 1950s, but recognize that you may use it as a secondary source for the 1920s. By the way, the playwrights set the scene in "a small town" and additionally qualify in the introduction that although this is supposed to be in a time "not too long ago" that it could "have been yesterday...could be tomorrow." So even the authors seem to allow us the opportunity to place the play within our own utilitarian context! I am choosing the 50s because I am focusing on primary documents and also because my students and I will have covered the 20s and the trial. The material will be familiar to them and thus let us dig deeper into the question of the issue resurfacing in the mid-1950s. So now let's talk about how we might engage students with *Inherit the Wind*.

***Inherit the Wind*- step by step with students**

As a teacher I might dive into this in a number of simple or even complex ways but I want to map out one possible scenario:

First we should simply deal with the plot of the play. As students we should ask the question, “What is this play about?” I would expect my AP students to easily deduce that this is a play that deals with the conflict between science and religion. They might also claim that it is about conservatism versus progressivism, but either of these will be moving our conversation, I think, in the right direction. It is probably smart at this point to establish more firmly a grasp of the setting or to figure out what time period we are dealing with. My class is a survey class and goes in the natural chronological order, so this should also be simple. In other words, we will be talking about the 1950s so it is reasonable to believe that time placement will be implied. One caveat here, I think I will probably, and you should consider showing the black and white film. I say this because having read the film and then watched the movie, I felt much more aware of the characters, their emotions and how to intelligently deal with the text after having done both. (More about film later in the unit).

Next, I think I want to move away for just a moment from the play itself to set kids up for understanding why we have apparently returned to a subject out of historical context. In other words, the anachronistic move I have made by interjecting this play into our study will most likely create a bit of confusion. So I want students to think about how we can compare the 1920s and the 1950s. I might ask them to look at cultural elements of the two decades and see if we find any similarities. Then we could look at political similarities and economic trends. And there are lots. I think with AP kids I might simply say “go home and figure out why Lawrence and Lee wrote this play 30 years after the fact and used the monkey trial.” And it may go without saying, that they should use the primary source analysis rubric to do just that.

Then finally we will need to have some fruitful historical knowledge to help make the situation of the play easier for students to understand. For those less schooled in the historical elements consider the following comparison:

1920's

1. 1920s known as the roaring twenties because of tremendous economic growth.
2. The decade was dominated by Republican administrations (Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover) with ‘laissez faire’ approaches to governance.
3. There was a cultural blossoming that had heretofore been unheard of in American society. Women’s liberation, though not on any massive national scale, was beginning, evidenced by the flappers. African-Americans were asserting themselves as ‘new negroes’ and nothing showed this more than the Harlem renaissance.

4. American musical trends that were distinctly American, jazz and blues took the airwaves by storm in the 20s. And speaking of airwaves, the radio was the most popular product for consumers.
5. The 1920s saw some very serious prejudice against foreigners and political dissenters. The Sacco and Vanzetti trial received enormous press, quota laws on immigration were put into place and we experienced the first Red Scare after A Mitchell Palmer of the FBI suggested that a communist revolution was likely to erupt in the United States.⁸

1950's

1. 1950's saw similar economic growth after war profits and production bolted us out of the depression.
2. Republican Dwight Eisenhower was a two term President from 1950-1958 and took a similar 'hands off' approach to the economy.
3. The 1950s saw the beginning of the civil rights movement that later gave impetus to the women's rights movement shortly thereafter.
4. New technology was widespread, automobiles and electricity changed our perspective on the future. The 1950s commenced the era of rock n' roll, a derivative of jazz, and the television took over the airwaves.
5. Of course we all know about the notorious hunt for communists in the 1950s under Senator McCarthy in what is referred to as the Second Red Scare.⁹

I think it is safe to say that students should be able to pick up on how alike these two decades were and my hope is discovery of these similarities will naturally arise from their analysis.

***Inherit the Wind*- primary source and performance**

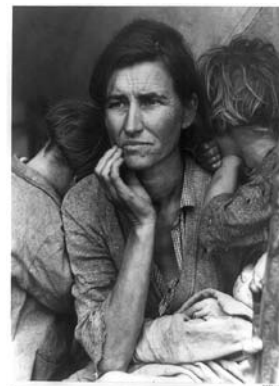
Given that a discussion about the relative qualities of the two decades has passed let's now assume that we as teachers should begin prompting students to start speculating about the choices the authors make to have an effect on meaning as it relates to the time that they wrote the piece. Why regurgitate the science versus religion argument? Why use a factual case but sway so much from the facts? Is this play a comment on 50s culture or 20s culture? Is it an indictment of McCarthyism? Is it modernism reconsidered from the postmodern perspective? And, I think most importantly, how does this play serve us as a primary source? If we as students were writing an essay on culture of the 1950s how would this play support any argument we might make? Any and all of this might come to life in their performance. The question is how to do the performance, so I have several suggestions as possibilities.

1. We could gather the class into groups and delegate specific scenes to each and then ask them to do some post-scene analysis where the class can discuss some of the aforementioned questions.

2. As a class, we could watch the film after having read the play, and do a sort of Socratic seminar on the elements of the play. The teacher might interject some of the questions from the heading paragraph that leads students into a discussion about the importance of the play to 1950s culture and politics. This sort of thing is common in classrooms. Teachers use inquiry-based questions to lead students down a path to discovery. In this case, it would be important to discuss the play as a primary source and then allow for various interpretations to develop during the discussion. The performance piece could be to ask students to choose, ahead of discussion, some lines from the play that they would read dramatically for the benefit of the class. This, I believe, would enhance the analysis of the play. If I were to do this, it would be with relation to an essay prompt.
3. This tactic strays a bit from the direction of this unit but we might find it necessary to divide the class into groups and have them find different plays to be performed over the course of the year pertinent to the material in question. It is possible that there would be a great deal of redundancy when employing the strategy in number one, but that would depend heavily on the student population I was working with and the scenes I chose (there will be a list of some plays to work with in **the annotated bibliography** at the end of the unit).
4. So the last suggestion would be to, no matter the path you choose in performance, have students use their discussion, analysis, and understanding of the period to respond to an AP style prompt. Remember, the point of this particular unit is to work on writing using primary sources for AP US History students. I should qualify this by saying it doesn't preclude someone from using this method with other classes and in differently constructive ways.

What about other types of sources- artwork, maps, photographs, film?

In the introduction I wrote about the piece *Washington Crossing the Delaware* and I think this work, among many, is perfectly suited to the exercise of 'performing' primary sources. Imagine your class (not necessarily dressed like the figures in the painting because that might be difficult for them to do) taking on the various roles of those pictured and then bringing them to life. What sorts of interpretation might they have to the elements of the painting? How could they help teach one another about the historical period implicit to the piece? In what ways, considering the answers to those questions, might a class use the information they've gleaned to produce an argumentative essay appropriate to your class. In my estimation, photographs could work in the exact same way. Dorothea Lang's photographs, like *Migrant Mother*, of Americans experiencing the depression strike me as being suitable for this exercise (inset). I can imagine three students who begin the performance in the pose given to us by Lang and then appropriating dialogue that makes clear the plight of people like the one



pictured during the throes of the depression. They could tell of the ordeal of the 'okies' and others effected by the dust bowl in the Midwest. There is perhaps even room here for a combination of art forms. So say for instance students took dialogue from Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and applied it to an interpretive enactment of the Lang photograph.

Maps and film, I think, present a special type of problem. I mention maps because the AP test creators are notorious for including maps, especially those that deal with demographic data. I would not go so far as to suggest that it would be impossible for interpretative performance to come from a map, though from my experience, any student that could arrive at dialogue from a map would have to be a top-tier student. It might be advantageous then, to assign students to specific kinds of documents.

Film creates a problem because it is performance. So I think students would not be allowed the same opportunity to construct their own interpretive performance if in fact it had sort of already been done for them. I would suggest that the best way to use film is to assist students if they are attempting to develop a segment from a play. Primarily because it might help them think more broadly about the characters and the direction they might take the action in their piece. Of course there is also the possibility that it might limit them as they become attached to the character interpretation done by the actors in the film. In the end, I think this is a matter of choice for the instructor.

Conclusion

Finally, one of the real challenges is to determine when one might do these sorts of things in class and how long that might take. I can see the unit taking a few classes if the teacher decides to focus on a single play like *Inherit*. I could also see the possibility of choosing plays before the year begins, giving instruction to the entire class about expectations for this exercise, and then having them sign up to perform at various times throughout the year (perhaps a play from the colonial era early in the year and so forth). This would require students to do outside of class rehearsals and could be a bit more complicated. It is also possible to do short performance scenarios. Teachers might choose pieces from plays for students to read from various times in our history and add them to the curriculum like any other documentary analysis. Snippets of dialogue would not be overly time consuming and teachers could rotate members of the class who would each read a given piece for the benefit of the entire class then do the sort of analysis I advise in the unit. I know that teachers are accustomed to taking suggestions like the ones made in this unit and making them work to their timetable and curricular constraints so I won't dwell here. Suffice it say that I think that teachers and their students will experience a powerful educational moment when they combine the analytical skills needed to deal with primary sources and the synthesis level skills

needed to transform that analysis into performance like I have proposed in this unit.

Appendix A- Analyzing Documents Rubric

According to the College Board website about the AP US History test, documents are not often derived from popular publications. In other words, you will not find pieces of the Declaration of Independence or the Emancipation Proclamation on the test. So students must have a keen understanding of the time period if they are to successfully analyze the documents they are given.

Here is a typical type of document that might be found on the AP US History test. I do not give you an essay prompt but that is not the point. We must first work on analysis skills and then bring together the prompt and essay writing.

Document:

Thomas Jefferson to Jean Nicholas Demeunier, January 24, 1786

"yet the hour of emancipation is advancing . . . this enterprise is for the young; for those who can follow it up, and bear it through to it's consummation. it shall have all my prayers, and these are the only weapons of an old man."

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/jefferson_papers/mtjquote.html

- What is the time period of the document? What do you as the student know about this period in American history and how does this document fit with that knowledge?
- Who prepared the document? What do we know about the author?
- Is there a discernible bias in this piece? Is there an argument in the piece?
- Given the time period, why might the author have chosen to write as they have?
- If not a text, what does the document tell us about the time period? What are the visual elements of the piece and what are they telling us?

Example of Student Analysis:

The time of the document is around the period when the founding fathers are considering the idea of forming a new constitution (1787). Jefferson was for a new document but worried about whether it would infringe on individual rights. He and other southerners were clearly worried about property rights, especially the right to keep their slaves. Jefferson in particular was torn over this issue. He needed them for his fields but apparently thought the institution was dying, and according to this quote, thought future generations would make this a reality. The biggest problem is that Jefferson established the American creed with his words in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal but never saw fit to release ‘men’ from bondage. In the final analysis we might think of this document as nothing more than Jefferson’s attempt to posture himself as a believer in certain principles for future readers, but we know better as is evidenced by his lack of action on this very important issue.

Appendix B- Sample Student Performance Dialogue with a Primary Source

Prompt: Assess the validity to which slavery played an integral role in bringing on the American Civil War. Use the document and your knowledge of the period to complete the essay.

Document:

“The people of the State of South Carolina, in Convention assembled, on the 26th day of April, A.D., 1852, declared that the frequent violations of the Constitution of the United States, by the Federal Government, and its encroachments upon the reserved rights of the States, fully justified this State in then withdrawing from the Federal Union; but in deference to the opinions and wishes of the other slaveholding States, she forbore at that time to exercise this right. Since that time, these encroachments have continued to increase, and further forbearance ceases to be a virtue. And now the State of South Carolina having resumed her separate and equal place among nations deems it due to herself, to the remaining United States of America, and to the nations of the world, that she should declare the immediate causes which have led to this act.”

Sample:

Setting: Lincoln, Taney, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Douglas and Jefferson Davis stand on the stage staring out toward the audience. They speak but not to one another, as if to themselves. The war has been dragging on for two years.

Lincoln: Had I been better prepared could I have staved off this conflict? I did say that if I could save the Union I would keep slavery intact.

Stowe: Am I the “little lady that made this big war” as Lincoln said? No, I cannot be to blame. I am only a novelist. I meant only to shed light on an important issue. Blood is not on my hands!

Douglas: John Brown made this happen...the meteor of the war...he scared them alright, he sure did scare them.

Taney: Lincoln has the blood of the innocent on his hands. It is the responsibility of the Executive, according to the principles of our constitution to uphold the law. And I decreed the law in Dred Scott. Had the fugitive slave law been enforced, would South Carolina have dared secede?

Davis: What about property rights in this country? If they can take our slaves, can they take our homes? Can they take our possessions? What rights do the people still have?

I am not a playwright so I won't continue. But this is the type of thing students might be able to do. They can draw upon the history discussed in the class and using the direction given to them by the document use powerful figures of the time to illustrate that direction. In this case there is obviously some debate, and this should allow students an opportunity to interpret through their dialogue.

Endnotes

¹ Fisher, David Hackett. *Washington's Crossing*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 1-25.

² Ibid.

³ Available from <http://www.edteck.com/dbq/index.htm>. Internet; accessed 11 November 2009.

⁴ May, JA. et. al., "South Carolina Secedes." 76-81. Library of Congress. http://www.americancivilwar.com/documents/causes_south_carolina.html. 1960.

⁵ Larson, Edward J.. *Summer for the Gods*. (Cambridge, Ma: Basic Books, 1997) 31-83.

⁶ Ibid, 47-193.

⁷ Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, *Inherit the Wind* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2007), 3-129.

⁸ David Kennedy and Lizabeth Cohen and Thomas Bailey. *The American Pageant*. 13th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, 720-768.

⁹ Ibid, 882-908.

Annotated Bibliography

David Kennedy and Lizabeth Cohen and Thomas Bailey. *The American Pageant*. 13th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006. This is an Advanced Placement textbook known to be one of the first developed specifically for the advanced placement high school curriculum. It has long been thought of as the text most closely aligned with the expectations of the College Board test.

Fisher, David Hackett. *Washington's Crossing*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004. Honestly I have only listened to the book on CD and only about half of it at that. I can say that Fisher is well thought of among his peers and has a number of strongly accredited works to his name. This book struck me to be particularly good for use in this unit because he spends quite a bit of time in the introduction dealing with an analysis of the Leutze painting. I am positive that this would be perfect for both teachers and students who would like to know more about the events of the Revolutionary War and how this event fits into that study.

Feldshuh, David. *Miss Evers Boys*. New York, NY: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1995. This play is about the Tuskegee Syphilis Study done in Alabama in the 1930s. The federal government duped a group of black males into believing they were being treated for syphilis while secretly studying them to see if perhaps the disease had different manifestations than it had on common white people. It is interesting in that it was conceived around the time of the LA race riots, Rodney King trial and OJ Simpson fiasco. I think it says as much about prejudice and discrimination in the early 20th century as it does about our struggle to maintain harmonious race relations in the last part of the 20th century. This play was made into a movie in 2001 and is available from HBO films.

Inherit the Wind, DVD, directed by Stanley Kramer. 1960; Hollywood, CA: United Artists, 1960. The movie strays slightly from the play but not too much to make a terrible difference. I think the movie is great for students or teachers who want to put faces and

emotions with the characters. I am a theatrical novice and so felt greatly assisted in understanding the play after having watched the film. It would be my advice, if anyone was to think about doing the unit I have proposed, to both read the play and watch this film.

Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. *Inherit the Wind*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2007. The play is set in the early 20th century and deals with one of the great trials in early American history. The Scopes monkey trial stands out because it rekindled the science versus religion debate that had been fought so many times in human history. The play is not historically accurate but certainly historically based and thus well worth the historian's consideration. Especially, as I make clear in the unit, as a primary source for studying the 1950s.

Kushner, Tony. *Angels in America part one: Millennium Approaches*. New York, NY: Theatre Communications Group, Inc., 1993. Part of the title of this play describes it as a gay fantasia on national themes. Granted this is not common language and begs the reader's interpretation, but so does the entire work. That is to say that it is a difficult play but one well worth the efforts of an upper level high school class. The play is regularly considered to be a cornerstone to the politically charged gay liberation movement of the time. So I think it would be perfect for students who are interested in studying the backlash to the conservative revolution of the 1980s under Ronald Reagan. I am not sure it works as a primary source for that period but there is room for students and teachers to think about how this work fits into the period of the fall of the Berlin Wall. I think it is well worth our intellectual speculation to consider this play and its insistence on breaking down political and social barriers in that context. The play was made into a film for HBO in 2003 and was directed by Mike Nichols. It is 352 minutes long and divided into 6 parts.

Larson, Edward J.. *Summer for the Gods*. Cambridge, Ma: Basic Books, 1997. This is one of my favorite books of the last five years. Larson won the Pulitzer Prize for this great piece of history. The majority of the text deals with the fore mentioned Scopes trial. This is a perfect resource for teachers and students who want to have a better historical understanding of and depth of knowledge about the events that took place in Dayton, Tennessee in the mid 1920s. Larson spends the latter part of the book talking about the evolution, no pun intended, of this argument into the modern day.

Moody, Richard. *Dramas From the American Theatre*. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Co., 1966. My seminar leader Ann Fox suggested this reference book to me if I happened to be looking for plays that fit to various periods of American history. She copied for me two plays, *Metamora/ The Last of the Wampanoags* by John August Stone and *The Gentle Savage* by John Brougham. I mention these because I hope to use them to implement the exercise I talk about in this unit. I have not read either at this point but use them as examples of this kind of think one might find in Moody's compilation.
