CHAPTER 12

Storying History in the Classroom

Gustavo Lopez and Arturo Valdez

Introduction

As we are writing this, quarantined within our homes with every semblance of normalcy relegated to memory, circumstances have given us the opportunity to take a hard look at our practice. It has challenged us to rethink curriculum and pedagogy in order to rework them. In a time of such uncertainty, of such change, of such loss, much has been revealed about ourselves, our societies, and the way we live in them. Our circumstances compelled all of us to recognize what was important, what was valuable, what was essential. If you had toilet paper as one of those valuables, then you surely had a better understanding of the crucial resources that govern our very existence within our society. Regardless, what had become abundantly clear was just how essential our profession was. The profession of teaching.

But even the best of us can sometimes forget. We get so bogged down, so immersed and almost solely focused on the task that lies before us; the task of growing the minds of the youth of our society and preparing them

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for the world they will embark into. As teachers, we still struggle to comprehend the potential impact our work has on the lives we touch. Sometimes we lose sight of how our work is acknowledged or appreciated by those we serve, often because we're not looking for it nor are we expecting it. However, when the youth remind us, it's unmistakable, always remarkable, and hard to forget.

This is one of those times we were reminded. It happened at a culminating ceremony of sorts—a graduation. A moment that is both a glorious ending to one chapter of life and a beautiful beginning, full of possibilities for many more chapters to come. The grass was warm, but the sun was forgiving as clouds between us stole its attention. As we stood on the football field, families had poured down from the stands to meet their kids and capture a beloved memory, we found ourselves completely surrounded. This is when the taking of photos began. Many of the photos taken are of students in their graduating attire, some are taken with friends, with family, but many, and boy do I mean many, are taken with us, their teachers. As we moved quickly from photo to photo laughing more and more with every flash of the camera, one of our best students approached.

"Me next, mister!" she exclaimed with her family following closely behind.

"Five bucks," we responded jokingly as we held our hands out.

"You see!" she explained to her family as she burst out laughing. She walked over and stood between us as her family crowded around to snap photos.

After taking a few photos, a voice called out to us from the back of her family's group.

"Mister!" they yelled. Did we mention most of our students call us mister? But we digress.

A young couple in their early 20s emerged from the family crowd. Their faces were familiar. As our faces surely depicted that we were struggling to sift through the many names and faces stored within our memory banks, they asked, "Do you remember us? We had you for History."

Finally, a match was made in our heads. They were both former students that we had taught long before!

"Whoa! Oh my gosh! What are you doing here?" we asked.

"I'm here for my cousin," the young man responded.

"Who? Her?" we questioned as we pointed to the student we had just taken photos with.

"Yes," they replied.

"I can't believe you never told us you were related to them!" we playfully shouted toward our current student.

"How are you guys doing?" we asked our former students.

"Great! Finishing up school and working part time," they explained.

As we conversed with the couple, we couldn't help but notice a newborn in their arms.

"Hey, wait. Who's this guy?" we asked.

"Yes, mister," the young woman replied.

"We wanted you to meet our son," the young man added.

"Holy Moses!" one of us yelled, I can't quite remember who, while the other added, "He's so beautiful!"

"What's his name?" we asked.

"Leonidas," they said almost simultaneously.

"Leonidas!" we exclaimed, "Like the famous Greek king of the Spartans!"

"Yeah," the young man responded, "from the story you told in class, the brave one who led them into battle, protecting democracy. That was my favorite story, mister."

The story to which he was referring to was one that we had told in our classes often. It was one that depicted the origins of Greek democracy and told of the struggle and sacrifice made by a people who desired to live free. In the telling of this story, we transported ourselves to an ancient civilization. We cast our psephos (voting pebbles) or erasers like Cleisthenes and the Athenians. We howled and raised our spears or rulers as King Leonidas and the Spartans did as they stood before the enormity of the Persian army to defend their sovereignty and their way of life. It's one of the many stories that we tell in our classes, storytelling that we wish to elaborate on here. But back to our former students on the football field full of celebrating students.

Needless to say, we were absolutely stunned, nay flabbergasted, to think that our work, our teaching, created a moment so moving, a memory so treasured that it influenced the naming of our former student's child. "Did you really name him Leonidas because of the story?" we asked, in disbelief. Before the young man could answer, the young woman replied, "Oh yes he did, cause I had to hear all about it when we were deciding!"

"Yup," the young man confirmed, "your classes were my favorite, I wish I never had to stop taking it. You guys were the best teachers I ever had."

We had always taught with the goal of making the content of our subject matter meaningful to our students both in school and in their lives outside of school. To make real connections with our students through learning experiences and relationships built over time. While this is not exactly how we imagined the impacts of our teaching manifesting itself, it was nevertheless revealing. It revealed how deep of an impression, of an impact we could have on the lives of our students, if our work was done in a manner that surpassed their often fatigued expectations of school learning. It revealed how long our work can endure, how cherished and beloved it could become if we somehow made our work memorable. It revealed the power of story in the classroom and how effective it can be to communicate, connect, engage, and inform our students.

Our names are Gustavo Lopez and Arturo Valdez. We are both middle school history teachers greatly interested in improving secondary school history curriculum and instruction. Among the many pedagogical tools we have examined, implemented, and reflected upon, the use of story and storying in the history classroom have been very effective. We believe these pedagogical tools have the power to excite, connect, bridge, and even heal people.

History and Pedagogy

A critical examination of history curriculum and pedagogy reveals ample opportunities for educators to include story and their students' voices through the use of storying. The act of using story and storying as pedagogical tools in the discipline of Social Science may lead to greater student engagement and mastery of historical content and skills. In addition, perhaps most importantly, it will give students not only a greater sense of belonging in their immediate Social Science classroom but also a sense of being part of the ongoing narrative that is the story of humanity.

In our minds, history and story go together like peas and carrots. Story did the job of history long before its discipline and methods were developed. Then, as the discipline was created, it served as one of its crucial elements. This connection between History and story goes all the way back to the father of the historical discipline. Enter Herodotus of Halicarnassus, the Athenian historian who wrote what is considered the first historical work from which the modern historical discipline stems. Were there others that preceded him which most likely contributed to the approach employed by Herodotus? The answer is almost definitely yes,

but since their work did not survive, it's Herodotus' work that remained to guide us. His work begins by stating the purpose of his approach which is in fact the safeguarding of people's lives and legacies. He begins by stating:

> Here are presented the results of the inquiry carried out by Herodotus of Halicarnassus. The purpose is to prevent the traces of human events from being erased by time, and to preserve the fame of the important and remarkable achievements produced by both Greeks and non-Greeks. (Herodotus et al., 2014, p. 1)

This is his attempt to prevent the loss of man's acts in time, which he would call *The Histories*. The work of Herodotus is largely notable for its movement away from the use of the supernatural to explain historical events. As Herodotus himself tells us, he simply wrote, "What he has seen and what he has been told" (Murray et al., 1986, p. 163). The gods have no say in his version of history. The foundation of his historical work was oral history, believing it to be the manifestation of living history. Herodotus rarely used written documentary sources as he perceived them to be lacking and perhaps more importantly, limiting in his research as the Greek language was the only language he had command of.

Herodotus' approach to history can essentially be watered down to two simple steps. The first is the gathering of stories. Herodotus was a traveler who gathered stories throughout Greece, the Mediterranean, North Africa, Egypt, and parts of the Middle East. It is also significant to note that when Herodotus recorded these stories, he made an effort not just to record them as they were told but within the cultural context within which they were created as well. He often paired research on the cultural customs and beliefs with the accounts he gathered. This approach that embraced and accepted other cultures was one he was greatly criticized for and one that was often discarded as the discipline of history evolved (Murray et al., 1986, pp. 162–163).

The second step was the reporting of a story or stories or "logos" to use the Greek term. Reporting history in the form of a story preserved the essence of the oral histories which he compiled and made history discernable and relatable to the people. Herodotus believed that fact alone did not do justice to history. History needed a story because "a story has a shape, a purpose: it is not an isolated fact preserved for its own sake; it may be true, but it must be interesting" (Murray et al., 1986, p. 164). Although

his process was far from systematic, his approach took the first crucial steps that would lead to the construction of a system of inquiry, steps that the discipline of history has employed but has also walked away from. The latter of which we argue to be problematic and one of the things that drives our approach to teaching history.

But Herodotus did not have all the answers. In fact, the methodology of history practiced today would be attributed less to the work of Herodotus and more to the work of his contemporary, Thucydides. Herodotus may be considered the father of the historical tradition but he clearly didn't provide all the tools necessary to develop a system of methodical inquiry. Enter Thucydides, a self-proclaimed rival and eager critic of Herodotus.

Thucydides' approach provided some of the core tenants of the historical methodology still in use today, the first being the identification of the value of recording history contemporaneously. He believed that the only way to provide an accurate historical account was to have it derived from sources that lived to experience the historical moment in question. He believed this so much that, oddly enough, he believed it was impossible to accurately write about the past that you did not experience (Murray et al., 1986, pp. 166–167). Clearly this is not the case, and while contemporaneous accounts of history are of great value, they are not without limitation. An overemphasis on the use of contemporaneous sources also ignores the value of cultural knowledge passed down through oral tradition, a value which we happen to be focusing on here.

The second major contribution made by Thucydides was the emphasis on the use of multiple sources. No single account of a witness or primary source is sufficient enough to provide the full scope of what transpired in any given event or time period. The fullest or clearest picture of what is at the focus of a historical investigation is mined out of an analysis of multiple accounts (Murray et al., 1986, p. 166). Analyzing the accounts and information provided from multiple sources, even when the accounts were conflicting, was what Thucydides found to be the key to making historical conclusions. It is this contribution that creates the critical study of History, culminating in the birth of the historical tradition from which the modern academic discipline is rooted, the western historical tradition that is. And therein lies the problem.

If we as teachers of history are to invite students to study the past, the past of our people, our culture, our nation, and of those of people throughout the world through the discipline of history, we must acknowledge its

flaws and limitations. Without doing so, risks committing a great disservice to our students and to the study of history itself.

As the discipline of history within the social sciences is rooted in the western tradition, it makes the discipline of history to be somewhat exclusionary. The study of history is an imperfect one specifically because the western tradition isn't everyone's tradition. This comes from the very application of science itself as the study of science is rooted in western culture.

Since the dawn of the scientific revolution, the application of scientific methods has spread to almost all disciplines. It has led to any knowledge being required to achieve a sort of certification through rigorous critical analysis and questioning in order to be recognized and valued within the academic community of any discipline (Bristow, 2017). But when the knowledge and methods used to scrutinize knowledge are centered in the cultural understandings and traditions of a specific culture, naturally knowledge drawn from outside this culture struggles to find its value and merit recognized (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). This is because the cultural understandings needed to grasp its value and the context from which that value is often derived are absent. In this absence the knowledge, cultural understandings, and historical traditions of non-western cultures have been left invalidated. We have seen this throughout history and throughout the world. Even within western culture, the culture had long excluded its own with the knowledge and skills necessary to partake in the practice of establishing knowledge being only accessible to the educated, the upper class, the men, the privileged (Phillips & Bunda, 2018).

In order to address this ostracizing flaw, the very least that we as teachers of history can do is create a space for story, and all of the rich oral traditions that come with it, within our discipline. In doing this we are returning to the approach of Herodotus that embraces historical accounts from all cultures and recognizes the cultural contexts within which they were created. By inviting story into the teaching of history we can begin to recognize the value and knowledge offered by histories recorded in story. We can begin to see these histories based in the tradition of story as just another one of the multiple sources to be recognized, giving it a place within our historical discourse. If the traditions of oral history and the telling of stories are practiced and embraced by cultures throughout the world, across classes, then by inviting story into the historical discourse and into the teaching of history we are also welcoming those marginalized classes and cultures (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). And by giving voice to

these marginalized classes and cultures we can create an avenue to allow our students to voice their story no matter the cultures and classes they come from.

Story and Storying in the History Classroom

We would like to share with you our experiences using story and storying in the classroom through a series of observations, reflections, and informal interviews we conducted of each other. We will share what we've observed, what we've learned, and what we've built with the use of story and storying, breathing new life into our teaching and into the learning of our students.

Valdez: One of your many approaches to teaching history, one of the pedagogies in your tool belt that you were already using by the time I met you was the use of telling stories. Something you simply call "storytime." What is "storytime?"

Lopez: It's the telling of a short history story that employs simple theatrical elements like playing with pitch of voice, facial and hand gestures as well as the simplest of props. The stories are usually no longer than 15 minutes long and there is typically one story per unit which equates to about 10 stories per school year. The stories are drawn from primary sources as much as possible and if not, then from reputable secondary sources. While the short history story is researched, prepared and told by the teacher, it usually invites student participation in the telling of the story. The collective act of telling a story not only helps develop social listening skills but also contributes to the further development of a positive classroom environment. Having a story unfold collectively leads to the building of trust among all the participants which is foundational for all positive relationships.

The stories are usually introductory in nature but can be used strategically to promote inquiry and challenge critical thinking. While on one hand, they aim to make difficult concepts and/or ideas more understandable and relatable. On the other hand, they're not meant to be definitive or conclusive when it comes to how historical events are remembered. This is largely because the story presented by the teacher is seen as another source to be analyzed within the historical discourse. The objective is to generate student excitement, engagement, curiosity, and a desire to further investigate the topic at hand and engage in an inquiry or offer

resolution to a historical dispute. Think of the story as the tip of a spear. Beyond it, students conclude the story through a historical investigation.

But within the process of telling or performing the story it becomes so much more. It becomes storying. Story is the language in which we present the history, and storying is the process in which we share that story. We understand storying to be a process focused on the making of meaning through stories (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). Storying "claims voice in the silenced margins; … is embodied relational meaning making; … intersects the past and the present as living oral archives; and … enacts collective ownership" (Phillips & Bunda, 2018, p. 43). The drawing of our stories from historical documents grounds the "knowing" of the teacher and establishes a connection to the past and to the lives, positions, and experiences we share with our students within these stories (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). As the teacher tells the story they embody the words of the historical documents, they embody the historical context, and they embody history. The telling of stories in this way becomes the continuation of the oral tradition that Herodotus so highly prized so long ago, bringing new life to the past.

The very recognition of the teacher as an oral source creates a space for story and oral historical traditions within the historical discourse. This process creates a connection between the past and the teachers and students of the present. Through this connection we, the teachers and students, are allowed to make new meaning. The process of storying, often being quite reflexive, also opens opportunities to access and share authentic emotional truths through the sharing of one's own stories (Raj, 2019). The ability to voice our stories and experience the stories of others offers a greater sense of self. The sharing of these stories always being a collective process relinquishes ownership of these stories, making authors of all involved in this process.

Valdez: Where in the world did the idea of literally telling students stories in the History classroom come from?

Lopez: Necessity. That's the short answer. I was responding to what I thought was an important need in an earlier time period in my teaching career. I would not have incorporated this strategy if it wasn't for this fact. My rationale for telling stories and the way I tell stories and use stories in the history classroom has evolved over time and as it did so did the practice evolve to eventually include my students' stories into the historical discourse.

I first started toying with this pedagogical tool of telling history stories in my first year of teaching middle school, which was also my fifth year of teaching Social Science. My first four years were spent teaching high school. I had every intention of spending my entire teaching career as a high school teacher. Embarrassed by it now I actually used to cringe at the idea of teaching middle school, but like with so many educators, I too was displaced by the reduction in force resulting from the economic recession that started in late 2008. One of the few places that could actually hire me was a middle school that could bypass seniority union rules. I accepted the position which consisted of six sections of eighth grade U.S. History. The average class size was hovering around 40 students and because of the school's block schedule, I would only see my students every other day for 84 minutes. In comparison to a more traditional 52- or 54-minute period, I would see my students roughly a third less time on average.

Back then, we had the California Standards Test (CSTs) which were administered toward the end of the school year. Although I repeatedly heard and was told that test scores didn't matter, a whole lot of fuss was made about test scores. School administrators would compare how different departments fared and make judgments about an individual teacher's performance based on these test scores. In fact, at the interview for this middle school teaching position, I was asked to bring my test scores which I complied with. I knew that despite the rhetoric that deemphasized testing, schools gave a lot of credence to these test results.

As much as I would like to say that I didn't care about these test results because what they really reflected, according to research, is a student's economic and social background. As a person of color teaching in a predominantly low-income school composed of children of color, I could not help escape falling into the trap of minding these tests to some extent.

The Social Science CSTs more than anything covered content, essentially measuring how much students could recall content covered throughout the year. As a result, I was laser focused on covering the content standards set out by the state. As someone who had just been hired to teach eighth grade U.S. History, I started drawing up my curriculum by reviewing the state's standards for this grade level. To my utter surprise, eighth grade Social Science students did not only test for eighth grade content but also seventh and sixth grade content. Regardless of how much or little a student had learned in those lower grades, eighth grade teachers were ultimately seen as responsible for what was really a three-year cumulative test.

In other words, for better or for worse, an eighth grade Social Science teacher was seen as responsible for the results of three years' worth of Social Science instruction. When this first became clear to me, I was nervous. Later, I administered pre-assessments to inform me how much my eighth grade students had learned or could recall from seventh and sixth grade history. I did so in order to draw up plans on how I would review two years' worth of instruction, in addition to covering new eighth grade content. The results revealed that either my students had not been taught the content or had completely forgotten what they had previously been taught. I was utterly mortified.

Also, there was the fact that as much as I did pay attention to the content standards, I really did want to use meaningful instructional practices. I really love history and hated the idea of reducing it to mere recall of content. My instruction early on was driven by the use of primary documents with an inquiry-based approach where students make sense of the past by analyzing historical documents. This resulted in either verbal presentations like debates, symposiums, socratic seminars or a writing assignment like an essay, historical fiction or short historical reflective writing piece. The weight, however, of the CSTs drove me to consider how I could quickly and efficiently deliver historical content to my students that they would then be able to recall on a multiple choice quiz or test.

The first major decision I made was to proceed with eighth grade history material in what I know are theory-based, best practices. That is, I would not be focused on the simple recall of content for eighth grade material. Instead, I would be driven by pedagogy and practices predicated on everything I knew was wonderful about the study of history along with trying to teach the whole child and raise their critical consciousness. This would be how the majority of time would be spent in our classroom.

The second major decision was to spend the first semester covering sixth grade content while the second semester would be focused on covering seventh grade content while simultaneously covering eighth grade material throughout the whole school year. Since the period consisted of 84 minutes, I decided that the 60 minutes would be eighth grade material and the remaining 24 minutes would be covering the earlier grade level content.

Third, I decided I would assess my students' learning once a week to see whether they were learning the content I was covering and how to best proceed. I must admit that I felt lost at the prospect of covering so much material in so little time. I distinctly remember nearly breaking down

thinking it was impossible to do. Nevertheless, I somehow convinced myself that I would figure it out or at least give it a good try.

To deliver the content quickly, I tried a variety of different strategies that included various reading strategies, games, short video and audio clips, student cooperative learning techniques, as well as classroom gallery walks and peer teaching. While the weekly quizzes and tests did show my students retaining some of the content, the results were far from where I thought they should be. I also turned to short lectures and this resulted in a slight improvement, but after a few lectures, my students started to complain about having to take so many notes.

Also, for as long as I have been in the classroom, the use of lecturing has been perceived as an antiquated, teacher centric approach that if used, should be used as sparingly as possible. So when I did lecture, it was with a lot of trepidation. I also tried a combination of all these approaches in an attempt not to bore my students along with trying to find a successful combination.

This process was so taxing and stressful that I literally ended up in the emergency room thinking I was having heart failure. The attending physician told me that the electrocardiogram indicated nothing was wrong with me physically and that while more tests would be run on me including blood work, more likely than not, I simply seemed like I was under a great deal of stress resulting in a lot of anxiety.

While I managed to control my stress levels and anxieties, I still worked on trying to figure out how to best deliver large amounts of historical content to my students quickly and efficiently. It then occurred to me that as a high school teacher, I had seen a tremendous difference in student reaction from one year to another when we went from learning about the tragedy of Emmett Till through a reading to me recounting the episode as a story. I remember that first year when I covered Emmett Till through a reading, I had sensed that my students didn't fully grapple with the gravity of what we had just read. The reading was meant as an entry point on the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. While the reading covered the events well enough, it failed to convey the urgency of the human tragedy and societal failure.

The following year, I decided that instead of having my students do the same reading or even a different reading, I would present this tragedy not as a reading or as a lecture but as a story that I would tell my students. While everything that I described in the story was age appropriate (this was to my eleventh grade U.S. History students), the impact was palpable

and profound. After the telling of this story to five different U.S. History classes, a change in my students and class culture was evident. I had touched a nerve like I never had before and my students repeatedly let me know afterwards how much this story had changed the way they viewed history and the importance of history. It was also the only real time that as a high school teacher I had told a story not simply presented information or historical context to better understand a primary document. I used story to make sense of a larger historical time period, to make meaning of another's position, to make understanding of another's lived experience. It was with this added intention that it became storying.

It occurred to me then, what if along with the strategies I was already trying, I tried incorporating the telling of some of the historical contents as stories. I did and the reception by my eighth grade students was beyond anything that I could have possibly imagined. Engagement soared and there was an air of excitement that simply wasn't there before. Coupled with this were the weekly test results that immediately demonstrated improvement across the board. According to the results, my special education students and English Language Learners (ELL) also seemed to get a lot out of these stories. It was then that I realized the impact that short little stories could have with connecting with students. From there, I began to play with this idea of conveying historical content through the telling of short stories which ended up being called storytime. The name of this approach actually came from the students. I remember students in different classes started to refer to this practice as "storytime."

"Mr. Lopez, are we going to have storytime today?" Almost every single time that I answered yes, it was followed by a "yay!" Shortly thereafter it became, "Can we please have storytime today?"

Valdez: It's interesting to hear the teacher's perspective on how a practice came to be. It wasn't a decision made out of luxury but from the need to get through a lot of content quickly and have students actually retain that content. But I also think there is a good reason for why it works. There's something about the telling of stories that allows students to connect with the teacher in a unique manner. This in turn allows them not only to feel connected with what we're learning, what we're discussing and what we're analyzing but also to feel connected in a uniquely human way that other methods or modes don't usually do. It's because the use of stories, as well as storying, are really fundamental to what it is to be human (Gottschall, 2013). In fact, it may have been one of the earliest human cultural behaviors (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Communicating through stories is one of the most common ways that we connect with each other, share things, express things, and of course learn. This was true early in the history of humanity and it is true in humanities today. In our current world, we are surrounded by story, both with oral and with communal traditions, as it was in the past and with art, literature, cinema, television, and practically every aspect of modern media. From family histories to gossip to teen novels to movies, story is the language we all speak. It is a kind of universal language and so it is particularly effective at reaching all of our students because it permeates any kind of communication or language barriers.

I often think of how our use of story is often what opens our ability to connect with our English Language Learners (ELL) both on a personal level and with the content. Where they might struggle to comprehend and understand content from within a dense textbook, or historical excerpts written in language that is either dated or far above their own developing reading comprehension levels, students thrive when absorbing content through story. I often see students, and particularly ELL students, making sense of what they read in historical documents by calling back to or making connections to the story that was previously told. They do this by either corroborating evidence or recognizing similarities and differences made in the arguments presented in both accounts. Story renders the privilege of language command null and makes the knowledge of history accessible. History shouldn't just be for readers. Consequently, the use of story thus makes the teaching of history much more effective and expedient.

And then there is an element of entertainment which we don't usually associate with learning and perhaps we should reconsider this. Why not? Why can't it be fun? More natural and akin to the way we learn outside of the classroom as we explore the world as children through a creative and fun experience. This pedagogical tool can be used the way all great stories have been used to garner interest in a topic, place, people, person, event, or even ideas. Whether it's to create suspense, excitement, or mystery, or as we employ it in our classroom to leave students with questions that need further exploring, thinking about, and analyzing. In addition, anything being either taught, shared, or expressed through story all of a sudden becomes that much more attractive. The experience of connection made as the story unfolds opens students up to further learning and inquiry. The experience in many ways is an invitation to be part of the discourse at hand.

Lopez: Yes, and it wasn't an approach that I had come across in my credential program or learned about through one of the many Social Science professional developments that I have participated in. It wasn't even read about in my search to further incorporate best teaching practices.

Valdez: But now let's be honest here, it's one thing to tell a story, and it's an entirely different thing to perform a story. Your storytime definitely has a performance element to it. How did that aspect come about?

Lopez: The performance element arose rather quickly once I had determined to tell stories, but at first it was unplanned and then it became thoughtful and methodical. I remember the difference there was between telling a story and incorporating a performance element to telling that same story when I was covering the rise of Alexander the Great and the spread of Greek culture. The more I played with the pitch of my voice to lend greater emphasis to a certain aspect of the story or to create suspense or made greater use of facial expressions as well as hand gestures, the more I held my students' attention. Whereas before, whenever I would be presenting information, my students rarely looked at me. They now followed me with their gaze even turning around their bodies to keep eyes on me as I moved around the classroom. The more I incorporated a performance element, the more my students positively reacted to the stories I was sharing.

It would not be long before my students wanted to actively participate in the telling of the stories. This was great. Rather than simply connecting by listening, my students started to verbally and physically be part of the stories being told. It started out very naturally and organic before I started to methodically think of how I could include them in the stories. The stories became an active group participation activity. In some instances, students acted as a chorus or as historical characters. For example, when telling the story of the major causes of the American Revolution, students chant with little prompting, "Without representation!" after I say, "No taxation!" It doesn't take much at that point to get all of my students to stand up and continue the chant as they put their fists up in the air. As easy as it is to get whole class participation, a few hand gestures indicating to sit down and stop the chanting is all it takes to move on.

Valdez: How did the use of props or "imaginary" props become part of the performance?

Lopez: I was going to be teaching about Hammurabi's code, which is 6th grade content, and I remember I had an excerpt from the document from the code that had to do with building codes and an "eye for an eye"

type of punishment. So, I came up with this story where I embody the role of a builder and my students, the residents. The premise revolved around the building falling on the residents, where I'm liable or responsible. And as I'm telling this, there were books, textbooks. I just started stacking the textbooks as I'm telling this story. They probably had no idea what I was doing with the books. They might have not even been paying attention to the fact that I was stacking up books until all of a sudden I start telling them, "these are your books and this, this is your house." And all of a sudden they're paying attention to the books not just as a prop, but as this house. I start to get them to see something as something completely different. "You've hired this person to construct this beautiful home," I say. I start to point at the stack of textbooks calling out imaginary features. Then, I start to bring my students into the scenario by asking them to tell me what other features the home possesses. They respond and say things like "a third story" and "a garage."

As they start to do this, I start to gesture to the students around me to start handing me books, to help me build the "home." I continue by telling them that this is where they're going to live with their families, that they're paying very good money to a builder to build them this home. That this home is going to be a sturdy home and it's going to be a fine home. And then … BOOM!

"It was an earthquake!" I yell as I shake the table.

The books collapse and I have them. They've completely imagined this scenario and are fully engaged in whatever is about to happen next.

I react in shock, "oh my goodness the home! It has collapsed! Where's all of our stuff?" I ask.

"Where's, dare I say …" I stop mid-sentence and turn and ask one of the students near me what the name of their dog was.

The student replied excitedly, "Chuchis!"

Then, I ask again with a trembling fear in my voice, "Where's Chuchis?" as I look at the pile of books.

The class gasped, and I screamed, "No! Chuchis No! Not my Chuchis!"

The class was then suddenly filled with giggles.

"Who's responsible for this?" I say with a slight tone of anger.

"Chuchis as it turns out," I say, "was safe after all. But it's not too hard to imagine what could have happened."

From there we begin to think about legal consequences and dive into Hammurabi's code and it just clicks. The students are engaged and the story becomes a fictional example that we can refer back to. From there I

start to think, *okay, so this is working, and this can't be accidental. This has to be a whole lot more methodical. This has to be really thought out.* Then I started thinking about props.

Valdez: Wow, so something as simple as a textbook huh? I love how the use of props can create opportunities and moments to connect with your students. When you ask them to grab the book, you're suddenly pulling them into that performance. You're not asking them to do too much, but they're a part of this process. And when you get that name of the student's dog, you're getting a piece of their life that you are then injecting into the process. It creates this opening to share a piece of our lives with each other, with the other kids that are listening. You're creating memories too because that moment is not only something they're not going to forget on their tests, but it's going to be something they remember on a grassy field at a graduation. If we have this ability to harness story, to create many of these memories or moments in our classroom, and have our content and intended understandings attached to them, then the content can ride these memories into their brains. If we can do that, then we'll have some real magic.

There's also something quite endearing to our students about the low budget affair that is the way we use props. It's silly when textbooks stand for buildings or when we use practical effects such as placing a water bottle in front of the projector lamp to blur an image to make it seem as if we were trying to see through water or through a dense jungle. They respect the effort and the risks we take in the classroom so that our dedication to the class is never in doubt. The fact that we are willing to let them see us regularly take risks with them, they're all of a sudden a lot more comfortable to express something, a thought or an opinion.

Lopez: Absolutely. Since then I quickly realized that if I was referring to a historical document and I held up a piece of paper, students' gaze would be fixed on the piece of paper, now acting as the document I was referring to in the story. In the same story recounting the causes of the American Revolution, I use a few boxes with the word "tea" written on them to dramatize the tossing of tea into Boston Harbor. I point to an open space in the classroom that I suggest is Boston Harbor and get several students now acting as protesting colonists to reenact the Boston Tea Party with me. All eyes are fixed on the tossing of these boxes as a protest to British taxation. I might also turn off the classroom light to indicate that the story takes place at night or play music to set a tone. Student

inclusion and the use of simple props helped to further animate and dramatize the stories being shared.

I have been careful, however, and sensitive not to include students in stories that are particularly sensitive or deal with difficult topics. The last thing we would want is to be offensive, belittling, or disrespectful. For example, I would never include my students in a recounting of events like slavery or the Holocaust. One has to be judicious and use good judgment.

Valdez: I totally agree. Using props definitely creates a path for student participation. And the more students participate the more authorship they begin to take in the collective process of storying. But sometimes this participation is spontaneous. As this is a collective process, we can't expect everything to go as we, the individuals, have planned. The stories we tell are impacted by how we as human beings are feeling in that moment, or perhaps influenced by what's happening in current events. It's going to be impacted by the knowledge and experiences that our students possess. This is part of what makes this a shared experience. As we share this experience with our students, they can inevitably shape the way stories are told.

In teaching seventh grade, the civilization of Rome is covered. Most particularly, the transition from the Roman Republic to the Imperial Era. There was a story I told about Julius Caesar. The story revolves around his rise to power to the bloody end of his assassination. While I'm telling this story, I had this idea that I was going to walk around the classroom as if I was Julius Caesar in the theater where he was assassinated and that all my students were the senator that awaited Caesar. Standing in the middle of the room I was completely surrounded by "senators." Around the room I walked and greeted each "senator" I locked eyes with.

"Senator Clarisa, Senator Michael, good to see you again!"

As I continued to greet senators with names that were coincidentally the same as my students, my students giggled. Until I came across a student who was deciding to interact with the story quite differently. This student had a ruler on his desk. And I assume that he had some kind of familiarity with the history of Caesar. Or maybe he hadn't.

He just kind of realized that I was getting to this moment because as I was acting this out, I was starting to act as if I had become scared of them, that they were starting to turn on me. The student holds out his ruler as if it was like a blade. And he had this devilish grin on his face as he sat in his chair.

I see him and I just roll with and respond, "Weapons? W-w-why would you bring weapons?"

The whole class is laughing because this kid is sitting in his chair with a ruler and I look terrified of him.

"But we're friends!" I continued and it became part of the performance of the story.

Now to be clear, although the story of Caesar involves assassination, I am never asking my students to participate in the story by pretending to stab me with rulers. That would not be appropriate, would be ridiculous, and completely missing the point.

I don't ever have to emphasize the death other than to say he was killed because the violence was not the focus of the story. The focus is always to transport them into that moment and focus on the human experience, which in this case was betrayal. A betrayal that led to a power struggle that would define the era of Roman Imperial rule and lead to the rise of the actual focus of that particular unit, Caesar Augustus. But ever since, that single performance had completely opened my eyes to the level of participation and agency the students have in interpreting and authoring the story within the process of storying.

I mentioned my students laughing in this story and I'd be lying if I said it didn't happen often. What about the use of humor? How does it factor into these storytimes?

Lopez: If appropriate and the story lends itself to it, I do not shy away from the use of humor. In fact, I welcome it. This does not mean that I am trying to do standup or to get a laugh for the sake of a laugh. Rather, I use it as a device to keep the flow of a story going or to emphasize a point that I really want my students to retain. The humor, however, never makes fun of people, past or present, or cultures as that would be counterproductive and harmful to our students.

Valdez: I agree. Humor can be a powerfully captivating tool. If you can make someone laugh you have their ear. That is particularly valuable when in the classroom your audience isn't always a willing one. Humor can in a sense disarm an audience and penetrate any barriers that they put up because humor entertains. If the students feel entertained it opens them up to what the teacher is offering, it opens them up to learning. But when using humor, how do you make sure that doesn't make students go off topic?

Lopez: So I have to make expectations clear that when I'm using humor, it's on purpose. I do want you to laugh and it is okay to laugh. I hope you get a laugh. Or sometimes these stories will be more of a sad nature, and it's okay to feel sad. But what is not okay, is for you then to

start cracking your own jokes because it becomes disruptive of the process that we're co-creating here.

Valdez: So initially you were mainly using story as a tool to deliver historical content but that changed over time. What brought the initial change?

Lopez: The delivery of story evolved very quickly as I have already described. A few months after a school year had started, we were informed that the state was dropping the CSTs for history. I was elated and relieved and decided there was no longer a need to use story to deliver historical content. I informed my students that we would no longer continue to review sixth and seventh grade content and that we would solely be focused on eighth grade content.

In all of my classes, my students asked about "storytime." The use of story had not been a part of my eighth grade instructional practices and as a result, I informed my students that we would no longer have storytime either. They expressed their disappointment and I thought they would quickly forget the practice. Much to my surprise, as the weeks and months went by, my students continued to bring up storytime and how much they missed it.

I was convinced of the practice's ability to excite, engage and motivate students, but could it continue to serve a purpose beyond its original intent?

I asked myself, "What other purposes can storytime serve beyond a delivery tool of content?"

I started to imagine and design storytime as a historical topic introductory tool with the express purpose of sparking curiosity and engagement in historical inquiry. In this regard, storytime would no longer solely inform, but would spark student longing to continue investigating. This would be done by leaving off the story with a cliffhanger so to speak. This made their motivation to go digging into those documents so much higher because a lot of them imagined as if they were trying to solve a mystery.

The story I told would just be viewed as another source to be analyzed and run through the historical investigative process along with other accounts. This is particularly effective if you were going to leave it with a kind of "Who done it?" For example, if you're looking at the Boston massacre, you could tell a story of the build up to the massacre, ultimately finishing with the climactic event. They are now left with the task of having to figure out who shot first (which is another Stanford based lesson).

All storytimes would since then be designed with a question or a series of questions that students would ultimately answer using the historical process. Whereas before, I had told a story from beginning to end or from A through Z, I would now simply tell A and allow my students to conclude the story with the aid of their investigation.

Valdez: Using story in this way does a great job of promotion inquiry. Since I taught 7th grade content as well, I saw that it presented the possibility of many different ways to use story to challenge our students. I had to explore different topics, different cultures, and there were often a lot of different scenarios regarding the focus of potential document based investigations. I then thought that maybe I could use these stories to do different things. I started thinking about great stories in movies. How sometimes a story or a movie will kind of lead you into one direction then all of a sudden reach this point where everything gets turned on its head. And I thought, what a great way to use the story to lead them, or to make them think I'm leading them, in a direction when I know that the challenge that I'm going to place before them with the historical documents. If they are using the historical skills the way they should, they'll begin to question the story that I told as they eventually navigate those documents.

There's a lesson that I did about a historical figure. And in that telling of the story I, very purposefully, based the story on sources that built him up as this kind of larger than life and legendary figure. But through the investigation they're led to question, was that really who he was or was there some more complexity? Was there something else? Or was he not what he was presented to be in the story I told all together? Then I realized our stories are used as another secondary source that is just a part of the historical discourse to be questioned and critically analyzed in the same way another historian or textbook should be questioned and analyzed. Once I saw I could do that with story, I saw a multitude of different ways to challenge our students.

I thought this strategic use of story was really fascinating because it really tested a lot of our students. As they pointed their fingers at me and accused me of being a liar, I couldn't help but feel so satisfied. Satisfied that they overcame the challenge, by comparing evidence from multiple historical sources to the story I told, to discover flaws in the historical claims presented. Coming up with their own historical conclusions and questioning things, even if it's me, the person in the position of authority. And that is so powerful. And one of the main goals that all Social Science

teachers have for their students when you're trying to teach them to become critical thinkers.

By the time I get to a lesson, like the document-based lesson revolving around the meeting between the Aztecs and Cortez and the Spanish conquistadors, they are ready for the ultimate test. I consider the historical investigation of the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire the ultimate test because they're dealing with historical sources and historical material that has come completely entrenched in bias and specifically controlled by one party involved to fit their particular narrative. This is a narrative that has been purposefully crafted to have the voices of the marginalized silenced. And so having them question these other things, having them question their own teachers and the historical account they present through story prepares them for the point where they have to question history itself. To then completely take the reins and control of historical understanding for themselves.

Let's discuss how storying brings life to historical documents. A lot of these documents that we use are super rich. But sometimes for some of our students, who only had 12 or 13 years of life experience, sometimes they struggle to imagine certain things or really see certain things the way we need them to see things for what they were. You know, in order to really have a full picture, which is kind of required to have a historical investigation. So I wanted to ask you, how does the use of the storying process bring these documents to life?

Lopez At their root, the stories seek to draw on human emotions and experiences. The goal is to make the history tangible, relatable and easy to imagine. When I use story to look at Christopher Columbus, my story starts by mirroring the textbook accounts. The textbooks talk about how Columbus went around asking for funds from different European royals and how he was searching for spices and silks. It explains the need to find a shortcut to Asia. But in my telling, I have a little wicker chest that I bring out, containing all the things that Columbus hopes to find. I bring out spices, including peppercorns. And we smell these and I have them imagine what this does to food. Then, I bring out a piece of silk, which is actually a shirt that I borrowed from my wife. And I let them in on the joke that, "Oh, my wife must be looking for this blouse. Don't tell her that it's here!" Cue the laughs.

But I say, "Imagine dressing in this fine silk."

Then I go around asking my students if they will fund this trip. And they know to say, "No, no, we will not."

I continue to ask students, "Oh, your majesty of the Italian state of Milan would you …?"

"No, no, no!" the students replied. "We're not going to follow you."

"Oh, Your majesty from Norway would …?"

"We said no!"

And then I finally arrive at a couple of students and I say, "Oh, you're king Ferdinand and you're queen Isabella. You're so magnificent and so brilliant. You will fund my trip, right?"

"Yes, yes, we will fund your trip," they reply quite nervously.

We create this story. And when I say create, we're not fictionalizing this. This is very much aligned with the historical record, but how rich it is then for us to collectively embody these figures, to embody this history.

The story then moves on to the three ships with Columbus, *La Nina*, *La Pinta* and *La Santa Maria*. Once there, they were transported to the Atlantic Ocean in 1492. They are imagining that they are on these Spanish dailies as I yell in search of land from atop of a student's desk.

And I, as Columbus, famously puts out a reward, "Whoever first sees land will be granted a year's worth of wages!"

As I peer out of the classroom windows in search of land, I say, "Who? Who sees land?"

Eventually, one of them gets the subtle request for participation, that one of them has to spot land, and a student shouts, "Oh me! Me! I see it over there!"

The story ends with a careful selection of lines from the primary documents and I embed them in the story to bring to life the tragedy that Columbus brings to the Native Americans through his actions.

Something in the reading of a source, whether it's primary or secondary, simply doesn't do that for us. Not initially, but hopefully by bringing it to life through the process of storying. Then they will start imagining as they are reading the primary sources. This connection with the past, this understanding, this enthusiasm and engagement carries over to the analysis of historical documents.

Valdez: Yes, I believe that this is when storytelling is at its most powerful. It has the ability to transport our students into the historical context and have them imagine vivid lived experiences by those of the past (Benjamin & Arendt, 1999). Imagining people in stories is the first step to having them understood (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). This aspect of storying is particularly impactful when we address the tragedy and trauma of history.

History has never been easy to look at and I doubt it ever will. When history becomes tragic and horrifying is also when it becomes hardest to understand and make sense of. It is uncomfortable. It is a burden, and one that, for the sake of humanity, we cannot shy away from. It is our responsibility to those who lived these traumatic experiences of injustice to take on the burden of history. I think about how important it is to history teachers in the U.S. to teach about the tragedies of this nation's history no matter how controversial. "Either the classroom becomes a site where we learn to talk to one another, or we will suffer the enduring consequences of never having learned to do so" (Wineburg, 2001, p. 230).

The process of storying is the key to addressing these sensitive moments of history with appropriateness and respect. Giving voice to the lived experiences of slaves and their descendants, of Native Americans, of all those whose voices have been marginalized, and of those whose lives have been invalidated is the first step in resurrecting them in our cultural and historical conscience. As many of them have passed from this world and are silent partners in this collective process, we can ensure respect for their stories by using their words they left behind to tell them.

The process of storying can also create profound understanding and empathy through the imagining of these lived experiences and recognizing their humanity as they existed within them. This type of imagining is what is referred to as sympathetic imagination (Nussbaum, 1997). In order to reach a true sense of compassion and understanding, one must first recognize their own vulnerability by imagining that these lived experiences, filled with trauma and injustice, could have been our lived experiences (Nussbaum, 1997). Through this genuine understanding fostered by storying, we can begin to make sense of these historical traumas, recognize the positionalities of those who have left us these stories, and acknowledge the cultural historical contexts from which these stories originated and that we are now a part of.

For our students, storying brings power to all the words they read in these documents. After bearing witness to these traumatic lives, it is not surprising for them to feel emotional as they reside in their newfound compassion.

They reach out to me in their confusion, often asking me during class and outside of class, "Mister, I can't believe that someone would do something like that to a person."

They declare their bold recognition of these injustices they have observed. They pour their newfound passion into the history that they are now co-authors of, reaching out on a very human level to make sense of the impact of this history, both in the past and now in their present. But it isn't easy. That's when I remind them that the weight they feel is the weight of history, and it is heavy. But if we all start lifting it together, we just might raise ourselves up.

The use of story and storying empowers history and connects our students to it. But we have seen how it can impact our students beyond the history of the past. How did the focus of the use of story transition from history of the past to the stories of our students in the present?

Lopez: While sharing stories of the past through storying was surely a collective process, creating a space for the sharing of our students' stories was the natural progression of this communal bond we were creating. I began to wonder what our students could gain from recognizing their role and place in history. What they could learn about themselves through the sharing of their stories, as well as the stories of others that are derived from different experiences, positions, and cultures. Ultimately, in seeking to make our study of history evermore relevant, I started to wonder if the experiences of our students could help us make greater sense of historical events. While history is fundamentally a study of the past, it nevertheless helps to explain the contemporary. The discipline of history, at least in the western sense, has also more recently embraced the tradition of using oral histories. I started to give a lot of thought to what student experiences or stories could be incorporated and how they could be incorporated. Could they be incorporated as entry points to historical topics? Maybe they could be used as part of our content? Or perhaps students' stories could be used to make sense of historical skills and ways of thinking.

If we examine the past simply through the lens of historical guiding questions, such as what events led up to the Boston Massacre or how Christopher Columbus should be remembered, then it's a bit more complicated to include students' own experiences. This is because the historical lens is too time and space specific to be relevant to students' lives. If the questions are, however, more transcendental in nature, such as essential questions, then it's easier to find places where students' experiences can inform past events. Essential questions pull back from the specificity of a particular time and place. Therefore, it is more universal in the students' gaze. Consider essential questions such as why do people choose to leave their home countries, or what attracts people to immigrate to specific

places or countries or how have immigrants been treated? While the historical content might be based in a specific time and place, such as looking at immigration during colonial America or immigration during the Great Wave of Immigration between 1880 and 1920, the essential questions allow for students' personal experiences or those of their family members or community members to be made part of the historical discourse.

Our unit on immigration was a place where we could invite our students (given the specific demographics of our school) to bring their personal stories into the classroom and make it part of the historical content. By bringing in their own personal stories or those of their family members or community members through storying, students not only added to the historical record but also found that their personal narratives to be part of the larger unfolding story that is history. In this regard, students found that their own personal plights and struggles are part of a much larger historical trend.

Rather than simply learning about the historical experiences of others, students found themselves reflected in the content. For example, numerous students have described the plight of fleeing war-torn countries or fleeing poverty. While others have described political persecution and the lack of educational opportunities. These students' personal experiences very much reflect the reasons why millions of people one hundred or two hundred years ago left their home countries. I didn't realize it initially, but the student's act of storying would also foster empathy among our students and create bonds that would not have been created otherwise.

I know you have a lot to say about this and I want to transition and ask you about your experiences with using story and storying in your classroom. Why do you think these particular pedagogical tools are so effective?

Valdez: Most of our students will end up saying that it's their favorite part of our class. I think it's for a lot of reasons. I think it's because to a certain point or to a certain degree, it's unexpected. It stands apart from other things that commonly happen in the classroom. They see their teacher in a new role. It's the way that things are being communicated and shared and the experience that is co-created between the storyteller and the listener in the classroom which is very different from the norm.

Lopez: This past semester though, rather than using a story that is drawn from the stories and history of the past, in your introductory history unit you decided to instead use storying in a very creative and timely manner. You decided instead of sharing a historical account through story to introduce your students to historical concepts and ways of thinking, to

instead incorporate storying where your students would share their stories describing their experiences with the pandemic. Their storying, however, was not only meant to create 'emotional truth' and connection between the teller and the listener, but also introduce your students to historical concepts and ways of thinking. It sounds like a tall order that you were trying to accomplish. Can you elaborate?

Valdez: Yes it was a real two for one deal. The approach that I employ when it comes to teaching history is heavily focused on introducing, practicing, and applying historical analytical skills. This approach is very much rooted in the approach that has been championed by Stanford University. The Reading Like a Historian curriculum which really has the aim of students assuming the role of historian and taking the reins of history in order to make greater sense of the past as well as making connections to the present (Wineburg et al., 2013).

The Reading Like a Historian curriculum has introductory history lessons that are not necessarily based on historical content but on these fictional accounts reflecting the kinds of experiences students might have lived or at least might be more relatable to their own immediate reality. The lesson that I usually have used to introduce students to historical concepts is about a fictional lunchroom fight between two students. The lesson is this kind of investigative, kind of mystery, of who started this lunchroom fight which parallels a historical investigation where students use multiple sources of information to engage in a historical inquiry.

Students are asked to take on the role of a principal who did not witness the particular events surrounding this fight. Nonetheless, in this role, students have to make sense of what happened and come to a conclusion based on the analysis of evidence of multiple sources. The process in short includes determining the reliability of each source, determining each source's claims, while paying particular attention to how language is used. In addition, taking into consideration the context under which each source was created to ultimately cross-examine the sources to determine where and what the sources corroborate. The lesson does an excellent job of introducing all of these historical elements and concepts.

Lopez: What is it about such an account, even though it's a fictional account, that makes it excellent for introducing these historical concepts to students as well as telling it as a story instead of having them read it as a passage that then needs to be resolved?

Valdez: At its core, it's the element of connecting these historical skills through story and wanting to resolve the inquiry at hand. Again, it has a

lot to do with the connection that a story brings. A story connects because the experience related in the story is something we already know. The experience in the story is something they recognize. An experience that they've probably either possibly experienced themselves or an experience that maybe someone they know experienced. Even though the account is fictional, the experience is nonetheless recognizable. Since it's an experience that's not too hard for them to imagine, their concentration and energy can be more effectively directed into understanding and applying the historical skills without the added challenge of difficult context. This approach streamlines the introduction and the practicing of historical skills.

The pandemic and having to teach remotely changed a lot of our practice and approach. One of the biggest and most apparent challenges to educators was just trying to keep our kids engaged and excited and being able to connect with them and what they were learning. The distance between us could be felt. The distance between the learning of the students and the learning could be felt.

It became imperative to make sure that whatever we were teaching and how we were teaching connected with their lives and their experiences so much more than ever before. Their presence and reality in what we were learning became even more urgent and valuable if we hoped to connect and teach our students. Using the lunchroom fight as an introductory unit of study this year was tabled for a unit that would connect even more directly with their ongoing lived experiences. Similar to the lunchroom fight, it would introduce students to historical thinking skills and concepts but in a much more relevant and profound manner. It wasn't something they could simply see themselves in but something that they were actually in. The pandemic was something they had all lived and were still living, and because they were living in at that very moment, it wasn't any struggle to imagine it.

There was no need for fictional sources. The lunchroom fight unit has students work with fictional experiences or knowledge about these fictional characters that were involved in the fight. Whether they were the students involved in the fight or their friends who might or might not have witnessed the events or the parents of the students in the fight. Instead, we would actually use ourselves. We used ourselves as the sources to understand and connect.

I started by first having our students recount their lives during the pandemic from the moment that they were sent home under the impression that they were only going to be quarantined at home for about two weeks

to the moment they were sitting in front of a screen trying to continue their learning and so on. Their world was turned upside down. Many recounted their struggles, the loss of family members, the loss of friends, the loss of hobbies and activities that filled their lives, and in many ways a loss of self and where they belong in their world.

As they recounted their experiences with the outbreak of the pandemic, other events also surfaced that factored into their lives like the Black Lives Matter movement, wildfires, and the loss of cultural figures. They asked whether they could include this or couldn't. It was stunning how much had happened and not just in their lives, but in all of our lives collectively. I remember sitting there thinking, *Oh, my God*. I should also note that I plan to continue this creation of student accounts next year with the hopeful return to in-person learning. I just can't help but think how intense those accounts will be, as I'm sure they will address the election of 2020 and the insurrection that followed, the vaccine rollout, and whatever challenges a return to in-person learning will present.

Once they shared, we had a body of sources detailing their individual experiences. In their accounts, students could detail as much as they wanted to and be as open and as honest as they felt comfortable with. Their experiences became valuable sources of information through which we could begin to understand historical skills and concepts. Students started by creating source information for their own accounts. Then, we began to introduce the concept of sourcing to determine a source's reliability as well as the concept of close reading and corroboration.

This approach allowed students to take a step back and make sense of what they had experienced and shared through a historical lens. Our students' experiences, which they had documented and shared, were put on equal footing with any other major historical event. In this regard, our students' lived experiences were just as valuable as any other historical experience we would learn about throughout the school year. Their experiences about this time, and what it was like to live in it, reflected a historical moment and their place in society and their connection to this truly global experience. Asking them to bring in their experiences placed our student's lives front and center into our historical discourse.

We took the next step of having our students share their experiences with other students, but this time applying the historical process of making sense of the past. As they analyzed their experience through a historical lens, they quickly undercovered that their own experiences often corroborated with the experiences of their fellow classmates. While other students

had very different experiences from the rest, for some students, the level of struggle was different.

Some had a really hard time relative to the experiences of their classmates and sometimes just by looking at the experiences of others, it allowed them to make sense of their own experience. These differences in experience changed student's perspectives. Being exposed to the experiences and positions of other students made them rethink what they had gone through. In that realization, they could make new meaning of the historical moment they lived through and start to view their own personal experience as part of a much larger shared experience. This process, in addition to teaching students how the historical process works, also helped students connect even further with each other. Together they were able to develop a deeper understanding of this historical moment than they would have ever done apart.

Lopez: Having your introductory history unit engage with students' pandemic experiences through storying had a lot of academic value. Everything from students exploring historical thinking skills, engaging with content of historical significance and learning the process and methods that historians use to make sense of the past but equally important, if not even more important there was a socio-emotional component to your unit.

When your students were sharing their stories with each other about who they are and how they came to be at that moment as a result of their pandemic experiences, they connected with each other. As they told their stories and listened to each other's stories they developed compassion and they grew as human beings. Can you talk about the value of the unit from that lens? From the lens of the importance of social-emotional pedagogy?

Valdez: It allowed students to understand each other's struggles on a very human level. As they shared their experiences, they examined their own experiences to make meaning and sense of what they were hearing. It was an acknowledgment that they weren't the only ones that faced struggles. They weren't the only ones that were scared. They weren't the only ones that were confused. They weren't the only ones that were dealing with rapid and sudden changes and struggling to adapt.

This understanding allowed them to empathize. They empathized with each other's experiences whether that was the experience of boredom that was so prevalent as the world around them shut down and confined them to their homes or the anxiety of the unknown and to the sadder reality of witnessing loved ones get sick and in many cases losing a loved one. The

experience created a place for their voices and gave them the sense that they weren't alone and that they were being heard. As they shared and listened to each other, they created bonds that I don't see being created in more traditional academic approaches.

But it wasn't all negative either. Many students also shared the experience of feeling happy at the beginning of the pandemic when they were first sent home. They thought it was like an extra vacation. They no longer had to get up early in the morning or get dressed for school. They also found that they had a ton of extra time with family members that they hadn't had before. They described staying up late binge watching series as well as playing online games way past their more usual bedtimes. This too was part of their collective experience that was validated as they shared with others. This was all part of the social-emotional learning component of this introductory unit.

Storying as a pedagogical tool allowed students to bring "emotional truths" that a more traditional introductory history unit approach would have missed. The "emotional truth" aspect provided an authenticity that made the unit real and relatable, both for the teller of the story and for the listener.

This approach allowed them to make meaning of real events and experiences and connect with each other, to empathize all while still learning how to do history and think about human experiences as elemental and foundational to the study of history. This in turn allows students to also appreciate the connection they have with all past peoples across time and space by the simple acknowledgment that their story is very much their own story and that ultimately history is very much about people just like them. That sense is often overlooked or lost in more traditional approaches to history.

Lopez: You have described students changing, growing and connecting with each other in profound ways as a result of using storying in history. How does it change you as a teacher?

Valdez: Such an approach, especially at the start of the school year makes what would normally be historical content, rich and meaningful content out of our students' lives and their experiences. Instead of, say, reading student essays about the meeting between Montezuma and Cortez, which eventually does happen, I'm starting the school year with reading about my students' lives but in an academic and historical manner. In the limited time that we have with all of the students that we're serving, it definitely provides valuable opportunities to connect with their lives and

their experiences and understand where they're coming from. As an educator, it allows me additional ways to better approach my students and support them and be more understanding. It allows me to better see their humanity and that changes one in profound ways. It makes them care much more, not only about their academic well-being, but also the well-being of the whole person.

Conclusion

History textbooks, along with the accompanying instruction of K-12 History, have excluded large swaths of the population for varying reasons, some benign while others less than benign. We know that representation matters. Doing a better job of recognizing historical sources rooted in the oral tradition within our historical discourse will go a long way toward acknowledging the cultural knowledge and understanding of those who have been less represented.

Story and storying can be used to make the content of history more accessible and more engaging for students all the while forging deep connections and understandings of the lived experiences of those that lived in the past. With reflection, a critical lens, and a little creativity, Social Science educators can find a myriad of places to have their students' realities represented in the curriculum. The use of story is an effective way to achieve this. While our Social Science practice employs surgical use of story throughout the school year to generate excitement and engagement in historical inquiries, our practice also focuses on bringing our students' personal, family, as well as community stories into our discipline. Through their own stories, predicated on storying, students find that history, far from being removed from their lived experiences and communities, is very much part of who we are individually and collectively. In this sense, history is not something that happened a long time ago in a faraway place to people far removed from our own realities, but rather the ongoing and yes, very much debated collective story of people.

Where textbooks and more traditional approaches to history fail to be more inclusive, using students' lived experiences along with their families' and communities' experiences serve to bridge the all-too-common inequalities of representation in the discipline of History. Any opportunity an educator has to use storying and/or invite students to share their stories should not be missed.

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