

# Freedom Summer and the Foot Soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement: Bottom-Up Historical Inquiry to Combat the Master Narrative

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AMERICAN DEMOCRACY has always been riddled with contradictions. The democratic principles and individual liberties articulated in the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution have not always been respected and honored for all citizens, especially with members of oft-marginalized groups. For example, it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century before all women gained the right to vote. Similarly, all African Americans did not gain the right to vote until the 1960s, and voting privileges are still a concern.<sup>1</sup> This reality curbed democracy and curtailed citizenship privileges for many people. In response, many groups have led different protest movements and calls for reform throughout U.S. history to compel America to live up to the ideals and principles in its founding documents. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. referred to this American contradiction in the following way:

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were

signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the “unalienable Rights” of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. King’s words reflect the experiences for many different groups in U.S. history. This includes the push for civil and voting rights for African Americans. As oft-marginalized groups pushed for their rights and liberties to be honored in law, an equal and opposite reaction has responded in American society: “The fires of fear in America have long found oxygen when broad seemingly threatening change is afoot.”<sup>3</sup> This dynamic in American society helps to frame an understanding of the trials and tribulations that activists encountered with the Civil Rights Movement (hereafter, CRM) of the 1950s and 1960s.

There are significant apertures between the history told within historians’ scholarship and teachers’ curricular resources.<sup>4</sup> The CRM did not start with Rosa Parks’ arrest in Montgomery, though it was a spark that inflamed a long-smoldering fire.<sup>5</sup> Nor did it end with Dr. King’s dream in Washington, as confirmed by the names “Bombingham,” Tuscaloosa’s Bloody Tuesday, Selma’s Bloody Sunday, and the Poor People’s Campaign.<sup>6</sup> The CRM’s roots extended downward long before Supreme Court decisions, and its branches stretched upward far beyond Dr. King’s death in Memphis.<sup>7</sup> Dominant personalities—like Martin and Malcolm, Booker T. and W. E. B.—led, argued, and personified distinct eras.<sup>8</sup> They were buttressed by figures often neglected in history curricula, like Ella Baker, A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton, Fred Shuttlesworth, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Medgar Evers.<sup>9</sup> The names of groups—like UNIA-ACL, NAACP, SCLC, SNCC—and mass movements—like Back to Africa, Pan-Africanism, Double V Campaign, and Black Power—now appear obscure, but they sought to confront economic marginalization and curtail judicial retribution as much as obtain political enfranchisement and social equality.<sup>10</sup> Through it all, multitudes of seemingly nameless advocates sustained these leaders, groups, and mass movements.

This inquiry is grounded on the courageous, dangerous actions of these near-anonymous activists during an era, Freedom Summer,

when the masses overshadowed the leaders.<sup>11</sup> From a curricular standpoint, Freedom Summer is the literal antithesis to and figurative antidote for students' consumption of the Master Narrative, which comprise the centralized, top-down, leader-centered stories that disregard the import and impact of regular folk.<sup>12</sup> This inquiry focuses on the foot soldiers of the CRM and their contributions, which adds complexity to the Master Narrative. As with all CRM events, radical change confronted reactionary resistance during Freedom Summer.

Particular to Freedom Summer, though, was the central role of anonymous advocates—often Northern and white college students—working for diverse CRM groups, like SNCC, SCLC, CORE, and NAACP, under the guidance of leaders who eschewed leadership roles, like Bob Moses, Staughton Lynd, and Ella Baker. Freedom Summer—along with Freedom Ballot, Freedom Vote, Freedom Schools, Freedom Libraries, Freedom Houses, and even the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party—represented the idea of *power to the people* before it became a slogan.<sup>13</sup>

### **Trends in History-Based Pedagogy**

State and national education initiatives, at times, may appear fluid, arbitrary, and unfunded to teachers.<sup>14</sup> They are, however, grounded on sound educational psychology and target discipline-specific pedagogy.<sup>15</sup> This particular inquiry lies at the intersection of educational psychology for young adolescents, which includes the higher-order thinking of Bloom's Taxonomy, and history education pedagogy.<sup>16</sup>

Critical thinking appears in differing degrees of intensity, from remembering and understanding in the lower tiers, to application and analysis in the middle, to evaluation and creation at the highest levels of criticality.<sup>17</sup> Adolescent learners can demonstrate all levels of criticality, especially when accessible material is supported with effective scaffolding that enables students to extend previously developed understandings.<sup>18</sup> Teachers' clear guidance and supervision of independent practice and collaboration positions students to demonstrate criticality, taking discipline-specific forms.<sup>19</sup>

History literacy, historical thinking, and historical argumentation are three foundational elements to history pedagogy.<sup>20</sup> History

literacy appears as close readings of diverse texts, usually primary and secondary sources; students scrutinize the texts for source, the source's perspective or bias, the context in which it was written or spoken, and if claims are credible and can be corroborated. Understandings developed during history literacy inform historical thinking, which manifests when students determine historical significance, take historical perspectives, and consider causes and consequences, to detail just three aspects of historical thinking. Understandings constructed through history literacy and historical thinking shape historical argumentation, or the evidence-based communication of newly generated understandings. In other words, historical argumentation involves discipline-specific, text-based writing tasks that can take many forms. If each element is reduced to the core and aligned with educational psychology, history literacy is close reading and appears as analysis; historical thinking is disciplinary cognition and rests on evaluation; and historical argumentation is text-based writing and centers on the creative demonstration of newly generated understandings.<sup>21</sup> These are three elements to (rather than separate stages of) history pedagogy, which emerge in the expectations of national education initiatives.

Historical literacy, historical argumentation, and historical thinking skills have been central to history education pedagogy for decades.<sup>22</sup> They each are integral in recent education reform movements and appear in the Common Core State Standards and the C3 Framework.<sup>23</sup> Both education initiatives are predicated on students analyzing primary and secondary sources to deconstruct arguments and contextualize them within their historical eras (Dimensions 2 and 3 of the C3 Framework). This deconstruction of arguments within primary and secondary sources sets the stages for students to then construct historical arguments about issues and events in historical eras (Dimension 4 of the C3 Framework). This approach to history education alters the parameters and depth of class discussions, as students work to replicate the professional practices of historians.<sup>24</sup> The C3 Framework influenced the recently launched NCATE Accreditation Standards. The NCATE Accreditation Standards emphasize historians' analytical skills in teacher preparation programs in the United States.<sup>25</sup> In other words, no matter which way a person turns, the history education landscape is shaped and driven by historical thinking skills.

## History-Based Sources and Strategies for Freedom Summer

This guided inquiry engaged students in history-based pedagogy using diverse texts with the intent that they determine and communicate historical significance. To do so, careful thought was placed on the primary and secondary texts. PBS's documentary, *Freedom Summer: Mississippi, 1964* (2014), was selected because of its engaging, accessible sections with interviews, both contemporary and recent, and testimony from white local Mississippians, African American Mississippians, and Northern white college students.<sup>26</sup> Susan Goldman Rubin's trade book, *Freedom Summer: The 1964 Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (2014), was chosen because it detailed similar elements with particular focus on Bob Moses, Fannie Lou Hamer, and the countless Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) volunteers.<sup>27</sup> Rubin historicized racism's ubiquity, but also localized strain ("Racism was rampant everywhere but particularly overt in the South, and especially strong in Mississippi"<sup>28</sup>); contextualized white citizens as complicit initiators and maintainers of a system of inequity from which they benefited; and located segregation's origins in slavery and Reconstruction, which many trade books on similar topics do not address.<sup>29</sup> The digitized primary sources—mostly letters, newspaper accounts, photographs, speeches, and telegrams—in the Freedom Summer Text & Photo Archive at Ohio's Miami University supplement the documentary and trade book.<sup>30</sup> Viewed from a distance, the PBS documentary is the curricular hook and grounding text, which Rubin's secondary trade book supplements and extends, and the manifold primary sources within Miami University's archive individualize, contextualize, and add nuance to the era.

The guided inquiry took place in a sixth-grade social studies classroom in the Southeast over the course of five class periods. On the first day, the teacher gave the students an overview of the Freedom Summer Project in Mississippi. She began by showing the students two clips from the PBS documentary about this event—the "Introduction" and the section on "Freedom Schools."<sup>31</sup> Then, students read-aloud portions of Rubin's *Freedom Summer* to ensure they had a firm grasp of the purposes and goals of Freedom Summer. The students also previewed Miami University's Freedom Summer archive. For homework, they reviewed the archive website and selected one primary source to work with the following day.

Who were the leaders in the Freedom Summer movement? Use evidence from your source to support your argument.	What did the people participating in the Freedom Summer movement want to accomplish? Use evidence from your source to support your argument.	Who were the adversaries of the people that participated in the Freedom Summer? Use evidence from your source to support your argument.	What were the adversaries' goals to the people that participated in the Freedom Summer? Use evidence from your source to support your argument.

**Figure 1:** Freedom Summer Graphic Organizer

On the second day, the teacher started by showing two sections from the PBS documentary, entitled “Fannie Lou Hamer’s Testimony” and “Living in Mississippi.”<sup>32</sup> There was a brief class discussion about these two clips. The teacher did this to reinforce content material covered the previous day. Then, students began working with their selected primary source to complete a graphic organizer (**Figure 1**).

The questions in the graphic organizer were designed to strengthen students’ historical literacy skills as they examined the contents of their selected primary source. The teacher walked around the classroom to guide students’ investigations. It took the students the rest of the second day to finish this task.

On the third day, the teacher started by discussing the four writing prompts and answering any student questions. She instructed students to select one of the four writing prompts (see the Text-Based Writing for Historical Argumentation section below on page 333), generate ideas, and create an outline for their writing

activity. The students started to answer one of these four prompts as they completed their graphic organizer (see the Close Reading for History Literacy section immediately below). Even though these were experienced and interested students, they worked at different paces. Some students finished the graphic organizer and started on the writing prompt for historical argumentation before others. The teacher and one of the authors circulated around the room to assist and guide, which took the entire class period. By the end of the third day, almost all students had completed the graphic organizer and created an outline for the writing prompt.

On day four, the students had the entire period to work on their writing prompt for historical argumentation. Like the previous day, the teacher circulated to help the students as needed. The students edited their historical argumentation for clarity—prose, syntax, and grammar—and complexity. At the end of class, they were told to continue working on their writing prompt as homework and to turn it in on Monday morning. This gave students three days to polish their writing. To illustrate students' involvement, their work on graphic organizers and the text-based writing are included and analyzed in the sections that follow.

### **Close Reading for History Literacy**

The teacher provided graphic organizers with the intention of achieving three goals. First, the close reading prompts were to spark students' history literacy. Students scrutinized the historical artifacts for subtext and meaning, principally exploring for source and perspective. In doing so, they engaged in analysis and interpretation, which are middle- and upper-level cognitive tasks; the critical thinking skills align with numerous Common Core history literacy expectations and the C3 Framework's Third Dimension. Second, the graphic organizer positioned students to evaluate the primary source and determine its historical significance—a key element to historical thinking. Evaluation, an upper tier of criticality, appeared when students made judgments about previously analyzed material; the questions cumulatively guided students to appraise the selected source's historical significance. The final goal of the graphic organizer was to prepare students to participate in historical argumentation the next day. Stated differently, students' subsequent

<p>Who were the leaders in the Freedom Summer movement? Use evidence from your source to support your argument.</p>	<p>What did the people participating in the Freedom Summer movement want to accomplish? Use evidence from your source to support your argument.</p>	<p>Who were the adversaries of the people that participated in the Freedom Summer? Use evidence from your source to support your argument.</p>	<p>What were the adversaries' goals to the people that participated in the Freedom Summer? Use evidence from your source to support your argument.</p>
<p>The Council of Federated Organizations seemed to organize and fund the most of the Freedom Summer (or COFO). COFO is made up of small civil rights and other local groups.</p>	<p>The protesters wanted to make life better, for example find work, learn to read, get better schools for the children, get the right to vote, and build safer and better houses.</p>	<p>The paper never directly states an adversary, but it hints at white supremacists and the government.</p>	<p>The state's government wanted to keep rights from African American citizens so that they wouldn't spend money on blacks, and this is shown when the paper says "It is the fault of the state that you cannot..." gives examples.</p>
<p>The Council of Federated Organizations seemed to organize and fund the most of the freedom summer (or COFO). COFO is made up of small civil rights and other local groups.</p>	<p>The protestors wanted to make life better, for example: find work, learn to read/write, get better schools for the children, get the right to vote, and build safer and better houses.</p>	<p>The paper never directly states an adversary, but it hints at white supremacists and the government.</p>	<p>The state's government wanted to keep rights from African American citizens so that they wouldn't spend money on blacks, and this is shown when the paper says, "It is the fault of the state that you cannot..." (gives examples.)</p>

**Figure 2:** Samuel's Freedom Summer Graphic Organizer (with Transcription). Source Consulted: "Brochure, Mississippi Freedom Summer by the Council of Federated Organizations, ca. 1964," Jackson, Mississippi, from Miami University, Freedom Summer Text & Photo Archive, Western College Memorial Archives, <<https://digital.lib.miamioh.edu/digital/collection/fstxt/id/749>>.

historical argumentation articulated understandings developed and refined from the observations and inferences first noted within the graphic organizer.

The students, with varying degrees of success, used this graphic organizer to accomplish the three aforementioned goals. A representative example of student work—not the best, certainly not the worst—is included in **Figure 2**. To determine a representative example, a graphic organizer at or near the class median in complexity was selected. No ideal yardstick exists for a graphic organizer, an object that reveals the writer's initial analyses rather than a final, polished product. Nevertheless, multiple measures—including length and accuracy of interpretation—were considered. Length was determined by counting sentences, an admittedly simplistic, but necessary measurement. Accuracy was established by ensuring all observations were grounded, all inferences were logical, and all claims were historical. Students certainly did not achieve equally in history literacy, historical thinking, and the origins of historical argumentation, but their work and the cognition recognized within their work are instructive.

History literacy, as noted above, manifested in various ways. This particular graphic organizer prompted students to engage in close reading, sourcing, and examination of the source's perspective, goals, and means. In this sample, Samuel (all student names are pseudonyms) selected a brochure created by Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) as his primary source.<sup>33</sup> COFO was an amalgamation of diverse organizations such as the legal expertise of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) led by future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, the religiously oriented Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) led by Dr. King, and the student-centered Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) led by Ella Baker. The brochure detailed COFO's aims, methods, resources, and needs of Freedom Summer, along with emphases on Freedom Schools, community centers, and voter registration. Samuel's work appears in its original form, followed by a transcription (**Figure 2**).

Samuel clearly scrutinized his selected primary source for explicit and implicit meaning, for both text and subtext. For the prompt in the first column, Samuel identified the source and noted its leadership role ("COFO is made up of small civil rights and other local

groups”). Some readers could critique him for (mis-)characterizing consequential organizations like NAACP and SCLC as “small,” but that may be pedantic. Nearly all students correctly identified the source of their selected primary source, as Samuel did. Those that did not offered an imperfect, technically correct, generic answer such as “protesters” or “civil rights people.” One can conclude that such an answer appears more all-purpose than correct. These are adolescents, an age group known for capriciousness and circumvention.<sup>34</sup> Middle grade students often struggle to use the source in their analysis.<sup>35</sup> Samuel, and about half of the students, did use the source in their initial analysis on the graphic organizer’s first column. Samuel noted that COFO “seemed to organize and fund the most of the freedom summer [sic],” which he likely determined from COFO’s stated aims and listed assistances. Samuel’s writing, like most students’ writing in the graphic organizer’s initial query, was succinct.

The second column prompted consideration of the source’s intent. Samuel noted COFO’s intent and, in doing so, reported what he interpreted as their perspective. He rightly positioned the action as collective and not driven entirely by COFO (“The protestors wanted to make life better”); he did not say COFO sought to make life better, but that “the protestors” did. COFO was not, in Samuel’s determination, a vanguard for the protestors; it was the protestors. Samuel noted how the citizens worked collectively “to make life better”; he offered examples such as helping African American Mississippians “find work, learn to read/write, get better schools for the children, get the right to vote, and build safer and better houses.” He likely extracted these specific examples from the COFO brochure’s stated aims. For the prompts located in the second column, Samuel analyzed the brochure to determine source, intent, and perspective; he used close reading to extract such meaning.

Samuel also decoded the primary source for subtext using close reading, which appeared most clearly in the third and fourth columns of the graphic organizer. COFO, in the brochure, did not claim that white supremacists and government were the opposition; the brochure did reference restrictions *by* the government, without local, state, or federal attribution. Samuel noted how this was implicitly encoded: “The [brochure] never directly states an adversary, but it hints at white supremacists and the government.” This text-based comment about COFO’s adversaries reveals both inferential thinking

and synthesis, if viewed from a cognitive perspective. The inference was likely based on an observation derived from close reading. Samuel engaged in synthesis when he made intertextual connections between this particular primary source and other texts. He did not, however, cite the origins of his understanding. There are three logical possibilities for the other text that enabled the aforementioned synthesis. It could be the trade book, which explicitly referenced white supremacy groups; the teacher used the secondary source on multiple days, and it was available for students to explore on their own during the inquiry. It also could have been a one of the numerous PBS documentary clips, which students watched on the first and second day of the unit. Lastly, Samuel might have explored, but did not analyze, another primary source in the collection; there were thousands of possibilities within the rich archival collection at Miami University. Samuel's inferential thinking and synthesis most likely originated from one or more of these possibilities.

Samuel's writing in the fourth column, when viewed from a historical thinking angle, reveals his ability to determine a source's historical significance and suggests engagement with a historical perspective. Samuel refined his third-column interpretation to consider more explicitly the opposition's intent, or perspective; he also polished the adversary from "government" in the third column to "state's government" in the fourth. He noted how COFO's perceptions of the state's aims ("to keep rights from African American citizens") and methods ("so that they wouldn't spend money on blacks"). Samuel also substantiated his claim ("this is shown when the paper says, 'It is the fault of the state that you cannot...[gives examples]']"). He utilized an ellipsis and suggested multiple conduits with his "gives examples" comment. When viewed cumulatively, Samuel evaluated the source to determine its historical significance.

The graphic organizer provided Samuel and his classmates the space to record what they determined through scrutiny, which involved history literacy and historical thinking. Samuel's close reading, sourcing, and determination of intent and perspective for both COFO and COFO's adversaries are indicative of history literacy. These cognitive tasks—analysis and interpretation—are middle- to upper-level forms of criticality. Samuel's close reading produced inferential thinking, synthesis, and evaluation, all of which

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MLK John Lewis Rosa Parks James Chaney	many black were scared to stand for there life for rights themselves + their family. In 1962 over 260 Blacks in Madison overcame there fear sign up to have	Byron de la Beckwith A black man called Medgar Evers while he was returning home. he was arrested but released after 2 trials + went to "hung trials"	Many white people thought the black men and women didn't want to vote but that was inaccurate many blacks wanted to vote	
MLK John Lewis Rosa Parks James Chaney	Many blacks were scared to stand for there life for rights themselves and their family. "In 1962, over 260 blaks in Madison overcame there fear and sign up to have [sic]"	Byron de la Beckwith murdered a black man called Medgar Evers while he was returning home. He was arrested but released after two nights and went to "hung trials."	Many white people thought the black men and women didn't want to vote, but that was inaccurate. Many blacks wanted to vote.	

**Figure 3:** Emma’s Freedom Summer Graphic Organizer (with Transcription). Source Consulted: “Mississippi and Freedom Summer found on the Sidwell Friends School website, October 27, 2000,” from Miami University, Freedom Summer Text & Photo Archive, Western College Memorial Archives, <<https://digital.lib.miamioh.edu/digital/collection/fstxt/id/1126>>.

are upper-level elements of critical thinking.<sup>36</sup> Samuel worked to determine the primary source's historical significance and determine a historical perspective, both of which are aspects of historical thinking. Samuel's graphic organizer was used for illustrative purposes because its complexity was at the class median, which represents how a typical student responded to these particular texts and tasks. Viewed collectively, the graphic organizer appears to have ably positioned students to engage in historical argumentation in subsequent days.

In another example, Emma's work was selected because it was near the class's median of complexity. For illustrative purposes, Emma's work appears in its original form, followed by a transcription (**Figure 3**).

Emma selected a secondary source that memorialized the era, not a primary source. She relied on recognizable names for the leadership role, and not the organizations and nameless contributors, which is the Master Narrative approach so commonly used. Emma substantiated some, but not all, of her claims. She was confused about the meaning of the word "adversary." As she was not prompted, Emma did not contextualize, corroborate, and consider the credibility of the source. While these mistakes emerged, Emma's work appears suitably complex and accurate, which positioned her for success at historical argumentation.

### Adjustments to Improve the Graphic Organizer

The graphic organizer might be improved with minor adjustments. Suggestions for modification originate from recognition of students' struggles in particular areas. First, many students did not select a primary source. Many sixth graders selected Miami University newspaper articles that celebrated Freedom Summer's anniversary; while engaging, these are secondary sources. A carefully placed prompt—such as "Is this a primary source? How do you know?"—could ensure students do not select a secondary source written decades after the era.

Second, a majority of students had accurate yet unsubstantiated historical claims. All of the queries tasked students with using evidence to substantiate claims, yet most students, like Samuel, failed to do so at least some of the time. Students answered the questions,

Who were the leaders in the Freedom Summer movement?	What did the people participating in the Freedom Summer movement want to accomplish?	Who were the adversaries of the people that participated in the Freedom Summer?	What were the adversaries' goals to the people that participated in the Freedom Summer?
Use evidence from your source to support your argument.	Use evidence from your source to support your argument.	Use evidence from your source to support your argument.	Use evidence from your source to support your argument.

**Figure 4:** Possible Adjustment to the Freedom Summer Graphic Organizer

but largely struggled to cite claims consistently; corroboration is a key history literacy skill.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the graphic organizer could be formatted differently to separate the question from the task of substantiation with evidence. **Figure 4** represents one possible adjustment; students would complete the first column, top to bottom, prior to moving to the right to complete the next three columns.

This adjustment might prove effective, as sections of the graphic

organizer were rarely unanswered, but often incomplete. This alteration might also guide students to move beyond concrete thinking; previously, names and dates often filled spaces that were intended for more complex answers. Students appeared to circumvent complex text-based writing with simplistic answers based on little more than recall of identified nouns. This is not peculiar, though, when one considers students' age and the cognition and behavioral patterns associated with early adolescence.<sup>38</sup> Students were not likely adversarial, so much as elusive, myopic, or some combination. In their minds, the questions were likely answered, so details were unnecessary.

Third, the most common, definitively wrong answer derived from misunderstanding the word "adversary." To be clear, more students mistakenly answered the first question with the imperfect, technically correct, generic answer like "protesters" or "civil rights people." Incomplete answers are not definitively incorrect; they were roughly accurate, but demonstrably imprecise. Many students, however, misjudged "adversaries" to mean "allies." A word bank for the definition could be provided on the side, or a short definition after the underlined, italicized, bolded, or highlighted word could alleviate the mistake. Compacting the sentence could provide increased clarity. These combined suggestions might appear as, "What were the *adversaries*' (opponents, antagonists, enemies) goals?" Together, these adjustments might prove helpful.

Fourth, the graphic organizer did not ask students to contextualize, corroborate, and consider the credibility of the source. Contextualization, corroboration, and determination of credibility are three important history literacy features.<sup>39</sup> Without simple prompts to guide students' thinking, they will not do so intuitively; historical thinking, we are reminded, is an unnatural act.<sup>40</sup> Such queries would certainly add to the rigor of the graphic organizer and, hopefully, to the complexity of students' thought. Teachers, however, might worry that such additions make the graphic organizer unwieldy or unnecessarily lengthy, which certainly appears to be a reasonable concern.

### **Text-Based Writing for Historical Argumentation**

Recent education reforms in history education stress that students have opportunities to construct writing pieces that engage them in

### Freedom Summer Writing Prompts

- 1) Imagine yourself as a volunteer for the Freedom Summer Project. Write an entry in a diary about your experiences, challenges, and feelings. Since you want America to live up to its ideals, how will you work to achieve it? Cite the sources originating from class, as well as online searches.
- 2) Which document or person, real or imagined, best represents or illustrates the Freedom Summer Project? Explain your selection and why you did not select another document. Cite your sources and explain the significance of your sources.
- 3) Assume the role of a volunteer for the Freedom Summer Project. Describe the activities taking place at your site. In other words, what activities are you doing to help African Americans in Mississippi? Why are these activities important?
- 4) Have a better idea? Write out exactly what you want to do and make sure you explain what sources you will use.

**Figure 5:** Freedom Summer Writing Prompts

historical argumentation.<sup>41</sup> In our intervention, students selected and completed one of four writing prompts to demonstrate their comprehension with events in Freedom Summer (**Figure 5**). The writing prompts enabled students to formulate historical arguments from analyses of primary and secondary sources that are provided to students.

Multiple options provided students choice and control in order to draw upon their academic strengths.<sup>42</sup> From examining and coding students' writing pieces, several themes emerged. We selected sample quotes from different students' writing pieces that best reflect the themes discussed.

First, the vast majority of the students accurately conveyed the key concepts and goals of the Freedom Summer volunteers. Students consistently said the two major goals of Freedom Summer were to improve the educational opportunities for African Americans in Mississippi while also helping them gain the right to vote. For example, Mike wrote, "We are going to Mississippi to educate

African Americans and to help them to vote.” The students also identified that the volunteers were white college students from the North. These findings reinforce that primary sources are valuable tools to help students learn history content material.<sup>43</sup>

Second, a large portion of students’ arguments captured the context of the historical era. Through mainly selecting and completing perspective-writing pieces, students conveyed the ever-present feelings of fear and violence that overshadowed Freedom Summer. Jane wrote, “We have already lost several of our members to bombings, beatings, and other acts of violence. It is just another summer here in Mississippi.” Many students also captured the overall resistance that Freedom Summer volunteers faced for their efforts. Bradley said, “We are basically fighting against the whole state of Mississippi.” This student example is indicative of the sentiments with most of the student writing pieces and demonstrates that students grasped the resistance civil rights activists faced.

Third, in students’ perspective-writing, they often assumed the role of a college student teaching classes at a Freedom School. Many students alluded to the ripple effects of Jim Crow segregation through the poor state of education for African Americans in Mississippi. They consistently mentioned that African American children had little background in basic education skills like reading and writing, but were eager to learn. Lorrie wrote, “I’d spend all day working with kids up to elders, teaching them how to read and write.” Lorrie articulated this sad reality in her writing, which unfortunately extended to African American adults that also attended the Freedom Summer Schools to gain basic educational skills. Sarah wrote, “There was a law where you had to be educated to vote, and African Americans did not get education so they were in an endless loop.” Jim Crow segregation laws created an imbalance in African Americans’ lives that demonstrated how prejudices enacted in public policies can have damaging effects on often-disadvantaged groups.

The sad state of affairs in Mississippi during the Freedom Summer that students explored through primary sources allowed twenty-first-century students to better understand, and perhaps even empathize with, 1960s-era African Americans’ daily experiences. Students’ writing consistently showed an understanding with the perspective for the basic rights, liberties, and privileges denied to African Americans under Jim Crow segregation laws. Laura wrote, “We

wanted to teach African Americans how to register to vote. We wanted their voices to be heard.” These actions were necessary, based on the daily realities that African Americans faced, as Kevin captured: “On a daily basis, we educate and care for these persecuted people. Every day they don’t know if they will make it into that same bed at night. You can feel the constant fear and unease.” They also captured the volunteers’ determination to persist in spite of adversity to address these injustices. Jerry wrote, “Working in a Freedom School is a challenging task because of violence, but we won’t give up.” The ability to empathize humanizes the individuals being explored and allows students to connect on a personal level with their choices and decisions.<sup>44</sup>

One key to understanding items that influence and inspire the actions of historical figures is people’s values, biases, and beliefs. President John F. Kennedy started the 1960s by challenging Americans to do more to improve their cities, states, and country. This spirit of the times influenced and drove much of the activism in the 1960s.<sup>45</sup> Volunteers for the Freedom Summer were driven by this desire to improve their country through addressing the inequalities that African Americans faced in Mississippi.<sup>46</sup> Students often captured these sentiments in their writing pieces. Kelly wrote, “Every action that we make, we are closer to equality for everyone.” Mary echoed a similar sentiment by detailing, “I’m here in Mississippi to make a difference to help give freedoms to African Americans by the ability to vote.” These student examples articulate how Freedom Summer volunteers felt their actions positively impacted African Americans and the United States as a whole. As a democratic citizen, an individual has the agency to interact with and alter existing social, cultural, economic, and political institutions.<sup>47</sup> The agency exhibited by Freedom Summer volunteers explains, at least in part, why some gave up their summers and put themselves in potentially dangerous situations to help African Americans in Mississippi. Gary wrote, “I am just one of three hundred people going to the South. Although the journey might be dangerous, it is worth the risk.”

While volunteers for Freedom Summer felt empowered by their agency to impact African Americans’ lives, there were more idealistic and lofty goals these activists were striving to achieve, which were captured in many of the students’ writing pieces. Mike wrote, “I volunteered for the Freedom Summer Project to

bring justice and equal rights to this country, letting the African American community vote.” Students consistently captured the idea that activism in Freedom Summer was designed to address social justice issues in American society. Mike went on to detail, “African Americans deserved to be able to vote, and I was willing to fight for this cause.” These examples show the driving forces of the CRM pushed to finish the work of previous generations to end not only Jim Crow segregation laws, but also the second-class treatment that African Americans faced. To accomplish these goals, civil rights activists had to guarantee that African Americans’ rights, liberties, and freedoms guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution were respected and honored. The volunteers’ actions were needed, as Ashley wrote, to bring “attention to racial oppressions in Mississippi. We strengthened the resolve of other civil rights activists to continue their struggle. Many of us influenced other activists throughout Mississippi. Our actions will mark a turning point for all people.” Ashley’s statements capture the focused, idealistic mindset of civil rights activists in the 1960s.

### Adjustments to Improve the Writing Pieces

The students’ writing pieces did demonstrate several problematic elements. First, a small portion of the students discussed inaccurate content material with Freedom Summer. These students identified events in Alabama during the CRM as occurring in Mississippi. This may be due to the fact these sixth graders have been inundated throughout their school years with key events of the CRM in Alabama.

Part of the inaccurate content material discussed centered on Dr. King. Again, some students engaged in a Master Narrative approach to examining Freedom Summer. One of the sources on the Miami University website mentioned that Dr. King spoke publicly about Freedom Summer. A small portion of the students misconstrued this to mean that Dr. King was actively involved in Freedom Summer and therefore elevated his role in this event. This demonstrates a misinterpretation of the source and engagement in a top-down history approach to exploring the CRM. It should be noted that only a small portion of the students did this.

Within their writing pieces, a small portion of the students also did not contextualize their historical arguments. Instead, these students

had several sentences that seemed logical to them, that volunteers would engage in certain activities during Freedom Summer. Some of these items included random details about building relationships while staying in African Americans' homes during Freedom Summer and how they missed their friends and family. These examples in student writings demonstrate that some students were not comfortable engaging in historical argumentation.

The most common problematic element in students' writing was with the language used by students to discuss segregationists opposing Freedom Summer. A majority of the students failed to identify the whiteness of Mississippians. Instead, they used phrases other than "white Mississippians" to describe the opponents of Freedom Summer. These phrases included "KKK," "They," "People," "Local Authorities," "Some people," "The government here," "local police," and "state authorities/officials." These phrases, and others like them, while technically correct, do not place the necessary blame on white Mississippians in particular and the white South in general for the violence in the CRM. There was a small portion of the students that did identify white Mississippians for the violence of Freedom Summer. Russell wrote, "A lot of the white locals are mad that we are helping the African Americans. Some of them are even burning down houses and churches." These results show that these sixth-grade students' analysis skills were not fully developed, as they did not fully articulate the segregationists' identities—in this case, in terms of their whiteness. In the broader scope, this perhaps suggests an unwillingness by a segment of the white South to accept responsibility for the racism and violation of civil liberties African Americans faced in the past and still grapple with in contemporary U.S. society.<sup>48</sup>

The issues mentioned here can be mitigated in several ways. First, this intervention only contained one opportunity for students to write a historical argument. More perspective-writing opportunities could have been integrated throughout this intervention. This would have enabled the small portion of students that inaccurately discussed the events of Freedom Summer.

These additional perspective-writing pieces could have focused on students assuming the role of volunteers for Freedom Summer to discuss their actions and contributions to the event. This would have enabled students to more thoroughly explore the central role

that volunteers played in Mississippi. The teacher could have asked students to share their writing pieces and asked several follow-up questions to drive home key ideas and clarify any misconceptions.

The issue of these sixth-grade students' misconceptions of the whiteness of segregationists in Mississippi could be addressed in the following ways. First, the teacher would need to review key reasons for Jim Crow segregation laws created in the aftermath of the U.S. Civil War, and how these laws directly impacted African Americans. Then, if students write without including the racial identity of segregationists, the teacher could lead discussions about sample student writing pieces. This helps students to clarify and accurately convey this material while connecting their ideas to the fact that white America has not really taken ownership for its role in slavery, segregation, and the second-class treatment of African Americans in the United States.

### **Adopting Bottom-Up Inquiry with Other Historical Topics**

Freedom Summer is an oft-neglected historical topic that exemplifies the import and impact of citizens and social movements. There are other, similar histories that stand in the shadows of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington, or whose voices cannot be heard over Dr. King's eloquence or Malcolm X's intensity. The Children's March is one such event. Like Freedom Summer, it had an immediate local impact that soon rippled onto the national scene with global audiences attending and responding. The youthful appearance of the protestors is more associated with playgrounds and ball games than with confronting irate police, ferocious police dogs, and the staunch, unrelenting spray of fire hoses. The Children's March, because of the age and resolve of the central activists, might be the ideal catalyst to capture young students' imaginations about their potential contributions to society.<sup>49</sup>

There are free, accessible curricular resources available for teachers to implement as suggested above. Two quality, free resources for teachers include the Academy Award-winning, forty-minute documentary, *Mighty Times: The Children's March* (with accompanying teacher's guide from Teaching Tolerance) and the ten-minute PBS feature, "Birmingham and the Children's March."<sup>50</sup> There are Children's March sections within other documentaries, like

the iconic and Academy Award-winning documentary *Eyes on the Prize*,<sup>51</sup> but it is unwieldy in length and not freely streamed online. Two quality secondary sources are the trade books *Marching for Freedom: Walk Together, Children, and Don't You Grow Weary*<sup>52</sup> and *We've Got a Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March*,<sup>53</sup> which scholar Kristy Brugar used to guide teachers' implementation.<sup>54</sup> These quality secondary sources—both trade books and documentaries—can ground students' analysis of primary sources.

There are some remarkable digital repositories of primary sources, including the aforementioned Miami University Freedom Summer Text & Photo Archive.<sup>55</sup> The Library of Congress (particularly its "African American Odyssey: The Civil Rights Era" resource), the National Archives and Records Administration, and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum (specifically, its "Civil Rights Movement" page) should be consulted.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, three quality sites complement each other well. The Civil Rights Movement Veterans page, entitled "The Children's Crusade: Birmingham - 1963," for instance, has countless, evocative photographs.<sup>57</sup> The Kids in Birmingham website offers oral histories—featuring African American contributors and bystanders along with white citizens—that are individually engrossing and collectively peerless.<sup>58</sup> Teaching Tolerance's "Birmingham 1963: Primary Documents" page provides telegrams and newspaper accounts that converge and diverge in curious ways.<sup>59</sup> Teachers can approach each of these types of primary sources differently.

Teachers can do a lot of creative activities with photography by having students consider what is inside and beyond a photograph's borders.<sup>60</sup> The "Children's Crusade" page contextualizes each photograph with a caption, but what if the teacher were to copy each photograph and separate the captions, which are then given to students for reassembly? Students would be reading to analyze and not simply reading to comprehend; the former is a higher tier of criticality than the latter. In doing so, the students engage in close reading, a history literacy task, as they determine the historical significance of each photograph, a historical thinking act. Middle level students can develop a children's book for elementary students about the Children's March; teachers can have students assemble, say, a ten-page book with ten images and develop a ten-paragraph accompanying story. This would be a novel form of historical

argumentation. Teachers can also task students with engaging in historical perspective-taking by having them write in speaking and thinking bubbles to the historical actors and actresses. Students, of course, would engage in close reading when determining the historical significance of each photograph they select or discard. Their text-based writing is also historical argumentation. Imagine if teachers were to ask students, “We see part of a scene in this photograph—what did the rest of the scene look like?” Students would then place the small, square photograph somewhere on a much larger, rectangular piece of paper and creatively finish the scene with drawing and coloring in historically representative ways. Creativity is an admirable goal for any teacher, but it should align with critical and historical thinking. For each of these tasks, teachers should ensure students are properly historicizing their writing and drawing. Tasking students with a contextualizing statement (or paragraph) can ease teachers’ worries. While these suggestions all center on photography, teachers can engage students in novel tasks using text-based primary sources as well.

Oral histories, specifically those offered by the Kids in Birmingham website, are unique sources because they are neither strictly primary nor secondary. The witnesses were presumably present, but their accounts were not taken contemporaneously like traditional primary sources. The witnesses were likely not trained historians or journalists, so these are not secondary sources either. Oral histories lie at the nexus of memory and history. And memory is limited and fallible, yet wonderfully personalized and perspective-driven. There are dozens of oral histories offered, so each student can choose what to analyze, and the teacher is assured they each are different. Teachers could easily separate the photograph from the accompanying account, provide students with the narrative, and task them with Questioning the Author, Guess the Source, or another oft-suggested history-based task that compels scrutiny.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps students could make a two-tiered chart detailing claims on the left side and leaving the right side blank for verification and corroboration, which is an underused aspect of history literacy.<sup>62</sup> Because students would not be able to confirm claims with certainty, students can select from a Likert scale—unlikely, possible, probable, and likely—of judgments, so long as a text-based explanation accompanies. As a final act, they could speculate which photograph

corresponds with the narrative, using their evaluation as a guide. Clearly, history literacy, historical thinking, historical argumentation, and critical thinking are inextricably intertwined within the suggested close reading and text-based writing tasks.

The telegrams and newspapers provided by Teaching Tolerance’s “Birmingham, 1963: Primary Documents” provides students meaningful insight in a succinct format. The teacher might consider providing the telegrams sans date and recipient or sender. By concealing this important information, students can establish meaning and sequence. They scrutinize the telegrams’ narrative for meaning while determining addressee or source and concluding the logical sequence. Analysis and evaluation are the cognitive tasks; close reading, sourcing, and contextualization are the history literacy skills; determining historical significance are the historical thinking elements involved. Students can also review newspapers—with the accompanying letters to the editor, editorials, and contemporaneous descriptions of events—to chronicle the prelude, climax, and implications while exploring the biases and geographical location of journalists, editors, and citizen contributors.

These are just a few curricular suggestions for the Children’s March, of which Freedom Summer is a historical corollary. The engaging, age-appropriate secondary sources include both book and film, which can illumine students’ appreciation for and interpretation of the primary sources. The illustrative, uncommon primary sources can be intertwined as the class collectively engages in each, or can be integrated as stations for students to move around more independently. These are a logical extension of the history literacy, historical thinking, and historical argumentation manifest within the Freedom Summer inquiry.

## Discussion

History, as noted above, is often taught sequentially and with a top-down Master Narrative. Middle level students likely have stronger Civil Rights schema than for other topics, because a Supreme Court decision, Rosa Parks’ bus, Dr. King’s dream, and a shot fired in Memphis are oft-repeated. These highlights are frequently retold around Dr. King’s federal holiday or during Black History Month. If repeated annually, this timeline would potentially

sprout apathy due to redundancy and realization that regular citizens lacked agency. Our approach is different. Exploring how seemingly nameless contributors shaped hidden, midway events positions students to view the precursors and successors, the antecedents and descendants, differently. Scrutinizing primary sources compels students to view their secondary sources in a new light and reshapes their historical schema. Our non-sequential, bottom-up approach to historical inquiry and students' responses provide insight for history teachers and researchers.

Historical argumentation is generally the umbrella term for text-based writing in history, but "historical narrative" might be a better descriptor for the writing prompts utilized. They are not persuasive essays, expository writing, or evidentiary arguments. They are written in the first-person, not third-person, and students' figurative fingerprints appear on historical narratives more clearly because they are story-oriented and rely on creativity as much as criticality, and innovative thinking as much as historical thinking. Historical narratives are works of historical fiction grounded on understandings generated from primary and secondary source analysis. Historical narrative, a term used infrequently in disparate fields,<sup>63</sup> appears only sporadically in research and practice articles in history education.<sup>64</sup> As such, we characterize historical narrative as first-person stories created to implicitly convey historical significance and explicitly communicate historical perspective using understandings constructed from primary and secondary sources. Historical narratives are different from document-based questions (DBQs), single-account interpretative essays (SAIEs), and historical assessments of thinking (HATs), which appear to be the most common forms of historical argumentation.<sup>65</sup> Historical narratives are extended writing activities developed over days and reliant upon graphic organizers, initial drafts, and revisions. DBQs, SAIEs, and HATs are extemporaneous writing; they are not developed and polished like historical narrative. These differences are not trivial. Historical narratives, we believe, can be a new tool for the teacher's metaphorical toolbox, but more research can inform teachers' implementation.

Research could explore how students of various ages perceive and respond to historical narrative differently from other forms of historical argumentation. Scholars have not considered which writing prompts and genre of writing elicit the most complex

manuscripts. Historical narrative, with its creative element, may spark students' interest in ways that argumentative or persuasive writing does not; we do not know. Research can also explore teachers' perceptions of different forms of writing and accompanying implementation approaches. Language arts teachers likely focus on literary components, while history teachers probably consider if the story is grounded within the historical artifacts; the prose, syntax, and plot are as important as the primary and secondary source integration. Language arts teachers and history teachers could each benefit from considering the heuristics and common practices outside their particular discipline. Whereas historical narrative appears to have an interdisciplinary blend, perhaps a study could explore how students respond to different foci.

Future inquiries might consider the cost-to-benefit impact of revision, both peer- and teacher-based. It is logical that the revision processes position students to refine the prose, grammar, and syntax to strengthen clarity. With the correct prompts to guide revisions, students can amend unsubstantiated claims and bolster complexity. Further, the revision processes hinge on reconsideration, which can only benefit students' grasp of evidence and argument. Peer- and teacher-revisions—as opposed to tasking students with rereading to complete the task—could have improved these sixth-grade students' historical narratives. American history teachers, though, are limited in various ways that impact if and how they offer revision. They are limited by number—middle and high school teachers generally have more than 100 students, which is an unwieldy number for multiple readings and constructive feedback. Additionally, teachers are limited by time—they have under an hour each class period for fewer than 200 instruction days in a year. Technology can potentially expedite and enhance revision and resubmission; it is far easier and less time-consuming to amend than to rewrite. Access to functioning technology for nearly thirty students, though, is not always a possibility, nor is it predestined that the computer classroom will have an availability at the right time. Case studies, interviews, and action research could offer insight into the cost-to-benefit influence of peer- and teacher-based revision.

It is easy for researchers to point out where more research is needed, yet there is much to be recognized within this inquiry. Students explored diverse secondary sources—both the trade book

and various documentary clips—to use as grounding texts for independent investigation of primary sources. More opportunity for similar inquiry can only benefit students' abilities to critically evaluate ambiguous situations using evidence. More experience with interpretation can only bolster students' ability to historicize new documents within the context of their developing historical schema. Middle grade students can engage in these activities, but the degree of sophistication in students' historical reading, thinking, and writing is dependent more on experience than age.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the cognition and experience are fundamental to constructive citizenship and informed decision-making in a democracy.<sup>67</sup>

The seemingly endless supply of primary sources associated with Freedom Summer stored at Miami University provides both clear *and* concealed value for teachers and students. The primary sources were manifold and meaningful, which offered students enviable choices. The array of possibilities also enabled the teacher to guide struggling students towards more accessible primary sources and to steer high achieving students to more complex historical artifacts. Differentiation, or individualizing curricula in developmentally appropriate ways, is a key tenet to best practice pedagogy, but it is difficult in the middle grades when students are aware of and might indecently comment on academic disparities.<sup>68</sup> The vast array of choices enabled the teacher to hide differentiation, which is not always possible with attentive, socially conscious middle level students.

The diverse writing tasks complemented each other in important ways. The graphic organizer, while imperfect, prompted students to utilize various elements of history literacy and historical thinking. The writing prompts positioned students to engage in historical argumentation through historical narrative writing. Viewed cumulatively, students articulated understandings initially generated from primary source analysis, subsequently formulated within the graphic organizer, and later refined within the historical narrative—a form of historical argumentation. The close reading and text-based writing align with modern education initiatives and, more importantly, historians' tasks. Students dissecting frogs in science and interpreting poetry in English are disciplinary-specific in ways that reading a social studies textbook and answering multiple-choice questions are not. Students, here, were historical apprentices; they

were both learning and doing history.

The final area warranting further research is the relationship among historical empathy, perspective-taking, and agency of common folks in a time period. These three historical concepts were intertwined and appeared in the majority of the students' writing pieces, which makes our research findings novel. Most students felt that Northern college students were spurred to action due to the contradictions of Jim Crow segregation laws in a democratic U.S. society, and a need to help African Americans gain basic liberties and rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. The dynamics and factors of how common folks apply their agency in different historical eras is critical for doing further research in bottom-up historical inquiries.

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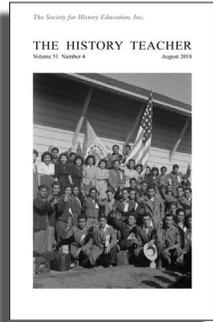
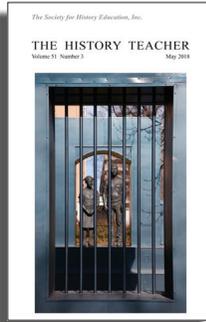
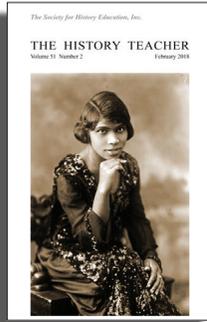
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