

Youth Historians and the Radical Possibilities of *Writing History*

Matthew B. Kautz and M. Yianella Blanco
Teachers College, Columbia University

JAMES BALDWIN opened his famous “A Talk to Teachers” speech by asserting a clear purpose for education and the powerful responsibilities born by teachers. Noting that our society is “desperately menaced” from within, he reminded those listening of their “obligation” to educate students who “examine society and try to change it and to fight it—at no matter what risk.”¹ Baldwin’s searing damnation of America’s white supremacist society and its schizophrenic consequences for Black children demanded teachers recognize that students deserve to learn the critical thinking skills necessary to understand their present through the past. Baldwin’s vision for revolutionary education, rooted in the study of Black history, still remains unmet in many American history classrooms.² Baldwin’s demands of teachers, written in the wake of the Birmingham Church Bombing, remain tragically relevant as police continue to murder unarmed Black people with impunity. Baldwin recognized education’s liberatory potential, and he challenged New York City teachers to realize it. Since Baldwin’s talk to teachers, other educators, researchers, and activists have echoed his ideas with calls for teaching practices rooted in student empowerment

and social justice.³ It is from these radical traditions forged largely by theorists and educators of color that Youth Historians in Harlem (YHH) was born.

YHH was first developed in 2012 by then-doctoral student Barry Goldenberg. At the time, he was seeking new pedagogical interventions to not only teach history, but also train students as historians. As a model, he used the structures offered by Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). At its core, YPAR is the “practice of mentoring young people to become social scientists by engaging them in all aspects of the research cycle, from developing research questions and examining relevant literature to collecting and analyzing data and offering findings about social issues that they find meaningful and relevant.” More than just a structure, YPAR rightfully positions young people as experts and authors in their own lives and experiences.⁴

Since these beginning years, YHH has taken various forms, including an after-school program, a summer institute, and an in-school enrichment course, among others. Regardless of its format, YHH has engaged with local history, educational history, and Black history as a means to better understand and connect past struggles for racial justice to current issues of inequality and how such inequality manifests itself in students’ communities. One of the driving goals of Youth Historians has been a commitment to collaborating with young people to produce new histories, which has illuminated the pedagogical power of historical production for training students as writers.

For this reason, YHH operates with the understanding that historical writing is political. Who gets to write history, whose perspective is published, and what topics find their way into school curricula are products of social and institutional structures. Therefore, taking Baldwin’s “Talk to Teachers” seriously, YHH has sought to challenge these power imbalances by encouraging students “to read to resist rather than to accept and to write to reconstruct rather than to regurgitate.”⁵ *Who* our students are and *what* they choose to write about is just as important as how they write about it. The recognition of these social forces within schools and who our students are proved necessary in training them in *writing history* because it established a purpose in historical writing, one directly applicable to students’ lives and negotiated on their own terms.

We share YHH's history and intellectual grounding at the outset of this article because the recognition of these realities has been critical to our work in training youth historians as writers. For one, it illuminates what we believe is a necessary realization to train students as writers: history is political, it changes over time, and students have a right to write historical narratives. Additionally, it illuminates how student interest undergirds our writing instruction and the ways pushing students to pursue their interests creates a purpose in historical writing to build student investment and increase engagement—both of which we believe are crucial to training students to write historically. The technical aspects of our pedagogy spring from this ethos and structure and it is impossible to understand our teaching moves without this framework.

In this article, we trace our writing instruction through the 2016-2018 school years. We begin by describing how we framed the foundations of historical work and the importance of this framing for the later production of historical narratives. Then, we discuss how we integrated traditional literacy instruction with specific disciplinary skills. After that, we demonstrate how a collaborative case study provides the necessary learning environment to cultivate historical writing. Finally, we conclude with our six most important learnings from this process and applicability of those learnings to writing instruction.

Foundations for *Writing History*

To write history without first considering the unique dimensions of the discipline will always limit the potential of students' historical writing. For too many students, history continues to be presented as an established set of facts rather than a dynamic discipline reliant upon interpretation.⁶ This reduction in history classes results in students *writing about history*, rather than *writing history*, as the vast majority of reading and writing assignments in history classrooms focus almost exclusively on basic reading comprehension and summarizing information.⁷ *Writing about history* rather than *writing history* reinforces the idea of history as a static discipline, and, therefore, it is no surprise that students struggle to select and interpret evidence as well as organize their ideas in historical writings.⁸ Thus, to best prepare the youth historians to write historically and reap the benefits of historical thinking, it was necessary to immerse them

within the standards and uncertainties of historical research and create *writing history* assignments that pushed them to develop, use, and question the tools of the discipline.

But, what do we mean by *writing history*? For us, *writing history* meant engaging the youth historians in the production of knowledge through the creation of a historical narrative. To be sure, we still assigned the youth historians writing assignments that asked them to *write about history* (describe a day's research findings; summarize an author's argument; or create a timeline of historical events), but our pointed focus was on creating spaces for students to use the act of writing as a place to learn. The crafting of historical narratives through *writing history* pushes students towards the synthesis, analysis, and uncertainty that defines the discipline. Indeed, it is this kind of writing that best prepares students to write historically and explore the benefits of historical thinking. For this reason, we designed YHH to culminate in the production of a narrative, and thus planned backwards from this end goal.

When we set out to engage the Youth Historians in *writing history*, we recognized quickly that our work must begin with a dialogue about the dynamics of the discipline. We needed to collectively cultivate a space that provided a framework for historical thinking while simultaneously opening pathways for questions and uncertainty; we needed to establish disciplinary rules while recognizing their malleability; and we needed an environment that provided accessible starting points while fostering independent discovery. Without this type of learning environment, our hopes for the youth historians to *write history* would quickly evaporate as a result of the oversimplification of the complex process of historical production. We knew if we skirted around the complexities of historical production, we would hinder the youth historians' training with regards to questioning sources and their reliability, analyzing the perspectives and positionality of other historians, or identifying the potential gaps in their own narratives. After all, it is this critical disposition, uniquely cultivated through history, that is one of the discipline's signature benefits.

To train students to think and write historically, we first had to establish what we meant by "history." Any educator who seeks to define what history is can easily close off the dynamism of the discipline. Therefore, we had to establish a workable definition, collaboratively built, refined, and (necessarily) unfinished to guide

our work. To do this, we used selections from Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* (1995). Trouillot's work spoke to our students' specific interest in the connections between the past and the present. His recognition that "the past does not exist independently from the present" established history's fluidity.⁹ Moreover, Trouillot's dissection of "the play of power" in history's sociohistorical production and our knowledge of that process presented new entry points for the youth historians to interrogate silences in the process of historical production. Specifically, his discussion of the four moments where silencing occurs demonstrated the necessity of youth engaging in the work of *writing history*.¹⁰

Trouillot's work also provided the youth historians with insights into historical writing. In addition to his unraveling of the silences in historical production, his identification of people as *agents*, *actors*, and *subjects* provided a tangible frame for the youth historians to study and question their chosen pasts and analyze those pasts' relationship to the present.¹¹ Maybe most importantly, in reading *Silencing the Past*, the youth historians recognized that although history is constructed, "not any fiction can pass for history," as historians develop narratives from the material and intellectual traces of the social historical process.¹² The youth historians' discussion of Trouillot's work enumerated disciplinary standards while recognizing their flexibility and the infinite ways historians can think about their work (see "*Silencing the Past* Reading and Discussion Questions" in **Appendix B**).

This foundational conversation prepared the youth historians to think about the kind of historical questions they might ask and the work they might do. To push these conversations further, we provided Eric Foner's preface to *Who Owns History?* (2002), which provided a brief description of how different historians approach their work, such as the ways social historians may differ or overlap with political historians (see "What is History?" in **Appendix C**). This unpacking built on previous discussions of the discipline because it helped identify what sources each type of historian might use in their journey, and the silences manifested as a result. Moreover, these discussions provided concrete examples of primary and secondary sources for the youth historians to question and analyze (see "What are Sources?" in **Appendix D**).¹³ What the youth historians soon recognized was the dearth and potency of stories told from the perspective of young people, as

well as the opportunities for counter-storytelling embedded in their participation in constructing history. Moreover, the absence of Black history in their traditional social studies standards and curricula became an animating force in their studies.¹⁴ Their recognition of those silences shaped the scope of their projects and the actors they centered in their research. This foundational work prepared the youth historians for *writing history* because it illuminated how history worked and how to participate in its production.

The youth historians' final intellectual exploration prior to *writing history* involved melding their disciplinary knowledge with the discussion of the different methods and sources that might shape and refine their historical questions. Indeed, the most crucial part of their *writing history* lay in their abilities to craft historical questions—to understand what avenues for research different questions opened (and which others they closed off) and to recognize the way the present informed how they interrogated the past. Using a guided activity (see “Crafting a Historical Question, Part I” in **Appendix E** and “Crafting a Historical Question, Part II” in **Appendix F**), we revisited a question all the youth historians wondered: “why do we have school uniforms?” What the youth historians came to understand through their shared responses and discussion was that although they had started with a similar question, each was seeking to understand something unique. As they refined their questions to better match their curiosities, they each developed richer ones geared towards their personal interests. Notably, the deconstructing and refining of historical questions prepared the youth historians for *writing history* because it promoted their historical thinking and sharpened into focus the topic for their research.

From the outset, we planned to culminate the program with the youth historians producing new knowledge through historical narrative. However, this foundational work was necessary for the youth historians to think and write historically. Delving into the dynamics of the discipline prepared them for *writing history* and deriving the benefits of historical writing—critical disposition for evaluating sources and society; ability to evaluate the significance of continuities and/or changes over time; clarity and precision in prose; and thoughtfulness to determine how the past can inform the present. Yet this would have been impossible had we not first spent time understanding what it meant to study history.

Integrating Basic and Disciplinary Literacy Skills into *Writing History*

These foundational questions used to frame the production of historical research were tied to our hopes for strengthening students' literacy skills. All of our youth historians were high school students ranging from tenth to twelfth grade, but they came from different middle schools with varying levels of literacy instruction. Knowing that historical writing often depends upon basic literacy skills, we began our work by focusing on creating clear thesis statements, organizing coherent arguments, using varying sentence structures, and eliminating the passive voice. We integrated these fundamental writing skills with disciplinary literacy practices that reinforced students' need to source, corroborate, and contextualize events and people in their historical writing, as well as the need for thoroughly documenting sources. As we describe some of these practices in detail, it is important to note that these elements of writing were not simply manifest in a single lesson, but were continuously returned to as students revised their writing throughout the program.

One of the first writing skills we practiced with the youth historians related to argumentative writing—specifically, how to organize evidence to build an effective argument and how to craft clear thesis statements (see “Writing Thesis Statements” in **Appendix G**). We directly connected this instruction to the youth historians' specific research questions. Focusing on their specific questions allowed them to pay greater attention to the evidence they used and its efficacy in supporting their claims, as well as the structures and styles of clear thesis statements. To do this, we read and critiqued examples in existing historical research, paying close attention to the various elements of each thesis statement, such as how authors might situate their argument within existing historiography or their descriptions of how they develop the argument throughout an article. Thus, the intense study of thesis statements and constant revising of the youth historians' claims fine-tuned their argument writing by providing multiple opportunities to practice and clarify their thesis statements.

Attention to the types of evidence historians use and the ways they organize their delivery arose organically from the intense study of thesis statements. As co-leaders, we trained the youth historians to read footnotes and identify the types of sources an author used.

Then, at the conclusion of each reading, we stepped back and explored how the author constructed their argument. We asked the youth historians: What context does the author provide? How do they order their evidence? How does the conclusion echo and build upon the introduction? This consistency of questioning with a diversity of texts allowed the youth historians to see various models of organizing arguments and determine what structures best suited their arguments.

As they started to write their own narratives using the models from group readings, we emphasized the need for clarity in writing. To do this, we started by practicing simple sentence structures (subject-verb-object) (see “Writing Clear Sentences” in **Appendix H**). This simplistic structure provided two key benefits. First, it helped the youth historians craft individual sentences by recognizing the need to identify historical actors, their decisions, and the consequences. Over time, we moved to more complex sentence structures that provided contextual information, but maintained clarity with regards to actors and actions. Second, attention to this basic structure helped the youth historians eliminate the passive voice from their writing. Attention to who/what was the subject of the sentence and the actions committed illuminated causal relationships. By using a vivid example from Karen Fields and Barbara Fields’ *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (2012), we established a consistent callback for the youth historians to remember the necessity of the active voice. As with the continuous revisions of thesis statements, the iterative process of historical writing became a means to practice basic literacy skills. Additionally, the practice of these basic literacy skills also reinforced important practices in historical writing.

While we recognized the importance of reviewing and developing these skills, we also viewed them as simply the first layer in training students in *writing history*. Indeed, learning to write historically has become its own subfield within education research. As a pedagogical approach, “content area literacy is focused on instructional strategies to support students in understanding texts within and across disciplines, [while] disciplinary literacy is meant to teach students to read and write as historians, mathematicians, musicians, scientists, literary critics, and so on.”¹⁵ Disciplinary literacy is essential because, while general reading and writing practices are important, they are not sufficient for engaging students in the specific ways of reading, writing, and thinking that are unique to academic disciplines, such as history.¹⁶

For this reason, we combined the literacy instruction mentioned above with best practices identified by social studies education researchers.¹⁷ For example, we spent a great deal of time working with the youth historians on sourcing and contextualization.¹⁸ We began every text with questions inspired by the Stanford History Education Group's introductory lessons on sourcing.¹⁹ We encouraged students to analyze and raise questions about the author, the publishing date, where and how a text was published, its reliability, and how the answers to those questions might tell us more about the intended audience as well as the author's biases and intentions. These were not simply conversations we had with each other, but were questions explicitly asked about in our research note catchers for the youth historians to carry into their later writing. Since they were writing historical narratives, their writing captured in the note catchers moved beyond an isolated analysis of a source. Instead, they would have to integrate their sourcing into their narrative as they built an argument. This added layer of complexity stretched the youth historians in new ways and ultimately strengthened their historical writing.

Additionally, we created spaces for the youth historians to practice corroboration. Since each of our projects relied upon the use of and engagement with multiple sources (school yearbooks, government reports, oral histories, and more), the youth historians needed to not only interrogate each one individually, but also synthesize them together. Depending on the project, a youth historian might compare the descriptions of a major event, like the Harlem Rebellion of 1964, between the mainstream white press and the Black press. They analyzed each source through comparison and contrast: What did each newspaper say about the topic? How do they complement or contradict each other? Are these sources reliable? How do we know? Moreover, *writing history* meant that the youth historians had an additional step to consider: how might their analysis of competing sources appear in their narrative? As the youth historians studied and corroborated these sources, they had authentic opportunities to determine what evidence to use in their narratives and how to present that evidence in an argument.

Though these historical thinking skills were helpful starting points for our historical writing, our engagement in this writing process made us recognize the need to push beyond the disciplinary skills identified by previous researchers. As the youth historians moved

to drafting their narratives, one of our co-leaders shared a draft of a narrative they had written. While some of the pieces of the work felt familiar, such as citing and corroborating sources, the narrative style seemed foreign to them. In that moment, we realized they had so little exposure to historical narratives and how historians blend descriptive and analytical modes of writing. Upon reflection, this made sense. In most history classes, students read history from textbooks or respond to a curated set of primary sources with short responses—both of which promote a kind of inevitability in history. For this reason, students rarely encounter the rich work of historians grappling with history's contingency, nor practice this type of writing themselves. While little research has explored how educators might teach different writing genres in history classrooms, our experiences with the youth historians cemented its importance in teaching students historical writing.²⁰ After we recognized the necessity for this instruction and practice, we sought to provide the space to train and practice writing with different genres.

This change also meant we needed to break away from formulaic approaches to writing and move toward a process-oriented one. Rather than relying exclusively on scaffolded outlines or sentence starters, we knew the youth historians needed opportunities to experiment. To do this, we had to trust that our students could do more, and we provided opportunities for them to try new writing methods. As we realized, our instruction for historical writing could not solely focus on the creation of a narrative at the end. We needed the youth historians to see writing as a recursive process, to understand that some drafts are revised—and some are completely scrapped. In reality, this meant needing to plan for even more time for the youth historians to write and peer review one another's work.

An example of this occurred when one youth historian became captivated by the manipulation of time in a particular reading. They noticed how the author began with a vignette about an event, then retraced the moments leading up to that event. This manipulation of time to grab the reader's attention and frame the argument around a critical event, which they then contextualized, inspired this youth historian to try to do the same thing. This complex writing move took multiple revisions before the youth historian could effectively transition from an opening vignette into a larger history they sought to contextualize it in. It should be re-stated that aside

from presenting different models of historical writing, our writing instruction in this instance was more about creating spaces for the youth historians to experiment and providing feedback rather than a particular emphasis in instruction.

Tying all of this skill development together was the significant time we scheduled for the youth historians to read and discuss each other's work. The youth historians practiced their foundational literacy skills by providing each other feedback about organization and writing clarity. After each peer review session, they could debrief with one another and share new sources or ideas (see "Youth Historians Research Rubric" in **Appendix I**). Intentionally carving out time for peer reviews and rewrites was critical to developing the youth historians as historical writers. Moreover, this peer review process tested the quality and depth of sourcing for each individual's project. Every round of feedback sprang new questions and investigations, which would then come back to more writing and research. In effect, this process created numerous opportunities to revisit and practice basic literacy skills and those more specific to the discipline.

For the purposes of historical writing, we found it crucial to integrate basic literacy skills (creating clear thesis statements, organizing coherent arguments, using varying sentence structures, and eliminating the passive voice) with disciplinary literacy practices (sourcing, corroborating, and contextualizing events and people in their historical writing, as well as thoroughly documenting sources). We carved out time and space for students to experiment in their writing as well as receive feedback from their peers. The iterative process of research, writing, feedback, research, writing, and so forth allowed us to embed basic literacy instruction with teaching that was more focused on disciplinary skills while pushing the youth historians as writers.

Case Study: A Method for *Writing History*

One of the greatest takeaways from our work with the youth historians was that case studies provide the scope and specificity necessary for students to hone these disciplinary skills and craft historical narratives. To be sure, we are not the first educators to find benefits to case studies; however, our targeted work alongside the youth historians illuminated how case studies better prepare

students to *write history* because it reinforces literacy skills while also providing educators with a supportable structure for engagement.²¹

One reason case studies best prepare students to write historically is that they lend themselves to both guided instruction and independent investigation. Our work with the youth historians focused on Harlem's educational history, with much of our initial investigations coming through the concentration of a singular school. Because of this narrower focus, each historian's independent investigation began with shared readings and understandings. These shared readings enabled us as instructors to return to the disciplinary questions with which we began the program, as well as open discussions into a variety of potential research questions. Moreover, this structure meant fewer curated class readings. Because of this, we were able to dedicate more time to differentiating texts and scaffolding readings to create accessible points of entry. We could help direct the youth historians to other accessible sources during their research. For instance, we were able to direct struggling readers to oral histories relevant to their projects, or point stronger readers to government reports relevant to their projects. Our ability to create these access points better prepared students to begin their independent investigations and use their shared knowledge as a means to unlock new sources. Thus, our case study lent itself to guided investigations at the beginning, which we leveraged to prepare students for more independent work. This, in turn, ensured that we could assign readings and craft assignments commensurate with where the youth historians were on their research trajectory to best support their development.

Moreover, the shared knowledge co-constructed in the opening stages of the program became a launchpad for the youth historians to ask new questions and follow new sources. As they dove deeper into their independent investigations, finding and interrogating their own secondary and primary sources, they soon had new ideas to discuss. As their independent work developed, their shared conversations helped them identify gaps in their own research or new sources they might use. Additionally, these conversations provided a feedback loop in which the group members could respond to one another's ideas in formulation to help expand or focus one another's thinking. These conversations operated as another means to return to our earlier conversations about historical methods, thus pushing each youth historian to greater care in their writing. This hybrid of guided

work and independent investigation naturally cultivated student-led discussion rooted in disciplinary dynamics, including the myriad ways to approach history, how different historical questions lead to different answers, and how researchers use primary and secondary sources—all of which strengthened students' writing. The case study model enriched peer feedback because each young researcher shared common knowledge about Harlem, but also brought a level of expertise to various topics, thus driving conversations—and eventually, writing—forward.

The new ideas and conversations engendered by historical investigation highlighted history's dynamism and helped our fellow researchers recognize that historical writing takes place within conversations. Not only did the youth historians recognize how their differing projects spoke to one another, but they also saw how their projects complicated and countered stories of their neighborhood and school. On more than one occasion, discussions about public depictions of Harlem emerged from their historical work, which often contradicted their previous understandings of their neighborhood and school. The various projects subsumed under a larger case study further enriched connections between the past and present by expanding their understanding of Harlem's educational history because they learned from one another. This iterative process of researching, writing, and discussion provided the youth historians with a ready-made audience for their historical writings. This authentic writing, geared towards other researchers, strengthened the youth historians' commitment to *writing history*, while also continuously pushing them to thoroughly document their sources, provide clear descriptions of evidence, make their analyses accessible to others, refine their arguments for clarity and potency, and sharpen their prose. While our larger ambitions lied in sharing this work beyond the after-school program, the fact that each youth historian's project was subsumed under a larger case study provided a ready and informed audience that contributed to each writer's growth.

Most importantly, doing a case study in this way provided the space for the youth historians to practice *writing history*. Rather than *writing about history*, these young researchers developed historical knowledge through collaborative and independent investigations to make sense of their present through the past. They asked questions relevant to their lives. The move to producing historical knowledge

compelled the practice of important disciplinary skills. Students, with guided support, interrogated primary and secondary sources before synthesizing their findings into narratives. *Writing history* created a space to practice multiple genres and enriched their ability to connect narrative to expository writing. Each time a youth historian wrote their draft, the presence of the passive voice became a recognition of what they did not know and a call to unearth the historical actors. Whenever a youth historian shared their historical argument, their peers challenged them to be precise and clear in their claims. As they shared their drafts with their peers, they put their written work in dialogue with their fellow researchers—a process that often led to further revisions as each youth historian would, with their colleagues' help, recognize gaps and uncertainties. This iterative process (rooted in shared knowledge and afforded by a collaborative case study) strengthened their writing. Moreover, the foundational recognition about the ever-changing nature of history prevented these revisions from becoming pedantic labor—instead, they became rich, historical writing.

For the youth historians, a case study provided the requisite intellectual community to strengthen their *writing history* abilities. The guided instruction and following independent investigation provided common ground for discussions among the youth historians, while also pushing them to engage in historical research. Moreover, the group discussions following periods of research and writing established iterative cycles of writing that replicated the work of professional historians. As each youth historian became more empowered through their evolving knowledge of Harlem's educational history, their unique perspectives helped each other refine their writings. The case study format provided us, as instructors, with a structure that enabled us to support students' work because it narrowed the scope (to an extent) of historical investigation such that we could provide helpful secondary and primary sources when necessary. Although we learned from each researcher's project, we also had our own developed knowledge of Harlem's educational history beforehand that made our work supporting research sustainable.

Finally, the youth historians' case studies, rooted in Black and local history, furthered their writing because it allowed them to place themselves at the center of history and the present. Historian

Manning Marable observed that “As racialized populations reflect upon the accumulated concrete expression of their own lives, the lives of others who share their situation, and even those who have died long ago, a process of discovery unfolds that begins to restructure how they understand their world and place within it,” thus “becoming the ‘makers’ of their own history.”²² The case study format created an environment for the youth historians to explore these connections in meaningful and relevant ways, and this type of historical writing grounded their work within attempts to “understand their world and their place within it.” For this reason and those listed above, we believe case studies not only prepare students to write historically, but also develop historical thinking and writing skills that transcend the discipline and have the power to enrich students reading of “the word and the world.”

Considerations and Limitations

There are important things to consider when attempting to do this kind of historical writing with students. First, partnerships with local libraries and archives are crucial. Archives can often be inaccessible to students because of their limited occupancy and hours of operation. Therefore, getting students into the archive to work through collections with larger classes, and even smaller ones, can be difficult. Lack of access to research databases can also hinder this research. However, partnering with local archives and libraries can help educators find creative solutions, so that students can use archival material in class. Local libraries will often provide access to at least some research databases, which students can use either at the library or remotely. These partnerships proved essential for YHH and enabled us to attempt the work we aspired to complete.²³

In a similar vein, it is important to develop community relationships. These relationships not only provide an additional audience for students’ work, but also present possibilities for oral histories. While we were unable to schedule oral histories conducted by the youth historians during this iteration of the program, they were still able to listen to past interviews from the Harlem Education History Project.²⁴ These interviews were some of the most illuminating and exciting sources for the youth historians to explore. The accessibility of oral histories provides a way for all learners to engage with the

past on an individual level, which can lead to even richer writing. Community relationships can also help more clearly establish connections between the past and present because they enable students to ground their research in local history. Undoubtedly, strong community relationships also expand the potential audience for students to share their work. This expanded audience furthers students' development as writers, providing opportunities to hear new perspectives on their work.

Finally, there is an important limitation in this type of work that is ever-present: students may not always finish their narrative in the ways teachers imagine. While we hoped the youth historians would be able to publish their work, they fell one or two rounds of revisions shy of reaching this goal. In reality, those additional rounds of rewrites might have sparked new rounds of revision, leading to a never-ending process. This is always possible when *writing history* because of the rigors of the discipline. For this reason, students may not “finish” their narratives. That is ok! Much of teaching students to write historically is engaging in the process and working through its difficulties. To deny this is to deny how hard *writing history* is—and how rewarding the process can be. To train students to write historically, we must trust them enough to give them opportunities to experiment. And, as educators, we must recognize that the depth and complexity of *writing history* means that publishable narratives may not be written within the confines of the classroom. However, our experience has instilled in us a belief that exploring history in this way goes further in training students in writing for the discipline and developing disciplinary skills to deploy in their daily lives than would a minimized version of historical writing that does not provide the same opportunity for student exploration. Because of this, the possibility of incompleteness is not a limitation on teaching students to *write history*, but part of the training process.

Youth Historians in Harlem: A Reflection on Teaching Historical Writing

Summarizing our thoughts on the best way to teach students to think and write historically feels a bit unsettling as we know that teaching writing, like writing itself, is an iterative process—one that we as educators constantly learn from, one that is filled with trial

and error and for which there is no single right way. That said, our experiences as instructors and collaborators with the youth historians impressed upon us some key tenets for teaching historical writing in ways that allow students to derive the benefits of the discipline that last beyond instructional spaces. We have tried to codify these below.

Design Units and/or Courses to Culminate with Writing History

Rather than assigning students tasks that only involve *writing about history*, design courses in which students construct historical knowledge through narratives. Positioning students as historians producing work relevant to their lives provides the intellectual environment necessary for developing historical writing skills. It also provides the space for educators to name and cultivate specific literacy and disciplinary skills as students work towards their final project. The push for contextualizing and corroborating sources, interpreting archival silences, naming actors and actions, and more, involves a new level of rigor when culminating in a narrative. Thus, *writing history* presents the best way to teach historical writing.

Use Disciplinary Conversations as a Foundation for Writing History

Whether a unit in a middle school class or a semester-long undergraduate course, grounding historical writing in disciplinary conversations is a necessary prerequisite for students *writing history*. Spaces where students can think through the fluidity of the discipline, its dialogic nature, and its standards for research allow them to explore the rigors of historical narrative and strengthen their writing skills in the process. Moreover, these spaces enable students to contemplate the parallels and divergences between the past and present, to critically question the silences created in their own narratives, and to build an intellectual community of researchers able to push one another's projects forward.

Depending on the level of instruction, educators should think long and hard about which text or texts provide the appropriate raw material for these conversations and develop the necessary scaffolds for students to access the texts. As education scholar H. Richard Milner notes, instructional scaffolds should allow students to start where they are, but not stay there.²⁵ For the youth historians, excerpts

from two key texts (Trouillot and Foner) provided entry points into these larger discussions. The shorter length of these excerpts and the additional scaffolds we supplied proved successful in launching disciplinary conversations that laid the foundation for *writing history*. Whether using one foundational text or five, the time and space created for these foundational conversations are necessary to prepare students for *writing history*.

Implement Case Studies for Group and Individual Growth

Use case studies as a way to build group knowledge *and* create spaces for independent investigations. Case studies provide educators a sustainable structure to curate, differentiate, and scaffold texts for the collective while also empowering students to work independently. A case study provides the teacher a structure that allows them to identify archival collections and other primary sources accessible to students beforehand, thus enriching their independent research. Most importantly, student choice in their research project allows them to make more meaningful connections between the past and present. As Baldwin noted, “the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all that we do.”²⁶ Student choice in research projects builds engagement and makes historical work meaningful, both of which are paramount to strengthening students’ historical writing skills and emboldening students as holders of knowledge, thereby enriching class discussions and the peer-review process.

Educators teaching survey courses or those covering longer periods of time may feel that the case study is an impractical and implausible tool. However, we believe it is still possible. For instance, a course that covers American history from Reconstruction to the present may break down units into case studies, or culminate with a case study project. To break down units in this way, the teacher might allow students to focus on individual topics within a unit—different groups of students could research the different functions of the Freedmen’s Bureau during Reconstruction; in exploring the New Deal, student groups might study individual programs, their local impacts, and their connection to the larger national project; and a unit on the Cold War might have students investigate different

youth-led protests against McCarthyism and America's imperialist project. Yet teachers could also choose to culminate the course with writing a historical narrative that synthesizes this longer history in a single project, such as one exploring the persistence of segregated schooling from Reconstruction to the present, or a historical narrative that traces the ideology of a local political party through the twentieth century. In either of these models (and we are sure there are more), students can meaningfully interact with the content of the course and contextualize that knowledge within their own present. This type of critical engagement is crucial to develop students' historical writing skills, and the case study provides a method to do this that can resonate beyond the instructional space.

Focus on Process and Content—but Mostly Process

One of the main reasons history classrooms promote *writing about history* rather than *writing history* is that courses focus on the dissemination and regurgitation of knowledge. Yet historical methods and the process of writing are what define the discipline. For this reason, it is imperative to emphasize the process of researching and writing to better train students to write historically. This means planning time dedicated to revision, where students can critically review one another's work and continuously draft new versions. The push for more thorough documentation, refinement of arguments, and clarity in organization that comes from revising is critical to training students to write historically. Furthermore, students' engagement as editors provides a meaningful way to reinforce important disciplinary skills, thus providing another way to strengthen their literacy skills. To be sure, content is important, and classes should still emphasize its delivery—after all, there is no process without content. However, creating the space for students to investigate their own research interests centers their ability to bring new knowledge into the classroom and share historical content with their peers. This empowerment then allows the educator to work as a collaborator who can better support students' skill development.

Finally, the focus on process provides educators the space to push literacy development in meaningful ways. Engaging students in discipline-specific writing tasks compels students to develop precision in their writing, to think through organizational structures that provide

clarity, to understand the necessity of the active voice (and the slippery nature of the passive voice), and to practice their dexterity with different genres of writing. Approached this way, assignments for *writing about history* lead to *writing history*. This iterative process pushes students to strengthen their writing again and again.

Offer Authentic Engagement

Whether the final products are shared with classmates, others in the school, or the community (however defined), having a real audience for students is necessary for strengthening their writing skills. Not only does it inform them how much information to provide and help determine the purpose of the writing, but it also creates opportunities for them to share their stories. A defining feature of YHH, in all its iterations, has been the opportunity to share the youth historians' knowledge and work. In addition to creating investment, it provides students with feedback from a variety of sources to help their writing grow. Rather than the didactic grading of an individual teacher, this authentic engagement allows students to contemplate different perspectives on their writing and carry those ideas forward. If we hope to improve students' historical writing skills, we need to create opportunities for students to see how others read their work.

Call Attention to the Center and Margins

Finally, in our work with the Youth Historians in Harlem, we centered the long Black Freedom Struggle in teaching historical writing. Drawing again from Baldwin, we recognized the liberatory possibilities of Black history because its incisiveness allows one to see that "American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it."²⁷ By studying American history through Black history, the youth historians were challenged to be more precise, to understand marginalization—not as a description, but as an active process enacted by people, government, and institutions. Indeed, this attention to detail dissolves the false distinction between "de facto" and "de jure" segregation, just as it demonstrates how different groups have been racialized over time. The criticality and precision that comes from exploring who we center and marginalize

in our histories, as well as who is centered and marginalized in past histories, reinforces a critical disposition necessary for students to find a way to use their “tremendous potential and tremendous energy” for the better, because—as Baldwin astutely observed—it “is the only hope society has.”²⁸

Conclusion

As we stated from the outset of this article, our work with the youth historians is grounded in the recognition of the politics and power that shape the production of history, and the resultant narratives. Because of this, we foregrounded these representations of power in our work with our co-researchers and built our program around the production of new historical narratives. Through this process, the youth historians illuminated how *writing history*, rather than *writing about history*, develops students as writers and equips them with historical skills for deployment in their daily lives. The model described above provides a template for writing instruction that carries significant potential.

Writing history is not easy. Historians will be the first to speak to its difficulties. The fact that historians often spend years researching and writing a single manuscript is a testament to its challenges. More than likely, those encouraged to experiment with this model will find each researcher’s project could be strengthened by spending more time exploring what other historians have previously written or more time with a particular archival collection. This is inescapable. Yet it does not mean that students will not benefit from the process of *writing history*. In fact, they will learn more from an incomplete research project than a paragraph summary of a singular source. For that reason, we urge educators to experiment—and let their students experiment. Those students who do may find radical new potential in learning to write historically.

Notes

The authors are immeasurably grateful to Barry Goldenberg and Ansley Erickson for their support in continuing Youth Historians in Harlem as well as the anonymous reviewers who provided feedback.

1. James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers," in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 325-326.

2. A nationwide survey of 525 elementary, middle, and high school classrooms conducted by the National Museum of African American History and Culture found that only one to two classes a year in American history classrooms focused on Black history; see LaGarrett J. King, "The Status of Black History in U.S. Schools and Society," *Social Education* 81, no. 1 (January 2017): 14-15. Moreover, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has found that states require minimal instruction about American enslavement and minimize its importance in American development; see Southern Poverty Law Center, "Teaching Hard History: American Slavery" (2018), <<https://www.splcenter.org/20180131/teaching-hard-history>>. The SPLC has also found that throughout the country, the majority of instruction on the Civil Rights "is reduced to lessons about two heroic figures—Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks—and four words—'I have a dream.'" See Southern Poverty Law Center, "Teaching the Movement: The State Standards We Deserve" (2012), <<https://www.splcenter.org/20110919/teaching-movement-state-standards-we-deserve>>, p. 4. For a discussion of textbooks' limited attention to Reconstruction, see Adam Sanchez, "When Black Lives Mattered: Why Teach Reconstruction," *The Nation*, October 24, 2017. Finally, Matthew F. Delmont has noted the need to move beyond limited studies of Black History to "Claiming the right of Black people to experience and enjoy the mundane aspects of daily life," and, as a result, has published the Black Quotidian, a digital history project "that reveal[s] how the Black press popularized African-American history and valued the lives of both famous and ordinary Black people." See <<https://www.blackquotidian.org/>>.

3. We use the term "radical" to describe education practices that are concerned with analyzing root causes of social problems and enacting larger structural change. For theories of radical education that influenced our work, see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition (New York: Continuum Bloomsbury, 2005); Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Educational Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 465-491; Django Paris and H. Samy Alim, *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017); and Teresa McCarty and Tiffany S. Lee, "Critical Culturally Sustaining/Revitalizing Pedagogy and Indigenous Education Sovereignty," *Harvard Educational Review* 84, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 101-124. For histories of radical teaching practices that shaped our work, see Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Joy Ann Williamson, "Community Control with a Black Nationalist Twist: The Black Panther Party's

Educational Programs,” in *Black Protest Thought and Education*, ed. William H. Watkins (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 137-157; Jeanne Theoharis and Komози Woodard, eds., *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Jon N. Hale, *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); and Ansley T. Erickson and Ernest Morrell, eds., *Educating Harlem: A Century of Schooling and Resistance in a Black Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

4. Barry M. Goldenberg. “Youth Historians in Harlem: An After-School Blueprint for History Engagement through the Historical Process,” *The Social Studies* 107, no. 2 (February 2016): 47-67. Critical to this work has been the pioneering work of Ernest Morrell regarding youth participatory action research. See Nicole Mirra, Antero Garcia, and Ernest Morrell, *Doing Youth Participatory Action Research: Transforming Inquiry with Researchers, Educators, and Students* (New York: Routledge, 2016); quote on page 2.

5. Paula M. Selvester and Deborah G. Summers, *Socially Responsible Literacy: Teaching Adolescents for Purpose and Power* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2012), 9.

6. Bruce VanSledright, “Confronting History’s Interpretive Paradox while Teaching Fifth Graders to Investigate the Past,” *American Educational Research Journal* 39, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 1089-1115; and Peter J. Lee, “Putting Principles into Practice: Understanding History,” in *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom*, ed. Suzanne Donovan and John D. Bransford (Washington DC: National Academies Press, 2005), 31-78.

7. Sharlene A. Kihara, Steve Graham, and Leanne S. Hawken, “Teaching Writing to High School Students: A National Survey,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 101, no. 1 (February 2009): 136-160.

8. Chauncey Monte-Sano, Susan De La Paz, and Mark Felton, “Implementing a Disciplinary-Literacy Curriculum for US History: Learning from Expert Middle School Teachers in Diverse Classrooms,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 46, no. 4 (2014): 545; and Christine Counsell, *Analytical and Discursive Writing at Key Stage 3* (London, United Kingdom: Historical Association, 1997).

9. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2015), 15.

10. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 26.

11. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 23.

12. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 29.

13. It is worth noting here that while we laid these foundations with two texts (one of which only included excerpts), these discussions could only be enriched by the incorporation of more texts. Yet the restrictions on time for the completion of the youth historians’ projects, and our desire to spend the majority of our time involving students in historical research and writing, limited our

discussions to a few sessions. Moreover, we modified the selected excerpts and shortened the length of the texts to meet the youth historians where they were in their development as historians, so they could grapple with these complex ideas in an accessible format.

14. LaGarrett J. King and Keffrelyn Brown, "Once a Year to be Black: Fighting against Typical Black History Month Pedagogies," *Negro Educational Review* 65, no. 1-4 (2014): 23-43; LaGarrett J. King and Prentice T. Chandler, "From Non-racism to Anti-racism in Social Studies Teacher Education: Social Studies and Racial Pedagogical Content Knowledge," in *Rethinking Social Studies Teacher Education in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Alicia R. Crowe and Alexander Cuenca (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2016), 3-21; Christopher L. Busey and Irene Walker, "A Dream and a Bus: Black Critical Patriotism in Elementary Social Studies Standards," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 45, no. 4 (May 2017): 456-488; Ashley N. Woodson, "We're Just Ordinary People: Messianic Master Narratives and Black Youths' Civic Agency," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 44, no. 2 (May 2016): 184-211; Ashley N. Woodson, "'What You Supposed to Know': Urban Black Students' Perspectives on History Textbooks," *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research* 11 (2015): 57-65; Ashley N. Woodson, "'There Ain't No White People Here': Master Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement in the Stories of Urban Youth," *Urban Education* 52, no. 3 (March 2017): 316-342.

15. Lara J. Hansfield, *Literacy Theory as Practice: Connecting Theory and Instruction in K-12 Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2016), quote on page 174. Also see Roni Jo Draper and Daniel Siebert, "Rethinking Texts, Literacies, and Literacy Across the Curriculum," in *(Re)Imagining Literacies for Content-Area Classrooms*, ed. Roni Jo Draper, Paul Broomhead, Amy Petersen Jensen, Jeffery D. Nokes, and Daniel Siebert (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).

16. Cynthia Shanahan and Timothy Shanahan "Does Disciplinary Literacy Have a Place in Elementary School?" *The Reading Teacher* 67, no. 8 (May 2014): 636-639.

17. Cynthia R. Hynd, "Teaching Students to Think Critically Using Multiple Texts in History," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 42, no. 6 (March 1999): 428-436; Jean-François Rouet, M. Anne Britt, Robert A. Mason, and Charles A. Perfetti, "Using Multiple Sources of Evidence to Reason about History," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 88, no. 3 (September 1997): 478-493; Steven A. Stahl, Cynthia R. Hynd, Bruce K. Britton, Mary M. McNish, and Dennis Bosquet, "What Happens When Students Read Multiple Source Documents in History?" *Reading Research Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (October/November/December 1996): 430-456; James F. Voss and Jennifer Wiley, "Expertise in History," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, ed. K. Anders Ericsson, Neil Charness, Robert R. Hoffman, and Paul J. Feltovich (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 569-584; Samuel S. Wineburg, "Historical Problem Solving: A Study of the Cognitive Processes Used in the Evaluation of Documentary and Pictorial Evidence," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 83, no. 1 (March 1991): 73-87; and Samuel S. Wineburg, "On the Reading of Historical Texts: Notes on the

Breach Between School and the Academy,” *American Educational Research Journal* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 495-519.

18. Avishag Reisman and Samuel S. Wineburg, “Teaching the Skill of Contextualizing in History,” *The Social Studies* 99, no. 5 (September-October 2008): 202-207.

19. Stanford History Education Group, “Sourcing Classroom Poster,” <<https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons/sourcing-classroom-poster>>.

20. Elizabeth B. Moje and Cynthia Lewis, “Examining Opportunities to Learn Literacy: The Role of Critical Sociocultural Literacy Research,” in *Reframing Sociocultural Research in Literacy: Identity, Agency, and Power*, ed. Cynthia Lewis, Patricia Enciso, and Elizabeth B. Moje (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007), 15-48; and Timothy Shanahan and Cynthia Shanahan, “Teaching Disciplinary Literacy to Adolescents: Rethinking Content Areas Literacy,” *Harvard Educational Review* 78, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 40-59.

21. For the value of case studies in history classrooms, see Michael P. Marino and Margaret Smith Crocco, “Doing Local History: A Case Study of New Brunswick, New Jersey,” *The Social Studies* 103, no. 6 (September 2012): 233-240; and Joy Williamson-Lott and Nancy Beadie, “Forum on Teaching: Constructing Historical Cases,” *History of Education Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (February 2016): 115-181.

22. Manning Marable, *Living Black History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America’s Racial Future* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 36-37.

23. Additionally, teachers can use online collections as a way to engage in this process. The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration’s online collection is one example of accessible archival material, available at <<https://catalog.archives.gov/>>.

24. For the oral history collection of the Harlem Education History Project, see <<https://harlemeducationhistory.library.columbia.edu/collection/collections/show/4>>.

25. H. Richard Milner IV, *Start Where You Are, but Don’t Stay There: Understanding Diversity, Opportunity Gaps, and Teaching in Today’s Classrooms* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2010).

26. James Baldwin, “White Man’s Guilt,” in *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 410.

27. Baldwin, “A Talk to Teachers,” 332.

28. Baldwin, “A Talk to Teachers,” 326.

Appendix A

Youth Historians Making History!

The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it, and history is literally present in all that we do.

-- James Baldwin

Writing history is a dynamic process that is profoundly shaped by the questions we ask, the sources we consult, and the interpretations we make. However, rarely do young people get to construct history. For histories of education, this is particularly damaging given that the unique position of students raises significant questions about how the past is connected to the present. Your experiences and views, therefore, have the opportunity to expand how we think about the history of education in Harlem and how that history might shape the present and future. That's why our final project will be the production of a historical narrative - one that grows out of your own research question and historical study!

In the end, you will produce a digital exhibit on Omeka that we hope to publish! The digital exhibit will consist of a historical narrative, primary sources, and others maps or images that help you tell your selected history. We hope to create the spaces and opportunities for you to share your larger work with the broader school community.



While we provided readings and primary sources at the beginning, you will now seek and find sources that help answer the historical questions you choose to ask. Of course, we will continue to support you over the course of the rest of the year in finding and analyzing sources, but you will be taking the lead in seeing your project completed.

Over the rest of the year, we'll help you continue to develop the skills necessary for crafting your own historical narrative.

Below is a list of what will be included in your final digital exhibit:
(see the attached rubric for further explanations)

- An introduction that sets the historical context for your reader and presents a clear thesis.
- An array of primary and secondary sources that support your argument.
- A conclusion that summarizes your argument and evidence.
- Citations of all sources used.
- At least one visual (photo, document, map, etc.) per exhibit page.

The process for writing historical narratives is cyclical, so we will often return back to previous work completed. However, we've tried to provide a timeline below that captures when we will be focusing on research, writing, editing, and presenting.

Timeline
(completed by)

- Developing/Refining Historical Questions: 10/26/17 - 1/15/18
- Initial Research: 12/16/17
- Developing/Refining Historical Questions: 10/26/17 - 1/15/18
- Next round of research: 1/7/18 - 3/15/18
- Writing/Research/Revision: 1/16/18 - 3/29/18
- Digital Exhibit: 4/26/18
- Presentation: 5/10/18

Appendix B

Silencing the Past Reading and Discussion Questions

Together, we will read and annotate the introduction to *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* by Michel-Rolph Trouillot. After reading, you will break into groups of three to answer the questions below. Then, we will discuss as a group. After our discussion, we will create a concept map with key terms from the reading.

In your own words, describe what Trouillot means when he writes, “the past does not exist independently from the present” (page 15).	
Trouillot describes the different capacities (agents, actors, and subjects) people can have in the social process of history (see page 23). Draw a line matching the capacities with the appropriate definition.	
Match the term with its definition	
Agents	Individuals’ reasoning about the actions they have taken and how they understand those actions.
Actors	The social or structural groupings of individuals, such as mothers, workers, or students, that enable or limit the capacities of individuals.
Subjects	Individuals’ “bundle of capacities” that are specific to the historical period and space in which they live.

Appendix C

What is History?

How do we ask historical questions? How do we answer them?

In his preface to *Who Owns History?*, Eric Foner mentions the different types of studies historians might undertake. As a group, define what these different domains of histories study.

<i>Foner's Guide to Studying History</i>	
<i>Social</i>	Definition -
<i>Economic</i>	Definition -
<i>Political</i>	Definition -
<i>Cultural</i>	Definition -

Appendix D

What are Sources?
How do we find them? Where do we find them?

Using the definitions your group created, identify what types of sources might help each type of historian undertake a study. Remember, different types of historians may use similar sources, but in different ways.

<i>What sources help us?</i>	
<i>Social</i>	
<i>Economic</i>	
<i>Political</i>	
<i>Cultural</i>	

Appendix E

Crafting a Historical Question, Part I

The different kinds of historical studies we decide to do, as well as the sources we choose to use, can shape our writing of history. Additionally, the questions we choose to ask can also shape our study. For this reason, we want to be precise in asking our historical question. Together, we will break down a historical question to better understand what we are asking when we ask, “why do we have school uniforms?” Then, we’ll each rewrite that question to be more precise and clear. Then, we’ll start to think about what sources might help answer this question.

<i>Why do we have school uniforms?</i>	
<i>When we ask this question, what are we asking? What are we missing?</i>	
<i>Are school uniforms a stand-in for a larger topic that we need to understand?</i>	
<i>Rewrite your historical question. How is this different from the first question we asked?</i>	
<i>Where, historically, might we start to look for answers?</i>	

Appendix F

Crafting a Historical Question, Part II

Now, you will take the historical question you wrote down at the beginning of our session today and place it into this graphic organizer. Like we did as a group in the earlier example, you will analyze your proposed question to refine it and make it more precise. Then, you will start to consider what types of sources might be helpful to explore to answer your historical question.

[INSERT QUESTION HERE]:	
<i>When we ask this question, what are we asking? What are we missing?</i>	
<i>Are school uniforms a stand-in for a larger topic that we need to understand?</i>	
<i>Rewrite your historical question. How is this different from the first question we asked?</i>	
<i>Where, historically, might we start to look for answers?</i>	

Appendix G

Writing Thesis Statements

<p>What is a thesis statement?</p>	<p>A thesis statement is a sentence (or set of sentences) that clearly defines the argument you will make in your paper, as well as how you are going to prove it.</p> <p>Your thesis statement is typically presented at the end of your introductory paragraph.</p>
<p>Why do you need one?</p>	<p>Your thesis statement is important for you, as the writer, because it provides a blueprint for your writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provides focus and clarity for your ideas ● Provides structure for the rest of your paper ● It is often revised and refined, especially as you learn of new evidence and find new sources <p>Your thesis statement is equally important for your readers because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It provides a “map” for your reader so they know what they will be reading about ● It keeps them focused on your argument ● A well-written thesis engages the reader in your argument and makes them want to read further

Let’s look at an example...

<p>Sample Thesis Statement</p>
<p>The vague language of school disciplinary policy enabled suspensions to become a tool of white resistance to desegregation and a limiter of educational opportunities.</p>

Based on the thesis statement provided above:

1. What is the argument the author is making?

2. What evidence will they provide to support their argument?

Now let's try creating our own!

<p>Step 1: Start with your <i>question</i>. What is it that you're curious about? What do you want to learn more about?</p>	
<p>Step 2: List two primary sources you have already found. How have they answered your research question?</p>	
<p>Step 3: Now you need to explain <i>why</i> this is your answer and <i>how</i> you will convince your reader to agree with you. Like in the example we read above, the final thesis statement doesn't just state your position, but summarizes your overall argument.</p>	

Use these sentence frames if you're feeling stuck:

- (1) Although many historians of _____ have argued that _____, closer examination shows that _____.
- (2) _____ uses _____ and _____ to prove that _____.
- (3) [Phenomenon X] is a result of the combination of _____, _____, and _____.

Enter your full thesis statement here:

These formulas are good starting points for your thesis statements because:

- (1) they state an argument *and*
- (2) they explain how you will make that argument.

Still, they could be more specific and you should refine them as you uncover *new* evidence and learn more about your topic. Use the spaces below to draft refined versions of your thesis statement.

<u>Thesis Statement, Version 2:</u>
What changed between these two versions of your thesis statements? What did you learn? How are those new insights reflected in this new thesis statement?

<u>Thesis Statement, Version 3:</u>
What changed between these two versions of your thesis statements? What did you learn? How are those new insights reflected in this new thesis statement?

Appendix H

Writing Clear Sentences: Identifying Actors and Actions

Active vs. Passive Voice
When we write in history, we always want to use the active voice instead of the passive voice. The active voice places the actor in front of the verb while the passive voice usually puts the actor behind the verb, if at all. In history, the passive voice can make it unclear who is doing what.

For instance, let’s look again at the example provided by **Barbara and Karen Fields** in *Racecraft*.

Black southerners were segregated because of their skin color.

Who or what is missing from this sentence? How does that absence change our understanding of segregation?

How might we rewrite this sentence using the active voice? How does using the active voice change our understanding of segregation?

Changing from Passive to Active

Now that we’ve reviewed differences between the active and passive voice, and the importance of the active voice, let’s practice rewriting more sentences from the passive voice to the active voice.

Passive Voice	Active Voice
Native Americans had their land taken from them and given to white settlers.	
Schools in Harlem were segregated because of housing patterns.	
The decision was made by the school’s administrators to enforce the dress code.	

Let's practice writing our own sentences using the active voice. To do this, we'll want to follow a simple sentence structure:

*Subject-**verb**-object*

*White homeowners and real estate agents **segregated** housing patterns in Harlem.*

Another way to think about this sentence structure is placing the *actor* at the front of the sentence (subject), what they **did** (verb), and to whom/what they did that action to/on (object).

Looking back at your own research, write five sentences from your notes using the active voice:	
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Appendix I

Youth Historians Research Rubric

Task	Outstanding	Good	Competent	Needs Revision
<p>Thesis Statement/ Claim</p>	<p>Thesis is sharply defined, concise, and compelling</p> <p>Clear introduction, which presents thesis in a highly engaging and compelling manner with ample relevant background information</p>	<p>Thesis is clearly defined</p> <p>Clear introduction, which presents thesis in an engaging manner with relevant background information</p>	<p>Thesis is comprehensible, but not entirely clear</p> <p>Introduction presents thesis with little background information</p>	<p>Thesis is not clear</p> <p>Introduction is not clear and/ or no background information is included</p>
<p>Use of Evidence & Sources</p>	<p>Evidence for supporting arguments is specific, relevant, accurate, verifiable, and persuasive, drawn from both primary and secondary sources</p> <p>Use of quotations and paraphrasing appropriately sustains argument</p>	<p>Evidence for supporting arguments is relevant, accurate, verifiable, and mostly persuasive, drawn from both primary and secondary sources</p> <p>Use of quotations and paraphrasing appropriately sustains argument</p>	<p>Evidence for supporting arguments is accurate and verifiable, mostly specific and relevant, and generally persuasive, drawn from secondary sources</p> <p>Use of quotations and paraphrasing is mostly evident</p>	<p>Evidence for supporting arguments may be inaccurate and might not be clear, persuasive, or relevant</p> <p>Use of quotations and paraphrasing is not evident</p>

Task	Outstanding	Good	Competent	Needs Revision
<p>Analysis</p>	<p>Coherent, complex, and sophisticated arguments that support thesis</p> <p>Examines multiple historical interpretations, evaluates the context, reasoning, bias, or reliability of varied sources, and applies these through analysis of its arguments</p> <p>Clear, thoughtful, and thorough explanation and analysis of the connection between all evidence and argument being made</p>	<p>Coherent, sometimes complex arguments that support thesis</p> <p>Argument draws on, explains and critiques evidence from alternative points of view</p> <p>Mostly clear and thoughtful explanation or analysis of how the evidence supports each argument</p>	<p>Coherent, but rarely complex or sophisticated arguments that support thesis</p> <p>Some alternative perspectives are presented, but not always well-examined or integrated to create new historical narrative</p> <p>Some explanation of how the evidence presented supports each argument, but the explanations are not always clear or thorough</p>	<p>Arguments lack coherence and/or clarity</p> <p>Alternative arguments/perspectives are either missing or poorly integrated</p> <p>No explanation or analysis of how or why the evidence supports argument</p>
<p>Understanding of Implication & Context</p>	<p>Narrative (arguments, ideas, and voice) reflects a highly informed awareness of the larger historical, political, and cultural context</p> <p>Broader implications of the central arguments are thoroughly explored</p>	<p>Narrative (arguments, ideas, and voice) reflects an informed awareness of the larger historical, political, and cultural context</p> <p>Some broader implications of the central argument are presented and explored</p>	<p>Narrative (arguments, ideas, and voice) reflects a general awareness of the larger historical, political, and cultural context</p> <p>The broader implications of the central argument are alluded to, but not necessarily explored</p>	<p>Narrative (arguments, ideas, and voice) reflects almost no awareness of the larger historical, political, or cultural context</p> <p>The broader implications of the central argument are neither presented nor explored</p>

Task	Outstanding	Good	Competent	Needs Revision
Student Voice	<p>Writing style was confident and highly fluid; language was lively and engaging; blending of genres was seamless</p> <p>Historical narrative has distinct, individual student voice that serves to develop and further the argument throughout</p>	<p>Writing style was confident and engaging; blending of genres was evident</p> <p>Paper has an individual student voice that manifests itself at important points</p>	<p>Writing style was engaging, but somewhat tentative or basic; blending of genres was attempted, but not always successful</p> <p>Student voice is present, but inconsistent</p> <p>Writing is generally clear, but may be awkward or formulaic</p>	<p>Writing style was inconsistent or unclear</p> <p>Only one genre was used, or two genres were used unsuccessfully</p> <p>Student voice is not present</p>
Organization	<p>Each argument presented flows in support of the overall structure</p> <p>Uses consistent, effective transitions to develop ideas and arguments</p> <p>Conclusion is distinct, compelling, persuasive, and synthesizes arguments to support thesis</p>	<p>Each argument presented supports the overall structure</p> <p>Usually uses effective transitions to connect ideas and arguments</p> <p>Conclusion is distinct and persuasive, and partly synthesizes, but mostly represents the major arguments to support thesis</p>	<p>Most arguments presented clearly support the overall structure</p> <p>Uses transitions that are sometimes abrupt, but the arguments mostly connect</p> <p>Conclusion represents major arguments and connects them to thesis, with some synthesis</p>	<p>Arguments are not organized in coherent paragraphs</p> <p>Arguments presented are not clearly or supportively connected to the overall structure</p> <p>Uses transitions between arguments that are largely unclear</p> <p>Conclusion is either vague or unclear and is poorly connected to the narrative's major arguments</p>

Task	Outstanding	Good	Competent	Needs Revision
Conventions	<p>Zero or very few grammar or punctuation errors</p> <p>Writing uses active voice throughout the paper</p> <p>Appropriate and consistent documentation of accessible sources, including a well-organized and complete bibliography and citations</p>	<p>Very few grammar or punctuation errors</p> <p>Writing uses active voice predominantly in the paper</p> <p>Appropriate and consistent documentation of accessible sources, including a well-organized and complete bibliography and citations</p>	<p>Some grammar and punctuation errors, but not in a manner that undermines the clarity of the narrative's ideas or arguments</p> <p>Writing fluctuates between active and passive voice</p> <p>Accessible and complete, but somewhat imprecise bibliography and/or citations</p>	<p>Many punctuation grammar errors that undermine the clarity of the narrative's ideas or arguments</p> <p>Writing uses very few, if any, instances of active voice</p> <p>Poor documentation of sources (poor organization, incomplete bibliography and/or citations)</p>

* This rubric has been adapted from the **New York State Performance Standards Consortium Standards**.

Appendix J

Youth Historians Project
Selected Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources

Arnesen, Eric. *Black Protest and the Great Migration: A Brief History with Documents*. New York: MacMillan, 2003.

Collection of Wadleigh High School Yearbooks. See: https://harlemeducationhistory.library.columbia.edu/collection/wad_yb.

Delmont, Matthew. "The Origins of 'Antibusing' Politics: New York City Protests and Revision of the Civil Rights Act." Gotham Center for New York City History (2016). <https://www.gothamcenter.org/blog/the-origins-of-antibusing-politics-new-york-city-protests-and-revision-of-the-civil-rights-act>.

Harbison, Thomas. "'A Serious Pedagogical Situation': Diverging School Reform Priorities in Depression Era Harlem." In *Educating Harlem: A Century of Schooling and Resistance in a Black Community*, ed. Ansley T. Erickson and Ernest Morrell. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020.

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Jeffords, Clyde R. and Claude F. Walker, eds. *High Schools of New York City: A Hand-book of Procedure and Personnel*. New York: High School Teachers' Association of New York City, 1921.

Matthews, Les. "Harlem Riot Trials Going on: What Happened to Those Arrested during the Riot." *New York Amsterdam News* (New York City), Aug. 22, 1964.

Rickford, Russell. *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016: 23-45.

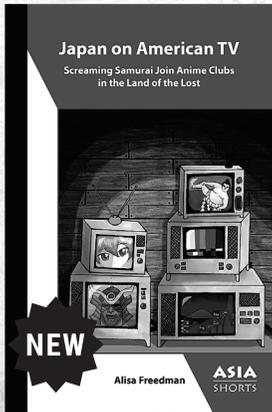
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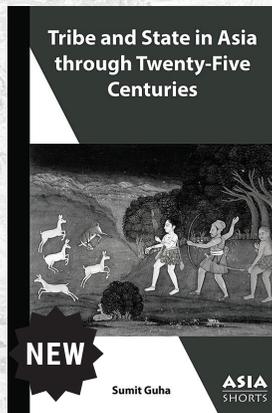
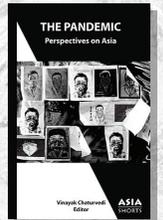
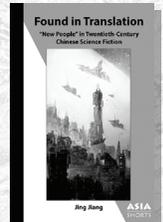
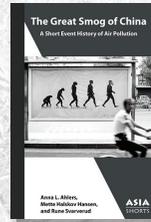
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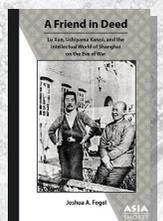
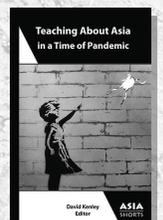
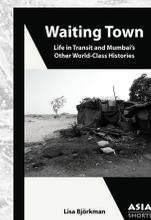
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