

Working with Documents to Develop Disciplinary Literacy in the Multilingual Classroom

Brian Carpenter, Matt Earhart, and Mariana Achugar
*Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Austin Independent School District,
and Carnegie Mellon University*

DEVELOPING DISCIPLINARY LITERACY in history requires that classrooms become an environment where students can engage in discursive practices typical of the profession. Disciplinary literacy refers to the specialized ways of reading and writing used in history to construct historical arguments and ways of reasoning. Learning history includes using language in particular ways to make meanings that are valued by the profession. Doing history involves close reading and evaluation of texts, making connections across texts, and constructing meanings by juxtaposing a series of texts to construct arguments.¹ The demands of this type of deep engagement in meaning making pose challenges to students and teachers alike. On the one hand, students need to read in new ways and deal with technical language and abstract conceptualizations. On the other hand, teachers are asked to apprentice students into the literacy practices of professionals without having the training to do it. In addition, today's classrooms include learners that come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making literacy especially important for students to learn how to think like historians.²

This article describes an approach to disciplinary literacy that can help teachers and students read the primary sources used in history lessons. The basic idea is to engage in reading practices typical of historians³ and

to use some linguistic tools to help students understand how language constructs historical meanings.⁴ Through the analysis of linguistic choices that authors made (consciously or unconsciously) when producing the document, teachers and students engage in conversations about how language constructs historical meanings and perspectives. Conversations around the meaning of texts make visible the ways in which expert readers make meaning by integrating information from the text with their knowledge of the topic. This approach to disciplinary literacy also provides students with access to a rigorous curriculum in a scaffolded manner, allowing them to look critically at texts and think about historical issues. By thinking about texts as the products of meaning making choices, we can explore the choices that were not made or that could have been made and therefore better understand the implications of the particular ways in which a document frames an issue.

In the history classroom, language plays an important role because teachers rely on texts to teach, and also use language to assess learning. In addition, the content (i.e., history) is constructed with language, while key practices in a historian's tool kit are realized through language (e.g., analyzing documents, reading across documents, and writing explanations). So, critical awareness of reading practices and uses of language to make historical meanings can support deeper historical understanding.

The activities presented here draw on the functional linguistic approach to disciplinary literacy⁵ and from educational research on the teaching and learning of history.⁶ The functional linguistic approach views language as a meaning making resource and proposes that we look at language from three perspectives: 1) what is going on? (events and participants); 2) what is the perspective of the author? (power relationships and points of view); 3) and how is the text organized? (structure and purposes). Looking at language from this functional perspective requires paying attention to context and thinking about what the meanings of wordings are.⁷ It entails unpacking texts to make explicit the ways in which expert readers make meaning from them. Our argument is that by analyzing the texts and unpacking how language is being used to construct historical meanings, students, both English Language Learners and others, can better understand what they read and have a deeper understanding of history.

These activities were developed as part of a collaborative research project between the authors.⁸ Brian Carpenter and Mariana Achugar are applied linguists and Matt Earhart is a history teacher in an urban southwestern school district. The goal of our project was to develop activities to be used in the mainstream history classroom with multilingual students, specifically where English Language Learners (ELL) learn together with native speakers of English, including speakers of vernacular dialects. The

course targeted was an “academic track” 9th grade American history course geared to students that were at risk to perform under district standards on the social studies portion of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The intervention was implemented in five 9th grade American history courses taught by the same teacher.

We worked together for seven months during the summer and fall of 2008. We had an intensive workshop during the summer, where the teacher was exposed to resources for text analysis with social studies texts. Then, during the end of the summer and while the semester was ongoing, the teacher developed three core lessons focused on doing close text analysis of primary sources with the assistance of the researchers. The goal was to help students comprehend texts more deeply by looking at patterns of lexical, grammatical, and organizational choices the author made.⁹ This was in addition to building background knowledge and other experiential activities that make the texts more accessible. The text analysis portion addressed one of the key guiding themes, depending on what the text and the issue at hand required: representation, orientation, or organization of information. In dialogue with the applied linguist and in response to students’ performance, the teacher modified the lessons he had originally designed during the summer to better serve the needs of his students. Pre- and post-tests were administered to assess the students’ learning of these text analysis strategies and reading comprehension of primary sources before and after the intervention. Classes were observed during the semester to register the implementation and contextual features of classroom interaction during core lessons.

The design of lessons had two parts: the first one involved selecting a primary source and the second creating the activities to scaffold students’ reading comprehension of the text. The teacher was instructed to select a text, contextualize it, and explain its historical significance and the reasons why it was worth spending an extended amount of time on it. In addition, he had to identify potential difficulties students could encounter when engaging with the text. For the lesson design, he had to write a lesson plan that included: goals (what students were going to learn); background knowledge diagnosis (how he would find out what students know about the topic or potential connections he could make to things they already know); potential challenges students could encounter during the lesson (what general obstacles or difficulties he foresaw and what particular strategies he would use to address them in the lesson); activities (what he planned and timed for in particular language analysis); materials and visual aids; and an assessment of student learning (how would he know if students had learned). These guidelines were meant to help the teacher think about how to integrate the text analysis into a regular history lesson. Earhart

reviewed each lesson with Achugar before teaching it, and afterwards, there was a debriefing session to assess how things had gone and to plan future lesson modifications.

Below, we present two language-focused disciplinary literacy lessons as examples of the approach. The first activity comes from a lesson designed to work with a comparison of two primary sources texts. The second activity comes from a second lesson designed to help students analyze primary sources. These activities provided students with an opportunity to engage directly with primary sources and enabled them to critically assess each author's representation and position on the topic.

Understanding Historical Documents through Language Analysis

The language analysis activities described here are intended to complement the typical instruction as students learn about a historical topic. The activities presented here focused on the Declaration of Independence and the origin of ideas about individual rights, as well as on the Muckrakers' role in triggering federal legislation regulating food and drug practices. These activities were part of a series of lessons and as such do not show all of the work the teacher did to help students learn about this historical period. Here, we focus only on strategies to work with difficult texts by exploring how historical meanings are constructed through linguistic choices. These activities demonstrate how a detailed functional text analysis can scaffold students' understanding of complex historical issues such as representation of contested events and perspective on controversial issues.

The first activity, on the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Declaration of Rights, focused on how the ideas presented in the Declaration of Independence had emerged. The text analysis centered on the representation of events and participants to better understand the options available at the time and the historical relevance of the choices made.

The second activity, on *The Jungle*, shows how looking at the tense, modals, and attitudinal vocabulary in a clause allows us to identify the orientation and bias of the authors. It also highlights the authored nature of historical documents, how to come to an understanding of bias evidence, and how to filter through sources.

Language Analysis Activity 1: The Declaration of Independence and Virginia Declaration of Rights

The Virginia Declaration of Rights has long been held as a precursor to the Declaration of Independence, and both documents have served as the foundation for how the United States frames concepts such as freedom,

Excerpt from the Virginia Declaration of Rights	Excerpt from the Declaration of Independence
<p>“That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.”</p>	<p>“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed;”</p>

Figure 1: Excerpts from the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the Declaration of Independence used for in-class student analysis. Selected phrases (in bold) and verbs (in bold and underlined) are highlighted by the teacher during class.

property, and rights. George Mason and Thomas Jefferson, as the principal authors for these respective texts, had specific goals in mind as they drafted the documents. The teacher had selected the first article from the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the first four clauses from the preamble of the Declaration of Independence to structure the lesson. In the classroom, the teacher began instruction by projecting each author’s portrait on the screen and asking the students if they knew who the men in the portraits were. Presenting the particular authors allowed the teacher to contextualize these texts as the concrete actions of historical actors. This highlighted the fact that the texts were not embodiments of abstract ideas of rights or freedom, but were material documents about ideas, which were central to debates occurring at the time of the formation of the United States. The teacher then stated, “our objective today is to think about where our ideas come from and the language used to create these ideas.” By looking at the particular linguistic choices made in these two texts, students can explore their relations and differences in terms of concrete meanings and how those relate to differences in opinion within those participating in the debate at the time.

After contextualizing the primary authors’ place in drafting the documents, and the significance of their writings, the teacher used a whole group activity to begin comparing the two excerpts. Brief pieces of text from the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the Declaration of Independence were displayed side-by-side and were used to begin the linguistic analysis (**Figure 1**).

The analysis began by the teacher asking the students to consider “what is said, and not said” in these two documents. After this, he distributed the texts on a paper handout; the teacher read each paragraph and stated that he wanted them to understand “the importance of language here.” As he read the documents, he took time to highlight selected verbs and phrases in the text; he then asked about the differences between the documents. One of the students suggested the “D of I has bigger words” and “Jefferson talks more specifically about government whereas Mason is about individuals who get their power from the government.” The conversation turned to the different focus on property and happiness, which were highlighted on the projected document. The teacher asked about the differences between the verbs “obtain” and “pursue” in the phrases “obtaining happiness” and “the pursuit of happiness” and the students discussed how one seemed to indicate more action than the other.

Then, the students asked about the lack of the word of “property” in the Declaration of Independence. The teacher seized the opportunity to draw their attention to the projected document and asked, “What did Mason mean by including ‘property’?” After a small slice of silence, a student answered, “slaves.” This exchange started a discussion on how Jefferson had to exclude an implicit reference to slavery in his document and how slaves were considered chattel or property. The conversation moved to how Mason stated that “all men are by nature equally free,” while Jefferson said, “All men are created equal.” The teacher at this juncture asked the students to notice the verb “are” in the phrases “*are* by nature” and “*are* created,” and argued that the verb “*to be*” indicates a fact. Discussion continued on whether Mason was emphasizing that it was nature that made us equal. Likewise, the teacher used this talk about verb choice to point to Jefferson’s choice of “*are* created” and “*are* endowed,” and whether Jefferson’s phrasing indicates that something must be doing the creating or endowing—we conclude the document shows that Jefferson meant a “Creator” as that something. This large-group activity led to pair work, which asked the students to join a peer and compare Section 13 of the Virginia Declaration of Rights to the state-ratified version of the Second Amendment in the U.S. Constitution.

The teacher distributed a worksheet with the two document excerpts and a set of four questions (**Figure 2**). He asked that the students think about the work they had just done identifying verbs and participants, and see how they apply to the questions on the worksheet. The teacher walked around the room answering specific questions and monitoring progress for about eight minutes, after which the teacher projected both texts on the screen. The teacher asked the students to present their answers. To the question regarding differences between the two passages, one student

Student Worksheet for Document Analysis

Passage 1: Section 13 of the Virginia Declaration of Rights (June 12, 1776)

“That a well regulated militia, composed of the body of the people, trained to arms, is the proper, natural, and safe defense of a free state; that standing armies, in time of peace, should be avoided as dangerous to liberty; and that, in all cases, the military should be under strict subordination to, and be governed by, the civil power.”

Passage 2: Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (December 15, 1791)

“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.”

Discussion Questions:

1. What differences do you see between these two passages?
2. What does Section 13 include that the Second Amendment leaves out?
3. What does the Second Amendment include that Section 13 leaves out?
4. How do you think our country would be different if Section 13 was actually the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution?

Figure 2: Student worksheet for document analysis. Excerpts from Section 13 of the Virginia Declaration of Rights and the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution are followed by in-class discussion questions.

suggested Section 13 to mean, “that the military should be governed by the people” and that the document says there should be “no military in times of peace.” The teacher asked the class, “What specifically in the text says ‘no military in time of peace’?” A student responded by pointing out how the texts differ around the mention of peace. The teacher then asked about the meaning of “standing armies,” and the discussion turned to how the term was defined. Regarding the final question on how the country would be different if we had Section 13 in the Constitution and not the Second Amendment, a student responded, “I think the military and gun owners would be more tightly controlled, [and] it would be more difficult to own guns.” The activity ended with questions and statements about whether the draft would be necessary if no standing army were allowed.

Language Analysis Activity 2:
The Jungle

Upton Sinclair’s portrayal of the Chicago meatpacking industry in 1906 stirred a great deal of political responses, and for this reason it can

Sentence 1:
 “**Let a man**^a **so much as scrape his finger**^b pushing a truck in the pickle rooms, and he **might have a sore**^c that **would put him out of the world**^d; all the joints in his fingers **might be eaten by the acid**^e, one by one.”

Sentence 2:
 “**I saw a man**^a that **scraped his finger**^b in the pickle rooms while pushing a truck; and the **resulting sore**^c **nearly killed him**^d, as **the acid had a terrible effect**^e on his hand.”

Sentence 3:
 “**When a man**^a **scrapes his finger**^b pushing a truck in the pickle rooms, he **has a sore**^c that **will most certainly kill him**^d; as the joints in the finger **will be eaten by acid**^e, one by one.”

Figure 3: Selection of potential opening sentences from *The Jungle*, with corresponding linguistic choices highlighted (in bold and underlined).

be considered as a historical document in addition to a literary piece. Sinclair’s work led directly to a federal investigation of the meatpacking industry, and *The Jungle* can be accurately credited with the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. Sinclair was emblematic of the role fostered by many Muckraking journalists. Through textual analysis of *The Jungle*, it becomes clear that Sinclair’s text had two primary purposes: 1) to expose the unsanitary and (potentially) harmful conditions of the food and 2) to expose the despicable treatment of the workers in the plant at the hands of their unforgiving employers. The latter of these two purposes was the one for which Sinclair was most adamant in unveiling, yet it is the former that became “more important” and was addressed by Congress.

Two brief passages from *The Jungle* were selected for use in this activity. Students were asked to pay particular attention to Sinclair’s choice of verb tense and the effects his choices had on the interpretation of the text. The linguistic analysis began with a whole-group activity in which students are provided with a list of sentences (**Figure 3**), and must predict which is the actual sentence Sinclair chose for the beginning of a particular passage.

Students were asked to select which sentence they thought was Sinclair’s opening sentence and to provide justification for their position. Phrases and linguistic choices that express an interpersonal meaning were highlighted in corresponding colors so that students could visualize the change in orientation (these are marked alphabetically in Figure 3). The class then discussed how linguistic choices (in this case, Sinclair’s choices) changed

Sentence A:

“There **was meat**^a that **was taken out of pickle**^b and **would often be found sour**^c, and they **would rub it up with soda**^d to take away the smell, and **sell it to be eaten on free-lunch counters**^e; also of all the miracles of chemistry which they performed, **giving to any sort of meat**^f, fresh or salted, whole or chopped, any color and any flavor and any odor they chose.”

Sentence B:

“There **was meat**^a that **was taken out of pickle**^b and that **was found to be sour**^c, and they **rubbed it up with soda**^d to take away the smell, and **sold it to be eaten on free lunch counters**^e; also of all the miracles of chemistry which they performed, they **gave to any sort of meat**^f, fresh or salted, whole or chopped, any color and any flavor and any odor they chose.”

Sentence C:

“**Sour meat**^a **is taken out of pickle**^b and it **is rubbed with soda**^d to take away the smell. **This meat is given**^f any color, flavor, and odor the meatpacking industry wishes, and then it **is sold to free-lunch counters**^e. Unsuspecting men, women, and children then **eat**^e this meat.”

Figure 4: Selection of potential opening sentences from *The Jungle*, with corresponding linguistic choices highlighted (in bold and underlined).

the meaning of a particular sentence. Student observations were very astute, with many pointing out that the use of “scraped” in Sentence 2 implies that Sinclair in fact witnessed a man scraping his finger, whereas “so much as scrape” in Sentence 1 implies that scraping one’s finger is only the beginning of potentially catastrophic activities. Adding the “so much as” to the same verb mitigates the force of the statement by implying there could have been worse things happening. The instructor allowed students to make more observations regarding the differing sentences, and then directed students to the linguistic choice at the beginning of each sentence (“Let a man”, “I saw a man”, and “When a man”). In many classes, students observed that the use of the word “let” implies that someone is responsible for a man becoming harmed. The culprit is not named, but students were quick to identify that Sinclair was most likely accusing the owners of the meatpacking plant. Some students even observed that the government and the American people were responsible for lack of regulation. Sinclair never wrestled with these exact sentences—the latter two are the instructor’s creation. Nevertheless, students were forced to wrestle with the author’s choice of phrasing in *The Jungle*, and how each choice could affect the author’s meaning. Students were then asked to independently read through the remainder of the paragraph associated with

Sentence 1 and to look for additional examples of Sinclair's orientation to the events depicted, providing evidence from his linguistic choices. A whole-group discussion then commenced regarding student observations. Students were then asked to work in groups of three or four to create a newspaper headline that would surmise the content of the read passage. These newspaper headlines were then shared with the whole group and recorded on the chalkboard.

With the class as a whole group, the instructor presented the beginning of the second passage in a nearly identical fashion; three sentences for students to compare linguistic choices (**Figure 4**).

The entire process was repeated. Students looked together at how the use of passive voice (e.g., "was taken" or "is rubbed") and tense, together with the word "would", help to construct an impersonal and typical sense of how things were done, focusing on the sanitary conditions and not who performed them or why. Students compared linguistic choices and discussed how meaning changed when different choices were made.

Again, students were asked to create a newspaper headline reporting these events. The lesson ended with a discussion about how the headlines revealed some of the issues that were taken up in the legislative act and why some of the issues related to workers' rights did not have the same political impact.

Implications

These activities encouraged students to examine linguistic choices made in primary historical documents. The students not only discussed specific lexical and grammatical choices related to the documents, but also used the information obtained by considering alternative choices to reflect on the historical significance of those texts. For example, the comparison of the representations of government and individual rights in the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Declaration of Rights enabled students to get a glimpse of some of the issues that were debated at the time and understand how those wording choices had important historical consequences. In the other lesson, students used Sinclair's wording choices to understand how he was placing blame for personal injury and appalling working conditions on the factory and even implied worse things happening in the factories. The students and teacher engaged in a dialogue that helped to apprentice students into close reading and connecting these literacy practices with those of professionals by linking the document to particular historical interpretations.

These dialogues across the series of lessons allowed all students to engage critically with texts and become aware of how linguistic choices are

meaningful. In addition, all students developed their academic language literacy. This was demonstrated through their performance on the pre- and post-test administered, as well as through the qualitative analysis of their responses. In addition, it should be noted that the teacher considered that these lessons allowed the students to take ownership for their learning, and enabled the students to move beyond “basic grammar stuff” and difficult vocabulary into the area of *understanding* why these documents were so important.

To involve the students in this type of work, the teacher had to engage in dialogue and reflection with the researchers, and this required time and effort outside his regular duties. But the teacher understood the lessons were not designed to be a series of one-off activities, and instead were meant to be a new way of approaching texts in the history classroom. The teacher took these ideas of a functional approach to disciplinary literacy and expanded on them by integrating this into his regular practice.¹⁰

Conclusions

When teachers work with students to talk about how language constructs historical content, they contribute to the development of historical understanding, critical thinking, and academic literacy. By analyzing texts and uncovering the ways in which different linguistic choices construct an author’s representation and orientation in history, students develop an awareness of the ways in which language functions, while engaging in deeper and more critical readings of documents. The activities described in this article give students, both ELLs and non-ELLs, the possibility to engage in rigorous thinking and inquiry in the history classroom while developing academic language. This scaffolded approach to working with disciplinary literacy in the history classroom demonstrates that content and language are inextricable, and that students can have a deeper understanding of history by engaging in conversations about texts that involve close readings and text analysis of documents.

Notes

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1. Gaea Leinhardt, Catherine Stainton, Salim Virji, and Elizabeth Odoroff, "Learning to Reason in History: Mindlessness to Mindfulness," in *Cognitive and Instructional Processes in the Social Sciences*, ed. M. Carretero and J. Voss (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994), 131-158.

2. Teaching history in today's public schools means, in many regions of the U.S., facing a multilingual classroom. About 3.8 million students were considered English Language Learners (ELLs) receiving services in public schools during the 2003-2004 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, <<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=96>>). California and Texas had the largest number of multilingual students, with 26% and 16% of the general population being ELLs, respectively. As a result, a large number of history teachers need to deal with language issues and literacy in the classroom and are searching for guidance in this area.

3. Gaea Leinhardt and Katherine M. Young, "Two Texts, Three Readers: Distance and Expertise in Reading History," *Cognition and Instruction* 14, no. 4 (1996): 441-486; Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 2001).

4. See, for example, Carolin Coffin, *Historical Discourse: The Language of Time, Cause and Evaluation* (London, United Kingdom: Continuum, 2006); and Jim Martin, "Writing History: Construing Time and Value in Discourses of the Past," in *Developing Advanced Literacy in First and Second Languages: Meaning with Power*, ed. M. Cecelia Colombi and Mary J. Schleppegrell (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002), 87-118.

5. Mariana Achugar and Catherine Stainton, "Learning History and Learning Language: Focusing on Language in Historical Explanations to Support English Language Learners," in *Instructional Explanations in the Disciplines*, ed. Mary K. Stein and Linda Kucan (New York: Springer, 2010), 145-169; Mary J. Schleppegrell, Mariana Achugar, and Teresa Oteiza, "The Grammar of History: Enhancing Content-based Instruction through a Functional Focus on Language," *TESOL Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (March 2004): 67-93. Luciana C. de Oliveira, "Nouns in History: Packaging Information, Expanding Explanations, and Structuring Reasoning," *The History Teacher* 43, no. 2 (February 2010): 191-203.

6. For example, Gaea Leinhardt, "History: A Time to be Mindful," in *Teaching and Learning History*, ed. G. Leinhardt, I. Beck, and C. Stainton (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994), 209-255; Sam Wineburg, "Historical Problem Solving: A Study of Cognitive Processes Used in the Evaluation of Documentary and Pictorial Evidence," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 83 (March 1991): 73-87.

7. Michael K. A. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London, United Kingdom: Edward Arnold, 1994); Mary Schleppegrell, *The Language of Schooling: A Functional Linguistic Perspective* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004).

8. For a more detailed description of the project design, implementation, and outcomes, please see Mariana Achugar and Brian Carpenter, "Developing Disciplinary Literacy in a Multilingual Classroom," *Linguistics and Education* 23, no. 3 (September 2012): 262-276; and Mariana Achugar, "Designing Environments for Teaching and Learning History in Multilingual Contexts," *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* 6, no. 1-2 (2009): 39-62.

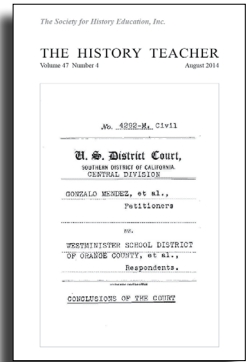
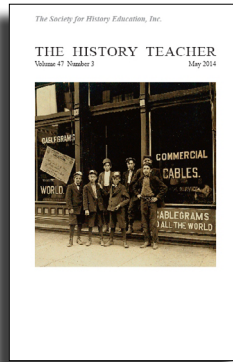
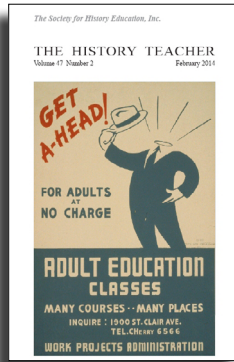
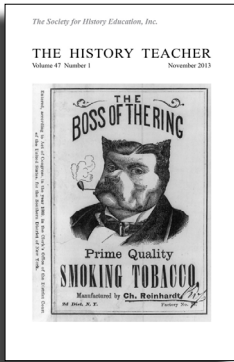
9. See three guiding questions and perspectives outlined on early in the article.

10. It should be noted that the teacher continued with the ideas presented in this design experiment, and developed subsequent lessons for the history classroom. Based on this work, the teacher applied for and received outside funding to continue developing these types of disciplinary literacy lessons. It should also be noted that the intense nature of this type of work might be more difficult if instituted on a larger scale.



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