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Summary Essay - Teacher Reflection
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The Teaching American History in South Carolina class has really helped me see the importance of using primary sources in Social Studies instruction. Before taking this class, I was familiar with primary sources, but I wasn't sure how I could use them in my classroom. The Master Teacher and some of my fellow teachers taking the class with me gave me some great, simple ways to include primary sources. Since I teach fourth grade, my use of primary sources is quite different from high school uses of primary sources. I have to make the process a little more simplistic and make it so that my students can understand the sources we are using.

Because of this course, I realized that using primary sources is supposed to be challenging – it is supposed to require higher order thinking skills. Every other time I tried to use primary sources, I would get frustrated because I felt like I was doing something wrong. I felt like my kids were struggling too much. However, after doing some of the activities in our summer course, I realized that it's okay for them to struggle with it because I struggled with some of them myself! I also always felt like my whole lesson had to focus on the primary source. Wardie Sanders showed us ways in class that we could use primary sources as a “hook” for a lesson and ways that we could use them as the focus of the lesson. Since I teach younger grades, it is easier for me to just use them as a part of the lesson since many of the documents are too difficult for my kids. I LOVE using photographs, though! I never really thought about photographs as primary sources until we used them so much in class this summer, but after seeing different ways to use them, I am hooked!

Reflecting on Creating the Lesson

The lesson I created for this course posed several challenges for me. The biggest challenge was that the standards our class focused on were geared toward 5th grade standards, and I teach 4th grade. This was difficult for me because I am not as familiar with the 5th grade standards. I first had a difficult time choosing a topic because I really wanted to choose something that I could use in my 4th grade classroom. Unfortunately, I was not able to come up with anything that would work for both, so I decided to do a lesson on something that I learned during our summer course. Before our summer course, I really knew very little about President Roosevelt's New Deal and the Civilian Conservation Corps. After listening to Kevin Witherspoon talk about this topic, I became very interested in how the CCC affected South Carolina.

After choosing my lesson topic, I found a new challenge – finding information on my topic. When we visited the South Carolina Room at the Florence County Library, I found a packet of information on the CCC and its lasting effects on South Carolina. This packet gave background information on the CCC as well as primary sources (including letters, sketches, photographs, etc.) that I could use for my lesson. I was elated to find such good information because I searched at several other locations before and could not find anything. The only other place that I could really find information was on the Internet.

My last challenge when planning the lesson was figuring out what to do with the primary sources that I had. I had a wide variety of primary sources from the packet, so I had to decide which to use and which to leave out of my lesson. There were some really interesting letters and other documents in there, but I was afraid that 5th grade students

would have a hard time understanding some of it. I finally decided to use FDR's organizational sketch for the CCC from the packet and to use photographs of the CCC that I found on the Internet as my primary sources. I knew that the students would be able to pull information from the photographs, and I wanted to look at the organization of the CCC as a whole group to discuss the basic idea of the plan.

Reflecting on Teaching the Lesson

Overall I thought that the lesson went pretty well. I taught it to a 5th grade class rather than my 4th grade class because I did not want to confuse my students by detouring to a completely different time period. It was a little challenging to teach a class that was not my own, but fortunately I knew most of the students from the previous year. I didn't tell the class what the lesson was going to be about because I wanted to use the photographs to get them thinking and making inferences. As the kids worked in groups to look at the photographs and fill out the handout, they were really getting into it. They wanted to know what the photographs were of and what the people were doing. I also thought that coming back together as a class and making a class list of people, objects, and activities seen in the lesson was good because not every group had the same pictures. This class list allowed them to really think about the photographs and begin predicting what the lesson was going to be about.

There were a few things about the lesson that I would want to change. First, I wish I had had more time to teach it. I had to teach it during my planning period, and that only gave me about 30 uninterrupted minutes of teaching. I really needed about 15-20 more minutes to really get into the content with them. Also, when I do another lesson

like this, I will put the students into smaller groups. They were in groups of five, and there were too many kids in the group for them to really get to study the photographs. I also would like to give each group at least 3 photographs instead of just 2. I think the more photographs they look at, the more inferences they can make. I didn't want to overwhelm them since they are not used to working with primary sources, so that is why I chose two. Now, however, I realize that using 3 or 4 would have given them a better reference to use in making inferences.

I learned a great deal from doing this lesson. I learned that there are ways that I can incorporate primary source documents into my instruction (even though I teach younger children), and I learned that giving the students enough time to work with the documents is a key component in the lesson's overall effectiveness. I can't wait to use more primary sources with my children. I hope to take the TAHSC class again when it covers the 4th grade standards, so that I can get some ideas that go with the standards that I teach.