

Ten Tips to Remember to Teach History Effectively (based on observations for our TAHSC Project)

1. **Enthusiasm!** If you want to make history come alive, you have to nurture your love for studying the past. Your enthusiasm and curiosity is contagious, and your students will catch the same bug.
2. **Present the past as a mystery to be solved** – Students acting as history detectives will want to know “the facts” to solve the case. Beyond the “who’s” and “what’s” of the past, they will naturally want to understand the “how’s” and “why’s” as well. Understanding motive and perspective is critical to a detective investigating a crime. The same is true for a historian who is always searching to understand the context of a given question. Encourage your students to detach themselves from emotion and look for supporting evidence to build their own knowledge and understanding of the past.
3. **Use a narrative structure that is rich in content and inquiry based** – Begin each class with an outline or idea of what will be discussed (using essential questions) and follow through with a cohesive beginning, middle, and end. Ask historical questions throughout your lesson and let the students’ responses guide your narrative. **Establish an understanding of place and time for all lessons.**
4. **Integrate multiple primary and secondary sources to understand the past.** Students are naturally curious, and primary sources can help to nurture that curiosity. Always ask the question: “How can these sources help us understand the ideas, attitudes, and beliefs of people in the past?”
5. **Teach students the definition/concept of a primary source** – Work with your students to know the difference between primary and secondary sources. Here is our definition of a primary source:

Primary sources are first-hand accounts of events and experiences, both public and personal. They include original manuscripts or reprints of original manuscripts, letters, diaries, documents, books, films, posters, play scripts, speeches, songs, sheet music, photographs, drawings, objects, structures, and first-person accounts and newspaper articles that are created at the time an event occurred.

6. **Secondary sources are important, too!** – Secondary sources provide the necessary context to allow you to present your lessons in a meaningful way. Students can understand the concept of a primary source by also working with a variety of secondary sources. Go beyond the textbook when preparing your lessons. Remember that when a historian investigates a question about the past, she considers all relevant evidence possible and constantly tries to place issues in proper context. Despite a common perception among educators, primary sources are *not necessarily* more reliable than secondary sources.
7. **Use a real story of a person to frame lessons** – Using biography as a means to teach broad themes or topics can be quite effective, particularly if the students can relate to a past life story (whether of another young person or someone that lived near them). The primary historical points of the lesson can then be examined in the context of a real person.
8. **Find local history examples to help you teach broad themes** – South Carolina has such a rich and diverse group of cultural institutions (museums, archives, historic sites), and these places have staff that are enthusiastic about history. Let your students know that history took place “in their own backyard.”
9. **Encourage higher-level thinking** – Lessons should reflect teaching strategies discussed during the summer institute, particularly those that encourage higher level thinking and historical interpretation among students.
10. **Use the web for research, but be wary** – There are lots of good websites out there on just about every topic in American history, and many contain primary sources. Be choosy where you get your information. Websites that end with .edu, .gov, and .org tend to be the most reliable.

Remember our project goal: *To help teachers develop innovative teaching techniques through the use of local primary sources and to connect national history to local and regional events, people, and places.*