

READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

Reading Like a Historian Video Transcript

Miroslaba Velo:

Good morning. Have your binders out. We're going to start off with the kickoff question, as we always do. The question is this: I want you to imagine that you're living in Hayward or more than 300 years. And a group of people have come in. They're armed -- they have weapons. They've been slowly taking over your neighbors' homes. So the question is, what would you do? Would you actually stay and fight and resist? Or would you say, "Let's move -- we don't want to fight against these people who have weapons?"

How many of you decide to stay in Hayward? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Majority would stay in Hayward, okay.

So today we're going to do a historical question. Why is it that President Andrew Jackson and a Cherokee named Elias Boudinot both support Indian removal? So that's our goal today. Read primary sources, answer the question, and we're going to answer it by writing a paragraph.

I gave out the central historical question. It comes from Stanford's Reading Like a Historian web site. And I provided some documents that would help them answer that. I build my units around these questions to engage the kids in that sense.

Now, let's get started. What did these two guys do?

Student:

Support Indian removal.

Velo:

Good. They supported the removal of the Indians. And the question is asking you, why did they do this?

They know the question. They know that they're going to be looking for evidence, and so I wanted to go over the timeline.

By 1802, what do you think? Has that relationship changed, or is it the same?
Jot, what do you think?

Jot:

The United States wanted to buy their lands.

Velo:

Okay.

Jot:

So they want... they don't want to sell their lands.

Velo:

What does that mean, though? Do you want to help us out, Shiksha? Is it still a peaceful relationship?

Shiksha:

Yeah, it's a peaceful relationship. They are showing a peaceful relationship. They're not forcing them.

Velo:

So one of my goals is to also remind students of what was the bigger picture, the context of what America was going through. So that's why we would go back and forth with the documents and the timeline.

And then now we're going to have our green toolkit. It lets us know how we analyze documents. So here, in order to analyze it, we've got to do four things. We've got to source it. Step two is, you contextualize. And then the third step is you actually read the document. You've got to figure out what is it saying? And the fourth step is you want to corroborate. So what I'm going to have you do right now is, I'm going to have you source document A. And you can do this with a partner, okay?

Student:

He'd want to talk to the Congress so they can give him the right to take their lands.

Velo:

I think if they can start wrapping their brain around, how is it that historians study history? It's a process. And that's why, when I start my history class, I really tell the students, "This is what historians do."

All right, your attention up here now. Let's start with document A. Casey, who wrote this document?

Casey:

Jackson.

Velo:

Okay, the author is Andrew Jackson, okay? And we know he's the president. Now, when was it written?

Student:

1830.

Velo:

Okay, 1830. Now, I'm going to stop you here. What was going on in 1830? Look at your timeline. Good. Some of you went straight to it.

Student:

Removal Act.

Velo:

Good, the Removal Act had been passed by 1830. Now, here's a hard question. Why was this created? Now, in order to answer that question, you need to know what this is, the State of the Union speech. Can anybody help me out here? Anybody help out the class?

Student:

Was it a speech that he gave to the Congress?

Velo:

Okay, why would a president give a speech to the Congress, to the politicians, and also to the people?

Shiksha:

To make believers.

Velo:

To inform them, right? So this speech was given to inform the Americans of his goals. Finally, do you believe this speech, yes or no, and why? Most of you are saying no. Why are you saying no?

Student:

They always lie.

Velo:

Because the presidents always lie? Interesting, the presidents always lie. What else?

Student:

Because he wanted to show that he had the right to take their land, so...

Velo:

Okay, so he might kind of make his argument to take their land, okay.

Evan:

No one really believed that document, because he was the president at that time, and he just want to show that he had the right to kick them out of their lands and take their lands so the U.S. can expand. I just like to, like, share my point of view with others and see what they say.

Velo:

Now let's go to document B here. Who wrote this?

What brings the students' curiosity into it is the use of documents. Documents can be in so many different forms. They could be letters, diaries, it could be laws, it could be newspaper articles.

Does anybody want to be Andrew Jackson and read his speech? Okay, Victor.

Victor:

"It gives me great pleasure to announce to Congress that the government policy of Indian removal has almost been achieved."

Velo:

You do a close reading. And that is just pulling out the argument or the claims, or a summary of what the document is telling you.

Let me stop there and make sure. So the first two paragraphs...

In any class, students always need to see examples, or you modeling what you expect them to do. I think for me, if kids feel more... That they trust themselves more. If you build their self-esteem, they'll be more willing to take those risks.

Turn to a partner and see if you can find a reason why Jackson says they must remove the Native Americans.

When I'm walking around the classroom, it's an opportunity for me to assess the students' understanding of what we're doing. And so sometimes I come to a

group where they're talking about the documents, but they have a completely different take on them. So I'm just coming around, checking, and making myself available in a smaller environment rather than as a big class. Because I think they need to have access to me in that sense, too.

They would not want to see it be restored. What does restored mean? To bring back to its original condition. So what they're saying here is that they want it... they want America to grow with cities, towns, farms. Is that another reason why he wants to remove them? So that's your second concrete detail. That's another one. I want to get to the writing process. So go to your next packet. Your topic sentence is the answer to the question, why do you think Andrew Jackson supported the removal? There's no right or wrong reason. I'm just curious to hear what you wrote. Now, the next step, what is your evidence to show that he helped the Cherokees?

Student:

Live longer.

Velo:

They can live longer and survive. There's another reason there. So right here we're going to put, "Andrew Jackson, in a speech to Congress, states they may live longer and survive as a people." And then on this side, we will write our commentary.

Our goal really was to read the documents, pull out evidence to be able to answer that question, and then write a one-chunk paragraph. When you give students a question – you say, "Here's the evidence, here are documents, real documents from history; you come up with your own interpretation, your own account of what happened in the history"-- I think kids have more of a buy-in. If teachers can try to realign their curriculum to that process, and try to make the students do more of what historians do, I think kids would be more engaged. And so that's why my units are centered around historical questions.