Historiography? What’s That?

by Alice Kawazoe

Such was my reaction two years ago when Shelly Weintraub, our district’s social science coordinator, shared with me her latest idea for a workshop series. “Historiography” sounded to me like some suspiciously synthesized educationese, conceived by underappreciated social scientists trying to legitimize their life’s work by attaching a Latinate affix to a common root — rather like linking “ology” to “astro” in a crude attempt to elevate horoscopes to the level of science, or coining linguistic atrocities like “leisureology,” the study of leisure time, an oxymoronic term at best.

Sensing my cynicism, Shelly patiently explained that historiography is not a sham, but a serious study of the processes of historical inquiry. It is concerned with questions such as: What is the nature of historical inquiry? How do historians do their work? What is their work? Is there such a thing as historical writing? If so, what distinguishes it from other writing? Can we teach students to do historical writing?

Or more importantly, can we teach students to be historians, to do history as historians do?

The phrase “to do history” sounded peculiar to me. We don’t do history by storytelling in the same sense that we do writing by writing, do science by experimenting, do reading by reading, do math by problem solving, do sports by participating in soccer or basketball, running or tennis. We do lunch, but we never do history. History is done to us. We study history. We don’t read history; we read about history from textbooks where history is neatly pre-packaged into chapters, generally arranged chronologically and more specifically rearranged under subheadings such as “The Rise of Industrialism” or “Millard Fillmore’s Contributions of the Presidency.”

Students associate history with dead things — dead civilizations, dead people, dead cultures, dead events. The facts and dates about these dead things are to be learned and remembered, at least until the test. For
students, history is never happening; it’s already happened — and a long time ago at that. Most students find it inconceivable that there are historians — people who devote their lives to doing history. In short, we rarely conceive of history as an active verb.

Part of the problem with historical study is that vast distance — in time and space, perspective and relevance — between the actual historical phenomenon and the student. Often the student is at least five times removed from the phenomenon, and fifth-hand information is as stale as fifth-hand gossip. First is the event; second, the eyewitness version of the event; third, the historian’s digestion of the eyewitness version; fourth, the textbook writer’s compilation of historians’ views; fifth, the teacher’s teaching of the text; and, finally, the student reading the text or hearing the teacher’s words about the text. Students would not recognize a primary source because they have seldom seen one.

Another problem with historical study is the abundance of information: so much to know, so little time. Covering world history, for example, in eighteen or thirty-six weeks is a ludicrous ambition, so classes gallop through time, touching lightly on this fact, that person, this detail, that movement. With history reduced to a litany of fifth-hand irrelevancies, it becomes, not just a passive rather than an active verb, but a sedative verb as well.

Considering these comatose classes, we have to ask: What, if anything, makes history compelling? What awakens and enlivens history? Shelly knew that what piqued her interest in history were professors who combined knowledge and expertise with an engaging and provoking teaching style and a zest for the subject. Why not, Shelly proposed, create a workshop series centered around these kinds of scholars and teachers who would share their insights and perspectives with classroom practitioners struggling to breathe life into a “study of dead things”? Why not give classroom teachers an opportunity to learn history, to understand the decisions and choices historians make in shaping their interpretations, and then give the teachers time to talk about what they learned? Why not? And so we did.

Shelly devised an impressive line-up of presenters, spanning a broad range of topics and viewpoints: Larry Levine, professor, on social history; Darryl Brock, writer, on the historical research he needed to do to write his novel on the early Negro baseball league; Henry Meyer, historian, on writing historical biography and Candesce Faulk, historian, on the life of Emma Goldman; Mauricio Tenner, on different perspectives of the Quincentennial; Chuck Wallenberg, professor, on studying communities and writing local history; Don Hardesty, archaeologist, on archaeological exploration; and a visit to Stanford University to tour the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project and hear Clay Carson on documenting history.

The mornings belonged to the presenters — to lecture, to talk, to show videos and slides, to read aloud, to tell stories, to respond to questions. The emphasis was not, as it is with many inservices, on a teaching strategy or methodology. The focus was the historians sharing some of their expertise to expand or deepen the knowledge of the participants. The afternoon belonged to the teachers — to discuss the morning’s learning, to explore applications for the classroom, to generate lessons perhaps, to share what they were trying in the classroom.

We opened the series to any interested elementary or secondary teacher in the district. All sessions were held on school days with the district’s curriculum department paying for substitutes. Would enough teachers be interested? Would anyone even understand or be intrigued by the notion of historiography to sign up? What if we gave an inservice series, and nobody came?

Well, they did come — thirty teachers, kindergarten to twelfth grade, the maximum number we could afford to support. Shelly at the outset declared the goals of the inservice:

- to enrich the teachers’ historical understanding;
- to increase the use of primary sources in the teaching of history;
- to increase opportunities for historical writing in the classroom by experimenting with lessons adapted from the historian’s presentations or gleaned from discussions.

Seven sessions later at the conclusion of the series, we had thirty zealots on our hands who lavished Shelly, the presenters, and the workshops with praise and gratitude. “Thank you for treating us like professionals,” “I would pay to attend these workshops,”
"... like taking a graduate seminar with wonderful teachers," gushed the participants, demanding "More, more," and asking, "Where do we sign up for next year?"

The second year Shelly had a reputation to uphold and a pleased audience to please even more. And Historiography II now had a legacy to surpass.

We could have scheduled a new roster of historians or even recycled most of the speakers from the previous year, and the teachers would have appreciated the filling of gaps in their historical understanding. In a recent article in The New York Times, James Atlas asserts that the "study of history deepens our sense of what it means to be human," but he asks, "Is understanding enough?" Shelly's and my answer with reference to Historiography II was no, developing teachers' understanding of history is not enough. We needed in this second year to see if the inservice was having any impact on student learning and the quality of student work. Compelling as it is to have students do "authentic" tasks — that is, produce real products for real audiences — teachers needed to define "authentic" tasks in history. "After all," surmised Shelly, "if an authentic task for a science class is to analyze the impact of local poisoning on the soil or a task for math class is designing a new playground, then shouldn't a student in a history class do what a historian does?" So what would a genuine historian-like activity look like and how would we help students perform that task successfully?

Thus, in Historiography II teachers were compelled to experiment with historical writing in their classes, to provide examples of student writing, to analyze the results, and finally to write about their experimentation with the writings collected in a publication at the conclusion of the series. We were not asking for a teacher research project or a teacher inquiry; we simply wanted teachers to plan a portion of their practice in a more premeditated way, to look closely at the student work resulting from that practice, and then to reflect on the teaching and learning processes. What would come of this request we were not sure.

The speakers for Historiography II were both provocative and entertaining, agitating and clarifying: Ron Takagi, U.C. Berkeley, on ethnic history; Peter Carroll, Stanford, looking at history through film; Leon Litwack, U.C. Berkeley, discussing cultural history; Marge Franz, historian, on women's history; Bill Coates, middle school teacher, on getting students to write history; and Patricia Limmerick, University of Colorado, on the so-called westward movement. They were all lively historians and each, too, was an inspiring teacher, modeling for the participants effective practices and habits of mind of stellar teaching. Caught in the thrall of each speaker, teachers were being transformed, the changes invisible to the eye and under the skin. Shelly and I were unaware of the extent of the transformations until the teachers submitted their writing.

Most of the teachers acknowledged that history is not an intimate study, yet they were part of a personally invigorating experience with dynamic, involved scholars captivated by the study of history, and they wanted their students to share in that excitement. But to do so, teachers had to create a class climate that invited risk-taking and experimentation — what Phillip Potestio, a junior high teacher in the workshop, calls Classroom Community Comfort (CCC). He explains further: "The establishment of CCC cannot be achieved by formula. It's important that the teacher provide a nonjudgmental atmosphere in the classroom ... a climate that is adaptable to different styles of learning, open to opinion and receptive to all work. The teacher should dispose of preconceived notions about what form work should take. Drawings, oral presentations, poems, raps, and plays are as valid as more traditional written discourses. The teacher should also suppress that right answer/wrong answer mentality. Once the students understand that the classroom exists to expand their options rather than restrict them, they will be on their way to achieving Classroom Community Comfort."

To stimulate personal involvement of students with history, to close the distance between learner and subject, many teachers used logs, journals, or diaries to invite student opinions, reactions, and feelings. Renee Swayne writes about "idea books" from her third graders; Kathy Lee and Sue Johnston, fourth and sixth grade teachers, called them reflections; and Miriam Laska, a secondary U.S. History ESL teacher, discusses her students', "thoughts and ideas — short answers kept like a log."

Almost all teachers cited the importance of reflection — of giving students the opportunity to think and write about what they were learning and about their own learning processes. But the workshops also gave
teachers the chance to reflect on their own practice, feelings, and attitudes. “Thank you for giving us time to think.” “Thank you for valuing thinking,” reiterates one teacher.

Kathy Lee credits the series for prompting her to experiment with new approaches and taking risks. She revealed to me in conversation, “I was a teacher who had her kids sitting in straight rows, but instituting the writers’ workshop idea from the Bay Area Writing Project and having kids write newspapers and oral history for Historiography forced me to break up those rows and get kids in cluster. It really frightened me at first because, as I said, I’m pretty traditional. But now, I can’t ever think of going back.”

Looking at her students’ work helped Sue Johnston redefine her role “as helping students to shape an understanding of time and place.” Renee Swayne realizes that as she incorporates more writing and thinking in social studies, she has to change the way she teaches writing for all subjects: “It (Historiography) has had an impact on my whole program.” Determined not to let her U.S. History class, filled with first and second year immigrants, “fall into a series of drills,” Miriam Laska ebbs and flows from risk-taking on challenging assignments to disappointment over less than successful student responses. Her paper is sprinkled with “unfortunately” and “very difficult.” But she sees in the end the importance of stretching ESL students with tough assignments rather than constricting them with trivial works, and even though the stretch may have exceeded their grasp, Miriam surmises, “Perhaps all of this was just breaking ground for a fabulous second year.”

Historiography I and II broke ground for fabulous teaching and learning about historical thinking and writing. Rather than talk further about the series and the inspired teachers involved, why not let Miriam Laska, Sue Johnston, Kathy Lee, and Renee Swayne speak for themselves and relate their own histories.

Alice Kavazo is director of curriculum and staff development for the Oakland Unified School District. Shelly Weintrob, who conceived the Historiography workshops, is the social studies coordinator for the Oakland Unified School District.

Strangers from a Different Shore: Teaching English to LEP Students

by Miriam Laska

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My Brother’s Story

Once, when he was a little child, he lived in a wealthy family. At that time, he had a lot of friends, and many of them praised him because he was born in the right family and right place. He was so proud to hear them say that.

But, on June 16, 1988, his father left home to go to the northern part of Laos. He went there to visit his old friend who had helped him so much. One month later, he didn’t know what was wrong. The soldiers of Laos came to his house. They searched his house without asking and found some guns they thought were illegal to keep. Then, they took his mother to jail. At the same time, the soldiers of Laos announced that they wanted his father to come home as an exchange, to get his mother out of jail. When his father heard about it, he escaped from Laos to Thailand and lived in a refugee camp. The happy home had changed immediately into a sad one. My brother, who had always been happy, couldn’t raise his head to see his friends faces anymore. Day after day, he could only imagine what his life would be while he was living without parents. He felt very hopeless, and he could only see the darkness of his future. Two weeks later, almost everything in the house had been sold in exchange for food.

The next night, his older sister talked to him about what they had to do because their parents weren’t with them. When she spoke to him, he said, “Whatever you tell me, I will do so.” She said, “We have to separate. I will stay with our younger brother, Vilai, and wait for our mother to get out of jail.”

That night he couldn’t do anything, only cry. He couldn’t eat and couldn’t sleep all night and day. The day after, he decided to leave his happy home and happy place in order to find his father ...

This excerpt is from an eleventh grade Lao student working at a third-year ESL level. She interviewed her
brother for an oral history project in my U.S. History class for LEP (Limited English Proficiency) students at Oakland High School. I wanted to show my students that history was something they could write, a part of their lives, not just something in the textbooks.

My most successful unit was based on immigration from China to America. The emphasis was on why these people left China, rather than their journey or their experiences upon arrival. I adapted Strangers From A Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans by Ronald Takaki (Penguin Books, 1990) by simplifying vocabulary for LEP students. Takaki’s book was a good choice, as his narrative includes ordinary men and women and a variety of primary sources. The students also watched the film A Thousand Pieces of Gold, a story of a Chinese girl sold by her parents and taken to America.

We read the text on immigration, then watched a short video called An Immigrant’s Journey, about a young Polish boy at the turn of the century. It asks the question, “How long does it take to become an American?” We compared his experiences to theirs.

Their assignment was to interview a person who had immigrated to the United States and ask them about what was happening in their own country that caused them to leave. The emphasis was to be on their reasons for leaving rather than why they chose to come, a more common question which students were already used to answering. The interview could be in their own language and then translated into English.

Below is an excerpt from a paper by a second-year student who interviewed her mother. She told me she liked the assignment because she learned so many new things about her father that she had never known (I have corrected spelling in student papers):

My father was taken to prison in Vietnam in 1975, before I was born. Looking back on those years in her life, my mother remembers that life was very difficult. The Communists came to my house to take my father to jail because he had worked for the American government before 1975. In the meantime, my mother could not get a job ... Nobody helped my mother. On a small plot, she planted peanuts and sesame seeds and sold them. She provided my father with food every month. When my father came back from prison, my mother decided to move to America because people said things were easier there. It broke my mother’s heart to leave, it would have broken her heart to stay.

First year students found the assignment very difficult. Most handed in a paper about themselves:

I am a Chinese. I came here one and a half years ago. The first Chinese came here because they were looking for money and gold. I think I am looking for money a little, too. I came to America because if I stayed in China, there would not be things to know and see because they are not there: computers, microwave ovens, electric coffee pots, heaters, and BART. I see them every day now. Therefore, I have come to America.

Many students get excited about this assignment, for through writing history they come to know themselves and their families in new ways.

Miriam Laska teaches eleventh grade at Oakland High School in Oakland, California.

In September...

by Sue Johnson

In September, wonderful projects present themselves and everything seems possible. The social studies curriculum scope and sequence is clear, logically planned, and progressively blocked out. I planned to begin the year with personal reflections, then autobiographies, move on to biographical sketches, and finally have students write historical fiction, all the time keeping an eye on the cultural universals that bind all peoples.

By combining social studies with literature, writing, and simulated activities, I hoped to get kids to begin thinking and writing like historians.

But reality strikes when thirty diverse, reluctant, and self-conscious sixth graders stumble through the door. Learning who they are, what they can do, and how far they can travel consumes the next 180 days. Sud-
denly, it is May. What happened to those plans that were carefully mapped out in September?

As I reflected on this year, I began to see that perhaps my plans did work, although obstinately taking their own course and providing many surprises along the way. A tapestry of reflections, “opinions,” biographies, autobiographies, essays, simulations, field trips, literary works, and drama provided the stimulus from which students began to make connections with the cultural universals of all civilizations, past and present.

I realize that my journey this year mirrors many of the ideas expressed by our guest historians. In September, writing historically took the form of personal exploration, as students wrote autobiographies, magnifying important moments in their lives.

In her narrative, Sarah shares a keen sense of geographical place in her story:

My Snapshot.

It was a cold crisp day, the sky was clear and the birds were chirping merrily. It was a Kodak moment. My mom and I were in a log cabin which we rented. It was my first or second time in the snow.

My mom was cooking chicken soup and she wanted to take some pictures. I don’t know about you but when I was four I hated pictures. I insisted on going outside to play. My mom bundled me up and then let me go outside. I made snow angels, snowballs, and ate the snow.

Later that day I was looking out the window and I saw our sled. Ideas were racing around my head. Then my mom took me for the ride of my life. I was having so much fun I had a minor accident. I pee in my pants. That’s the story of my snapshot.

As Bill Coate shared in his presentation, reflective and diary style entries are most effective in getting younger students to begin thinking as historians. After some study of early humankind, Sam was able to write in the “voice” of early man:

This morning I woke up to the sound of a mammoth stampede and me and my tribesman were up immediately with our spears ready, while the women took shelter deep in the cave. We killed 2 mammoths and we will eat well today. We have enough food so no more hunting will be done today and we can relax. The rest of the day will be spent with the women gathering herbs and the men making new spears for the winter.

This piece shows evidence that Sam has some understanding of the different roles of male and female, daily life, foods available, and tools used by early man; and he can write in a narrative form that shows historical knowledge.

Another historian who influenced my teaching this year was Peter N. Carroll, who spoke on the importance of film as history. In his book Keeping Time, Memory, Nostalgia, and the Art of History, Carroll “struggles to live in history even as he studies it, writes about it, and teaches it.” His narratives were so poignant that I read excerpts to my students as models for biographies I wanted them to write on a family member. The results were warm histories of people who came to America determined, as Carroll’s grandmother was determined. Walter wrote:

Mom remembers … sitting there with her family on autumn evenings to view the moon. Mom thinks moon viewing was a way to thank the moon and mother nature for good crops and good health and to pray better crops and health the next year. Her family decorated the veranda with pampas grass, water chestnuts, sweet potatoes, rice, and other autumn things as an offering to the moon. Her gentle grandfather used to say, ‘there’s a rabbit in the moon and it’s pounding rice cake.’

As I studied and sifted through my students’ work, I began to realize that what was missing was a sense of time. What events shaped the world at the time they were writing about? What factors influenced people’s life conditions? This is a hard concept to convey to students, and I wonder how much ten- and eleven-year-olds grasp. As a colleague, Ron Mark, always hammers at us, “If the kids don’t know what was happening ten years ago, and ten years is ancient history, how in the heck can you get them to understand ancient civilizations?”

I think a partial answer to Ron’s question might be that children best understand a period in history through the stories of their elders. Looking at my students’ work has helped me define my role as helping students begin to understand time and place.
From spending time analyzing my classroom experience with historiography this first year, I have reached two conclusions. First, my teaching next year needs to focus more directly on getting students to understand time and place and the influences that create situations and changes. Second, students need to have the idea of cultural universals firmly embedded in their understanding of people and history...

And in September...
Wonderful projects present themselves, and...
Everything seems possible.

Sue Johnston teaches sixth grade at Joaquin Miller Elementary School in Oakland, California.

Writing History through News Publication and Oral History

by Kathy Lee

For several years, I have used novels such as Island of the Blue Dolphin, By the Great Horn Spoon, and Journey to Topaz to make California’s history meaningful for my students. I was intrigued by the way history was taught by historiography workshop presenters Ronald Takaki, Peter Carroll, and Bill Coates. I asked myself, how can I make writing history more meaningful and interesting for my students?

Since I had only eleven fourth graders from 2:10 to 3:10, this made it possible for me to focus on the writing of history using novels as well as reference books. Instead of the usual research of a specific topic, note taking, and expository writing, students published a newspaper and completed an oral history project.

In the fall my student Melissa was a reluctant writer; her body language indicated she disliked writing. She spent more time worrying about correct form than about her thoughts. Writers’ workshop developed her fluency and interest in writing. In January she wrote in a portfolio assignment, “I like writing because you get to write about fun things, and when we do writers’ workshop, I can write whatever I want.”

In January, students read Sid Fleishman’s By the Great Horn Spoon, a fictional book about the gold rush days. Through the novel, students discovered the adventure of traveling around Cape Horn, the regional language spoken by the book characters, and the hardships of the miners.

Students also learned factual information about the gold rush days through educational films, textbooks, and other resource books. Students were asked to write new facts through their research. The culminating activity for the novel was publishing The Diggers’ Chronicle. The gathered facts were used to write articles for the paper.

Students elected the editor and decided on the name of the paper and the date of publication. During writers’ workshop, I presented a lesson on writing newspaper articles. After brainstorming ideas, students decided to have three sections in the paper — news, feature, and sports. Students chose a section of the paper to work on and elected their editor. Each group decided on the news coverage of their section. More research was done before students were able to write their articles.

The articles students wrote were fictional; however, stories were based on events which happened in California in 1849. When we evaluated the newspaper, Melissa wrote, “We spent lots of time doing the writing. Every one was proud and happy about their work in the paper.”

We also read Yoshiko Uchida’s Journey to Topaz, a novel about the Japanese internment camps. The timeline for the study of California’s history was the period from 1940-1945. Instead of having a resource speaker talk about her experience at camp, the students prepared questions and interviewed an internee, Grace Okamoto.

As a homework assignment, students wrote the first draft of the interview. Students had a choice of writing their pieces in the first or third person. The following day they met in response groups, worked on revisions, listened to parts of the taped interview, and worked on another draft, and repeated the process until a final draft was produced.
Melissa chose to write her interview of Mrs. Okamoto in the first person. The following is a portion from her piece entitled, My Life in Camp.

My name is Mrs. Okamoto. I am here to tell you about my experience in the Japanese internment camps.

I was 7 years old when I went to Tanforan. Our family’s barrack was Barrack 22, C and D. I shared D side with my parents and my four brothers shared C side. When I was 6 I didn’t know what was going on so I just went with my family. When my three brothers volunteered to go to the army, I was shocked and I missed them while they were gone.

When we transferred to Topaz, Utah we stayed there for two years. I didn’t like eating in the mess hall because of the bad food. I was very skinny then because I didn’t eat that much. There was powdered eggs, powdered milk, and Vienna sausages. The powdered eggs always had a bad smell.

How were my students assessed? Instead of a test recalling facts, after each novel and culminating activity were completed, students wrote a reflective piece on what they learned. Everyone was able to write in narrative form. After our study of internment camps, one student wrote:

Once in World War II, Japanese Americans had to go to detention camps. The Japanese Americans had to live in a horse stall called a barrack. The food was terrible. Everything was powdered. The camps had schools. The schools were little and only had one light. You didn’t have much homework because there wasn’t much paper. They had a library and some had play grounds. They had guards and fences. If you didn’t hear the guard and go the fence, you would probably get killed.

A couple of weeks ago, a lady, Mrs. Okamoto, came to our class and we asked some questions. We recorded all of our questions and our answers.

I learned that in World War II, the Japanese Americans were in a camp and the Japanese Americans didn’t want to go in the camps and some people got killed. Some people wanted to get out. If I was president, I would not call war and not have Japanese put in detention camps.

Integrating literature, writing, and social studies made California history come alive for my students. Inspired by the many historians at the historiography session, I was led to experiment with new approaches and take risks in how I assessed my students. For me, the change was an exciting one.

Kathy Lee teaches fourth grade at Joaquin Miller Elementary School in Oakland, California.

Third Graders as Historians

BY RENEE SWAYNE

As an elementary school teacher, social studies is just one piece of the total curriculum. As I’ve changed the curriculum to incorporate more writing and thinking in social studies areas, historiography has touched my classroom in many ways that go beyond social studies instruction.

This year I decided to initiate a daily writing period during which students write about a variety of topics: some related to things we are learning (or going to learn), others related to current news items (especially if they involve controversy), and some dedicated to exploring children’s feelings and ideas. I write notes and comments as I read through the booklets, and they often write back to me. Children have come to feel safe and comfortable with their writing, and we have established a wonderful exchange of ideas.

Through their “idea books,” I find out what children already know about things; as we move along, I can see how their knowledge is developing and how they are responding to the information I am sharing. I also use the idea books to assess children’s writing skills. If I see they have problems with spelling, grammar, usage, or punctuation, I can present a lesson to cover those skills. The idea books were a necessary bridge to using historiography in my classroom this year.

Third graders present a challenge for historians because they are almost ahistorical in their thinking.
They've never had formal history/social studies instruction so they come with few preconceived ideas and very little historical context. Columbus Day provided a good starting point for our social studies program. I decided to start with the "traditional" European story of Columbus, then to present information that introduced other perspectives. After I'd presented the information, I decided to see how children had processed it and what they remembered. Here are sample entries from their idea books:

Christopher Columbus likes to trade things and he lived 500 years ago. He had to go somewhere that no one had been there before and he was the captain of the ships. He was the only man who believed the world was round. He was trying to get spices and he was looking for gold too.

When Christopher Columbus was a young boy and his father was a weaver, Christopher wished that instead of being a weaver he wanted to be a sailor. When he grew up he was sailing ships and one day he became a captain. He sailed to many places to get spices. He thought that there might be a shorter way to get to India and he took so long that the people in the ship almost threw him overboard. They were looking for any lands and then they saw people of the lands ahead of them and when they sailed to the land Christopher Columbus called the people Indians. One day he put flag on the ground and took over the land. Christopher took some people and brought them to Spain ... they traded with the people. He was thinking that the people were so stupid. When they went back to Spain he made the people into slaves and sold them to people so he could be rich.

At the end of the unit I asked children to decide if Christopher Columbus was a hero or a villain and to explain their answers. (We had discussed these issues as we went through the unit.) I planned to use this as my assessment, and I expected responses that would be as complete and rich as their idea book entries had been. Here are two samples:

I think Columbus is a hero because he did good things and he gave people a job and he is nice to people.

Many students answered with only one or two sentences (as compared with their journal entries). When I shared some of the student responses with the historiography group, it was pointed out how much "richer" the journal entries were. I now include journal entries as part of my assessment. They give me an informal measure of what each child is or is not getting. I can make adjustments in my lessons when I see a need to correct or add information. While they are not as convenient to file away as a "test" paper, they are often more valid.

With the emphasis on writing, social studies has become more integrated into the rest of the curriculum. I often include social studies lessons (geography, historical setting, etc.) when we are reading stories and/or books. Our classroom library has grown tremendously. We have two sets of encyclopedias, multiple copies of selected reference books, and a variety of other books on related topics.

Around Washington's birthday, I used George Washington's Breakfast as a reading and social studies unit. We read the book and discussed it, did vocabulary activities and other traditional reading activities. I brought in materials to give students a sense of what life was like in the 1700s. We talked about slavery, the Revolutionary War, life in the colonies, etc. Our final project was to write a biography of George Washington. Students worked in pairs. We talked about chronology and details before we started. Students took notes in prepared booklets as we went through the unit, and they used these notes as their research base. I told them they needed to make the biographies interesting by adding details and information. Students had to decide which information they wanted to include. After students finished, we critiqued them for content and accuracy:

Washington was born in 1732 and died in 1799. He was a general and rich as you already know. When he was little he liked to count steps and he had ten mean hunting dogs. Two of his dogs'
names were Lady and Pilot. They mostly hunted foxes for fun. He also was six feet tall, wore a size thirteen shoe, and he was president for eight years. The best of all, he and Lafayette helped fight the revolutionary war for the Americans. When he resigned from the army, he wore a black and tan uniform. He married Martha in 1759 and was elected president in 1789. He died two months before his 68th birthday. He was the first president for the U.S.A.

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the historiography group. It has become a pleasure to read students' writing projects. They produce writing that is interesting, informative, and individual enough so it's not a "chore" to read a class set. I can also see that my students are really learning and understanding the events we have written about. Historiography has helped me to bring my curriculum in line with the new frameworks. I hope funding can be found to continue such programs for many years into the future. I am honored to have been chosen to participate in the program. Not only has it enriched my life, it has also touched my children's lives — they are the real benefactors when all is said and done.

Renee Swayne teaches third grade at Cleveland Elementary School in Oakland, California.