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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2010 Volume III: Creating Lives: An Introduction to Biography

Micro Biographical Essays: Students Helping Students Learn about American History

Guide for Curriculum Unit 10.03.06, published September 2010
by Jeff Joyce

This unit will be for my Advanced Placement United States History classes. I will conduct the unit over the course of the last month of school as AP exams take place in early May but our school calendar continues until mid-June. It will be the final product for the year.

My proposal for this unit is to assist students in creating Micro-biographical essays (MBEs). I hope to accomplish two things: 1) Address the need to make lessons in history easily consumable as it seems to me that large volumes of history create a barrier to young people beginning to take an interest 2) Help students to learn the craft of the biographer- telling a tale of a bio-subject in history. I also want to give others a meaningful historical resource by posting our MBEs on a website that my students will construct.

These histories are not to be immense by high school or any other standard. They will follow in the direction of a recent phenomenon called the micro-history. But these will be kind of like super micro histories but written as biographies. I would imagine at this point that they will be somewhere between 15 and 20 pages in length.

(Developed for AP U.S. History, grade 11; recommended for AP U.S. History, grade 11)

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