

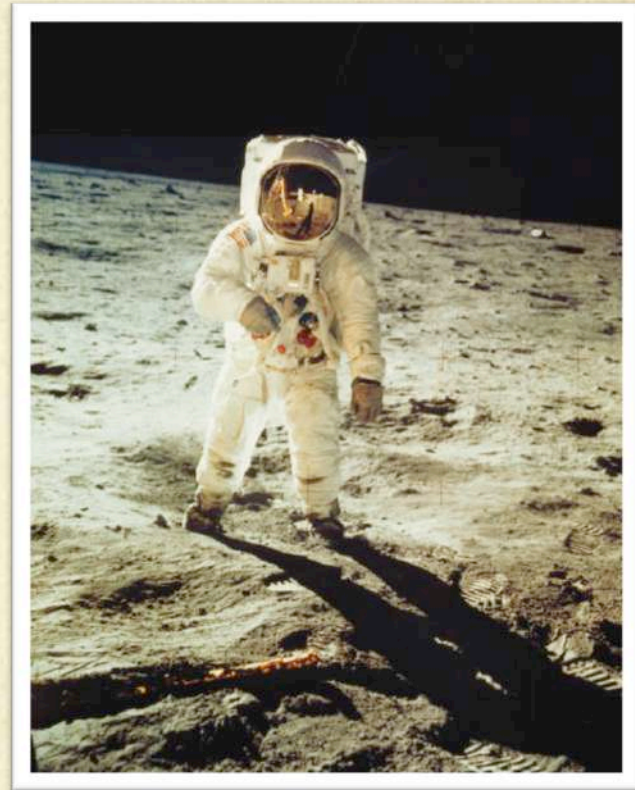
# Build Skills by Doing History

Based from an article by Chauncey Monte-Sano

There's a way for students to achieve the thinking, reading, writing and history expectations laid out in the common core.

No Child Left Behind has profoundly limited the teaching of history over the past 10 years.

Now, the Common Core State Standards offers an opportunity to reverse this decline by giving history a more prominent place in the school curriculum alongside literacy goals.



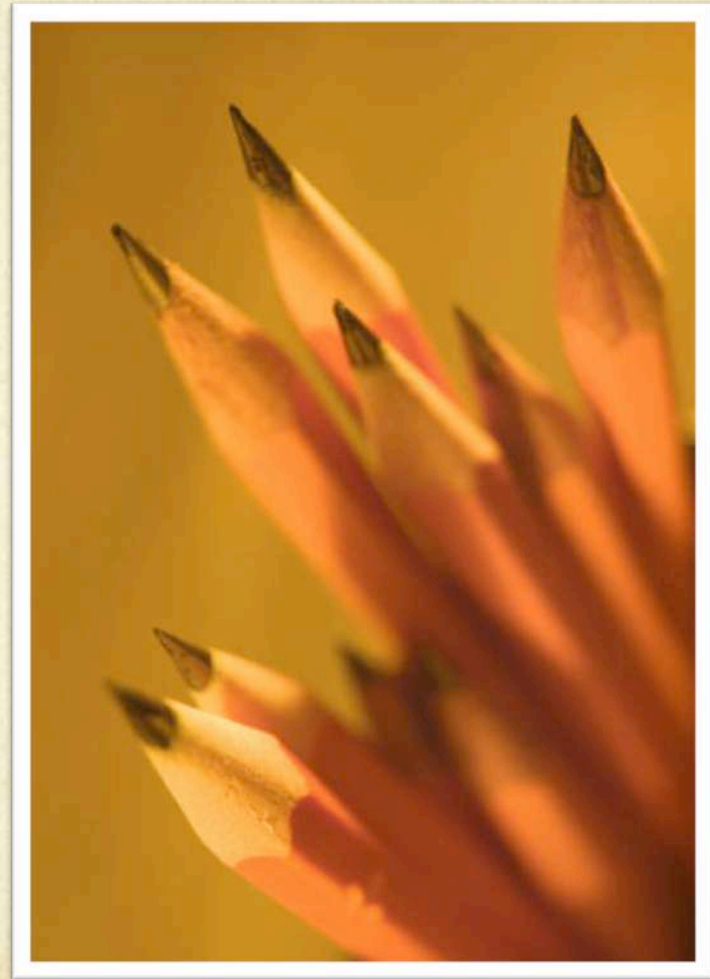


Common Core standards state that students in grades 6-12 “have to become adept at gathering information, evaluating sources, and citing material accurately, reporting findings from their research and analysis of sources in a clear and cogent manner”

NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) found that

88% of 12th graders could not “communicate reasoned interpretations of past events, using historical evidence effectively to support their positions”

83% of 8th graders did not meet a similar expectation in history.

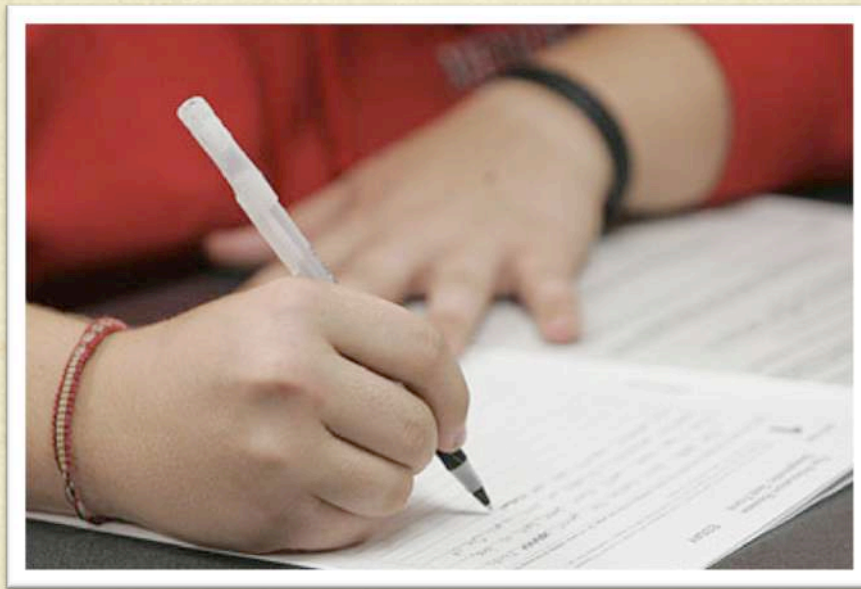


NAEP exam asked 12th graders to read two primary sources and “explain how events of the Second World War inspired many African-Americans to argue for civil rights at home.”



Only 22% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders made a connection between the war and civil rights for African-Americans at home while referencing the sources.

NAEP writing exam presents comparable, if equally disheartening, results.



Only 24% of 12th graders and 33% of 8th graders are “competent” writers

Given the Common Core's emphasis on thinking and literacy in history, this is a good time to think strategically about what we can do to support students' development as thinkers and writers.

These two challenges don't have to be addressed piecemeal or added to the long list of demands facing schools.





One thing is clear: Students don't improve when they practice writing without feedback or explicit instruction, or if they only experience lecture and textbook exercises.



Instead, when students are explicitly taught argumentative writing at the same time that they're involved in **doing** history, they improve.



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What does this mean  
and what does it look like in classrooms?

**Doing** history means letting students experience the interpretive nature of history by giving them opportunities:

- to read historical sources
- consider multiple perspectives
- evaluate the reliability of sources
- construct their own interpretations or arguments about the past based on this evidence.

Present history as an inquiry- oriented subject by posing central questions that can be answered in multiple ways



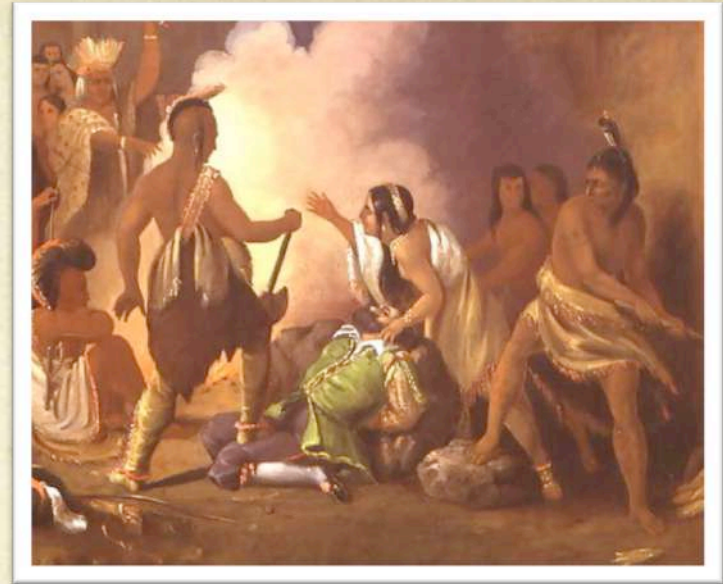
Central questions can guide a single lesson or a series of lessons. One successful teacher used central questions to guide individual lessons such as “Who is the savage?”

[http://lazerbrody.typepad.com/photos/uncategorized/trail\\_of\\_tears.jpg](http://lazerbrody.typepad.com/photos/uncategorized/trail_of_tears.jpg)

Questions can range from the concrete,

“Did Pocahontas rescue John Smith?”

— to the more abstract —



<http://www.1startgallery.com/thumbnaill/131900/1/Pocahontas-Saving-The-Life-Of-Captain-John-Smith-C-1836-40.jpg>



<http://catapult.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/lesbian-feminist-choir.jpg>

“Electricity and women’s work: Who really benefited, and when?”

Another successful teacher, Mr. Lyle, focused an entire semester on one question:

Why did the Civil War happen?



<http://www.marketplace.co.uk/images/us-civil-war.jpg>

After exploring the realities of the Civil War, Lyle used three units

- the American Revolution
- the opponents and defenders of slavery
- Westward expansion and sectionalism

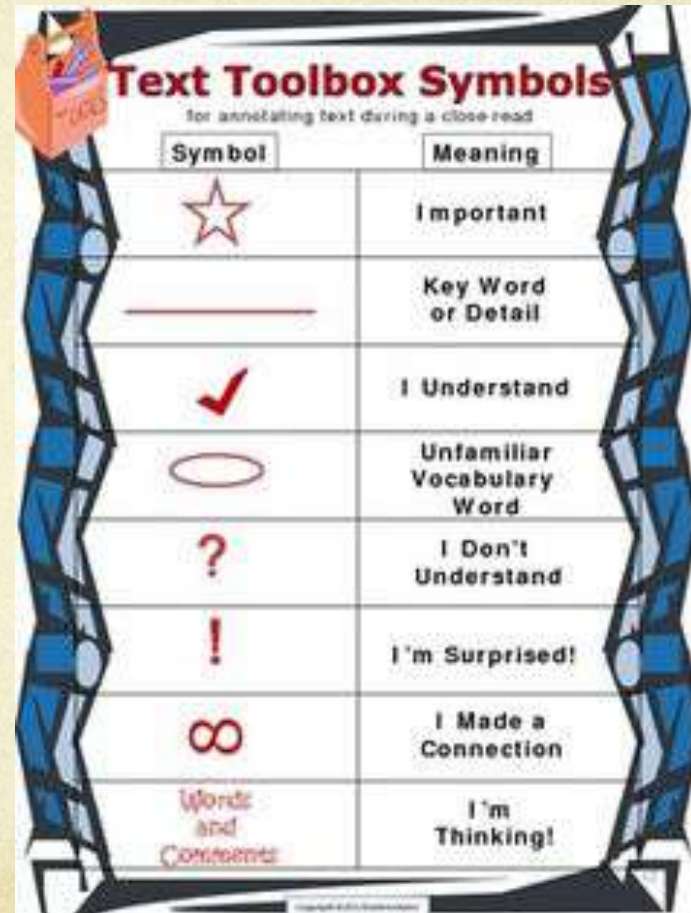
to investigate why the Civil War happened.

Asking questions is a start, but we must also give students a chance to investigate by structuring opportunities to read historical sources that present multiple perspectives.



To support students' reading, Lyle taught them to write. He pushed students to be active readers and to interact with text by requiring them to annotate every reading. This included:

- making margin notes
- underlining
- circling
- adding question marks in and around each text.



The image shows a 'Text Toolbox Symbols' chart designed to look like a toolbox. The title is 'Text Toolbox Symbols' in red, with the subtitle 'for annotating text during a close read'. The chart is a table with two columns: 'Symbol' and 'Meaning'. The symbols are: a star, a horizontal line, a checkmark, an oval, a question mark, an exclamation point, and an infinity symbol. The last row is labeled 'Words and Comments' in red. The chart is decorated with blue and black patterns on the sides, resembling a toolbox handle.

| Symbol             | Meaning                    |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| ☆                  | Important                  |
| —                  | Key Word or Detail         |
| ✓                  | I Understand               |
| ○                  | Unfamiliar Vocabulary Word |
| ?                  | I Don't Understand         |
| !                  | I'm Surprised!             |
| ∞                  | I Made a Connection        |
| Words and Comments | I'm Thinking!              |

<https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/5a/03/80/5a03801b4b01e267e781069740c9f086.jpg>

In other readings, the teacher used SOAPS questions (i.e., questions that ask about the subject, occasion, audience, purpose and speaker) with many document sets to help students recognize authors' intentions, and to consider who might have heard or read the text originally.

## Analyzing Primary Sources using SOAPS!

Directions: Using the supplied primary document, answer the following questions in the graphic organizer below.

| Subject   | Occasion  | Audience  | Purpose   | Speaker  |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the topic or idea being addressed in this source?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the time and place that this source comes from?</li> <li>What historical events occurred during this time period?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is the document being written for?</li> <li>Who does the writer or artist want to read, see, or hear this document?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why would the author write this piece?</li> <li>What did they hope to accomplish in this letter/speech /cartoon?</li> <li>What kind of argument is the speaker making – are they supporting something, trying to change something, or explaining something?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who is the author or creator of the document?</li> <li>What is his or her occupation?</li> <li>What is his or her historical significance?</li> </ul> |
|   |   |   |   |  |

One easily accessible resource, “Historical Thinking Matters”, offers ways to structure students’ reading of historical sources so they can comprehend and analyze.



**historical thinking matters**

Welcome to **Historical Thinking Matters**, a website focused on key topics in U.S. history, that is designed to teach students how to critically read primary sources and how to critique and construct historical narratives. Read **how to use** this site.

**student investigations**

Four investigations of central topics from post-civil war U.S. history, with activities that foster historical thinking and encourage students to form reasoned conclusions about the past

**spanish american war**

**scopes trial**

**social security**

**rosa parks**

**why historical thinking matters**

An introduction to the site's approach using documents to explore conflicting accounts of the 1775 Lexington Green skirmish

**teacher materials & strategies**

Resources for instructors, pre-service teachers and teacher-educators offering classroom materials and strategies, examples of student and teacher work, and supplementary sources

Stanford University's "Reading Like a Historian" curriculum engages students in historical inquiry. Each lesson revolves around a central historical question and features sets of primary documents designed for groups of students with diverse reading skills and abilities.

The screenshot displays the Stanford History Education Group website. At the top, the logo features the Statue of Liberty and the text "STANFORD HISTORY EDUCATION GROUP". To the right, there are social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, along with a "LOGIN" button and a link to "or sign up to download lessons". Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for "HOME", "CURRICULUM", "ASSESSMENT", "PROJECTS", "PUBLICATIONS", and "ABOUT". The main content area is titled "CURRICULUM" and includes a testimonial from Matthew McDonald, a teacher in Woodbridge, VA, who praises the lessons for his 6th and 7th-grade U.S. History classes. The "Reading Like a Historian" section is highlighted, showing a breadcrumb trail: "Home > Curriculum > Reading Like a Historian". The page title is "Reading Like A Historian", and there is a "VIEW LESSON PLANS" button. A video player shows students in a classroom setting. The text describes the curriculum's focus on historical inquiry, primary documents, and teaching strategies like sourcing, contextualizing, corroborating, and close reading.

“SAS Curriculum Pathways” is a free resource for teachers and their students. Allowing teachers to bring high quality educational technology into their lessons.

The screenshot shows the SAS Curriculum Pathways website homepage. At the top, the site name "SAS Curriculum Pathways" is displayed in a dark header, with navigation links for "Sign Up", "Log In", and a search box labeled "QL #". Below the header is a blue navigation bar with links for "Professional Development", "Standards", "Favorites", and "Community".

The main content area features a large banner with a group of four diverse students. The banner text reads: "Interactive, standards-based resources in the core disciplines" and "Sign Up FREE for Students and Educators". To the left of the banner is a search bar labeled "Search for Resources" and a list of "Browse Resources" including English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Spanish, and More Cool Tools. Below this list is a mobile phone icon with the text "Questions about mobile?".

Below the banner is a section for "SAS Writing Navigator", which is described as a free suite of tools for writing. It includes a "Sign Up" button and a link to the "App Store and Google Chrome Store".

On the right side of the page, there is a vertical list of links: "Sign Up", "View A Demo", "System Requirements", "Professional Development", and "Individual Student Accounts: FAQ". Below these links are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, RSS, YouTube, and Pinterest.

At the bottom right, there is a "Pathfinders Blog" section with a "Recent Posts" list. The first post is titled "Mobile, Mobile Everywhere: Learning Anytime" and includes a small image of a dog. The text below the post reads: "Mobile devices are arriving in classrooms around the world in soaring numbers. Chromebooks and iPads are everywhere – from 1:1 ...".

A natural next step is to **discuss inquiry questions and relevant historical sources** in small groups or as a whole class.

Another free resource for teachers to start a group discussion is [Poll Everywhere](#). Let's try it!

**Poll Everywhere** Plans & Pricing Take a tour Help & FAQ Log in [Sign up](#)

# Live Audience Participation

Poll Everywhere lets you engage your audience or class anywhere in real time

[Create your first poll](#)  
Takes 30 seconds. No sign up required.

[Watch our 1 min video](#)

Use your phone to text a vote now!

Did you know Poll Everywhere offers a PowerPoint add-in? Seamless, baby.

Respond at [PollEv.com/ballot](#) Text **BALLOT** to 22333 once to join, then **A, B, C, or D**

Duh. I use it all the time. **A** 26%

# Teach argumentative writing

Giving students opportunities to **do** history can expand their view of history and prime them for learning how to communicate arguments in writing.



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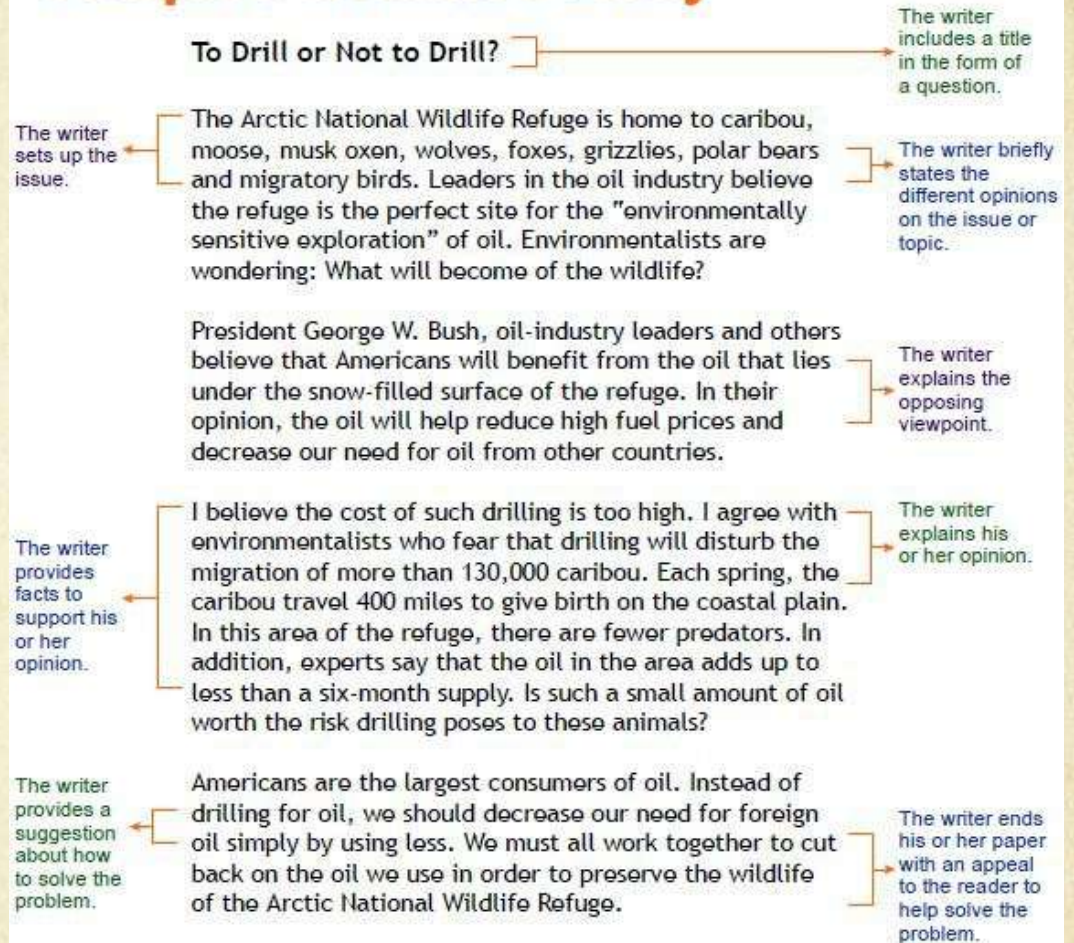


Explain to students what an argumentative essay should include.

In other words, make your expectations explicit. This can be done with a visual display (e.g., an outline) that follows a specific format, or a representation of what makes an ideal essay.

Provide explicit instruction in particular aspects of writing and show them what good writing looks like.

## Sample Persuasive Essay



Learning history and argumentative writing is key to developing analytical ways of thinking that prepare students for college, career, and democratic life.

The good news is that schools can achieve both of these goals with the same effort. Learning history can lead to literacy gains if students learn by “**doing**” history.



## Helpful Links

- “Historical Thinking Matters”
- <http://historicalthinkingmatters.org>
- “Reading Like a Historian”
- <https://sheg.stanford.edu/rlh>
- “SAS Curriculum Pathways”
- <https://www.sascurriculumpathways.com/portal/>
- “Poll Everywhere”
- <http://www.polleverywhere.com/>