

12th History McCarthy
Materials Interview

Interviewer: Please describe the instructional materials you're using for the lesson.

Teacher: This lesson has a couple of elements to it. There is the PowerPoint that guides the activity, which sets up the rules and the goals. It has the follow up questions, which is important because sometimes the kids are zoned out when I ask the question orally, but then they can look up and their it is on the screen. They can see it. The whole presentation and the activity part has slides that have the written directions that go with it. I say everything. I explain it and I usually add some more detail to it, but generally speaking, everything should be written, also, and it is. That really does make a difference. Especially with the classes ... My 10th grade students, I do the same thing when we talk about McCarthyism and they need it more than me. In fact, I have a class where I have some students who are very recently arrived from China and speak very little English. I ran the directions through Google translate, just so they would know what they were supposed to do, so they could participate. Actually, they won. They beat the other kids. The other kids didn't suspect them because they thought that the Chinese kids wouldn't know what was going on and then it did. They won the game anyway. That was kind of good.

Everything's written. Also I have a packet of ... For the students. I put everything together they're going to use for the whole unit into a packet. It has a schedule of what's due on what day. Has their notes. So the kids will have the notes done ahead of time or they'll have done the notes into the packet. Then the ... We're going to read a poem afterwards and the poem is in the packet. I'll just say, "Take out your packets and open to page 20." They'll take it out and it'll be there.

[00:02:00] It saves me a lot of time passing out papers during class. I don't have to worry about, "Go find that one paper I gave to you two days ago." In the whole year long, they have like 13 packets and that's it. That makes life a whole lot easier for everybody involved. It does mean I have to plan ahead. I suppose there's a downside in that way. Generally speaking, I've done a pretty good job of getting everything planned. At least enough weeks in advance that I can give them the one packet on the first day of the unit and it usually helps.

Interviewer: Why did you consider choosing these materials?

Teacher: The original idea for the project came from another teacher who I met, who I did a workshop with. He was from California. I modified it a little bit to kind of match my personal style. I re-wrote some of the rules to make it work for my class and then the poem is something that he had that he did as part of it. That I just borrowed, essentially. I reformatted it to go in the packet, but otherwise it's essentially the same idea and lesson that I borrowed from him. The video afterwards is a primary source from the time. I've forgotten now where it came from. That video and then the questions that follow up, I developed.

Interviewer: What is it that you like about the materials?

Teacher: In this particular lesson, I really do like it that ... Especially because there's the poem in there. I've tried here and there in the class to bring in literature. The Harlem Renaissance we did literature. This is a case where, some poetry is nice to have every once in awhile. Another take, a different look at thinking about the ideas of history. Especially because this one is sort of a abstract idea of standing up for people and justice and don't fall for somebody's lies. It's not, "Hey, you have to look at this map of where this battle took place." It's more separated from that sort of concrete reality. So in this case, poem is a good way to do it.

Interviewer: Are there any changes that you would make to these materials?

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Teacher: I think every year I tweak it somehow. Is that how it goes? I may at some point think about putting some questions into the packet related to the poem instead of just doing it orally. Or maybe putting up some sort of a slide in the PowerPoint that has the questions. That's a possibility. I don't know. Every year I kind of see how it goes and then I just see what happens the next time. Like I say, I've tweaked the PowerPoint with the rules as we go, to make it more streamlined and make it work. That has already happened so I think that's going to be pretty smooth.

Interviewer: That's a very common response. "Yeah, I'm going to do it and then I'm going to see ... Constantly tweaking it."

Teacher: Yeah.

Interviewer: Finally, how would you describe the materials as meaningful and relevant to students' lives?

Teacher: The materials themselves? I don't know. Some kids like poetry. That's about ... I mean, I like poetry, that's why I do it. I guess ... Relevant is in a couple of ways. One, it's relevant because they're going to be taking the test, so they need to learn the basic material. So the notes and so on and the activities in class are relevant in that they need to learn the material. I did bring in ... I tried periodically through the year, and in this case also, to bring in something very current. So the current campaign and Donald Trump's rhetoric is something that ... To me it's current. Some of my students have turned 18 already and are going to be voting. So they sort of have a sense of the urgency of it. They like talking about the campaign, but so far it's just like, "Oh, we had a vote in New Hampshire, or something like that." In this particular case, though, there's a historical precedence to this lesson of the past can be applied now. In a way, I guess that's a relevance element.