

# FIELDWORK

NOTES FROM EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING CLASSROOMS

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## Making the Erie Canal Matter IN AND THROUGH THE ARTS

BY CHRIS DOLGOS

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How can we make subjects matter to students?

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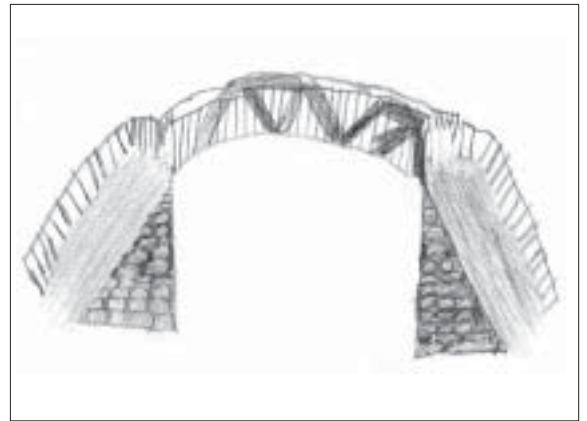
For more teacher tools related to this issue, visit our website at [www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v13n2tt.html](http://www.elob.org/publications/webarchive/v13n2tt.html).

*In learning expeditions, students have the opportunity to create, perform, and respond to a variety of art forms, and to connect the arts to content.*

—Expeditionary Learning Core Practice Benchmarks (2003)

Our “Sketches on the Erie Canal” exhibition performance concluded with a partner song, a harmonious re-interpretation of the folk songs “Low Bridge (Everybody Down)” and “Drill Ye Tarriers, Drill.” The song not only told the story of the Erie Canal, but embedded the concept of a work song that echoed back to the original ditch diggers of the canal.

My third-grade students, at Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York, performed this song in front of backdrops inspired by their field sketches from our Erie Canal overnight experience and the study of nineteenth century landscape painting. Eight crews told the story of the canal through narrated, creative movement and supported by a soundtrack of 10 songs the children had recorded in advance. Their scripts, based on research from primary source documents and



Amelia Carter, a third grader at Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York, drew this change bridge at Palmyra Macedon Canal Park during an overnight excursion on the Erie Canal.

secondary sources, told the story of the canal from a different focus.

An audience of jubilant parents and friends is not an accurate gauge of the success of our expedition. But as I watched the performance I realized our careful planning to integrate the arts fully into this expedition had worked. We had made the history of the Erie Canal, a rou-

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## *Making the Erie Canal, continued from page 1*

tine part of life in Rochester, accessible to our students.

### SETTING THE STAGE

As expedition planning began, our third-grade team started with the end in mind. How would students demonstrate what they learned about the Erie Canal? With such a broad subject, selecting a narrow, compelling topic from the whole of a curriculum was a challenging task and the answers sometimes came from unexpected places. We knew our focus would be the Erie Canal, a requirement for New York students that is embedded in the state learning standards, but we needed to get a handle on such a wide-ranging topic (see website for expedition plan and sidebar on guiding questions).

While researching the canal and looking through children's books, we came across the concept of line boats, canal vessels that transported both passengers and goods. Intrigued, we looked further and found Peter Spier's picture book, *The Erie Canal*, which told the story of a line boat's transit across the canal system in mid-1800's New York. We adopted the book as our anchor text and were able to address most curricular requirements using the simple story of an Erie Canal line boat family to explore and answer our guiding questions.

Because GCCS is located in Rochester, the canal is no mere footnote of history. It is a significant part of what made our community the place it is, America's first "boomtown." Yet, we drive over the canal during our daily commute—the old, granite canal lock stands as a sentinel on a grassy shoulder of the expressway—and we rarely give it a second thought. How do we get twenty-first century students to understand the importance and value of the canal during our community's early years? We get there with careful planning and immersion in experiences that make the subject irresistible.

My teammates, Melissa Conklin and Maggie Torres, and I brought our early ideas to our

*As we planned together, we could see how the arts provided the lens for many of the social studies subjects we needed to address.*

arts team to create a collaborative expedition that would demonstrate not only an understanding of the social studies content, but showcase the skills learned from the various arts disciplines. At GCCS, planning an expedition is never done in isolation. There are sharing and feedback protocols and the arts team is involved in product development and subject integration from the start.

As we brainstormed with our arts colleagues (a process we affectionately refer to as "mucking about") a few nuggets emerged. We wanted the children to live the Erie Canal experience, not just by visiting a dock or a park, but to really eat, sleep, and breathe on the canal. We arranged an overnight through the Corn Hill Waterfront and Navigation Foundation, and the packet boat Sam Patch was ours for two days. We wanted the students to experience the physical challenge of digging the canal and to connect that experience to the songs the workers sang to pass the time. It just so happened that before the school's new playground could be installed, the site had to be cleared of nearly 200 square feet of landscaping rock, shrubs, stumps, and leaf litter. What a perfect opportunity for third-graders to experience a day in the life of an Erie Canal digger. As we bounced ideas off each other, we could see how different projects and investigations would culminate in an exhibition of creative movement, landscape painting, and folk songs all related to the Erie Canal.

### FOCUS ON CONTENT

As we planned together, we could see how

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# Making Subjects Matter:

## AN OVERVIEW

BY BARBARA WAXMAN

*M*aking Subjects Matter is the theme of our National Conference for 2005, and represents our take on the title of a book written by one of our keynote speakers, Harvey Daniels (*Subjects Matter: Every Teacher's Guide to Content-area Reading*, Daniels and Zemelman, Heinemann Press, 2004). How do teachers in Expeditionary Learning schools make subjects matter? That is, how do teachers ignite curiosity and engage students in in-depth learning across the subject areas?

Four teachers, in this issue of *Fieldwork*, describe their methods for making subjects matter. These methods include robust, controversial content (compelling topics), effective and engaging instructional practices, and culture building. It is no accident that these general categories of methods represent three of our core practices, the anchors of Expeditionary Learning's view of teaching and learning: learning expeditions, active pedagogy, and building classroom culture and fostering character through academic work and projects. In these articles, we also see that it is the orchestration and blending of strategies across the core practices that make subjects matter—and learning happen—the most.

### IN AND THROUGH THE ARTS

Chris Dolgos, who teaches third grade at Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York, demonstrates that integrating the arts can make even a “dry” subject like the Erie Canal come alive and motivate inquiry into how a community started and was sustained. The success of the Erie Canal expedition also speaks to the power of collaboration: classroom teachers and the arts teachers collaborated not only during planning time, but

also during the actual arts classes. In this way, the classroom teachers learned the arts along with the students, and were able to reinforce skills lessons in the classroom. They were also able to help students make connections to their academic studies during the arts classes. Dolgos describes teachers making a “song to anchor text connection”—a wonderful example of how the social studies content enriched the music lesson, and how the music lesson deepened the understanding of the social studies content. It is in the fertile soil created by the mixture of the arts and rich content that connections and deeper understandings grow.

### ENGAGEMENT IN ALGEBRA

Mallika Scott's article on teaching middle school algebra at Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California, demonstrates how intentional culture building, fostering a need to know, and consistent use of practices that ask students to find patterns, see relationships, and make connections all work in concert to make algebra matter to students. Notice how by asking students to detect patterns and generalize

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Clara O'Connor, a third grader at Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York, sketches during a solo in the shadow of the ruins of the Richmond Aqueduct on board the packet boat Sam Patch.



from those patterns, Scott engages her students, involves them in critical thinking, and ensures that students are interested in the thinking of their peers. Notice, too, how once Scott carefully sets up the day's inquiry, she is free to gauge students' understanding, confer with students, and spot the solutions that may well illuminate the concept for the rest of the class. It is worth lingering over this article to explore how Scott forges a collaborative learning community and conscientiously scaffolds for group work.

#### MAKING HISTORY COUNT

Harnessing the power of imagination and putting it into the service of historical inquiry is another way to make subjects matter, and Matt Strand demonstrates this in his article on how inventing plausible characters in the context of a compelling investigation invites empathy, compassion, and historical understanding. Strand, who teaches seventh- and eighth-grade Humanities at PIONEER School for Expeditionary Learning in Fort Collins, Colorado, realizes how compelling topics and good projects motivate the asking of questions, which, in turn, stimulates further inquiry.

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lutions that may well il-  
luminate the concept for  
the rest of the class.*

#### CONTROVERSY MOTIVATES

Katherine Stevens and Chris Johnson, of Central Alternative High School in Dubuque, Iowa, find just the right controversy to provoke their students to grapple with the thorny issues inherent in the Bill of Rights. The Supreme Court case they use is a portal into teaching the Civil Rights movement, freedom of speech and why the right to free speech became the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Case studies that revolve around controversy impel students to care about the subject matter and are also fodder for teaching reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. The controversy and the heated arguments that ensue motivate students to read a variety of texts such as newspaper articles, editorials, and the actual Supreme Court case. The use of anchor texts builds ample background knowledge with which to interpret the subsequent articles.

Inviting students to write a brief promotes critical thinking by insisting that students synthesize their understandings, support opinion with evidence, weigh the constitutional rights of opposing sides, and think about the impact of precedent on current issues or future issues that might arise. It is a great example of a purposefully layered investigation that teaches history and literacy, and fosters character and citizenship through the study of significant content.

Expeditionary Learning's Core Practices "make subjects matter" through compelling topics that drive expeditions, through authentic products created for real audiences, through the active pedagogy that enlivens the material and ensures that all students think and participate, and through character development based on the study of issues of significance. ✎

*Barbara Waxman is a school designer and associate director of professional development for Expeditionary Learning.*

the arts provided the lens for many of the social studies subjects we needed to address. Nancy Valle, our visual arts teacher, opened the door to the study of geography by introducing students to the Hudson River School of painting. A visit to the Memorial Art Gallery, two blocks away, provided us with an opportunity to study landscape painting and artist technique. This allowed us to address the geography of New York state and how it affected the construction of the Erie Canal. The students could now visualize how valleys needed to be forded and why locks were such an important part of traversing New York's variable elevation.

Carrie Haymond-Hesketh, our music teacher, introduced us to the rich heritage of canal music, and we were able to select a variety of songs that blurred the line between music, language arts, and social studies instruction. "Song of the Canal" introduced students to the way songs are adapted from other tunes to serve new audiences. This one was based on a traditional Irish song and modified by the Irish immigrants who toiled away in Montezuma Swamp, referencing the "mire, the muck and the mud" a laborer had to remove by hand each day, like a nineteenth century Sisyphus. Clearing the playground of stumps and gravel gave students new insight into the meaning of this song!

Sarah Morrell, our physical education and movement teacher, also tapped into the "ditch digging" experience when introducing how our bodies move to express motion and emotion. The students developed pantomime sketches that used physical movement to explain a concept. Crews performed for each other and provided feedback to extend or make clearer ideas connected to their canal research. Morrell also reinforced the crew ethic through a canoe initiative that required students to work together to propel and navigate through the marsh of Irondequoit Creek.

The responsibility of teaching the arts did not fall on the arts team alone. The classroom

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## EXPERIENCING MONTEZUMA

The students first learned of Montezuma, New York, in a schema building activity that had them locate it on a map and determine the obstacles to construction in this locale. Students identified many factors, including disease, dirty water, cold temperatures, humid conditions, and smallpox. No one could imagine why anyone would work or stay there.

During our overnight excursion on the Sam Patch packet boat, we pulled up to Lock 25 to tie up for the night. After hours on the cramped quarters of the boat, we were grateful to get off and run around. We were in Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, a name not lost on the students. Within seconds of stepping off the boat, the mosquitoes greeted us. And greeted us again. Then greeted us some more. It was humid, we were covered in mosquito bites (this variety was apparently immune to repellent), and we had to sleep in close quarters. The experience was a shared one and it remains a touchstone to the participants to this day.

—Chris Dolgos

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teachers learned the same skills along with the students by participating in the lessons. This provided the classroom teachers an opportunity to learn the techniques and help students in the classroom. We also had the opportunity to interact in think-alouds and share ideas beyond planning time that made the lessons more meaningful. For example, referencing a scene from our anchor text helped activate students' schema during a music lesson. Finally, it helped us as adult learners to understand the challenges and frustration children might experience in mastering a movement, hitting a certain note, or adding detail to a field sketch.

The deliberate inclusion of the arts in the planning process made for a richer learning expedition. Although not every expedition involves such a finely planned integration of the arts, the process we undertook to combine arts and social studies skills and content has provided us with a model to refer to in future expeditions, a model that truly made the subject matter. ✎

*Chris Dolgos co-teaches with Melissa Conklin and Maggie Torres in the second/third-grade loop at Genesee Community Charter School in Rochester, New York.*

# Making Algebra Matter

BY MALLIKA SCOTT

*Algebra is fun because it's like a game.*

—Ana

*I really like the way Ms. Scott puts algebra in a fun learning way like the problem of the week.*

—Ade

*I have an algebra mind that I didn't know I had.*

—Stephanie

**A**lgebra is the foundation for much of the mathematical learning that takes place in high school and in college. It is also a subject where students can easily get lost because it requires a level of abstraction that is new for many students. My goal this year has been to give my seventh graders, at Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California, access to the abstract world of symbols and functions no matter what mathematical strand we are investigating. As their comments above reveal, so far my students are enthusiastic about algebra and can reason with patterns and functions in a very sophisticated way.

I have looped with my students from sixth to seventh grade and over this time we have created a strong community of learners in which we challenge, support, and learn from each other to strengthen our understanding of mathematics. At the beginning of sixth grade,

*My students now expect that understanding is something we construct together. They have learned to see each other as experts.*

students came from schools all over Oakland with vastly different levels of mathematical understanding and predominately traditional math experiences. The first hurdle I had to overcome to build a learning community was to help students move beyond seeing the teacher as the only expert in the room and start to see each other as experts.

## A CLASSROOM OF EXPERTS

When we studied area and perimeter, we examined how the area of shapes changed when their perimeter was doubled. I asked students to try to generalize (a key algebraic thinking skill) what happens to the area of shapes when the perimeter doubles.

As I was circulating and observing students work I noticed something interesting about Jose's work. Jose had drawn lines inside his rectangles showing how four smaller rectangles fit inside the rectangle with double the perimeter. Many students were noticing that the area of the shapes seemed to quadruple even though the perimeter only doubled. But most were unsure why that happened and many were not ready to make a generalization about all rectangles.

I asked Jose to share his way of looking at the rectangles with the rest of the class. Jose came up to the overhead and—to the oohs and aahs of his classmates—elegantly showed and explained why the area quadrupled when the perimeter doubled. Throughout the rest of the investigation we continued to try “Jose’s method” of looking at area.

From the beginning of my first year with these students I have tried to look for these moments when one student’s way of understanding a concept may illuminate something for the rest of the class. Over time students have become more confident and independent

about sharing their unique strategies and more open to learning from each other. My students now expect that understanding is something we construct together. They have learned to see each other as experts.

#### WORKING COLLABORATIVELY

Once students began to see that every member of the class could be an expert, they began to see for themselves the value of collaboration. However, working together is not always easy for seventh graders. My students sometimes collaborate as a group or in pairs and sometimes work individually. In middle school I have found that students go through different phases of how they like to interact with their peers. I want them to learn the skills and see the value of collaboration, but I also want to give them some choice and independence in how they work.

When we do work in pairs or groups I support the development of their collaboration skills by structuring how students work. Before beginning group projects students decide on personal and group collaboration goals. This goal setting has been useful in helping students see their strengths and challenges as collaborators. After students finish their group work they reflect on their goals. This reflection helps build in some accountability and again helps students be more aware of their collaboration skills. I have found that since we started consistently setting goals and reflecting, students enjoy working together much more and are able to be more productive. Being deliberate and thoughtful about collaboration has helped students build a learning community with each other.

#### CHALLENGING ALL STUDENTS

In order for students to become experts and to collaborate in a meaningful way, students must be engaged in work that pushes their understanding. However, with a diverse group of learners it is not always easy to push all students. I manage this by always offering challenges that are open to all students and offering blocks of time where students have choices

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Problem summary: Suppose you build towers by stacking cubes on top of each other and then paint the squares on each side and on top of the tower. What is the relationship between the height of the tower and the number of squares you have to paint?

#### THE PAINTING TOWER PROBLEM

*[Copied verbatim from handwritten problem.]*

Jennifer L.

11/3/04

My Solution: If there were 99 squares, you will have to paint 397 sides of the square.

My Strategy: The first thing I did was constructed a table with the number of cubes and the total. The second thing was that I notice a pattern in the total, it was adding 4 that was the iterative rule. Then I needed to get all the way to 99, I decided to try and find the explicit rule. I used guess and check. The first thing I did for guess and check was trying to multiply. I multiply the # of cubes by 4, I multiply it because their are 4 sides but then I had to add 1 more because I had to add the one in the top. And that's how I got the answer of the explicit rule that is  $Sx4+1=T$ .

Equation:  $4n+1=T$

$N$ =# of cubes

$T$ =Total

*Jennifer Lopez, a seventh grader at Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California, describes her strategy for solving the problem.*

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in their learning. I structure this by setting up activities on the walls around the room that correspond to different strands of math. This allows students to choose activities that are at their level. In class, students reflect on their learning through individual journal writing, class discussion, and examining assessment data so that students know their areas of strength and weakness and can make informed choices about their mathematical learning. My experience has been that when given this responsibility and activities that interest them, students make good choices.

An example of this differentiation and choice is a game we play called "Guess my

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Tucker Creveling, an eighth grader at PIONEER School of Expeditionary Learning in Fort Collins, Colorado, did this illustration for his children's book on slavery.

*Making Algebra Matter, continued from page 7*

Rule” where students guess what function rule is determining the y-values in a table. We played this game together as a class using linear functions and then students made up their own rules to try on their classmates. The game then became one of the possible choices in the room. Some students have had so much fun with this game that I have had to come up with increasingly complex quadratic and exponential functions to keep pace with their growing abilities. This

has also created a need to know about nonlinear functions so that students can stump their classmates with tougher and tougher rules. So while some students are now working with complex nonlinear functions other students are continuing to work with the linear functions that are part of our seventh-grade content standards. This gives students a chance to work at a level that is appropriate and rigorous for each individual.

Another crucial piece of building our community has been our interactions with adults around mathematics. We play a game called “Silent Math” in which we solve patterns of multiplication and division problems and then make generalizations based on these patterns such as “when both factors are doubled the product is quadrupled.” We also write these generalizations using symbolic notation. By using these generalizations students are able to solve complex problems mentally (see website for games’ write-up).

At our first parent night last year students played this game with their parents and the stu-

*Now, after a year and a half together, we have built a learning community where students are responsible for pushing themselves and their classmates to help build and deepen our collective understanding of mathematics.*

dents were able to solve many problems that none of the parents were able to solve mentally. Students talked about this for weeks afterwards, so it clearly made a big impression on them. Recently several educators came to visit our classroom and became completely immersed in working on a challenge problem with a group of students. These experiences with adults help to fuel the students’ perception that the work they are doing is both challenging and engaging beyond the scope of the classroom.

Now, after a year and a half together, we have built a learning community where students are responsible for pushing themselves and their classmates to help build and deepen our collective understanding of mathematics. There have been several times over the past few months when students have been so involved in their math work that they do not want to stop for break time. With seventh graders that kind of engagement in academics feels like something of a miracle. ✍

*Mallika Scott teaches seventh-grade math and science at Lighthouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California.*

# Emancipating History:

## CHARACTER MAPS INSTILL A NEED TO KNOW

BY MATT STRAND

*Whenever I go to the general store, I hear people talking about the possibility of a civil war. They talk about whether Kansas will be admitted to the United States as a free or slave state. They also talk about the latest attacks by both proslavery settlers and abolitionists, especially John Brown—how he hacked five proslavery settlers to death in front of their families. There is a lot of fear in this community right now.*

—Russell Connelly, eighth grade  
Second draft of his fourth character map

Russell has not said much in class today. He is too busy poring through stacks of library books, searching for references to “bleeding Kansas” that will help him complete his character map. He found this topic through our study of the Underground Railroad and the abolitionist movement and asked for permission to branch out. At the end of class, he stops me to share some of what he has found. His enthusiasm reveals that his thinking about life in this era bubbles well beyond the classroom.

For several years, I had been seeking ways to help students in my seventh- and eighth-grade humanities classes at PIONEER School for Expeditionary Learning, Fort Collins, Colorado, create characters with historical accuracy and emotional depth. In the past year, I have started using character maps, a structure for developing characters through inquiry. Character maps consist of a list of 15 to 25 questions, which my students and I generate together. The questions balance both the personal background and historical context of the character and act as a guide for historical inquiry and prewriting. As students conduct research to answer the questions, they acquire the

knowledge and content they need to enhance their writing products.

As we begin practicing historical inquiry, I ask my students why they do not ask as many questions as they had asked when they were toddlers. They typically reply, “It’s not cool to want to know” or “We don’t want to look like we don’t know the answer,” and even going as far as suggesting, “I know everything I need to know already.” This, for me, is where the importance of a compelling topic really emerges. I am trying to cultivate a classroom environment where students care about what they are learning and are developing historical habits of mind that will sustain this motivation.

Our most recent character maps reflect the first person point of view to help students explore their character’s voices. Questions like, “What do you fear and why, and what comforts you?” and “What is your most prized possession and why?” are coupled with “What current events are people talking about?” and “What historical event has impacted you, and how?” These questions are based on historical content, and require a clear connection between the fictional character and real events, people, or social trends. A character map that balances content and creativity honors students with choice and ownership while compelling them to

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Eighth-grade student Rolla Stout, who attends PIONEER School of Expeditionary Learning in Fort Collins, Colorado, did this illustration for a children’s book on slavery.



*Emancipating History, continued from page 9*

investigate relevant information. By creating historically accurate characters with deep personalities, my eighth graders are working toward the development of their culminating writing products, children's books on slavery. Character maps themselves constitute a major part of our prewriting process because they help to familiarize the writer with story elements such as settings, details, characters, and conflicts (see website for a look into how character maps are integrated in seventh-grade science).

Created Equal, our eighth-grade learning expedition on the African American experience in U.S. History, is structured to help students build confidence in researching their own questions regarding this compelling and complex period of our shared story. While students used to rely on character maps I developed, they have started to create their own.

One eighth-grade student, Lindy, discovered she needed an extra map: "I was thinking that my main character was going to be a fugitive slave girl on the Underground Railroad and have lots of historical details that are revealed through the curiosity of a boy that has traveled back in time through the cellar in his grandparents' house. Now I realize that I need to create a character map for him too, because I want to focus on their relationship in the story. So now

I have two historical periods to research!"

Lindy had clearly internalized the purpose of creating a character map. But there is another powerful undercurrent that can take place when we blend a compelling topic, research, and creative writing.

I am circled up with my crew late in the afternoon, discussing our third character map. "I don't know about using dialect in your story," one student remarks. Several other students nod in agreement.

"I mean, it's really good use of voice, and realistic, but people might misinterpret your motives, because your character sounds uneducated."

Students are aiming for historical accuracy, and slave narratives themselves are written in dialect. This discussion is parallel to one from the second character map, a debate regarding the common use of racial slurs in primary sources and whether or not they have a place in our writing as a means to explore emotional impact. After strong cases are heard, we come to an agreement that because the audience for our books will be elementary and middle school children, a consideration for the age-appropriateness of the material should be the deciding factor.

A character map is a simple structure that helps students with more than just asking questions and conducting historical research. Character maps instill a need to know and sustain imagination. They scaffold the development of a polished writing product. But perhaps most importantly, character maps aid students in becoming empathetic with historical events and the individuals who experienced them. Learning through personal connection with history compels students and the educators that guide them in an exploration where the voices of the past merge with those of the present. ✎

*Matt Strand is seventh- and eighth-grade humanities teacher and a founding teacher at the PIONEER School for Expeditionary Learning, Fort Collins, Colorado.*

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## CREATING STRONG CHARACTER MAPS

- ~ Find a balance between imaginative responses and content-based questions that require research.
- ~ Pose the question to the character rather than the writer.
- ~ Provide a template to help students answer research questions.
- ~ Encourage students to create and share their own character map questions; provide time to explore strong student work as models and opportunities for critique.
- ~ Provide a writing prompt, role-play, or project that allows writers to "become" their new character.

—Matt Strand

# In Our Defense:

## CONTROVERSY MAKES HIGH SCHOOL MATTER

BY KATHERINE STEVENS

My colleague Chris Johnson reads from *Missouri Knights of the Ku Klux Klan v. Kansas City*.

Q: Are black genes as good as white genes?

A: Not when it comes to intelligence. Not when it comes to building society. The Blacks are very emotional people and they don't reason. This is why for thousands of years the Blacks had nothing in Africa except the mud hut...

"These are the words of Dennis Mahon, Imperial Dragon of the Missouri Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," Johnson said. "What do you think class? Should they be allowed to go on television?"

"Sure," said Casey. "They have freedom of speech."

"But that's just wrong!" April said. "Besides they want to march through those Black neighborhoods in robes."

"Why not? They have the right."

At this point Johnson intervened. "Both of you have good ideas, now write your opinion: Should the KKK be able to go on cable access TV and present a racist program?"

In *Our Defense* takes our students at Central Alternative High School in Dubuque, Iowa, on a journey into the Bill of Rights through examples of actual U.S. Supreme Court cases such as the one April and Casey are debating above. We study the background of the Bill of Rights, the legal history of each amendment and Supreme Court decisions that influence the interpretation of the amendments.

Before we delve into the cases, we establish some background knowledge on law. For example, we discuss the differences between ethics and law. Students, like April, are outraged when they believe something is wrong, or should never be permitted and then discover it is legal. But then we ask, "Who should get to decide what is accept-

able speech and what is not?" They begin to realize that when one group or person has the authority to stop another group or person from expressing their beliefs, then no one's beliefs are safe.

Using current newspaper articles and editorials dealing with the rights of citizens, we also discuss the difference between fact and opinion. For students, it is difficult to accept that testimony and evidence are not always facts. We also review historical background on the founder's intent. In *The Words We Live By*, one of our anchor texts, Linda R. Monk mentions important court cases and briefly explains how they have interpreted the meaning, over time, of each amendment.

With this foundation, students are ready to begin work on the cases. Our two remaining anchor texts, *In Our Defense* and *The Right to Privacy* by Ellen Alderman and Carolyn Kennedy, include transcripts of Supreme Court cases.

Students organize their thoughts and notes on a case using a "brief" Chris and I have developed following the structure of the court cases presented in the Alderman/Kennedy books. The brief asks students to give their opinions, to keep track of facts of the court case, to grasp the arguments or constitutional rights on each side, and to imagine how changes in thought might alter the interpretation of this amendment in the future.

In the case of *The Missouri Knights of the Ku Klux Klan v. Kansas City*, the issue is really one of truth. Most people agree that the KKK's opinions are lies and half-truths, but for believers it is gospel. But there are those who believe that the truth will win in the free marketplace of ideas. In fact, when students write the facts of the case,

*"Sure," said Casey.*

*"They have freedom of speech."*

*"But that's just wrong!" April*

*said. "Besides*

*they want to*

*march through*

*those Black neigh-*

*borhoods in*

*robes."*

*"Why not? They have the right."*

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# FIELDWORK

NOTES FROM EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING CLASSROOMS

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### *In Our Defense, continued from page 11*

they find the argument is really about censorship and First Amendment rights.

"I'm with Reverend Cleaver," said April.

"How can cross-burners get on television and say all that stuff?"

"If no one listens to them, they won't have a program," Casey replied.


"But what about those who do listen? Who think they are telling the truth? Or who are leaning in that direction anyway?"

"I don't know, but I don't want people to tell me what to listen to, do you? You want someone telling us what we can watch or hear?" he said.

The brief tests students' critical thinking skills. For example, students often change their opinions after considering the ramifications of their earlier thoughts. Once they choose a side in a case, students might want their evidence viewed as fact, and so there are often heated arguments. The last section

stretches students the most. We have many discussions about the Bill of Rights and the challenges of our changing times, for example, "freedom of speech" as an absolute in an era of The Patriot Act.

By the end of the quarter, students have a good idea of their rights, have thought about the ramifications of society's views and progress, and have seen themselves as active citizens protecting the rights of all.

(By the way, the free marketplace of ideas won in the end. While Kansas City had to let the Klan air their program, "Kansas City Cable," they only aired one episode. And, in the next election, Reverend Cleaver became the first Black mayor of Kansas City). 

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