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Reinvigorating the Teaching of History through Alternative Assessment

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THIS ESSAY IS FRAMED by the recent attempts to reinvigorate the teaching of history and make its content more meaningful to students. Over the past decade, three organizations, the Bradley Commission on History in Schools, the National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools, and the National Center for History in the Schools, have served as catalysts for a national dialog on the problems of teaching history in today's classrooms.¹ Widespread agreement has emerged among history teachers and historians that the quantity of history taught must be increased, from pre-school through grade 12 and beyond, and that the historical content presented in the respective grade levels must be taught well. As teachers of history strive to improve their curriculum and instructional methodologies, however, they must also remember that curriculum planning, classroom instruction, and *assessment* of student learning are inextricably linked. This essay provides a model and a rationale for the assessment of student learning of history. This model will reinforce the efforts of teachers who are rethinking what their students should know about history and what they should be able to do with that knowledge.

Traditional forms of assessing students' knowledge of historical facts—true-false questions, fill-in-the-blanks, matching exercises, short identifications, and multiple choice questions—must be complimented, if not supplanted, by new methods of assessment if the objective of reinvigorating the teaching of history is to be reached. Teachers who have a plan of assessment in mind as they develop their objectives for a course, or a unit of instruction, or a lesson plan will be in a better position to select the historical content and the teaching techniques that will spark their students' interest. Often identified by educators as “performance” based assessment, “authentic” assessment, and “alternative” assessment, purposeful assessment in the history classroom requires a student to accomplish complex and significant tasks by applying their prior knowledge and skills within a predetermined amount of time.² Although there is disagreement over terminology, there are two things reformers in history education agree upon: they want students to think seriously about the past, and they want to engage students in meaningful activities that illuminate the story of the human community. Alternative assessment activities provide teachers and students with the opportunity to do just that.

Alternative assessment activities reveal information about three dimensions of a student's historical literacy. First, students who complete alternative assessment activities demonstrate their *knowledge* of historical facts, themes, and ideas. Second, students who complete alternative assessment activities demonstrate their ability to *reason*; that is, to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize historical evidence. And third, students who complete alternative assessment activities demonstrate their ability to *communicate* their historical knowledge and reasoning to a wider audience. In short, alternative assessment provides teachers with an excellent opportunity to assess the traditional cognitive development of their students. Moreover, it opens up a wide variety of affective teaching and learning techniques that engage students in history lessons while at the same time tapping their powerful minds and allowing them to use their multiple intelligences to communicate what they know and how they think.³ Alternative assessment is a perfect vehicle for teachers to develop a pedagogy that involves the different manners in which students learn.

Each dimension of a student's historical literacy has its own characteristics. *Knowledge* of historical evidence is the prerequisite students need to demonstrate their ability in the other two dimensions. Students who have developed historical knowledge are able to demonstrate the accuracy in identifying, defining, and describing important concepts, facts, and details. The study of history, however, must extend beyond the

acquisition of discrete pieces of historical information. While mastering the contours of a given narrative and knowing about significant individuals and events are important, it is essential that students also know about the universal themes and ideas that cut across the human experience. These themes and ideas serve as screens that help students differentiate between what is important and insignificant in the historical record. The Bradley Commission has identified what it called six “Vital Themes and Narratives”⁴ to help teachers organize the knowledge domain of a history curriculum. These themes and narratives are:

- Civilization, cultural diffusion, and innovation
- Human interaction with the environment
- Values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions
- Conflict and cooperation
- Comparative history of major developments
- Patterns of social and political interaction

The six “vital themes and narratives” set the context for both explaining historical processes and events and understanding why they matter.

Historical facts and themes, approached through informed questions, are a point of departure for demonstrating a student’s ability to reason. *Reasoning* makes the facts and themes meaningful, thereby bringing about a deeper understanding of the subject. Reasoning is an active process, an intellectual transaction between a student and information. Reasoning involves translation, interpretation, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information. Reasoning requires students to discover relationships among facts and generalizations, and values and opinions, as a means to provide a solution to a problem, to make a judgment, or to reach a logical conclusion. Teachers will recognize these abilities from lists of critical thinking skills. However, just as a distinction can be made in the relationship between isolated facts and more fully developed historical knowledge, a distinction must also be made between critical thinking skills and historical reasoning. Thoughtful reasoning ought to be the principal aim of historical study. A useful explanation of historical reasoning was provided by the Bradley Commission in its description of thirteen “Habits of Mind.”⁵ These “habits of mind” include the ability to:

- Understand the significance of the past and the present to their own lives and to the lives of others
- Distinguish between the important and the unimportant
- Perceive events and issues as they were experienced by people at the time

- Acquire a comprehension of diverse cultures
- Understand how human intentions matter
- Comprehend the interplay of change and continuity
- Realize that all problems may not have solutions
- Appreciate the often tentative nature of judgments
- Recognize the importance of individuals who have made a difference
- Appreciate the force of the nonrational, the irrational, and the accidental in human efforts
- Understand the relationship between people, time, and place as the context for events
- Recognize the difference between fact and conjecture
- Use evidence to frame useful questions

More recently, the National Standards for History (Basic Edition, 1996) has identified five Standards in Historical Thinking that require students “to raise questions and to marshal evidence in support of their answers; to read historical narratives and fiction; to consult historical documents, journals, diaries, artifacts, historic sites, and other records from the past; and to do so imaginatively—taking into account the time and places in which these records were created and comparing the multiple points of view of those on the scene at the time.”⁶ The five Standards in Historical Thinking are: Chronological Thinking; Historical Comprehension; Historical Analysis and Interpretation; Historical Research Capabilities; and Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making.⁷

Effective communication of historical knowledge and historical reasoning requires a student to organize his or her thoughts. In recounting the story of the past, a student must have a clearly defined thesis and an interesting narrative that tells what happened in an informed way. A well-organized presentation also supplies relevant examples to support main ideas and offers conclusions and a synthesis based on an analysis of historical sources. Furthermore, evidence of a student’s knowledge and reasoning must always be apparent in an effective presentation. Alternative assessment in history offers a wide variety of ways for students to communicate their knowledge and reasoning: analyzing a primary source, drawing political cartoons, creating newspapers, participating in historical simulations, and writing research papers. Imaginative history teachers and students can create dozens of additional activities which are appropriate for assessment at the end of a class session, during a unit of study, or at the conclusion of a semester.

Many teachers, however, do not take advantage of alternative assessment activities to assess their students’ levels of knowledge, reasoning, and communication. Some teachers do not realize the full potential of

their current instructional activities as a reliable means for assessment. Others are uncomfortable using multiple assessment activities because they do not have a systematic means to assess a variety of student performances. In either case, teachers may have a general sense of what makes an outstanding report or historical exhibit; but they lack established criteria, or a rubric, that provides specific feed back about their students' abilities in each of the three dimensions. Moreover, teachers who have been exposed to a variety of rubrics, which are often borrowed from other subjects, may not have a rationale for their use in the teaching of history.

A History Rubric

In FIGURE 1, we offer a rubric and general criteria that teachers can employ to assess their students' historical knowledge, reasoning, and communication.⁸ This model is an analytic rubric: it allows a history teacher to assess simultaneously student performance in each of the three interrelated dimensions. Each level is defined by several criteria which reflect a student's abilities and skills. Collectively, Levels 6, 5, 4 are designed to differentiate among students whose knowledge, reasoning, and communication skills are *Developed*. Collectively, Levels 3, 2, 1 represent knowledge, reasoning, and communication skills that are still *Developing*. Level 6 represents work of a student who exhibits the most developed skills; Level 1 represents the work of a student with the lowest level of developing skills. *The gap between Level 3 and Level 4 is wider than the gap between any of the other levels because it differentiates between a student whose skills are still developing and a student whose skills are developed.*

An analytic rubric is especially appropriate and useful for assessment in history education. Teachers know that their students may perform at a more or less developed level in one dimension than in another. For example, when a student analyzes a primary source document he or she may demonstrate knowledge at a Level 6, reasoning at a Level 5, and communication at a Level 3. An analytic rubric allows teachers to take these differences into account when assessing their students. An analytic rubric also benefits the students. It shows them their strengths and weaknesses in each dimension, thereby indicating where they must place their time and effort to improve their historical knowledge, reasoning and communication.

Students who show developed knowledge—Levels 6, 5, 4—are able to demonstrate their ability to identify, define, and describe key historical concepts, themes, issues, and ideas; they show their awareness of the

connection between key facts and supporting details; and they are accurate in their use of facts and details. The levels are differentiated by the degree to which students can demonstrate their knowledge, that is, by being thorough, inclusive, and accurate. Similarly, students who are developing knowledge—Levels 3, 2, 1—are unable to demonstrate their ability to identify, define, and describe key historical concepts, themes, issues, and ideas; they show an inadequate awareness of the connection between key facts and supporting details; and they are largely inaccurate in their use of facts and details.

A student with developed reasoning abilities must be able to organize evidence and select and apply an appropriate method for analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. To begin the effective analysis and evaluation of historical evidence, whether that evidence is located in a printed document, a song, poem, picture, or statistical table, a student must ask relevant questions. A student with developed reasoning abilities also demonstrates the use of the “habits of mind” which are continually nurtured by the study of history. These “habits of mind” demonstrate not only how a student thinks about historical sources; they also reveal aspects of the student’s intellectual character. That is, students who possess requisite “habits of mind” display self-discipline as thinkers and can interpret historical content and engage in thoughtful discourse about their inquiry.

While all developed students must be able to reach an informed conclusion, there are several ways to differentiate among students’ historical reasoning skills at Levels 6, 5, and 4.

— FIGURE 1 —

A History Rubric for Alternative Assessment

Knowledge

Knowledge of evidence from history: facts/supporting details; themes/issues; and concepts/ideas

-
- 6 • Key concepts/"vital themes and narratives"/issues/ideas are thoroughly identified, defined, and described
 - Significant facts/supporting details are included and accurately described
 - Has no factual inaccuracies
 - 5 • Key concepts/"vital themes and narratives"/issues/ideas are considerably identified, defined, and described
 - Facts/supporting details are included
 - Has only minor factual inaccuracies
 - 4 • Key concepts/"vital themes and narratives"/issues/ideas are partially identified, defined, and described
 - Some facts/supporting details are included
 - May have a major factual inaccuracy, but most information is correct
-
- 3 • Some key concepts/"vital themes and narratives"/issues/ideas are identified, and described
 - Few facts/supporting details are included
 - Has some correct and some incorrect information
 - 2 • Few key concepts/"vital themes and narratives"/issues/ideas are identified, defined, and described
 - Facts/supporting details are not included
 - Information is largely inaccurate or irrelevant
 - 1 • Key concepts/"vital themes and narratives"/issues/ideas are not identified, defined, and described
 - Facts/supporting details are not included
 - Information is inaccurate or absent
-

Reasoning*Analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of evidence*

-
- 6 • Identifies and logically organizes all relevant evidence
 - Uses appropriate and comprehensive critical thinking skills and “habits of mind” to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize evidence
 - Reaches informed conclusions based on the evidence
 - 5 • Identifies and logically organizes most of the relevant evidence
 - Uses appropriate and critical thinking skills and “habits of mind” to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize evidence
 - Reaches informed conclusions based on the evidence
 - 4 • Identifies and organizes some of the relevant evidence
 - Uses partial critical thinking skills and “habits of mind” to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize evidence
 - Reaches informed conclusions based on the evidence
-
- 3 • Identifies some of the relevant evidence but omits other evidence
 - Uses the incomplete critical thinking skills and “habits of mind” to analyze, evaluate and synthesize evidence
 - Reaches incomplete conclusions based on the evidence
 - 2 • Identifies little relevant evidence and omits most of the evidence
 - Uses unclear or inappropriate critical thinking skills and “habits of mind” to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize evidence
 - Reaches inaccurate conclusions based on the evidence
 - 1 • Important evidence relevant to the problem is not identified
 - Critical thinking skills and “habits of mind” are absent
 - Conclusions are lacking or unclear
-
-

Communication

Demonstrates knowledge and reasoning through oral, written, visual, dramatic, or mixed media presentation

- 6 • All ideas in the presentation are expressed in a way that provides evidence of the student's knowledge and reasoning processes
 - The presentation is well focused with a well-defined thesis
 - Presentation shows substantial evidence of organization
 - Presentation shows attention to the details of specific performance conventions

- 5 • Most ideas in the presentation are expressed in a way that provides evidence of the student's knowledge and reasoning processes
 - The presentation demonstrates a focus and thesis with minimal narrative gaps
 - Presentation shows sufficient evidence of organization
 - Presentation has minor mistakes in attention to the details of specific performance conventions

- 4 • Some ideas in the presentation are expressed in a way that provides evidence of the student's knowledge and reasoning processes
 - The presentation demonstrates a focus and thesis with several narrative gaps
 - Presentation demonstrates adequate evidence of organization
 - Presentation has mistakes in attention to the details of specific performance conventions

- 3 • Few ideas in the presentation are expressed in a way that provides evidence of the student's knowledge and reasoning processes
 - The presentation demonstrates an inadequate focus and thesis
 - Presentation demonstrates inadequate evidence of organization
 - Presentation has insufficient attention to the details of specific performance conventions

- 2 • Most ideas in the presentation are not clearly expressed
 - The presentation demonstration insufficient focus and a poorly defined thesis
 - Presentation demonstrates insufficient evidence of organization
 - Presentation has multiple mistakes in attention to the details of specific performance conventions

- 1 • Expression of all ideas in the presentation is unclear
 - The presentation demonstrates little focus and lacks a thesis
 - Presentation demonstrates little evidence of organization
 - Presentation has no attention to the details of specific performance conventions

Differentiation among these higher levels is a matter of the degree to which a student can identify, analyze, and organize evidence and then construct a new historical synthesis.

Ultimately, students at a Level 6 will methodically analyze and evaluate the evidence, thereby linking themselves with historians who seek answers to two fundamental questions: How has the past affected the present? and Why does history matter? Students at a Level 6 will understand the significance of historians' questions and the tentative nature of their judgments. They will recognize how historians' interpretations rest on differing assumptions, constructing a past that changes over time, and they will recognize that each preceding generation's inquiries about the past carry forward the implications of its predecessors' knowledge and reasoning. A student at Level 4 will identify and analyze the evidence from one perspective—but one that is still sufficient for them to evaluate successfully the sources and combine their new knowledge with what they have already learned.

Students who are still developing their ability in reasoning will show important deficiencies. They may fail to organize information for proper analysis and may omit evidence. A developing student may also select an inappropriate method for analyzing, evaluating, and synthesizing evidence. Students who are in the process of developing reasoning skills have difficulty thinking critically and applying the requisite "habits of mind" when answering an historical question. For example, when reading a newspaper editorial from a Radical Republican newspaper dealing with the impeachment of Andrew Johnson in 1868, they may accept the editorial's declarations at face value, as opposed to students with developed reasoning who recognize the difference between fact and conjecture, and evidence and assertion. Finally, the inability to reach a reasonable, informed conclusion is indicative of a student who is still in the developing stage of historical reasoning.

A student can select a variety of techniques to communicate his or her knowledge and reasoning skills. The teacher, sometimes in conjunction with the student, establishes the context, or audience, for a student's presentation; e.g. an in-class or out-of-class essay, an oral report presented to a student's classmates, a letter to the newspaper, or an exhibit or model placed on display at a local business or historical society. Students may wish to develop a history project to enter in local, state, or national academic competitions like National History Day; other academic competitions like The Model United Nations and We the People provide avenues for students to display significant historical knowledge and thinking. Each communication technique has its own conventions which teachers should take into account. For example, assessing an oral report

may include such conventions as effective use of voice, gestures, eye contact, and use of visual aids. Assessing a student-made exhibit might include such conventions as the use of color, neatness, captions, and the selection of appropriate pictures, photographs, maps, and other materials.

A student who has developed ability in communication will present historical knowledge and reasoning in a clear and organized fashion. The presentation will also take into account the appropriate conventions for the selected activity. In an historical essay, for example, teachers would expect everything from a clear thesis statement to the appropriate use of footnotes or endnotes and bibliographical citations. A higher assessment, Levels 6, 5, 4, is determined by the degree of clarity and organization, the quality of illustrations and supporting examples, and the power of the conclusion. That is, the main ideas and reasoning processes must be well-developed and clearly articulated in the student's presentation. Finally, a presentation at the highest level of development must meet all the convention standards for the types of activity the teacher assigns or the student selects.

A student who is still developing his or her communication skills lacks the ability to present historical knowledge and reasoning clearly and effectively in an organized presentation. That is, a student who is developing cannot successfully provide a thesis or a clearly written narrative that is supported with evidence. Moreover, the student cannot present an informed conclusion. Lastly, a developing student neglects the details of the performance convention that he or she has selected as a means to communicate his or her historical knowledge and reasoning. The difference between students performing at Levels 3, 2, or 1 is also a matter of degree in each of the criteria.

The authors learned during their field testing of the History Rubric for Alternative Assessment that effective use of a rubric requires planning and practice.⁹ As teachers create assessment activities, they should ask the following questions:

- Does the activity match my teaching goals?
- Does the activity adequately reflect the historical content and “habits of mind” that I expect my students to learn and use?
- Does the activity enable my students to demonstrate their development in historical knowledge, reasoning, and communication?
- Does the activity motivate students to demonstrate their capabilities?

Teachers should share the rubric with their students because it contains the criteria that students will have to meet as they construct historical knowledge, engage in historical reasoning, and communicate what they know and understand about the past. It is essential that teachers and students alike know in advance the criteria they are looking for in each

dimension. Students should be informed about a lesson's or unit's content; they should be advised about which combination of "habits of mind" provides the entry point for thinking about that content; and they should consider which performance medium affords them the best potential opportunity to show what they know and can do. For teachers, therefore, the rubric serves as a diagnostic tool; for students, it establishes the parameters for attaining success. Teachers will need to practice using the rubric and students will need to be coached about the best ways to demonstrate their abilities in each of the three dimensions.

Samples of Alternative Assessment

We conclude this essay with representative samples of an alternative assessment activity and how the history rubric can be employed to assess student work. FIGURE 2 has a "prompt," or directions, for an activity in World History. FIGURE 3 reproduces (in type-script) an unedited student response to the prompt. FIGURE 4 provides a "prompt" for the same activity as applied in United States History. FIGURE 5 demonstrates (in type-script) four unedited student responses to the prompt. The student responses in FIGURE 5 illustrate various levels of the knowledge, reasoning, and communication dimensions.

Briefly, in establishing the criteria for knowledge in the Theodora activity (FIGURES 2 and 3), and when discussing its particulars with students, the teacher should insist that, for a student to achieve the highest assessment at the knowledge level, the key facts and important details of Theodora's life must be accurately recorded. (Some readers might think the task of applying for Secretary General of the United Nations is anachronistic; however, the teacher wanted the student to apply his/her knowledge to a contemporary leadership position.) The teacher would also want the student to draw upon the "vital themes and narratives," such as values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions, to place the life and times of Theodora and the Byzantine Empire into a wider historical context. Moreover, the teacher would expect accurate information about the job requirements for the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In the reasoning dimension, the teacher would expect a student to use one or more of the historians "habits of mind" to explain why Theodora's life continues to be relevant. For example, the student would have to show that he or she had developed historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness by perceiving past events as they were experienced by people at the time. In the communication dimension, the teacher would expect the style and format of the resume and the letter of application to facilitate a clear presentation of what the student knows and thinks about the past.

Experienced tenth grade teachers used the history rubric to review this student's energetic attempt to come to terms with the life of Theodora. First, they concluded that the student was developed in all three dimensions: there was a good deal of accurate information; there was evidence that the student had thought about the significance of Theodora's life; and there was evidence that the student understood how to write a letter and construct a resume. Second, the teachers used the rubric to determine with more precision the developed student's performance. Based on the student's cover letter and resume, the teachers determined that this tenth grade student of world history demonstrated knowledge at Level 5, reasoning at Level 4, and communication at Level 4.

Like the Theodora sample, the George Mason activity calls upon students to apply for a position, this time as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787 in Philadelphia. In this particular activity (FIGURES 4 and 5), the beliefs of Mason as an 18th century gentleman endeavoring to attend the Grand Convention must be emphasized within the context of a resume and letter of application. Mason's role as the architect of the Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776) and his insistence upon a "bill of rights" at the Constitutional Convention (although only in the last two weeks of the convention) should be emphasized. It is Mason's contribution to this belief in rights—organized around the "vital theme and narrative" of values, beliefs, political ideas, and institutions—that should be stressed in the knowledge domain. A student who has knowledge about Mason must emphasize this important contribution about his role in protecting rights.

A student who has the highest level knowledge of Mason would also point out that Mason contributed greatly to the Constitutional Convention in no less than three ways: First, he contributed to the writing of the Virginia Plan, although primary responsibility for the Virginia Plan rested with James Madison. Second, Mason spoke to the convention delegates in early June 1787 about a "partly national, partly federal" government, a distinction which had an effect on the thinking of the "Father of the Constitution," James Madison. Madison would acknowledge the contribution of Mason in making this distinction regarding the role of a new central government, a role which prior to the Grand Convention in Philadelphia had not been made and, prior to June 1787, had not been articulated. And third, it was Mason who warned Thomas Jefferson (in Paris when the Constitutional Convention took place) in a post-convention letter that, "There is no Declaration of Rights." It was Mason's letter that helped launch the anti-federalist campaign to challenge the work of the Constitutional Convention and the documents which the delegates had created.

In the reasoning dimension, a student would be expected to use one or more of the historians "habits of mind" to explain why Mason's dedication to natural rights has meaning and importance. For example, the teacher would want the student to empathize with Mason's dedicated pursuit of protection of rights, a dedication which prevented him from signing the Constitution when delegates refused his offer to preface the new plan of government with a declaration of rights. A student who truly empathizes with Mason might construct a letter of application that appreciates Mason's position. Certainly, the teacher would want students to recognize that George Mason was a significant individual whose dedication to protection of rights helped pave the way for a national Bill of Rights. In the communication dimension, the teacher would expect the student to present in proper format a resume and letter of application that expresses clear knowledge and reasoning about the contributions of George Mason.

Four teachers scored each of the four student samples of the George Mason activity. The consensus was that SAMPLE 1 was a Level 4 in knowledge, a Level 4 in reasoning, and a Level 4 in communication. SAMPLE 2 demonstrated knowledge at Level 5, reasoning at Level 4, and communication at Level 5. SAMPLE 3 was assessed at a Level 4 in knowledge, a Level 5 in reasoning, and a Level 5 in communication. And SAMPLE 4 showed a Level 1 in knowledge, a Level 2 in reasoning, and a Level 1 in communication.

In reviewing the four student samples, it is apparent that none of the high school students met the highest level of achievement of knowledge, reasoning, and communication about George Mason and the Constitutional Convention. And yet, except for SAMPLE 4, these students constructed a resume and letter of application for George Mason that demonstrated that they did recognize and understand several of his important achievements. There are many possible explanations for the results of this activity which can be explained by such variables as the differences in teacher preparation, student ability, and access to information. Nevertheless, the value of the rubric is that it provides a framework for both the teacher and the student to know in advance what is expected in knowledge, reasoning, and communication, given the variables that affect learning in all schools.

Conclusion

An enormous amount of energy has been spent thinking about how best to reinvigorate the teaching of history. Certainly, the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), published in

November 1995, warrant the conclusion that, in general, students' knowledge, reasoning, and communication of historical content has not improved.¹⁰ Alternative assessment activities and a rubric that is especially designed for use in history classrooms combine to address the continuing demands that teachers become more selective in their content and imaginative in their teaching of history. Knowledge, reasoning, and communication are contextual, but students must be held to rigorous standards that counter miseducative visions of doing "whatever students think is proper." The criteria for student learning of historical knowledge, and reasoning should be determined and directed by those who know and understand the subject, that is, the teacher/historian. Effective alternative assessment activities and a history rubric will help to set these standards and criteria, motivate performance, provide feedback, and evaluate a student's development in the three dimensions of historical literacy.

Notes

1. Paul Gagnon and The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, ed., *Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989); The National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools, *Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century* (National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools, 1989); the National Center for History in the Schools, *National Standards for History for Grades K-4: Expanding Children's World in Time and Space; National Standards for World History: Exploring Paths to the Present; National Standards for United States History: Exploring the American Experience* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, 1994, 1996).

2. Numerous educators have written about alternative assessment. For basic information, see J.L. Herman, P.R. Aschbacher, and L. Winters, *A Practical Guide to Alternative Assessment* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1992); Robert J. Marzano, Debra Pickering, and Jay McTighe, *Assessing Student Outcomes* (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1993); Lorrie Shephard, "Why We Need Better Assessments," *Educational Leadership* 46 (April 1989), 4-9; and Grant Wiggins, "Teaching to the (Authentic Test)," *Educational Leadership* 46 (April 1989), 41-47; Grant Wiggins, "A True Test: Toward More Authentic and Equitable Assessment," *Phi Delta Kappan* (May 1989), 703-713; and Grant Wiggins, "Assessment: Authenticity, Context, and Validity," *Phi Delta Kappan* (November 1993), 200-214.

3. Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) and Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

4. Paul Gagnon, ed., *Historical Literacy*, pp. 26-27. The Bradley Commission on History in the Schools also presents the six "vital themes and narratives" in their indispensable pamphlet, *Building A History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools* (Educational Excellence Network: 1988, 1989), pp. 10-11.

5. Paul Gagnon, ed., *Historical Literacy*, pp. 25-26 and The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, *Building A History Curriculum*, p.9.
6. *National Standards for History* (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), p. 14.
7. *National Standards for History*, pp. 15-16.
8. This rubric was developed by Lawrence W. McBride, Frederick D. Drake, and Marcel Lewinski as part of an alternative assessment project published as *Alternative Assessment in the Social Sciences* (Illinois State Board of Education, 1996). For information concerning availability, write to: John Craig, Illinois State Board of Education, School and Student Assessment Division, 100 N. First Street, Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001.
9. Between April and May of 1995, approximately 2,000 students completed one or more of thirty-seven different activities, and 125 teachers applied the rubric to assess their students' work. For examples of student work and how teachers used the rubric, see McBride, Drake, and Lewinski, *Alternative Assessment in the Social Sciences*, 1996.
10. For a discussion of the wider implications of the failure of students to improve their knowledge and understanding of history, see Lewis H. Lapham, "The Republic Is In Trouble," in *History Matters*, 8 (January 1996), 1, 5.

— Figure 2 —

Famous Personalities
World History

One of the most important aspects of applying for many jobs is the preparation of a resume and a letter of application. A resume is a brief outline of the most important aspects of a person's life. It is designed to make a person attractive to a prospective employer. A typical resume includes: 1) the person's name and address; 2) the title of the job he or she is seeking; 3) an outline of the person's background and work experience; 4) past achievements; 5) a list of the person's strengths; and 6) the name of at least one person who is familiar with his or her abilities. A letter of application explains why a person is applying for a position and why he or she should be hired.

Part A:

Listed below are some individuals who have had an important influence in world history. Choose one name from the list and prepare a resume that describes the person at the high point of his or her career.

- Theodora
- Christopher Columbus
- Martin Luther
- Montezuma
- Jean D'Arc
- Michelangelo
- Attila
- Richard the Lionheart
- Mansa Musa

Part B:

Write a letter of application for the individual you chose. Explain why he or she is an outstanding choice for the job.

— Figure 3 —

Famous Personalities
World History

STUDENT SAMPLE 1
Grade 10

To Whom It May Concern:

Greetings! My name is Empress Theodora of the Byzantine Empire. I am interested in the job, as the Secretary-General of the United Nations. I feel I am best qualified for this job, because first and foremost, I am known as the definite leader, a sole ruler, recognized now as one of the most powerful women in the history of Byzantine, and served a total of twenty-one years as the empress of this large kingdom. Part of being the secretary-general of the U.N. is to have good communication skills with many different kinds of people. I have excellent communication skills with many kinds of people, both verbally and written. I even talked with foreign envoys and rulers about important issues which is something usually reserved for the emperor. When I was the empress of Byzantine, I had, and still have, superior intelligence and the ability to deftly handle political affairs. This, in result, caused many people to think that it was I, rather than Emperor Justinian I (my husband), who ruled Byzantine. I even saved my husband's crown and his empire with my excellent advice, during the Nika revolt in January of 532. Also, during my reign, I wrote many laws of religious and social policies that were in my favor. This, in turn, became good decisions for the people of Byzantine. With my charming, gentle personality and strict moral life, I also became Justinian I's most trusted adviser, an excellent advocate of decisions and even one of the first rulers who helped the rights of women and girls, who were especially being mistreated in that day and age.

I, myself, was even one of those women who was mistreated as a young girl. However, I educated myself and overcame this state in my life. All of this led me to have great intelligence and political aptitude, despite how unusual it was to the public eye. Then I met Justinian and soon after we got married; but before that incident occurred, Justin had to tell his uncle (who was king at the time) to repeal the law forbidding marriages of senators with actresses. Justin had to confront and overturn the law, in order to marry me, Theodora.

As the secretary-general of the United Nations, I will not, I repeat, will not just idly enjoy the splendor and fame. As empress of Byzantine, I did a lot of effective and important things, and I assure you, I will do the same

for the United Nations. If I am selected as chief administrative officer of the U.N., I will absolutely make sure to bring before the organization any matters that threaten international peace and security of the world. I will also administrate peacekeeping operations so every generation, everyone of any race, creed, color, ethnic, religious, etc. background, now and in the future, can live in a world of peace, instead of hostility and war. I will make sure that countries will be able to have proper education for children, so they can learn, and have the intelligence and knowledge. I will also make sure women, or other people, of all countries are treated equally and fairly, and also, have proper education. I will pursue to help the small countries of the world and its people, who have constantly been bullied by other countries. I will organize international conferences and treaties, and provide mediation in resolving international disputes, so enemy countries can get along in peace, instead of war. I will prepare surveys of world economic trends and problems, study rights and natural resources, compile statistics, and maintain the communication medias of the world with information pertaining to the U.N. Those are just a few samples of what I plan to do if I am selected. I have many other ideas and suggestions that will be effective and excellent for our world if I am chosen as secretary-general. However, overall, if I am selected as secretary-general of the United Nations, I will make it my first priority and I will try my absolute best to maintain international peace and security for the organization, the world, and its people.

Sincerely,

Empress Theodora of Byzantine

Empress Theodora
I Royal Castle of Byzantine
Constantinople, Byzantine Empire

Objective: *Secretary-General of the United Nations*

Date of Birth: c. 500 A.D. in Constantinople

Marriage Status: I am married to Emperor Justinian I (reigned 527-565) of the Byzantine Empire.

Summary of Qualifications:

- I am a definite leader, sole ruler and served twenty-one years as Empress of Byzantine.
- I am recognized now as one of the most powerful women in the history of Byzantine.
- I became Justinian I's most trusted adviser with my great intelligence and political ability.
- I have excellent communication skills with many different kinds of people, both verbally and written.
- I have "superior intelligence and deft handling of political affairs, (it) caused many to think that it was rather than the Emperor, who ruled Byzantine."
- I was a member of the legislation of Byzantine.
- I am excellent in organization, commitment and peacefulness.
- I "talked with foreign envoys and rulers, which was usually reserved for the emperor."
- I am an expertise in political affairs—eg. the Nika Revolt in January of 532—"The two political factors in Constantinople, the Blues and the Greens, united in their opposition to acts of the government and set up a rival emperor." The advisors of Justinian feared that there was trouble, and told him to flee, but it was I, who told him to stay and save his empire and his crown. This, in result, did save his empire and his crown.
- I was one of the first rulers who helped the rights of women.
- I have a charming and gentle personality which makes me able to work with everyone.
- I lead a strict moral life.
- I am an excellent advocate in making decisions.

Employment History:

527-548 A.D.—I became the Empress of Byzantine Empire; Justinian's most trusted adviser; enrolling myself in the legislation, social and political affairs.

525 A.D.—I became a mistress of Justinian, who was a senator at the time, and also, I had the rank of a patrician/

(?) 525-520—I was an actress at the Hippodrome in Constantinople, and also, a wool spinner. I had these jobs in order to make money for my poor family.

Education:

525-500—Not a lot is known about my education, except when I was empress, I was known to have great intelligence. I was probably self-taught and excelled in this skill, which was very unusual for women in that day and age.

Additional Activities (eg. Volunteer Work):

During my life, I also did additional activities. I instituted homes for prostitutes and on the occasion, I helped out or sent money to them.

Other Interests:

Some of my other interests include reading books, magazines, etc., keeping up-to-date on the latest news, and also, legislation, politics, peace, religion and social structures and policies.

References: *There are two people that especially know me, as a person, and what went on during my life:*

Justinian I—He is my husband also a valued friend. We got along very well, and I became his most trusted adviser. He knew about what I was doing and had not only a husband-wife relationship, but also a team-cooperation relationship.

Procopius of Caesarea—He wrote the Secret History of Procopius of Caesarea, which recorded some of the early years of my childhood.

— **Figure 4** —

Famous Personalities
U.S. History

One of the most important aspects of applying for many jobs is the preparation of a resume and a letter of application. A resume is a brief outline of the most important aspects of a person's life. It is designed to make a person attractive to a prospective employer. A typical resume includes: 1) the person's name and address; 2) the title of the job he or she is seeking; 3) an outline of the person's background and work experience; 4) past achievements; 5) a list of the person's strengths; and 6) the name of at least one person who is familiar with his or her abilities. A letter of application explains why a person is applying for a position and why he or she should be hired.

Part A:

Listed below are some individuals who have had an important influence in the history of the United States. Choose one name from the list and prepare a resume that describes the person at the high point of his or her career.

Abigail Adams
Thomas Jefferson
Charles Pinckney
John Adams
James Madison
George Washington
Alexander Hamilton
George Mason
James Wilson

Part B:

Write a letter of application for the individual you chose. Explain why he or she is an outstanding choice for the job. You have three days to complete this assignment.

— **Figure 5** —

Famous Personalities
U.S. History

STUDENT SAMPLE 1
Grade 11

Honorable Governor of Virginia,

This letter is to serve as written documentation of my request, to be sent to Philadelphia as a delegate to the Federal Constitutional Convention. I intend to represent our glorious state of Virginia and support and serve the wonderful people of this state.

As you know, I have attended many other conventions and have served on quite a few committees. I believe I possess the expertise to understand and participate in conventional protocol.

In addition to my strong desire to serve my fellow Virginians, there are a few items I wish to address to the members of this convention regarding the pending constitution.

I intend to oppose sectional compromise relative to slavery, tariffs and slave trade. I will favor the gradual emancipation of the slaves. I will object to the extensive but vague power given to congress.

For the above mentioned reasons, and the opportunity to share my ideas, I again formally request, that I be selected to attend the Federal Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

Thank you for your kind and prompt consideration to this manner.

Sincerely,

George Mason

George Mason
Fairfax County, Virginia

Position: Seeking position of Delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

Background:

Born in 1725

Living in Fairfax county Virginia

Work Experience:

1759: Member of the Virginia House of Burgesses

1774: Member of the Virginia Committee of Safety

1775-1776: Member of the State Constitutional Convention

1776-1788: Member of the Virginia Assembly

Past Achievements:

1769: Drew up Nonimportation Resolutions

1773: Published Extracts From the Virginia Charters

1774: Wrote the series of 24 Resolutions (Fairfax Resolves)

1776: Drew up the Virginia Declaration of Rights and most of the Virginia Constitution

Personal Strengths:

Honest

Reliable

Consistent

Student of Politics

Reference:

Neighbor and lifelong friend, George Washington

Famous Personalities
U.S. History

STUDENT SAMPLE 2
Grade 11

Dear Governor,

I am writing this letter to encourage you to choose me as a representative for the great state of Virginia in the upcoming Constitutional Convention. I feel it is extremely important for me to be present because of the need for this country to have a Bill of Rights. As you know I was largely responsible for the Virginia Bill of Rights, and feel as though our national government needs something similar. I will be one of the older men there and feel as though my life experiences, and knowledge will contribute greatly. Perhaps most importantly I do not consider myself a politician or lawyer, even though I have held many political positions. I am honest, straight forward, and care greatly about this new country, and its people. The contributions I have already made to this new country speak for themselves. This includes everything from serving as Fairfax County's Justice of the Peace with George Washington, to helping with the militia, and organizing Maryland's and Virginia's plan for British boycott.

I trust you will not overlook my accomplishments, and grant me my wish. The importance of this convention is well known. It will change all our lives like nothing before in history. I feel it is my responsibility to represent the average man, and his rights the government should not be able to touch. If chosen I will represent Virginia in a manner to be proud of. My actions and past history show what I am capable of, and what I plan on doing in the future. Thanks again for taking the time to consider me as a delegate, and remember above all I will fight for the addition of a Bill of Rights. I will not sign or support any document that does not contain one.

Respectfully yours,
George Mason

George Mason
Address
Gunston Hall, Dogue's Neck, Virginia

SEEKING A SEAT IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Personal Information:

Born:

December 11, 1725 to Anne Thomson Mason, and George Mason III
 —oldest of three

Married:

April 4, 1750 to Ann Eilbeck. She died in March of 1773
 —nine children
 1780, remarried Sarah Brent

Occupation:

Land owner, planter/farmer

Hobbies:

Reading—favorite book: *Every Man His Own Lawyer*

Previous Achievements:

- Owns thousands of farm acres in Virginia, and Maryland, over a thousand acres of uncleared land to the west
- Justice of the Peace, Fairfax County
- Trustee and co-founder of the town of Alexandria
- Treasurer of the Ohio Company
- 1759 elected to the House of Burgesses
- Drafted Maryland's and Virginia's plan for British good boycott
- Helped organize Fairfax Militia
- Served in the colonial Militia

****Member of Virginia Convention:**

- largely responsible for the Virginia Declaration of Rights
- largely believe in a man's natural right
- feel a Bill of Rights is extremely important
- should be certain areas government cannot interfere

****Longtime Member of Virginia House of Delegates**

References:

George Washington
 Richard Henry Lee
 Patrick Henry
 Charles Pinckney
 George Wythe
 Thomas Jefferson
 James Madison

Famous Personalities
U.S. History

STUDENT SAMPLE 3
Grade 11

Dear Governor of Virginia—

I, George Mason, am writing to you to express my deep concern for the future of this country we are building. I feel we must work together and pool our strengths as individuals to help create a nation for all to live in that is fair and just. I feel that my strengths are greatly needed at the Constitutional Convention that will be held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Thus, I feel that I would be a superb choice as a delegate representing the state of Virginia.

To create a fair and just nation, I feel we must secure the rights of the individual. Upon writing the draft that was accepted as the Virginia Bill of Rights, I have come to see that certain ideas are prevalent with many individuals. As a delegate, I will be sure to push for the rights of the individual. I believe that we must create a document to serve all fairly.

We must make the outline of a national government that may overpower the state government but never infringe on the rights of the states. Our Virginia Bill of Rights can play an important role in the development of the Constitution. I will bring such ideas to the Convention as all men are created equal and free, all are entitled to the pursuit of life and liberty, all shall have rights to acquire and possess property, no citizen shall be compelled to testify against themselves, cruel and unusual punishment shall not be allowed, men shall receive a trial by jury, prescribed freedom of religion, and a general guarantee of people's freedom against the government. For these reasons and my genuine concern for this country, I feel I am a superb candidate as Delegate to the Constitutional Convention representing the state of Virginia. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

George Mason

Resume of George Mason

1786
George Mason
Gunston Hall
Virginia

I, George Mason, am applying for the job of the Delegate to the Constitutional Convention representing the state of Virginia.

Background & Work Experience:

- born in Virginia in 1725
- studies politics as a youth
- held a public office for the state of Virginia
- single-handedly run mansion, Gunston Hall
- own over 75,000 acres of land and 90 slaves
- wealthy squire
- worked on Virginia Bill of Rights

Past Achievements:

- served on the committee to work out a government for the state of Virginia
- produced the draft that was accepted as the Virginia Bill of Rights
- produced a fair and just document for the people of the state of Virginia to live by

Personal Strengths:

- independent
- clear and precise thinker
- honest
- careful student of politics
- reliable
- truly believed in the preservation of the rights of the individual
- consistent

Reference:

- George Washington

Famous Personalities
U.S. History

STUDENT SAMPLE 4
Grade 11

To the Governor:

I believe you know me. I have lived in Virginia all my life. I have lots of money. I have slaves too. Rights are important to me. I have done many things to help this country. I have respect from many leaders.

I should go to Philadelphia because I have spoken about rights before. I have friends in my state who want me to be there. I don't know what to say but I'll do the best I can.

Very truly yours,

George Mason

George Mason
Gunston Hall
Virginia

Owned slaves
Had 75,000 acres of land
Leader of Rights
Married two times with 9 children
Planter and farmer

References:

James Madison
