

Reading historical documents or *Reading like a Historian* (notes for Workshop August 2015) Ed

Dorgan

- “Facts are mastered by engaging students in historical questions that spark their curiosity and make them passionate about seeking answers.” (Wineburg, v)
 - It is because so few students pursue a degree in history that it is crucial to teach the skills of thinking as an historian and reading like an historian in our schools.
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#1 Let’s look at the different ways that students & historians look at primary source documents:
many students start reading the article right away and don’t do the preliminary check-up like historians and experienced readers.

The Historian approaches a document in the following steps:

- Begin analyzing a document by glancing at the title and subtitles
 - Next they go to the end of the article/document and check the source
 - seeing who wrote it
 - would the author be bias towards any particular group
 - the date the document was written/created
 - the intended audience
 - This action is referred to as sourcing the document
- *‘For historians, the act of reading is not about gathering lifeless information to repeat on a test, but engaging a human source in spirited conversation.’* (Wineburg, vi)

#2 Next we will examine the second ‘pillar of Reading Like a Historian’ **contextualization** – the idea that events need to be located in the proper time and place in order to be understood.

Both Sourcing and Contextualizing are important to *Reading like a Historian* and are the skills referred to as ‘discipline-specific literacy’

This approach is a break from reading the textbook to get answers or just answering worksheets.
Instead - students need repeated practice across topics & different eras to benefit from this approach.

#3 Finally we ask students pull-in specific information from the sources **close reading** in order to provide supporting facts for their argument.

Struggling readers will benefit most from this approach:

- Remember – primary source documents are the place to teach students to slow down and read closely; to think about word choice and subtext.
- When needed, provide a word bank to assist students in definitions of words and with vocabulary that is unfamiliar in the 21st century.