

SCOPE

NEWSLETTER
OF THE
NAGC
CURRICULUM
STUDIES
NETWORK

SUMMER
2010

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

From the Editor

"Exploring New Horizons" is the theme for SCOPE's Spring/Summer 2010 edition, and I mean that both literally and figuratively. In this edition, you will learn about ways to expand your learning by traveling and delve further into your particular discipline at the same time. We encourage our students to become intellectual risk takers, but to continue to grow as teachers and curriculum writers, we need to take a few intellectual risks of our own. When we venture outside our comfort zones as teacher-travelers, we can reflect on who we are as teachers, learners, and human beings. Read on to find out about programs around the world designed for teachers to approach their subjects with fresh eyes and a deeper knowledge. One reflective teacher, Heather Pang, ventured forth to Europe to study history and art and she shares her thoughts, advice and photos with you in the following pages.

In the spring, *Yom Hashoah* or Holocaust Remembrance Day was celebrated around the world. The Holocaust is a tough issue to approach in our classroom, but a necessary one. I will share an article about how we can teach *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank in a thoughtful and developmentally appropriate way that focuses on Anne's identity as a writer. Additional resources to supplement the diary will be included.

In the fall edition, we will follow up on the Anne Frank article with quotes from student writing. We will also give you a "sneak peek" into sessions that you can look forward to at the upcoming NAGC Annual Conference in Atlanta.

-Leighann Pennington, editor

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NAGC Curriculum Network
2010
Network Leadership

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From the Network Chair

As I read the articles in this newsletter, I am reminded of the power of reflective teaching and the power of big ideas on which young minds can ruminate. In my teaching past, I had a wonderful opportunity to attend two summer institutes at Princeton's Plasma Physics Laboratory where a colleague and I were given an opportunity to learn about an emerging field of study, Fractals, Chaos Theory and Dynamic Systems. My professors opened new vistas for me to explore that fundamentally changed the way I see the world. My paradigms shifted and I became immersed in Cantor dust, Julia and Mandelbrot sets, the Von Koch snowflake, iterations, infinity, fractal geometry, chaos theory and dynamic systems. My professors, Dietmar Saupe, Hans Otto Pietgen and Benoit Mandelbrot opened a door and I walked through it. It was a paradigm shifting, life changing experience. I couldn't wait to come home and bring all I learned to my eighth grade classes. We explored, we speculated, we talked and listened, we discovered! We made connections to the science of genetics; we envisioned infinite shorelines that couldn't be measured because we couldn't possibly get small enough to walk the spaces between sand particles. We read "The Allegory of the Cave" from Plato's *Republic* and thought about our natural blinders and preconceived notions and how they can sometimes not allow us to perceive all there is to see. I now view the natural world differently and I remember students in their "end of the year" letters to me sharing that they would never look at the world the same way again. I felt empowered because they felt empowered. I had an opportunity to explore and reflect, that changed my view and the way I teach.

Our articles in this newsletter show the power of reflective teaching and the sharing of big ideas/concepts with students while "filling our own cups." The beauty of being a member of NAGC is learning from the many professionals surrounding us, who, not only reflect on their own teaching methods and beliefs about teaching, but also are willing to share what works for them. They walk with and among us!

~Carol Ann Williams, Network Chair

Reflecting on American History in Cambridge, England: One Teacher's Journey by Heather Pang

In the summer of 2008, I had the opportunity to go back to graduate school, or at least to go back to the parts of it that were the most precious to me. I attended the Oxbridge Teachers Seminar in Cambridge, England with two goals in mind. First, I was reworking my 8th grade US history curriculum. We had adopted a new textbook, and Castilleja School, where I work, is growing its global program, so I wanted to rework the logistics of the course while also giving it a more global perspective.

The second goal was more personal; I wanted to be a student again—to think, reflect, talk about history, visit other schools, hear experts from a wide range of disciplines, and talk to teachers from many different types of schools and communities. The webpage for the seminar put it best, "participants in the Cambridge Teacher Seminar have the opportunity to take part in the ancient traditions of academic discovery and creative endeavor that have made Cambridge one of the greatest centers of intellectual excellence and achievement in the world." I enjoyed the variety of the seminar, getting to know the other participants, and spending my days really thinking, learning, writing, and exploring. But more importantly, I was able to recommit to my subject and to the process of lifelong learning, for myself, for my department, and for my students.

Oxbridge Academic Programs (www.oxbridgeprograms.com) organizes student summer study programs in Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, and Barcelona. What I saw of the Cambridge programs made me wish every American student and every American teacher could have such opportunities. There were two formal components to the teacher seminar. The first was a series of lectures, activities, trips, and school visits. We wandered through the history of science, the power of abolitionist poetry, Oliver Cromwell, criminology, Virginia Woolf, the history of Cambridge, and the experience of receiving, rather than teaching, a math lesson. We visited Ely Cathedral, the Cromwell museum, the Whipple Museum of the History of Science, two local area schools, Choral Evensong at King's College, and a college garden performance of *Hamlet*. We even had a special reading and discussion session with Britain's poet laureate, Andrew Motion, which, for many of us, was the highlight of the program.



The second, more focused, part of the seminar was a small group seminar on one of four topics. I had chosen this program specifically because of the seminar "American History in Transatlantic Perspective." Our group leader was also the program director, Adam I. P. Smith, who teaches American history at University College London. In a format familiar to those of us who had been history graduate students, we tackled some of the big questions of American history in this seminar, with specific readings and questions for each of our six meetings. The teachers in this discussion group taught classes from 4th grade to AP, and each of us came to the topics with perspectives from our own teaching and educational backgrounds. Most importantly, we had the opportunity to think about big questions - not to plan specific lessons, but to consider what it is we are *doing* when we teach our own national history.

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We started the seminar with the argument made by Thomas Bender in *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History*, which states that American history is often taught in a vacuum, as if it took place outside of the larger context of world history. If we spent less time thinking about how American history is exceptional, Bender contends, and more time thinking about how it is similar to other histories, we would deepen our understanding of America and the world, and prepare our students for a world where everything really is connected. I kept a blog about the trip for my family and friends, and this is what I wrote about the work as we progressed through the topics: "Our discussion group had its second meeting this afternoon. We were soon off on a lively discussion, complete with epistemological diversions (What is a revolution? What makes change revolutionary?) We started right back with nationalism, with questions like: "What is an American? Is Louis Hartz right, is America exceptional in its Lockian consensus? (the reading for today). Does studying or arguing for American exceptionalism make any sense without actually making the historical comparisons?" Tonight we are reading Turner's "Frontier Thesis" (again, for most of us), for our discussion tomorrow. Many historians have taken Turner to task for overstating the importance of the frontier, but his argument is in many ways as much about exceptionalism as it is about the frontier, so it should be a lively discussion.

"If we spent less time thinking about how American history is exceptional, Bender contends, and more time thinking about how it is similar to other histories, we would deepen our understanding of America and the world, and prepare our students for a world where everything really is connected."



Again and again, I asked myself how to bring some part of this discussion back into eighth grade history. Since the seminar, I have tried to be much more intentional about the way we talk in class about America itself. To the extent that it is possible, I set out this year to think in terms of similarities rather than differences. We talked specifically about how to teach national history when national history is bound up in patriotism and love of country. It seems to me that a deeper understanding of national history is even more important than a sense of exceptionalism. Since being a student again myself, I have tried to tell my students more about why I get so much out of learning history and exploring the human experience through time.

Another great strength of the program was the chance to spend time with so many teachers from different places and different subjects. Many were from the United States, but two teachers came from Raffles Institution, a secondary boys' school in Singapore, and one English teacher came from Switzerland. When teachers come together and talk about their lives, their classrooms, their students, and their hopes for the future, there is much to discuss that can be disheartening. I heard from teachers

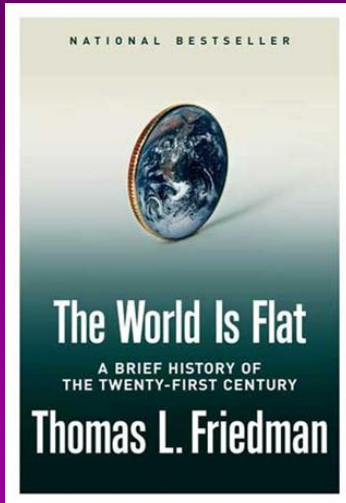
"Since being a student again myself, I have tried to tell my students more about why I get so much out of learning history and exploring the human experience through time."

who cannot teach evolution because parents object. I heard from history teachers who were supposed to help their students make sense of the world without teaching about any form of religion because someone might object. I also heard about teaching loads that make my job seem almost luxurious (something I need to keep reminding myself as I face another stack of papers to grade!). Meeting this fantastic group of teachers from independent and public schools around the world, and working with them for a fortnight, made me optimistic about the future. Although some face terrible obstacles, while others worked in well-appointed schools, each one of these teachers arrived with great programs for their students, and they departed for home more enriched.

Through this summer program of study, and the work I have done since I returned, I have refreshed my acquaintance with the type of historical inquiry I have not enjoyed since graduate school (in a setting much less stressful than graduate school). I have thought about, and I will continue to think about, the project of teaching American history: why we do it, how we do it, and what we need to think about to improve the way we do it, in order to help students see themselves in the world, not just in the nation. Every teacher should have the opportunity to think about poetry, philosophy, teaching, history, and all kinds of other subjects, connected and not, in one of the most beautiful places of learning in the world.

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Recommended Reading

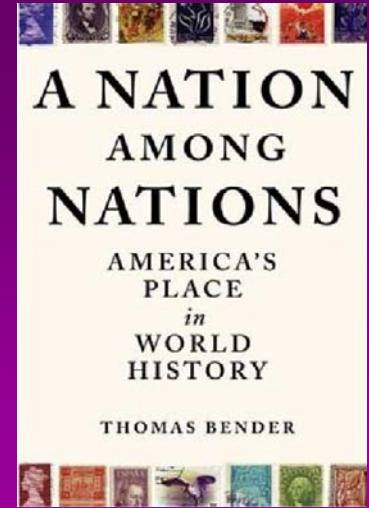


A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History (2006)
By: Thomas Bender

A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future (2006)
By: Daniel Pink

The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century (2006)
By: Thomas Friedman

Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns (2008)
By: Michael B. Horn



Acknowledgement: A version of this article was originally published in the California Association of Independent Schools Faculty Newsletter. Thank you to CAIS for permissions to share this article. Please visit www.caisca.org for more information.

Teachers: It's TIME for you to TRAVEL!



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American Councils Educational Seminars

Locations:



Longer programs: Greece Classics Program and Italy Classics Program

Shorter programs: locations may change, but previous trips include Argentina, Brazil, Jordan, Thailand, India, Mexico and Uruguay.

More details are available at the site address below.

<http://www.americancouncils.org/educationalSeminars.php>

List of Teacher Exchange Programs

http://www.americancouncils.org/_educationalSeminars2.php?type=7

Other programs for principals available.

More Specific links:

Greece program:

<http://www.americancouncils.org/program/42/GCP/>

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Archaeological school with which the Greece program is associated:
<http://www.ascsa.edu.gr/index.php/programs/Summer>

Other travel grants:

This site about “**Teacher Tested Travel Grants**” will share links of interest: <http://www.edutopia.org/travel-grants>

The Earthwatch Institute.

<http://www.earthwatch.org/browse.aspx?ContainerID=edfelfund>

The Fund for Teachers

<http://www.fundforteachers.org/>

Teaching *Anne Frank* with New Perspectives and Inspiration

By Leighann Pennington, Editor

“I have made up my mind to live a very different kind of life,” Anne wrote in her diary as she shared her dreams to become a journalist. I had made up my mind to teach *The Diary of Anne Frank* in a very different kind of way than what I had seen before and I will share with you that journey.

Anne was a gifted student who voraciously learned about everything, from the French language to obscure events in history, even shorthand! She especially loved Greek myths. She didn’t always do well in school because she loved to chat, chat, chat and was highly social. However, she was a prolific writer and almost painfully thoughtful. She was extremely sensitive to the world around her and considered the big questions that often plague gifted students about the state of the world. Anne considered human nature, anti-Semitism, and the purpose[lessness] of war, alongside what it means to be a friend, a mother, a writer. She considered, what does true love and authentic connection in close relationships really mean? These abstract ideas and emotionally layered passages will appeal to gifted students who consider the tricky questions and are socially and emotionally sensitive and profound.

The most useful resource that gave me perspective and inspiration to frame my teaching of *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank was entitled *Anne Frank: The Book, the Life, and the Afterlife* by Francine Prose. Renowned author of both fiction and non-fiction Prose addressed the following questions:

- • What aspects influenced the long afterlife of the book and its influence?
- • Why is Anne such an icon in so many countries?
- • What is it about **Anne’s voice** that continues to *engage* her audience?

As I read Prose’s thoughtful analysis, I began to focus with Prose on Anne’s identity as a writer: **What did being a writer mean to Anne? Why did she want to be a writer?** The book has often been taught as a girl who inspires hope, such as in the *Freedom Writers Diary*. However, I decided that in addition to the concept of hope, I wanted my students to look at how Anne identifies herself as a writer. **How does Anne think like a writer?** As in my other curriculum units influenced by the Parallel Curriculum Model, I wanted to focus on creative writing as a discipline and ask students to reflect further on “How can I think and read like a writer?”

*What did being a writer mean to Anne?
Why did she want to be a writer?
How does Ann “think like a writer?”*

I hope the following will provide background information for you. I use the text below to introduce the reading of Anne Frank’s work to my students. Some students have expressed concern, with preconceived notions that this book is too sad, or too girly, or they already read it. However, this is a story that calls out to be read and re-read and can be most viscerally responded to during the adolescent years. I am teaching this book in my 7th grade English class. Please see below what I wrote as an “introductory text” for you to share with students and lead a discussion before reading *The Diary*.

WHO IS ANNE FRANK, REALLY?

Why do people read and re-read *The Diary of Anne Frank*?

Many people can remember where they were when they first read this diary. I remember sitting on the floor of the library in my hometown, which had bookshelves cramped into a historic house. I would sit on the floor and choose books, reading the backs and building a pile to bring home. One writer remembers reading Anne Frank, looking up and all of a sudden the day had passed and darkness had fallen.

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So what draws us in? When I was reading Anne Frank now as an adult, I started think about my diary as a teenager and what it had in common with Anne's. You do feel wrenched and lonely and scared about the future, yet hopeful. You are grappling with and trying to fathom human nature, good and evil, like when I wrote entries about 9-11. Sometimes a journal *is* the only one you can *really* talk to, the best confidant while you sort yourself out.

Who do people think Anne Frank is? Who is the REAL Anne Frank?

When setting out to teach you about her story, I knew there was more to it than the ways it has already been taught. She is not just a symbol or a face of the Holocaust or a martyr or a hero—Anne is more than a symbol of peace and hope. She didn't write just because she was stuck in a room, bored.

She wrote to discover who she was, to reinforce her writer self, to try to understand herself, to have someone to talk to when no one else, not her sister or Peter “got” her. She was *not* just a cute girl with a crush on Peter or a chronicler of some clandestine romance in the Secret Annex, as the original play and film versions tend to emphasize.

In many ways, Anne was a teenager, who liked to hang out with her friends and have fun. She was moody and curious and angry. She didn't always understand her mood swings. She makes fun of the people in the Annex who begin to annoy her. She gets mad at her mom and sides with her dad. Her sister gets on her nerves. She isn't just some “good girl,” some romantic figure, a silhouette in history. She is honest and funny. She says in her journal what you might be thinking or wondering, but you're too afraid to say out loud. In many of her photos, of which there are many, she is laughing or mischievous.

Did Anne want her diary to be published?

Growing up, I thought, what if someone published my diary after I died? I flushed in embarrassment just thinking of such an event! Anne, on the other hand, had dreams of fame as a writer. She wanted to be a journalist when she grew up. She specifically chose the photo that she wanted to be on the cover of her diary, pasted it especially in the pages; she chose that one because she thought she looked both pretty and serious.

Anne chose this photo:



This one is on many student book covers:



One day, everyone in the Secret Annex was listening to the radio and the leader of Holland asked for everyday documents to record this time. Everyone thought of Anne's diary. This call for documents got Anne thinking. She imagined the leader of Holland reading her work. While she didn't show anyone in the Secret Annex her writing, Anne began to revise her work furiously over the period of about a year. She still wrote new entries as she revised old ones. She reflected as she looked back, surprised she

could fight so much with her mother or be so sentimental about boys.

Anne wasn't there to choose the final edits. Her father made some choices for her, leaving out some scenes where she complains about her mom or talks about the physical part of growing up. Later, in the Critical Edition these were restored, but most students your age read the version that Otto Frank edited.

How did writing help Anne?

As I re-read her diary, I really liked how Anne envisioned herself as a writer. This writer's identity kept her from giving up and dissolving into a puddle of tears. She used this thought to steel herself against giving up hope and sinking into a depression.

So who is Anne Frank?

Is she a talented writer? An ordinary girl in extraordinary circumstances? The face we remember among millions who died in the Holocaust? Is she the bubbly, high-voiced girl in the movie, the hopeful romantic of the play? The beacon of hope to inner-city kids like in the *Freedom Writers' Diary*?

Why not just let Anne speak for herself and find out who she is by reading her diary?

(END text meant to share with students)

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Some Final Thoughts for Teachers: As Anne wrote at the beginning of her diary **“I want to bring out all kinds of things that lie buried deep in my heart”** and I hope this discussion you begin with your students and further discussions over the text of the diary will lead students to a deeper understanding of Anne’s life, what it means to be a writer, and the historical context in which she lived.

Looking Ahead to the Next Edition: Stay tuned for more resources, including a **reading guide** based around “Anne as a writer” and close reading skills, more tips for teaching Anne Frank’s diary and feedback from students. See below some resources that will help you get started:

Resources:

The Museum

Anne Frank Museum Amsterdam—the official Anne Frank House website

<http://www.annefrank.org>

Books for students:

1. ***Yours, Anne: The Life of Anne Frank***: published by Scholastic A wonderful biography of Anne for students 4-7th grade.
2. ***A Friend Called Anne: One Girl's Story of War, Peace, and a Unique Friendship*** by Jaqueline Van Maarsen: a biography by Anne’s best friend growing up adapted for younger students by Carol Ann Lee

Book for teachers:

Anne Frank: The Book, the Life, and the After-life by Francine Prose

Film:

1. ***Anne Frank Remembered***. Award-winning documentary by Kenneth Branagh. The first hour or so is appropriate for middle school age, but the end becomes sadder or more graphic and should be reserved for older students, in my age.
2. ***The Diary of Anne Frank*** film adapted from the play. Anne’s character is not well-developed, leaving out much of her intelligence, wit, and maturity. However, the film could lead to a good discussion about the differences between the film and the book and why the directors made those choices.

Article Contributors

Mrs. Heather Pang graduated from Castilleja in 1984 and now teaches United States History to the 8th grade and serves as the Department Chair. She has a PhD and an MAT in History from UC Davis, and a BA from Wesleyan University. Before returning to Castilleja to teach, she taught at UC Davis, Santa Rosa Junior College, and American River College. She also worked as an editor for Encyclopaedia Britannica's web guide. In addition to her teaching duties, Mrs. Pang is the coordinator for the Castilleja School Archives and is co-author of *Castilleja: Celebrating a Century* a school history produced to celebrate Castilleja's Centennial. She is the 2003 recipient of the Castilleja Distinguished Alumna Award. **Feel free to contact her about this article at:**