

Notes from Daisy Martin's Presentation and Discussion – November 8, 2005

Key ideas, questions, and instructional responses generated from student writing (UC Berkeley students' 3/5 Clause identifications and OUSD student writing about significant event in American history.)

Ideas:

1. Historical significance of any individual, event, or idea is not fixed.
2. Judgment of significance depends on criteria used and parameters (*time period, place, individuals, events etc.*) set by question.

Questions:

1. What does strong student thinking about historical significance look like?
2. What makes a strong piece of student writing about significance?
3. What do we want to see?
 - Thesis statement that focuses on why something matters historically
 - Use of appropriate criteria for evaluating significance
 - Evidence, details, to support
 - Multiple reasons

Instructional Responses: What kinds of lessons and feedback might help students improve?

- 1) Help students identify multiple reasons through a graphic organizer.
- 2) Ask students to take a stand on significance - develop a pro and con chart, rating system.
- 3) Develop and place a poster with possible criteria on wall.
- 4) Ensure that students know factual content, have the specifics, so they are able to develop and support historical significance arguments.
- 5) Be "transparent" about significance - tell students why you think specific events or ideas you teach are significant
- 6) A discussion that focuses on whether immediate impact (*"The master would get more votes than his slaves."*) is as historically significant as long term impact (*"it gave the South an upper hand by bolstering their votes in Congress, allowing them to preserve slavery."*).
- 7) Use student writing to point out to students when they are establishing a criterion for significance. Build on this attempt to help them refine, revise, or add to that criterion.
- 8) Helping students establish criteria for significance. Questions that help focus on the need to develop criteria.
 - Why is this event more important than others?
 - Will this be important 100 years from now?
 - What lessons can we learn from this event?
 - How is this event connected to present ideas and conditions? What is the event's long term historical impact?
 - What does this event reveal about its historical period?
 - Why is it in the history books?
 - "So what?"