

# Teaching with Biography in American History:

## Issues, Questions, and Possibilities

(from surveys and bluebooks)

OUSD Teaching American History Project

2004-2005

# Standards and Time

## What do we mean by teaching with biography?

### *Questions and comments from survey:*

- How do I teach children about specific people when the curriculum doesn't allow for it? At my school there is a very delicate balance between program based material and supplemental material.
- There is actually no time to teach a biography, dig deep into content, and still keep up with the required district pacing. Priority for state testing also a challenge.
- With the curriculum we have to adhere to it would be quite impossible to use a biography. I would if I could.

# Who?

## - A Question of Selection

- Curriculum
- Significance
- Teacher knowledge
- Student interest
- The known and the unknown individual
- Resources

*Questions and comments from survey:*

- I'd like input on selecting biographies for children - and supplementing them with primary sources, good literature study books.
- I also want to explore biographies of less famous people in addition to exposing my students to their first biography of famous people.
- Find bios of interest - with info besides facts...some controversy for example



# Resources

- Individual biographies for participants
- Presentations
- Materials connected to presentations
  - Documents
  - Narratives
  - Sample lessons

*Questions and comments from survey:*

- With the intense Open Court reading, writing, and assessments, I need supporting materials which I will be able to teach biography for my classes.
- Access to materials both meaningful and accessible for ELL students?

# Why Teach with Biography?

<b>from Survey</b>	<b>from Caroline Cox's presentation</b>	<b>from Project</b>

# How?

We begin with three areas of questions:

- “Who is \_\_\_\_\_? What can we know of his or her life, how can we know it?” (*time, place, evidence, multiple perspective*)
- “Why is he or she significant? Why should we care about him or her?” (*historical significance*)
- “What we might learn about American history by studying his or her life. How should it shape our understanding of American history?” (*empathy, moral judgment, interpretation*)

# How to help students answer these questions?

- Resources, lessons, activities, student products
- A focus on historical thinking - All work together towards a judgment of historical significance
  - time and place
  - evidence
  - multiple perspectives
  - historical empathy and moral judgment
  - interpretation

## *Questions and comments from survey:*

- How can we avoid “cult of personality,” “hero worship, etc.? The real idea is to illuminate times, struggles, change, and the students’ role in making society better.
- What questions do ask to reveal a person’s life?
- I think it is a great idea to personalize history. My question is how do we do this in the classroom?

