

# No More Boring Writing!

Sarah Cooper, Flintridge Preparatory School, La Canada, CA



<https://www.middleweb.com/tag/sarah-cooper/>

[scooper@flintridgeprep.org](mailto:scooper@flintridgeprep.org)

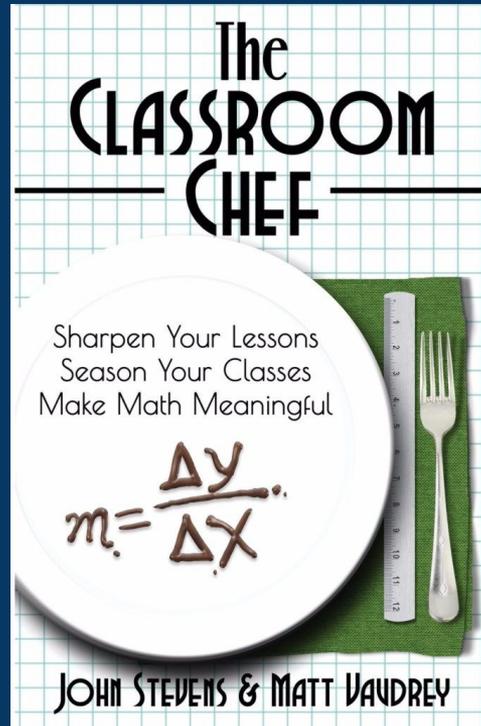
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# Presentation Overview: No More Boring Writing!

1. What Makes Writing Work (or Not)
2. Mini Writing: The Dailies
3. Bigger Writing: Blow-Up Moments
4. Ways Into Creating Interesting Writing
5. Discussion of What Has Worked for You



# An “Appetizer”: A Current Events Spoken Word Poem



# A Writing Assignment That Didn't Quite Work (one of many!)

An Electoral College debate in 2017, for instance, in which I -

- Stuck with an old topic instead of searching for a new one.
- Didn't think enough about how political the topic would feel.
- Didn't scaffold skills as much as I should have.
- Didn't give enough chance for students to differentiate themselves on the assessment.

FUTURE OF HISTORY / TEACHING STRATEGIES

## Can I Have a Do-Over? A Debate Gone Awry

BY SARAH COOPER · PUBLISHED 01/15/2018

### A MiddleWeb Blog



Most days, I feel reasonably positive about how my classes have gone, in this my 19th year of teaching. I usually have in mind tweaks or even overhauls for next year's version of that topic, but rarely do I feel that an entire project **has fallen short of my expectations.**

But last month, when we did a debate in my eighth-grade history classes on whether the electoral college should be abolished, I finished the weeklong

unit feeling I'd misstepped as a teacher in a number of ways.

# Commiserate Over an Assignment That Didn't Work

Discuss with someone near you either:

1) A writing assignment you gave students that didn't work as well as you'd hoped, and why.

*or*

2) A writing assignment *you* had to do that you just weren't excited about, and why.

# The Dailies: Mini Writing = Small Reflections

Small reflections could be...

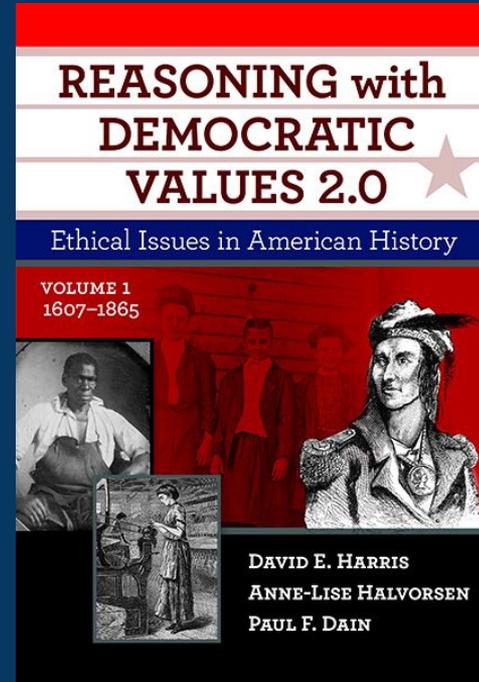
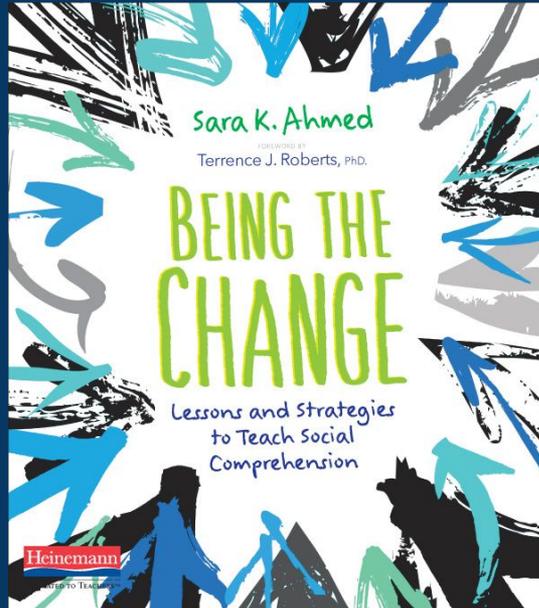
- Do Nows or opening activities
- A short paragraph reflecting on a homework reading
- Exit tickets or exit cards
- An open-note, low-stakes reading quiz that asks for student opinions and then leads into class discussion

# The Dailies: The Elements of Mini Writing

With any kind of quick writing, I hope students will...

1. Have choice
2. Think
3. Show something of their biography, identity, world view, opinions or ethical stance

# Two Books that Encourage Student Engagement with Issues



# Mini Writing 1: Madison's *The Federalist* No. 51

This mini-writing began with a reading assignment about ratifying the Constitution and adding the Bill of Rights. The reading included this quotation by James Madison:

If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed, and in the next place oblige it to control itself. (*Federalist* No. 51)

# Mini Writing 1: Madison's *The Federalist* No. 51

Write 100+ words on any or all of these questions, including and underlining at least one fact from the reading:

- a. Do you agree with the first sentence of Madison's quotation on p. 60?
- b. Would you have wanted to ratify the Constitution if you had lived in the late 1700s?
- c. Are there any amendments that really stand out to you or that you have questions about? Why?

# Mini Writing 2: Asking Adults How They Follow the News

“My mom thinks that kids should be aware of important events, however only in an age-appropriate way. For example, she thinks that if the news can be scary or terrifying for kids, their parents should inform them about it, but not in a scary way. Also, she thinks that if kids read newspapers and understand the facts, they will be able to form their own opinions at a younger age. She didn’t follow the news much, but is very interested in it now, and wants me and other kids to share her passion for learning about world events.”

*~Sydney, 8th grade*

# Mini Writing 3: Debriefing in Just a Couple of Sentences

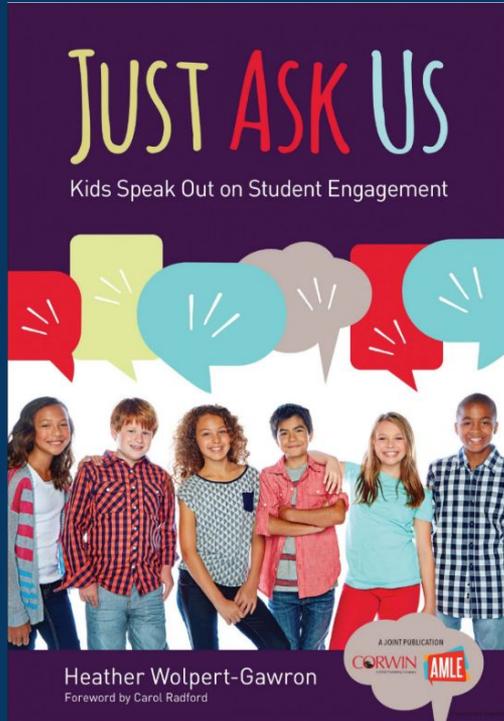
- What did you notice about the process of a bill becoming a law from the diagram we just did skits about?
- What do you want to remember from the film *Paper Clips*, and why?
- What would be two problems if California tried to secede from the U.S., based on today's Los Angeles Times article?

# Bigger Writing: The “Blow-Up” Moments

Beyond daily mini-writing, I also want to build in skills-laden projects that students will remember.

These are assignments about which they can say, “Remember when we did that awesome project in Ms. Cooper’s class?”

# Bigger Writing: The Coffee-Table Test



*In Just Ask Us: Kids Speak Out on Student Engagement, Heather Wolpert-Gawron suggests: “Think about the tests or assignments you don’t mind spending time reviewing over your own coffee table at home. Which ones do you prefer? I would argue that if you are engaged reading them, the students were probably engaged developing them.”*

# Passing the “Coffee Table Test”

The writing I enjoy reading usually involves:

- Choice
- Authentic audience
- Peer feedback
- Application of a variety of skills  
(research, reading, literary devices)
- Meaning that goes beyond one  
assignment



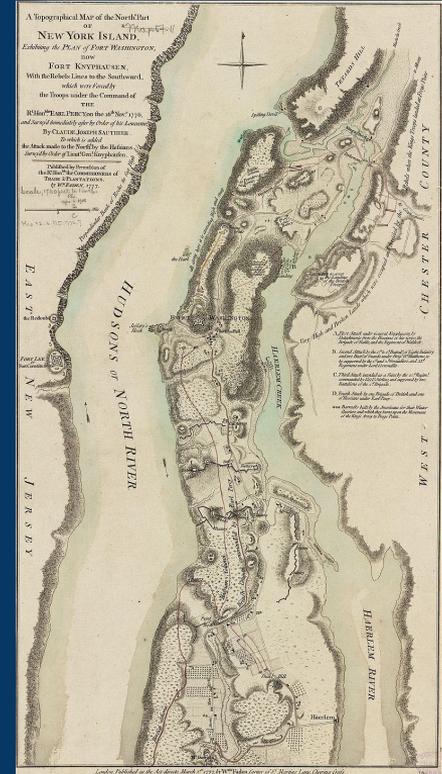
# 4 Bigger “Blow-Up” Writing Projects

1. Primary Source Song/Poem Project
2. Reformers Research Project & Campaign
3. Interdisciplinary Letter to a Politician
4. Spoken Word Current Events Poem

# Bigger Writing 1: Primary Source Song/Poem Project

During a unit on the Revolutionary War, we read a number of primary sources, including...

- The Declaratory Act (1766)
- John Adams' diary entry on the Boston Massacre (1773)
- John and Abigail Adams' letters to each other (1776)
- Two of George Washington's letters during the Revolutionary War (1776 & 1778)
- The last two paragraphs of George Washington's Farewell Address (1796), as quoted in *Hamilton's* "One Last Time"



# Bigger Writing 1: Primary Source Song/Poem Project

During this project, you will get to...

- 1) Connect history with music or poetry
- 2) Imprint some Revolutionary language on your brain
- 3) Write a song or poem that makes people think in interesting ways about the Revolution (and, thus, about any kind of rebellion or challenge to authority)
- 4) Perform your song or poem for your classmates – on an audio recording, a video or in person
- 5) Have fun!

# Song Excerpt: “We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident”

...’Cause “We hold these truths  
to be self-evident”  
“That all men are created equal,”  
yes they are  
You gave me liberty  
Supposedly  
Pursuit of Happiness  
This is the right of the people  
Rights for you and me

Give me a voice  
Give me rights, Give it now  
You promised  
you’d never blot it out  
You need to know to  
“ ‘member the ladies”  
You promised  
you’d never blot it out..

*Caroline, Madison & Jazzy*  
*To the tune of Shawn Mendes’ “Treat You Better”*

# Bigger Writing 2: Steps for Reformers Research

1. Take time to browse reformers and choose a topic.
2. Find at least one primary source and two secondary sources.
3. Annotate the sources.
4. Make notecards on NoodleTools.
5. Print and sort notecards into a physical “outline.”
6. Write a 2-page paper on your reformer, with MLA citations.
7. Create a campaign with other like-minded “reformers.”

# Choice: Students' Reasons for Picking Their Reformers

I want to do my reformers project on **Frederick Douglass** because he was an interesting character. He was a former slave who supported women's rights, and people still listened to him and know who he is today.

*- Kyla, 8th grade*

# Choice: Students' Reasons for Picking Their Reformers

My number one choice for the project is **Dorothea Dix**. I would love to study her because I am very interested in mental illness. She decided that it was unfair for mentally ill people to survive on their own in the cruel world so she helped Mental Institutions. I think that is extremely thoughtful because the well being of many mentally ill people is almost always overlooked. I believe that receiving the opportunity to study this amazing women would be a life changing experience that brings tears to my eyes and thankfulness to my soul.

*- Yaya, 8th grade*

# Authentic Audience: Creating a Reformers Campaign

One Campaign “Product” (e.g., debate, video, press conference, story, etc...)  
*Tim, Lori & Veronica, 8th graders*

## A Debate on the ERA- Phyllis Schlafly vs. Gloria Steinem

**Jane:** Hello everyone! My name is Jane Jacobs, your local moderator, and today we will be discussing the Equal Rights Amendment. Personally, I’m a proud affirmer of women’s rights in urban planning and overall. Today we have activist and author Gloria Steinem arguing in favor of the ERA and Phyllis Schlafly, also author and activist, arguing against the ERA...



# Bigger Writing 3: A Letter to a Politician

Dear Representative Schiff,

I am an eighth grader at Flintridge Preparatory School. I would like to bring up the topic of privacy policies regarding social media. People's private pictures are allowed to be sold without even being told about this. As I was reading the "Chicago Tribune" it has come to my attention that around seventy percent of the U.S., including both major political parties, feel the same about this issue. Neither one wants to grant permission for social media to make a profit off of their posts or tweets etc.

Now with a new bill signed, internet service providers can sell a user's data to advertisers without their permission. This is very unethical and a very secretive way to make money as the users have no idea that they're being the victim of this. The reason they get paid is because the users' information they use have no idea what is going on. According to another article published in April by the Washington Post, the highest bidder gets to purchase the information. This is another reason why the account owner should get some profit, since the sellers get the highest profit possible. I have pictures of my family and a lot of things that go on in my life that I would not be content with others knowing about since it's not their business. Also, the second article said that service providers should be "accountable for sensitive data". This could mean that people get notified if their data is being taken.

The main thing to be taken away from this letter is that we shall not allow this to continue and turn into a no privacy experience. People should not suffer from others'

The screenshot shows a document editor interface with three comments from other users. Each comment includes a user profile picture, name, and timestamp. The first comment is from Georgia Yama... at 8:34 AM May 3, with a 'Resolve' button and a three-dot menu. The comment text reads: "You use I a lot in the first paragraph. Maybe start your sentences with something different". Below the comment is the text "From imported document". The second comment is from Ryan Alameddi... at 8:28 AM May 3, with a 'Resolve' button and a three-dot menu. The comment text reads: "It might be useful to explain how they feel or your view on the topic here". Below the comment is the text "From imported document". The third comment is from Willy Glarum at 8:41 AM May 3, with a 'Resolve' button and a three-dot menu. The comment text reads: "state the bill m8.". Below the comment is the text "From imported document". The fourth comment is from Georgia Yama... at 8:35 AM May 3, with a 'Resolve' button and a three-dot menu. The comment text reads: "Rephrase this sentence".

# Letter to a Politician: Interdisciplinary Connections

## Rationale

We have looked closely at the myriad ways Abraham Lincoln persuaded his audience to listen to his point of view, in four pieces of writing from the beginning to the end of the Civil War:

- Lincoln's First Inaugural Address: March 4, 1861
- The Emancipation Proclamation: January 1, 1863
- The Gettysburg Address: November 19, 1863
- Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address: March 4, 1865

You are also reading Harper Lee's magnificent *To Kill a Mockingbird* in English class.

In the hands of both Lee and Lincoln, you have seen the power of language to persuade people to be calmer, more open and more tolerant. In a Socratic seminar in English, you have also discussed broader themes of empathy, human nature, innocence and race. Finally, you recently wrote a position paper that required you to rank evidence, address counterarguments, and choose language deliberately.

# Letter to a Politician: Interdisciplinary Connections

## **The Project**

Mrs. Burton and I would like you APPLY what you have learned by writing... what else? A letter to Congress!

This project gives you the chance to echo the power of voices from the past while exercising your own considerable voice in our current political system. If all goes well, you might even get a reply from your representative.

# Bigger Writing 4: A Spoken Word Current Events Poem

- Get excited by looking at models: [Get Lit](#), [Button Poetry](#)
- Embed research, annotation and public speaking skills we will use all year
- Lay the groundwork for developing “hard empathy” for historical sources, on everything from Shays’ Rebellion to the Little Rock Nine

# Bigger Writing 4: Spoken Word Current Events Poems

“It’s People Not Politics” (Tim)

Take a look at the people like Jenny  
Stienke

In a small town in Idaho she died of  
asthma

“How can you die of asthma in a first  
world country”

She would still be with her family had  
she been able to afford a doctor...

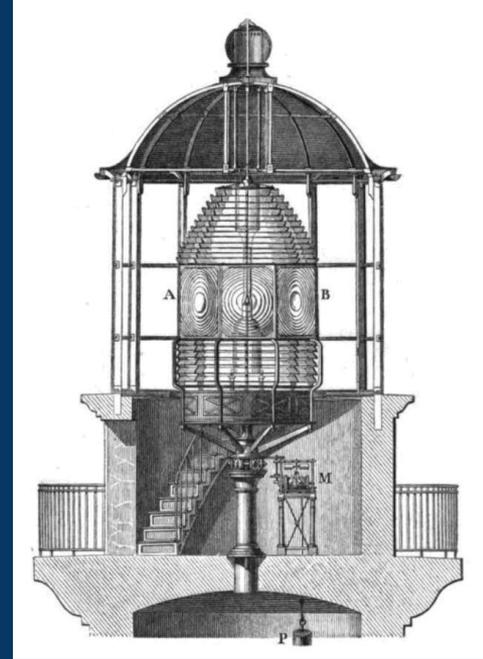
# Questions to Ask While Designing Bigger Writing Projects

- Which outcomes do I want?
- How much time will it take for these outcomes?
- How many skills and how much content can I reasonably embed in this project?
- Which content do students need beforehand?
- Is it worth the time this project will take for the skills and content students will learn?
- Who is an authentic audience for this project?
- How can I make the project fun?



# What Do You Think About When Creating a Writing Project?

- What gets you inspired to create a “blow-up” writing project?
- What do you think about when you start creating a writing project?
- What is a mini-writing and/or a “blow-up” project that has been successful for you, and why?



# Thank You! + Contact Info

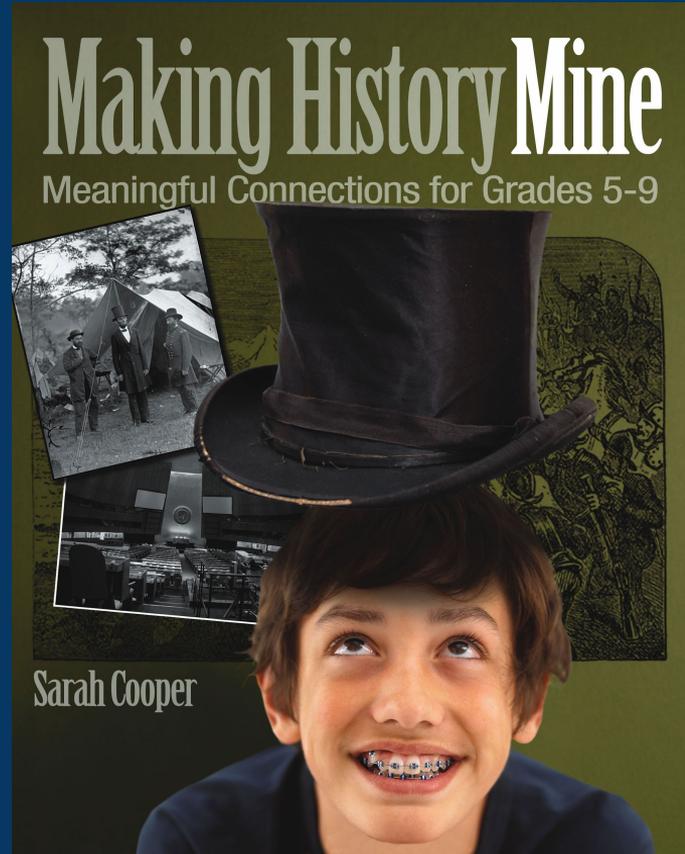
- Please feel free to get in touch with me about this presentation or anything else. I love hearing from fellow teachers!

→ *Email* [scooper@flintridgeprep.org](mailto:scooper@flintridgeprep.org)

→ *Blog* [MiddleWeb Future of History](#)

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