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Feature story posted at www.whatkidscando.org | march 2003

Forging Habits of Inquiry at Urban Academy

New York City's peculiar blend of hard-edged intensity and neighborhood intimacy shows up daily in the idiosyncratic classrooms of Urban Academy, which occupies a second-floor corner of a transformed giant high school building between First and Second Avenues at 67th Street.



Here 120 students in grades 9 through 12 experience both the tough intellectual push and the close individual scrutiny on which Urban Academy has made its name since 1985. For Urban teachers and students alike, their work centers around inquiry. The power of asking hard questions is evident in every class and activity.

“They’ll ask a question and they’ll step back and let us discuss it,” says Lilia, summing up her teachers’ approach.

“They don’t want to tell you how to do it—they want us to figure it out for ourselves,” explains Alexis, a 17-year-old Urban student. “We’re like, ‘Break it down for me!’ And they say, ‘Break it down yourself,’” she says.

Teachers at Urban, whom students call by their first names, design courses around their own interests and expertise, developing questions that get at important concepts and give practice in key skills. Whether the daily newspaper or the daily workout, most anything can shape the habit of active student inquiry. So from the moment they apply to the school, students are learning to take positions of their own and analyze those of others.

“I challenge people, I challenge their thoughts, I even challenge my own thoughts,” says Diandre, a recent Urban graduate who currently attends the College of New Rochelle. “At Urban, they’re not looking for just an answer, but for how you came about getting this answer,” she explains. “It starts in class. You have to take something and really develop it.”

Passionate teaching, disciplined learning

Just one floor below Urban, a Center for Inquiry in Teaching and Learning helps faculty develop their own skills of inquiry and serves other New York small schools as well. “Students’ interests are important, but it’s more complex than that,” explains Ann Cook, the Center’s founder and co-director of Urban Academy. “It must be the teacher’s job to introduce students to the world of knowledge through good questions that they will respond to as they learn to read, take notes, come to informed opinions using evidence, and present what they have learned.”

As a result, Urban’s ever-varying course catalog reflects the faculty’s individual passions. Class offerings like Cuban Film and Literature, Twentieth Century American Foreign Policy, Ancient India, and Social Documentary Photography are standard curricular fare. In *Looking for An Argument?*—perhaps the quintessential Urban course—students debate controversial social issues.

Vance, a former student, appreciates the diversity of course offerings, understanding what lies behind them. “The mark of a good teacher is that no matter how weird or boring you might think their subject is,” he says, “their love for it is what pushes you to learn something. It could be rat feces or some nasty topic, and the fact that their eyes are glowing when they talk about it makes you want to know something about it.”

A variety of teacher-developed protocols hones students’ ability to take notes, gather evidence, conduct discussions, and present and defend their work. In a trigonometry class, for instance, students always complete a “Practical Procedures” protocol that explains to any outside reader exactly what students have done and why. Its final question counts the most: “Does your answer *make sense*? Explain, using logic and examples of how you could estimate the answer.”

As teacher Terry Weber explains, “My philosophy is that people have to understand why they do stuff, not just how to do it.” In typical Urban fashion, he aims to show that even in math, “there is room for students to put their own opinions into it.” For whatever problem he throws their way, he wants his students thinking, “Could I do this another way?”

Coaching, respect, and mastery

Urban clearly expects from its students a level of intellectual and personal respect rare in a high school setting. “No personal attacks!” students loudly protest if a class discussion turns rancorous, echoing the school’s guiding “agreements” that protect its ethos of “fairness, not uniformity.” From their teachers they get the same respect, along with warm support for their individual needs. Most have transferred from schools where they have not thrived; at Urban, they battle to stay on and do well.

Urban Academy at a Glance

Urban is one of six small autonomous schools that replaced the huge and failing Julia Richman High School during the 1990s. All of the school’s 120 students—who reflect the city’s diversity—have applied for the chance to attend Urban, through a process in which they visit classes, complete an application exercise, and interview with staff.

Students from all four grades mingle in semester-long courses designed by Urban teachers to reflect their own expertise and interests. Time allotments vary according to need; courses may meet three times weekly or twice for an extended period.

Skills developed in courses result in projects, papers, exhibits, presentations, and experiments through which students accumulate proficiency in six academic areas: Literature, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Creative Arts, and Art Criticism. They earn their diploma by demonstrating proficiency in these areas, plus others like community service, independent reading, library research, and computer competency.

Ninety-four percent of Urban’s graduates attend four-year colleges, many earning full scholarships. In 2000 Urban Academy was one of 27 schools chosen by the U.S. Department of Education as a New American School Showcase Site.

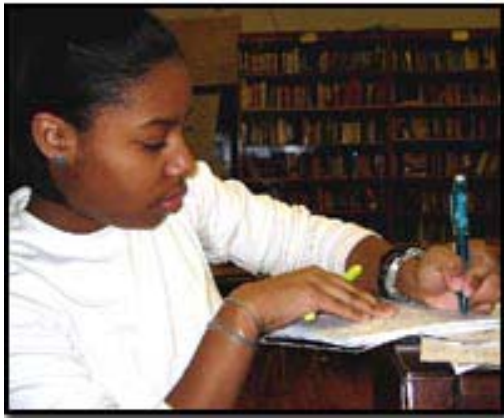


Urban's small size means all students get intensive individual attention and coaching for all their work. "When I got to high school, I didn't know how to compare three books, so my teachers told me new ways to do it," says Alexis. "They would say, 'Here, you can have a tape recorder,' or, 'Just write what you think about these three books and then we can think about how to organize it. We'll sit down with you and work on it.' Now I'm not afraid any more."

To graduate, Urban students must demonstrate their proficiency in key skills and content areas, presenting portfolios of work that meet the school's rigorous diploma requirements. A teacher mentor consults, supports, focuses, and helps students through the process of achieving each proficiency, with two-hour long blocks set aside weekly for this difficult work.

"It's hard or frustrating when they expect you to take responsibility for your own education," says Vance. "But if teachers give you every step leading up to the answer, you're not really learning anything—you're just reciting it. A teacher's job is to say 'I don't know, why don't you prove it to me?'"

He adds, "It's nice to have conversations about politics, religion, anything with an adult who doesn't think you're a dumb teenager."



Argument and Research in Social Studies

*Social studies classes at Urban Academy reach wide and deep, often incorporating the humanities and arts, too: *When Worlds Collide: The Literature of the Immigrant Experience*, *Ancient History and Religion*, *Social Documentary Photography*, *From Harlem to Havana*, *About Men and Women*, *Political Philosophy*, *Twentieth Century American Foreign Policy*, *Ancient India*. Urban's social studies proficiency underscores the student skills nurtured*

across these diverse offerings: the ability to express verbally and in writing a clear argument backed by evidence that addresses a debatable question.

Here we close in on two unique Urban Academy courses: one called "Looking for an Argument?" and another named "Frontiers and Borderlands."

LOOKING FOR AN ARGUMENT?

At first, if I couldn't get what I wanted out, I would just say forget it, forget it. It would be silence and I could feel everyone looking at me. But Herb was like, "You know what you want to say, take your time." After class he would take me aside and say, "You're really smart, you have a lot to say, so take your time and say it." At first it was annoying, but it helped. Because he kept doing this, after a while I started to say it. — Alexis

Of the many inventive courses at Urban Academy, one stands out especially. For more than ten years, teachers Avram Barlowe and Herb Mack have led students through a high school version of CNN's "Crossfire," squaring off on a controversial topic and then prodding students to take up where the two leave off.

A dozen or so topics, each paired with a framing question, form the backbone for "Looking for an Argument?" which meets for one hour, three days a week. Barlowe and Mack select the topics, the questions, and the in-class readings in the months leading up to each spring's course. They know what they are looking for: material that is both timely and provocative. But it's hard work, reminding them regularly of the equivalent demands they will later make on students to hone their own questions and arguments.

Barlowe explains:

"Herb and I sit down ahead of time and brainstorm the topics. We clip four NY daily newspapers every day for topics we think will interest, stretch, or compel this for the coming term. For example, we found an article on a woman thief who was hired to teach school in the Bronx; it connected to kids and so forth, but we also wanted the topic to focus on job discrimination. What do you bring to the table when you apply for a community service job, for example? It took us half an hour to come to the question: How should an employer decide whom to hire?"

"Out of that question came another question relating to racial discrimination: What is acceptable in the language kids use when talking to each other? We had articles on the use of the word 'nigger,' and we refined the question to: Should we discourage the use of commonly used profanities?"

For a third question, Mack and Barlowe decide they wanted to push students on the subjects of social class and money, asking them to weigh their own material and personal ambitions against notions of equality. Should society regulate income, they ask. Should the government control the maximum and minimum amount that each citizen earns? "We had an article on conspicuous consumption—a bar mitzvah party on the Queen Elizabeth 2," notes Mack. "For the essay part of the question we changed it to: If you had the power, would you change what people in different occupations earned?"



Other questions follow: Would our society be better off without TV? (The two teachers had an article about the Taliban's outlawing of television.) Is the fast-food industry good for our society? Should parents have rules about sex for teenagers? Should we try to change things that offend us in other cultures?"

"We look for questions that can get to several sub-issues, that pull in different kinds of kids in the class," says Barlowe. "And we try to find things that get them out of this country."

Topics and questions in hand, Mack and Barlowe then spend about 20 minutes together developing the pro and con arguments. In class they will each have three minutes to present one side. If they can't do that, it's not a good question, they have learned. "We try more to synthesize the pros and cons, rather than develop them forcefully," Barlowe adds. "We want to

speculate and argue, but not to shape the students' own opinions." How vociferous can you be without sacrificing that aim, they wonder.

Whether framing questions or arguments, Barlowe and Mack have come to trust their students to keep the class discourse on edge but respectful, on target but open. "Many times I think I have to introduce a particular idea into the discussion," observes Barlowe, "but if you wait, one of the kids will invariably say it. That's when you know the class is working."

CLASSROOM NOTES

The notes that follow derive from the videotape *Looking for an Argument: Case Study of an Inquiry-based Social Studies Course*, Center for Inquiry in Teaching and Learning, 2002. (The video and an accompanying booklet can be purchased from the Center for \$25.) Since students are not identified by name on the videotape, we have provided fictitious names.

It's Monday, early in the term, and students are trying out their voices, for the first time, in the classroom debate that kicks off each week's topic in "Looking for an Argument?" On the board is written the question for the week: *Should children's television watching be restricted?*

The students take a quick look at the readings. Then, for three minutes each, Mack and Barlowe take the pro and con positions. The students take notes. Mack argues that television is thought provoking as well as fun and that it's American society that creates the violence and stereotyping we wrongly blame on television. He adds, "I watched massive amounts of TV as a child," yet went on to earn advanced degrees in school. Barlowe counters that while television may not have invented violence and stereotyping, it certainly reinforces them—and where books feed the imagination, TV starves it. He also cautions students to be wary of arguments that say, "I made it, so can anyone else—or it didn't harm me, so it shouldn't harm you."

Mack has a speaker's list of students already, and they offer their arguments in turn, staying within the one-minute time limit:

James: When I was watching television, back when I used to have cable, I mostly watched the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, more educational things than just cartoons. I still like watching Sesame Street.

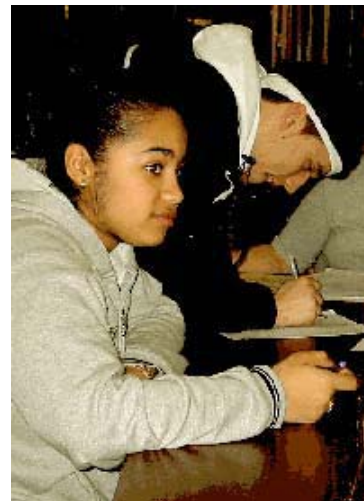
Urban Academy Course Catalog Spring 2002

Looking for an Argument? (Avram, Herb, and Shuba)

This course will look at controversial issues in our society and analyze them from different points of view. The teachers will argue opposing positions and students will join in, taking whatever side they prefer. Students will also be encouraged to propose debate topics.

Students will take notes during every debate and in-class reading and highlighting of articles that relate to the topics being debated. Every week they will also plan and write an in-class essay that connects or refers to the issues they have debated. The in-class essays are aimed at giving students the kind of time-limited, pressured writing experiences they can expect to encounter in college. Students will need to use their notes and their highlighted readings in order to write these weekly essays.

No homework will be assigned in this class. Students who arrive late or who, for any reason, are absent will be responsible to ask for make-up assignments, to be prepared at home. All in-class work will be placed in folders that the teachers and students will periodically examine and evaluate.



Eric: I've watched the Discovery Channel, I've sat there for hours watching penguins jump off of icebergs and all that stuff. But I tune it out the same way I tune out a really good show. I don't go off and become a penguin biologist.

Mack: You watch Sesame Street, which is what the majority of shows are like, and it's fast-paced advertising-type tactics that turn off the mind. What you're really getting on TV is a babysitter. Folks say to their kids, "Go turn on the television, I'm cooking dinner."

Tanisha: I think it's okay for a parent to take off a half hour for themselves while their child is watching Sesame Street, to just relax without the child running up and down screaming.

Mack: You're talking about parents who turn on the television as a babysitter for kids when they are only two or three or four. And these little kids see sex, they see violence. You don't think that's formulating?

James: A two-year-old baby has a hard enough time figuring out that his hand is really his hand to figure out that people are having sex on TV. He's still working out his own body, he isn't watching TV and thinking "Wait, she's about to take off her bra." He's worrying about his toe and "how am I going to get my toe in my mouth."

Eric: I think it has a big impact on kids in a positive and negative way. Personally, I'm not going to have my kids sitting around all day watching TV, but after they come home from school and have done their homework, they can watch TV until whatever time they go to bed. I don't see a problem with that.

Aaron: Television does affect your time management and other stuff like that. I spend anywhere from 5 to 10 hours some days watching TV and I wish I didn't. I would get out there and experience more of life, to be honest, if there weren't television.

Barlowe: I disagree. I don't think he's being denied experiences in life. In fact, he can watch 5 or 10 hours of television a day just as long as he gets done what he needs to get done in the rest of his life.

Mack: He might be a decent chap. But maybe he'd be a better chap if he didn't spend 5 or 10 hours a day on television!

Sonia: Kids that live in a small town in the middle of nowhere don't necessarily experience things like drug dealers and criminals, so if they watch television and the television portrays drug dealers as black men, then they're going to think that all black people are drug dealers and criminals. Television doesn't necessarily portray what real life is.

Barlowe: Look, we had racism in society before TV existed, in harsher forms actually. Who says that books are so sacrosanct and holy? Books can lie just as much as television. Hitler wrote a book called *Mein Kampf* that millions of people read—and it was full of lies. Was that better than television because it was a book?

It's now Wednesday and students move on to the next step in the weekly cycle of "Looking for an Argument?": critiquing the notes they took on Monday's discussion. As is the custom, Mack and Barlowe have pulled out several examples of contrasting note-taking styles (with the students' names deleted) and the pass them out to the class. The idea, they reiterate, is to find a note-taking strategy that works for each student and not the one "right" way to take notes.



"Take a look at the notes and make a comment on each one—a comment you might make to the student who did these notes," says Mack. "Is there a style of note-taking that you like better than others?" Barlowe adds, "What would you say to the student as suggestions for improvement?"

Ricardo: A lot of the people just ended up re-stating a point that's already been made, like notes #3. It gets repetitive. I'm more interested in the points than who said them.

Jason: I like notes #1 a lot, because they present both sides of the argument really well. [The student has created a list of pro arguments on one side and con on the other.] With notes # 3, they are good if you want to document everything everyone said, but they are long and repetitive.

Maria: I like notes # 1 and #4, but in both, I think the person should have included the name of who said what. That way, when you go back to the notes, instead of saying "in my notes, blah, blah," you can say, "in my notes, so and so said."

Rosa: I like the style of # 3, but I agree it's too long. It should have just said when someone said something new, not what every single person said.

Eric: #1 generalizes things too much. And people's points may not be as concrete as to say "television is bad or television is good." So you need something in between, which is why I like # 2. It has the student's words and not just the pros and cons. #4 is not organized enough for me, like it has no headings—I don't know who is for what, without reading through everything.

STUDENT NOTES, ESSAYS, AND CRITIQUES

As indicated above, though the topics change weekly in "Looking for an Argument," the format stays the same. Debate fills the first class each week, with students taking notes at the same time that they add their voice. Their notes go into a folder that teachers review before the next class, picking three or four for critique. Students begin the second class with this note-taking critique, then go on to read articles pertinent to the week's topic, highlighting what they consider salient points. As with their debate notes, their highlighted articles go to their teachers who select two contrasting styles for discussion at the next class. At the third class, students briefly critique the highlighting strategies of classmates, then complete a timed essay in which they must pose new questions as well as reflect on the articles they've read. Class ends with students sharing and critiquing completed essays.

Looking for an Argument?: An Inquiry Course at Urban Academy Laboratory High School by Avram Barlowe and Herb Mack describes this course cycle in detail and provides examples of the resulting student work. We offer here an excerpt from the publication (available through the Center for Inquiry in Teaching and Learning).

STUDENT RESPONSES: Would Our Society Be Better Off Without Television?

Would our society be better off without TV? I think that this question is easily answered; our society would be far better off without TV. We should do what the people of Afghanistan are doing—destroying their television sets! Look at what is happening to the children of society who spend hours every day in front of the TV. They are being brainwashed into believing what ever they see on it.

Some people say that even though there are many things wrong with television, it is also useful. Parents can relax with it after coming home from work instead of being bothered by their overactive kids. It also benefits the kids because there are many educational channels for children. For example, there is Sesame street and Barney.

But television is the reason why there is so much stereotyping in our society. I don't think it's stupid for people to believe the stereotypes they see on television because when a person grows up around only one type of people or has limited experience with other types of people, they have no choice but to believe what they hear or are told about those people, especially when they are children. For example, in the article "TV's Black Characters Aren't For Real" a man named Jonathan Capehart describes how it was when he was young and going to a white school. Because of what they saw on TV, the students there thought all black people were good basketball players. Capehart had to justify why he couldn't play basketball, why he couldn't talk jive, and why he could not do the "handshake." If it wasn't for TV, they would not have asked him those stupid questions and they probably would have treated him like everyone else.

The Taliban was doing a great thing by destroying their people's television sets. This happened on July 9th in Afghanistan when they gave people 15 days to get rid of them. In the article "Afghan Rulers Planning to Smash TV Sets" it says that video set recorders and satellite dishes were also ordered to disappear by the Afghani minister for the prevention of vice and promotion of virtue. I believe we should do the same. I think it would be better for the future children of America not to hear one-sided opinions and to be brainwashed and not know it.

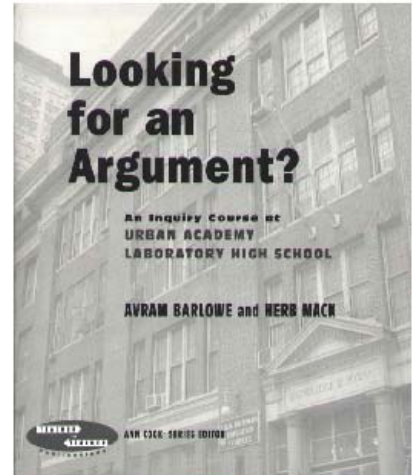
In conclusion, Afghanistan was helping its people by making them get rid of their television sets. Television distorts things, makes things up, ruins society, and makes people believe they have to act in a certain way.

* * * *

For many years families would gather around the "Ole Tube" to watch high quality programming. They would watch in wholesome awe as the world entered their little home. Television was a revelation. It modernized how information is received and perceived. High quality programming would only enhance. What happened? Now all we see on TV is violence, sex, and millions of commercials.

High quality programming is no more; all that is left is advertising and a narrow- minded view of the world and the people in it. Something like this is not helpful to our society. It is only harmful and should be eliminated.

Television is not all bad, as some things on television are useful. TV gives us news. In the morning when you wake up it's easy to turn on the news



so you can be informed on what's happening in the world around you. TV keeps us informed and aware; it's one of the fast ways of receiving information. Television can also be looked on as a learning tool. Many channels show educational shows helping children as well as adults learn about our world. Television is also a way to keep youngsters off the streets. Would you rather have your child watching Barney or selling drugs? In a lot of ways TV can be a useful tool.

When watching TV one can learn many things and pick up many ideas. But what happens if they are all the wrong ideas? Television can be useful.

* * * *

Would our society truly be better off without television? Are the negative aspects of television really that serious?

There are many positive sides to television. Television is educational and entertaining. It gives us fast information and a clear view of what is happening in the world. It lets you see and experience things, which would be impossible for you to experience through reading a book or listening to the radio. It also gives you something to do on a rainy or a cold day. Television seems to prevent violence in children as stated in the article "Fresh Air, No TV, Fighting Kids."

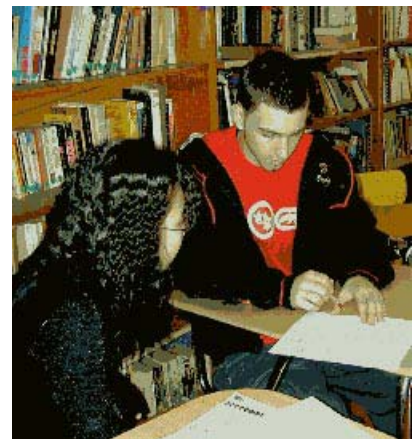
But as the evidence will show the negative aspects of television surpass the positive aspects. Most television shows are junk. They show false and unreal stereotypes. A very small percentage of television shows are actually educational and a very small part of these shows are actually entertaining. Television is also very biased and shows you only one side of the story; it brainwashes people into believing whatever they see on television. Television also makes kids violent and wild. Television stops kids from going out and exercising or from just staying home and reading a book. Television knows it gives you fast entertainment and that it dumbs down our society, especially our younger generation. There are many more overweight people now than ever before and sitting in front of the TV has something to do with this. There are also many more channels to watch than ever before.

We need to do something about the effects of TV on our society. I believe that all violent and sexual shows should be removed from television. People should still have access to educational television which should be carefully analyzed in order to make sure its programs present the least amount of bias as possible and no false information.

FRONTIERS AND BORDERLANDS

Textbooks might be trying to indoctrinate you into what the society wants you to know. Our history teacher had like 50 textbooks in the room, and we were supposed to look through and compare what they said about the same event like the American Revolution. Even the dates were the same, but the interpretations were all different and some even incorrect. Instead, we use evidence and actual documents. — Alexis

It's hard to say something's wrong because it's someone's opinion. Different people might see the same thing 18 different ways. You can see that in descriptions of eyewitnesses to crimes, when one person says the person who did it was black,



another says Puerto Rican, or male, or female. That's why you need different sources to get the truth—some grain of truth is the same in each of them. — Vance

Urban Academy Course Catalog
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Frontiers and Borderlands: Researching the History of the American West (Cathy and Rachel B.)

What's so special about America? Many believe that America is a unique country whose strength is based on a tradition of democracy—a democracy that stemmed from the endless possibilities allowed by westward expansion. Is there truth in this? In this course we will contrast the images of John Wayne-style cowboys with stories of the Black Buffalo soldiers, gun-toting frontier women, and savvy Native Americans who fought and negotiated with the new arrivals.

We will attempt to separate the myths that impelled and grew out of westward expansion from the truth. Through readings, discussion, and library research we will arrive at a more accurate picture of the American West, its place in history, and in the American imagination. We will view movies, artwork, and websites connected with this subject, as well as visit the library on a regular basis to complete research on a student-chosen topic related to the frontier.

In “Frontiers and Borderlands,” co-taught by Rachel Birdsall and Cathy Tomaszewski, students explore the growth of democracy and meaning of the Western frontier in American history. A variety of media and sources—Frederick Jackson Turner’s essay on the frontier, the Library of Congress’ American Memory archives on the Internet, Ken Burns’ TV series “The West,” and the Museum of American Indian History in New York among them—helps students answer a fundamental question: “Was the West all it was cracked up to be?”

“You have to have enough sources so they can talk to each other,” Birdsall explains. “Students tend to find viewpoints and simply re-present them,” she continues, “they don’t ask questions about them or identify opposing points of view.” The goal is to teach students to identify conflicts of fact, to recognize interpretation, and to question historical records and cultural narratives—in other words, says Birdsall, “to get the historical context right.”

The teachers begin the course by showing students an array of photographs and paintings of frontier times to gauge the class’s background knowledge.

They ask: “At what time does this fall in the historical narrative of the American West? What do we know collectively, as a class? What do we know a little about, or nothing about?”

Students come up with questions that interest them, the first step in developing their own topics for a subsequent research paper. Why were Indian children sent to boarding schools? How were African-Americans’ lives affected by the frontier era? What was the impact of the railroad? (For more student questions, see [teacher prompts](#) below.)

Using the questions that come up, the class moves on to figure out together what makes a good research question. Would it ask for facts, or analysis? What if there is no written record? (Several students are investigating Native American subjects, like the story of Sacajawea, that lack extensive written sources.) Throughout, the teachers persistently ask: Whose voices do you trust? How can you make accurate inferences about the narrators? In order to answer your question, what do you need to know about history?

During this particular class period in May, students are critiquing early drafts of each other’s research papers. (See [teacher prompts](#) below for critiquing guidelines.) Birdsall and Tomaszewski circulate among pairs of students, asking questions and offering help. Tuli and Steven recap for Birdsall their discussion of each other’s work. Tuli begins:

Tuli: He basically has the life of Geronimo from beginning to end. I was never confused as to what happened next. But he doesn't begin to answer the question he asks: whether Geronimo was a hero or not.

Birdsall: Can you make any suggestions as to how he might do that?

Tuli: If he could add a little to each paragraph to say, "and because of this we can see that etcetera . . ."

Birdsall: Or we could ask: "Are they heroes to their own people?" But we'd have to find some more sources.

Steven follows:

Steven: Tuli's paper was about the railroad and how it affected the economy. It was talking about progress, but I couldn't find the question.

Tuli: Did it help, did it not help? There are two sides—the Indian side and the white people's side.

Birdsall: Now you're talking, now you're talking.



TEACHER PROMPTS

Frontiers and Borderlands: A Good Research Question

These are the questions that came out of our opening sort of the photographs. Your job is to browse through the questions and do two things:

1. First, are these good research questions? In your group decide if each is a good research question, and if it is you can leave it alone. If you think it is not a good research question, think of a way to rephrase it so it becomes a good research question.

2. Now, choose three questions that you think you would be most interested in researching. If there is a question not on the list, feel free to add one. (Run it by your classmates to see if they think it is a good research question first.)

- Were most workers in the West people of color?
- How did white women fare in the West? Did they die more easily?
- What were the conditions that white migrants to the West faced (e.g., health, sanitation, food)?
- What were the different ways that people interacted with their environments? For example, how was the housing built in the deserts in the Southwest different from the housing built in other parts of the West?
- Were the white settlers settling barren land or land that was lived on by Native Americans?
- Did white settlers have a more hostile interaction with the environment than migrating people of color or Native Americans had?
- Did the U.S. military settle the West or was it settled by individuals traveling in small groups by themselves?

- What was the U.S. government's role in fighting Native Americans?
- Why was coexistence impossible between white settlers and Native Americans?
- Why were Native Americans interacting with whites? What kind of interactions did they have?
- What propelled settlers to move West?
- Has migration West always occurred?
- Why do we see pictures of people all alone?
- Why would enemies (a white woman and a Native American man) pose together?
- What role did women play in the West?
- What is a cowboy?
- Were cowboys only white?
- How is slavery related to westward expansion?
- When did black soldiers first fight?
- How were black soldiers treated?
- How did the railroads expand from east to west?
- What role did the Chinese have in building the railroads?
- Were Native American students in boarding schools unhappy?
- Was education important to Native Americans?
- Were children institutionalized and treated as slaves in the West?

Frontiers and Borderlands: Critiquing a Student's Research Paper

Read your assigned partner's research paper and use the following questions as a guideline for your critique. Take notes on the paper as you read it.

1. What is the thesis of this paper? At what point do you understand what the thesis is? How does the author make the thesis clear to you, the reader?
2. Next to each paragraph, note in 1-2 sentences what you feel the meaning is of each one. Does each paragraph serve a specific purpose? Comment on how the paper is constructed.
3. How does the author handle the conflict of ideas that he/she discovers in his/her research? Does he/she use more than one source of information?
4. What are the strengths of the paper?
5. What sub-headings should be inserted into this paper, if they are not included already?
6. What is the difference between a book report and an analytical paper? In your opinion, under what category does your partner's paper fall? Why?
7. If you were a teacher, would you consider your partner's paper to be plagiarized to some degree? Is the paper written in your partner's own voice? Do they document their sources?
8. What specific suggestions would you make to improve this paper?

STUDENT RESEARCH PAPER

“Was the union between John Rolfe and Pocahontas true love or a political strategy?” asks Urban Academy junior Cierra in her final 13-page research paper for “Frontiers and Borderlands.” “

The reality is Pocahontas was a child who was manipulated into a culture against her will. Even though there are no written records that indicate what Pocahontas felt, she may have learned to love Rolfe because he was the only English person she knew and trusted. But initially, Pocahontas was a tool used to trick Powhatan into giving up the land. As a result, the Indians have no land and, as you can see, the trick worked successfully. — Cierra, grade 11