Watson Research Process

“Our goal is not to lead students to solve mysteries, but to give them the tools, the historical thinking skills, so that they discover insights and form ideas and possible answers on their own.”

Research Process:
Students’ misconceptions of history must be explored not ignored. Students believe history to be a time lines, dates, names and battles, they must unlearn this when they go to college. Begin with unlearning what history is. Must go beyond facts toward the making of narrative.

Introduction/Start Here:
Description of Research Journey and Image map – intro to the idea that history research is creation of a story through investigation and imagination.
• Image of process
• Historian process or navigation
• History is about people, including the small people- those without a voice – these people should be a focus of research for what they tell us about human experience.
• We are all historians. History is human experience recollected. We all have memories and so we are all contributors and participants in history. To create coherent stories about experience is to crate histories.
• Stories – histories have power. The power to change things. Thus history is not dead but alive.
• Historians cannot return to the present of their subjects, they cannot have complete knowledge of that past experience. They must rely on the “leavings”, letters, diaries, reports, maps, photographs, etc. to reconstruct the larger story of which these artifacts were merely a part.
• “in the process of doing history, one can be changed, transformed by what one learns. Stories have power. Power changes things. Thus history is not dead, but alive…” (pg 9, Holt, 1990)
• “students should be taught to form their own historic narratives in a disciplined way” (Holt, 1990, pg.12)

Topic
Just a note: I am thinking the kids get the subtopic and are supposed to choose a theme…rather than topic to subtopic to theme….
• (pg. 60, Benjamin) “select a topic you are interested in, every subject can be studied backward in time because every event was caused by events that preceded it.”
• “an ideal topic is not only one you are curious about, but one you already know a little bit about”

Subtopic
•
**Question**
- What do you want to know about the subject?
- What seems interesting – what would you like to investigate?
- Is there something in the reading that can connect to your life, that you know something about. Often asking a question that is relevant to your life can make your research more interesting and fulfilling

**What do you know?**
- Ask them what they know about their topic? Ask them how the topic relates to them?

**Thesis statement:**
- a sentence that summarizes the main point of your presentation/final product
- appears in introduction of presentation/final product
- establishes the position you choose to support
- should appear at end of your presentation to support/conclude the points you have made.
- will change throughout your research as you learn new things/collect new data and revisit it periodically

**Data collection**
Instead of teaching you to be a consumer of someone else’s stories, “someone else’s facts” Watson will help you create stories of your own from the raw materials of history, the actual documents and artifacts from which historians construct their narratives.

- Historians begin collecting data with the ending in mind.
- Read between the lines.
- You are creating a story, based on the information you find, that answers a question. You can tell many different kinds of stories in many different ways.
- Remember that documents were created and shaped by human minds.
- Imagine what is missing or not said. How might the doc be different?
- Behind the words in the document are doubts, fears, visions and beliefs.
- Answers are not in the book, but in the environment of thought that is created through examination of a variety of sources, discussions, and analyses.
- Remember that you have a point of view, which you may limit, but will impact what you find and determine. The choices you make and the values you hold influence the conclusions you will draw from what you find.
- History is incomplete! It is filled with competing narratives, what voices are left out?
- History is an experience in problem solving… of using evidence: documents, secondary sources, and the problems they hold to piece together a “story” not the “story”.
- You must question and imagine!

**Sourcing/context – “Sense making activities”**
- History is created by people
- First review the source of a document before you read or evaluate it.
Is it a primary or secondary source, that is, is it produced by an eyewitness or participant, or by a commentator after the fact?
Who wrote this?
What is their point of view?
What is their motive?
What biases might the person have?
What is missing from the story?
Imagine someone with an opposite perspective, how would they react to this source?
What do you believe from what you have read? Why?
What points in this source answer your question?
What is the point of view of this source?
How and why was this document produced, and how does that affect its trustworthiness?
What are the documents silences?
What does it leave out?
What does it assume?
Even professional historians bring who they are to the research process. The process can also change by what you learn as you research, as your perspective changes.
Encyclopedia sources are not often wrong or incorrect, however what is selected and how it is told tells a particular story without acknowledging that there may be an alternative version of events. What voices are missing in the story? What is implied by the article? Remember that encyclopedia versions of history are not inaccurate factually, but they are closed, stunted versions of the history of the period presented. Their closure misrepresents the dynamism of history.

Context:
Pay close attention to when an event happened and where it took place.
What is the context of the documents prior existence?
What was the social and cultural environment of the creator?
What is the documents relation to other documents?
What impact do you imagine the doc had in its context?

Supporting Points
In order to evoke as “true” an image of an event as possible, when you write your narrative or tell a historical “story” it isn’t about inventing facts, but about choosing the right facts. What does it seem an audience is likely to respond to, does it seem right?
Each point should clearly support the thesis statement
This is where you include direct quotes, events, descriptions to illustrate your point

Corroboration
When possible, check important details against each other before accepting them as plausible or likely.
Narrative outline

- “organize stories of your own” (Holt, 1990, pg.10)
- “tell it like a plot, beginning, middle, end” (Holt, 1990, pg.10)
- “bringing some of your present to the past” (Holt, 1990, pg.11)
- Organize the major points and evidence
- Summarize using supporting docs, quotes, evidence
- What point do you want to make?
- There must be a beginning, a middle and an end. The structure of your story should work backward from a conclusion to support it with evidence.

Corroboration (again?)

- Need to toss anything?
- Do you have conflicting sources?
- Do some sources not triangulate?
- Where do you have gaps in your information?
- Any points that are weakly supported?

Checklist before presentation

- Have I answered the specific question?
- Have I included a thesis statement that specifies what I am presenting?
- Have I developed at least three major points that support the thesis statement?
- Have I included enough historical evidence to support each major point? (forcing them to get 10 sources?)
- Have I used at least 3 different types of sources? (TVA)
- Have I presented the information in a clear and logical manner?
- Have I restated the thesis/main idea of the presentation?
- Have I summarized the main points of the presentation in a cohesive manner?