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"Why Won't You Just Tell Us the Answer?": Teaching Historical Thinking in Grades 7-12

Bruce A. Lesh

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Every major measure of students' historical understanding since 1917 has demonstrated that students do not retain, understand, or enjoy their school experiences with history. Bruce Lesh believes that this is due to the way we teach history—lecture and memorization. Over the last fifteen years, Bruce has refined a method of teaching history that mirrors the process used by historians, where students are taught to ask questions of evidence and develop historical explanations. And now in his new book "Why Won't You Just Tell Us the Answer?" he shows teachers how to successfully implement his methods in the classroom.

Students may think they want to be given the answer. Yet, when they are actively engaged in investigating the past—the way professional historians do—they find that history class is not about the boring memorization of names, dates, and facts. Instead, it's challenging fun. Historical study that centers on a question, where students gather a variety of historical sources and then develop and defend their answers to that question, allows students to become actual historians immersed in an interpretive study of the past.

Each chapter focuses on a key concept in understanding history and then offers a sample unit on how the concept can be taught. Readers will learn about the following:
• Exploring Text, Subtext, and Context: President Theodore Roosevelt and the Panama Canal
• Chronological Thinking and Causality: The Rail Strike of 1877
• Multiple Perspectives: The Bonus March of 1932
• Continuity and Change Over Time: Custer's Last Stand
• Historical Significance: The Civil Rights Movement
• Historical Empathy: The Truman-MacArthur Debate

By the end of the book, teachers will have learned how to teach history via a lens of interpretive questions and interrogative evidence that allows both student and teacher to develop evidence-based answers to history's greatest questions.

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