

Facilitating Students' Historical Argumentation about Eleanor Roosevelt, The Conscience of a Generation

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IMAGINE spending a lifetime hoisting humanity upwards through small acts of kindness and bold, unprecedented actions while humbly deflecting praise—only to pass away when it appears the world will end in nuclear war. Visualize a child born to affluent parents with an unparalleled family history; this child grows to shun privilege and speak out for the voiceless and, in doing so, evokes derision from her former friends and high society contemporaries. Picture a young mother, uncertain about how to best raise her children and uneasy about speaking in public; she finds her confidence in service to others the world over and becomes arguably the most consequential journalist, spokesperson, and public voice of the twentieth century. Consider how a shy, introverted girl with an anguished childhood could later garner superlatives like the First Lady of the World, America's Conscience, the Conscience of a Generation, and a Mother Hen for all Rescue Agencies.¹ Eleanor Roosevelt (ER), niece of President Theodore Roosevelt (TR) and wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR), was so revered that towns were named in her honor; she advocated for so many causes for so many people across most every continent that space prevents compilation²

Now imagine young students' reactions upon discovering that the selected classroom trade book minimized certain historical aspects to such an extent that meaning was almost lost. Pre-adolescents reading about a gracious, humble lady would be astonished to discover their *non-fiction* trade book disregarded consequential aspects of her life. Using students' bewilderment as a catalyst for engagement, teachers might want to intentionally select a trade book with historical omissions and misrepresentations. As pre-adolescents are keenly sensitive to slights or perceived disrespect, fertile pedagogical ground lies in the conspicuous discrepancies between the history told in a trade book and the history that emerges within vivid primary sources. Just as different versions of the same rumor evoke students' attention and close inspection in the lunch room, learners can identify and interrogate a book's historical *misrepresentations* if they rely on understandings developed from primary source analysis. Further, teachers can position students to repair these historical oversights using diverse writing tasks and appropriate scaffolding. In doing so, the teacher melds historical thinking with history literacy and close readings with evidentiary writing as students consider—and reconsider—historical significance. Justifications, descriptions, guidance, and examples of typical students' writing follow.

The Interconnections Between Primary and Secondary Sources

Contemporary education initiatives provide space for interdisciplinary—or at least complementary—curricular tasks; students in both social studies/history (SSH) and English/language arts (ELA) are expected to demonstrate understandings through text-based writing generated from close readings of diverse texts.³ While textbooks are possible options, trade books and primary sources—sometimes termed *informational texts*—are uniquely suited for the aforementioned education initiatives. Trade books are age-appropriate, secondary historical accounts that students generally read to comprehend past events; dozens, if not hundreds, of trade books cover each historical figure, era, or event and are written at various levels. Primary sources, like photographs, letters, speeches, and newspapers, are remnants from a distant era that historians use to reconstruct the past.

Primary sources are evocative, numerous, and free for classroom use through various digital warehouses. The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project has countless videos, photographs, correspondence, and both her “My Day” (daily) and “If You Ask Me” (monthly) columns. American Experience: Eleanor Roosevelt has myriad primary sources aligned to a biographical documentary. Library of Congress: American Memory and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library’s Digital Collection link ER to relevant topics, events, people, and initiatives. Teachers should prudently deploy primary sources, since they can easily overwhelm students.⁴ Newspaper headlines and accompanying dates are succinct text-based sources for students to determine context; photographs, documentaries, and news clips enable students to visualize key events; and letters, speeches, and political cartoons can be scrutinized by students for perspective and bias, though sources like photographs should be used cautiously as they are deceptive in meaning and implication.⁵ Students may struggle with decades-old prose written by adults and intended for adults, so teachers should revise accordingly; truncate the length by pruning unnecessary content, modify the language to avoid jargon or convoluted phrases, but maintain the original intent.⁶ Teachers should select primary sources that fill a gap, balance a misrepresentation, or add vibrancy to a book.

Trade books are selected for their engaging narrative and digestibility. Trade books frequently misrepresent ER’s experiences, accomplishments, and interests through vague or minimized accounts of complex events.⁷ Doreen Rappaport’s *Eleanor: Quiet No More* (2009) has evocative imagery and engaging prose. It includes—but does not detail—three multifaceted causes about which ER was particularly passionate: soldiers, workers, and their families; civil rights and desegregation; and human rights and prevention of war. It also references her passing, but not the context in which she died.⁸ These are four areas of historical misrepresentations—these gaps are also pedagogical opportunities for students to identify and then *negotiate*, much like a trekker traversing a gorge.

Soldiers, Workers, and Their Families

Eleanor Roosevelt was keenly attuned to soldiers’ hardships, workers’ experiences, and their families’ burdens. ER’s attachment to

soldiers started when FDR was Secretary of the Navy and flourished when he was President. She visited soldiers in the naval hospital, organized women's and social groups to prepare care packages for soldiers, advocated for legislation to support wounded soldiers, wrote letters to their families, and, in her role as First Lady, went abroad to visit soldiers close to the war front. ER was similarly concerned with the sufferings of workers and their families. Starting as a teenager and continuing through adulthood, ER personally assisted workers and their families as she taught immigrant children, financially sustained various schools, served in soup kitchens, visited obscure locations to see how the poor lived, entered actual coal mines to better understand working conditions, and advocated—even picketed—for state and federal legislation to recognize unions, raise minimum wages, and provide workers' compensation.⁹

Rappaport's *Eleanor: Quiet No More* (2009) detailed most every aspect of ER's devotion to soldiers, but included only partial details of her attention to workers, workers' families, and their discernable poverty and insecurity.¹⁰ "Franklin sent Eleanor around the country... She visited coal miners and veterans and sharecroppers. No First Lady had ever done that. She told Franklin what she saw and what she thought needed to be done."¹¹ Rappaport's prose places the origin for ER's journey on her husband, not her own interests and concern; it does not detail ER's exhaustive efforts, nor does it report her various successes; it disregards the workers' and family members' responses to ER's involvement, which are nothing less than astonishing when viewed from the twenty-first century. Students, however, can be positioned to discover these historical yarns.

To guide students to consider Eleanor Roosevelt's historical significance, evocative—and easy to locate—primary sources¹² can supplement the trade book's vague representation of ER's attention to laborers, their kin, and the manifestations of poverty and insecurity. Mrs. Roosevelt, in her autobiography, wrote about the origins of her social conscious within her Uncle Theodore Roosevelt's Thanksgiving dinner traditions.¹³ In her various articles, ER alerted the world to the harsh experiences and tenuous security of American workers and defended her choice to enter coal mines.¹⁴ *The New York Times* headline—"Notables in Strike March: Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt Among Them"—and accompanying article demonstrate her active involvement.¹⁵ Easily obtainable photographs illuminate

ER's willingness to work at soup kitchens and eagerness to inspect mines for working conditions.¹⁶ To demonstrate workers' admiration and appreciation for ER, images of historical markers denote how citizens in Westmoreland Homesteads (Pennsylvania) intentionally change the location name to Norvelt to honor *Eleanor Roosevelt*.¹⁷ These distinct primary sources aptly position students to discover, not simply comprehend, the gaps in the trade book. Juxtaposing primary sources with a secondary text can complicate students' thinking as they consider ER's historical significance.

Civil Rights, Desegregation, and Equality of Opportunity

Eleanor Roosevelt assisted innumerable desegregation efforts, resigned from social organizations that maintained segregation, and drew ire for frequently socializing with, employing, serving, and dancing with African Americans. Rappaport's *Eleanor: Quiet No More*, though, included only ER's involvement with a single civil rights initiative. This conspicuous gap is a convenient place to integrate illustrative primary source material.

Marian Anderson, a world-renowned African American contralto, was prevented from singing in a prestigious concert hall in segregated Washington, D.C. by the hall's owners, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), which was a traditionally white organization. ER resigned¹⁸ and shamed the DAR in her "My Day" column.¹⁹ She facilitated Anderson's performances on separate occasions in front of both the British royalty²⁰ and an integrated Washington audience of 75,000 at the Lincoln Monument;²¹ these actions and the accompanying sources illustrate both her influence and her unwillingness to tolerate intolerance.²² A myriad of other speeches, photographs, and newspaper articles enable students to unearth nuances that Rappaport's *Eleanor: Quiet No More* compacts within the few sentences about and image of Anderson singing. While her actions for Anderson were admirable and anomalous, ER was also involved in civil rights activities that were of grave concern.

American race relations during the interwar period wavered between tenuous and deadly; public lynching was common and consequences for the vigilantes were rare.²³ President Roosevelt, ever the pragmatic politician, was unmoved by ER's pleas and recurrent requests for federal intervention from numerous people and organizations.²⁴

Mrs. Roosevelt wrote a personal letter on White House stationary articulating—but not accepting—FDR’s stance to Walter White, the head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).²⁵ This historical anecdote is one of many illustrating ER’s fervent push for equality of opportunity. Reading the original sources enables students to easily identify the gaps in *Eleanor: Quiet No More*, which they likely presumed would tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Eleanor Roosevelt’s passionate intervention on Anderson’s behalf curiously juxtaposes with her goading of FDR for his seeming indifference to anti-lynching legislation. The former situation had a successful conclusion, was of mild content, and emerged in *Eleanor: Quiet No More*; the latter was ultimately unsuccessful, a ghastly yet consequential subject, and entirely disregarded within Rappaport’s book. Consider the implications for a pre-adolescent with little prior knowledge reading a trade book that detailed the former, but not the latter: segregation was present, Marian Anderson was mistreated, ER enabled performances in front of larger, desegregated, and more prestigious crowds, and everything ended happily. Taken further, it reinforces the (mis)perception of African Americans as entertainers and it celebrates white Americans as idealistic antagonists of segregation. To the young reader, this framework conceals the white mobs’ ubiquitous violence, the government’s complicity, and ER’s fervent and anomalous stance.

To position students’ recognition of ER’s historical significance, educators can integrate haunting primary sources with the book. Primary sources, like ER’s aforementioned letter to Walter White of the NAACP about FDR’s non-intervention, provide new understandings of her desegregation attempts and civil rights initiatives. The headline, photograph, and commentary in *The Greensboro Watchman* (North Carolina) depicts the reactionary outrage when ER invited and *served* African Americans on the White House lawn.²⁶ In meeting Rosa Parks soon after her arrest, ER’s “My Day” column characterizes Parks’ civil disobedience as auspicious.²⁷ Historical documents illustrate the negative, reactionary responses ER received for resisting segregation, which ranged from respectful disagreement like C. B. Alexander’s (of Knoxville, TN) mailed letter contending African Americans were simply an inferior breed of human,²⁸ death threats,²⁹ and every imaginable gradation in between. Teachers can

also add rich texture to ER's advocacy for Marian Anderson, like the DAR's press release maintaining segregation,³⁰ ER's resignation letter to the DAR,³¹ her telegram to a friend promising action,³² newspaper headlines and photographs demonstrating the enormity of the crowd in front of the Lincoln Monument, and Walter White's laudatory letter to ER requesting she present an award to Mrs. Anderson at the NAACP conference.³³ Students will more ably determine the events' and ER's historical significance by scrutinizing the sources, which fill the trade books' gaps that students would not likely know existed until handling the sources.³⁴

Human Rights and Prevention of War

Eleanor Roosevelt worked both to prevent war and to care for those most deeply affected by it. Prior to the America's involvement in World War II, ER pleaded—to her husband and anyone who would listen—for relaxed immigration restrictions for refugees fleeing Nazi Germany. After the war's conclusion, ER implored an international community to give safe haven to refugees fleeing (or refusing to return to) the Soviet Union. She later worked internationally in various roles to avert military conflicts and compel nations to respect citizens' basic human rights.³⁵

Rappaport's *Eleanor: Quiet No More* simplifies and sanitizes ER's participation in the United Nations (UN), international human rights advocacy, and transnational travel to prod world leaders to respect women, children, and the disenfranchised:

President Harry S. Truman appointed her to the United Nations. She headed a committee of people from different countries. Many had different ideas about freedom and religion and human rights. Eleanor listened and talked and argued. After two years, the committee agreed on a declaration of rights for people all over the world: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."³⁶

The world's attempt to prevent another Holocaust and a third world war are nearly lost in the minimized narrative. No details were given that the UN's scope was literally unprecedented, that ER was the only female UN representative, that she was *unanimously* elected as chair, or that deliberation swung frequently between contention and negotiation. ER was at the epicenter of discussions that distinguished for the world where individual human rights begin and state power ends.

Primary sources can provide insights about ER's historical significance that are absent from the secondary text. Rappaport's *Eleanor: Quiet No More*, for instance, mentions but does not define human rights, which is a relatively abstract concept. Students can discern its meaning and origin from ER's speech at the United Nations.³⁷ Similarly, Rappaport's *Eleanor: Quiet No More* denotes ER's passion and persistence, but an excerpt from Joseph Lash's *Eleanor and Franklin*—in which Franklin asks a friend to help him make peace with Eleanor, who “hasn't spoken to me for three days”—can illustrate the degree of ER's intensity and obstinacy.³⁸ ER's various speeches at the United Nations on behalf of the refugees—coupled with any of the tens of thousands of letters she personally received from terrified immigrants migrating from a war-torn land—can elucidate refugees' desperate thirst for freedom and her insistence they have it.

Eleanor Roosevelt's Death and a World's Bereavement

Eleanor Roosevelt—who refused a life of opulence and instead lived to resist the social conventions associated with affluence, gender, and race in a post-Victorian society—left this world wondering if its leaders' pride and military prowess would trigger its demise. In the fall of 1962, ER was diagnosed with a rare bone marrow tuberculosis while still contributing to organizations like President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women, maintaining her “My Day” column, and finishing her twenty-eighth book, *Tomorrow*. While acutely aware of reactionary violence to desegregation efforts in Georgia church bombings and the murders of civil rights workers in Mississippi, ER attended closely to the international politics surrounding what would later be called the Cuban Missile Crisis.³⁹ Internationally, ER was mindful of the deadly repercussions that could easily emerge from the stalemate between an implacable Premier Joseph Stalin and a resolute President Kennedy. Domestically, she abhorred the unrelenting clashes between continuity and change manifest within the civil rights initiatives. On her deathbed, ER received updates from the few friends she allowed to see her in this humbling position. ER died at a most inopportune time as her world and country, figuratively, teetered on the brink of calamity.⁴⁰ Rappaport's *Eleanor: Quiet*

No More does not detail nor contextualize the melancholy finale of ER's life.

Newspaper headlines with complementary dates can position students to discover the timeline intersections of the Cuban Missile Crisis, church bombings, and ER's death. Adlai Stevenson's memorial address can illumine the appreciation so many had for this "glorious and gracious lady" who was "a cherished friend of all mankind."⁴¹ To appreciate her significance among contemporaries, one need only read the list of mourners at her funeral, which included President Kennedy, Mrs. Kennedy, Vice (and future) President Johnson, former Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, countless other American leaders, and numerous international dignitaries. An image of her simple casket, enhanced with pine boughs and a photograph of her unadorned white marble gravestone with only her name and years, permits young learners to grasp her—and her husband's—wish for simplicity. Primary sources can illustrate her Quixotic life as well as her Shakespearian death, which was absent in Rappaport's *Eleanor: Quiet No More*. Evocative primary sources can supplement this engaging yet imperfect trade book; doing so creates a catalyst for inquiry and historical argumentation.

Facilitating Students' Diverse Writing and Historical Argumentation

Curricula is typically organized sequentially from content dissemination through assessment; instruction precedes evaluation before a new topic begins. The traditional configuration, at times, compartmentalizes the learning with focuses on comprehension and completion; similarly, traditional tests do not always elicit students' criticality, creativity, and consideration of nuance.⁴² A modest restructuring can integrate the process and product of learning by intertwining students' history literacy, historical thinking, and argumentation.⁴³ History literacy is the scrutiny of primary sources to establish the source; the source's perspective, credibility, and intent; if it is corroborated; and the context in which it was produced. History literacy is basically examination of diverse, divergent sources.⁴⁴ Historical thinking manages understandings developed from history literacy to determine historical significance, consider ethical implications, juxtapose historical perspectives, and

Close Readings of Primary Sources

1. Primary document. Who is its source? What do we know about this person? What is this person's perspective, bias, or intent? Who is the audience? What do we know about the audience? Be specific.
2. Historical significance. What did you learn from this? Why is it important? Be specific.
3. Connections. How is this document similar to or different from others? Be specific.

Figure 1: *Close Readings of Primary Sources*

understand tensions between tradition and transformation, between cause and consequence. Historical thinking emerges from reflection, dialogue, and reconsideration.⁴⁵ Historical argumentation is the communication of a clear position about, say, historical significance grounded in reference to primary and secondary material. Historical argumentation can appear as writing (evidentiary or narrative), speech (persuasive or debate), or media (website, documentary, etc.).⁴⁶

The subsequent five sections integrate historical literacy, thinking, and argumentation, which merges the process and product of learning. These steps are repeated with the inclusion of new historical content to compel reconsideration and refinement of understandings. All activities were done in a heterogeneous public sixth-grade English/language arts classroom full of diverse learners, some of whom read at the fourth-grade level with specialized educational support plans and others who read beyond the ninth-grade level.

Close Readings of and Text-Based Writing about Primary Sources

Text-based writing prompts guided students to purposefully scrutinize the readings, demonstrate emergent understandings, and pose questions. Students worked for three days in four stations, each of which had ten and fifteen interrelated, distinct, diverse, and divergent primary sources. The interrelated sources all centered on the station's theme, which were based on ER's interests in: soldiers, laborers, and their families; desegregation efforts on Marian

Anderson's behalf; other civil rights initiatives; and the prevention of war and establishment of human rights through the United Nations. Each document was distinct as it held unique, readily obtainable insights. Collectively, the documents were diverse; some were textual, like transcribed speeches or letters, and others were visual, like photographs or political cartoons. To meet the disparate abilities in the heterogeneous class, the sources represented various levels of reading complexity; some, like a newspaper's headline, were succinct and clear, while others, like a politician's speech, were tedious and veiled. The sources represented divergent perspectives; *The Greensboro Watchman's* (North Carolina) outrage that ER held an integrated picnic on the White House lawn⁴⁷ contrasted sharply with ER's "My Day" column celebrating Rosa Parks' civil disobedience.⁴⁸ Students were provided both original and modified versions—truncated for length and abridged for language—along with document-specific reading prompts to direct attention to key elements and provided necessary background. **Appendix A: Modification and Supplementation of Primary Source, An Example**, offers an example of one primary source in its original and amended form with its reading prompts. Students analyzed all documents using a three-question writing prompt that originated in previous scholarship (**Figure 1: Close Readings of Primary Sources**).⁴⁹

Close Readings of Primary Sources is based on history literacy and historical thinking and align with numerous Common Core Reading Informational Texts standards, Common Core History Literacy standards, and C3 Framework's second and third dimensions.⁵⁰ The three-question writing prompt guided students' consideration of each document's source, the source's intent and perspective, contextual factors, corroboration, and if and how it is related to other documents.⁵¹ These are heuristics for history literacy and are touched upon in near every Common Core Reading Informational Texts and History Literacy standard. The queries prompted students to engage in historical thinking, particularly the consideration of disparate perspectives and historical significance.⁵² The seeds for students' recognition of contextual tensions between change and continuity, which is perhaps more gestalt than considering historical significance, were planted here for later cultivation.

Students worked individually and in small groups as they moved to different stations during the three days. Whole-class discussions

Close Reading of a Secondary Source

1. What new things did you learn?
2. What questions do you have?
3. Did the author include:
 - a. Her mother, A. Roosevelt? If so, how?
 - b. Her father, E. Roosevelt? If so, how?
 - c. Her uncle, T. Roosevelt? If so, how?
 - d. Her teacher, M. Souvestre? If so, how?
 - e. Her husband, F. D. Roosevelt? If so, how?
 - f. Her mother-in-law, S. Roosevelt? If so, how?
 - g. Lucy Mercer (Rutherford)? If so, how?
4. Describe how the author included Eleanor Roosevelt's involvement with:
 - a. Workers, their working conditions, their family, their poverty, and living conditions.
 - b. Soldiers and their living conditions after the war.
 - c. Securing a desegregated concert audience for Marian Anderson.
 - d. Civil rights initiatives like anti-lynching and integration efforts.
 - e. Human rights and international peace efforts, like safe havens for refugees, the United Nations, and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Figure 2: *Close Reading of a Secondary Source*

enabled Molly to pose queries, answer questions, and pique curiosities for upcoming stations. Students' understandings emerged and were refined through individual interpretative work and small-group discussions, which the teacher evaluated through text-based writing.

Close Readings of and Text-Based Writing about a Secondary Source

Rappaport's *Eleanor: Quiet No More*, as noted above, was selected for its artwork, prose, and historical misrepresentations, specifically, the minimized or omitted content. More illustrative than informative, *Eleanor: Quiet No More* is a detectably incomplete

tale. Students used prior knowledge—formed from primary source analysis and manifest in text-based writing—to individually scrutinize this secondary source. A writing prompt directed students to note places where the author might have relied on previously analyzed primary sources, identify topics the author ignored, and list new understandings. **Figure 2: *Close Reading of a Secondary Source***, originated from previous research about ER's historical (mis)representations in trade books and was modified for sixth-grade use.⁵³

Students largely assumed a non-fiction trade book would include all relevant information. They were astonished at how often important content was minimized or disregarded. Lively discussions materialized as one student noted his homophonic bewilderment, “It’s not the *whole* story. It’s a story full of *holes*.” Students’ interrogations of the secondary source were supported by both the writing prompt (**Figure 2: *Close Reading of a Secondary Source***) and understandings generated previously from primary source analysis (**Figure 1: *Close Readings of Primary Sources***). As before, students constructed understandings through individual analysis, small-group work, and whole-class discussions. They were excited to discover historical gaps in *Eleanor: Quiet No More* because they felt they knew more than some adults, like the author and publisher. This was a response Molly intended to best evoke students’ interest in historical argumentation, a difficult task.

Historical Argumentation

Students’ understandings of—and recognition of others’ divergent perspectives about—ER’s historical significance originated from primary source interpretation and were complicated during scrutiny of a secondary source, which had noticeably omitted and minimized content. Close readings of primary and secondary sources enabled students to begin to consider history as a mosaic, a collection of stories told by competing storytellers. These intertwined and complementary reading and writing tasks contributed to students’ eagerness to engage in historical argumentation, a discipline-specific form of text-based writing.

In historical argumentation, students convey thoroughly developed ideas through refined prose and syntax, as well as citation of relevant

primary and secondary sources.⁵⁴ They are to evaluate multiple, interrelated sources and consider their divergences and convergences in their answer; the process usually involves peer review and teacher review prior to completion.⁵⁵ Historical argumentation, in which students develop claims using logic and evidence to communicate conclusions, is aligned with the first Common Core writing standard and the C3 Framework's fourth dimension. Students were required to answer:

What is Eleanor Roosevelt's historical significance? Consider her involvement with soldiers, laborers, and their families, civil rights, human rights, and how people responded to her involvement. Use your notes and cite evidence to support your claims.

Molly measured various considerations when developing the question. She considered the scope and focus to be appropriately broad yet direct. The question included specific interests of ER to evoke and prioritize key concepts. She established expectations for an acceptable answer by requiring the use of notes to assist with evidentiary citations. Such stipulations effectively positioned students to engage in historical argumentation.

Students worked for three class periods. Peer review targeted elements of grammar; teacher review assisted students' use of historical evidence. Students' historical argumentation was assessed on many criteria—specifically, the number of historical sources cited, accuracy of historical claims, and appropriate prose, syntax, and proper spelling. Holden's writing (a pseudonym) was selected because of its place at the median of the criteria; it was emblematic of a typical student's work as half the students' writing was more complex and half were not (**Appendix B: *Historical Argumentation***).

In three days with no less than two revisions, Holden's final writing included more than forty sentences in seven paragraphs on two pages. Length is an imperfect measure of substantive writing and does not indicate complexity, clarity, or persuasiveness. Having read one book and up to forty documents, Holden's writing included more than thirty in-text citations with a reference list of twenty-seven documents and one book. Bibliography is an imperfect measure of written complexity and does not reveal appropriate use, clarity, or persuasiveness. Recognizing the limitations of length and bibliography to measure substance and complexity, Molly was pleased with her sixth graders' median length and references. Holden

and his classmates were evaluated by the accuracy of historical claims along with appropriate prose, syntax, and proper spelling. A close examination of Holden's writing yields no conspicuous grammar errors, which is likely the result of teacher and peer review. Holden's argument is logically sequenced and clear assertions were made about ER's historical significance. Holden attempted to persuasively convince the reader about the importance of ER's civic contributions, but at times he simply described them. He certainly could have expanded upon certain points or cited more sources, as half of his classmates did, but his writing—particularly its location at the class's median—is remarkable considering it was completed by an 11-year-old. Students' historical argumentation was an assessment, but not a final destination, as students' historical understandings of ER were enhanced with new content.

Close Readings of and Text-Based Writing about a Documentary

Students viewed the documentary *Biography: Eleanor Roosevelt*, which was selected because it incorporated and offered new details about all the previously mentioned initiatives. It provided historians' claims and even a few quibbles about ER's relationship with particular individuals as it complicated students' understandings. When viewed from the distance of the twenty-first century, many of ER's relationships were both peculiar and impactful, both positively and negatively. The documentary rightly characterized ER as a shy, introverted girl and ascribed blame on ER's parents, Elliot and Anna. Young Eleanor envied but could not model Anna's beauty, charm, and confidence; Anna was discomfited by her daughter's reticence and ordinary appearance. While Eleanor adored her father, Elliot was largely absent but reckless (and inebriated) when present. Both parents died when ER was young. The documentary asserted that ER appreciated but rarely interacted with her famous uncle, President Theodore Roosevelt, and marveled at her teacher's, Marie Souvestre, social conscience and sophistication. It detailed her mother-in-law, Sara Roosevelt, and her influence on and control of ER's marriage, children, ability to parent, and the collective negative implications on ER's sense of self and inadequacy. ER's marriage, FDR's polio and affair with Lucy Mercer (Rutherford), their impact on ER's boldness,

Close Viewing of a Documentary

1. What new things did you learn from the documentary?
2. What questions do you have from the documentary?
3. How did the documentary characterize:
 - a. Her mother, A. Roosevelt?
 - b. Her father, E. Roosevelt?
 - c. Her uncle, T. Roosevelt?
 - d. Her teacher, M. Sovestre?
 - e. Her husband, F. D. Roosevelt?
 - f. Her mother-in-law, S. Roosevelt?
 - g. Lucy Mercer (Rutherford)?
4. How did the author characterize Eleanor Roosevelt's involvement with:
 - a. Workers, their working conditions, their family, and the poverty in which they lived?
 - b. Soldiers and their living conditions after the war?
 - c. Securing a desegregated concert audience for Marian Anderson?
 - d. Civil rights initiatives like anti-lynching and integration efforts?
 - e. Human rights and international peace efforts (safe havens for refugees, the United Nations, and the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*)?

Figure 3: *Close Viewing of a Documentary*

and ER's intense relationships with women evoked students' attention. *Biography: Eleanor Roosevelt* added depth to students' understandings and evoked questions that could not have efficiently originated from the aforementioned primary and secondary sources. A writing prompt guided students' viewing, which is included in the **Figure 3: Close Viewing of a Documentary**.

The documentary, which required three class periods, elicited students' attention and provided countless opportunities for Molly to pause it to answer questions and provide clarification. The viewing prompt intentionally aligned with *Close Reading of a Secondary Source* (**Figure 2**) and originated from previous research about trade books' historical misrepresentations of ER.⁵⁶ To ensure students

added new content on different days, the teacher required them to write in different color pens on each new day. As before, students' written responses to the viewing prompt enabled the teacher to gauge students' understandings. At this point, students' understandings originated from scrutiny of primary sources, a secondary source, their own historical argumentation, a text-based writing in which they communicated understandings developed from examination of the aforementioned sources, and a documentary.

Reconsideration of Understandings through Novel Writing

If primary sources provided insights and contexts for ER's interests and accomplishments only vaguely included in the book, then the documentary *Biography: Eleanor Roosevelt* gave texture to her relationships and experiences. It positioned students to consider ER as mother, daughter, friend, and other distinct relational roles. The teacher, for a culminating activity, encouraged students to reflect on and document their historical travels:

You have read dozens of primary sources, a secondary source, and now seen a documentary, all of which were about Eleanor Roosevelt. You are like a detective because you analyzed them and pieced them together as you evaluated—in writing—each one of them. Now, as historians, I want you to think about how Mrs. Roosevelt should be remembered by students today. I want you to rewrite Doreen Rappaport's *Eleanor: Quiet No More*.

This was a novel task, both literally and figuratively. *Narrative Revision*, in which students refine the narrative of a historically misrepresentative trade book, is a previously suggested but seemingly unexamined form of historical argumentation.⁵⁷ *Eleanor: Quiet No More* was the template for students to revise. Students were to persuasively and comprehensively detail ER's historical significance while citing appropriate sources. Students bolstered historically minimized sections of the original narrative, like ER's involvement on Marian Anderson's behalf, and incorporated (with appropriate reference) the various initiatives that were absent from the novel. Students wrote and revised over a period of three days.

Students critiqued cohorts' grammar during peer review as the teacher targeted use of historical evidence and elements of historical argumentation.⁵⁸ Molly assessed *Narrative Revision* based on the

number of areas enhanced within the (revised) novel, historical sources cited, precise historical claims, and appropriate elements of grammar, like prose, syntax, and spelling. Students could earn extra credit for historically relevant, hand-drawn images that supplemented the narrative. Students relied on an informative or explanatory writing style to examine a topic, which aligned with the third Common Core writing standard and the fourth dimension of the C3 Framework. The third and fourth pages of Anne's (a pseudonym) *Narrative Revision* illustrate a typical student's work because it was assessed at the criteria's median (**Appendix C: Narrative Revision**).

Anne's writing included no less than two revisions, one each for peer and teacher review. Anne's final writing, which was the median in the class, surmounted Holden's writing in every measurable way. She had more than fifty sentences on eight pages, coupled with various complementary hand-drawn images. She included forty-six in-text citations with thirty-five primary sources and one trade book on her reference list. Like with Holden, there were no obvious errors in historical claim accuracy, prose, syntax, and spelling. Anne's writing was similarly logically sequenced with clear assertions about the historical significance of ER. She wrote with far more superlatives about ER than Holden wrote.

Students' *Narrative Revision* relied on understandings developed from scrutiny of primary sources, a secondary source, and a documentary; their understandings were refined through various text-based writing tasks connected to each source and first synthesized and communicated within *Historical Argumentation* (**Appendix B**). In this way, *Narrative Revision* was a written act of judgment of ER's historical significance.

Discussion

Eleanor Roosevelt was a remarkable twentieth-century historical figure. Students need time to fully analyze the diverse, distinct sources necessary to adequately determine and communicate her historical significance. To enable such consideration, though, teachers must do more than simply assign the densest, most detailed trade book; they should elicit students' interest and evoke their attention, which is easier said than done. If confusion is the "antecedent of discovery," then curiosity is its catalyst.⁵⁹ We intended to elicit and maintain

students' curiosity as they were *doing* history.⁶⁰ In the process of reviewing students' work, two important issues emerged. These are pedagogical issues, not conclusions.

First, students considered and *reconsidered* ER using diverse, divergent, and even competing primary sources, which provided details that were largely minimized—if included at all—in the trade book. The historical minutiae and historiographical quibbles within the documentary startled students. During and after each primary and secondary source review, students constructed understandings through discipline-specific, text-based writing, which were then refined when given new sources and new writing tasks. Assigning multiple readings and writing tasks enabled students to consider how new information relates to previously generated understandings in order to revise and develop their understandings. Far from becoming overwhelmed, students were undaunted as they explored ER from a myriad of angles. They engaged in every Common Core ELA reading informational text standard, the Common Core history literacy standard, and the C3 Framework's second and third dimensions.⁶¹ Students communicated newly generated understandings in historical argumentation and *Narrative Revision*. These two text-based writing tasks aligned to multiple Common Core ELA writing standards and the C3 Framework's fourth dimension.⁶² We assert students' *reconsideration* of understandings, as done multiple times here, to be a key and underappreciated pedagogical ingredient. *Reconsideration* is more than simply reflection; reconsideration is the deliberate reexamination of understandings and adjustment of assertions compelled by the integration of new content. We raise the importance of *reconsideration* as an issue for scholarly contemplation, not as a conclusion. Often, curricular guides position students to move sequentially through diverse content, from unfamiliarity to enlightenment, with steps like reading, reflection, and written communication.⁶³ Evidence indicates young students experience more whole-group, centered instruction targeting fact acquisition.⁶⁴ Reconsideration, as we view it, is not simply revision or reflection, but the intentional alternation of argumentation to model newly developed understandings. Pedagogy must scaffold students' recognition and reconsideration of ER's historical significance.

Second, the type of writing assigned may have had an impact on the complexity of students' writing. Students' *Narrative Revision*

writing was notably more complex than historical argumentation, as evidenced by the median *Narrative Revision* being demonstrably longer, with more in-text citations, and a longer reference list than the median historical argumentation. This could be a result of the elements of *Narrative Revision*; its biographical elements encourage students' consideration of ER's entire life, and the complementary, hand-drawn imagery encouraged more complexity. The complexity of *Narrative Revision* could also be explained on its instructional location at the unit's end. Students completed *Narrative Revision* one week after viewing the documentary, which humanized ER in ways not seen in the trade book and primary source material. We raise the importance of *Narrative Revision* as an issue for deliberation, not as a conclusion.

We did not design a quasi-experimental study to determine the statistical significance of *Narrative Revision* as a text-based writing task, use CT scans to determine patterns of students' neural activity as they engaged in reconsideration, or employ the pedagogy with students of various ages and demography. We did, however, reference various curricular sources for others to use and improve; we did report on sixth-grade students' responses to particular instructional tasks as they considered, reconsidered, and communicated the historical significance of the recipient of such titles as the First Lady of the World, America's Conscience, the Conscience of a Generation, and a Mother Hen for all Rescue Agencies.⁶⁵ The importance of this work lies at the nexus of historical content, history literacy, historical thinking, and diverse forms of historical argumentation with middle-level students.

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Appendix A

Modification and Supplementation of Primary Source

Reading Prompt

In 1936, Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) is President and Walter White is the leader of a civil rights organization, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP had tried to get the President to outlaw lynching. Lynching is where a group of (usually white) people kidnap and kill a (usually black) person because they suspect them of committing a crime. Lynching was common in the Southern states. Mr. White tried to get Eleanor Roosevelt (ER) to help persuade FDR to outlaw lynching. This is ER's response to Mr. White.

Modified Primary Source

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

The White House
Washington

March 19, 1936

My Dear Mr. White:

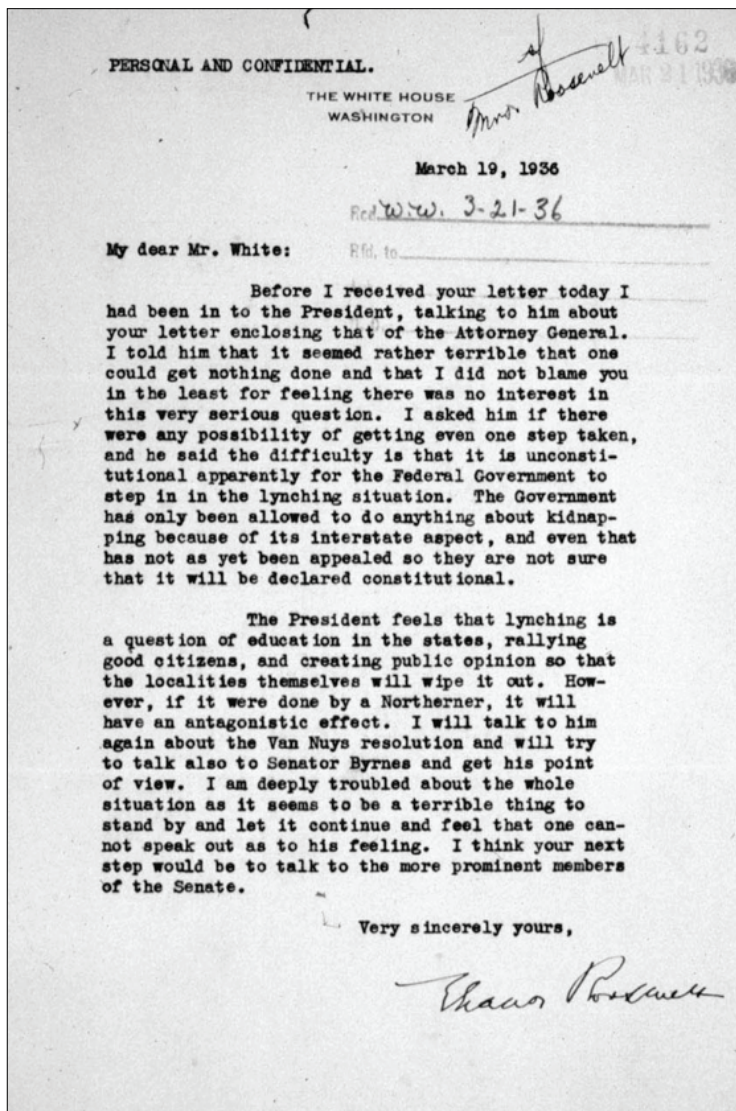
Before I received your letter today I had been in talking to the President. I told him that it was rather terrible that one could get nothing done to stop lynching. I told him that I did not blame you in the least for feeling that he was ignoring your concerns by not outlawing lynching. I asked him if there were any possibility of getting even one step taken, and he said he should not step in the lynching situation. He said it is a decision for the Southern states where the lynching takes place. The President feels that lynching is a question of education, getting good citizens in the South to stop lynching, and wipe it out in their own Southern state.

If this were done by a Northerner like the President, then the South will get angry. I am deeply troubled about the whole situation as it seems to be a terrible thing for the President to stand by and let lynching continue. I think your next step would be to talk to the more prominent members of the Senate.

Very sincerely yours,

Eleanor Roosevelt

Original Source



Citation: Eleanor Roosevelt, "Letter, Eleanor Roosevelt to Walter White Detailing the First Lady's Lobbying Efforts for Federal Action Against Lynchings," 19 March 1936, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Records, Library of Congress, <[https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/mcc:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(mcc/015\)\)](https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/mcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(mcc/015)))>.

Appendix B

Historical Argumentation

Student Writing Sample

Eleanor Roosevelt did a lot of things for this country, and for this world. She was very worried about rights for all humans, and worked to change them. She was also not okay with civil rights in our country. She didn't like how some people were so racist. She also cared about laborers in America who were underpaid and mistreated. She led a very interesting life.

She wanted all people to have the same rights. She didn't understand why people were mistreated around the world. She believed that human rights began in small places like homes, schools, and neighborhoods (H.R. 1). She understood that some people would not support her, but still accepted her invitation to the UN (H.R. 2). Everyone in the UN voted for her to be the chairman because they knew she was capable, even if she thought differently (H.R. 3). Many refugees didn't want to return to their home country, so Eleanor was trying to help them (H.R. 4 & 6).

Eleanor was very involved in trying to get Marian Anderson perform in Washington DC (M.A. 7). When the DAR said she couldn't perform in the Constitution Hall (M.A. 6), Eleanor resigned because she didn't agree with their decision (M.A. 4 & 5). Eleanor really wanted her to perform, so she was able to have her perform in the Lincoln Memorial in front of 75,000 people, both black and white (M.A. 2 & 3). The NAACP was so happy that Marian got to perform that they had Eleanor give him the Spingarn Medal for many accomplishments of hers (M.A. 9 & 1). Eleanor was the first white person to give an NAACP award.

She was not happy with how laborers were treated. She knew that people were suffering and wanted to help them (L. 2). For example, she served food to unemployed women and their children (L. 1). She went down into mines to see the conditions people worked under, even though some people thought it was wrong of her (L. 3, 4, 5, 10). She could've lived a life of luxury, but she decided to spend it helping people (L. 6 & 7). She didn't like how workers were treated across the U.S.A.; she even went on strike with them (L. 8 & 9). She helped to build a town and they were so grateful for her help that they named the town after her (L. 11).

Eleanor also wanted everyone to have civil rights. She tried to help people whenever she saw her heard about something unfair or wrong, but not everyone supported her (C.R. 1). She wanted to try to make lynching illegal, but her husband, the president, did not support her decision (C.R. 2). She wanted to spend time with all types of people, but people did not support her (C.R. 3).

She did not have a very good have a very good childhood. She was born in 1884 and her parents died when she was 10 (Rappaport, 2009). She went to school in England at 15, returned at 18, and started helping people right when she returned (Rappaport, 2009). When she married Franklin, she learned a lot about politics and gave lots of speeches (Rappaport, 2009). She helped soldiers and visited people during the Great Depression (Rappaport, 2009). Even after her husband died, she continued to serve and help people (Rappaport, 2009). She died at the age of 78 in 1962 (Rappaport, 2009).

Eleanor changed our world and country in lots of ways. It was her goal to help people, and that is exactly what she did. She changed people's lives by changing rights, both human and civil, for the better. She also helped laborers and worked to change how they were. People were very thankful for her service for our country.

Note: Holden's writing (a pseudonym) was selected because of its place at the median of the three noted criteria.

Appendix C

Narrative Revision

Eleanor Roosevelt spoke at the United Nations (U.N.) about the universal rights for humans (H.K. 1). She also spoke about how her being a chairperson would be a difficult job for her but she is still willing to do it (H.K. 3). Backing up a little bit Eleanor was nominated for a position at the U.N. she says that she felt like it wasn't really meant for her but she took up on it and became chairman (H.K. 2). On March 6, 1948, Eleanor received a letter from a committee of hand-picked refugees from the Soviet Union not wanting to return and asking for help (U.N. 1). Later Eleanor writes an article wanting people to see the good in the Russians. They're not all bad (H.K. 4).

On December 1, 1938, Eleanor goes and sees unemployed women as well as children (L. 1). Later she makes part of speech and talks of what first interested her to start helping people (L. 2). May 19, 1938 Eleanor rides into a coal mine in order to check the safety conditions of the workers and if they're being paid fairly (L. 4-5). Even though people often criticized her, she still continued to work and help many people (L. 10). January 15, 1948 Eleanor writes a column about what the women in textile mills. She says that the women work eight hours a day with little pay and deserve a hot meal every once and a while (L. 9).

3 - Human Rights

4 - Human Rights

Note: Anne's writing (a pseudonym) was selected because of its assessed location at the median of the four criteria referenced above.