

## Teaching and Learning Competent Historical Documentary Making: Lessons from National History Day Winners

*I WISH I HAD BEEN ABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL HISTORY DAY WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL. WHAT A GREAT WAY TO GET KIDS EXCITED ABOUT HISTORY, RESEARCH AND THE MECHANICS OF COMPOSING A STORY. STUDENTS TODAY ARE SO SOPHISTICATED ABOUT THEIR WORK. I MIGHT JUST HAVE TO SNAG A FEW OF THESE YOUNG DOCUMENTARY EXPERTS FOR MY NEXT PRODUCTION!*

- Ken Burns<sup>1</sup>

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DOCUMENTARY MAKING has surged as a popular category among students participating in National History Day (NHD), the history-making contest for secondary school students.<sup>2</sup> The surge coincided with rapidly expanding availability of documentary making software and online archives. Not coincidentally, history teachers and students throughout the United States have employed documentary making as a means of historical representation. Today's students, suggested American documentary maker Ken Burns on the NHD website, grow up in a technological milieu of hand-held computers with high storage capacities, Internet access, and the ability to shoot high definition photographs and video.<sup>3</sup> As such, they are empowered to construct representations of the past virtually "on the run." Should history teachers ask their students to make historical documentaries using computer software? If so, then why? What should teachers know, and students learn, to produce competent historical documentaries?

To answer these questions, we investigated the historical *and* documentary making practices National History Day contestants used to produce prize-winning entries. Research on historical thinking attained momentum long before technological developments made documentary making a practical possibility in history classrooms. For decades, researchers focused on written narratives, exposed historical practices

of professional historians, and offered suggestions for how elementary and secondary school teachers could help students participate, if only partially, in the “discourse community” of academic historians. Although researchers have expressed concern with how teachers employed primary sources, those investigating historical thinking agreed that it “opens up the knowledge doors of historical meaning-making and practice.”<sup>4</sup> Drawing upon insights from previous theory and research on historical thinking, we sought to identify historical practices of documentary makers—a project still in its early stages.<sup>5</sup>

From analyses of NHD contest winners, we found that documentary makers practiced skills of analysis, interpretation, source evaluation, and synthesis. These practices paralleled those enacted by historians and student-historians who produced source-based written accounts. However, documentary makers practiced historical synthesis through a medium—computer software—with history making capacities unique to desktop documentary making. From studying NHD productions, together with scholarship on documentary making,<sup>6</sup> we identified history production practices teachers can teach, and students can learn, to produce competent documentaries of less than ten minutes duration.

This article’s organization is as follows. First, after providing background on National History Day, we argue for documentary making’s integration into history classrooms. Documentary making, we assert, represents a valuable medium through which students practice and learn historical thinking skills. Secondly, we identify documentary making practices, or conventions, NHD winners exercised to produce *competent*, prize-winning documentaries. We defined “competent” documentaries as those to which NHD judges assigned high scores based on criteria in the scoring rubric (see Figure 1). Those skills included analysis, interpretation, and use of evidence to synthesize well-crafted narratives. Lastly, in the article’s conclusion, we discuss how teachers can foster competent documentary making practices in secondary school classrooms. This includes discussion of how documentary making works powerfully in tandem with written accounts of the past to deepen students’ understanding of the ways historians, whether in print or through film, employ varieties of evidence to construct the past.

### **National History Day Winners: Research Papers, Documentaries, and Historical Practices**

#### National History Day and Contest Rubrics

Inaugurated thirty years ago to encourage production of primary source-based research, the NHD contest has five categories. Contestants

can choose to produce original papers, exhibits, websites, performances, or documentaries. For each category, contestants create primary source-based productions on an annual theme such as “Triumph and Tragedy” (2007) or “Conflict and Compromise” (2008). Within these broad themes, NHD competitors produced historical accounts on a wide variety of topics. For the 2008 theme “Conflict and Compromise,” for example, contestants participating in the documentary category produced short histories on such topics as *The Brink of Armageddon: Conflict and Compromise in the Cold War* and *Simon Bolivar: El Libertador*. Contest rules require documentaries be no longer than ten minutes.<sup>7</sup>

National History Day rubrics, for every category, required contestants (if they expected to win) to produce histories reflecting familiar historical practices. Judges’ rubrics (see Figure 1) applied to source-based history papers and documentaries spurred compositions in both categories containing strong thesis statements. In both categories, winning contestants shaped coherent narratives and used historical evidence. Both writers and documentary makers, to meet the rubrics’ demands, had to convince judges their productions were “historically accurate,” show “analysis and interpretation,” place the topic in “historical context,” and demonstrate “wide research.”

Although NHD documentary producers and paper writers shaped evidence and narrative through different media, highly judged submissions in each category reflected historical practices advocated in various standards documents including, for example, the National Standards for History.<sup>8</sup> In the next section, we review thinking skills required to produce competent historical compositions, whether written or composed through documentary making software.

### Historical Practices Common to Historical Writing and Desktop Documentary Making

The importance of cultivating historical thinking skills, such as analyzing and interpreting primary sources, has attained wide currency. State and national standards for history, including the National Standards for History and National Council for the Social Studies standards, emphasized infusion of source-based instruction into history curricula.<sup>9</sup> To produce winning entries, NHD rubrics virtually required contestants who wrote history manuscripts to enter online archives in search of written sources while shaping “organized” narratives. To best tell their stories, writers rejected or retained evidence in a practice historian Cecilia O’Leary termed “recursive iteration”—the repeated re-visiting of archives and evidence while composing accounts of the past that “separates good historians from not very good historians.” Recursive iteration to produce

JUDGING CRITERIA (Judging criteria are explained in the Rule Book)	EVALUATION			
	SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
<b>Historical Quality (60%)</b>				
• Entry is historically accurate				
• Shows analysis and interpretation				
• Places topic in historical context				
• Shows wide research				
• Uses available primary sources				
• Research is balanced				
<b>Relation to Theme (20%)</b>				
• Clearly relates topic to theme				
• Demonstrates significance of topic in history and draws conclusions				
<b>Clarity of Presentation (20%)</b>				
• Paper is original, clear, appropriate, organized and well-presented				
• Text is clear, grammatical and spelling is correct; entry is neatly prepared				
<b>Rules Compliance</b>	Yes	No		
• Maintains length requirement (1500-2500 words)				
• Includes annotated bibliography				
• Other				

JUDGING CRITERIA (Judging criteria are explained in the Rule Book)	EVALUATION			
	SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
<b>Historical Quality (60%)</b>				
• Entry is historically accurate				
• Shows analysis and interpretation				
• Places topic in historical context				
• Shows wide research				
• Uses available primary sources				
• Research is balanced				
<b>Relation to Theme (20%)</b>				
• Clearly relates topic to theme				
• Demonstrates significance of topic in history and draws conclusions				
<b>Clarity of Presentation (20%)</b>				
• Presentation, written material is original, clear, appropriate, organized and articulate				
• Entry is organized, visual impact is appropriate to topic				
<b>Rules Compliance</b>	Yes	No		
• Maintains time requirement (10 minutes)				
• Includes annotated bibliography				
• All equipment student-run				
• Other				

**Figure 1:** National History Day rubrics for Research Paper (left) and Documentary (right).

competent history occurred whether students wrote the past or produced audio-visual representations of it.<sup>10</sup>

Like their NHD counterparts who wrote papers, NHD documentary contestants engaged in what historian David Hackett Fischer termed “adductive reasoning.” “Historical thought,” Fischer argued in *Historian’s Fallacies*, “is a process of *adductive* reasoning in the simple sense of adducing answers to specific questions, so that a satisfactory ‘fit’ is obtained.” Fischer continued:

A historian is someone (anyone) who asks an open-ended question about past events and answers it with selected facts which are arranged in the form of an explanatory paradigm. These questions and answers are fitted together by a complex process of mutual adjustment.<sup>11</sup>

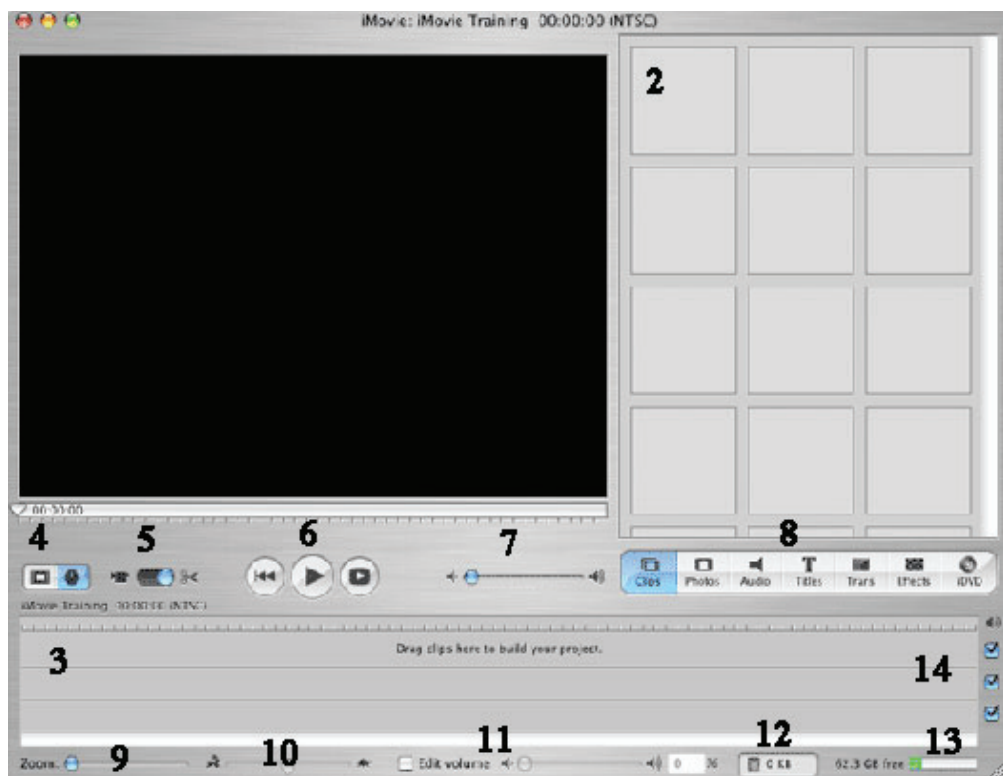
Building on Fischer's formulations, history educator Martin Booth (1993) described historical meaning making as "a process by which meaning, or potential meaning, is abstracted from a discrete source of evidence and drawn to a common center."<sup>12</sup>

While NHD research paper writers and documentary producers both practiced abstraction of meaning and fitting together of questions and answers, there were differences with respect to *how* they "fitted together" "discrete" pieces of historical evidence. Fashioning competent source-based written histories required knowledge of conventions such as expressing a strong thesis statement, issuing caveats when there were uncertainties, and citing evidence to convince readers that assertions were warranted. Documentary makers, too, expressed theses, and mobilized and synthesized evidence. They did so, however, through documentary making software containing operations for manipulating and maneuvering audio-visual material.

### Documentary Making Software and Its History Making Operations

Whereas historians use word processors (the ultimate "cut-and-paste" machines), documentary makers employ programs, such as *Photo Story 3* and *iMovie*. The software is the place wherein historical meaning making takes place. It contains tools (operations) NHD documentary producers used to shape their productions. *Photo Story 3* is a free download from Microsoft that is compatible with Windows operating systems.<sup>13</sup> Apple *iMovie* comes pre-installed on Mac computers. The primary difference between the two is that *iMovie* allows download of video clips while *Photo Story 3* does not offer this capability.

Figure 2 shows a screenshot of the *iMovie* software interface. NHD contestants using *iMovie* software downloaded images from the Internet and placed them in the square placeholders shown at "2" in Figure 2. The documentary maker pulled images or movie clips from the squares in "2" to the "storyboard" at "3." Program toggling buttons were located at "4" and "5," while playback was controlled at "6." Using the volume slide at "7," producers increased or reduced audio volume. The control panel, "8," allowed the producer to add such features as images, audio, special effects, or words. With the zoom slider at "9," a contestant "zoomed" in or out of an image, while the speed slider at "10" controlled the duration particular images appeared on the screen.



**Figure 2:** *iMovie* Software Operations. Image from <<http://www.teachme2tech.com/imovie/day1.html>>.

NHD documentary makers continually enacted these history-making operations while shaping narrations. To attain narrative continuity, they deployed documentary conventions including “voice-of-god narration” and “image animation.” In the section below, we discuss documentary conventions. Subsequently, we identify how contestants used those conventions to produce competent historical documentaries.

### **Documentary Making Conventions and Competent History Production: Analysis of National History Day Winning Entries**

#### Conventions of Expository Documentary Making

From analyses of National History Day winning entries, as well as scholarship on documentaries, we identified history-making conventions

employed to make prize-winning entries. Every NHD winner enacted these conventions, in varieties of ways, to produce “expository” documentaries, “the mode that most people identify with documentary [production] in general.” Expository productions, according to documentary scholar Bill Nichols, convey information or present arguments. They construct meaning, above all, through voiceover, and with images and video clips augmenting spoken narratives.<sup>14</sup>

The best-known American practitioner of expository documentary making is Ken Burns. He is famous for his documentary histories of jazz, baseball, and, especially the Civil War. In an interview with historian David Thelen, Burns identified prominent conventions of expository documentary making:

A literate script ... combined with first-person testimony, combined with authentic music, combined with authentic sound track effects, combined with the comments of scholars and those whose familiarity with the subject is unquestioned, can ... make the past come alive.<sup>15</sup>

In *The Civil War*, the most-watched and influential documentary in American history, Burns hired popular historian David McCullough to read the script, thereby supplying “voice-of-god” narration. Burns also wove into his production authentic-sounding music, above all *Ashoken Farewell*. Historians Barbara Fields and Shelby Foote, among others, provided expert testimony. Burns also employed liberally his signature movie making technique, now a documentary convention: camera motion applied to photographs. The technique is now widely known as the “Ken Burns Effect.”<sup>16</sup>

NHD winners employed the Ken Burns Effect, as well as other conventions Burns identified. Most prominent among these were scripts, authentic sound tracks, and experts’ testimonies. Prize-winners also used “voice-of-god” narration—the signature convention of expository documentary making. Below, we provide brief descriptions of these conventions: 1) continuity editing; 2) “voice-of-god” narration; 3) image selection, sequencing, and animation; 4) sound track; 5) expert testimony; and 6) source citation. Following the descriptions of conventions, we provide analyses of how contest winners used them to produce documentaries NHD judges recognized as prize-winners based on application of the documentary rubric (see right side of Figure 1).

### *Continuity Editing*

Continuity editing is an overarching historical practice embracing other expository conventions described below. Using computer software operations, NHD producers fashioned seamless coherent storylines linking together,

especially, voiceovers and images. With convincing storylines providing narrative glue, producers “brought forward” images, music, and sound effects as needed “in support of the film’s point of view or perspective.”<sup>17</sup>

### *Voice-of-God (or Voice-of-Authority) Narration*

Nichols explained how “voice-of-god” narration attained such overriding power among documentary making conventions:

The voice-over commentary seems literally “above” the fray; it has the capacity to judge actions in the historical world without being caught up in them. The professional commentator’s official tone, like the authoritative manner of news anchors and reporters, strives to build a sense of omniscience.<sup>18</sup>

Voice-of-god narration, according to Nichols, places in subservient position a documentary’s images, sound, and other elements. Indeed, for NHD contest winners, voice-of-god narration was the central device for creating narrative continuity. In *The Civil War*, as aforementioned, historian David McCullough read the script connecting “voices” and images of, for example, different soldiers from different battlefields. In Burns’ hands, as well as those of NHD winners, the voice-of-god remained “off screen.” As was the case with David McCullough, NHD winners’ voices supplied narrative continuity. In addition, voiceovers augmented a documentary’s authenticity as seemingly the only account of an event that could possibly be told.

### *Image Selection, Sequencing, and Animation*

Working in tandem with voiceovers, historical images—especially photographs—buttressed NHD documentaries’ historical authenticity. While writing scripts for voiceovers, NHD producers continually selected, studied, and sequenced images collected from online archives. They decided which image worked best in conjunction with parts of their scripts, other images, and music to support the documentaries’ perspectives. In the process of gathering images, documentary makers adjusted scripts in light of an image’s impact upon the storyline or its value as supportive evidence. As they selected and sequenced images, moreover, contestants employed the Ken Burns Effect. They focused and zoomed on images (in other words, they animated them) to illustrate, document, or propel narratives.

### *Sound Track*

Each NHD winner employed music and, occasionally, sound effects. They selected music for purposes akin to their professional counterparts:



to evoke or intensify emotion or establish a sense of time and place. Ken Burns, as noted earlier, integrated into *The Civil War* sound track the “bittersweet and tragic lament” of *Ashoken Farewell*. The music heightened the audience’s emotional attachment with, for example, a doomed soldier writing a love letter to his wife.<sup>19</sup> NHD winners, too, combined music with images to elicit from viewers sadness, happiness, or other emotions. They also employed music to infuse historical authenticity. For example, one contestant integrated 1960s anti-war music to authenticate the pervasiveness of mass protests against the Vietnam War.

### *Expert and Participant Testimony*

To strengthen historical credibility, NHD winners wove expert testimony into their productions. They relied especially upon academic historians, who spoke with confidence and authority. The experts sometimes “looked the part.” With appearance, tone of voice, and setting (e.g., a scholar surrounded by books or artifacts), a historian helped convince viewers of the documentary’s truthfulness. Some NHD winners integrated testimony of witnesses to, or participants in, historical events. Although eyewitnesses or participants usually have, in fact, quite narrow visions of what happened, for example, in a civil rights struggle, their testimony infused significant historical credibility into the documentaries.<sup>20</sup>

### *Source Citation*

Source citation for ideas and evidence is a central feature of analytical history—the approach to the past prevailing among academic historians. Primary and secondary source citation, of course, appears in footnotes, endnotes, or bibliographies. The NHD rubrics in Figure 1, under “Rules Compliance,” required paper writers and documentary producers to supply annotated bibliographies. At the conclusion of documentaries, NHD winners provided what moviegoers recognize as “credits:” lists acknowledging those whom they interviewed or those assisting with their production efforts.

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The article’s next section provides analyses of two national winning entries to show how these contestants used software to enact conventions in the composition process. Expert testimonies, image alignments, voices-of-authority, sound, and special effects, were the tools with which NHD winners constructed their documentaries. Each winner also offered acknowledgements as at least a gesture to the rubric’s requirement for an annotated bibliography.

### **Case Studies: NHD Winners' Employment of Documentary Conventions**

We lead off each case study with the documentary's title and year entered; award received; NHD theme for that year; the number of times each documentary has been opened for viewing; and the YouTube web address where readers can view the documentaries. Next, we summarized the documentary's content. Lastly, we identified and described documentary making practices producers employed: continuity editing; voice-of-god narration; image selection, sequencing, and animation; sound track; expert or eyewitness testimony; and source citation. These are historical practices or documentary making conventions teachers should teach, and students should enact, to produce competent, source-based historical documentaries.

#### **Case Study 1: *The Great Seattle Fire: Phoenix of the Northwest* (2007)**

First-Place National Winner, Junior Division (Grades 6-8)

NHD Theme: Triumph and Tragedy

Views: 23,198 as of November 15, 2011

Web Address: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZTgdRLJWoo>

*The Great Seattle Fire* producers focused upon a little-known local story: Seattle's destruction in 1889 by a massive fire. The documentary makers charted the fire's outbreak, Seattle's decimation, and the city's reconstruction in the fire's aftermath.

#### *Continuity Editing*

For uncritical viewers, *The Great Seattle Fire* told an unquestionably accurate account of a significant episode in Seattle's history. Through continuity editing, the producers seamlessly interpreted the event through a familiar narrative framework: Americans re-building from catastrophe to create a better situation than before. Use of four "chapter headings" ("The Fire Ignites," "The Inferno Spreads," "The Aftermath," and "Relief and Reconstruction") strengthened the sense of continuity and seamlessness.

#### *Voice-of-God Narration*

The producers' script supplied voice-of-god narration or storyline, conveying chronology and explaining images of Seattle before, during, and after the fire. Adhering to the 2007 NHD theme, "Triumph and Tragedy," the producers narrated a theme of a city enveloped by fire through the

city's virtually complete reconstruction and transformation in just two years from June 6, 1889 to ca. 1891-1892.

### *Image Selection, Sequencing, and Animation*

*The Great Seattle Fire's* producers selected and employed sixty-one black and white photographs from the time and place: Seattle in the late nineteenth-century. They coordinated the photos with the voice-of-authority to have images illustrate assertions made in the voiceover. The documentary makers used software to animate photographs by panning across them, focusing on a part of them, or fading from them. Producers also added special effects to photos and other images (including a city map and newspaper headlines) to further illustrate and buttress claims made in the voiceover. The documentary makers also integrated their own graphic representations into the production to show, for example, specific methods and costs associated with re-building. The producers concluded their documentary with a juxtaposition of images: a black-and-white photo of 1889 fire-scarred Seattle followed by a colored photograph of the city's contemporary skyline. The message: Seattle recovered and, like Phoenix rising from the ashes (a metaphor used by the authors), took off into a modern, prosperous city.

### *Sound Track*

The producers introduced the story with somber background music. They transitioned to banjo music while talking heads (see below) introduced Seattle as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, rough frontier logging town. Next, they integrated music cueing a frenetic effort to control the fire. Subsequent music clips conveyed tragedy, hope, and, finally, triumph. To further establish a sense of authenticity, producers infused into sound of fire burning and, at one point, crickets chirping to convey nightfall.

### *Expert Testimony*

Media expert Nina Gilden Seavy has observed that selection of a particular historian to appear "on camera" was a matter of meticulous "casting." As an example, she pointed to Ken Burns' casting of historian Shelby Foote to enhance the authenticity of *The Civil War*. Seavy pointed out that there were many more "eminent historians" of the Civil War than Foote, "[b]ut his lyrical southern drawl, his scruffy comportment, and his verbal facility with the intricate details of Civil War life made him irresistible as an on-camera commentator."<sup>21</sup>

When it came to their casting of local historian Paul Dorpat, *The Great Seattle Fire's* producers seemed to take a page directly from Burns' playbook. While listening to Dorpat's comments, viewers see a bearded

man with historical artifacts surrounding him. The producers used words on screen to announce Dorpat's expertise as a "local historian and author of many books on Seattle history." Appearing three times in a ten-minute documentary, Dorpat's descriptions of late nineteenth-century Seattle heightened the documentary's authenticity as a truthful telling of the Seattle Fire's history.

### *Source Citation*

The documentary makers ended with citations for sources overlaid with the music, "We Didn't Start the Fire." They credited the Seattle "Museum of History and Industry" and the "University of Washington Photo Collection" as sources of photos and written documents. They identified secondary sources for the Seattle map and the HistoryLink website for photos and accounts of the fire. They also credited sources of music and a person who was "inspiration" for the project.

### **Case Study 2:**

#### ***Courage of Convictions: The Conflicts of the Black 14 (2008)***

First-Place National Winner, Junior Division (Grades 6-8)

NHD Theme: Conflict and Compromise

Views: 9,662 as of November 15, 2011

Web Address: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bljO4ovARZQ>

Like the authors of *The Great Seattle Fire*, the *Courage of Convictions*' author employed each convention to tell the history of a local event. The latter focused on the controversy that swirled around fourteen African American football players who protested against racist Mormon religious practices. The controversy began when the University of Wyoming's black players refused to play against Brigham Young University's team because Mormons did not admit African Americans into the church's priesthood. Whereas producers of *The Great Seattle Fire* competently constructed the Fire's history in a single unified voice, *Courage of Convictions*' author integrated into his production voices reflecting different perspectives or opinions on the controversy. The perspectives were those of black players; the white head football coach and his supporters; white players; university administrators; and, in a more fleeting way, the "voices" of white supremacists.

### *Continuity Editing*

The producer examined the historical context and development of the fourteen University of Wyoming (U of W) African American football

players' protest against the Mormon Church's racial discrimination by their refusal to play against Brigham Young University. The producer composed a coherent representation of the sources of black protest and of U of W authorities' refusal to countenance the football players' and their supporters' protest activities. Woven into the representation was how this particular protest fit into the larger (national) black civil rights movement of the 1960s.

### *Voice-of-God Narration*

The documentary began by placing the football players' protest into a larger historical context and then proceeded to cover the specific story. The narration guided viewers through images showing the origins of the players' protest: the nineteenth-century roots of Mormon racial discrimination; the civil rights movement as a context for U of W's black football players' protests; black players' protest and mobilization of support for their protest activities; white support of the coach's decision to dismiss black players from the team; the Mormon Church's decision to change its policy toward blacks entering the Mormon ministry; and the complicated issues involving freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and racial discrimination. The producer concluded the documentary by posing questions to the viewing audience.

### *Sound Track*

The producer used a myriad of audio clips to fit the particular development he was "covering." For instance, the documentary began with an introduction of the fourteen college football players while marching band music played in the background. During coverage of Mormon Church history, the producer overlaid the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing softly in the background. The producer also included music from the time period, such as The Doors' "Break on Through," to provide historical context for the black players' actions within the more generalized culture of protest of the 1960s.

### *Participant Testimony*

Unlike *The Great Seattle Fire's* producers, who adeptly employed local historians' expertise, the *Courage of Convictions'* author wove into his production video clips of participant testimony from one black and one white former football player for U of W. The black player was one Mel Hamilton. As a participant in and witness to the Black 14's protest, Hamilton offered his perspective that the U of W coach unfairly dismissed black players from the team without a hearing. Hamilton viewed the coach's action as paternalistic and condescending.

### *Image Selection and Sequencing*

Besides effectively employing participant testimony, the producer competently selected and sequenced images to place a local civil rights contest within the national civil rights struggle. Moreover, historical images were used as evidence to lend credibility to the narrator's comments. For instance, the narrator discussed the racial tension in the U.S. at the time by integrating the iconic image of the black Olympians displaying the black power hand signal during medal ceremonies of the 1968 Olympics. Images of newspaper clippings were used throughout the documentary to suggest the growing prominence the story attained throughout the nation.

### *Source Citation*

The producer briefly acknowledged those whom he interviewed or helped in the documentary's production.

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By viewing *The Great Seattle Fire, Courage of Convictions*, or other amateur or professional "shorts" on YouTube, students gain familiarity with documentary conventions. In possession of terms such as "continuity editing," "voiceover," and "expert testimony," teachers put these ideas into classroom circulation. The concepts begin to work as analytical tools within the classroom's discourse community. Just as common terms such as "thesis statement" and "topic sentence" support students' reading and writing, concepts such as "image animation" and "sound track" support critical viewing and production of competent expository documentaries. Teachers should distribute documentary conventions to students, such as those found in the rubric in Appendix A, and use them in the course of viewing and producing expository documentaries.

While our research into NHD productions yielded few examples of non-expository documentary (and none of these fared well in the competitions), it should be noted that teachers and students have experimented with modes of historical documentary construction other than the expository. Some documentary scholars, moreover, have deep suspicions of expository productions. For example, Michael Rabiger, in his exhaustive guide to documentary production, regarded the *The Civil War* and other famous expository documentaries as "echoing the textbook emphasis on facts rather than questions and issues."<sup>22</sup> Nichols identified and described, in addition to the expository, five other documentary modes that openly interrogate evidence or express opinions on controversial issues. The modes include the "poetic," "observational," "participatory," "reflexive," and "performative." Rather than employing off screen voice-

of-god narration, documentary makers operating within non-expository modes may put only music on the sound track to evoke emotion or open interpretation to viewers. Participatory documentaries, for example, may express subjectivity through the filmmakers “on-screen” appearances. With expository documentary making as a baseline, we encourage teachers to also have students “experiment” with poetic, participatory, or reflective modes to produce unique, often insightful, representations of past events or developments.<sup>23</sup>

### **Conclusion and Implications**

In his 1993 article on “communities of inquiry,” Peter Seixas argued that secondary school history teachers should implement pedagogical practices positioning students to understand the knowledge generating practices of professional historians.<sup>24</sup> Based upon our research into the history making practices of NHD prize-winners, we recognized that desktop documentary making provides students and teachers with powerful tools for understanding history as a construction involving warranted use of evidence whether visual or written.

Whether writing source-based essays or creating audio-visual productions, teachers and students practice interpretation and synthesis of evidence into coherent versions of the past. As such, both the medium of writing and the medium of audio-visual representation contribute to teachers helping students attain historical thinking and content goals of various standards documents.

We also believe that desktop documentary making affords teachers and students certain efficiencies to deepen understanding of history as construction and interpretation based upon evidence. Student-produced written essays are usually for teachers’ eyes only. Some good teachers, of course, make copies of a student’s essays for classmates to read and critique. This procedure, while valuable, takes a lot of time and resources. By contrast, desktop documentaries are almost always less than ten minutes long and usually less than five minutes duration. Furthermore, teachers can project documentaries onto a screen for common viewing.

After a five- to ten-minute shared viewing experience, teachers and students can point toward arguments either explicitly stated or implicitly embedded within a desktop documentary. Teachers can distribute rubrics, such as the one used by NHD judges, to evaluate class members’ productions or one of the hundreds of student-produced historical documentaries appearing on YouTube. Additionally, teachers may distribute the rubric we provide in the Appendix as a means to analyze the historical practices of each documentary. In the course of shared viewing, teachers and students

can raise serious philosophical questions about the nature of historical evidence, historical knowledge, and the construction of history.

Our research into the history making practices of National History Day prize-winners joined a small but growing research effort to understand how new technologies can work powerfully to engage the cognitive and affective skills of teachers and students. Some of this early research has documented the excitement students experience as they produce documentaries.<sup>25</sup> Future research, we suspect, will refine understanding of the commonalities and differences of historical and cognitive practices enacted by history writers and documentary makers. In the meantime, history teachers may be confident that desktop documentary making excites their students' interest in the past while having them experience knowledge generating practices of historians.

## Notes

1. National History Day website at <<http://www.nationalhistoryday.org/>>.
2. Scott Scheuerell, "Developing Digital Historical Natives," *The History Teacher* 40, no. 3 (May 2007): <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/40.3/scheuerell.html>>.
3. National History Day, <<http://www.nationalhistoryday.org>>.
4. Among many important contributions to research on historical thinking are Sam Wineburg, "Reading Historical Texts: Notes on the Breach Between School and Academy," *American Educational Research Journal* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 495-519; Bruce A. VanSledright, *In Search of America's Past: Learning to Read History in Elementary School* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002); Linda S. Levstik and Keith C. Barton, *Researching History Education: Theory, Method, and Context* (New York: Routledge, 2008). On "discourse community" and history teaching and learning, see Linda S. Levstik and Christine S. Pappas, "New Directions for Studying Historical Understanding," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1992): 374-381; Peter Seixas, "The Community of Inquiry as a Basis for Knowledge and Learning: The Case of History," *American Education Research Journal* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 305-324. The quote is from Stephane Leveque, *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 172. For research showing that many teachers employ primary documents in a less than robust fashion, see John K. Lee, Peter E. Doolittle, and David Hicks, "Social Studies and History Teachers' Uses of Non-Digital and Digital Historical Sources," *Social Studies Research and Practice* 1, no. 3 (Winter 2006): 291-311; Wilson Warren, "Closing the Distance Between Authentic History Pedagogy and Everyday School Practice," *The History Teacher* 40, no. 2 (February 2007): 249-255.
5. Pathbreaking research on desktop or "digital" documentary making has been published by Mark Hofer and Kathleen Owings Swan. See Mark Hofer and Kathleen Owings Swan, "Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge in Action: A Case Study



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18. Ibid., 107.

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20. Seavy, 123.

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## Appendix: Rubric for Analysis or Production of Desktop Documentaries

**Title of Documentary:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Convention</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Continuity Editing	Documentary producers employ software to construct smooth transitions from scene to scene to provide narrative seamlessness, rhetorical logic, or coherent argument.	
Voice-of-God Narration; (also called Voice-of-Authority Commentary)	Documentary makers employ voice-of -god narrative overlay throughout the production, which contributes to seamlessness by providing an “objective” standpoint and authenticity.	
Image Selection, Sequencing, and Animation (Special Effects)	Documentary makers choose images and sequence them in coherence with voice-of-god narration. Photos from the event and time establish historical authenticity. He or she animates images through, e.g., focus or fade, to support an argument or storyline projected through voice-of-authority narrative.	
Sound Track (Music and Sound Effects)	Documentary makers employ music or sound effects to infuse argument, storyline, or scenes with senses of time, place, or emotion.	
Expert, Eyewitness, and/or Participant Testimony	Historians’ talking heads or eyewitness testimony infuses a storyline with a sense of objectivity and authenticity.	
Pacing or Scene Duration	As part of the continuity editing process, scenes of long duration, within a single frame, focuses a viewer’s attention or provides explanations through, e.g., expert or eyewitness testimony. A series of short duration images or frames supply “loads” of visual evidence to support an argument, claim, or storyline.	
Source Citation (References)	Bibliographic references credit sources and convey that the documentary has been based on primary and secondary research.	



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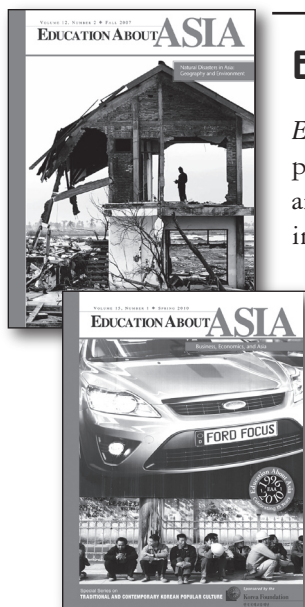
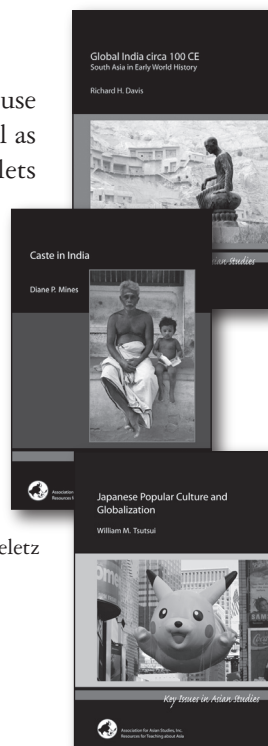
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