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John H. Bickford III
Eastern Illinois University

Dylan Dilley
Eastern Illinois University

Valerie Metz
Eastern Illinois University

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Historical Writing, Speaking, and Listening using Informational Texts in Elementary Curricula

John H. Bickford III
Dylan Dilley
Valerie Metz
Eastern Illinois University

Using History-Based Trade Books as Catalysts for Historical Writing, Speaking, and Listening in Elementary Curricula

State and national initiatives have aligned to compel change in elementary classroom curricula and instructional practice (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2012; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010; Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers [PARCC], 2012). An increased focus on informational texts and content area literacy are two significant changes intended to both facilitate and integrate historical thinking and historical content. For a subject that has struggled to maintain relevancy in elementary curricula, the social studies has a new, stronger position (Center on Education Policy, 2008; Fallace, Biscoe, & Perry, 2007; Holloway & Chiodo, 2009; National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2010, 2013; Wilton & Bickford, 2012). Scholarship on both the cognition behind, and practical applications of, historical thinking directs teachers of adolescent students and elementary children (Bickford, 2013b; Nokes, 2011; Wineburg, 2001) yet historical thinking cannot emerge without solid curricular resources.

Elementary teachers have a variety of options when selecting curricular resources for social studies and history content, each with positive and negative attributes. Textbooks are ubiquitous in schools and intend to be comprehensive in coverage yet there is a growing awareness of the frequency of historical misrepresentations within them (Chick, 2006; Clark, Allard, & Mahoney, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2009; King, Davis, & Brown, 2012; Lindquist, 2009; Loewen, 1995). Document-based materials, like those collected, organized, and provided by *Jackdaw Publications*, are helpful in sparking historical thinking yet most are intended for secondary students (Loewen, 2010; Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2011). Elementary teachers interested in age-appropriate materials usually rely on children's trade books, in lieu of formal secondary sources, and condensed, digestible primary sources (Schwebel, 2011).

Scholarship encourages elementary teachers to use trade books as a unit's centerpiece (Field & Singer, 2006; Henning, Snow-Gerono, Reed, & Warner, 2006) yet be aware of the literature's historical misrepresentations (Bickford, 2013a; Schwebel, 2011; Williams, 2009). Primary sources should also be integrated yet modified length and readability (Wineburg & Martin, 2009). While the aforementioned understandings are relevant for elementary teachers,



they remain largely disconnected. In other words, there is a dearth of scholarship that both examines the historical representations within children's literature and provides adapted primary source material centering on a *singular* aspect of history. Research has empirically scrutinized trade books while providing ancillary primary source materials on Christopher Columbus, slavery in America, Native Americans, Rosa Parks, Helen Keller, and Eleanor Roosevelt, but little else (Bickford, 2013a, 2013b; Bickford & Hunt, 2014; Bickford & Rich, 2014a, 2014b).

Similar research is needed more now than ever considering the rigorous literacy expectations of state and national initiatives (CCSSO, 2012; NCSS, 2013; NGA & CCSSO, 2010; PARCC, 2012). Beginning in lower elementary school, teachers are required to use multiple informational texts to enable students to consider history like historians; they are expected to evaluate diverse perspectives, scrutinize authorial bias, and weigh evidence. Elementary educators, thus, must integrate primary informational texts with secondary literature.

We attend to such tasks using elementary-level literature centered on Abraham Lincoln and Amelia Earhart. We selected Lincoln and Earhart because of their potential for inclusion in elementary curricula. The subsequent sections detail our methodological research approach, findings, and primary source ancillaries with suggestions for classroom instruction.

Methods

Statistical sampling theory informed our approach to establish a representative data pool and *inductive content analysis*, a rigorous qualitative approach, guided our evaluation (Kline, 2008; Krippendorff, 2013; Maxwell, 2010). We used reliable, popular search engines to generate a complete, current data pool of trade book titles published in the last two decades. To ensure the data pool represented only elementary-level literature, we removed all titles with reading levels higher than the sixth grade. We randomly selected 30% of the books on each historical figure in order to have a sample that embodies a representative amount, which are noted in Figure One.

Figure 1. Children's Literature about Amelia Earhart and Abraham Lincoln.

Amelia Earhart Books

- Abraham, P. (2002). *Amelia Earhart*. New York, NY: Children's Press.
- Anderson, J. (2007). *Amelia Earhart: Legendary aviator*. Mankaton, MN: Capstone Press.
- Burleigh, R. (2003). *Amelia Earhart: Free in the skies*. Orlando, FL: Silver Whistle Harcourt.
- Doak, R. (2013). *Amelia Earhart*. Chicago, IL: Heinemann.
- Golightly, A. (2013). *Amelia Earhart: Female aviator*. New York, NY: PowerKids Press.
- Langley, A. (1997). *Amelia Earhart: The pioneering pilot*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kerby, M. (1990). *Amelia Earhart: Courage in the sky*. New York: Puffin Books.
- Mara, W. (2002). *Amelia Earhart*. New York, NY: Children's Press.
- McDonough, Y. (2000). *Sisters in strength: American women who made a difference*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company.
- Ryan, P. (1999). *Amelia and Eleanor go for a ride*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Tanaka, S. (2008). *Amelia Earhart: The legend of the lost aviator*. New York: Abrams Books.
- Taylor, S. & Sturm, J. (2010). *Amelia Earhart: This broad ocean*. New York: Hyperion Books.



- Wearing, J. (2011). *Amelia Earhart: First Lady of the sky*. New York, NY: Weigl Publishers.
- Abraham Lincoln Books**
- Adler, D. (2009). *Honest Abe Lincoln*. Alexandria, VA: Holiday House.
- Blashfield, J. (2002). *Abraham Lincoln: Profiles of the presidents*. New York: Compass Point.
- Borden, L. (1999). *A. Lincoln and me*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Brenner, M. (1994). *Abe Lincoln's hat*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Cohn, A. & Schmidt, S. (2002). *Abraham Lincoln*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Harness, C. (1996). *Young Abe Lincoln: The frontier days, 1809-1837*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Harness, C. (1997). *Abe Lincoln goes to Washington*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.
- Hopkinson, D. & Jendrix, J. (2008). *Abe Lincoln crosses a creek: A tall, thin tale*. New York, NY: Schwartz & Wade.
- Kalman, M. (2010). *Looking at Lincoln*. New York, NY: Nancy Paulsen Books.
- Krull, K. & Brewer, P. (2010). *Lincoln tells a joke: how laughter saved the President (and the country)*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt.
- Kunhardt, E. (1993). *Honest Abe*. New York, NY: Greenwillow Books.
- Phillips, E. (2007). *Abraham Lincoln: From pioneer to president*. New York, NY: Sterling.
- Rappaport, D. (2008). *Abe's honest words: The life of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Hyperion.
- St. George, J. (2008). *Stand tall, Abe Lincoln*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.
- Turner, A. (2001). *Abe Lincoln remembers*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Van Steenwyk, E. (2000). *When Abraham talked to the trees*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Books.

To balance the workload and ensure a multiple and independent evaluations, the first and second authors addressed Earhart as the first and third authors attended to Lincoln. We first individually read all the books and recorded observable patterns and anomalies. We met separately as a Lincoln group and an Earhart group to discuss initial observations. We noted potential areas of historical representation and misrepresentation. Such discussions guided the development of individualized research instrument, which are reported in Figure Two.

Figure 2. Research Instruments for Amelia Earhart and Abraham Lincoln books.

Amelia Earhart books

1. Author's name, book's title, publication date, publication company.
2. For (about) what age/grade was this book is intended?
3. What is the genre? (If it is historical fiction, would this be clear to a reader of the intended age?)
4. Who was the main character(s)? Was there anyone besides Earhart?
5. Does the book describe the early 20th century rise of technology? If so, how?
6. Does the book describe the early 20th century rise of media? If so, how?
7. Does the book describe Victorian norms/society or the changing role of women? If so, how?
8. Does the book describe Earhart's beginnings in aviation? If so, how?
9. Were any primary sources explicitly utilized within the book (introduction, foreword, narrative, afterward)?



10. Did any common historical misrepresentations emerge? (Give examples of exceptionalism, heroification, presentism, omission, or villainification.)

11. Were there any parts of the book that just seemed historically inaccurate or implausible?

Abraham Lincoln books

1. Author's name, book's title, publication date, publication company.

2. For (about) what age/grade was this book is intended?

3. What is the genre? (If it is historical fiction, would this be clear to a reader of the intended age?)

4. Who was the main character(s)? Was there anyone besides Lincoln mentioned?

5. How does the book describe life in 19th century American society?

a. Lincoln's poverty

b. Slavery/race relations

c. North/South

6. Does the book describe Lincoln's professional beginnings? If so, how?

7. Does the book mention/detail people who contributed to Lincoln's success? If so, how?

8. Were any primary sources explicitly utilized within the book (introduction, foreword, narrative, afterward)?

9. Did any common historical misrepresentations emerge? (Give examples of exceptionalism, heroification, presentism, omission, or villainification.)

10. Were there any parts of the book that just seemed historically inaccurate or implausible?

The Lincoln group and Earhart group individually re-read each book, evaluated it according to the research instrument, and discussed tentative findings. We then collaboratively compiled results to determine the frequency of emergent patterns of historical representation and misrepresentation. This approach mirrors best practice qualitative content analysis research methodology (Kline, 2008, Krippendorff, 2013; Maxwell, 2010). We emulated similar studies on children's literature (Bickford, 2013a; Bickford & Hunt, 2014; Bickford & Rich, 2014a, 2014b) and history textbooks (e.g. Chick, 2006; Clark et al., 2004; Fitzgerald, 2009; King et al., 2012; Lindquist, 2009).

Findings

We scrutinized the trade books for historical misrepresentations that scholars have previously identified. *Heroification* and *villainification* manifest when a person or group is unfairly or unreasonably credited or blamed (Bickford, 2013a); Martin Luther King, for example, deserves much credit but is not near-deity. *Exceptionalism* appears when the atypical and anomalous is portrayed as typical and usual (Bickford & Rich, 2014a; Williams, 2009); Bill Gates, for example, does not represent the average life path for a college dropout. *Presentism* surfaces when people's view of the past is influenced by their contemporary understandings (Nokes, 2011; Wineburg, 2001); viewing Christopher Columbus's successful voyage as fated is an example of presentism. *Omission* occurs when a historical account disregards important information (Bickford & Rich,



2014a, 2014b); a Civil Rights story that begins with Rosa Parks and ends with the March on Washington omits consequential material and context.

When scrutinizing for historical misrepresentations, many patterns emerged. Some would appear predictable, like book characteristics such as intended audience and genre. Others, like various forms of historical misrepresentation, are significant for elementary educators. These are detailed in the following subsections.

Amelia Earhart

Amelia Earhart's celebrity status derives from her accomplishments in aviation and tragic, public death at the zenith of her fame yet other factors contributed mightily (Butler, 2007; Lovell, 2009; Winters, 2010). The 20th century's second, third, and fourth decades saw an upsurge in media presence and the changing role of women; Earhart benefited (and sought to benefit) from both. An increasingly diverse media sought celebrities to attend to; Earhart solicited attention through various endeavors. Precocious, attractive, and adventurous, Earhart was a logical choice for the media's attention. Various presidents met with Earhart both to acknowledge her accomplishments and be photographed with a celebrity that attracted national and international attention. We report below how children's authors constructed narratives about this oft-celebrated figure.

Genre. A significant majority of Earhart children's books ($n = 11/13$; 85%) were non-fiction, specifically biography or narrative non-fiction. These findings about genre compare favorably to those derived from analysis of children's literature about Abraham Lincoln (reported below), Christopher Columbus, Rosa Parks, Eleanor Roosevelt, Helen Keller, and Native Americans (Bickford, 2013a; Bickford & Hunt, 2014; Bickford & Rich, 2014b) but not slavery, where historical fiction were prevalent (Bickford & Rich, 2014a; Schwebel, 2011; Williams, 2009). As a genre, non-fiction books intend to achieve historicity and minimize historical misrepresentation. Authors of children's non-fiction literature approach their content differently than if they were writing fiction and historical fiction, where authorial liberties abound.

The two historical fiction books were relatively historically representative and the authors openly acknowledged fictionalized aspects in Author's Notes and Afterwards (Ryan, 1999; Taylor & Sturm, 2010). A young student reading only the narratives would not likely grasp their fictionalized accounts because the disclaimers are inconspicuously located; a child may or may not read sections they deem to be extra or unnecessary. That young readers might not comprehend that the accounts are novelized is potentially problematic; we address this possible tension below in the section entitled, *Informational Texts and Practical Suggestions*.

Targeted age. Our content analysis revealed that a distinct majority targeted intermediate elementary readers in third to sixth grade ($n = 9/13$; 69%) than primary elementary readers in kindergarten to second grade ($n = 4/13$; 31%). This finding was expected considering the historical complexity and sensitivity of themes surrounding Earhart's story. Technological advancements, social achievement of women, and her eventual, unexpected death are topics likely deemed more appropriate for intermediate elementary readers. In *Informational Texts and Practical Suggestions*, we provide tangible guidance for both intermediate and primary elementary educators.



Main character(s). The vast majority of trade books ($n = 11/13$; 85%) focused almost entirely on Earhart, which was both expected and potentially problematic. It was anticipated because children's literature tends to have few main characters (Bickford, 2013a; Bickford & Rich, 2014a, 2014b; Williams, 2009). It is problematic because various historical misrepresentations emerge. The Earhart-focus disregards others' involvement, an example of omission. It cultivates exceptionalism of Earhart's achievements when, in fact, many other pilots (including some female aviators) were similarly accomplished.

Omission and exceptionalism are both historical misrepresentations. They each are a result of the myth of Earhart as the first and best female aviator. The myth was a resultant implication of a cultural shift, the focus of the subsequent subsection.

20th Century changes. Historians have explored significant social changes and technological advances in early 20th century America along with their collective impact on American society. Women experienced a social role repositioning to varying degrees that were largely determined by social class; the media also became increasingly diverse and more abundant (Butler, 2007; Lovell, 2009; Winters, 2010). Authors of children's literature are not expected to thoroughly detail complex historical nuances. They are, however, expected to historicize—or historically contextualize—the era in age-appropriate ways for a young reader bereft of prior knowledge. Considering their distinct impact on Earhart's celebrity, women's social repositioning and the emergent media appear necessary for inclusion. They were irregularly incorporated within the reviewed literature.

The reviewed children's books all ($n = 13/13$; 100%) included Earhart's nonconformity to social norms in varying ways. Earhart's non-conformity was implicitly included, for example, when Earhart's father gently prodded a young Amelia about typical interests for women in *Amelia Earhart: Free in the Skies* (Burleigh, 2003). Robin Doak's (2013) *Amelia Earhart* explicitly informs young readers of the distinct and manifold ways Earhart did not conform and the ubiquity of sexism and patriarchy; these included her unorthodox short haircut and attire (p. 13), antagonistic male saboteurs (p. 13), and her nonconformity to archetypal post-marriage behaviors like wearing a wedding ring and changing her name (p. 27). While Earhart's unconventionality is a theme that underpins all the reviewed literature, the authors failed to fully contextualize Victorian society. The duration and intensity of Victorian norms are unmentioned, much less detailed, in all the books. A young reader would likely view Earhart as trying something new or engaging in behavior that no female had previously attempted; elementary students reading only these books would not understand that Earhart actively resisted from generational patterns and societal regulators who intentionally sought to maintain patriarchy.

The reviewed children's books largely disregarded the increasingly ubiquitous media ($n = 12/13$; 92%). This omission is especially important considering Earhart's popularity. Helen Keller's notable accomplishments, like Earhart's, were highlighted within the media, which only produced more attention (Einhorn, 1998; Nielsen, 2010). Earhart, as has been argued, was a product of the media and more celebrity than aviation anomaly (Winters, 2010). In the subsequent section, we offer interested teachers both content and strategies to overcome the apparent omission, a historical misrepresentation.



Earhart's beginning in aviation. Every reviewed trade book ($n = 13/13$; 100%) noted the origins of Earhart's interests in aviation, which indicates the authors' belief that students can grasp details. The authors, however, were selective in the details provided. Few of the books ($n = 5/11$; 45%) referenced other pilots who supported Earhart or female aviators—like Neta Snook, Mabel Boll, and Elizabeth “Bessie” Coleman, for instance—who competed with Earhart (Burleigh, 2003; Doak, 2013; Langley, 1997; Taylor & Sturm, 2010; Wearing, 2011). Two historical misrepresentations—omission and exceptionalism—are connected to this pattern. Omission manifests when the full (or more complete) picture is not painted. Exceptionalism, in this context, is a corollary to omission; exceptionalism materializes when the author disregards historical characters like Snook, Boll, and Coleman, which compels the young reader to perceive Earhart as anomalous.

As noted above, scholars have identified similar historical misrepresentations in trade books about various topics. These instances of omission and exceptionalism within Earhart-based trade books were not egregiously misrepresentative considering the targeted reader age (elementary students) and the biographical nature of the topic. Teachers can actively confront such omission and exceptionalism, though, through purposeful steps, like those offered in *Informational Texts and Practical Suggestions*.

Incorporation of primary source material. Primary documents, or informational texts, are as essential to historians as numbers are to mathematicians. The majority of books ($n = 8/13$; 62%) about Earhart did incorporate primary source material. Considering that a significant majority of Earhart children's books ($n = 11/13$; 85%) were non-fiction, specifically biography or narrative non-fiction, one would presume to find primary documents within the history-based trade books. This conforms findings from previous explorations into the content of children's history-based literature, including our report below regarding Lincoln literature, which indicated the absence of primary source material (Bickford, 2013a; Bickford & Rich, 2014a, 2014b; Williams, 2009).

Photographs were the most frequently included informational text. Newspaper headlines, maps, and diagrams also appeared. To facilitate intertextual evaluation, teachers can provide students with ancillary primary source material. Document-based questions (DBQs) are a staple of Advanced Placement history exams and can be modified for elementary students, also. We provide guidance for interested elementary teachers below.

Patterns of historical misrepresentation. There were subtle yet perceptible manifestations of common historical misrepresentations, like the omission of her female competitors detailed above. It is important for teachers of young children to be aware of their appearance. Exceptionalism emerged when Earhart's records were listed and not compared to other pilots (Golightly, 2013), when it was implied that Earhart inspired—and continues to inspire—women worldwide (Langley, 1997), or when the narrative detailed the large parties Earhart received without mention of those who contributed to her success (Abraham, 2002). Similarly, heroification arguably manifested when she was characterized as a hero (and not simply an ambitious, accomplished aviator) (Langley, 1997) or when she was categorized as America's Joan of Arc (Burleigh, 2003).



Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln was a literal and figurative giant, the former among contemporaries and the latter within history. While not without shortcomings, Lincoln has a special place in American folklore, history, and national monuments (Burlingame, 1994; McPherson, 2009). We were quite curious in how children's authors represented this complex man within this complicated historical period.

Genre. A distinct majority of Lincoln-based children's books were non-fiction ($n = 12/16$; 75%) in comparison to fiction ($n = 4/16$; 25%). The non-fiction books were biography with one expository and one narrative non-fiction. The fiction books were historical fiction with one distinctly graphic novel. These genre-based findings are similar to those on historical figures and themes like Amelia Earhart (reported above), Rosa Parks, Eleanor Roosevelt, Helen Keller, Native Americans, and Christopher Columbus (Bickford, 2013a; Bickford & Rich, 2014b) whereas historical fiction appeared far more frequently in trade books about slavery (Bickford & Rich, 2014a; Schwebel, 2011; Williams, 2009).

Characters included. As with our analysis of Earhart above, children's history-based literature usually has a main character with few supplementary characters (Bickford, 2013a; Bickford & Rich, 2014a, 2014b; Williams, 2009). The trade books about Lincoln, however, were uncharacteristically inclusive of many individuals with substantive involvement. Most of the books ($n = 13/16$; 81%) devoted significant space to a variety of people. While the inclusion of additional characters varies from book to book, the young child learns the impact Lincoln had on people around him and their reciprocal influence on him.

Lincoln's family, acquaintances, and professional contacts were included substantively in most of the books. In doing so, the vast majority of books noted aspects of Lincoln's life beyond his political and professional life. A holistic perspective is constructed when the trade books portray Lincoln as a curious child compelled to confront various obstacles, a doting father, a helpful neighbor, and eventually a president. A more historically representative narrative is assembled when others' contributions to Lincoln's success are noted. This holistic, representative approach to the majority of narratives contests the omission, exceptionalism, and heroification rampant in children's literature.

One frequent and dubious omission, however, was that of Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth. Only a small number of books ($n = 4/16$; 25%) explicitly mentioned Booth in the narrative (Blashfield, 2002; Harness, 1997; Phillips, 2007; Turner, 2001). Three trade books noted Lincoln was assassinated but did not name his killer (Kalman, 2010; Krull & Brewer, 2010; St. George, 2008). One would think that Booth's name would ubiquitously appear yet it did not. There are many inferences or potential explanations one could draw from this observation. The authors might not have wanted to humanize the killer—through naming—of an influential and celebrated leader. Or, in understanding the targeted age group, the authors might have wanted young children to focus on Lincoln's accomplishments and not dwell on Lincoln's killer. Or, in consideration of the children's working memory, the authors might not have wanted to overwhelm students with names. All of these hypothetical explanations are possible. The first two appear more reasonable than the latter (considering the frequent inclusion of other characters). There



might be another (and still undetected) reason why Booth was so infrequently named. Such omission, however, negatively impacts readers' understandings that Lincoln's contemporaries did not universally revere him; Lincoln had enemies and rivals who viewed him and his policies with contempt. Teachers can supplement narratives that omit such content; students can identify Booth's name and examine his political affiliations with various primary source material.

Lincoln's poverty. If a top hat personifies Lincoln's professional life, then a log cabin typifies his early life. If Lincoln's adult life is characterized by struggle and success, then his childhood is characterized by humble beginnings. While the log cabin was ubiquitous in the children's literature ($n = 16/16$; 100%), its significance—as indicative of poverty—was not. Only a small portion of trade books ($n = 5/16$; 31%) explicitly noted the scarcity and shortage that accompanied Lincoln's origins (Blashfield, 2002; Harness, 1996; Kalman, 2010; Kunhardt, 1993; Phillips, 2007).

A young student reading Ellen Blue Phillips's (2007) *Abraham Lincoln: From Pioneer to President* can easily grasp Lincoln's humble beginnings with text like, "Reared in poverty on the Illinois frontier, Lincoln worked from the age of eight – as a laborer, soldier, postman, and shopkeeper" (Phillips, 2007, p. 1). Young readers, however, may not decode the insinuations of poverty that the author implicitly encoded with content like, "He was born in a log cabin. The cabin had a dirt floor. It had just one window" (Adler, 2009, p. 2). A child reading previous excerpt might decode the words but (wrongly) assume that this is how everyone lived during the 19th century. A resourceful teacher can include engaging photographs and other informational texts for students to scrutinize and juxtapose with Lincoln's log cabin.

Slavery and political turmoil. Considering the age of the reader, we were curious to see emergent patterns about Lincoln's many political failures on the path to the White House, slavery, race relations, political disagreements among states, and the Civil War. He was not professionally unbowed; tension and unsettled conflicts mark the context in which he assumed the presidency. Lincoln's story can hardly be told without addressing the contentious political context and brutality of slavery. We discovered that most books included most of the content but in minimized renderings.

A distinct majority ($n = 12/16$; 75%) explicitly noted Lincoln's pre-presidential political losses while the rest implied as much. A significant majority ($n = 14/16$; 88%) detailed regional disagreements between the North and South, as only two books omitted such content (Hopkinson & Hendrix, 2008; VanSteenwyk, 2000). Similarly, nearly every book ($n = 15/16$; 94%) included at least some reference to slavery and race relations as only one book entirely disregarded it (VanSteenwyk, 2000). Due to the age of the reader, though, most books explicitly included but significantly minimized the incumbent violence of slavery. While this raises concerns of historicity, a diminution of the violence is arguably age-appropriate and has been noted in similar research on slavery-based literature (Bickford & Rich, 2014a; Schwebel, 2011; Williams, 2009). Edith Kunhardt's (1993) *Honest Abe* is a representative example of this inclusion, yet minimization, of content; "Abraham saw slaves. These black people did not get paid for the work they did. White people owned them and could sell them" (p. 12). Such depictions of slavery are age-appropriate yet one could argue that perhaps slavery—the most divisive issue of the 19th century with reverberations into 20th century and beyond—should not be reduced to a work contract.



When viewed collectively, these findings indicate trade book authors have historically represented Abraham Lincoln in an appropriate, though not faultless, way. Through inclusion of Lincoln's missteps, heroification and exceptionalism were each curtailed. The authors did not disregard the political tensions and turmoil but did omit or egregiously minimize slavery's inescapable brutality. Elementary educators, if interested, can overcome the latter's ahistoricity while attending to the rigorous standards of state and national initiatives. The subsequent section provides an illustrative guide.

Informational Texts and Practical Suggestions

The ancillary informational texts and classroom activities guide teachers interested in extending students' understandings beyond comprehension of a single class novel. The primary sources and instructional procedures challenge students with age-appropriate and discipline-specific cognitive tasks consistent with state and national initiatives. Previous research has either not addressed classroom application (Bickford, 2013a; Schwebel, 2011; Williams, 2009) or provided specific sources with seemingly indistinct strategies (Bickford, 2014a, 2014b). To provide teachers with ample informational texts, we have reviewed and reported on various digital databases. We also offer educators age-appropriate and discipline-specific strategies.

Primary Documents

Document-based questions (DBQs), a primary source compendium that spotlights a specific period in history, are used to challenge students' historical thinking (VanSledright, 2014; Wineburg, 2001; Wineburg, Martin, & Monte-Sano, 2011). Younger students engage in what has been termed "shadows of historical thinking" and, when given proper scaffolding and age-appropriate content, teachers can foster historical thinking (Bickford, 2013b, p. 61). Large and publically funded digital archives, like *The Library of Congress*, specifically *American Memory*, *The National Archives and Records Administration*, specifically *Teachers' Resources*, provide teachers with free, fertile, and countless primary source documents. For Lincoln archives and exhibitions, teachers can survey *The Library of Congress: Abraham Lincoln Papers* and *The National Museum of American History: Abraham Lincoln, an Extraordinary Life*. For virtual tours related to Lincoln's life's path and current Internet-based ancillaries, teachers can review *Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum*. Slavery, abolition, and mid-19th century political history are other historical angles that teachers could incorporate to guide students towards a richer understanding of Lincoln.

For Earhart archives and exhibitions, teachers should review *The Library of Congress: Amelia Earhart Online Resources*, *George Palmer Putnam Collection of Amelia Earhart Papers*, and the *Amelia Earhart: The Official Website*. Teachers can also better contextualize Earhart within aviation's larger landscape with *Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum: Women in Aviation and Space History*, *The Library of Congress: The Wilber and Orville Wright Papers*, and *The Ninety-Nines, Inc.: International Organization of Women Pilots*. Through exploration and selection of rich informational texts, teachers can customize a DBQ that coheres precisely with the intent of their unit. Teachers



can abridge the length and language of the text-based primary sources while maintaining their historicity (Wineburg & Martin, 2009).

Classroom Methods

Pundits have, at times, bemoaned the direction of the social studies, critiqued historical inquiry, and argued for little more than historical comprehension to supplant historical thinking (Hirsch, 2009; Leming & Ellington, 2003; Senechal, 2010). For reasons that others have more eloquently articulated, we advocate for teachers' facilitation of students' historical thinking (Bickford, 2013b; Nokes, 2011; Wineburg, 2001). The subsequent classroom activities are an illustrative, though not exhaustive, list intended to connect historical thinking and criticality with state and national initiatives. These instructional procedures are curricular extensions of quality methodological guides (Loewen, 2010; Wineburg et al., 2011). We encourage educators to make modifications however they see fit.

Amelia Earhart and narrative revision. As noted above, Amelia Earhart's contemporary competitors—and other female pilots who died in flight—were noticeably absent from many of the trade books we reviewed. *Amelia Earhart: This Broad Ocean* is an illustrative anomaly to this pattern. In it, the lady aviator Mabel Boll actively vied with Earhart for awards and achievements; space was devoted to other female aviation pioneers who valiantly pushed the boundaries of accomplishment (Taylor & Strum, 2010). Such content contradicts the Earhart narrative that has been popularized in children's trade books and within collective consciousness where Earhart is mythologized as *the* foremost female aviator and for her untimely death in flight.

Elementary students, upon learning the entire history, will likely inquire about the conspicuous omission of seemingly relevant content. Such queries are potential catalysts for both historical thinking and completion of Common Core-prescribed writing tasks (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). During *narrative revision*, students engage in expository writing as they modify a book's storyline to be more historically inclusive. Narrative revision centers on critical writing, not creative writing; narrative revision is distinct from historical fiction writing and role-play because it requires that students synthesize understandings generated from multiple sources (Bickford & Wilton, 2012; Gregg & Greene, 2010; Schwartz, 2009).

To do so, we offer four distinct steps and curricular materials. We encourage teachers to use their discretion when incorporating the suggestions. We use the fourth grade level for illustrative purposes. First, the fourth grade teacher should assign a whole class novel written at a fourth grade level; this is for all students to read. Second, teachers should organize literacy groups according to students' varying abilities and assign each group a different yet developmentally appropriate trade book. Third, the teacher should provide ancillary informational texts; these should be modified so that some are at, others are above, and still others are below grade level. Finally, all students should then read a third trade book written far below their grade level; we encourage fourth grade teachers to assign a trade book targeting first grade children. The first element provides a foundational narrative, from which all discussions build. The second element provides space for differentiation by ability and students' interest. In the third element, students scrutinize primary source material for areas of similarity and difference, convergence and



divergence with understandings developed in the first two elements. The first two elements center on secondary informational text sources, the third focuses on primary informational texts, and all are inextricably intertwined with the central theme. The fourth element provides students an uncomplicated narrative to juxtapose with their previously generated understandings. These fourth grade students are then tasked with the narrative revision of the fourth element, the children's book written far below their grade level.

As students engage in the first three elements, teachers can incorporate various methods to facilitate students' historical thinking (Bickford, 2013b; Loewen, 2010; Nokes, 2011; Wineburg et al., 2011). Students' reading of the curricular materials above encompasses the cognitive tasks associated with Reading Standards for Informational Texts (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). If teachers incorporate the above tasks and materials, the first nine Writing Standards are efficiently integrated (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). We encourage teachers to make adjustments whenever necessary.

Abraham Lincoln and structured academic controversy. The vast majority of the reviewed literature referenced Abraham Lincoln's pre-presidential dialogic duels with Stephen Douglas and presidential political negotiations with slavery advocates. For students to best grasp the intricacies of Lincoln's historical disagreements and the implications of Lincoln's subsequent choices, they must be able to scrutinize and *use* the content. Debate is a popular classroom activity and the cognitive tasks required—purposeful speaking and active listening—manifest within state and national initiatives (NGA & CCSSO, 2010; Meany & Shuster, 2005; Parker, 2006). Debates, however, tend to elicit antagonism as participants value conquest over conversation (Hess, 2009; Lavery & Gregory, 2007). *Structured academic controversy*, or constructive controversy, aims to create light, not heat (Johnson & Johnson, 2007, 2009).

Structured academic controversy utilizes multiple steps to reduce rivalry and guide participants towards dialogic negotiation. First, the teacher frames a central theme in the form of a statement to be supported or refuted. Some examples include, but are not limited to, "By 21st century standards, Lincoln was a racist" and "Lincoln freed the slaves." The teacher then organizes students into groups for cooperative primary source evaluation, organization of understandings, and construction of a presentation. The amount of content the teacher provides and the speed at which students process the content determines the time commitment for this step, which may last two to four days. The students then present their position, using evidence and logic. The listening group is asked to seek to understand the speaking group's position by listening, recording notes, and asking clarifying questions. The groups switch roles from listening to speaking. Similar to debate, the students are asked to discuss amongst each other. Each group advances their position using evidence and logic, develops a better grasp of the opposing position, candidly discusses the theme, and distinguishes areas of agreement and disagreement.

While students may begin such discussions in earnest, the contextual intensity usually increases as students speak more than listen and assert more than discuss. To regain attention and reduce intensity, students then are tasked with advocating the opposition's perspective. If students are reluctant to verbalize their rival's position, the teacher could state, "Show me you were listening by telling me what they were saying." Students are compelled to think beyond their original position, to critique and to receive critiques, and to demonstrate a nuanced understanding



of the opposition's position. Each side is also provided an opportunity to clarify the opposing side's summation. In the final step, students reassemble into one large group with the task of identifying (and developing further) areas of convergence. This final step is a cooperatively constructed position. This final step is not a compromise; there may be gaps and it may be only partially complete. Just as historians and politicians rarely reach consensus, students engaging in this final step are to locate common ground and consider alternative syntheses. For instance, the opposing sides of the abortion debate have relatively entrenched views and there is little opportunity for compromise yet both would likely agree that reducing the rate of unplanned pregnancies is a positive step forward for both sides. Structured academic controversy positions students to engage in discussions that could potentially generate similar areas of convergence.

Structured academic controversy has many academic benefits. Students cannot be uninvolved as they read, develop initial understandings, organize a position, and dialogically negotiate. Students, in doing so, evaluate multiple informational texts and scrutinize sources for usability, bias, and corroboration, all of which are incorporated within Reading Standards for Informational Texts (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). As they discuss with their own groups, organize their understandings, and then both present and respond do a divergent perspective, students engage in all six of the cognitive tasks associated with the Speaking and Listening Standards (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). We encourage teachers to modify activities accordingly.

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