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## Historical Thinking and Common Core: Facilitating Adolescents' Scrutiny of the Credibility of Slave Narratives

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## Historical Thinking and Common Core:

### Facilitating Adolescents' Scrutiny of the Credibility of Slave Narratives

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Without questions, there isn't much need for serious thinking. Without thinking, there is little understanding. Therefore, developing deeper historical understanding begins with rich questions.

Bruce VanSledright, *Assessing Historical Thinking and Understanding*, 2014, p. 32

### Facilitating Students' Historical Scrutiny of Credibility within Slave Narratives

Historians employ specific thinking patterns, or heuristics, when reading and interpreting primary source material.<sup>1</sup> These heuristics include source, context, corroboration, credibility, and a meta-analysis of what is said, how it is said, and what is left unsaid. These appear as questions like, who is—and what is known about—the speaker/writer? What type of document is it and what implications are inherent with this type of document? Who is—and what is known about—the intended audience? When—and what is known about—the time period in which this document was created? Through this document, to what or whom is the speaker/writer responding? Are there other documents or perspectives that corroborate or refute this speaker's/writer's claims? Most importantly, what does this document do? Historians first reflect on these queries *prior* to reading a primary source in order to *purposefully* read it. They are then better able to historically contextualize, or historicize, the source as they digest its content. Such cognition emerges as a continuous, reflexive stream of self-conversation. Historians, in doing so, derive tentative meaning(s) as they explore the source's explicit perspective and implicit bias. The effective use of heuristics must be taught, developed, and practiced due to the complicated nature of primary source material.<sup>2</sup> Age-appropriate methodology and discipline-specific historical thinking must address young learners.<sup>3</sup>

Current state and national initiatives prescribe such discipline-specific thinking to ensure preparedness for college and career.<sup>4</sup> Middle level history students, for example, are expected to refer to textual evidence during primary source analysis; distinguish the implicit bias or perspective of an author and explicit purpose of the author's primary source; recognize fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment within a primary source; and examine the relationship between a primary and



secondary source of the same topic.<sup>5</sup> Such cognition relies on reader's use of heuristics, specifically sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration. Research-based examples of students' applications of these specific heuristics already exist.<sup>6</sup> However, not all heuristics have been addressed and examined. Credibility, for instance, has largely been overlooked within historical literacy research;<sup>7</sup> it manifests when students actively question the plausibility of a historical figure's version of events. When credibility has been included, the focus has been on nuances too intricate for many adolescent thinkers. For example, research has investigated the unintended perspective-clouded bias of competing primary sources, the reliability of divergent secondary sources, or the trustworthiness of online sources.<sup>8</sup> Such gradations are likely too subtle for middle level students to distinguish. A child must have experience distinguishing a boy from a not-boy prior to categorizing the intricacies of male students' social groups. Similarly, before adolescent students can aptly evaluate nuances, they should first examine distinctly credible and uncredible sources. Students are then better prepared to distinguish the former from the latter. Exploring the credibility of a source is an age-appropriate heuristic for middle level students and should be supported with scaffolding.

Middle level history teachers are knee-deep in the changes associated with students' cognitive development.<sup>9</sup> The need for discipline-specific history literacy skills increases as the history content both deepens and widens.<sup>10</sup> To facilitate students' historical thinking, teachers must locate, modify, and integrate *unambiguous* primary sources that do not unjustifiably confuse students. If high school students are expected to utilize multiple heuristics with various primary and secondary sources, then middle level students should focus on a single heuristic (or two) with multiple sources. The heuristic should emerge within age-appropriate methodology, the primary sources should appropriately puzzle students, and students' learning should be evaluated with a discipline-appropriate assessment.

### **Method: "I believe...I don't believe..."**

Primary sources, like rumors passed in a school's hallway, usually have gradations of plausibility. The strategy "I believe...I don't believe" (hereafter, IB/IDB) facilitates students' purposeful reading of and active scrutiny for credibility. As students individually read each text, they are asked to consider what is believable and what is not. Students' IB/IDB work emerges as a long list of observations with accompanying inferences about what appears to be historically plausible or implausible. To be clear, IB/IDB is a list of initial interpretations, not a lengthy or paragraph-based analysis. Viewed from an educational objectives perspective, IB/IDB elicits students' comprehension, interpretation, analysis, conjecture, and evaluation.<sup>11</sup> From a cognitive constructivist standpoint, students critically read and actively question multiple primary sources or perspectives, which in turn complicates their prior knowledge.<sup>12</sup> From a historical thinking perspective, students apply the credibility heuristic during IB/IDB as they actively inspect and evaluate the explicitly and implicitly encoded messages.

When given two primary sources of distinctly different levels of credibility, IB/IDB extends wide and far like a flashlight's beam revealing the landscapes of credibility. The following primary



sources provide a clear juxtaposition of credibility. The subsequent section illustrates the possible, or likely, historical thinking patterns elicited from the primary sources.

### Primary Sources

American slavery, that peculiar institution, is an oft-studied history topic in middle level social studies curriculum. Historians have long collected<sup>13</sup> and examined<sup>14</sup> slave narratives to supplement the letters, diary entries, newspaper accounts, logs, and other primary sources as they reconstruct the past. History education researchers encourage the incorporation of such oral histories because they richly reveal one person's memories about navigating life's peaks and pitfalls. Oral histories, however, are problematic. The interviewer can fail to fully record the interview or record comments out of their stated context. The interviewee can intentionally ignore relevant information, inadvertently forget consequential details, or deliberately exaggerate in an attempt to improve how they—and their actions—are perceived. Slave narratives are especially complicated due to the racial, regional, and social class differences that emerged as white, middle and upper class, educated, Northern historians interviewed poor, uneducated, African Americans in the South. They remain, however, an exceptional resource.<sup>15</sup> Charlie Smith and Fountain Hughes, two ex-slaves, are two narratives worthy of exploration and juxtaposition.<sup>16</sup> Meaningful and illustrative excerpts appear below. Smith's narrative appears first to illustrate how examination of an egregiously unbelievable primary source compels diligent scrutiny of a credible source.

#### Excerpts of Interview with Charlie Smith

Elmer Sparks: Uh, Mr. Smith, what was your full name?

Charlie Smith: That man that raised me name me Charlie Smith. My first name, first name what my mother name me, is Mitchell, Mitchell Watkins. That's what my mother and father name me, Mitchell Watkins. The man that raised me name me Charlie Smith. My first name, first name what my mother name me, is Mitchell, Mitchell Watkins. That's what my mother and father name me, Mitchell Watkins. I was raised in that, uh, born in Africa. And come to the United States. You see that was in slavery time. They sold the colored people. They sold the colored people. And they bringing them from the Africa. And they brought me from Africa. I was a child, a boy. The colored folks want to throw me off the boat coming from Africa. "Throw him overboard!" I was in cuffs. "Throw him overboard, let the damn whale swallow him like he done Jonah." Hadn't have been, the colored one want to throw me off, hadn't have been for L. and the Captain of the boat. L. was a white man and the Captain of the boat was a white man, but the colored is the one wants to throw me off the boat. And D. J., when they bring him from Africa, Liberia Africa, where I was brought from. And put in the United States. Me know, the northern people bought colored folks, put you up on a block and sell you, bid you off. The highest bidder gets you. Highest bidder gets you. ...

ES: Did they trick you to get you on the boat?

CS: What? They fool you on the boat. They fool the colored people on the boat. I ask my mama could I go down to the boat landing to see that white man. I was raised in Galina, Africa. That was in Africa. ...And the white folks, didn't no white people stay in Africa, south part of Africa.

ES: Yeah.



CS: They stayed in the north part of Africa. And that where they sold the colored people, in the south part of Africa. They put you up on a block and bid you off. And the way they got us on the boat, he said, "Come right in here!" That what they said. "Come in here! Colored in here, all the colored. Over in that country, you don't have to work. If you get hungry, all you got to do go to the fritter tree." Had the fritter tree on the boat, claim that the fritter tree. "You go to the fritter tree." Same thing now we hear people call in the United States, call them pancakes, they call them flitters. And them flitter tree, bore the, the tree bore the flitters, they claim. "Here the flitter tree. It's on the boat." We got on. ... Got down in the hatch hole, we should have felt the boat moving, but we thought we was going back up there to the fritter tree. And they are leaving. And when it landed, it landed in New Orleans. That where the colored people was sold at. Sold. They bringing us from Africa over here, the colored folks want to throw me off. "Throw him overboard, throw him overboard." And the white, Mr. J., Mr. J. say, "Don't you throw tat boy out there!" "Throw him overboard! Goddamn, let the damn whale swallow him like he done Jonah." That what they said. Going to throw me off the boat, bringing me from Africa in the United States. That was when we had the slavery. Just put you on the block and sell you. Put you on a stage, but well they called it a block. Put you up on a stage. Than man would buy you. The highest bidder gets you. Bid on you. He'll carry you to his plantation. Put another one up there. Me highest bid, which ever one bid, gives the most, he'll carry him to his plant, that the white, in the South. And they went to mistreating the, the colored. Getting children by the colored women. And all such as that, getting colored. ...

ES: And who was it that bought you? Do you remember who bought you?

CS: Bought me?

ES: Yeah.

CS: Oh. I was in, in uh, when they went to New Orleans, that's where they sold the people. The man that raised me, he didn't buy me. The man raised me. They would try to put you up on the block to sell you. He was Jake. The man was Jake. He name me. That's the name I go in now. Charlie Smith. He name me. When he, uh, I uh when he took me. He raised me, in Texas, Galveston, Texas where I was raised in. And the man that raised me, he name Charlie Smith, and that's the name he give me. He gave me Charlie Smith. And always teach me and his children. He treated me just like he treated his children, in everything, not one thing, everything. We ate together, we slept together. All the boys now, we just talking not about the women now. All we the boys slept together. I was, uh, raised with a cattleman. Charlie Smith raised me. He had all kind of cattle. And all of us toted pistols and something to shoot. And I was the only colored cowboy. I got on a cowboy shirt now that I brought from Texas. Been have it all of my days. I was raised up a cowboy. I was the only cowboy [record skips], colored cowboy he had, was in Texas. His name was Charlie Smith. And he always teach me and his children, anything you got to have don't never let it give out. He say, "And enjoy your money when you living. You can't carry none of it with you when you dead." He said millionaires die and leave all they got. Everything they got, they ain't carry nothing with them. And that, his name was Charlie Smith and he name me Charlie Smith. And he always told me don't change my name. And when he died, all us, he had three, uh, three or four of them, [unintelligible]. He didn't put no money in no bank. He had these little old money safes. People tell me, people got them now in some places, in the house, you know. He had two, two in the drugstore, in the dry goods store, and two in the grocery store. That made four. That



where he kept his money and all us cowboys' money, what we didn't tote. We, all cowboys wore boots. Half a leg boots, knee, what they call knee boots that come clean to your knees. Well, we toted our, what he didn't keep for us, we toted in our boots. And I was the only colored cowboy he had. All the rest of them white. We toted pistols and rifles. We carried them, we carried them. We killed bears and panthers and things like that, what was eating up the stock. He was a cattleman. He had plenty of cattle. And all them animals, bears and panthers and things like that and lions, they'd eat up the little pigs and real young stuff. That's what we makes, the cowboys was carrying their pistols and rifles, to kill them.

ES: Now what did you do after the slaves were free? After you was with him [CS *interrupts*]...

CS: When they freed the colored, we just stay. The man would. [*clears his voice*] When they freed the colored, they, they bought the whole state of Louisiana and give it over to the colored people for their territory to make their laws and rules. And the colored people sold their rights. All that ... property, anything, they have to get it approved by the white. Now, that's the way it was done. They ain't got no, can't make no laws, can't make no rules. If they make them, the white let them have it. They sold out.

ES: Did, did, did you go out West then or stay there? [ES and CS *overlap*] ...

CS: Yeah, after they freed them I was in the West. That was when we call old man Charlie. When they went to selling them. He'd object, selling, uh, selling me. Put you up on a block, he'd object. Because he rule that part of Texas. He was a cattleman. And they rule that part of Galveston. He rule that part, and what he, he said, he, he, went. [*Elmer Sparks interrupts then Charlie Smith continues*] ... Didn't teach us one thing, he teach us all. He say, "Anything you got to have, don't never let it give out." He say, "Enjoy your money when you living, because you can't carry none of it with you when you dead. Enjoy your money when you living." He teach us that all the time. And I didn't go to school much. Because I thought I hadn't been, when you ... toting those pistols and nothing to shoot with, and I was so full of loading my pistols and rifles I had to carry, and, and didn't learn anything else. But I was the only colored boy. All his cowboys was white. We all ate together, we slept together, and everything. Wasn't no difference in the treatment at all. None. Old man Charlie. ...

ES: You, you worked, you worked in Mississippi didn't you?

CS: I'm a, I'm a state man mister. I work for the United States. I go get bad people. I'm a state man and will as long as I live. Here my folders right here . I'm a state man. I'm the man went with, me and Billy the Kid, the man went and got the man kill the President. And the state name me. I got three name. The United States, I work for the United States now. Name me "Trigger Kid." Me and Billy the Kid, went and got the man kill the President, went and got him. Had a five hundred dollar reward, anybody go get him. He kill the President. Guiteau killed Garfield. Garfield the first President ever was killed of the United States. And the man killed him name Guiteau and went back over in his state where he come from.

ES: That was Charles Guiteau wasn't it?

CS: And when they, put out the five hundred dollar reward anybody would go get him. There was six men right at the line of the states. You had to get your authorities from them to go over there. Everybody go over there and get them five hundred dollars, them mens would kill them. Kill them. [*unintelligible*] They'd kill you. If you go over there and get that man, the man done the killing, he went back in that state because that was the state he was born and raised in. And there's six men



right at the line of the United States. You, you, you had to get authorities from them to go any further in that state, state. And they done it, and we, me and Billy the Kid, they sent us over there. This United States name me "Trigger Kid," but that's a name I've hated. I been working for the United, I work for the United States now. If you bad, I get all bad people. That's my job now. White or black. If you be do the wrong thing, and they send me after you, only reason I won't get you, I won't see you. They send us after him. The man kill the President. [recording stops briefly then interview starts up again] ...

ES: ... Did the Social Security people, did they come see you?

CS: Social Security?

ES: Yeah.

CS: Yeah.

ES: They did. And, you remember how old you were then? ...

CS: ... My age, yeah, I'm older now than I was then. I'm older now. I'm a hundred and forty-four, last, last year, fourth of July. A hundred and forty-four years old now. My birthday, I gets a birthday card, I'm a hundred and forty-four last fourth day of July, last year. I'm a hundred and forty-four.

ES: And you don't, you don't wear glasses.

CS: No, I ain't never wore none.

ES: And you don't wear a hearing aid, is that it?

CS: I got hearing. I hear just as good now as I ever been hearing.

ES: Oh, I believe that.

Adolescent learners will likely perceive Smith's assertions to be dubious. During a cursory reading, they will probably probe Smith's claims about being an armed cowboy prior to slavery's conclusion and a deputized bounty hunter riding with Billy the Kid afterwards. During a closer reading, adolescent students will likely question the credibility of Smith's original African name, his story of capture, his claims of being 144 years old at the time of interview (without the need for glasses and a hearing aid no less), and his slave owner's familial, decent treatment. The young reader, during a detailed scrutiny, will probably ask when exactly the United States outlawed the importation of African slaves. Smith's less-than-credible oral history generates such queries, which in turn beg to be answered or proven incorrect. Stated differently, the content is the catalyst first for students' curiosities and then for students' active participation in their own learning.

VanSledright, in the opening quote, asserted the primacy of historical questions. We contend that content that elicits consequential historical questions are essential. Reading an incredible source generates questions in ways that examining credible sources do not. Evaluation of an incredible source contributes to a classroom context where student-generated queries are sought, curiosities are examined, and—with practice—even the credible source cannot escape close scrutiny. Hughes's narrative is an example of a relatively credible source that, when following an incredible source, demands inspection in ways that it would not ordinarily.



### Excerpts of Interview with Fountain Hughes

Hermond Norwood: Who did you work for Uncle Fountain when ... ?

Fountain Hughes: Who'd I work for?...

FH: Well, I belonged to, uh, B., when I was a slave. My mother belonged to B. But my, uh, but, uh, we, uh, was all slave children. And after, soon after when we found out that we was free, why then we was, uh, bound out to different people. [names of people] ... We had no home, you know. We was just turned out like a lot of cattle. You know how they turn cattle out in a pasture? Well after freedom, you know, colored people didn't have nothing. Colored people didn't have no beds when they was slaves. We always slept on the floor, pallet here, and a pallet there. Just like, uh, lot of, uh, wild people, we didn't, we didn't know nothing. Didn't allow you to look at no book. And then there was some free born colored people, why they had a little education, might call but there was very few of them, where we was. And they all had uh, what you call, I it now, uh, jail centers, was just the same as we was in jail. Now I couldn't go from here across the street, or I couldn't go through nobody's house without I have a note, or something from my master. And if I had that pass, that was what we call a pass, if I had that pass, I could go wherever he sent me. And I'd have to be back, you know, when uh. Whoever he sent me to, they, they'd give me another pass and I'd bring that back so as to show how long I'd been gone. We couldn't go out and stay a hour or two hours or something like. They send you. Now, say for instance I'd go out here to S.'s place. I'd have to walk. And I would have to be back maybe in a hour. Maybe they'd give me hour. I don't know just how long they'd give me. But they'd give me a note so there wouldn't nobody interfere with me, and tell who I belong to. And when I come back, why I carry it to my master and give that to him, that'd be all right. But I couldn't just walk away like the people does now, you know. It was what they call, we were slaves. We belonged to people. They'd sell us like they sell horses and cows and hogs and all like that. Have a auction bench, and they'd put you on, up on the bench and bid on you just same as you bidding on cattle you know. ... Selling women, selling men. All that. Then if they had any bad ones, they'd sell them to the nigga traders, what they called the nigga traders. And they'd ship them down south, and sell them down south. But, uh, otherwise if you was a good, good person they wouldn't sell you. But if you was bad and mean and they didn't want to beat you and knock you around, they'd sell you what to the, what was call the nigga trader. They'd have a regular, have a sale every month, you know, at the courthouse. And then they'd sell you, and get two hundred dollar, hundred dollar, five hundred dollar.

HN: Were you ever sold from one person to another?

FH: Mmmm?

HN: Were you ever sold?

FH: No, I never was sold.

HN: Always stayed with the same person. [HN and FH overlap]

FH: All, all. I was too young to sell. ...

FH: when I come along, young men, young men couldn't spend no money until they was twenty-one years old. And then you was twenty-one, why then you could spend your money. But if you wasn't twenty-one, you couldn't spend no money. I couldn't take, I couldn't spend ten cents if somebody give it to me. Because they'd say, "Well, he might have stole it." We all come along, you might say, we had to give an account of what you done. You couldn't just do things and walk off





and say I didn't do it. You'd have to, uh, give an account of it. Now, uh, after we got freed and they turned us out like cattle, we could, we didn't have nowhere to go. And we didn't have nobody to boss us, and, uh, we didn't know nothing. There wasn't, wasn't no schools. And when they started a little school, why, the people that were slaves, there couldn't many of them go to school, except they had a father and a mother. And my father was dead, and my mother was living, but she had three, four other little children, and she had to put them all to work for to help take care of the others. So we had, uh, we had what you call, worse than dogs has got it now. Dogs has got it now better than we had it when we come along. I know, I remember one night, I was out after I, I was free, and I didn't have nowhere to go. I didn't have nowhere to sleep. I didn't know what to do. My brother and I was together. So we knew a man that had a, a livery stable. And we crept in that yard, and got into one of the hacks of the automobile, and slept in that hack all night long. ... Now, uh, when we were slaves, we couldn't do that, see. And after we got free we didn't know nothing to do. And my mother, she, then she hunted places, and bound us out for a dollar a month, and we stay there maybe a couple of years. And, she'd come over and collect the money every month. And a dollar was worth more then than ten dollars is now. ...

FH: We didn't have no property. We didn't have no home. We had nowhere or nothing. We didn't have nothing only just, uh, like your cattle, we were just turned out. And uh, get along the best you could. Nobody to look after us. Well, we been slaves all our lives. My mother was a slave, my sisters was slaves, father was a slave.

HN: Who was you father a slave for Uncle Fountain?

FH: He was a slave for B. He belong, he belong to B.

HN: Didn't he belong to Thomas Jefferson at one time?

FH: He didn't belong to Thomas Jefferson. My grandfather belong to Thomas Jefferson.

HN: Oh your grandfather did.

FH: Yeah. And, uh, my father belong to, uh, B. And, uh, and B. died during the wartime because, uh, he was afraid he'd have to go to war. But, then now, you, and in them days you could hire a substitute to take your place. Well he couldn't get a substitute to take his place so he run away from home. And he took cold. And when he come back, the war was over but he died. And then, uh, if he had lived, couldn't been no good. The Yankees just come along and, just broke the mill open and hauled all the flour out in the river and broke the, broke the store open and throwed all the meat out in the street and throwed all the sugar out. And we, we boys would pick it up and carry it and give it to our missus and master, young masters, told we come to be, well I don't know how old. I don't know, to tell you the truth when I think of it today, I don't know how I'm living. None, none of the rest of them that I know of is living. I'm the oldest one that I know that's living. But, still, I'm thankful to the Lord. Now, if, uh, if my master wanted send me, he never say, you couldn't get a horse and ride. You walk, you know, you walk. And you be barefooted and collapse. That didn't make no difference. You wasn't no more than a dog to some of them in them days. You wasn't treated as good as they treat dogs now. But still I didn't like to talk about it. Because it makes, makes people feel bad you know. Uh, I, I could say a whole lot I don't like to say. And I won't say a whole lot more. ...

FH: I remember when the Yankees come along and took all the good horses and took all the, throwed all the meat and flour and sugar and stuff out in the river and let it go down the river. And they knowed the people wouldn't have nothing to live on, but they done that. And that's the



reason why I don't like to talk about it. Them people, and, and if you was cooking anything to eat in there for yourself, and if they, they was hungry, they would go and eat it all up, and we didn't get nothing. They'd just come in and drink up all your milk, milk. Just do as they please. Sometimes they be passing by all night long, walking, muddy, raining. Oh, they had a terrible time Colored people that's free ought to be awful thankful. And some of them is sorry they are free now. Some of them now would rather be slaves.

HN: Which had you rather be Uncle Fountain?

FH: Me? Which I'd rather be ? [HN laughs] You know what I'd rather do? If I thought, had any idea, that I'd ever be a slave again, I'd take a gun and just end it all right away. Because you're nothing but a dog. You're not a thing but a dog. Night never comed out, you had nothing to do. Time to cut tobacco, if they want you to cut all night long out in the field, you cut. And if they want you to hang all night long, you hang, hang tobacco. It didn't matter about your tired, being tired. You're afraid to say you're tired. They just, well [voice trails off]. ... you know how we served the Lord when I come along, a boy?

HN: How was that?

FH: We would go to somebody's house. And uh, well we didn't have no houses like they got now, you know. We had these what they call log cabin. And they have one, old colored man maybe one would be there, maybe he'd be as old as I am. And he'd be the preacher. Not as old as I am now, but, he'd be the preacher, and then we all sit down and listen at him talk about the Lord. Well, he'd say, well I wonder, uh, sometimes you say I wonder if we'll ever be free. Well, some of them would say, well, we going to go ask the Lord to free us. So they'd say, well, we, we going to sing "One Day Shall I Ever Reach Heaven and One Day Shall I Fly." Then they would sing that for about a hour. Then they, next one they'd get up and say let's sing a song, "We Gonna Live on Milk and Honey, Way By and By." They'd, they'd, oh I can hear them singing now but I can't, can't, uh, repeat it like I could in them days. But some day when I'm not hoarse, I could tell you, I could sing it for you, but I'm too hoarse now. And then we'd sing, [pause] "I'm Gonna," "I'm A-Gonna Sing Around the Altar." Oh, I, I wish I could, I wish I could sing it for you, "I'm Gonna Sing Around the Altar."

HN: Well I wish you could too.

Hughes's oral history is a rich and relatively credible perspective. It elicits scrutiny, in part, due to the purposeful positioning after Smith's slave narrative. Students likely will question specific details about, say, Hughes's grandfather's age and historic owner. Hughes's claims are not implausible but might be perceived as such when placed after Smith's claims. Active scrutiny is never discouraged. Students might also question the credibility of Hughes's accounting of the Yankees' brutality or the owners' treatment. The teacher should use this query to incite students' interests in learning more. Such questions arise from the interest generated in a source that may or may not be credible. Examining credibility is a catalyst for future historical research. During research, the claims are confirmed, refuted, or unsubstantiated. Whatever the result, students' historical understandings become richer and deeper.

Historical exploration also enables students to inferentially reflect about why *and* on what Hughes remained silent. Hughes stated, "But still I didn't like to talk about it. Because it makes,



makes people feel bad you know. Uh, I, I could say a whole lot I don't like to say. And I won't say a whole lot more.” This evocative four-sentence statement compels students to wonder about the substance of what Hughes could have said and also about Hughes’s motivation to remain silent. Such rumination similarly exhorts students to reexamine their perceptions of the credibility of his other claims. A historian will reflectively ask, “If a less-than-credible braggart would likely continue to espouse unbelievable claims, what does that say about someone who notes that more could—but would not—be said?” An adolescent learner can mirror the thought pattern while employing colloquial language, “If a liar lies to make himself look better, why does a humble person keep quiet?” In doing so, students will juxtapose the tone of Hughes’s narrative with Smith’s as they examine their respective historicity.

Students’ credibility-based questioning will first emerge at the onset and continue throughout as they gauge historicity. The first questions emerge when students contextualize Charlie Smith’s narrative by noting the interview date; the questions will continue as purposefully read to determine the quantity of ahistorical comments. They are not reading for comprehension, an activity that students engage in ad nauseam; they read instead to evaluate, critique, question, and categorize as their understandings have invariably been complicated. Whereas a credible source has potential for use within the narrative of a document-based question, the incredible source is a catalyst for further rumination and possible explanations for the historical deviation. The incredible source compels questions that would remain unasked if only credible sources were provided. The incredible source generates a new dimension of historical thinking beyond the oft-used dimensions of source, context, and corroboration. The subsequent subsection facilitates teachers’ assessment of such intellectual explorations.

### **Assessing Historical Thinking**

In order to not encumber students’ cognitive resources, assessments should require the same discipline-specific thinking as the employed methodology.<sup>17</sup> During IB/IDB, students consider and weigh the source, context, explicit claims, implicit messages, and potentially corroborating evidence to evaluate the credibility of the source. Students’ learning, however, cannot be assumed simply because they read the texts. To assess students’ learning (or, more precisely, to measure their ability to use this specific heuristic with this specific historical content), teachers should construct opportunities that compel students to employ criticality and reflectivity as they redeploy the heuristics. *History assessments of thinking* (or HATs)<sup>18</sup> elicit students’ historical thinking during evidence-based writing. HATs are intended to be done after students have already interpreted a primary source and accounted for the evidence’s source, corroboration, and contextualization.<sup>19</sup>

*Cooperative Interpretation* (or CI) is a four step process; it enables exploration of a source’s credibility to continue beyond categorization as credible or incredible. This first step is reflective, individual writing to facilitate each student’s demonstration of the credibility heuristic. If students’ questions during IB/IDB’s were akin to a flashlight’s beam exposing extensive terrain,



the subsequent queries are like laser beams: explicit and precise. Possible catalysts for rumination include, but are not limited to,

- (1) Disagreements are ubiquitous and based on divergences of understandings. Was the cause for divergence due to the source's honest unawareness of information, active avoidance of information, or a dispute over the importance of the information?
- (2) Recognition and reputation can materialize from inclusion in publications. Did the departure enhance the source's reputation or potential for recognition?
- (3) New information can complicate and modify understanding. Was the source compelled to confront representative and contradictory information and, if so, how did the source respond?
- (4) Memory can fade. How far was the source removed from the event?

Such precise reflection and reevaluation are encompassed within the first step. This enables young adolescent learners to digest the content slowly as they reflect and think historically. The deliberate speed coheres with both guidance suggested by educational psychologists of adolescence<sup>20</sup> and scaffolding suggested by scholars of historical thinking.<sup>21</sup>

To begin the second step of CI, the teacher can collect and redistribute individual students' writing. Each student is tasked with reading another's reflections and, in doing so, the reader compares the writer's historical evaluations with their own. Students then assess the merits of another's evidence-based interpretation. In this step, one student's learning assessment from the first step is utilized as a teaching tool for a second student in step two. The reviewer adds critiques and queries to the initial student's interpretation. Upon completion, students should reclaim their original reflective writing, read the reviewer's comments, and, possibly, reconsider their original interpretations.

In the next step of CI, the teacher can lead a whole class discussion. Discussions might prove more speculative than evidentiary, more subjective than objective, but they are no less engaging and are certainly not haphazard. Such dialogic negotiation and reflection indicate historical thinking. These discussions elicit middle level students' interest because they are novel and, in their eyes, a departure from learning. They are frequently overlooked in comprehensive methodological guides.<sup>22</sup>

In the final step of CI, students are asked to finalize their evaluations of the credibility of each source. Students weigh initial impressions, changes to initial impressions, and important points brought out in class discussion. In writing, students detail both their assessment of



credibility and the considerations that contributed to this judgment. The teacher should encourage students to view such writing as a tentative conclusion, amendable if new evidence compels modification.

Sources deemed uncredible, thus, are catalysts for contemplation and discourse that do not have a definitive endpoint; such appraisal of credibility cannot be accomplished without students' redeployment of the heuristic and reconsiderations of their historical understandings. The incorporated slave narratives are manageable for students to examine, especially when they are modified and juxtaposed. IB/IDB is an age-appropriate reading strategy for middle level students to engage in historical literacy that seamlessly emerges into CI, a HAT.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Nokes, "Recognizing and Addressing the Barriers to Adolescents' 'Reading Like Historians,'" *The History Teacher* 44, no. 3 (May 2011): 379-404; Bruce VanSledright, *Assessing Historical Thinking and Understanding* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014); Sam Wineburg, "Reading Abraham Lincoln: An Expert/Expert Study in the Interpretation of Historical Texts," *Cognitive Science* 22, no. 3 (1998): 319-346.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Barton and Linda Levstik, "Why Don't History Teachers Engage Students in Interpretation?" *Social Education* 67, no. 6 (October, 2003): 358-361; Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> John Bickford, "Initiating Historical Thinking in Elementary Schools," *Social Studies Research and Practice* 8, no. 3 (2013): 60-77.

<sup>4</sup> Common Core State Standards Initiative, *Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (Washington, DC: Department of Education, 2010); Council of Chief State School Officers, *Vision for the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Inquiry in Social Studies State Standards* (Washington, DC: Department of Education, 2012); Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, *PARCC Model Content Frameworks: English Language Arts/Literacy Grades 3-11, Version 2.0* (Washington, DC: Department of Education, August, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Common Core State Standards, 61; Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 40-66.

<sup>6</sup> Cory Callahan, "Analyzing Historical Photographs to Promote Civic Competence," *Social Studies Research and Practice* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 2013): 77-88; Mark Baildon and Rindi Baildon, "Evaluating Online Sources: Helping Students Determine Trustworthiness, Readability, and Usefulness," *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 24, no. 4 (March/April, 2012): 11-14; Cheryl Mason Bolick and Meghan M. McGlenn, "Harriet Jacobs: Using Online Slave Narratives in the Classroom," *Social Education* 68, no. 3 (April, 2004), 198-202; Jeffery Nokes, Janice Dole, and Douglas Hacker, "Teaching High School Students to Use Heuristics While Reading Historical Texts," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 99, no. 3 (August 2007): 492-504.

<sup>7</sup> Daisy Martin and Chauncey Monte-Sano, "Inquiry, Controversy, and Ambiguous Texts: Learning to Teach for Historical Thinking," in *History Education 101: The Past, Present, and Future of Teacher Preparation*, eds. Wilson J. Warren and D. Antonio Cantu (Charlotte, N.C.: Information Age Publishing, 2008); Daisy Martin and Sam Wineburg, "Seeing Thinking on the Web," *History Teacher* 41, no. 3 (2008): 1-15; Daisy Martin, Sam Wineburg, Roy Rosenzweig,



and Sharon Leon, "Using the Web to Teach Historical Thinking," *Social Education* 72, no. 3 (2008): 140-143, 158; Avishag Reisman and Sam Wineburg, "Teaching the Skill of Contextualizing in History," *Social Studies* 99, no.5 (2008): 202-207; Sam Wineburg and Daisy Martin, "Tampering with History: Adapting Primary Sources for Struggling Readers," *Social Education* 73, no. 5 (2009): 212-216.

<sup>8</sup> Baildon and Baildon, 11-14; James Loewen, *Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks and get Students Excited about Doing History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010); Sam Wineburg, Daisy Martin, and Chauncey Monte-Sano, *Reading Like a Historian: Teaching Literacy in Middle and High School History Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> John Bickford, *Adolescent Masculinity and Media* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012); Robert Feldman, *Adolescence* (Upper Saddle, NJ: Pearson, 2008); Robert Feldman, *Child Development* (Upper Saddle, NJ: Pearson, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Baildon and Baildon, 11-14; Nokes et al., 492-494.

<sup>11</sup> Lorin Anderson and David KrathHOHL (Eds.), *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Longman, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Roni Jo Draper et al., *(Re)imagining Content-area Literacy Instruction* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> John Blassingame, *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1977); Belinda Hurmence (ed.), *My Folks Don't Want Me to Talk about Slavery*, (New York, NY: John F. Blair Publications, 1984); Belinda Hurmence (ed.), *Before Freedom, When I can just Remember*, (New York, NY: John F. Blair Publications, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1972); Leslie Howard Owens, *This Species of Property: Slave Life and Culture in the Old South*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1976)

<sup>15</sup> Ira Berlin, Marc Favreau, and Steven F. Miller, eds., *Remembering Slavery: African American Talk about Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation* (New York: The New Press, 1998); Jerrold Hirsch, *Portrait of America: A Cultural History of the Federal Writers' Project* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC, 2003); Sharon Ann Musher, "'Contesting the Way the Almighty Wants it': Crafting Memories of Ex-Slaves in the Slave Narrative Collection," *American Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2001): 1-31.

<sup>16</sup> Charlie Smith, interview by Elmer E. Sparks, *The Library of Congress, Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center*, Bartow Florida, March 17, 1975, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/afcesnbib:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(afcesn000032\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/afcesnbib:@field(DOCID+@lit(afcesn000032))); Fountain Hughes, interview by Hermond Norwood, *The Library of Congress, Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center*, Baltimore Maryland, June 11, 1949, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/afcesnbib:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(afcesn000030\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/afcesnbib:@field(DOCID+@lit(afcesn000030))).

<sup>17</sup> Nokes, 379-404; VanSledright, 46-79; Wineburg, *Historical Thinking*, 44-48.



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<sup>18</sup> Sam Wineburg, Mark Smith, and Joel Breakstone, “New Directions in Assessment: Using Library of Congress Sources to Assess Historical Understanding,” *Social Education* 76, no. 6 (2012): 290-293.

<sup>19</sup> Chauncey Monte-Sano, “What Makes a Good History Essay? Assessing Historical Aspects of Argumentative Writing,” *Social Education* 76, no. 6 (2012): 294-298.

<sup>20</sup> Robert S. Feldman, *Adolescence* (Upper Saddle, NJ: Pearson, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Bickford, 60-77; Nokes, 379-404; VanSledright, 46-79; Wineburg, *Historical Thinking*, 44-48; Wineburg, “Reading Abraham Lincoln,” 319-346.

<sup>22</sup> Loewen, *Teaching What Really Happened*; Wineburg et al., *Reading Like a Historian*.

<sup>23</sup> Monte-Sano, 205-297; Wineburg, Smith, and Breakstone, 291-292.