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The [Hi]story Lives On: Using OER and Renewable Assignments to Engage Students

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The [Hi]story Lives On: Using Open Educational Resources & Renewable Assignments to Engage Students

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Pedagogical Approach

Redesign intro level History 148: American History to 1877 using an OER history text and a project based group assignment based in principles of open pedagogy.

“Open Educational Resources (OERs) are any type of educational materials that are in the public domain or introduced with an open license. The nature of these open materials means that anyone can legally and freely copy, use, adapt and re-share them.” (UNESCO definition https://bit.ly/1xL0Wup)

“Open Pedagogy is that set of teaching and learning practices only possible in the context of the free access and 4R (reuse, revise, remix, redistribute) permissions characteristic of open educational resources.” (Wiley, 2013).


Renewable Assignments are authentic assignments that have a life after the class is over. Examples are building a resource for others to use, build upon, or learn from.

- Learn by doing
- Learn / do using and creating open resources (5Rs)

Digital Exhibit Tools

Evaluation Criteria
- Web-based
- Public and private options
- Supports collaboration

Low learning curve
- Supports multiple formats (at minimum: images, text, video, audio)

Recommended Tech

New Google Sites for collaboratively building exhibit and publishing it on the web
- Supports multiple formats (at minimum: images, text, video, audio)

Google Spreadsheet (for tracking exhibit materials)
- Supports collaboration

Digital camera and audio recorder (if needed)

Course (Re)Design

Redesign Goals
- Why: To enhance student engagement and critical thinking via digital storytelling using primary and secondary OER.

Course Text: The American Yawp, high quality, free, online

Project Assessment Criteria
- Individual Submission: Midterm and Final Evaluation of the Project and the Group Dynamic
- Group Submissions: Length & Timeliness (10%); Content (40%); Storytelling Strategy & Creativity (25%); Grammar & Spelling (25%)

Successes & Challenges

Went well!
- Thumbs up for OER!!
- Enhanced engagement in History
- The power of creating narratives
- Juggling group/project management, digital storytelling, website/story design, identifying and evaluating copyright, finding and organizing materials
- Faculty/instructional design/archive/library collaboration
- Technology was not a barrier for students
- Rubrics (assessment criteria) may need refinement
- In-class group work sessions
- Lack of student understanding about how to tell a story

Needs work...
- Group work
- Time
- Student confusion about assignment instructions

Next Steps
- Review student assignments to evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the course design
- Add more scaffolding opportunities related to storytelling and exhibit conceptualization
- Add more in-class group work. Add a session on how to work in groups
- Refine assignment instructions and rubrics for clarity
- More periodic feedback from instructor and peers

Exhibits As Storytelling Site

The exhibits as storytelling assignments, rubrics and instructor notes are available for use, adaptation and sharing under a Creative Commons license at https://sites.google.com/view/exhibitsasstorytelling/home
The [Hi]story Lives On: Student Work

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Group 1 Revised Exhibit Preparation

Imitations of the American Period

During the 1830s the majority of the immigrant population were of Irish descent. This was due to the potato famine and the rise of food costs in Ireland. In the 1860’s America had an industrial boom, which pulled Irish immigrants with the hopes of work in factories in the major cities in the United States. In the 1840’s Irish immigrants made almost half of the American population, which started a great deal of hostility and gang formation in the American period in New York City (PBS). Americans were threatened by Irish immigrants for a number of reasons, the main one being their connection with Catholicism and their dedication to the Roman Catholic Church. Goons such as the Bowery Boys and the Dead Rabbits took the streets of New York City with violence, adding more hostility toward those of Irish Descent.

For the portion of this exhibit, we trace the life of an immigrant young woman from Ireland in the late 19th century in America. Her story will show the reasons for leaving her homeland to venture to The New Land. Her story will also show the struggles and anti-immigrant early Irish immigrants faced before the start on the Civil War. Her story will show the impact of gangs on everyday life and the hardships of being poor as an immigrant in early New York City. Our target audience for this exhibit will be high school and college students. It is important to teach the hardships and reality of early immigration to America to realize the origin story of the American Dream, and show how it was not the reality of immigrants that childhood stories make it out to be.

The American Yawp

A Free and Online, Collaboratively Built American History Textbook

Resources & References

- The American Yawp: http://www.americanyawp.com/
- What is Open Pedagogy: https://www.yearofopen.org/april-open-perspective-what-is-open-pedagogy/
- Open Pedagogy Examples: https://digitalpedagogy.mla.hcommons.org/ and https://tinyurl.com/y8vl4ahc
- What is OER: https://bit.ly/1xLOWup

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