

taking. History in your Hands



ST. THOMAS SCHOOL EDUCATOR SELECTED FOR A NATIONAL PROGRAM TO HELP FUTURE LEADERS HARNESS THE WEALTH OF PRIMARY SOURCES

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How do we learn history? For many students, our country's past is presented in neatly packaged textbooks with a set of names and dates to commit to memory. St. Thomas School (STS) students, however, study history a little differently. And for that, they can thank Dr. Alpha DeLap.

Last year, Dr. DeLap, the librarian and media specialist at STS, was selected as one of 120 teachers around the world to participate in the

National History Day (NHD) spring professional development program. This elite program uses Library of Congress resources to help educators teach students how to develop and support historical arguments. Dr. DeLap's training, along with STS's hallmarks that value technology, character, and leadership development, ensures STS students use their intellectual curiosity and critical reading and thinking skills to engage with the raw ingredients of history — primary sources.

Thanks to this one-of-a-kind professional development program, Dr. DeLap will educate STS students to use primary documents to make sense of the world and their place in it. The program trained Dr. DeLap to teach with online resources from the Library of Congress. This training puts a wealth of historical primary sources in the hands of STS students, which enriches their learning environments by expanding the perspectives they can pull from. For those who study with Dr. DeLap, history will be a tapestry of ideas and arguments to critically evaluate and engage with.

A vital part of exploring essential questions is understanding others' experiences and views. Students who can place the past into relevant context and understand the relationship among different ideas can find where they belong in our complex world, as well as what responsibilities they have to it.

Her selection to the NHD professional development program is just one of many of Dr. DeLap's honors as an educator. In 2019, she was one of 14 people appointed to the Newbery Award Selection Committee, the body that awards the prestigious Newbery Medal for distinguished contributions to American literature for children.

As part of her professional development, Dr. DeLap spent the last five months completing readings and participating in discussion boards with peers and historians from around the world. The topics studied prepared them to pass along a historian's critical thinking and reading skills to their students. Dr. DeLap focused on understanding how primary documents are sourced and about the close reading skills of corroboration and contextualization. Other webinars guided participants in developing a critical perspective on primary documents, navigating questions of agency in history, and negotiating hindsight when evaluating primary sources.

Dr. DeLap brings each of these skills to her STS students, providing them with unique insight into how to use historical primary sources and research and present historical arguments. St. Thomas students actively engage with the different questions and perspectives that make up the historical record, teasing out meaning and insights that go beyond oversimplified narratives.



As a part of the NHD program, Dr. DeLap had the opportunity to work with historians and curriculum specialists to develop new pedagogical approaches that develop critical reading and thinking skills. The payoff for such an approach to history for STS and the Medina community? A more intentional and analytic community that can engage with the complexities and contradictions of their own time and place. Students who are thoughtful learners can become better leaders and citizens. It is Dr. DeLap's hope that students and other teachers share their new discovery process and the findings they uncover with those around them.

"The skills and strategies Dr. DeLap is developing through this series will benefit her students over the course of their academic and professional careers," said National History Day Executive Director, Dr. Cathy Gorn. "As a Library of Congress TPS Consortium member, NHD is incredibly fortunate to be able to offer this opportunity for teachers, especially now as teachers and students continue to address challenges of non-traditional learning settings required by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic."

To truly understand history, students must move beyond the usual highlights of historical narratives. They must understand and actively evaluate how those narratives were created and the differing voices and viewpoints that shaped them. This approach to history creates intellectually curious students who are able to engage with their world both critically and compassionately. Thanks to the extraordinary opportunity that Dr. DeLap had to participate in the NHD program, she will help the STS community better understand their worlds with a historian's eye.