

NEW YORK CITY & THE NATION

A SCHOOL/COMMUNITY CONSORTIUM TO TEACH AMERICAN HISTORY

New York City Department of Education, Gotham Center for New York City History, City Lore, Brooklyn Historical Society, New-York Historical Society, Henry St. Settlement, Historic House Trust

ISSUE #2

Gotham Fellows Take on NYC History Day!

BY LYNDA KENNEDY, GOTHAM CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY HISTORY

My students enjoyed the day and my parents were thrilled to see their kids so motivated. One of my group entries was by two boys who I never imagined would be so interested.

— Lynn Tiede, teacher, M.S. 45



Each year, middle and high school students and their teachers gather to show off their history expertise by competing in the local round of the National History Day Competition: New York City History Day. Students can present their work in the form of exhibits, documentaries, performances, historical papers, and web pages. Local winners compete at the state level, and state winners advance to the national competition held in June at the University of Maryland.

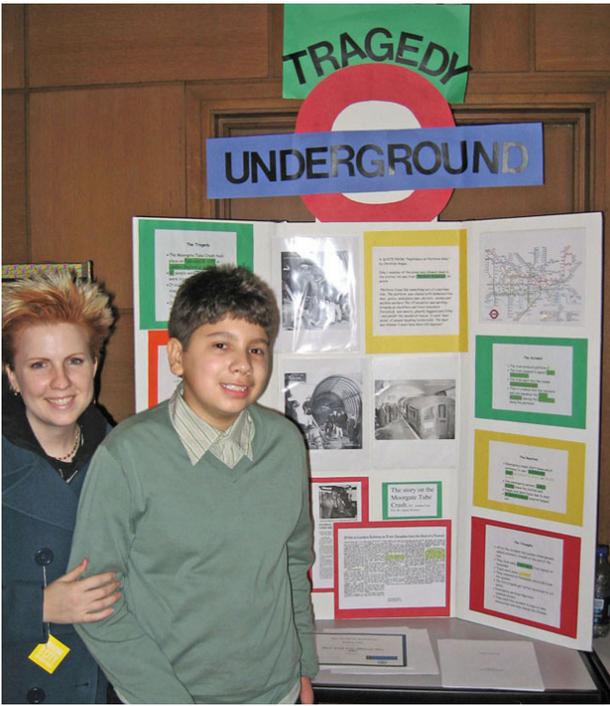


Teacher Sonia Rivera and her students from the Academy of Business and Community Development in front of their entry.

This year, colleagues from the New York City Department of Education and the Gotham Center for New York City History devised a plan to support greater participation of public school students. Six intrepid teachers who have participated in professional development programs with the NYC Department of Education and the Gotham Center were given the opportunity to directly apply what they have learned. As *American Journey NYC History Day Fellows*, they received extra training and support in order to guide students through the History Day competition process, working both with Carmen Fariña and with staff at the Museum of the City of New York who are responsible for organizing New York City History Day.

Next the Fellows went to the NYC office of the Northeast Region of the National Archives for Records and Administration (NARA) to learn from NARA staff about the resources available to teachers and students. A veteran History Day teacher from Franklin K. Lane High School, Stephen Namm, also shared his expertise.

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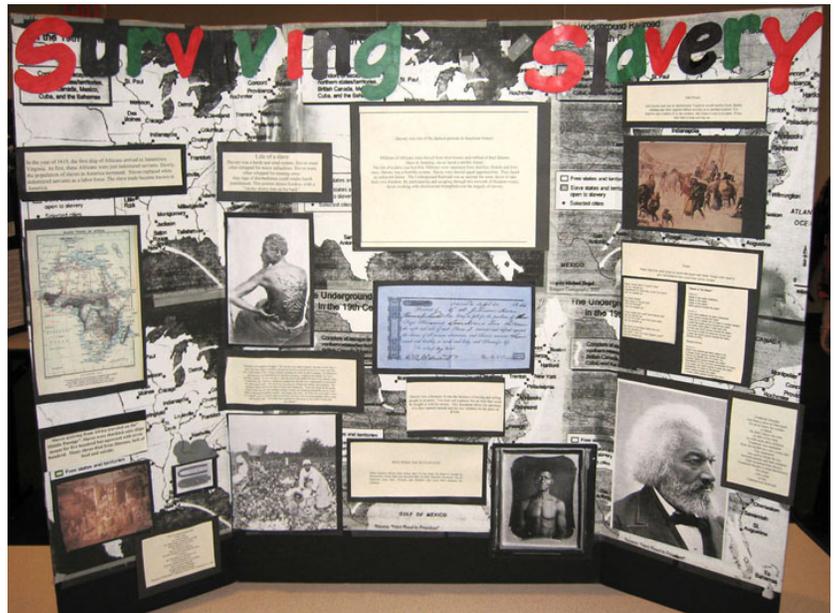


Junior Individual Exhibit 3rd place winner, Joshua Cruz and his teacher, school librarian Taralyn Ciarmello from PS 96, in front of his winning entry.

Third place for individual junior exhibit went to Joshua Cruz (P.S. 96, under the guidance of Terri Ciaramello) for “Tragedy Underground,” and third place in the junior group exhibit was awarded to Christine Brown, Shameeka Skeete, Dijon Johnson, and Brandon Brown (I.S. 78,

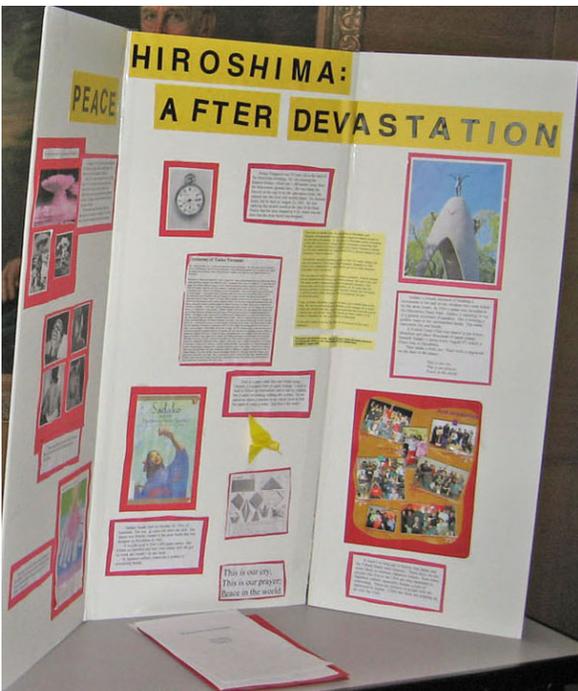
In a very short span of time (compared to those who compete regularly and begin planning the summer before!) our *American Journey History Day Fellows* guided more than 30 students through the process of researching and putting together 13 projects. American Journey covered the entry fees for all of the students.

Each participating student received entry gifts of a book and a one-day pass to the Museum of the City of New York and El Museo del Barrio. After a long, exciting day in which all of the students proudly showed their strong projects, answered the judges’ questions all morning, and explored the museums in the afternoon, the awards ceremony began. The Manhattan Borough President and several Borough Historians spoke. As the awards were called, we were thrilled to find that in addition to a special “Recognition of Women in History” award given to Laquasia Jackson, Gabriella Villanueva, and Ashley Rojas from P.S. 96 for their group exhibit on Amelia Earheart, two projects submitted by “our” students placed third in their categories.



Third place winner for Junior Group Exhibits, “Surviving Slavery,” by students from IS 78, the Roy Mann school.

under the guidance of Janise Mitchell) for “Surviving Slavery.” Both third place entries are eligible to advance to the state competition in Cooperstown. Students will receive feedback from the judges in order to refine their projects and *American Journey* will provide travel and registration funds. We congratulate them and wish them luck!



Another student entry from American Journey New York City History Day.

Feature Lesson from New York City and the Nation

A successful format for our institute sessions has combined scholar talks, hands-on workshops, and discussion of classroom application in a full day of learning. During one such session in 2006, program partner City Lore presented a workshop on teaching history through songwriting, led by Amanda Dargan and teaching artist Leo Schaff, and historian Adina Back gave a talk on immigration to New York from 1865-1898. Fifty NYC public school teachers from grades 4,5,7 and 8 took part. We're happy to share City Lore's teaching strategy with you here.

Teaching History through Songwriting

AMANDA DARGAN, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, CITY LORE, INC.

Workshop Overview

This workshop models effective ways for teachers to use interviews and songwriting to enhance student learning in social studies. The interview activities modeled in the workshop are designed to help students build the skills necessary for conducting interviews that yield compelling stories and rich historical information. The songwriting process that the workshop models takes students to the next step of analyzing and interpreting oral history interviews with the goal of expressing their understanding through the lyrics and music of an original song. These models can be adapted to students in grades K-12.

Student Learning Goals:

- Students will plan and conduct an oral history interview focusing on the theme of immigration
- Students will analyze and interpret an interview
- Students will compose lyrics and a melody to convey their interpretation of an oral history interview

Mini-Lesson:

Why do oral history in the classroom? As preparation for conducting an oral history interview, we led a group of teachers in a discussion of what oral history interviews can bring to our understanding of history. We discussed how oral histories provide a way to learn about the past from people with firsthand knowledge of historical events. These interviews also provide evidence about the experiences and perspectives of ordinary people who may have been excluded from published histories or who did not leave behind written materials, such as letters and diaries. In addition, they provide compelling material, such as stories, personal anecdotes, and eyewitness accounts of historical events.

We discussed the challenges and benefits of designing oral history projects — identifying people for students to interview, helping students develop skills in asking questions that yield interesting information, and designing culminating projects that engage students in analyzing and interpreting their interviews. Then we modeled some of the activities and processes City Lore uses to build students' interviewing skills.

ACTIVITY #1: LEARNING TO LISTEN

Grouping: Pairs

Description:

One of the most important skills in interviewing and one of the most difficult for inexperienced interviewers is how to listen carefully and how to make the interview feel like a conversation even though one person is doing most of the talking. The activity below — the first one we use with students — helps develop those skills.

Procedure:

1. Divide class into pairs
2. Designate one member of the pair as A and the other as B.
3. Tell students that they are going to listen to each other talk for two minutes about a particular experience they or a member of their family had. Select a topic that relates to the lesson theme. Since the scholar talk for our session had focused on immigration history, we asked our teachers to close their eyes and recall a memory of leaving a person or place that they thought they might never see again.
4. Ask students to close their eyes and use guided imagery to help them recall rich sensory details (if they are recalling a personal experience) or to imagine those details if they are retelling a family story: sights, sounds, smells, emotions. Then give them a few minutes to think about how to shape their memory into a story with a beginning, middle, and end.
5. Tell students that while A is talking, B is to listen only and not take notes nor ask questions. When two minutes is up, ask the pairs to reverse roles; B will talk for two minutes and A will listen.
6. Ask pairs to stand or come to the front of the class, one pair at a time. Ask A to say his/her name and introduce his/her partner, then to retell to the class what B said. Then A should ask B if there is anything that was left out that B would like to add. Reverse roles and have B do the same for A.
7. Discuss the experience with students. What did it feel like to listen and not ask questions? What is difficult or uncomfortable? Was it easier to listen or to talk? Did anything surprise you? What did you learn (about interviewing, about yourself, about your partner)? What would you do differently if you did this again?

Debrief the Activity

We led teachers in a discussion of the skills this activity helps develop and ways to integrate this activity into their teaching. Ideas generated by the group included:

- Students can develop good listening skills, i.e., listening to remember without writing notes, and showing interest without using words, such as nodding, smiling, and making eye contact with the person you are interviewing.
- Students can practice shaping personal experience into narrative form with a beginning, middle, and end.
- Students can practice using oral language to retell, in their own words, what they heard from their partner.
- Students can get immediate feedback from their partner on how well they listened and remembered.
- Students can make personal connections to the topic explored in the social studies unit.
- Students can generate rich information to inspire further research.
- Students may begin to develop confidence in speaking, first in a one-to-one situation and then to the entire class. Shy students are often less fearful telling their partner's story to the class rather than their own.

ACTIVITY #2: MODEL INTERVIEW**Grouping:** Whole Group

After debriefing the listening exercise, we selected one participant to interview in depth. Before conducting the interview, we discussed important steps in preparing students for interviewing, including identifying a person to interview who has first hand experience of the events or period of history you are researching, calling ahead to explain your project and assure the person that you are interested in their personal experiences, preparing a list of topics and questions (thinking ahead to your culminating project or use for the interview helps in the formulation of questions), and checking your equipment if you plan to record the interview. Since we were writing a song based on our interview, we discussed questions that might yield the kind of material we would need for songwriting, e.g., interesting phrases and images, styles of music that the interviewee likes or associates with the cultural or historical event, sensory details, and a narrative sequence to tell a story. Then we discussed two types of questions that are essential to a good interview. These are:

1. **Closed-ended questions** that get “yes” and “no” or one or two-word responses and help you gather basic information. These questions often begin with the words:
 - *What* (is the name of the town where you were born?)
 - *Where* (were you stationed during the war?)
 - *When* (did you family come to the United States?)
 - *Did* (your family enter the United States through Ellis Island?)
2. **Open-ended questions** give the narrator a chance to talk at length on a topic. Devote more time to open-ended questions, which often begin with the words and phrases:
 - *Tell me about* (your experiences working in the mine)
 - *What was it like* (living on the Lower East Side at that time)?
 - *Describe* (a typical day at sea).
 - *Explain* (how you prepared for your journey).
 - *How* (did you feel leaving your family behind)?
 - *Why* (did you decide to take a job in a factory)?

We also encourage students to listen carefully to interviewee’s responses and ask follow-up questions to clarify or probe more deeply into a topic or to get more specific and detailed information. Students should also ask for specific examples and stories rather than general statements and information. We encourage students to use their list of prepared questions as a guide only and to be open to exploring unexpected topics that arise in the interview and to explore. During the interview students should show that they are interested and listening by making eye contact, being attentive to what is said, not repeating questions, waiting until the narrator is finished answering before asking another question, and by asking good follow-up questions.

ACTIVITY #3: THE SONGWRITING PROCESS

Grouping: Whole Group and Individual

After conducting the interview, we introduced teachers to the songwriting process. Although City Lore’s teaching artist, Leo Schaff, has students write both the lyrics and the music, teachers new to songwriting may feel more comfortable with having students write lyrics using an existing melody. Many folk songs share melodies, and some songwriters, such as Woody Guthrie, often borrowed traditional melodies for his songs.

LEO’S SONGWRITING PROCESS

In writing songs with children, it is important to keep the process fun and interesting. It’s also important to be flexible and open to whatever happens in the room. These are some of the steps I use in songwriting with children, although the order may change and often we move back and forth between steps, such as writing melody and lyrics.

Generate Ideas - Songwriters get ideas from many places: from their own experiences, from news stories, from signs they see on the street. Many songwriters keep a notebook to write down ideas, phrases or titles to use later for songwriting, and I encourage students to start a songwriter’s journal. For this workshop we will write a song based on our interview.

Select Key Words, Phrases, Images - From what you heard, or from notes you wrote down, let’s list some words and/or phrases you remember from our interview; include images or feelings of your own that may have come to mind while listening.

Organize and Categorize - Organize words/phrases into groups based on a particular aspect of the interview: an event, a description, a story, a feeling, a memory, etc.

Analyze and Interpret - Is a theme emerging — struggle, journey, longing, the old and the new, hardship, hope, loss, the importance of family ties, etc.? Is there a story we want to tell? We can start a list of possible themes.

Add Rhyme - Transform phrases into lines that rhyme. Take one of the groups of phrases and try to transform them into two or four lines that rhyme. (This can be done as a whole group, incorporating individual suggestions; or it can be worked on individually or in small groups, each then reporting to the whole.)

Select a Musical Style or Form - What kind of music would be appropriate to the theme, mood, or cultural identity of our interviewee? What mood should the music convey – spirited and energetic, quiet and peaceful, somber and sad, comical, or inspirational? What kind of music did our interview subject say he/she liked. Should we try to write music in that style? Or, should we write music in a traditional style from our interview subject’s country of origin?

Add Melody and Rhythm - As rhyming sections emerge, would someone like to try to sing a couple of the lines (i.e., make up a melodic phrase)? Or, would someone like to say this section a couple of times over, but give it a beat as you say it (i.e., make up a rhythm). If not, let’s play a chord or two on the guitar, and see if that helps us come up with a melody or rhythm. [OR: Take an existing song — either traditional to the interviewee’s native country, or a song they like, or a song the class (and the teacher!) are familiar with — and use it as a template upon which to write a new lyric.]

Give It Structure and Form - Do we have a section that sounds (lyrically and/or musically) like a verse — sections that move the story along? Or, do we have a chorus — a section that repeats and that captures or sums up the theme of the song? Or, do we have a section that can work as a bridge — a section that crosses the song over from the main part of the story to a new and culminating part?

Put It All Together - In groups (or as a class), let’s work on the sections and bring them together.

Keep It Interesting - Just as a story needs to move to different places, so, the music has to move out of its loop of melodic verse repetition into a chorus that sounds different, and that usually lifts the song – in melody and spirit. A bridge or even a spoken word section is another way to move the story along, change the melody and/or the rhythm, and keep it interesting.

Give It a Title - Do we have a title? The title helps define the message of the song.

Edit and Revise - The process of writing a song is like a journey to an unknown country: exploring new combinations of words, new feelings and images, new ways of telling and re-telling a story, new melodies and rhythms. But have we taken on too much baggage? Do we have too many verses or too many subjects or words in the lyric? Have we kept to our theme or themes, or have they been lost along the way? Have we gotten a bit carried away in our journey and are we beginning to feel a little lost? Do we need to return to the familiar roots of the song: the catchy phrase or melody that repeats (i.e., the “hook”); the central story line; the central image or feeling? Do the melodies of the different sections work and flow together?

Perform It and Pass It On - Once the pieces begin to fit, the song comes to life – when we sing it. And it takes on a life of its own when it’s then sung and played in new and different ways – by other people!

RESOURCES FOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

We have found the following resources useful in designing oral history projects with students:

Brown, Cynthia Stokes. *Like It Was: A Complete Guide to Writing Oral History*. NY: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1988.

Dickson, Diane Skiffington et al. *The Oral History Project: Connecting Students to Their Community, Grades 4-8*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2006.

Rogovin, Paula. *Classroom Interviews: A World of Learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.

SAMPLE FROM A CITY LORE SONGWRITING RESIDENCY

In a songwriting residency at P.S. 11 in Woodside, Queens, two third grade classes interviewed two immigrants from Colombia, South America: Clara Lopez, a classroom teacher, and Luz Garcia, who worked in the bakery across from the school. Each class wrote two songs based on their interviews and performed their songs for the school and the two women they had interviewed. *Clara Saw an Eagle* is one of the pieces they created.

Clara Saw an Eagle

Clara saw an eagle up in the sky
The wind was blowing in her face causing her to cry
Clara saw an eagle way up high
She thought she saw her father
At the same time

Chorus:

And a tear ran down her lonely eye
She wondered why, she wondered why
It reminded her of when she had
To say goodbye, to say good bye
Manizales, Colombia – Manizales, Colombia
Manizales, Colombia – Manizales, Colombia

Clara saw an eagle up in the sky
Looking for the river where many people died
She thought she saw an angel way up high
And thought about her country
Why must people die?

Chorus:

And a tear ran down her lonely eye
She wondered why, she wondered why
It reminded her of when she had
To say goodbye, to say goodbye
Manizales, Colombia – Manizales, Colombia
Manizales, Colombia – Manizales, Colombia

Clara saw an eagle up in the sky



City Lore is a cultural organization, located on Manhattan's Lower East Side, whose mission is to document, preserve and present the living cultural heritage of New York City. Education is central to our mission and informs all of our programs, both school and community-based. For more information about City Lore's education programs, contact Schools Program Director Anika Selhorst, at 212-529-1955 ext. 303, or anika@citylore.org.

New York City and the Nation Spring 2007 Workshops

EXPLORE ON-SITE LEARNING: STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING NATIONAL AND LOCAL HISTORY

Free May 2007 Workshops for New York City public school Social Studies Teachers, grades 4, 5, 7, and 8.

ADVANCE REGISTRATION REQUIRED.
SPACE IS LIMITED TO 20 TEACHERS PER WORKSHOP

MAY 8, 2007, 8:30AM-3PM

“Investigating History and Architecture: Merchant’s House Museum, Manhattan”

Led by educators from the Merchant’s House Museum and Historic House Trust, and a teaching architect.

Explore New York City’s only family home that is preserved intact from the 19th century. Study how architecture and community studies can be incorporated into interdisciplinary learning. Teaching strategies include a neighborhood walk, sketching, conducting primary research, and roleplaying.

MAY 16, 2007, 8:30AM-3PM

“Incorporating Photography into the Classroom: Alice Austen House, Staten Island”

Led by educators and teaching artists from the Alice Austen House and Historic House Trust.

The Alice Austen House is the home and workplace to one of America’s earliest and most prolific female photographers. Discover how photography is an interdisciplinary learning strategy using Polaroid and digital cameras. Analyze Austen’s photographs of Staten Island in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Learn how this collection can be connected to student projects documenting contemporary Staten Island life.

MAY 23, 2007, 8:30AM-3PM

“Investigating Local History and Architecture: Kingsland Homestead, Queens”

Led by educators from the Kingsland Homestead/Queens Historical Society and Historic House Trust, and a teaching architect.

The Kingsland Homestead, a late 18th century farmhouse where family descendants lived until the 1920s, is now home to the Queens Historical Society. Learn how architecture and community studies can be incorporated into interdisciplinary learning. Conduct primary research in the homestead and the surrounding neighborhood. Explore how neighborhood walks can be used for the study of local history.

EACH WORKSHOP SESSION INCLUDES:

- Complimentary breakfast
- Free curriculum support materials
- Discussions on classroom application and linking to New York City and New York State Learning Standards

TO REGISTER:

Email the following information to gothamed@gc.cuny.edu

- 1) Your name, email address, and two phone numbers (cell, home, work).
- 2) The workshops you wish to attend (NOTE: there is a limit of two workshops per person).
- 3) Your school and the grade level/subject you teach.
- 4) Please put “On-Site Learning Registration” in the subject line of your message.

You will receive a confirmation via email. Please bring your confirmation to the workshop.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

contact the Gotham Center at 212-817-8471 or gothamed@gc.cuny.edu • <http://www.gothamed.edu>

New York City and the Nation Spring 2007 Workshops *continued*

NEW YORK CITY AND THE NATION: A TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY EXTRAVAGANZA

SATURDAY, JUNE 2, 2007, 9AM-4PM.

Explore the rich history of New York during this FREE one day event!
Workshops & Resources for New York City public school Social Studies teachers, grades 4, 5, 7, and 8.

ADVANCE REGISTRATION REQUIRED.

THE DAY FEATURES:

- Keynote address by Pulitzer-prize winning historian Mike Wallace, author of *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*
- Hands-on workshops utilizing neighborhood walks, drama, oral history, and museum exhibits bring history to life
- Free continental breakfast and lunch for networking
- Free educational resources, including books, teaching manuals, and more

TO REGISTER:

Email the following information to gothamed@gc.cuny.edu:

- 1) Your name, email address, and at least two contact phone numbers (cell, home, work).
- 2) Your school and the grade level/subject you teach.
- 3) Please type "June 2 Event" in the subject line of your email.

Participants will be registered on a first-come, first-serve basis. Registration required; no walk-ins. Your registration will be confirmed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact the Gotham Center at 212-817-8471 or gothamed@gc.cuny.edu • <http://www.gothamed.edu>

Citywide American History Professional Development: A Success Story

ELISE ABEGG

DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL STUDIES, NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND
PROJECT DIRECTOR FOR THE DEPARTMENT'S CITYWIDE TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY GRANTS.

New York is a city of talented and committed teachers. Our citywide Teaching American History grants afford us the opportunity to work with some of these professionals in an ongoing, in-depth capacity. The results have been wonderful. Teachers involved in the programs often remark on the unique opportunity of working with citywide colleagues, saying, "I find this sort of concentrated study with colleagues from various parts of the city extremely valuable," and "This experience has given me the tools to make real change in my class and in my school." The engaging historians, stellar NYC & the Nation partners, experienced DOE staff and indeed the teachers themselves provide a wealth of information and teaching strategies that transform the pedagogy of the participants. As such, teachers involved in the ongoing Teacher Leader program, which is an outgrowth of the citywide TAH grants, have moved beyond their role as participants to the role of workshop facilitators. In this capacity, they presented to a citywide audience at a full-day American History Conference on April 14th. In taking on this leadership role, each of these teachers is contributing to the sustained improvement in the teaching and learning of American History.

Contact New York City & the Nation and its partner organizations:

For more information about **New York City & the Nation**, please contact the grant's Project Directors: Elise Abegg, Director of Social Studies, at eabegg@schools.nyc.gov and Julie Maurer, Director of Education, Gotham Center for New York City History, at gothamed@gc.cuny.edu

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