



Learning Together: Book Discussions and Reading Strategies

By Susan Bonthron

“How open am I to changing my own point of view?”

“How interesting and enlightening it can be when people interpret the same information differently.”

“I really made connections between a number of themes that I tend to think about in isolation – slavery, immigration, westward expansion.”

These quotes are taken directly from teacher’s responses to the questions: “What was the most important thing you learned today?” and “What is one question you have about what you learned today?” These teachers from the Rivendell bi-state school district were taking part in one of Flow of History’s fall reading groups in October and November of 2005. This particular group met four times at the Samuel Morey Elementary School in Fairlee, Vermont. Inspired by previous Flow of History book groups that focus on historical content, these Rivendell teachers decided to go deeper and engage in critical reading strategies that could be taken back to classrooms with the goal of helping students interpret nonfiction, historical fiction, and primary sources while studying American history. The “Ticket Out of Class” that requires answering the two questions above is one such strategy used in the group and later in classrooms.

Questions Drive the Discussion

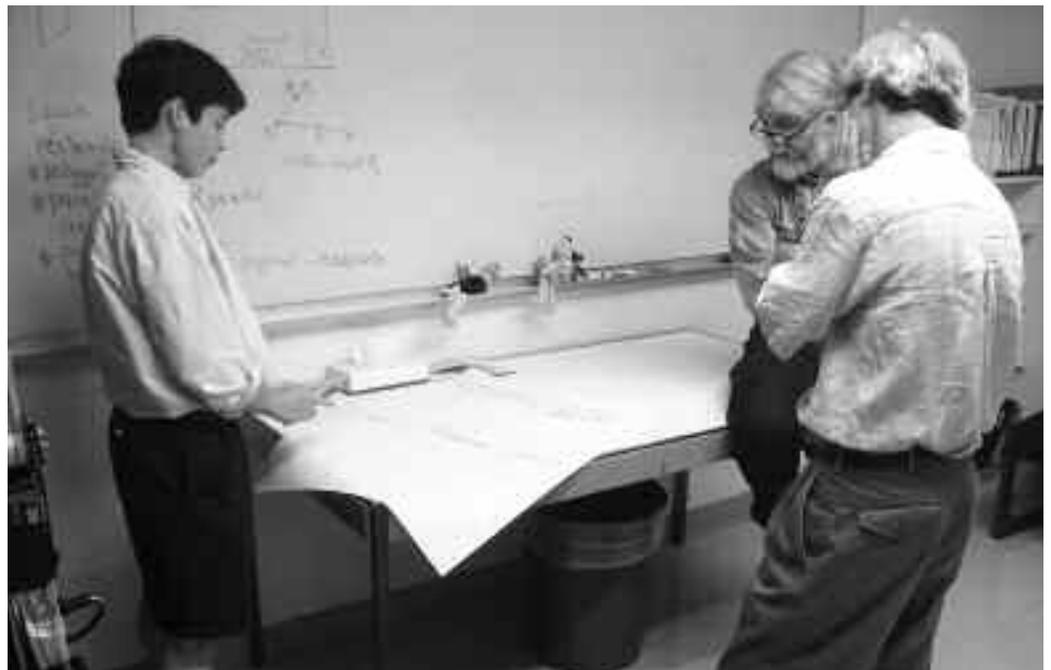
I had the opportunity to attend two of the reading group meetings, and early in 2006 I visited the Rivendell School classrooms of two participants who were employing strategies learned or reinforced in the group. The book group examined four essential content questions as they read a variety of fiction and nonfiction books and excerpts:

- How are the needs and values of various cultures reflected in their use of land?
- How do these needs and values vary according to culture?
- What is progress?
- What choices, values, and consequences arise in the name of progress?

The nature of these questions required making connections across books, eras, and points of view.

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Rivendell teachers Bridget Fariel and Dan Noseworthy contemplate the Frayer model while Project Historian Alan Berolzheimer looks on.



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The group’s discussions were wide ranging and fascinating, but always grounded specifically in the texts. Helping students become strategic readers was an ongoing focus of this group. Participants read:

■ Diane Muir’s *Reflections in Bullough’s Pond: Economy and Ecosystem in New England*, which examines how the New England landscape has influenced and been influenced by the people who inhabited it over time; and three young adult novels:

■ Joyce Rockwood’s *To Spoil the Sun*, about a Cherokee girl and the devastating losses to her tribe wrought by the advent of smallpox;

■ Katherine Paterson’s *Lyddie*, about a Vermont girl who goes to work at the Lowell mills;

■ Joseph Bruchac’s *Hidden Roots*, about how a Native American boy’s family was personally affected by the eugenics movement in Vermont; along with excerpts from Nancy Gallagher’s *Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State*, which explores the relationship between the eugenics movement, racism, and policies of social reform.

Throughout the program, Gail Keiling, principal of Samuel Morey Elementary School and herself a reading specialist, played an important role in collecting and summarizing the group’s responses for distribution online, fielding questions, and offering suggested readings to complement the discussions. She and Bridget Fariel (high school history teacher at Rivendell) facilitated discussions that periodically revisited a chart on the theme of “Progress” and what it means culturally and historically. Our understanding and reflections changed from week to week as we engaged in the books.

On the day I visited, Gail introduced the agenda. Before breaking into groups to discuss the assigned reading from *Reflections in Bullough’s Pond* and *Lyddie*, Gail reminded us about how to compare ideas, disagree politely, add on to others’ ideas, give evidence for our ideas, and keep the talk close to the book with questions and statements such as, “Where in the book does it say that?” “What makes you think that?” “I disagree and here’s why....”

Making Connections

In our small group, Orly Hasbani (third-grade teacher at Samuel Morey) spoke about the connections between wage slave, planta-

All over the room teachers were making connections between Diana Muir’s descriptions of industrial America at its beginnings and global commerce now—how exports/imports change the availability of goods and labor, and with what consequences.

tion slave, and immigrant labor. Patsy Belknap (fourth-grade teacher at Samuel Morey) spoke about adjusting her previous misconceptions about immigrants and how they ended up taking jobs because they were “willing to work for less.” Both made connections to current labor practices and pondered creating a map of where our clothes are made today and under what conditions. All over the room teachers were making connections between Diana Muir’s descriptions of industrial America at its beginnings and global commerce now—how exports/imports change the availability of goods and labor, and with what consequences.

Strategies for Literacy

Some of the strategies and information that teachers could take back to the classroom included:

■ A laminated bookmark with questions about the text and suggestions for journal entries.

■ An “Inquiry Chart”—a graphic organizer that helps readers synthesize information by posing a set of questions to be answered with text-based evidence and “synthesizing statements” (see Figure 1).

■ David Liben’s notes on “Comprehension Monitoring” to help students become aware of

their reading comprehension and be able to find “Fix-Up Strategies” such as reading more slowly, re-reading, reading aloud, figuring out meaning of words from context, and so forth. Teachers were encouraged to model their own strategies for students by “thinking out loud” while reading a difficult passage.

■ Using “Frayer model” response sheets that encourage readers to find themes, make connections, describe facts or characteristics, wonder and question, and to describe morals or lessons or picture images from the text (see Figure 2 on page 6).

■ Distributing “Tickets Out of Class” that require responses about what was learned today and ongoing questions that the discussion engendered, setting the stage for further discussion or wondering.

Later on in the large group, Bridget asked us how we liked the “Four Squares” approach (as the Frayer model came to be called). Several teachers expressed how much they liked this strategy. Orly added that it reinforces techniques they have been using already, such as targeted mini-lessons on what it means to question and wonder.

Site Visits with Two Teachers

In addition to the many close-read strategies that have been emphasized in all the book groups that sixth-grade teacher Gordon Christie-Maples has attended, he finds note taking with the Frayer model particularly useful. “I use that a fair amount with fiction. For many students it gives them different options (i.e., sharing something visual if they are not strong writers) but it also challenges them to make connections and to get something down

continued on page 6

| Question | Evidence p. | Evidence q. | Evidence r. | Synthesizing Statement |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|
| How do words and ideas reflect or contrast one another? | | | | |
| How do words and ideas vary according to context? | | | | |
| What is progress? | | | | |
| What values, beliefs, and consequences arise in the name of progress? | | | | |

Figure 1: Inquiry chart to encourage text-based synthesis across readings.

Resource Packet to Highlight Civil Rights Connections

by Alan Berolzheimer

The past few issues of this newsletter have presented various historical links between Vermont, New Hampshire, and the Sea Islands region of South Carolina. Extending these links up to modern times, the Flow of History is creating a primary source-based resource packet for teachers about the Civil Rights era, with a focus on the state of race relations in Vermont and New Hampshire at mid-century and stories of people from this area who were active in the Civil Rights Movement. Kirsten Surprenant, a teacher at Rivendell Academy, will be helping to create classroom lessons and activities for the packet, which will include background essays, primary source materials, and teaching suggestions.

In addition, plans are in the works for a presentation and teacher workshops on the Civil Rights era, tentatively scheduled for early in 2007. We will keep you updated by email and snail mail.

Some of the local connections that stand out so far include:

■ **Penny Patch**, who moved to Vermont in the late 1960s after spending five years immersed in civil rights work, was the first white female field worker for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1962.

■ A young man from Bradford, Vermont, named **John Chatfield** was catapulted into the movement in 1962 when he read in the *New York Times* about a confrontation between sheriffs and civil rights workers in Terrell County, Georgia, that involved a college friend whom he didn't know was there (as well as Penny Patch). He went to Georgia and was soon wounded by gunfire in a similar confrontation in the same community. Chatfield became a historian and now teaches at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

■ Drawing on his understanding of the needs of Vermont small businesses, **Senator George Aiken** brokered the critical compromise that ensured passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

■ Shortly after enactment of the Civil Rights Act, two couples from the Portsmouth, New Hampshire, area—one white, one black—forced a prominent historic hotel there to abandon its long-standing policy of neither serving nor employing African Americans, Jews, and other minorities.

■ One of the white martyrs who gave up his life in the struggle—murdered in Lowndes County, Alabama, by a Klan sniper deputized by local police for the attack—was **Jonathan Daniels**, a New Hampshire native who was an Episcopalian seminary student at the time. He had been working with Stokely Carmichael and SNCC in Selma, Alabama. (He is also the subject of a new documentary film.)

■ **African-American students** at Dartmouth College collected money to assist students at South Carolina State University who were caught up in the Orangeburg Massacre of 1968, a shocking precursor to the killings at Kent State and Jackson State in 1970. At the same time, voters at Hanover Town Meeting debated whether or not to continue financing the ABC program that was bringing black inner-city youths to attend Hanover High School.

We will be exploring some of these stories and primary sources in the fall Flow of History book groups. Sign up now (see back page for details). For more information contact Alan Berolzheimer, bercress@sover.net.



Teaching the Civil War: At Home and on the Battlefield

December 5, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Woodstock, VT
Registration Fee: \$35

At this workshop, you will gain knowledge of the primary sources available, both locally and online; learn about the Civil War; and have opportunities to make connections between local stories and the national experience. We will find soldiers buried in the Woodstock cemetery and research their experiences both at home and on the battlefield. Handouts and teacher discussions will help make workshop topics applicable to classrooms in grades 6-12. Workshop leaders include: Jack Anderson, Civil War historian; Sarah Rooker, Director, Flow of History; Amy Cunningham, Educator, Vermont Historical Society.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE NOVEMBER 1.

To register send your name and contact information, along with a \$35 check made out to "Woodstock Historical Society" to: The Woodstock Historical Society, 26 Elm Street, Woodstock, VT 05091.

Gullah Studies Institute Sizzles!

By Alan Berolzheimer

The history was inescapable and the culture was bursting in South Carolina, as thirteen Flow of History teachers and staff reveled in full immersion at the summer institute on Gullah Studies. We toured historic Charleston, starting at Fort Sumter; we were stimulated by dynamic course and workshop leaders on a range of fascinating subjects; we ate authentic Gullah cuisine day in and day out; we were privileged to study the local history and culture with knowledgeable and respected members of the Gullah community; we did substantial hands-on research in Beaufort and at the Penn Center; we walked around Vermonter Louden Langley's neighborhood and located his house there, and the gravesites of Louden and his brother Lewis in the National Cemetery; we enjoyed much great conversation and good humor after hours, usually while working away on our journals; and most of us even managed to spend a little time on the beach. One whirlwind week was productive and fun, but many of us also felt it wasn't quite enough.

The consensus of the group was that the caliber of the institute faculty was impressive all around, with classes and workshops both informative and exciting. The other institute participants we met and became friendly with were equally wonderful. Several Flow of History participants attended the classes on the Port Royal Experiment, Gullah Cultural Legacies, the Black Seminoles of Oklahoma (descendants of escaped Gullah slaves), and teaching about slavery, all of which proved to be fascinating. The workshops on photographing black farmers, dyeing with indigo, and Gullah-style polyrhythms won unanimous high praise. The group also took advantage of evening programs, including an appearance by 90-year-old master decorative blacksmith Philip Simmons of Charleston, and lectures on

Everyone who went on the trip made a hand-bound journal with Susan Bonthron, which served as a fulcrum for our place-based learning experience of absorbing and reflecting upon the sights, sounds, feel, and history of the Sea Islands.

the myths and realities of the Underground Railroad and the fight for civil rights in Beaufort and the Sea Islands in the 1960s. Elise Guyette gave an excellent presentation of her work on Louden Langley's journey from a farming community in Hinesburg, Vermont,

to Beaufort, where he participated vigorously in the constitutional convention of 1868, became a school superintendent, purchased a lot of land, and passed his final years living at the Oakland plantation on St. Helena and serving as the lighthouse keeper on Hunting Island (where we strolled the beach, in the shadow of the tower, drinking in the ocean splendor).

Teachers pursuing research projects found fantastic resources, documents, and photographs for classroom use at the Penn Center and the Beaufort County Library. Among the more exciting finds was a 1930s slave narrative recorded by a man who was born a slave on the Fripp Plantation on St. Helena Island, just down the road from Penn, as well as historic photographs of the man and



Samples from the journals created by Flow of History participants at the institute.

Gullah Studies Institute group portrait. Flow of History Director Sarah Rooker stands at the far left.



The teachers who went to South Carolina came away convinced of the value of studying history in the place where it happened. Having the opportunity to walk the ground, explore the buildings, find the cemeteries, and discover the things left behind by those who made that history will enrich their teaching and make it more vibrant for their students.



Aunt Pearlie Sue (and her grandson) entertained the institute crowd with Gullah storytelling.

his family—the links and verifications all corroborated by other sources such as diaries, journals, even a painting hanging in the back room of the Laura Towne Library. We also discovered a list of northern teachers who came South during and immediately after the Civil War, and found to our delight the names of nearly 80 people from Vermont and New Hampshire; Martha Johnson now has company!

Everyone who went on the trip made a hand-bound journal with Susan Bonthron, which served as a fulcrum for our place-based learning experience of absorbing and reflecting upon the sights, sounds, feel, and history of the Sea Islands. People did amazing work in their journals: sketching and watercolor, calligraphic lettering, note taking, pasting in bits and pieces from maps and brochures, inserting flowers, grasses, shells, and freshly printed digital photographs. On our last evening the Penn Center threw a fish fry and crab crack for institute goers and members of the community, where we proudly displayed our journals. They were the envy of all, and I'm betting that next year all participants in the Gullah Studies Institute will be making and using journals like the ones that Flow of History folks were seen carrying all

around South Carolina for a week in July.

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Shrimping in the salt marsh.



“My favorite type of professional development includes not only relevant content but also methods and strategies to take right back into the classroom. That’s what these Flow of History book study groups have done.”

that they can reflect on. Just writing it down helps them to articulate their thinking.”

Gordon continues, “One of the most refreshing things about the book groups is reading these books together and listening to other’s ideas about them, which are often different from your own. The conversation takes you in different directions and helps make connections with modern-day events. It has helped me become more sophisticated in my approach to instruction, targeting a close-read strategy as a primary focus for reading nonfiction for students. Often 6th grade is the first time these kids have encountered this strategy, and they find it challenging. The idea of re-reading and analyzing text is very new to them—making notes, asking them to be involved in the process of reading for understanding.

“Some like it, some don’t, but either way they find it helps them understand the text better, helps them reflect on what they’ve read and process it and then come into a discussion and be able to work with the information.”

Proof of his conclusions was evident in my visit to his classroom. I wandered around listening to snatches of conversation his students were having about Athenian democracy and its relation to American democracy based on the reports they were sharing with each other in small groups. These were a few of the comment I overheard:

“You might want to make it clear who is

struggling for their rights—women and slaves or Plebians?”

“You missed saying what a democracy is, and how the concept of democracy developed.”

“A democracy is when people get together to decide how to run things. A republic is when all citizens elect leaders to run their government—that’s a representative democracy.”

Gordon uses the “Ticket Out of Class” as a strategy both for encouraging student reflection on the day’s learning and as a good way to stimulate discussion at the beginning of a class. He has found that encouraging students to pair up and share their learning and questions allows the kids who are shy to build confidence. Having to identify and write down what stood out for them and what they have a question about encourages all students to become more active participants. “It’s my perception that I see kids being more active in their ownership of what they’re learning. It also helps them when they have to report or take tests,” adds Gordon.

As participant Kirsten Surprenant described the book group experience, “My favorite type of professional development includes not only relevant content but also methods and strategies to take right back into the classroom. That’s what these Flow of History book study groups have done.

“In a personal sense, it’s great to work with colleagues in talking about content—we don’t usually do that. We don’t just sit and talk about a

book. The strategies we used were great because they modeled something you can take into the classroom and try out.” Kirsten attended the spring book group too, deepening her knowledge of African-American history and meeting teachers from other schools she hadn’t met before.

Kirsten chose the Frayer model to use with her students because “it is one page that can be folded up with everything in one place. For students this is a good starting point, not intimidating. Even content-wise, I feel I learned something new. We tend to focus on practice rather than content in other contexts.”

“Several of the book groups have nothing to do with what I teach, but they provide a stimulating environment to read and discuss that becomes a useful model to use in my classroom.”

When I asked Gordon about an ongoing sense of collaboration with other teachers as a result of the groups, he replied, “That’s one of the benefits. Several of the book groups have nothing to do with what I teach, but they provide a stimulating environment to read and discuss that becomes a useful model to use in my classroom. The reading groups take discussion to a further level. They reinforce the teacher as a moderator or guide who facilitates the discussion rather than leading it, so the students become more actively engaged. As the year goes on, students become more skilled in the process.”

The following quote from a high school student’s “Ticket Out of Class” reinforces the skill-building aspect of this kind of discussion, and the dramatic impact group reflection can have on students.

“Today in my Holocaust class I learned how important it really is to see another person’s point of view. And this...relates to everything: the Holocaust and how it began because people didn’t stand up for what they believe in, and our group discussions and how other opinions really help shape your own. If you are stuck on one opinion, I would hope it was a conclusion of the facts and considering other opinions. It’s important today in government issues and all your life to listen to others and learn from others. It’s a skill—a skill I realized we will need.”

The Flow of History continues to offer book discussion groups in the Connecticut River watershed area. See the notice on the back page of this newsletter, and contact www.flowofhistory.org for more information.

Figure 2:
Example of a
Frayer model
from Kirsten
Surprenant’s class.



Reading Strategies and Flow of History Book Groups

By Sarah Rooker

Ever since we began Flow of History book groups in 2004, each session has combined discussion of content and reading strategies. Using the nine concepts identified by the Vermont Strategic Reading Initiative (VSRI), facilitators work to identify reading strategies that participants have used to inform the discussion. Good readers (which, of course, all our participants are!) combine strategies without even being aware of them; facilitators draw attention to them as they arise in discussion rather than actually teaching them.

Perhaps the most common strategy that launches a strong book discussion is “Asking Questions,” whereby participants bring their own questions about the text to the table. This collaborative inquiry builds strong connections both to the content and among the participants. Throughout all book discussions, participants are asked to stick closely to the text. Before going deeply into a comment, a speaker brings everyone to the passage under consideration, keeping the discussion grounded in the reading. This is only possible if the text has been “coded” or given a close read prior to the discussion with underlining and annotations. Sometimes, this prior work provides an entrance into discussion: Sharing with a neighbor what one chose to underline or annotate is itself a way of reflecting on the text. It can also be used to highlight a strategy—for instance, a facilitator might ask participants to share observations that connect the text to some prior knowledge about themselves, another text, or events in the world.

As adult readers and discussion participants, taking a step back to reflect on how we read the content of a book, article, excerpt, or document and the questions and connections we bring to it is a rejuvenating activity that always makes everyone want a little more. We look forward to another great year of book groups!

The VSRI Strategies

■ **Imagine, Using a Variety of Senses**, such as visualizing a scene depicted in the writing, creating a graphic or three-dimensional representation of an abstract principle, or imagining how a substance might feel, smell, or taste.

■ **Make Connections** by drawing upon prior knowledge to make text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections in order to clarify and extend understanding of the text.

■ **Analyze Text Structure** means using transition words, table of contents, subheads, bold print, and text patterns to help discriminate among fiction, nonfiction, comparative, explana-

tory, and other text structures, as well as paying attention to other technical aspects of the author’s craft.

■ **Recognize Words and Understand Sentences.** The decoding of words and the comprehension of sentences provide the underpinning for successful reading. Strategic readers use: knowledge of sounds, syllables, and letter patterns; a range of cueing systems; familiarity with vocabulary and word origins; contextual cues; knowledge of syntax; etc.

■ **Explore Inferences** involves various means of thinking about the text, including recognizing cause-and-effect relationships, making predictions, developing analogies, extending the logic of a piece of writing, and merging known and new information to develop new understanding.

■ **Ask Questions** about the text, such as “What is the author trying to say?” “How does this relate to my life?” or “Why did the author write in the way she did?” The reader also engages, throughout the reading, in posing metacognitive questions: “Am I getting the point?” “Why does this text (not) engage me?”

■ **Determine Important Ideas and Themes.** Strategic readers focus on introductory material, topic sentences, and/or concluding material in order to identify important parts of text and to distinguish among subplots, examples, big ideas, and underlying themes.

■ **Evaluate, Summarize, Synthesize.** Strategic readers pause during or after reading to consider the main points, construct new ideas from two or more pieces of text, and reflect on the quality and relevance of the text.

■ **Reread and Adjust Approaches to the Text.** In response to the differing demands of a text, strategic readers modify the pace and rhythm with which they read, and take notes to clarify their understanding. As necessary, they also reread, read aloud, and/or underline the text, etc.

Exploring History in Picture Books and Children's Fiction

This free series, geared toward elementary teachers, examines strategies for investigating history through reading and visual thinking strategies.

Session 1:

October 24, 4–6 p.m., Dummerston, VT

Old News, New Pictures: An Annual Review of Historical Picture Books.

A survey of what's new in children's historical picture books, this session reviews current themes and topics, as well as some lesser-known favorites. Participants will receive a bibliography of books reviewed, as well as ideas for classroom connections. Presenter: Jeremy Brunaccioni, Conway (NH) Grammar School.

Session 2:

November 7, 4–6 p.m., Dummerston, VT

“What’s in a Picture?” Explore picture books that depict a variety of historical people, events, and themes. “Reading” the images they contain, participants will examine ways in which such picture books effectively convey complex and fascinating historical content to older as well as young learners.

Presenters: Barbara Mathews, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, and Reba-Jean Shaw-Pichette, Eric Carle Museum.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: SEPT 30.

To register go to:

www.learningcollaborative.org/register.htm and under “Course Name” enter **Exploring History in Picture Books**, Session 1 and/or 2; for “Location” enter **Dummerston**.

Fall 2006 Book Discussion Series

“The Problem of the 20th Century is the Problem of the Color Line”: Exploring the Civil Rights Movement

The Flow of History book group focus on African-American history and culture wraps up this fall with an exploration of the modern Civil Rights era. We will examine the major events and overall trajectory of the Civil Rights Movement, but also pay attention to lesser-known but critical grassroots work in communities throughout the country; study the writings and strategies of key figures and groups; and consider issues of perspective in primary sources that connect to local stories.

Organizing Question:

Why did African Americans’ long struggle for full participation and equality in American society achieve breakthroughs and success at a specific historical moment during the 1950s and 1960s?

Dates and Readings:

October 11: The Grand Narrative of the Civil Rights Movement

Juan Williams, et al., *Eyes on the Prize: America’s Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965*.

Primary sources with VT/NH connections

November 1: Which Side Are You On?

Han Nolan, *A Summer of Kings* (2006) [Young Adult novel].

Excerpts from the writings of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.

November 15: From Nonviolence to the Black Panthers: Conflicting Approaches to Leadership, Strategy, and Goals

Selections from *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, and Firsthand Accounts from the Black Freedom Struggle*.

November 29: An Alternative View

Emilye Crosby, *A Little Taste of Freedom: The Black Freedom Struggle in Claiborne County, Mississippi* (2005).

These book study groups are open to all teachers in the Connecticut River watershed. Books will be provided and teachers in grades 3-10 are eligible for a \$150 stipend. Sessions will take place in Hartford and Dummerston, Vermont and Claremont, New Hampshire. For further details contact Alan Berolzheimer, 802-649-2857, bercross@sover.net, or check the Flow of History website, www.flowofhistory.org.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE SEPTEMBER 22.

These sessions fill fast. To register go to: www.learningcollaborative.org/register.htm. Under “Course Name” enter “Exploring the Civil Rights Movement”; for “Location” enter Hartford, Dummerston, or Claremont.

c/o Southeast Vermont Community
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