

Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

Using Primary Source Materials to Facilitate Guided Discussions

Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

The instructor facilitates guided discussions in which students are required to analyze primary source materials. The instructor utilizes a 300-page document analysis workbook that includes assignments corresponding to each day's in-class discussion. The workbook consists of excerpts from historical documents with accompanying scaffolding questions to assist the students with their analysis of the document. The documents are organized by themes, such as American imperialism, and are typically three or four pages in length.

During class, the instructor gives a 5- to 10-minute introduction to the day's subject. The instructor uses document-based questions derived from Advanced Placement courses. These questions are designed for students to respond in essays, but the instructor uses the questions to prompt discussion instead. The instructor calls upon students to answer the document questions and discuss its importance to the topic. Students form groups for the activity and earn participation points for their analysis.

For some classes, the students must use the documents to answer an overarching question (e.g., "Why did Reconstruction fail to gain equal rights for African Americans?"). At the end of the class, the discussion centers on creating a five-paragraph essay outline to answer the overarching question, with each document's analysis serving as a "main point."