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Conference Report: NEH Summer Institute on “Rethinking the Gilded Age and Progressivisms: Race, Capitalism, and Democracy, 1877-1920”

University of Illinois at Chicago – June 25 – July 21, 2017

Thank you so much to the TEPS Committee and to the Clarence School District for supporting my participation in this truly transforming experience. Not only did it make me think deeply about the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, but it has inspired me with its emphasis on teaching strategies and student engagement. One of the most wonderful aspects of the program was the refreshing feeling of being a student again - of learning and processing and making connections - all in the good company of teachers from around the country. The Institute far surpassed my wildest hopes. The 25 other teachers were each such passionate educators: from a rural Alaskan school with just a few students in each grade to a huge performing arts school outside of Dallas, from Minnesota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Nevada, Alabama, Georgia, Michigan, and seemingly everywhere in between: from prestigious boarding schools, public schools, private schools, charter schools, we had history teachers, elementary teachers, art teachers, library media specialists, music teachers, and English teachers like me. Getting to know so many people doing such good work from around the country was completely inspiring.

Over the course of the four weeks, we had 13 seminars with visiting scholars, 8 “Applications to Teaching” sessions where we learned various strategies to engage students in an inquiry-model of research, went on several field trips, and met in working groups to develop our own lessons. A link to my lesson is attached. My juniors will be writing historical fiction based on the imagined experiences of a resident of Clarence, NY, during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. What might someone living in our community during that time period have been concerned about, interested in, or frightened of? This creative writing (backed by research) experience will be nestled between our study of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and I know that it will be a very rich experience for each of us. My colleagues in English 11R this year, Christina Boody and Alex Chambers, both are on board with the idea, so each student in English 11R will benefit from the work I have done this summer.

This whole experience was incredible, and again I want to thank the TEPS Committee for providing over \$500 to allow me to do this. What a way to recapture the joy of learning and to find myself newly appreciating the privilege it is to be a teacher.

Link to my lesson:

<https://docs.google.com/a/clarenceschools.org/document/d/1jwAElWmSlFBi5NqW5yPqH6MmRZrZpMmD3InUTxrHLio/edit?usp=sharing>