

## A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE *by Abigail Khun*

My students and I often engage in conversations about how we wish we could travel to the places we are studying. Sometimes we imagine having our classroom on an airplane, conducting our reading and writing in between places. “Can’t we just go there on a field trip?” is a common question. It is this curiosity that drives my teaching.

History education should open the world to students. Using a variety of hands-on activities and primary sources, I seek to provide a doorway to the world and its past. The Michigan History Day (National History Day in Michigan) program is one outlet, allowing students to explore and discover the past in relevant ways that leave a lasting impact on their personal growth. By learning to create a connection to the people of the past, students see history as a grand story, woven together by the actions of people like them.

Understanding the significance of history as a story leads students to my History Day elective. Michigan History Day creates a context where students connect the chapters of history’s story in ways that foster better global citizens. I encourage students to choose based on their interests, and I continue to be amazed at the topics they find relevant to both their lives and the nation. An eighth grader has discovered a love for the 1960s and is wrestling an issue with long-standing roots in our nation’s history that is still relevant today.

Regardless of how students place at the competition, students’ work through Michigan History Day allows a greater connection to the story of history, our place in it, and the ways in which we are affected today by the events of the past. From confidence-building to advanced critical-thinking skills, students who participate in History Day reap the benefits of this program.

When I first came to the Ann Arbor Learning Community, I encountered a sixth grader with the determination to qualify for the National History Day (NHD) competition. For three years, I watched her grow, and at the end of her eighth-grade year, we traveled to Washington, D.C. As she set up her exhibit in the grand ballroom, she said, “I feel like I belong here.” Recently, she served as a Michigan History Day district-level judge.

Working with History Day students has enhanced my own growth as a history teacher. Last summer, I traveled with NHD to China, encountering new ways to enrich my teaching. As I seek to spread NHD’s influence, I look beyond the walls of my classroom toward university students, encouraging those entering the rewarding field of history education. My hope is that they use NHD in their own classrooms, providing an experience that will affect their own lives as well as those of their students.

