

TEACHING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY TO A NEW GENERATION

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I am about to wrap up my 13th year teaching high school social studies. It is mind blowing to think about the amount of changes I have seen in my teaching career - the first i-phone, Instagram, Snapchat, 89-deadly school shootings, first African-American President, Netflix, Amazon, one of our most divided presidential elections ever, club sports, school of choice, vaping, Twitter, online dating, every student with a camera in their pocket, vast increase in partisan politics, marriage equality, and every student in my school given a laptop. This is just a brief list of the many ways life has changed in my short teaching career.

Beginning this year almost every single one of my current students were born after 9/11/2001 and they all have no memory of the pre-9/11 world. They have no memory of what it is like for our country to not be at war, to go to an airport and walk a family member right to the gate, or to have the majority of socialization be face to face rather than face to screen. Our students live in a different world than even I did, and I am a 2001 high school graduate-a millennial.

It seems like every year of my teaching I need to adapt, shift and find new ways to re-engage today's students. There is no shortage of advice on how to engage the students, relate to their world and make content exciting and relevant to them. We have online classrooms, text your answers, college credit classes,

apps for teaching, hands on classes, primary sources, document based questions, video game design, virtual reality in the classes and the list could go on. I have been to more trainings than I can count on topics of student engagement. One common theme I have noticed with these trainings is they are trying to take old ideas and dress them up with technology. You can put as many bells and whistles on a lesson, but if the content is dry, the students will not be engaged. I can have them in virtual reality headsets, then transition to an online quiz game, and even give prizes away, but if they don't feel connected to the content, there will be no real learning. They may have fun, but what did they really learn?

Thankfully, there are organizations out there trying to engage our youth in relevant, exciting and rigorous content activities. Harvard Business School has been using case method pedagogy within their classrooms since the early 20th century. Harvard University is now offering training to high school and college teachers using the case study approach. In short, the case study approach takes a short narrative document which presents a specific challenge facing an individual or organization. Students will be asked to read the case, put themselves in the place of the actual decision-makers and consider what they themselves would have done given the information at the time. In order to appropriately situate themselves to make an informed decision, each case will provide background history on the most relevant issues/events leading up to the decision point. Active participation is critical, and students will quickly learn to appropriately use their voice, to challenge each other, and build upon other students' ideas. This provides students with the opportunity to make complex concepts accessible and help to

develop their leadership skills, all while creating a rich, engaging intellectual atmosphere.

Our students need more opportunities like this, to unplug from the technology and to engage in rich conversations through our content. Students today have access to more information than at any other point in the history of the world and it is all in their pocket! Teaching the content is important, however, more importantly we need to teach our students what to do with the content. The case study approach allows for our students to access key moments in the history of American democracy and have constructive conversations about them. The importance of approaching a topic with empathy and true understanding of differing views cannot be understated in today's political climate. Our students are being taught through the actions of our political leaders that they can say whatever they like - however they like - and all without having a conversation. Case study teaching will also reveal to the students how American democracy has evolved over time and how US history is always ends up on the side of positive social change.

This is the learning I want to be a part of and want for my students. We can educate and inspire our students to be a part of our evolving democracy and the case study approach is an excellent starting point for today's youth.