Notes on Teaching History- 7th Grade
By Janet Langley

Engraved under one of the massive sculptures outside the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. is this quote, "The Past is Prologue."

Why do we teach history? History is not about teaching the past, it is for preparing the students for the future. As teachers we need to ask: What are these young people going to need to face their future? What challenges will the world put forth as they grow up? Nationalism? Fundamentalism? Environmental issues? Social challenges? Challenges introduced due to technological or scientific advances?

The world they live in now (and will live in) is a direct result of the past and what individuals and societies do now will create the future. History teaches us about the relationship between the individual and humanity. As human beings have evolved, their state of consciousness (awareness) has changed; one stage is different from the other…not necessarily superior and inferior, but different.

As we study history, we can find a direct correlation to individual child development, for individual development recapitulates humanity's development; history is the visible trace or manifestation of key spiritual impulses.

Steiner tells us that we should cultivate 3 qualities in our students to help them form a strong foundation for future judgments. They are:

a. What does it mean to be human?
   b. What is freedom?
   c. What is brotherhood?

Teach history as a living imagination through biography and mental pictures. Ask yourself, "What biographies are symptomatic of the gesture/impulse of the time you are covering."
During the Renaissance block, help the students to understand that during the 1500's in Europe, the consciousness of the people began to undergo a major transformation with the advent of the humanist viewpoint. People began to see the world not as a place to endure prior to Heaven, but as a gift from God that should be embraced through the senses. For example, Petrarch, the Italian poet, was the first European to climb a mountain just to enjoy the view. And with the advent of the printing press, the knowledge within books leapt out from the confines of the monasteries and into the hands of the common people. The events of the Renaissance and Reformation set the stage for the modern era.

As you look at a particular time/place, look for examples of:
   a. the spiritual impulses of the time
   b. the legal relationships between human beings
   c. the economic systems that prevailed and how they inform us about the values of that society
   d. how art and science reflected the state of consciousness of the time

Also, recall anything from the past that moves forward in a new way...such as the art, science, architecture, etc. of the Ancient Greco-Roman cultures in the Renaissance. They were inspired by these ancient treasures, but used them only as a starting place for their own advancements and achievements.

Some recommended biographies to research:

RENAISSANCE/REFORMATION INDIVIDUALS:
   1. Leonardo da Vinci
   2. Michaelangelo
   3. Raphael
   4. Lorenzo de Medici (and Cosimo)
   5. Pope Julius II
   6. Isabella de Este
   7. The Sforza's
   8. Savernola
   9. Francis I of France
   10. Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire
   11. Petrarch
   12. Dante’
13. Galileo  
14. Copernicus  
15. Tycho Brahe  
16. Johannes Kepler  
17. Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain  
18. Joan of Arc  
19. Eleanor of Aquitaine (great transition biography from Middle Ages to Renaissance if you didn't do this in 6th)  
20. Henry VIII and Elizabeth I  
21. Shakespeare  
22. Martin Luther and Wycliff/Calvin, etc.

EXPLORERS:  
1. Marco Polo, can do in 6th  
2. Ibn Battuta, also a possible 6th gd. bio  
3. Prince Henry, the Navigator  
4. The Vikings  
5. Polynesian sailors  
6. China’s “Cheng Ha and the Golden Fleet”  
7. other explorers as described in resource books below

Age of Exploration recommended resource books:

**Around the World in 100 Years**, Fritz  
**The Age of Discovery**, Silver Burdett (All realms of exploration: medicine, arts, science, commerce, etc.)  
**Journey of the Great Explorers**, Burton, Cavendish, Stonehouse

As far as books on the Renaissance, there are many, but I found the following helpful:

**Joan of Arc**, Bernard Shaw’s play about her life and trial- a great dramatic read for the students to perform  
**Saint Joan**, Polly Shoyer Brooks (title may be “Joan of Arc”?)  
**The World Awakes**, Dorothy Mills (a great one! Order through Abebooks.com)
The Creators, Daniel Boorstein
Travels of Marco Polo, Marco Polo
Lives of the Artists, G. Vasari
Sonnets, Michaelangelo (He was a very well respected poet!)
Nancy Poer has written a play on Joan of Arc based on George Bernard Shaw's play of same name

Student literature for the above themes:

Proud Taste of Scarlet and Miniver, Koingsburg (Eleanor of Aquitaine)
The Second Mrs. Gioconda, Koingsburg (Leonardo)
I, Juan de Paraje, (Velasquez, Spanish artist)
Joan of Arc, Polly Shoyer Brooks
Morningstar of the Reformation, (Wycliff)
Travels of Marco Polo, Marco Polo
Stowaway, Karen Hesse (Cook)
The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle, Avi (a girl's adventures on an ocean voyage- fiction)