



## Research: Now It's Your Turn

### Culminating the Trails Across Time Curriculum



#### Description:

The purpose of this curriculum has been to pique the students' interest into the history of the Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area, to provide examples of how to utilize primary sources for information, and to ignite a desire to conduct research into their own local history — wherever that might be. Now it's their turn.

Research is perhaps the most powerful tool in the teacher's toolshed. Developing a research question, designing a strategy, seeking out information, synthesizing this information, developing a research project, then presenting their findings to others encapsulates a multitude of critical processing skills. A successful historical research project requires creativity, insight, evaluation, applied intelligence, and empathy. Why empathy? Because the ultimate goal is for the student to understand what the people were thinking, feeling, and acting ages ago. They have to immerse themselves into that subject.

From a teacher's perspective, research-based instruction does not mean simply assigning a "report" and a due date. By providing structured parameters and expectations, the students can drive their own learning as they explore their chosen topic.

Here are some suggested considerations when developing a research project.

**Select a Class Research Theme That is Compelling:** Choose a unifying class theme that deserves to be explored, one from which students all have ample topics to research yet not so broad that it loses a class-wide purpose. The overall goal is that when student projects are shared, together they will interface to tell a broader story. For instance, asking students to research "*The History of the Kenai Corridor*" certainly has enough research topics to explore, but it lacks a compelling question and when finished will be so diluted that it will not provide a tight overview of the topic. Conversely, a theme of "*The Rise and Fall of Sunrise*." is compelling but lacks

enough topics and resources for a full sized classroom. More appropriate themes might be "*The Effects of the Railroad on the Kenai*," or "*The Gold Towns: Hope, Sunrise, Girdwood, Cooper Landing*." Both themes provide ample individual and independent windows for students to research.

**Determine End Product:** Will this be your run-of-the-mill research project? That's fine but don't feel confined. Other options are narratives that follow a story line, films, photo essays, or even (within the parameters of accurate context) historical fictions where characters are made up to recreate a slice of history.

**Detail Expectations by Defining Evaluation:** Define for students what the academic expectations will be for the project. Don't confine these expectations to history and research — rather include specific facets of writing. Use a rubric (such as the ones that have been utilized in the curriculum) with specific objectives with descriptions that define the levels of competency. When a paper is handed back with a single grade attached, it does little to explain how the paper succeeded (or not) in the teacher's expectations. A more detailed rubric presented prior to the assignment, then filled out as the final grade, provides incredible feedback as to expectations and to evaluation.

**Brain Storm Topics:** With the theme and product defined, as a class brain storm as many appropriate topics as possible. The topics may be well aligned to the theme but may also be on the fringe. For instance, if the theme is focused upon the four gold towns, an appropriate topic, if not a bit "fringy," might be the geology of the Kenai Peninsula as long as it discusses formation (and location) of the lode and placer deposits.

With the topics brainstormed on the board, the teacher can help facilitate the student's choice of project and of the potential pitfalls for obtaining resources.

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**Consider Resources:** The question is, how close to original sources are you willing/able to get? Develop a plan for acquiring the type of information that is needed.

There are many sources for information. This curriculum has exposed the students to a variety of primary and secondary resources. These include:

<b>Maps:</b>	Ch 1: Silent Yet Restless Earth Ch 5: Hope and Sunrise
<b>Current Research Theory:</b>	Ch 2b: Russian River Salmon
<b>Interviews:</b>	Ch 2: Early People Ch 6: By Ways
<b>Internet:</b>	Ch 3: Exploring NW Passage Ch 5: Hope and Sunrise
<b>Translated Primary Docs</b>	Ch 4: Russian America
<b>Newspaper Clippings</b>	Ch 5: Hope and Sunrise
<b>Archived Data</b>	Ch 5: Hope and Sunrise Ch 2b: Russian River Salmon
<b>Historical Research</b>	Ch 5: Hope and Sunrise Ch 6: Rails
<b>Photos:</b>	Ch 6: Rails Ch 7: By Ways
<b>Direct Observation</b>	Many Field Trip Sites

An effective topic is one that can be effectively researched. Before selecting a topic, consideration needs to be given to the allotted time for research and the availability for resources.

**Then Let Them At It:** When conducting research, students need to understand that they have a responsibility to themselves and a responsibility to history. Although plagiarism occurs, a greater risk is paraphrasing which is a re-gurgitation of information. It may not be intentional but could be the result of ineffective note taking.

### Suggested Note Strategy

- 1) Use notecards. *This allows for easier restructuring and regrouping of notes prior to writing report.*
- 2) Consider how information is written on notecard. *One strategy which helps meaningfully process the knowledge is to write a question based upon the resource information, then to create a response to the question without looking at the resource. Here's an example of a notecard written while reading Capra's "Magnificent Bedlam..."*

*What was the significance of Nellie's necklace?*

*Although it was very valuable, it was probably more valuable as a symbol of saving the mail carrier and the transformation to her emerging identity as being Alaska Nellie. It was after 1920 (when she saved the carrier) that she became more widely known for her toughness and spirit. As a result, she wore it with pride all her life.*

Later students categorize/regroup their notecards to help structure their final project. The result is not only a product that is "in the student's own words" but is a product that is "in the student's own understanding."

**A Word About Responsibility to Facts.** The closer to primary resources the students use, the higher the degree of responsibility to their work. If they interview a person, they have a humbling responsibility to make their product correct for their project can become a research source for someone down the line.

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To illustrate what happens when a fact slips: Bill Spencer has been not only the winner of the Mount Marathon race on several occasions but holds the record time for both Juniors (24:34) and 1981 Senior Men (43:23). His record was the one mentioned in the Mount Marathon Pamphlets and in newspapers covering the event as being the one that everyone wanted to beat. That is until 2012 when local Seward graphic illustrator and super sluth, Carol Griswold, was updating race photos for a project when the photo clearly shows Spencer crossing the finish line at 43:21. Turns out the error was propagated as a simple typo on a fact sheet published late in 1981. Not only that, but his junior time was off by 6 seconds faster. As Alaska Daily News reported, it was an error probably "repeated about 4 trillion times by this newspaper." When Spencer heard that seconds were being shaved off of his record time some 31 years after the fact he replied, "It's like a dream come true, I'm getting faster and I didn't even have to race. I beat my own record! Woo-hoo!"

Humorous story, but it's a lesson to the students to take all measures to make sure their research is accurate. If using living resources, make sure they send a copy to the interviewee for fact checking prior to submission. It not only insures a level of accuracy, but is fair to those who have helped during the project.

**Share and Present:** Since the students' projects share a common theme, share interesting facts and new findings throughout the research process. Information that one student finds can strengthen or redirect another's project.

Finally, following the completion of the project, make sure to develop a design for presenting their research. This can simply be a oral or power point presentation or it can be part of the creative process. Presentations could come in the form of a film or song. Perhaps compile the projects into a booklet. Think outside of the box. Seward 6th grade used to create a "living wax museum" where the students would assume the positions of

wax figures depicting historical events or personages. Bottom line, find a way to share and celebrate the extraordinary work that the students have done.

Because they have accomplished much. They've become not only researchers of the people, events, and values that make up their community... they've become an essential component of keeping this history alive.

It is not necessarily that we are doomed to repeat the history that we don't remember, but rather, we can be *inspired* by the lessons of those that came before us. After all, there is gold in them hills.