

LWVSA General Membership Meeting
February 9, 2021 at 11:30 am and 6:30 pm
Susie Gerard, Coordinator for Secondary Social Studies Instruction,
Spokane Public Schools (SPS)

Overview of Susie Gerard's Presentation on American Perspectives

Students called for another look at American History: Almost two years ago, students at North Central High School asked for a different kind of learning. They wanted an American History course that told the stories of all kinds of Americans – Native Americans, immigrants, African-Americans, the LGBTQX community, those Americans who defied societal norms and expectations during their time and made a difference in the course of American History. These students wanted to read about people like themselves.

Designing a course, creating a textbook: Susie Gerard, a social studies teacher with 30 years of teaching experience who now works to coordinate social studies instruction in seven SPS high schools, looked for a textbook for the course, which was eventually called American Perspectives. A textbook of American History told from a range of viewpoints and in many cases focusing on forgotten history did not exist, and so Susie Gerard created a new textbook. Going to primary sources, she researched narratives from Americans whose “voices” have not always been heard (see the list below of topic comparisons between this course and a traditional American History course).

Students provided input into the course; teachers met many times to develop it, and members of the community, representing a range of perspectives on multi-cultural education, provided feedback on its content.

The textbook, created through this extensive collaboration, was designed to be a consumable resource for students. Produced at a low cost (\$3.00/book) through the SPS printing services, the textbook was meant for students to use, to write in, and to keep. It was also designed to be updated yearly as new information and resources became available. Available both online and in paper, it offered students two modes of learning, and was created to be especially helpful to students who learn best by reading in print, taking notes in the margins, and underscoring important points.

A long journey from idea to design to teaching the course: Fall 2020 was the target date for the course to be taught for the first time. At that point in the Pandemic, all courses were online. The American Perspectives course had been approved by the school Board and had met the social studies standards for the junior year American History credit. Teachers had committed to teaching it. Then an unexpected problem developed. The teachers' contract did not require teachers to teach a new course being taught in a new methodology (such as a new course taught for the first time online). The teachers, who had strongly supported the

course and provided input into it, committed to teaching it and wrote a letter to the School Board stating this commitment.

An overview of the course – some good examples of American History Perspectives. Provided by Susie Gerard.

Questions/Comments?

One example from Proposal to the SPS School Board

Traditional US History-WWII	American Perspectives
Causes of WWII	Causes of WWII
US entry into the War	US entry into the War
Pacific-European fronts	Bracero Program
Major campaigns, such as D-Day, etc.	Navajo Code Talkers
Manhattan Project	The Holocaust
Briefer coverage of the Holocaust, Double V Campaign, Women, Japanese internment	Anti-lynching proposal of Eleanor Roosevelt
	Double V campaign, Tuskegee Airmen, Impact of War on Civil Rights initiative
	Women in the War and on the home front
	Japanese internment in our region
	Redlining
	Briefer coverage of Pacific and European Fronts, major campaigns, and the Manhattan Project

[Curriculum Proposal to SPS School Board](#)

Media Coverage:

SPS board members vote in favor of more inclusive U.S. History curriculum

...The new curriculum meets the criteria for the standard 11th grade history course, but will also entail first-person stories of Americans from different backgrounds, including groups marginalized by American society.

The district struggled to find current American history textbooks that accomplished that goal, so teachers will be given additional resources. Some of those books include *Is Everyone Really Equal?* And *A History of U.S. Feminists*.

To give an example of what the new curriculum would look like, SPS provided a traditional course guide for a WWII unit, versus what that unit would look like taught under the American Perspectives curriculum.

The cultural responsive curriculum would include teaching about Navajo Code Talkers and the Bracero Program. It would also broaden coverage of the Holocaust and Japanese Internment, while narrowing coverage of topics like the Manhattan Project.

You can read a full outline of the curriculum proposal [HERE](#).

KXLY: July 16, 2020

[KWLY July 16 on American Perspectives Course](#)