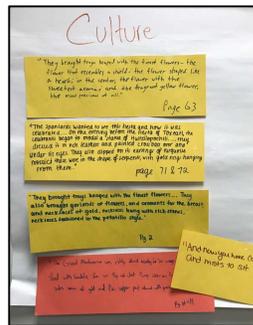
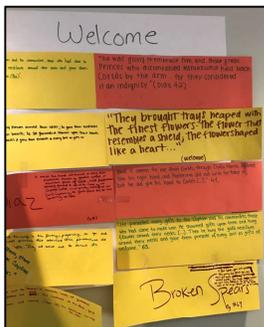


History in Action: Collaborative Comparisons

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One of my favorite classroom activities in HIST 125 is a collaborative learning activity that enables students to actively work through the process of gathering, organizing, analyzing, and comparing information from different historical accounts in preparation for writing a comparative essay.

I have students gather in small groups of three to four to brainstorm a list of themes/topics covered in each account; they then write each theme on a large sheet of paper posted on the walls, consolidating topics as needed. In groups, students identify specific evidence (quotes) related to the themes, write each piece of evidence on the color construction paper strips (in photos here, orange for a Spanish account and yellow for an indigenous account), include a page number for a citation, then tape the quote to the corresponding theme.



During this process, students are able to model for each other **how to identify key evidence and sort it into a large organizational structure**:

After about fifteen minutes, I ask the groups to stop work, and we discuss ways to interpret the visualization of evidence. I ask questions like:

- What might it mean if we only have information from the Spanish account (quotes on orange paper), but not from the indigenous account, or only information from the indigenous account (quotes on yellow paper), but not the Spaniard's account, or more information from one account compared to the other?
- How do we evaluate the reliability of evidence for themes that are discussed or described in both of the accounts or in only one of the accounts based on factors like the author's background, potential bias, proximity to the event, or the history of the creation of the account?

Each of these steps mimics the process that historians use to create historical arguments, yet in an open, visual, and physical way, and prepares students for completing the essay assignment. This format and activity counters the assumption that ideas for essays flow out of the mind and onto the keyboard without any work or preparation. The process teaches students concrete steps for engaging with historical content in a low-stress, collaborative, active learning environment.



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