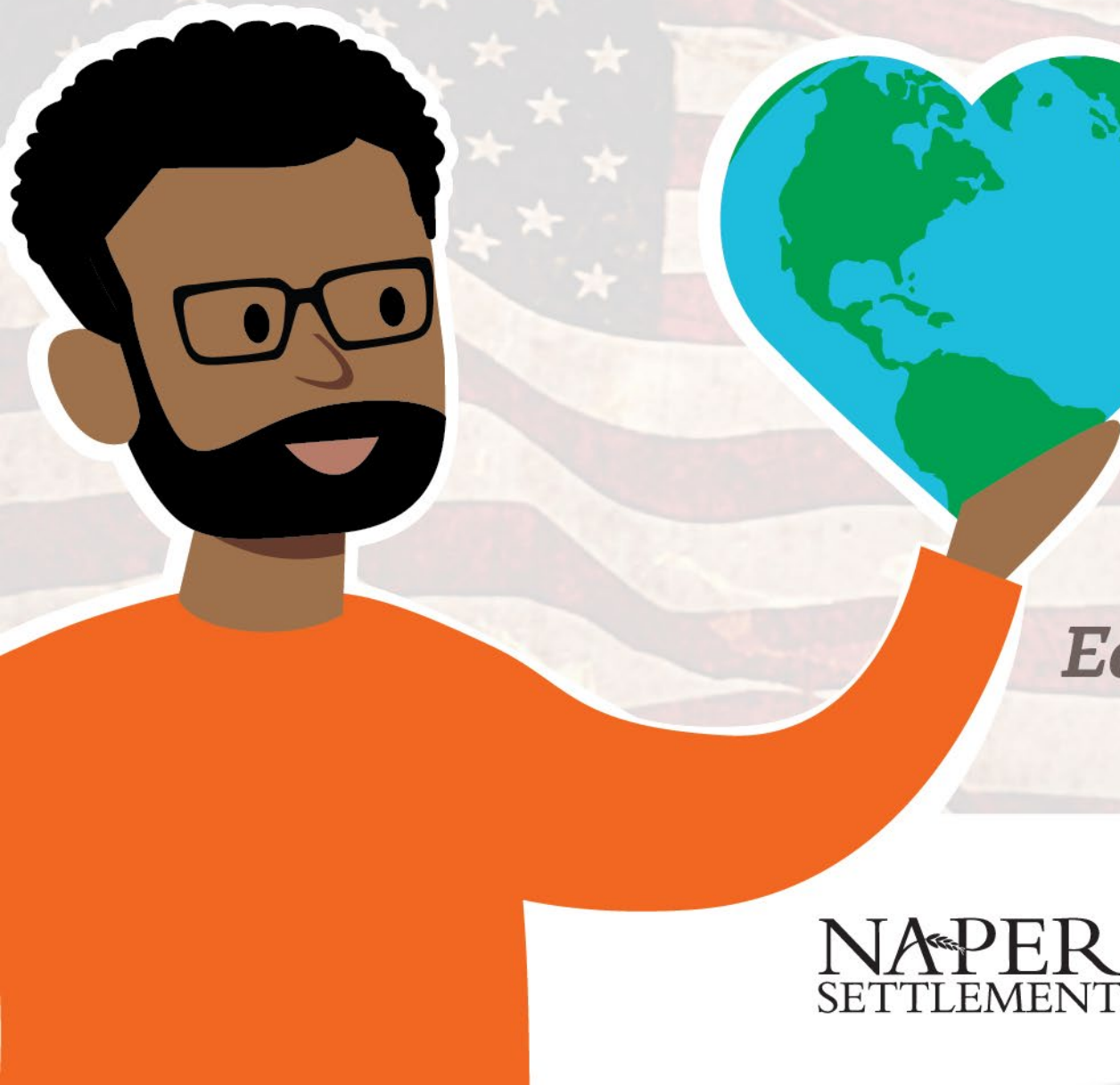


Teaching Inclusive History



Educator Needs

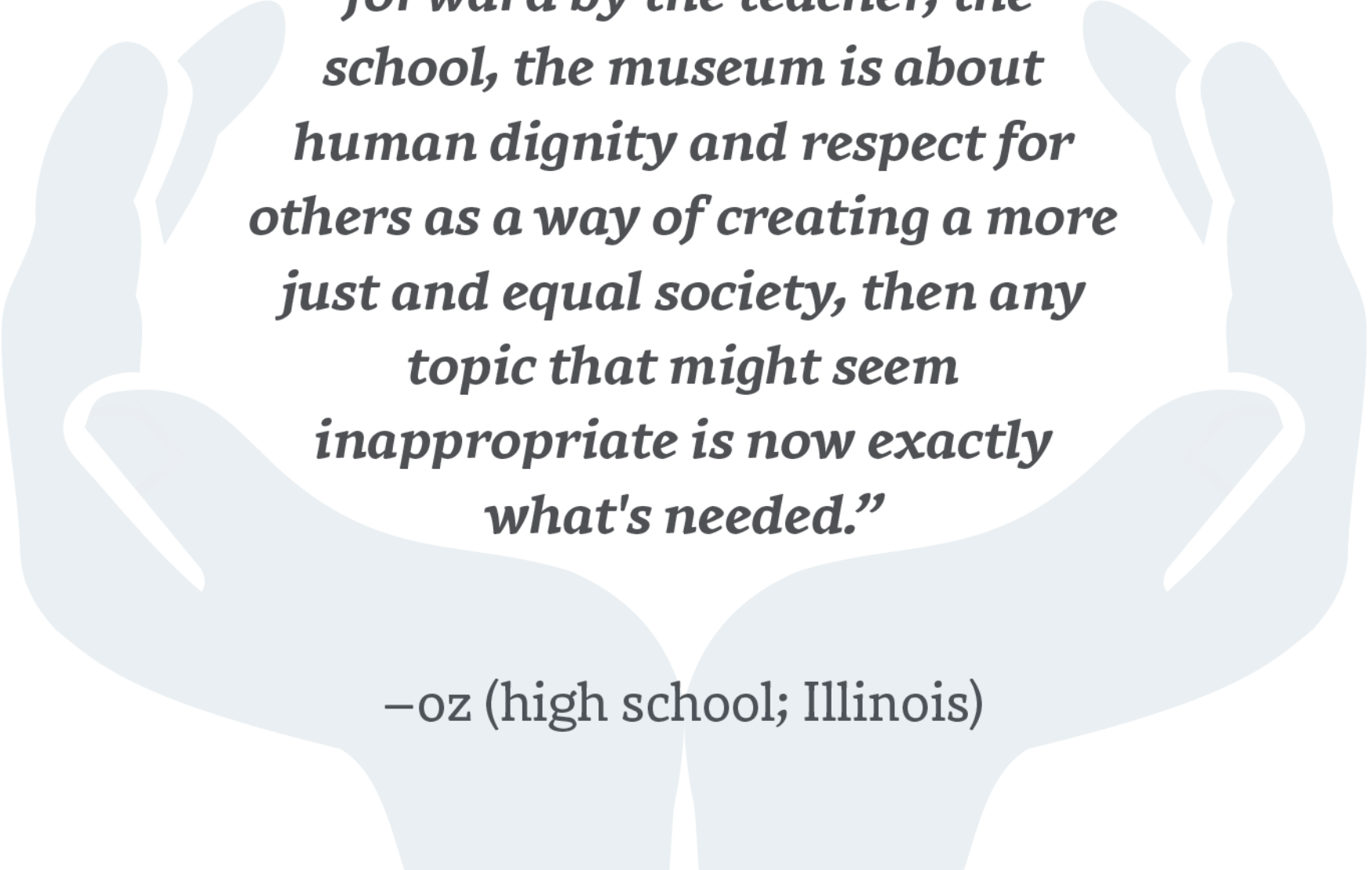
SPRING 2021

NAPER
SETTLEMENT


Wilkening Consulting

audience research | knowledge curation

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The image features two light blue hands, palms up, framing the central text. The hands are stylized with white outlines for the fingers and palms. The text is centered between the hands and is written in a bold, italicized, black serif font.

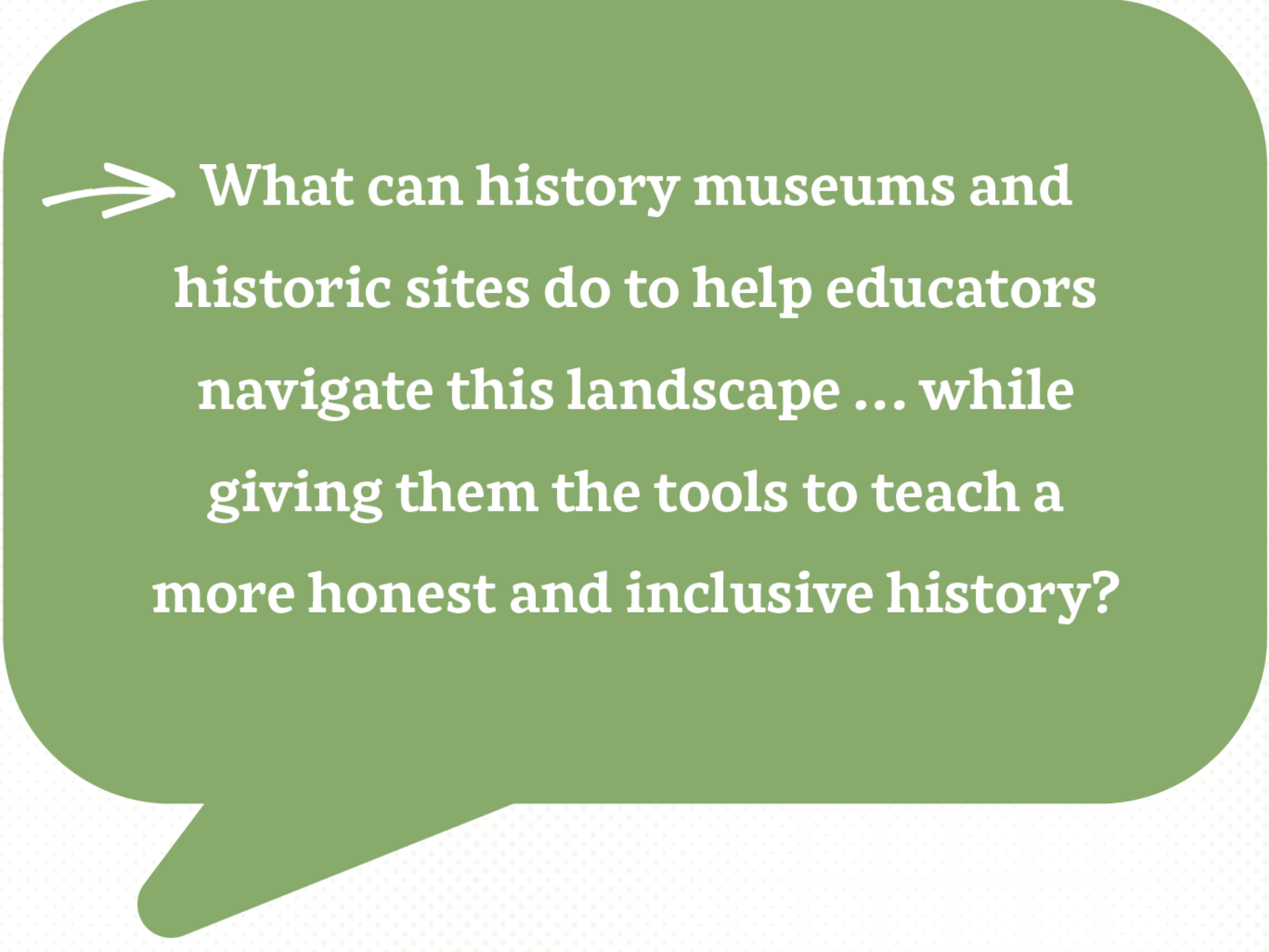
“As long as the belief system put forward by the teacher, the school, the museum is about human dignity and respect for others as a way of creating a more just and equal society, then any topic that might seem inappropriate is now exactly what's needed.”

–oz (high school; Illinois)

In our polarized country, teaching history and social studies has never been more difficult.

Educators are wrestling with issues
of identity and inclusion in the
classroom ... and in the lessons
they teach.

And they do so in an environment
that is paying closer attention than
ever before.



➔ What can history museums and historic sites do to help educators navigate this landscape ... while giving them the tools to teach a more honest and inclusive history?

This question is critical, because more than anything else, history and social studies educators need support.

They are isolated, and teaching the most emotionally difficult content in schools



They need to feel that history organizations have their backs (especially when they feel administration can't be counted on).....



And they need support for them as humans navigating our divisive and polarized society, and its effects in the classroom



Research Methodology

Survey of Educators:

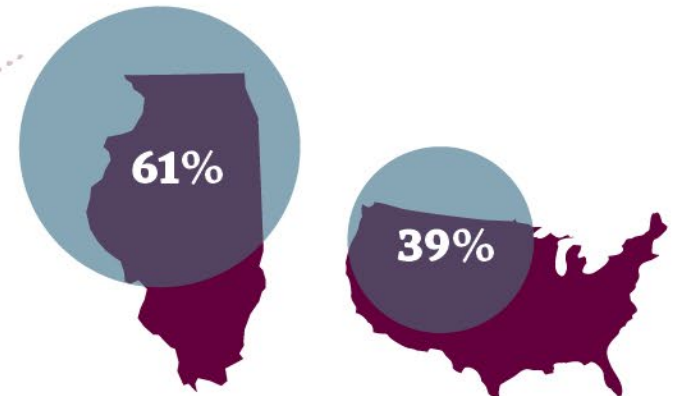
FIELDDED WINTER 2021

Distributed via the email lists of:

- Illinois Education Association
- Illinois Equity Teachers Working Group
- 21 history museums and historic sites nationwide

N = 5,020

- 61% from Illinois
- 39% from rest of United States



Online Qualitative Panel:

FIELDDED WINTER 2021

Recruited from educator survey

- Invitation list was equally weighted for participants from Illinois and the rest of the country

N = 121 entered panel; 77 completed all 8 questions

GRAPHIC NOTE: *Research participant quotes used in this presentation were graphically represented with a figure that matches known demographic characteristics (race, general age estimate based on years teaching, and gender) only if shared by panelist.*

Methodology Note:



RESEARCHER BIASES

- My lived experience is as a white woman
- My ideology, attitudes, and behaviors skew heavily liberal
- I also feel strongly that children should have a thorough understanding of the past, which requires an inclusive approach
- To mitigate my biases, I:
 - Was careful to ground my research in evidence, quantitative and qualitative
 - Provided response choices that reflected a spectrum of viewpoints from educators in the quantitative survey
 - Ensured that the qualitative panel was a place that encouraged educators to freely express their opinions and experiences
 - Tapped into a small network of advisors who have different viewpoints than my own, to assess if the findings were fairly represented or if my bias was coming into play

Methodology Note:

PROJECT BIASES

- This project was fielded with the viewpoint that the history taught in schools should be inclusive and provide a variety of perspectives and experiences
- This viewpoint drove the line of questioning around educator experiences with inclusive history
 - Particularly in the qualitative panel, which asked questions not about whether educators *should* teach inclusively, but instead *how* to teach it most effectively
- That said, in both methodologies educators were encouraged to speak to their own experiences and perspectives
 - Response choices with alternate viewpoints were included in the quantitative survey
 - And the questions in the qualitative panel were comprehensive in ways that gave space for disagreement and different perspectives

Project Assumptions:

- Based on previous research, there were base assumptions made about educator needs (and we did not ask explicit questions on these topics). In particular, we assumed that educators would want resources from history museums and historic sites that are:
 - Age appropriate for their students
 - Accessible to those with special needs
 - Address different ability levels
 - Interactive and/or hands on
 - Digital classroom ready (e.g., graphics, videos)
 - Meet standards
 - Free (or very low cost)
- Additionally, we assumed that educators have:
 - Limited planning time
 - Time constraints in the classroom itself



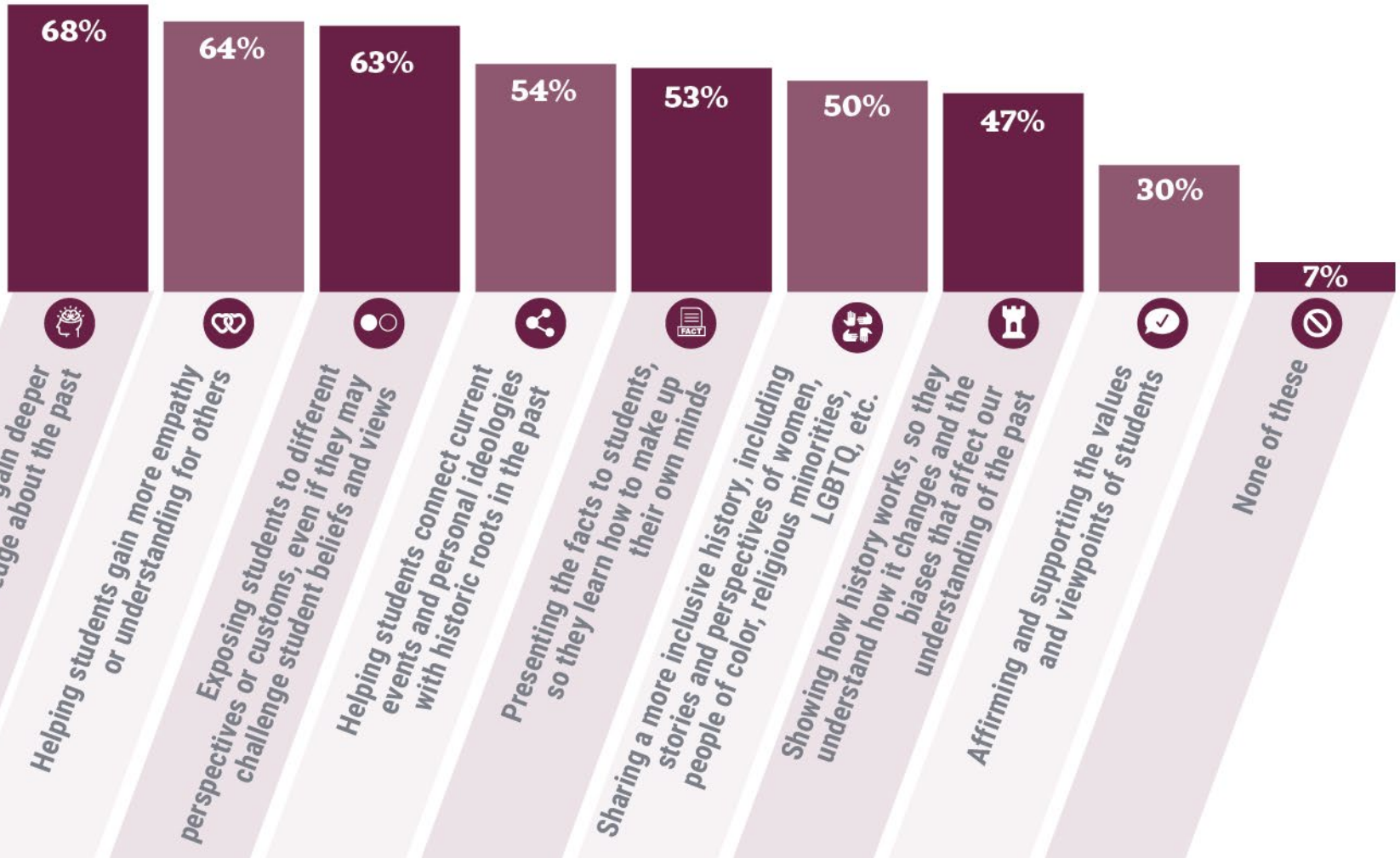
Bottom line: it needs to be easy for educators to find, high-quality, and plug-and-play in their classroom.



Survey Results

To get started, let's explore what educators want to accomplish in the classroom, the resources they use, and the barriers they face.

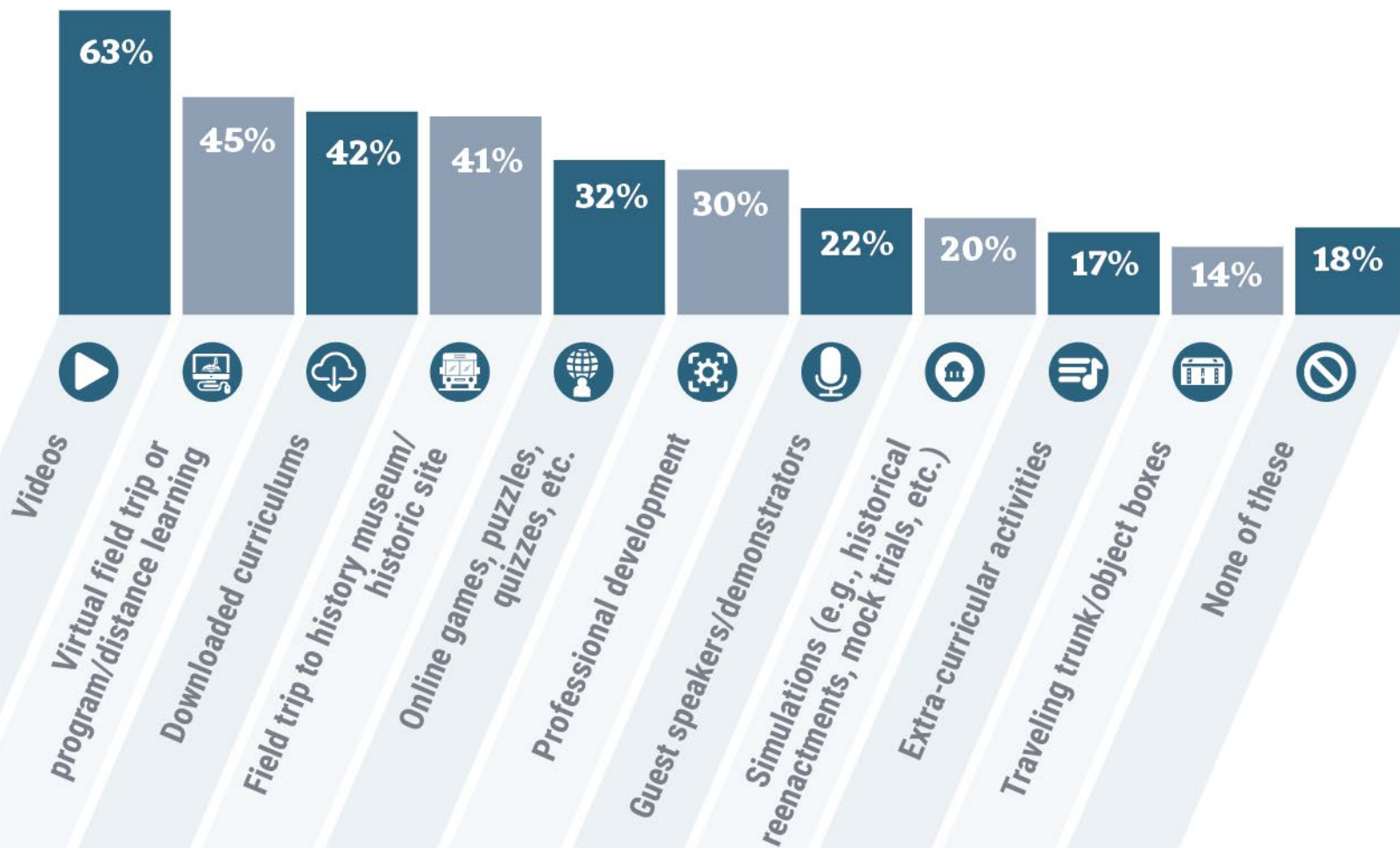
What Educators Seek to Accomplish in Classroom:



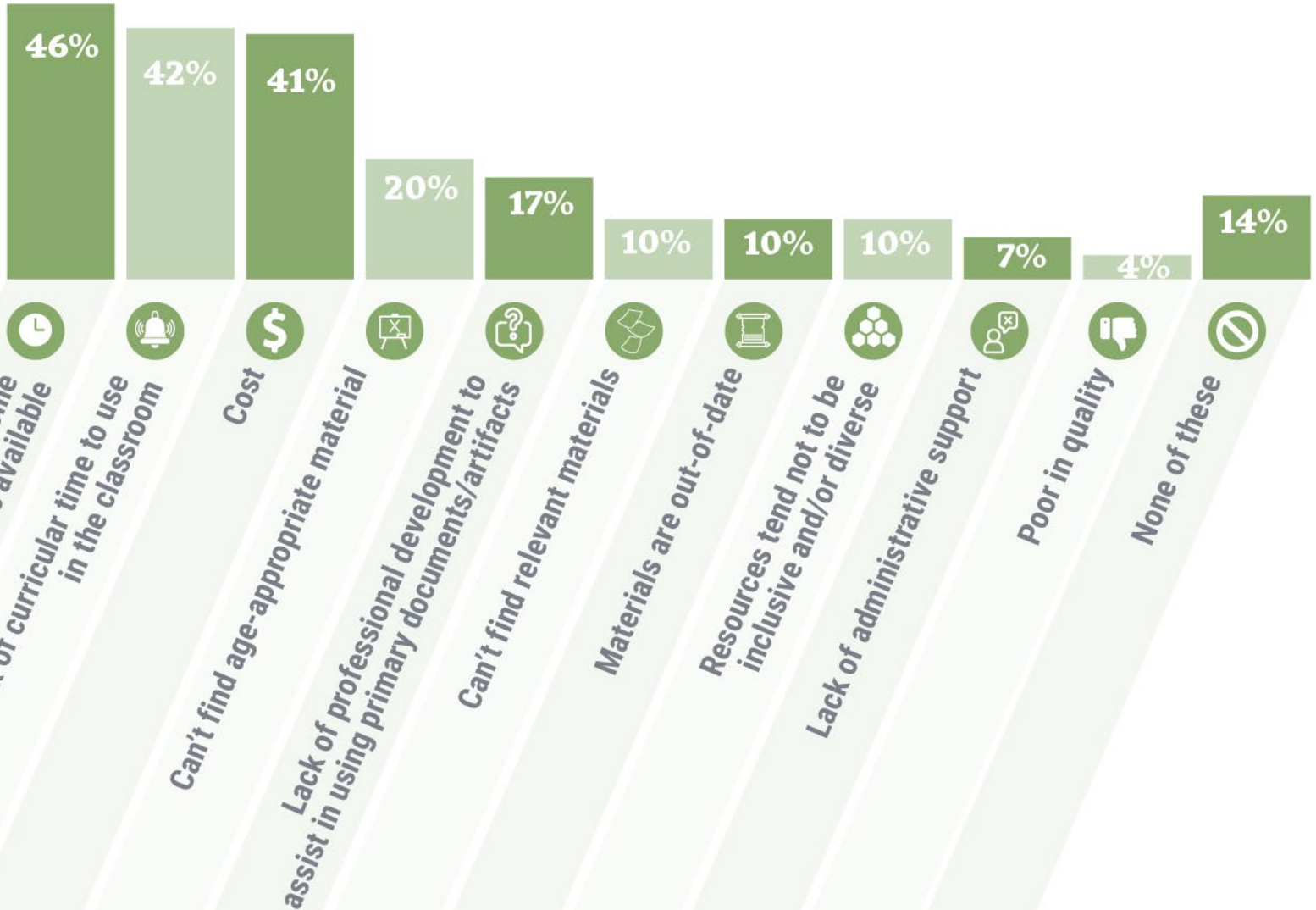


Use of Resources From History Museums/Historic Sites

(Previous 3 Years):



Barriers to Using Resources From History Museums/Historic Sites:



But educators are not monolithic in their values, attitudes, and beliefs.

Like the broader public, they have a variety of perspectives that affect how they teach history and social studies.

We estimate that half of educators are actively trying to teach inclusively, and only a quarter explicitly prefer a more traditional history.



The “status quo” group are not sure how they feel about inclusive history; they know it is part of history, but don’t feel it is as important as more traditional stories of the past.

NOT TEACHING INCLUSIVE HISTORY

“As educators, we have become so obsessed about teaching what’s wrong with America, we often lose sight of what is right with America.”

–Primary Source Artifacts
(high school; Illinois)



STATUS QUO

“Students need to understand all sides of each and every issue, so they are able to develop their own conclusions and perspectives.”

–Survey respondent
(high school; Ohio)



INCLUSIVE

“I teach Title I students in a majority African American school, and I was sick and tired of teaching them about old white people! I decided to get my Masters in American History and OH MY GOSH! I now teach students about women, different races, different ethnicities, different treaties, different prejudices, etc. I have had parents thank me for teaching their child something they can relate to as well as students who said they can finally understand how history relates to them!”

–HistoryTeach7234 (high school; Illinois)



And we found that engagement in teaching history in the classroom correlated closely with their attitudes towards teaching inclusively.

More Traditional Educators (these traits tend to cluster together)

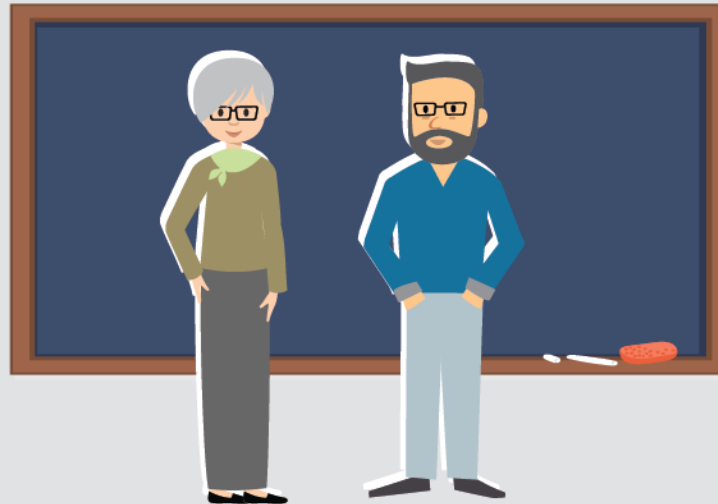
Less engaged with history themselves

More likely elementary teachers

Less excited about teaching history

Less comfortable teaching challenging topics

Less likely to report students are comfortable with challenging topics



Have fewer history/social studies goals for their students

Playing it safe in the classroom/not fielding complaints

More likely to identify as white

Less likely to be proactive about inclusion in the classroom

Less likely to seek content from history museums/historic sites

More likely to teach at rural and/or less diverse schools

More Inclusive Educators (these traits tend to cluster together)

More engaged in history themselves

More likely middle and high school teachers

Have higher comfort levels with teaching challenging topics

More likely to report students are comfortable with challenging topics



More likely to be proactive about inclusion in the classroom

More likely to seek content from history museums/historic sites

Have more history/social studies goals for their students

More diverse themselves

More likely to teach in urban and/or diverse schools

When we compare these clusters directly, we find that more inclusive educators are:



3.5x more likely to want to "affirm and support the values and viewpoints of students"



2.3x more likely to want to "show how history works, so they understand how it changes and the biases that affect our understanding of the past"



2.0x more likely to want to:

"Help students connect current events and personal ideologies with historic roots in the past "



"Expose students to different perspectives or customs, even if they may challenge student beliefs and views "



"Help students gain more empathy or understanding for others"

**BUT they are also over 2x
more likely to receive:**



Complaints that the history they teach is too "liberal"



Surprise at the different ways we talk about the past than what parents/caregivers learned in school themselves

And there is a BIG caveat.

While these traits tend to cluster together ...



... there are educators who would like to teach inclusive content, but can't because of:



Administration taboos



Pressure from parents/caregivers and/or students



Fear of reprimands, being fired

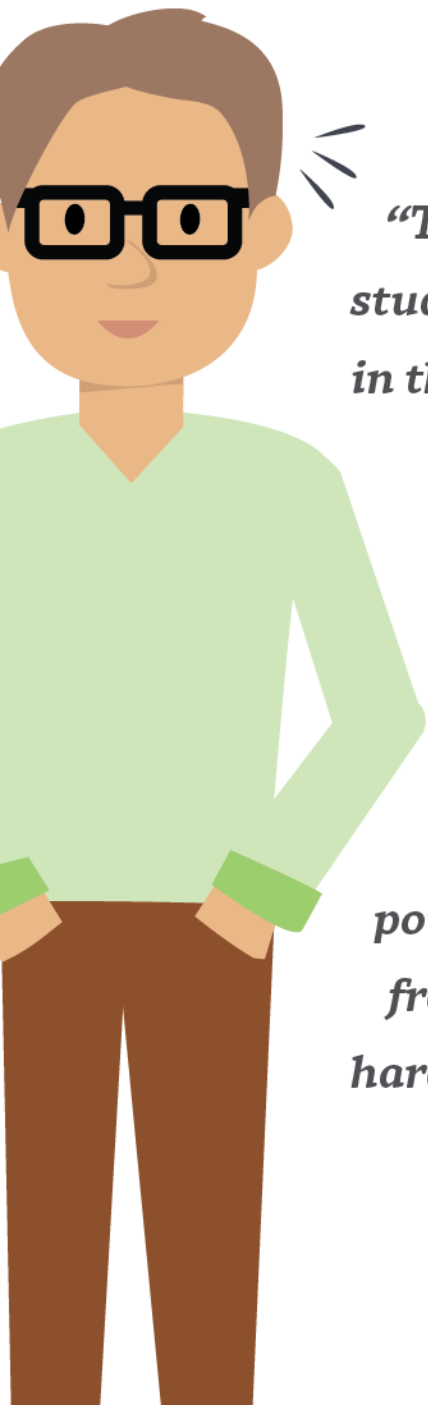
Thus, they have to “play it safe,” and teach a more traditional history, in order to keep their jobs.

For this research, our focus isn't so much on how to change educator minds on the value of inclusion, but more on giving educators the tools and confidence to teach inclusively.

We want to help them mainstream inclusive history.



**In the Classroom:
“Hard” History
and Inclusion**



*“Teaching at a school that has 97% African American students, with many who have family members involved in the criminal justice system or who have been involved themselves, **teaching history is always hard.**”*

–HistoryTeach7234 (high school; Illinois)

*“Unfortunately, I just end up teaching the tough stuff and do not have a class discussion. I tend to skim over them much faster than I should. The point of history in many ways is to confront and learn from the past. It probably should be a little scary and hard, **but I don't know how to get past my own fears.**”*

–Abigail J (high school; Texas)



What is “hard” history in the first place?



For most educators, it is any history that brings feelings of discomfort. Typically, it has to do with race, ethnicity, and the harms humans have done to one another.

“I think for most ‘hard’ history has come to encompass anything that has an identity associated with it, so topics that deal with race relations, discriminations based on nationalities, gender, etc.”

–taylorj160 (middle school; North Carolina)



“I think of hard history as the uncensored version of history, not the white-centered history I grew up on. I think of the history that makes us shake our heads, that make our hearts heavy, that make us question how such awful things could have happened. I think of the history that I was not taught in school because it didn't fit into the white supremacist ideals that our nation was founded upon. I think of the history that shows the ugly side of humanity.”

–cmhiker (elementary; Illinois)



The topic educators were most likely to shy away from was gender and sexuality. Few educators were willing to even bring it up (and those that were tended to be in more “liberal” communities).



“... while issues of race in modern contexts is challenging, sometimes teaching about LGBTQ history is even harder to teach.”

–Mickey (high school; Nebraska)

But is “hard” the right descriptor for events of the past that did harm?



For most educators, the answer was “yes.”

“I think the phrase ‘hard history’ is appropriate because history is often hard. It's hard to learn about how cruel and evil humans have been in the past and how that cruelty and evilness, in part, shaped the world we have today.”

–Sean (middle school; Illinois)



But there were other terms that some educators said they preferred:



Difficult



Sensitive



Untold



Complex



Ugly



Uncomfortable



Controversial

“I don't qualify it in any way but rather name it as ‘a historical moment that is racist or sexist or xenophobic,’ etc.”

—oz (high school; Illinois)



Most educators felt they had a duty to teach “hard” history, and that avoiding these subjects caused even more problems in our society.



“I absolutely explore harder history in my classroom. I think that I have a duty to teach it. Shying away from topics just because they are difficult to talk about is not ok in my book.”

–JOR (middle school; Illinois)

“... if we refuse to teach the hard aspects of history, the problem is going to be that social media and other avenues will ‘teach’ history in a way that is not focused on facts but driven by a bias approach.”

–Cscarroll (high school; North Carolina)



But that doesn't mean they are comfortable teaching "hard" history.

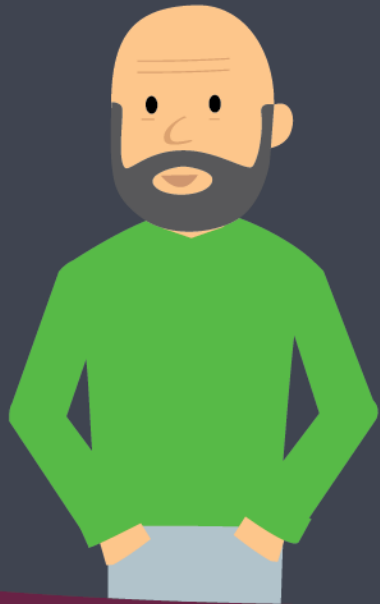
"An alternative phrase I use in my PLC is 'uncomfortable,' because that's the feeling it makes a lot of teachers feel when covering."

–Liz3303 (middle school; Illinois)



Generally, comfort levels with teaching “hard” history correlated with the spectrum of attitudes towards inclusive history.

NOT TEACHING INCLUSIVE HISTORY



Those who preferred a more traditional history were more likely to feel discomfort, or avoid it altogether.

INCLUSIVE



Those who felt inclusive history was important were much more likely to feel comfortable teaching “hard” history.

There are also some who want to teach the “hard” history, but are not allowed to or fear the repercussions if they were to do so.

There are other ways that teaching “hard” history is uncomfortable, which have less to do with the educator, and more to the gaps between the educator and the students’ own experiences with racism.



Some educators pointed out that the different lived experiences between a white teacher and students of color can make “hard” history more challenging.



“I am an older blonde, Caucasian women teaching American History to 7th Grader -currently via Zoom- in a majority minority, low-income school. I always wonder how these students feel about my ‘right’ to talk about some of these topics. They know nothing about me, but at their age they know plenty about prejudice and racism.”

–Ellen J (middle school; Virginia)



While others pointed out that their more privileged white students couldn’t go there or understand the challenges others experience.

“One of the problems with hard history is that many students, who are of a more privileged background (middle/upper middle class, white, suburbs of major city) simply cannot really ‘see’ or understand institutional racism or effects of imperialism/colonialism in other parts of the world.”

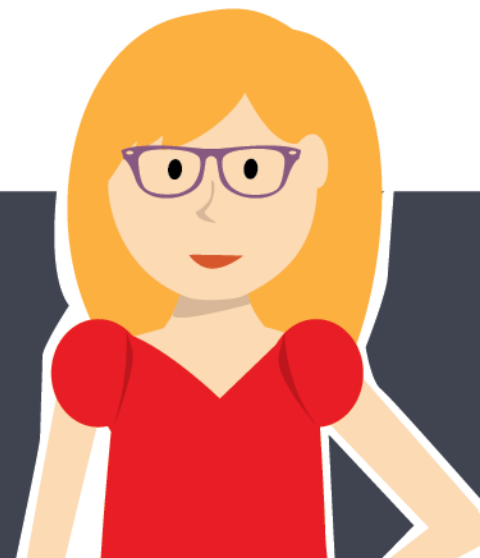
–History_Teacher_HS (high school; Illinois)



➔ So, educators end up worrying a lot about how they teach “hard” history.



They worry about getting it right.



“Mostly I struggle developing lessons, but I struggle because I don't want to teach it ‘wrong’ or from an insensitive white perspective.”

–JulieMD (high school; Illinois)



And they worry how classroom conversations can go wrong.



“It is also hard in a virtual world because students can record you or take what you say out of context. In our ‘cancel culture’ it can be hard to have an honest conversation without fear of repercussions.”

–mehhusky (middle school; Virginia)



We also asked panelists what an inclusive classroom means to them.

**Every child sees
themselves**

“To me, an inclusive classroom is where every child sees their identity mirrored in some way (through curriculum, books, images). Different identities are celebrated.”
–Kirsten (elementary; Illinois)

**Worthiness and
humanity**

“I think an inclusive classroom (library) embraces open communication and high expectations for everyone. Everyone has a voice worth hearing. And we learn from each other – both in expanding our knowledge of the world and in seeing our common humanity.” –Antoinette (elementary; Alaska)

Respect

“To me, an inclusive classroom means that all student voices are heard, acknowledged, and respected; showing respect is probably one of the top things an inclusive classroom needs.”
–Jessica C (high school; Arkansas)

**Differences are
appreciated**

“Inclusion to me means that everyone is included, and differences are seen and appreciated.”
–JesuitJags (middle school; Nebraska)

**Safe and
comfortable**

“I think that an inclusive classroom is a space where students feel safe and comfortable being themselves.”
–maydoty (high school; Alabama)

What it isn't:

“I do not like it when the curriculum is segregated. This was common when I was a student. You'd see in a textbook the same ol' history that's been taught for generations and then in the corner would be a text feature called something like ‘a woman's spotlight’ or ‘The African American perspective.’ Historians should look at history from the bottom up and there is no need then for curricular segregation.”

–Scott P (high school; Illinois)





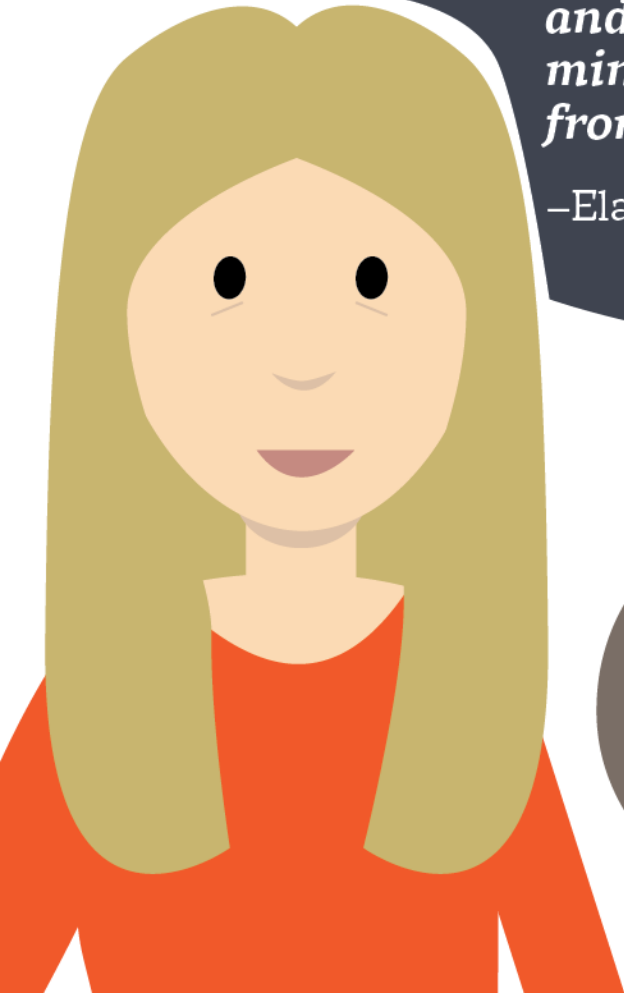
About half of educators actively want to be inclusive.

“I would teach a history that includes the experiences, struggles and accomplishments of women, minorities, enslaved people, and from a more global perspective.”

–Elaine T (elementary; Connecticut)

“... my main goal would be to help them begin to recognize the hidden power structures and structural racism that we’ve built our country on.”

–Beth (elementary; Illinois)



But this can be a struggle, as history lessons have changed over time, and norms and expectations continue to shift.

“It can be hard at times when you are taught one thing one way and have to teach it a completely different way.”

–tsobie (elementary; Illinois)

“I’m consistently reevaluating how I teach the concept of race and have expanded/modified in the past few years.”

–historydoctor (high school; Missouri)



Additionally, curriculum lags behind current inclusive thinking.

“Our students want to learn about the full story, but the curriculum traditionally leaves out so many important voices.”

–R. (middle school; Virginia)

“The last thing I’d like you to know is the difficulty and reward of finding materials that challenge the traditional narrative, so any assistance you can provide in showing the full picture of history would be greatly appreciated.”

–cmk (middle school; Michigan)



Some educators, however, are resisting inclusion in the classroom, giving reasons such as:

**It isn't
"important"**

"I know that many would say that an inclusive classroom should feature content/topics that harmonize with various groups/cultures (e.g., studying prominent African Americans in history helps African American students feel more welcome), but I struggle with that idea. It's not that I'm opposed to teaching those topics, but I think there should be a set of important ideas that every class should focus on regardless of who the students are ... topics that make certain student groups feel more welcome should be introduced only so far as they are able to become a medium for teaching the essential topics." –George H T (high school; Illinois)

**It can make people
of color more likely
to assert themselves**

"Our school has many Black families, and there have been a few instances where they claimed the school did something 'because they weren't white' or 'they weren't like you people.' I have worked in the school for nine years and the clientele has remained the same. But I feel like in my earlier years those things did not come up, and they are coming up much more recently in the past few years." –Hannah_4205 (elementary; Nebraska)

It is indoctrination

"I do not personally believe it is my responsibility to teach social aspects such as 'inclusion' ... At the end of the day, America is a free nation and people should be able to think and feel for themselves as to how historical events impact them. indoctrination will be the death of free-thinking."
–Survey respondent (high school; Alabama)

In response to increasing polarization, many educators are trying to take a “status quo” defensive position of teaching history “neutrally” or without bias.

“... whatever topic in history/social studies I am teaching at the time, I am presenting the information in a factual, truthful and unbiased manner. This approach allows me to speak honestly on whatever history/social studies instruction is being delivered, so I do not have to avoid certain topics.”

–Mr. Teacher
(middle school;
Illinois)

“I only state factual information and never stress my political affiliation to students. I don't have any pushback from parents because I usually just stick to the textbook and don't veer very far off of it.”

–JesuitJags
(middle school;
Nebraska)

“... present all sides of the event, maintaining a neutral position.”
–taylorj160 (middle school;
North Carolina)



And some of their comments mirror those of more traditional museum-goers, who say museums should present “just the facts, and let me make up my own mind.”

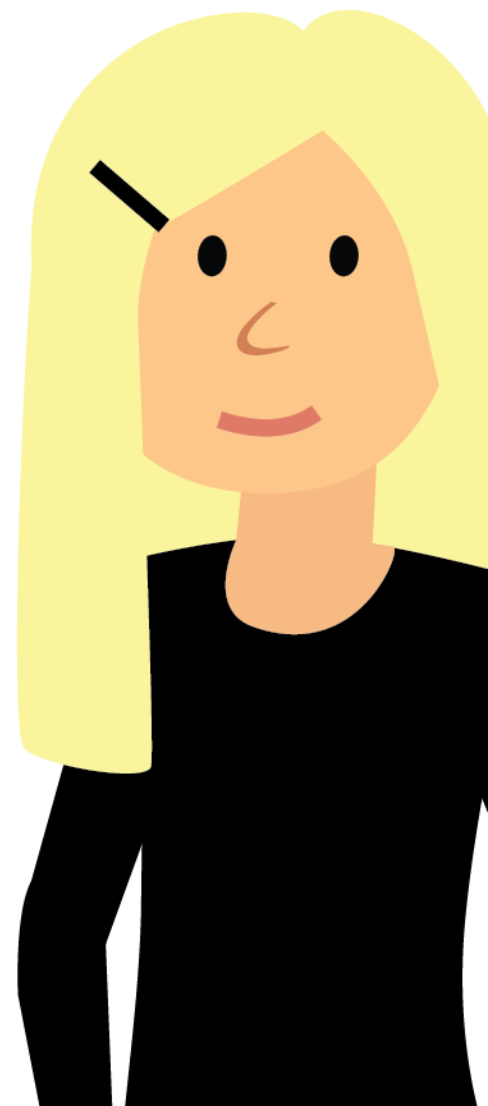


“These are topics that I want to present both sides and give my students the ability to decide the conclusion for themselves.”

–Barobi01 (elementary; Kentucky)

“I do prioritize sharing both sides of topics so that students can make their minds up for themselves.”

–Kirstin (elementary; Illinois)



But other educators pointed out that there really is no neutral.

“I admit that my stance on teaching these moments is far from unbiased. I see the importance of naming inequality and oppression what they are at the outset and stating that they are, in fact, unjust and wrong ... I think the ‘hardness’ comes from the presumption that teachers are not supposed to call out injustices but rather serve them up on a plate for students to decide. I don't think that approach serves anyone. There's enough in the world that is debatable and ripe for academic theorizing outside the realm of human rights ... At the end of the day, the teacher should ask himself, ‘hard for who?’ and I tend to fall on the side of acknowledging the feelings of the oppressed than sparing the feelings of those that benefit from oppression, past and present.”

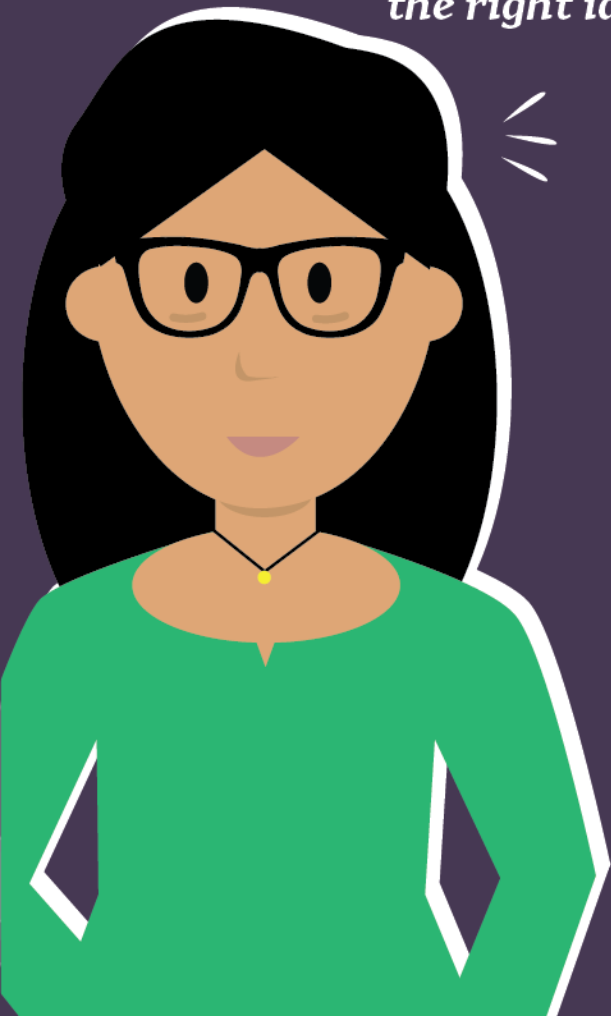
—oz (high school; Illinois)



“I think sometimes we run into trouble over false debate--I always say, I never want to debate someone's humanity. Therefore, I'm not going to participate in a debate over whether manifest destiny was the right idea or urban renewal was better for our city--when the

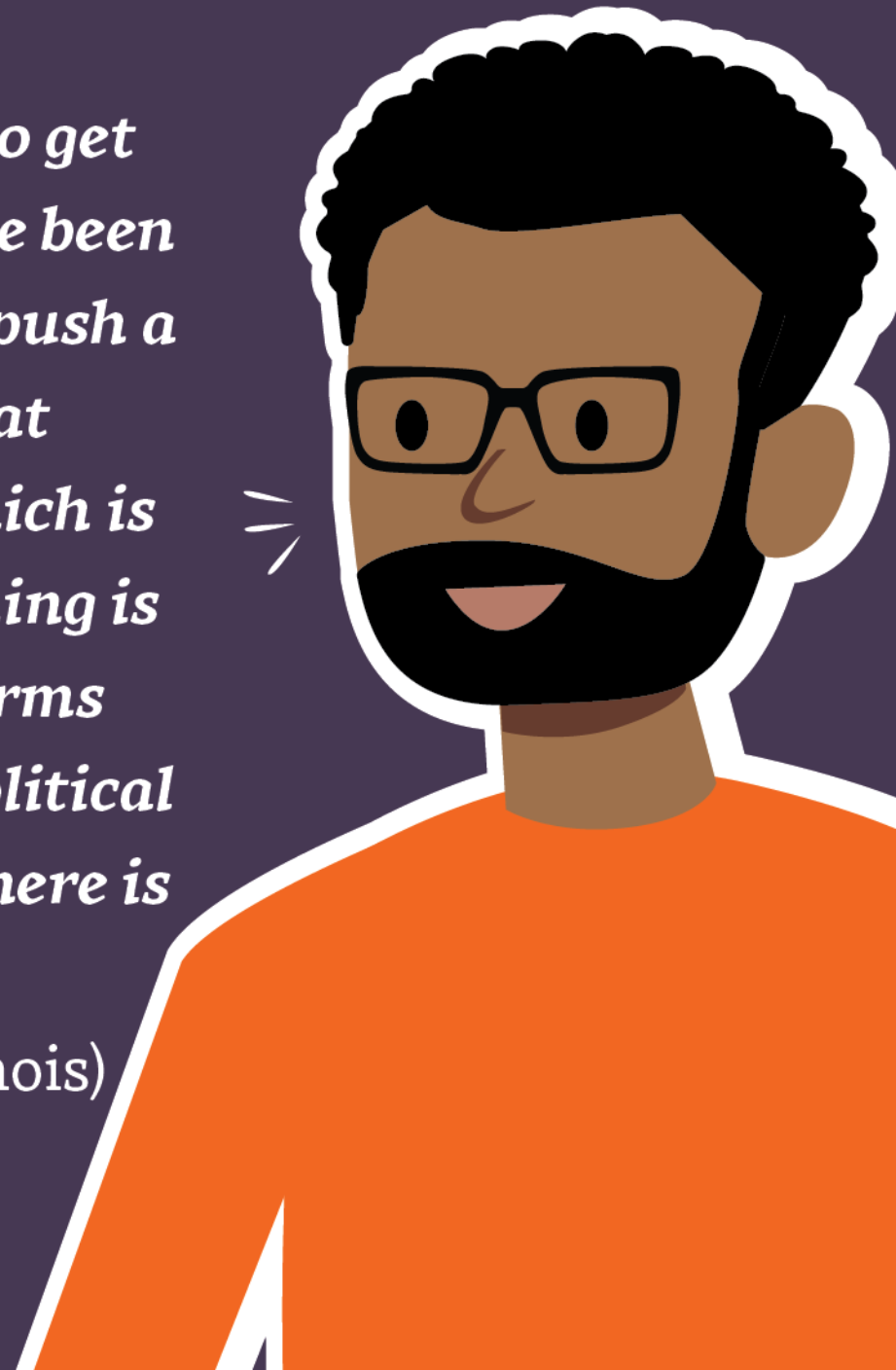
other side of that is that it destroyed communities and homes. I guess what I am saying is I would rather not have resources from museums that are overly concerned with representing ‘both sides’ when at times one side or the other is clearly harmful to my student population.”

–timetoteach37 (high school; Pennsylvania)

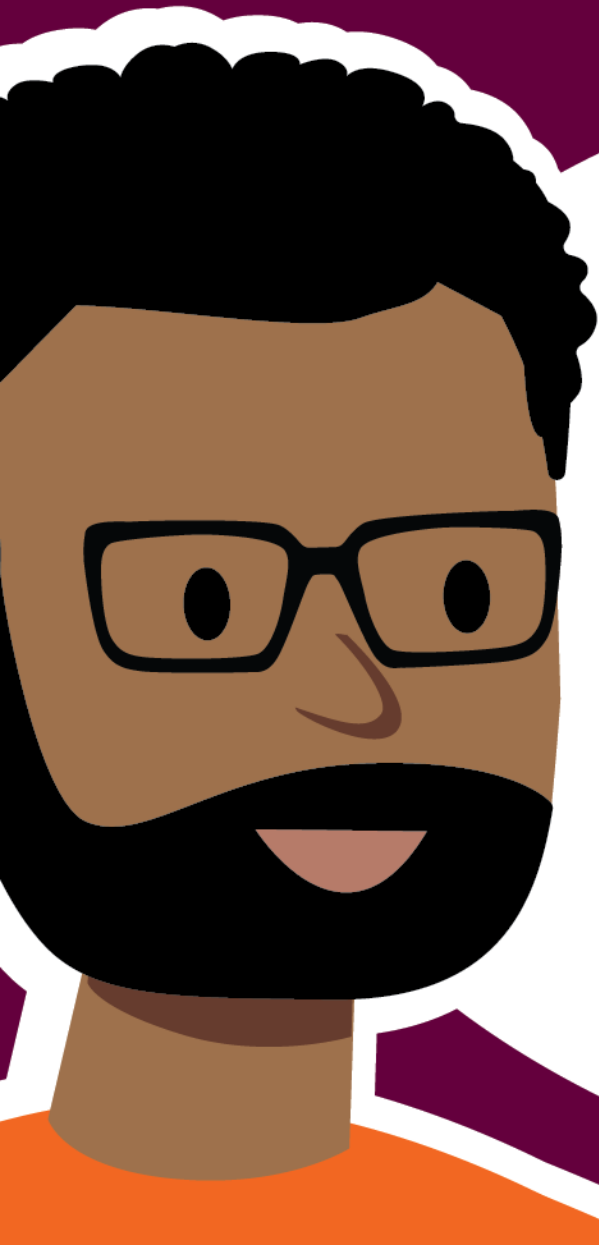


“In terms of challenges, I do get pushback here and there. I've been told that I've been trying to push a particular agenda or that teaching is not political, which is interesting because everything is political, our politics informs notions or beliefs of what political neutrality really entails if there is a notion of that.”

–Philly88 (high school; Illinois)



And a few were more deliberately activist.



“I use my work as an educator in abolitionist contexts - to work to dismantle these oppressive systems that continue to dehumanize and marginalize through intersections of race, class, gender, ability, language and a host of other ways.”

–Philly88 (high school; Illinois)

That activist approach can work in
some communities ... but not in
most.

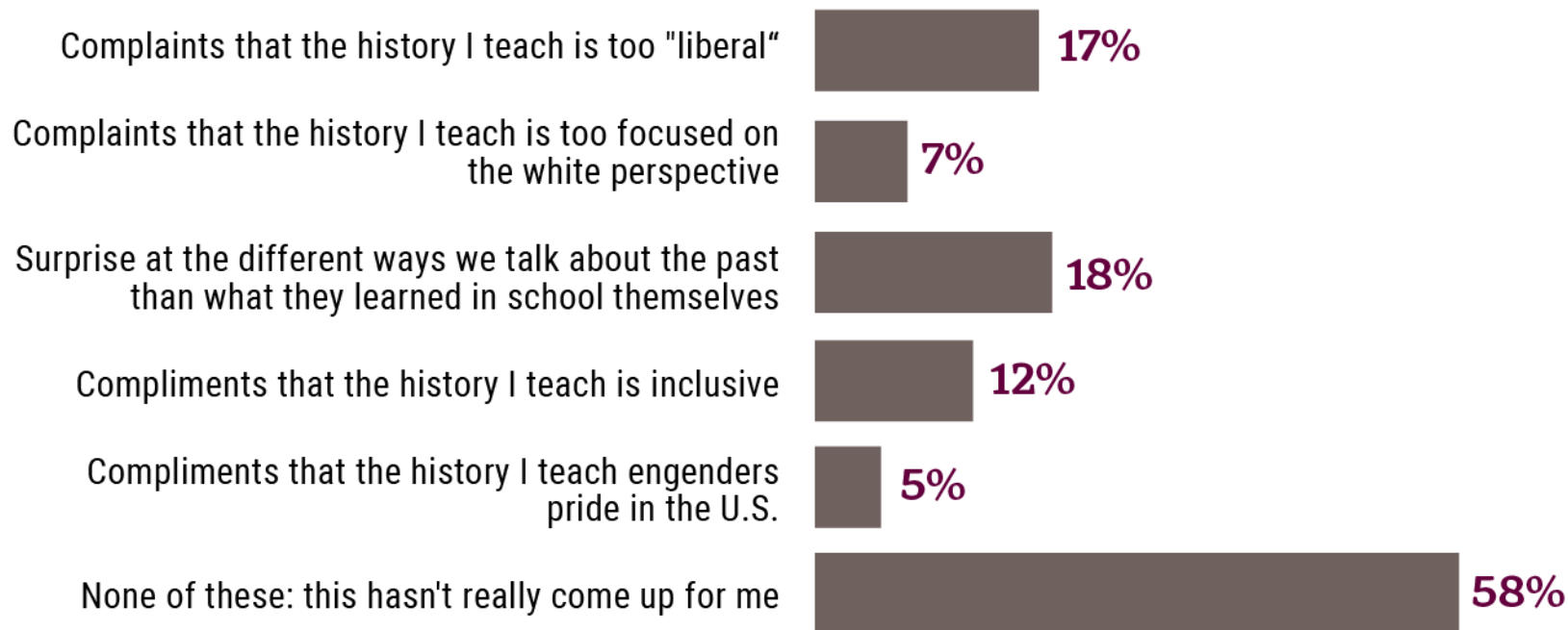
And in some communities, *any*
movement toward a more inclusive
history draws criticism.



Polarization and the History Classroom

When we asked educators if they had received complaints about how they taught history or social studies, the majority said no.

PERCENT OF EDUCATORS RECEIVING:



But in our initial panel question, this issue came up early and often.

And the initial question *wasn't even about this topic.*



“Combined with the current social atmosphere where parents are allowed to opt out of tough lessons, it is almost dangerous to teach history and government today.”

–Romeo46 (middle school; Texas)

Turns out, educators had *a lot* to say about political polarization and its effect in the classroom, primarily pressure from parents/caregivers.

They also had some thoughts about their administrations, and how they handled issues that arose.

First, why *isn't* it coming up for the majority of educators?

Four reasons emerged.

.....> REASON #1

Many parents are not that involved/paying attention.



“... most parents of kids I have aren't overly involved in what their kids are doing, so I honestly don't get a ton of parental feedback one way or the other.”

–arttieTHE1manparty (high school; Nebraska)

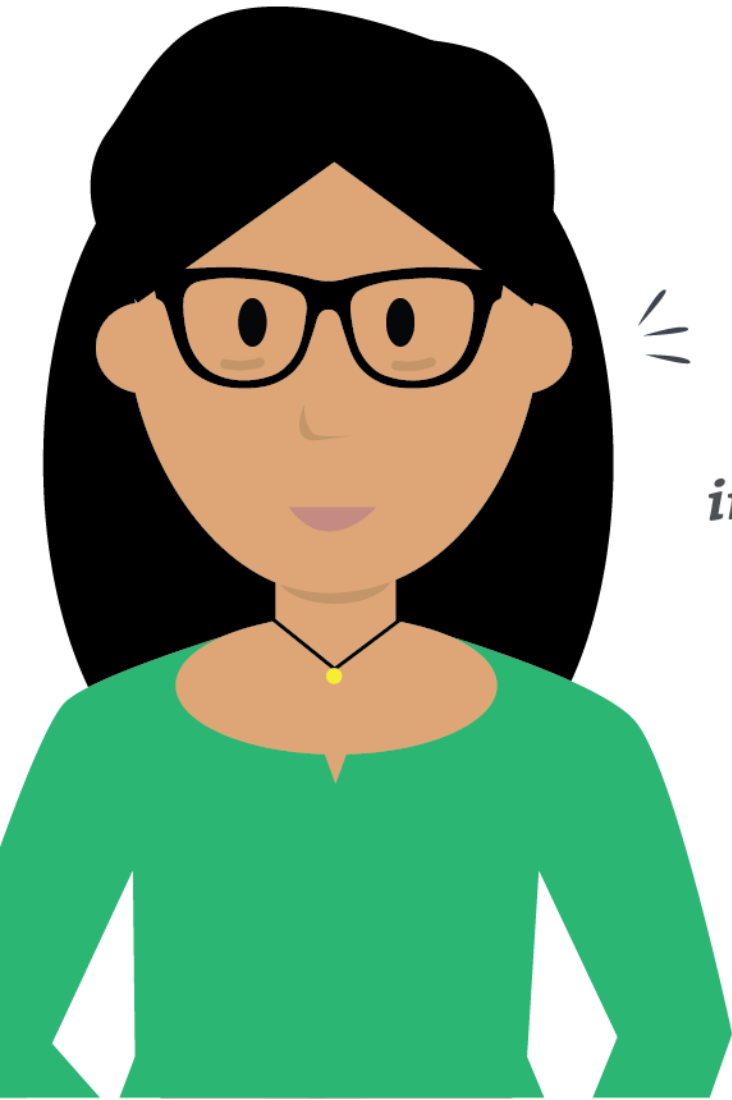
“For most of my teaching career I taught American History in a Title 1 school and parents had little, if anything to say regarding most of the curriculum. When you are working 2 and 3 jobs to keep afloat it leaves little time to reflect on what is going on at school. In addition, many parents did not speak English as their first language.”

–MsA (elementary; Illinois)



.....> REASON #2

There is a “match” between the values of the educator and the values of the community.



“I have not had a lot of pushback from parents or students about how I teach history, but I think that is because I teach in a very liberal school in a very liberal city. We are all in a bit of a bubble.”

–timetoteach37 (high school; Pennsylvania)

.....> REASON #3

They are teaching
"middle ground"/
status quo history

“My experiences with parents in teaching history/social studies over the span of my career has, thankfully, never had any issues .. I always present both sides of an issue that can possibly be misconstrued as controversial. For example, the genocide of the Native Americans. I teach why it happened, why some may disagree, and where the middle ground between many points of view can be found.”

–Sean (middle school; Illinois)



.....> REASON #4

“I think political polarization does unconsciously affect how I teach social studies. I think I shy away from digging deeper into events and getting into in-depth discussions with students because I worry about what could be said and if it is a politically correct thing to say.”

! / -Hannah_4205

(elementary; Nebraska)



They are avoiding controversial content.

“In terms of current events, which I always start the week off with, I have increasingly shied away with this year as students do share conspiracy theories in class, like QAnon, widespread voter fraud, or that masks do not work. While normally I would be fine talking through these, I have been nervous about potential pushback from their parents for disagreeing with them in class.”

! / -Drew (high school; Alabama)



Some educators aren't getting direct pushback so much as they are surprising parents and caregivers.



This seems to be coming from “status quo” parents/caregivers who are neither seeking nor avoiding inclusive history.

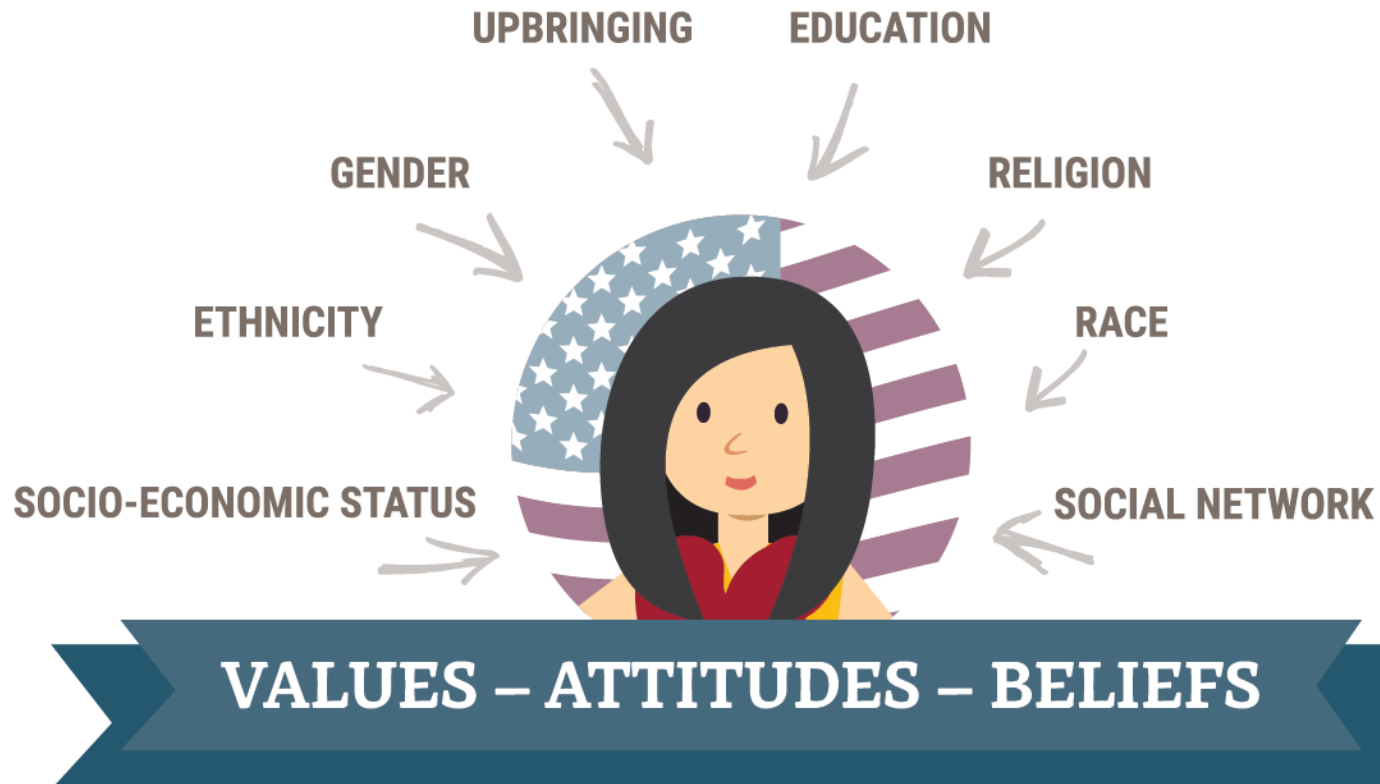
“I often get the ‘I never knew that,’ or ‘we weren’t taught that when I went to school.’ ”

–Barobi01 (elementary; Kentucky)



So, let's do a quick recap of public attitudes towards inclusive history, since parents and caregivers are part of that public.

To understand how inclusive attitudes can vary so widely, it is helpful to back up and examine what influences us all in the first place.



Turns out, it is a lot of things. From our upbringing to our race (and more), each of us develops our own unique set of values, attitudes, and beliefs that shape our worldviews.

In the aggregate, that means our audiences comprise a spectrum of worldviews.

**SPECTRUM OF VALUES,
ATTITUDES, AND BELIEFS**
Of Likely Museum-Goers



TRADITIONAL

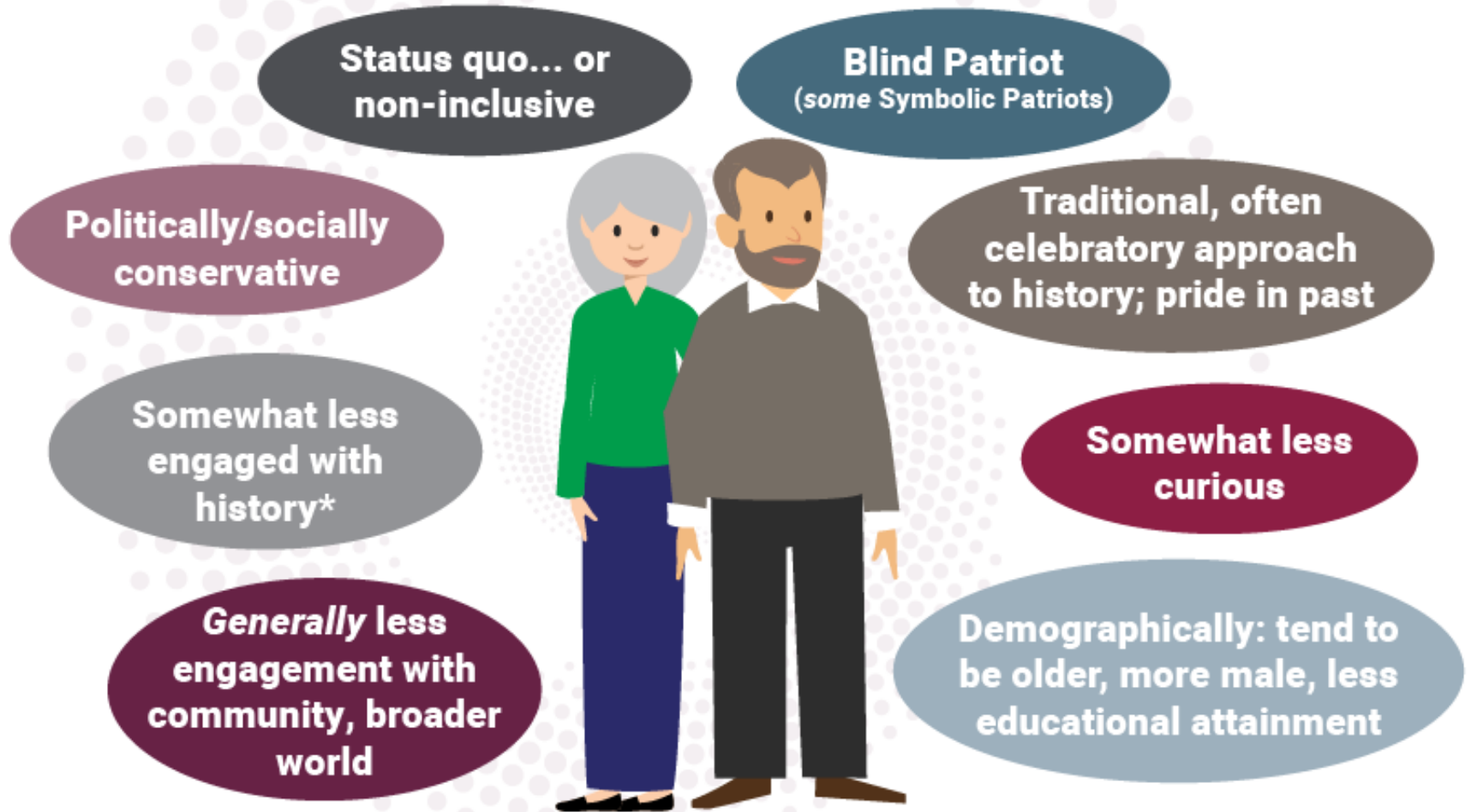
MIDDLE

NEOTERIC

But while individuals have their own unique blends, there are key traits that *tend* to cluster together, forming “Traditional” and “Neoteric” segments that reflect our society’s polarization. (There is a “middle,” but most people tend to lean one way or the other.)

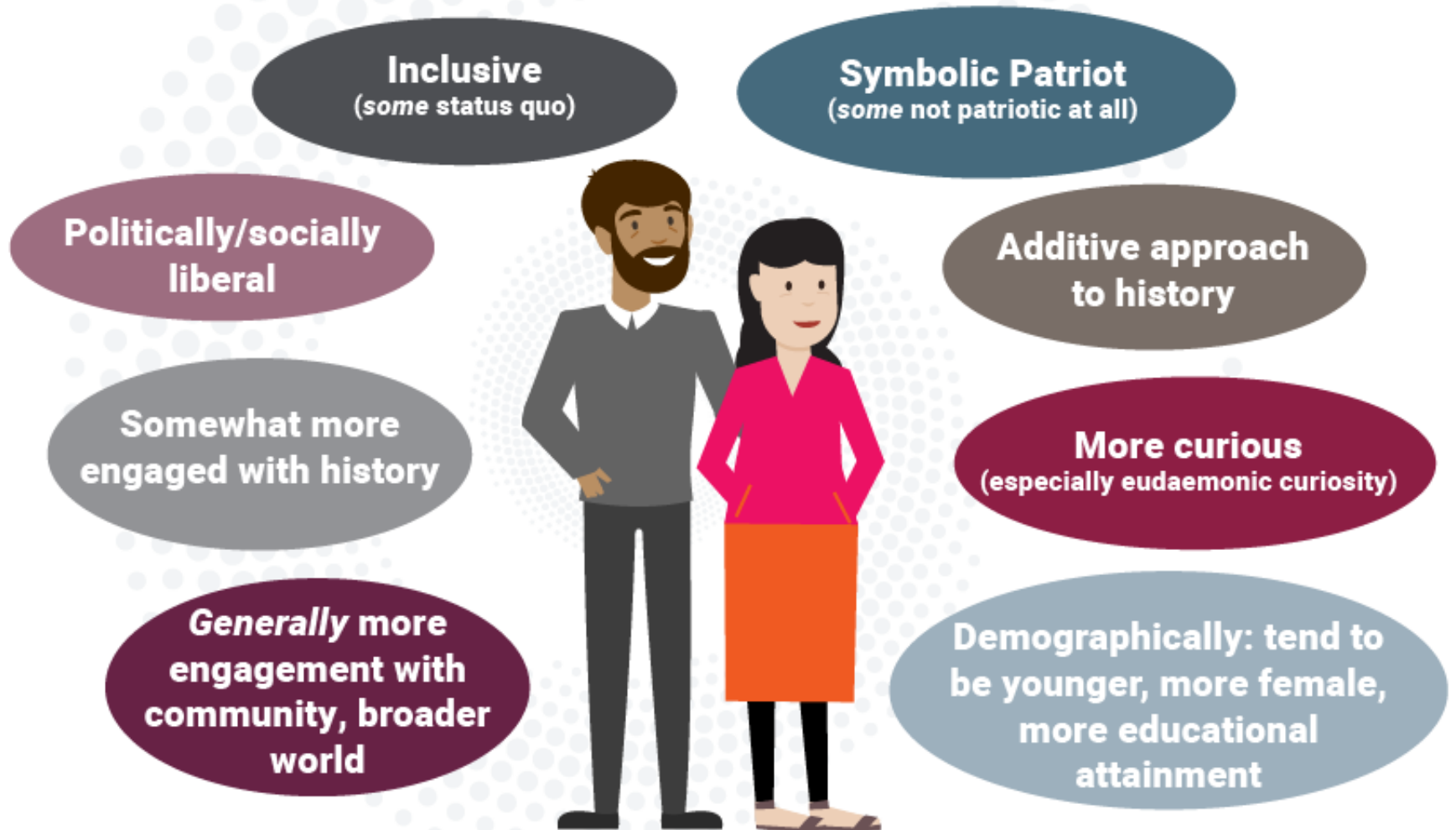


TRADITIONALS: More likely to have these traits



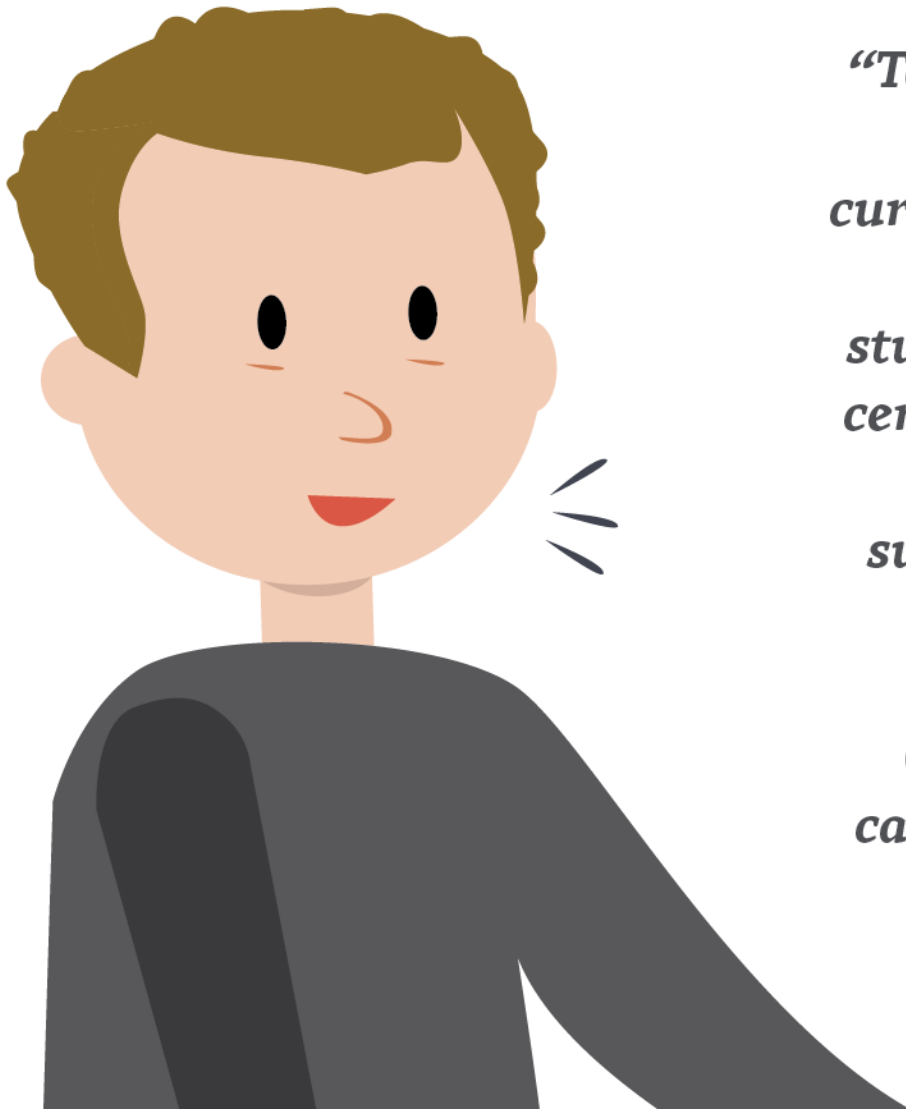
* Exception: small segment of "history buffs" that are heavily engaged in history

NEOTERIC: More likely to have these traits



Neoteric: adjective that describes new or modern ideas; from the Greek *neos*, for new

When educators get pushback from parents/caregivers (or even grandparents), it tends to come from the *traditional* cluster.



“Teaching in Alabama, I have received several parent complaints that my curriculum is ‘too liberal.’ While I have not heard such criticism from students, this has been leveled against certain topics, such as my approach to teaching colonization (one parent suggested that I did not teach enough ‘white history’ of this period) or my essay prompt for the lead-up to the Civil War (I asked, ‘Why did slavery cause the Civil War’ and a parent said it was incorrect to presume such).”

–Drew (high school; Alabama)



“Right now, our community has a very vocal group of right-wing conservatives who are looking for examples of teachers ‘indoctrinating’ their children with left-wing, socialist propaganda. A simple thing of having a quote up on the board during Black History month has already yielded parent phone calls.”

–Liz3303 (middle school; Illinois)

Criticisms tend to arise from people's fears and defense mechanisms.

Typically, these fears fall into five categories.



But this work with educators uncovered a sixth category:

Loss of identity and values that parents/caregivers wish to instill in their children

And once fear rears its head, and defense mechanisms are triggered, conversations cease to be productive.



“I have had several issues with parents questioning whether or not a fact is a fact.”

–rnicholas (middle school; Massachusetts)

School administration has two choices once complaints are raised:



.....> CHOICE #1

**They can back up
the educator.**



“One of our school's cultural norms is inclusion. It is a new cultural norm that was voted in by the staff before school started this year. At the beginning of the school year, I try to create an open and inclusive atmosphere. In doing this I discussed the LGBTQ community in my introduction. I discussed one of my best friend's being bi-sexual, to which a parent quickly sent me a private message in Class Dojo (we're 100% remote) that she was pulling her child out of the class. I ... explained the need to create inclusive classrooms and awareness. Although she was not happy, the administration informed her that our policy is one of inclusion, and that includes the LGBTQ community. In addition, they informed her that the B in LGBTQ stands for bi-sexual, so there was no harm in mentioning the term.”

–taylorj160 (middle school; North Carolina)

.....> CHOICE #2

Or they can attempt to defuse the issue.

“My teaching history hasn't been a direct issue for parents, however my district allowed parents to pull their students from our LGBTQ+ Equity week and I had one student who was pulled during social studies time every day. (It was very upsetting to me that the district allowed parents to do this.)”

—cmhiker (elementary; Illinois)



Either choice can ignite public controversy.

Many administrations have decided the safest course is one of “neutrality,” which means avoidance of hard history and inclusive content in the first place.

Essentially, a “safe” middle ground that actually promotes a more traditional, white-centered history, and excludes a more nuanced understanding of the past.



“I think pressure from parents and administration is causing schools to be more careful about how they teach history. I think schools might be deciding to choose less polarizing topics because they worry about pushback from parents.”

–Hannah_4205 (elementary; Nebraska)

“I definitely feel that the potential for ‘hard history’ topics to upset parents is a reason that administration avoids insisting that we teach correct history. It is much easier for them to have us continue to teach the whitewashed version that has been taught forever.”

–poohfan77 (elementary; Illinois)





“Most recently, I was completely silenced and not allowed to mention the Capitol insurrection.”

–Ms L (high school; Virginia)

“My district approaches DEAI from a perspective of not wanting to touch on white guilt.”

–MsA (elementary; Illinois)



The result of these pressures – from administration, parents/ caregivers, and the overall political climate – is a classroom climate of fear for educators.



Fear being expressed by more traditional parents/caregivers about their identity.



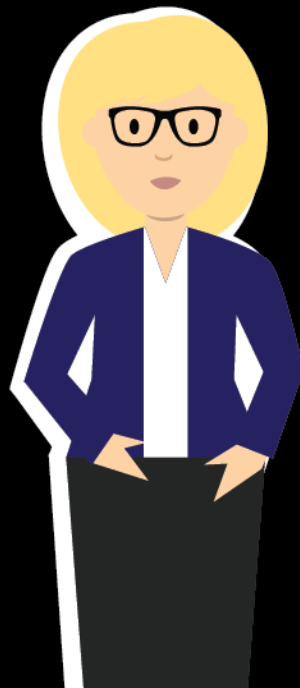
Fear expressed by administrations that don't want to deal with this (or make headlines).



And fears of educators about their own careers.

“I am annoyed that I have to feel my second dominant feeling which is fear. In our profession, the simplest thing blown out of proportion can cost a teacher their job, or at least a paid leave of absence. That is something I am obviously trying to avoid.”

–Liz3303 (middle school; Illinois)



For many educators, fear is stressful,
but still manageable.

That is, they worry about how they
handle inclusive content in the
classroom, and how to navigate a
politically divided classroom. Their fears
are real, and they need support.

But some educators have more potent fears that show how difficult teaching history and social studies has become.



FEAR #1

Major Controversy

This has been exacerbated by digital technology and virtual teaching, when recordings can provide fodder for being challenged and for controversy.

“It is impossible to ignore what is going on in the world, whether that be BLM, impeachments, rallies, riots, COVID, etc. It can be difficult to know how much you be candid with students, and it can be hard to not be polarizing. It's especially hard online with this ‘cancel culture’ when you do not know if students are recording you.”

–mehhusky (middle school; Virginia)

“A challenge I am seeing more and more is not being ‘political’, when really I am not being political. Because of the live streaming in hybrid learning, parents are listening and feel anything that contradicts their world view is political, when really I am trying my best to just give the facts!”

–Hailee (high school; Massachusetts)



FEAR #2

Loss of Livelihood

This is most likely to be experienced by educators in conservative communities.

“I think that it can be an opportunity to try and bring that diversity and sense of inclusion into a world that seems to be pushing back against it, but I haven't found the time or energy to fight parents for that environment.

And I blame myself a lot for that because I know I can do better. I'm just tired this year and I don't want to lose my spot in the district because I pushed too hard.”

–8thGradeTeacher

(middle school; South Carolina)

“It isn't the lack of resources that is the barrier. Social media is the concern. We are so polarized that if an alternative view is presented the parents go to social media to shame the teacher and unleash the mob to get that teacher fired.”

***–Survey respondent
(middle school; Ohio)***

Which brings us back to our major takeaway:

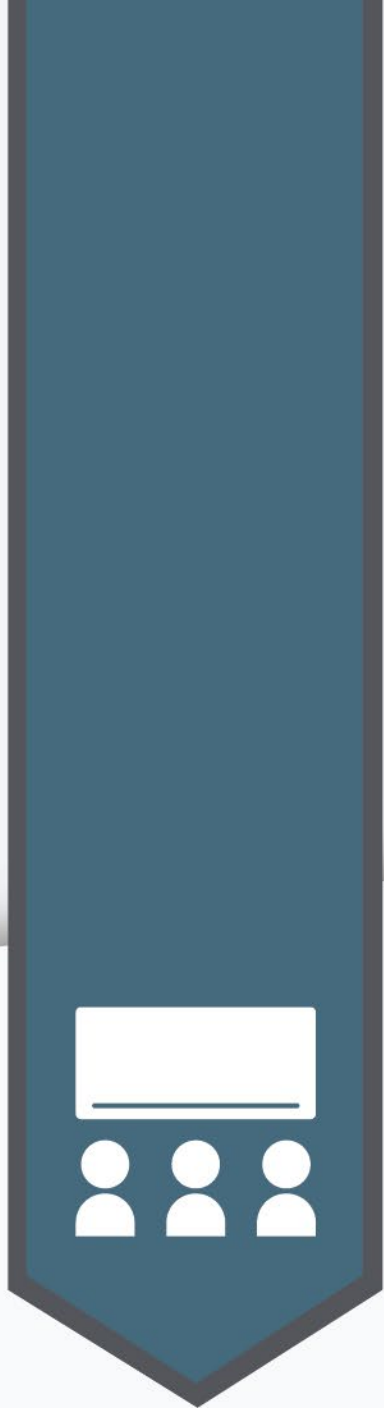
More than anything else, educators need support.



They need to feel that history organizations have their backs (especially when they feel administration can't be counted on)



And they need support for them as humans navigating our divisive and polarized society, and its effects in the classroom



Classroom Needs

When we ask educators what they need from history museums and historic sites, their first response is an immediate “things they would use in the classroom response.”

It's easy to come up with, and specific.

And they want *everything*.



Simulations



Discussion guides



Curricula



**Lesson plans (45-minutes,
not days or weeks)**



Artifacts/objects



Videos (especially shorter ones)



Primary sources



Traveling trunks



**Puzzles, games, mysteries,
challenges that are effective**



Guest speakers/interpreters



Hands-on activities



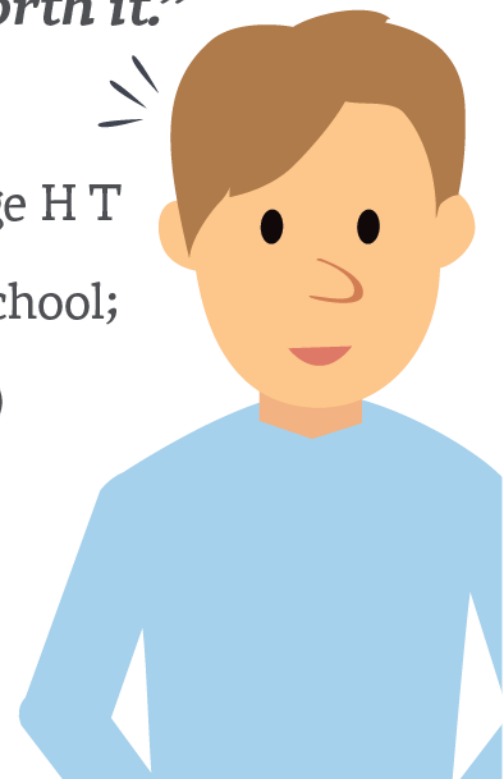
Virtual tours/field trips get a mixed reaction:

“As field trips are not an option for the foreseeable future, I would really enjoy more options for virtual field trips. The ones we have done my students have truly enjoyed and find so very cool so it would be amazing to have more of these moving forward.”

–tsobie (elementary; Illinois)

“I’ve never experienced a virtual tour that I thought was worth it.”

–George H T
(high school;
Illinois)



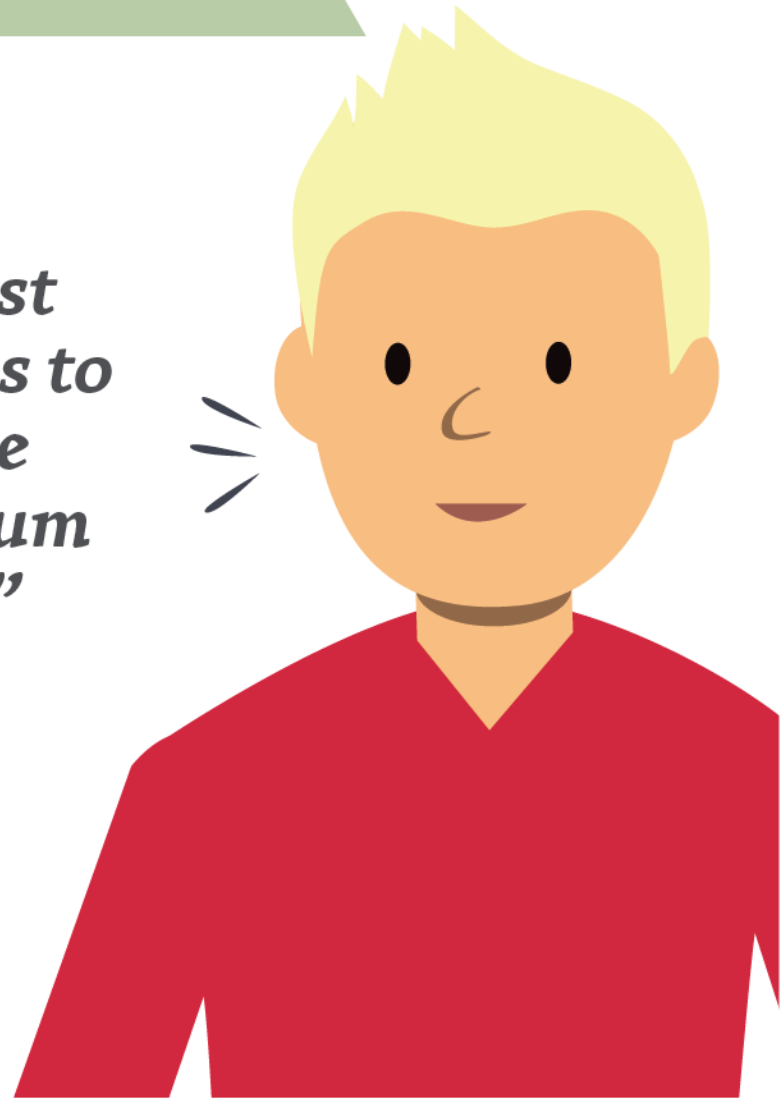


**They want a rich
curricula that focuses
on six themes:**

Multiple Perspectives

“For the most part, the largest frustration is the ease of access to resources that offer multiple perspectives ... Good curriculum guides are hard to come by.”

–BryR (high school; Illinois)



Primary Source Materials



“Access to primary sources that are already curated and easy to find would be helpful.”

–Bcookss (high school; South Carolina)

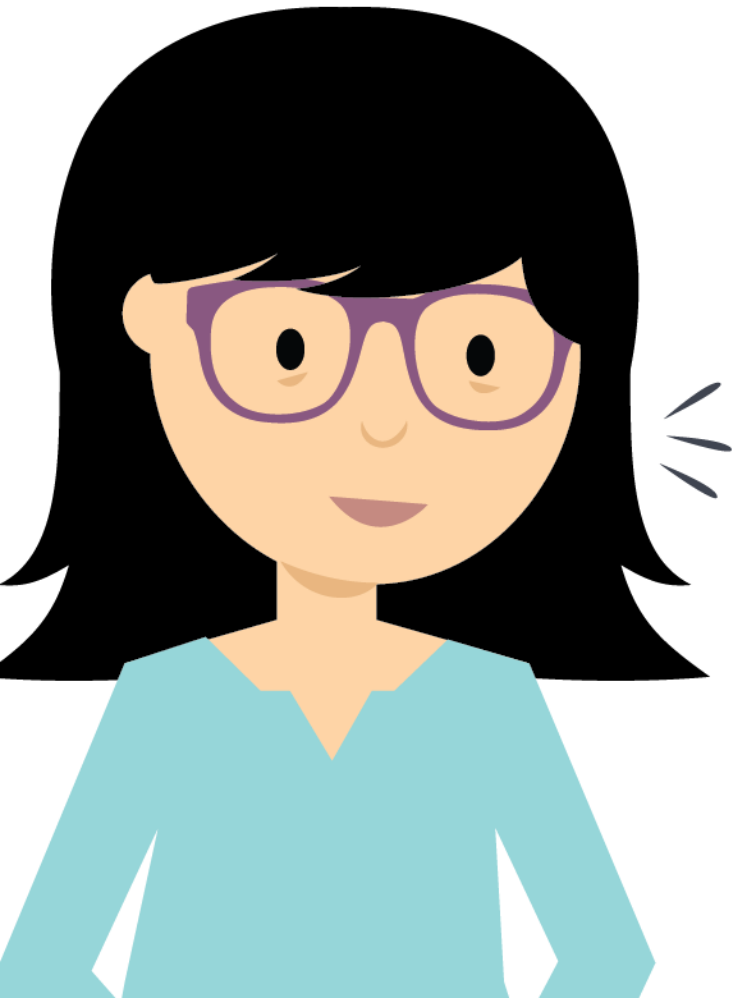
Civil Discourse

“It is challenging to approach sensitive topics while maintaining a culture of respect and comfort, but it is so very important. By doing this, it helps the students learn how to engage in respectful discourse - a skill that is increasingly important in our political world.”

–maydoty (high school; Alabama)



Self-Reflective, Not Just Finger-Pointing



*“Stories that touch on hard truths *and* connect to Illinois--because hard history has happened here, but we too often make it about those Other people (in the South, etc.).”*

–Beth (elementary; Illinois)

Inquiry/Project-Based/ Curiosity

“With all constraints removed, I would sincerely prefer to teach in an inquiry model, through project-based learning. So, with this approach, I would teach the students to be curious, skeptical, inquisitive, and to embrace nuance and complexity ... The impact I would like to have would be to foster their curiosity and ability to draw conclusions from complex and diverse evidence. More than anything else, I want my students to develop a level of comfort with leaving class with more questions than answers.”

–Lars Heart (high school; Florida)



And Most of All Inclusive

This is a big theme ... it goes back to what the educators themselves are grappling with and their fears and emotions

“I would love resources that are completely ready to go. I want lesson plans that I know I can trust so I don't have to spend time correcting mistakes or fact-checking or tailoring it to non-white students. A lot of the lesson plans I find aren't designed for culturally responsive classrooms.”

–cmhiker (elementary; Illinois)

“Lesson plans that challenge students to think deeply about who history left behind and why would be amazing.”

–R. (middle school; Virginia)

Yet their top curricula/classroom need wasn't more content for the classroom ...

... it was better ways to *find* what already exists.

"I just wish we had one database where teachers could go to see all the professional development out there ... A database of museums and what they offer would be amazing, then it would help narrow my search when I collaborate with my teachers."

–Emily (middle school; Tennessee)

"Yes! A database of PD would be awesome."

–maydoty (in response to Emily) (high school; Alabama)

"Emily suggested that a central database of history PD opportunities would be helpful, and I think that is a tremendous idea. It's hard to know what is out there, so I feel like I just keep going back to the same wells over and over."

–wredmond (high school; Maryland)

This was an emphatic request.



“It would also be helpful to have a landing place for teachers from all over the United States to find these virtual field trips and sign up for them with our classes, given we may no longer be restricted to just museums in our own communities and can travel virtually with our class anywhere.”

–Amy (elementary; Illinois)

“In an ideal world, I would like one website that would be a clearinghouse of sorts for museums and historic sites, a one-stop-shop if you will ...”

–tbwiub93 (high school; Missouri)





“It isn't that there aren't enough resources, as it is hard to know what is out there and where it is hiding.”

–cmk (middle school; Michigan)

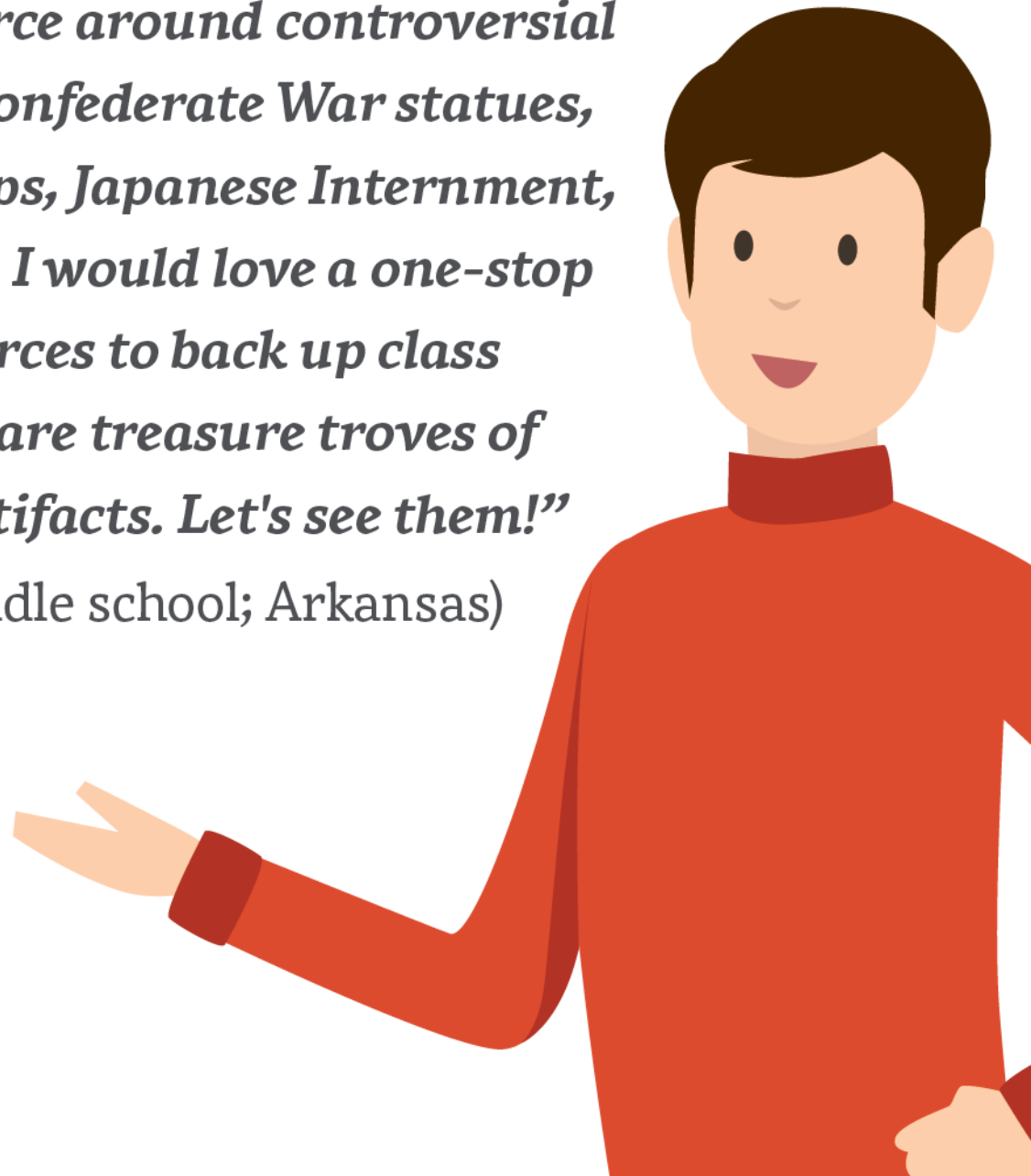
“Museums have a lot of resources and teachers are always looking for new resources- so how do we get the two together? Online speed dating?”

–Joyfulsparkles (middle school; Arizona)



“... a bank of primary source around controversial topics would be great – Confederate War statues, LGBTQ history, hate groups, Japanese Internment, Native American history. I would love a one-stop shop for primary sources to back up class discussions. Museums are treasure troves of primary sources and artifacts. Let's see them!”

–AKTransplanted (middle school; Arkansas)



The classroom tools and better access/organization were the easy things that came to educators' minds.

But that's not where they struggle the most.

What they need more than anything
is for you to have their backs.

 **Historical Advocacy Tools**

 **Professional Development**

 **Emotional Support**



Historical Advocacy Tools


 Professional Development

 Emotional Support

History and social studies are the most contentious subjects taught in school.


And educators often feel like they are on their own, with no back up from administration or from history organizations.

If they are going to effectively teach a history that is built on multiple perspectives, is honest, and is inclusive, they need historical advocacy tools and backup.




“I am often frustrated by the lack of support for historical educators and the pushback from teaching history that is not ‘traditional.’ For example, I am originally from Arkansas, so I see updates of bills being presented to prevent the teaching of black history and threatening to pull funds if certain curriculums are taught. I also see backlash about teaching LGBTQ history.”

–taylorj160 (middle school; North Carolina)




“I do find having resources from ‘acclaimed’ sources like museums, teaching websites, or historical sites, is helpful because it gives me something to fall back on if parents or students do have questions, and something I could show my administration.”

–timetoteach37 (high school; Pennsylvania)



“I think museums need to help us make the case that history should not be censored. By teaching history through omission, we are doing our students a disservice.”

–K. Jacobs (middle school; South Carolina)



“History advocacy tools: These would be great to have. Some possibilities include position statements on major areas of contention, like slavery, the degree to which elites have controlled the American legal and political systems, and American imperialism.”

–Beth (elementary; Illinois)

They need a version of the *Audiences and Inclusion* primer, so they have a framework for understanding parental and community attitudes ... and how to constructively discuss history with parents and caregivers.





They want materials from museums they can share, including form letters, pamphlets, etc.

“Form letters that can be used for: grant writing (answers to typical grant questions - benefits for students, community engagement, sustainability of learning post experience, how will you evaluate student learning etc.), request for funds for administration or PTO, blurbs for the school newsletter, sample letters to administration about why this ‘hard history’ is important to teach and how it will be handled appropriately, letter to send home to parents with a permission slip, home/school communication letter about how families can continue the learning at home.”


–Elaine T (elementary; Connecticut)



A stylized illustration of a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a teal top and a white scarf. She has a small gold hoop earring and a slight smile. Three short black lines radiate from the top left of her head, indicating she is speaking.

“I think any pamphlet/handout/etc. geared toward parents explaining hard history and connections to today is beneficial.”

–America Ritchie (middle school; Kansas)

A stylized illustration of a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a dark blue blazer over a white top. She is wearing black-rimmed glasses and has a neutral expression. Three short black lines radiate from the top right of her head, indicating she is speaking.

“I would find templates for parent letters to be useful. Letters about teaching ‘tough history,’ or the like. Even letters to admin or people within our educational institution. I find that some of our school board members and upper administrators tend to be more ‘old school’ when it comes to how history should be taught. They only know the way that they've learned it and they think that's the right way or the only way. Templates for ways to educate those people would be helpful.”

–Liz3303 (middle school; Illinois)



And they also need advocacy for school boards, legislatures, and standards/textbook commissions.

“I would really like to see museums reach out to school boards to talk about the importance of social studies, oftentimes we are the first classes cut or condensed to pack more kids in a room, and hearing from outsiders as to why our courses are important would be helpful.”

–History and Gov Teacher (high school; Ohio)





“Can we please start a lobbying group to ensure that social studies is taught in all grade levels? Seriously this is a HUGE issue. Kids are not learning the fundamentals in elementary school because it is skipped for reading, math and testing. Then they arrive in MS and everyone want everything taught all at once. My kids don't understand what is going on in the world because they have no context. I cannot teach them all of US History in a year in a meaningful way. They cannot understand civics if they don't apply it but there is no time.”

–JesCav (middle school; Florida)

“If I could ask for anything from a history museum, it would be for support in the state level to help implement standards that are age appropriate and easy to understand. I also would love parental information on tough subjects that is just facts and no political agenda; I would use these to allow parents to know what I am teaching and how to answer tough questions at home.”

–Ms.Stevens (K-12; Oklahoma)





For historical advocacy tools to be most effective, they can't just be from the local historical society.



They should be professional documents that are visibly endorsed by a variety of well-known history organizations across the country.



Additionally, this isn't just a "history" issue.

"This kind of mythologizing can be really exclusionary for students not seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum."

–Maggie Stern, Children's Defense Fund



Inclusive history is a child welfare issue, and these advocacy tools should consider and include new advocacy partners that can speak directly to the harms children sustain when history doesn't include the experiences of people like them.



 Historical Advocacy Tools

 **Professional Development**

 Emotional Support

Educators are enthusiastic about professional development ... especially around:



Professional development is an opportunity to help them become more effective history advocates, build their inclusive confidence, and give them strategies and tactics for the classroom.

Professional Development: *Inclusion*



“... any professional development about traditionally ignored peoples would be incredible.”

–JOR (middle school; Illinois)



“I would like ongoing training on how to teach hard history to a multicultural classroom in a culturally responsive way. I would like ongoing diversity and equity training. I am a white woman who teaches white, black, and brown students. I know that my antiracism learning is ongoing, and I would like support with that. I think having trainings for this every year would be ideal. This would communicate just how important teaching hard, true history is.”

–cmhiker (elementary; Illinois)

“Teachers would like more professional develop on guidance for teaching young children difficult topics like the Civil Rights Movement, as well as multiple perspectives of what was happening when white settlers took over land, or won battles and pushed other people away, and shining a light on celebrations of various cultures.”

–Amy (elementary; Illinois)



Professional Development: “Hard” History



“Museums can provide teachers with materials on how to teach difficult subjects and offer PD that include strategies on how to have students think about the ‘hard’ history topics.”

–scales10 (middle school; California)

“More PD related to talking about difficult topics, how to respond to students.”

–JulieMD (high school; Illinois)

“I think also trainings focused specifically on those ‘hard’ history moments. I would feel more confident teaching certain topics if I had more knowledge and information on those topics.”

–8thGradeTeacher (middle school; South Carolina)

Professional Development: *Historical Competency*



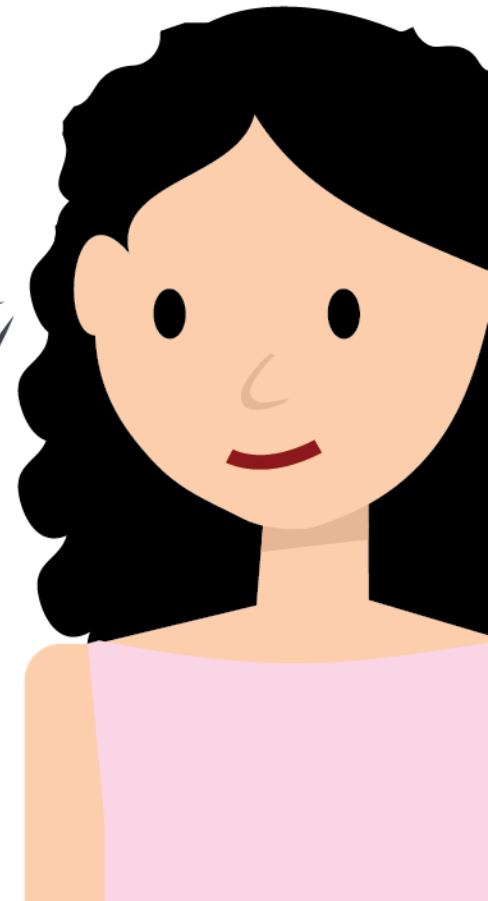
“I don't feel properly equipped to teach history since I was only told stories.”

–poohfan77 (elementary; Illinois)



“On a final, related note, I'd love to participate in virtual museum discussion boards, social media groups, etc. that facilitate conversation between museum professionals and educators about current hot topics.”

–Antoinette (elementary; Alaska)



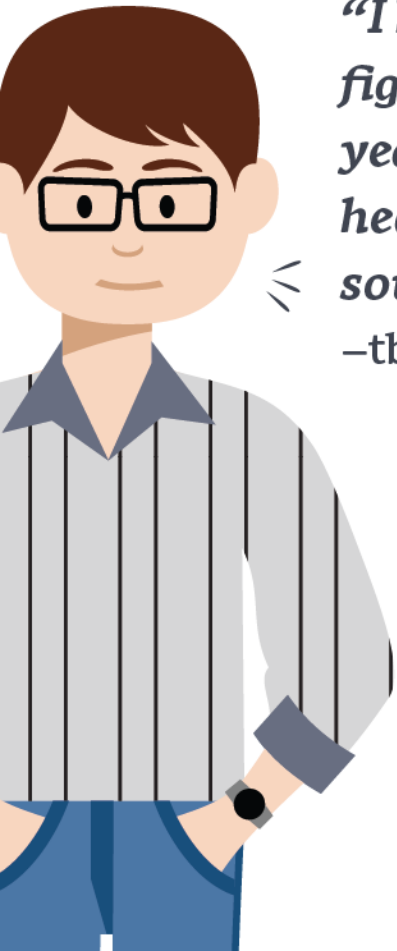
 Historical Advocacy Tools

 Professional Development

 **Emotional Support**



Underlying so much of the panel discussion was stress and the toll the challenges of teaching history today is taking on educators.



“I hate myself for it, but there are days I'm not ready to have to fight back on something that they should know. The last few years politically have really opened my eyes to what my students hear at home, from friends, and what they ingest from online sources. Somedays it is very hard to counter that.”

–tbwiub93 (high school; Missouri)

“... during a discussion about the Atlantic Slave Trade following an activity evaluating what slave ship conditions were like, I had a student accuse me of ‘white shaming.’ For reference I am a white female. I had no idea what to say..... I recovered but was floored.”

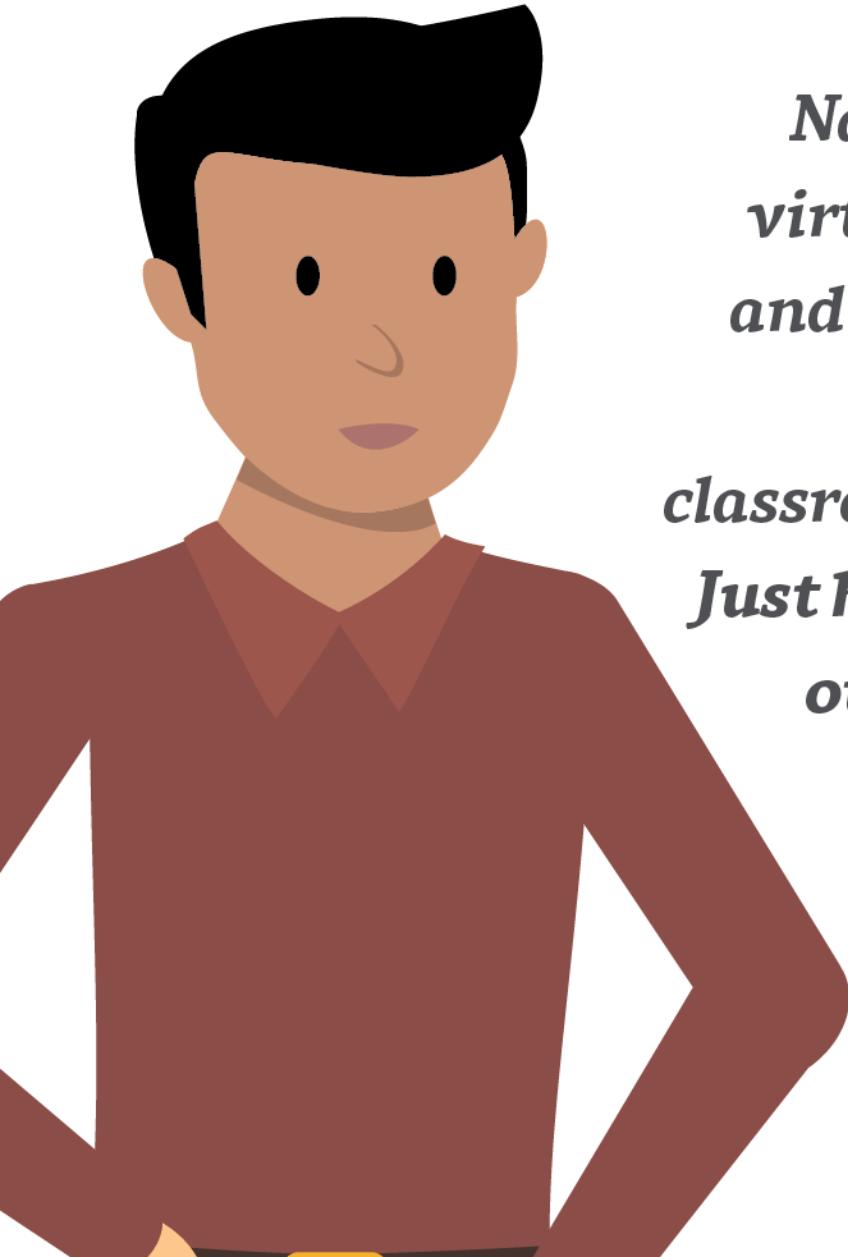
–America Ritchie (middle school; Kansas)



Some of them are isolated but doing the best they can.

Others are feeling the stress of political polarization.

This need is not going away.



“After the events of January 6th, the Teacher Advisory Council of the National Constitution Center had a virtual meeting where I got to talk to and with other teachers and the topic was dealing with an issue in the classroom like the Capitol Insurrection. Just having that resource and having other teachers to affirm how they handled that day took a lot of stress off of me.”

–Romeo46 (middle school; Texas)



Two forms of support were explored:



COACHING AND COUNSELING

“Someone else mentioned having a point-person at museums that we could reach out to directly if we have questions or need help. I love that idea!”

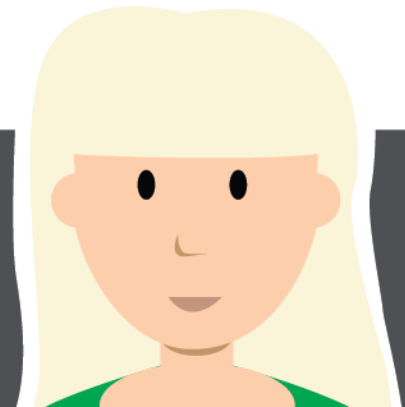
–cmhiker (elementary; Illinois)

“I love the idea of having a museum ‘coach’ - a specific contact person I can talk to when I need help. Establishing a relationship with someone who can answer questions, bounce ideas off of, give suggestions, etc. would be fantastic.”

–Elaine T (elementary; Connecticut)

“Also, maybe some kind of educator ‘help line’ for those tricky subjects that we need help on!”

–Abigail J (high school; Texas)





PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

“Emotional support would be VERY useful - that's been heavily lacking, although my department is full of wonderful people, and we work hard to support each other ... A community of educators also teaching the same things, beyond my school, would also be good.”
–historydoctor (high school; Missouri)



“I would LOVE more support. Sometimes I have ideas and can talk to the teachers I am near, and I can reach out to my social media PLN but having experts as well as connections with other highly motivated teachers is vital to my teaching and growth!”
–America Ritchie (middle school; Kansas)

“I would say that we could all use more social/emotional support, especially in current times. I believe programs connecting teachers with one another and with museum educators would be a valuable resource.”
–taylorj160 (middle school; North Carolina)

Because if we want kids to be engaged with history, and to learn a more complete and inclusive history, we have to take care of the educators.



Outcomes and Conclusions

Most educators realize that history and social studies matter. And a significant percentage of them want to do it inclusively, so that children go into the world with positive outcomes.

CRITICAL THINKING

“My middle school students crave debates. So, we would take the time to dive deep into a historical question, gain the needed knowledge to have an informed opinion, and have some wonderful, intelligent, and structured arguments.”

–AKTransplanted (middle school; Arkansas)

SOCIAL JUSTICE

“My hope would be that they would grow into our future leaders, fighting for the rights of all persons and becoming an ally of social justice.

In order to ‘get it right’ we have to stop ignoring history and stop shying away from difficult topics.”

–taylorj160 (middle school; North Carolina)

CURIOSITY

“They feel supported, curious, and excited. They have a full understanding of the subject, and why it is relevant in their life. I want my students to become lifelong learners.”

–maydoty (high school; Alabama)

SEEING MULTIPLE TRUTHS

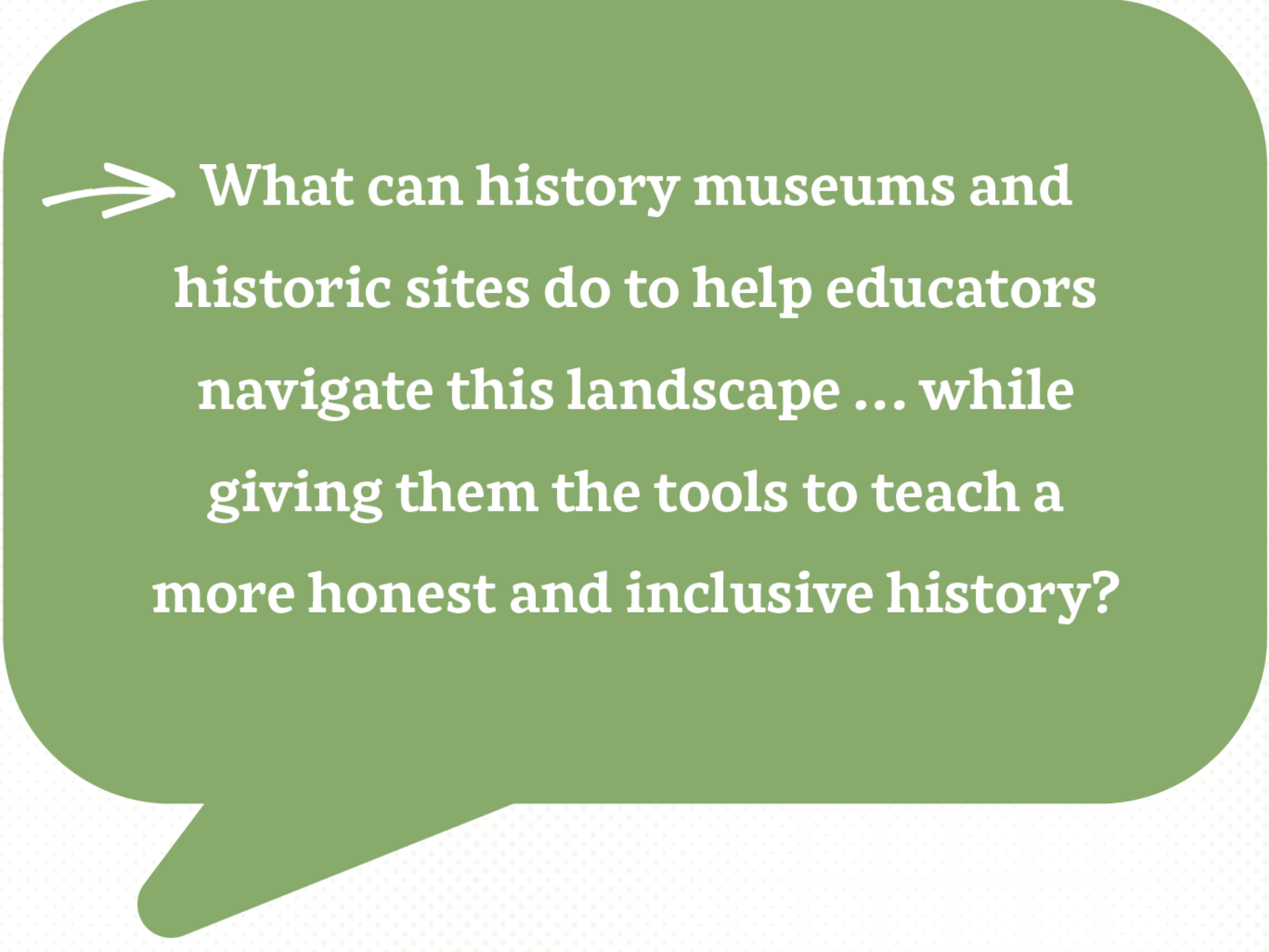
“Getting it right means that students understand there is always more to learn and that there is no one single truth.”

–mhb3 (middle/high school; Massachusetts)

AND BROADER WORLDVIEWS AND EMPATHY:

“I want them to develop not just their historical knowledge, but their empathy as well. I want them to understand that there is such a wider world beyond them. Many of my students will travel extensively, and they know that the world is more than just their day to day lives, but they still live in bubbles of money and in many cases relative luxury ... I want them to sit with the discomfort that CAN come with learning about the history that we've built in this country - and around the world ... I want them to leave class feeling like ‘Huh, I never thought about X that way.’ and then KEEP thinking about what they do with that knowledge. Because it's not good enough if they learn something and it sits in their head and never does anything else. WHAT WILL THEY DO WITH THIS KNOWLEDGE???? That's what I want them to think about Every. Single. Day.”

–historydoctor (high school; Missouri)



➔ What can history museums and historic sites do to help educators navigate this landscape ... while giving them the tools to teach a more honest and inclusive history?

**WE HAVE TO
SUPPORT THE
EDUCATOR FIRST,
REMEMBERING:**

They are isolated,
and teaching the
most emotionally
difficult content
in schools



They need to feel that history organizations have their backs (especially when they feel administration can't be counted on).....



..... And they need support for them as humans navigating our divisive and polarized society, and its effects in the classroom

If we can support the educator through historical advocacy tools, professional development, and emotional support ... we can make those desired outcomes more likely for more children.

Organizations Participating in This Research

Brea Museum and
Historical Society

Chesapeake Bay Maritime
Museum

Chicago History Museum

Conner Prairie

Discovery Museum

Ford's Theatre Society

George Washington's
Mount Vernon

Historic New England

History Nebraska

Illinois Educators Association

Illinois Equity Teachers
Working Group

Michigan History Center

Minnesota Historical Society

Naper Settlement

National Civil Rights Museum

Noah Webster House and
West Hartford Historical
Society

Oak Park River Forest
Museum

Ohio History Connection

Tampa Bay History Center

The Tenement Museum

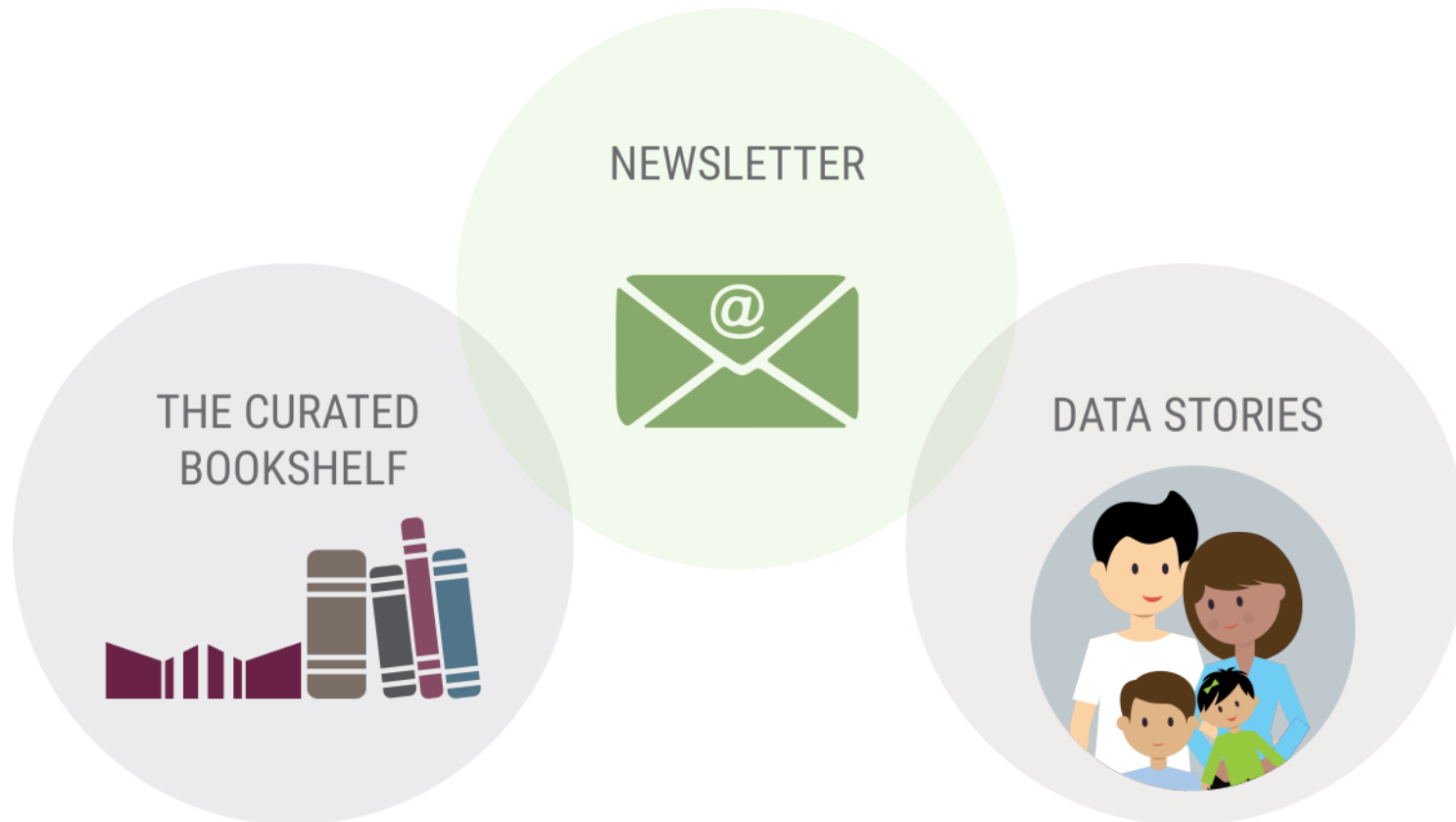
Thomas Jefferson's
Monticello

Virginia Museum of History
& Culture

Washington State
Historical Society

Wisconsin Historical Society

Three Ways to Learn More:



All can be found at [wilkeningconsulting.com](https://www.wilkeningconsulting.com)



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