Fourth Graders Historical Understanding of Diverse Civil War Narratives
Sydney Grieger and Dr. Stephanie Serriere

Purpose
As Language Arts and Mathematics become the forefront of elementary curriculum, Social Studies is left on the backburner, ultimately being tied in with Language Arts (Boyle-Baise et. al, 2011). When both Social Studies and Language Arts are used in a healthy integration of cross-curriculum content, students become more in tune with the diverse perspectives throughout history (Barton & Levstik, 2011). Therefore, a Journey Box promotes healthy integration of Social Studies and Language Arts by containing primary and secondary sources that work to engage the inquiry minds of students (Labbo & Field, 1999). This project seeks to better understand how this method of teaching can promote young people’s historical understanding through investigating primary and secondary sources (from a journey box) and a related high-quality children’s book.

Research Questions
Research question. To what extent can 4th grade students demonstrate historical understanding of perspectives in the Civil War?

Sub-question. I also seek to understand the pedagogy that supported their growth: How does the teaching strategy or pedagogy support historical understanding?

Objectives
Elementary Students’ Historical Understanding. As a result of this teaching, fourth grade students will be able to demonstrate historical understanding of the Civil War by interpreting primary and secondary sources to showcase life experiences in-depth from a particular perspective.

Teaching Methods to Support Historical Understanding. Simultaneously, I seek to understand the teaching methods that support such historical understanding.

Findings
Students were given a three-column paper that asked them to describe “What was life like during the Civil War.” Students recorded their answers before any lesson/inquiry took place. Then students answered after reading “Pink and Say.” Lastly, students answered after exploring primary and secondary sources during the Civil War.

After students explored the primary and secondary sources, students...

- Provided more in-depth answers using information from the notable trade book and sources.
- Gathered information from diverse perspectives in order to synthesize what life was like during the Civil War.
- Used their knowledge from notable trade books as well as primary and secondary sources to form an educated journal entry on a rarely discussed perspective of the Civil War.

From the beginning answers of, “What was life like during the Civil War?” to the end, 75% of students were able to build upon a more in-depth explanation based on their inquiry with the sources and the notable trade books. Based on the given rubric that assesses the students’ historical understanding, 65% of students received a 3 or higher which ultimately means they have met the learning objective.

Conclusion
Based on this final data, using primary and secondary sources encompassed in a Journey Box can promote student engagement and inquiry skills. When providing students with outside resources, such as a notable trade book and primary and secondary sources, students can analyze and understand a more adequate depiction of this time in history. Overall, utilizing notable trade books and primary and secondary sources can teach students a more in-depth analysis and bring awareness to the perspectives that are not always taught.

References:
Barton, K. (2010). Research on Students’ Ideas about History In Linda Levstik and Cynthia Tyson (Eds.) Handbook of research in social studies education, pp. 219-238. Routledge.

Sydney Grieger and Dr. Stephanie Serriere

Journal Entries

Formative Assessment Answer Sheets

Map of the Union and Confederate States

Unification

Unique Song

Journey Box: Telling the Story of Place, Time, and Culture with Photographs, Literature, and Artifacts

Summative Assessment Rubric

Unique Song

Journey Box: Telling the Story of Place, Time, and Culture with Photographs, Literature, and Artifacts

Summative Assessment Journal Entries

Primary Accounts of Enslaved Peoples

Notable Trade Books

Union Nurse Workers

Family of Enslaved Peoples

United States Colored Troops

Union Song