

Voyages Reflective Essay

Allison Gee, Vergennes, VT

Formerly with Vergennes Union High School (7th – 8th Grades)

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Being part of the Voyages of Discovery program has been an absolutely amazing experience. I continue to process both the information and the experience as a whole from the past three weeks. The opportunity to be part of this program was such a unique one for me having come from a strong archaeology and Vermont studies background, while teaching is the area in which I have the least experience. I have come away from Voyages knowing I have gained so much on many different levels. I feel the program helped me academically to become more knowledgeable in the area of Vermont history that I had been lacking most, and to reconnect and further analyze information I have studied previously. On a more interpersonal level I cherished the opportunity to meet and share so many ideas and stories with a handful of extraordinary teachers from all over the state. Personally, this experience has led me to further evaluate where I am in my professional life and where I want to be headed, trying to connect my love of archaeology and history with my interest in education. I feel that Voyages has impacted me on many levels: academically, interpersonally, as well as personally. The encompassing of all these areas has helped me to envision how to better connect students to the world around them through history and archaeology.

Academically I knew that some of Voyages would touch upon areas in history that I had studied previously. It was great to refresh my memory and knowledge of familiar subject areas such as the history of Native Americans in Vermont and its surrounding areas. I found the readings and discussions enhanced my background knowledge, and led me to some great “Ah ha!” moments. One of these moments occurred when we began talking about the strategies and

complexities of Native Americans. I felt “The Columbian Exchange” was an incredibly useful article in helping to better understand the extent to which Old World diseases decimated the indigenous populations of North America. Although I knew that disease had played a major role in their disappearance, looking at the specific instances and statistics made the information much more powerful. This information, in addition to what I have previously studied dealing with Native American survival strategies of movement and withdrawal, led me to realize I had not fully thought through the motives of some of these strategies. I had never connected the concept of Native Americans taking European captives. Once I realized a group with such a population decline would need to increase its members in order to survive, the concept just made sense. I couldn’t believe that I had never once thought of or discussed this point of view.

In all of my learning about Vermont history, I didn’t recall having closely discussed the French settlement of the state. This is the area in which I gained the most academically through the course. The combination of having Elsa to help educate all of us about Chimney Point, our tour of Crown Point, as well as Andre Senecal’s visit gave me such a strong picture of what was going on in the Lake Champlain Valley around the time of the French occupation.

I found the Coolidge reading to be very useful in getting a general idea of how the New France government planned to establish roots in the Champlain Valley. I was very interested to learn about the entire seignore system. It was intriguing to find out the lengths to which intendants would go in order to convince people to settle on their lots. I keep thinking of Joy comparing Fort St. Fredric to a shopping mall where settlers could go each day and pick up their bread. The specific information on Hocquart and his land helped to bring a narrower picture of the size of a seignore and I began to connect this to the present landscape I was seeing each day in Addison as well as on my ride home to Vergennes. After learning such specific information

from Andre's lecture, I enjoyed going back to the Coolidge article feeling I had a better understanding and could better imagine a seignore system upon the landscape.

By far the highlight of studying this was Andre's visit and presentation. The Coolidge reading helped in understanding the larger concept of medieval-like seignores, but it was Andre who really helped to draw my attention and understanding. I was very impressed with the extent of his research as well as the amount of detail he included to give such a vivid image of the lives of French occupants. I was very interested in learning the simplicity of life for French settlers without much material culture to leave a historical footprint. The French appeared to have lived so similarly to the Native peoples around them, with a real closeness to nature. The French lived without many European conveniences such as tables or chairs. It was surprising to think about the amount of privacy given up due to the practicality, or lack there of, of European clothing in Vermont's hot summer climate. It was during Andre's discussion of the possible specifics involved in the life of Corporal Fayard that Don made a very beautiful point. With an increase of information from research, the more history is transformed into a narrative. It becomes so much more understandable on a person to person level. I felt so strongly in agreement with Don's statement. This is exactly at the heart of why I am so passionate about history and archaeology. I feel that this is exactly the way in which educators can effectively motivate students to delve into history and connect themselves to it on a personal level.

My feelings of agreement with Don's observations help to demonstrate the importance of having other educators to share the experience of Voyages. Part of what I loved about Voyages was the opportunity I had to meet such motivated and enthusiastic educators. I loved being able to bounce ideas off of other people, share stories of all kinds, and have many other people to help clarify or elaborate on information and concepts that I didn't fully understand. I truly valued our

morning sessions that brought about such lively discussions and ideas. I loved hearing people's thoughts and ideas that arose from the previous days work, discussions and readings. This brought so much more to the table each day. I feel this allowed me to process increased information more thoroughly, knowing that each person brought to me new perspectives and understandings of history, as well as their experience with teaching. I was pleasantly surprised by the group dynamics. There was such a high level of enjoyment and comfort I gained working with all of the other teachers. I felt so encouraged, supported and genuinely cared about by each group member. I could not have imagined a better group of educators with which to spend a few intense weeks of learning. The high degree of collaboration with physical work as well as the classroom work was incredible. It perfectly modeled my idealized image of collaborative work in the classroom. These feelings led me to really question how an experience like Voyages can be replicated for students. How can we bring to the classroom all of the associated feelings of excitement, exploration and connectedness that I found myself going through during these three weeks? This question led me to evaluate my own personal experiences with archaeology and history. I began thinking about my growth in developing a passion for these areas and in particular my relationship with objects and hands-on research.

Looking back on what I remember most from my education surrounding history, I found that the pieces of history that remain most meaningful to me are the ones in which I had either active participation in research, hands-on learning, or there was something to connect or draw me in on a personal level. Projects that included interviewing family and community members, going to libraries and town offices to research primary documents, working with experts, and physically creating objects, such as atlats with John, are the ones that caught my interest. Projects like these motivated me to consider a career that incorporates history and archaeology.

Although I have still not quite decided how best to incorporate my interests professionally, Voyages has helped reignite my passion for archaeology and history that has been missing and offered me some new and exciting work opportunities.

While brainstorming how the Voyages experience could best be replicated for students as well as some of my own educational opportunities, I found myself spending a considerable amount of time reflecting on the few summers I spent working at Relics and Ruins. The more time that was spent discussing how to motivate and connect students to history and their surroundings, the more I realized how unique and amazing the experience of Relics and Ruins has been for both its students and I, as an educator. I had such an incredible time assisting with the field archaeology portion of the summer program. I truly feel that it is an extremely valuable interdisciplinary model that schools should look towards in order to create an important connection and understanding for each student with the environment, linking the past and present. At Relics and Ruins students take on the roles of scientists, observing and analyzing the present landscape, learning about the changes that have occurred and their causes. Students become historians, researching and documenting information from various primary resources. They learn field techniques in archaeology; excavating, processing and analyzing artifacts. By the end of the program students have learned an impressive amount about the history of a specific area. They gain an understanding of the land; its ecosystems, natural resources and landscape. They realize the impact that land use has and develop a greater sense of stewardship. The students demonstrate what they have learned with a number of creative products such as a period gazette and artwork using a variety of media. Student work is displayed for the public at a local art gallery. To help gain exposure with the nearby community, there is an opportunity to take a walking tour through the historic site where the excavation has taken place.

Overall, I feel the Relics and Ruins program matches the experience of Voyages of Discovery. I think both programs allow learners to gain a great deal of knowledge about the history of their community. My academic, social and personal experiences that developed from these past three weeks reconnected me with my admiration of the Relics and Ruins program and desire in educating students about their local history and landscape. I feel a great need for all students to have opportunities like these to give them a better sense of place and connect them to their surroundings and histories at a much deeper level. The combination of gaining knowledge through collaborative work and discussions, and the development of closer personal connections to other individuals, history/archaeology, and my own passions made for an incredibly intense, wonderful program. I personally have come away feeling empowered and motivated to figure out the logistics of a Relics and Ruins model of a field school for other educators to use in their own areas. I am excited to think that there is a way in which we, as educators, can recreate an experience like Voyages for students; one of excitement, exploration, collaboration and connectedness.