**Opening Up the Textbook**

Opening Up the Textbook (OUT) moves the textbook from its position as the one true story about the past to one historical account among many. It is designed to help students slow down, read closely, and critically evaluate their textbook. This is not a strategy that fits well with reading lengthy textbook passages or chapters.

When conducting an OUT the teacher juxtaposes a short excerpt from the course’s textbook with an additional document or two. These documents are chosen to open up the textbook’s story and engage students in comparing and crosschecking sources. Using sources that shed a different light on the textbook’s account can open up that account and students’ understanding of what history is.

Students read and compare the textbook excerpt and additional source(s). They back up their comparative claims with evidence from the documents. Students can grapple with questions like, “How do you explain the differences in these accounts? What is the significance of these differences?” Summative assignments can include write a response to a line of textbook prose or rewriting the textbook passage so it is more complete, accurate, or complete.

**Six ways to open up the textbook are:**

* **Comparing:** Comparing two textbook accounts (e.g. U.S. to non U.S. or old to new)
* **Direct Challenge:** Using primary sources to challenge textbook facts or interpretation.
* **Narrativization:** Where does a textbook begin to tell the story? Where does it end it?
* **Articulating Silences:** Who is left out of the textbook’s narrative? Are there voices that are not there?
* **Vivification:** Bringing life into a text that only mentions, or omits.
* **Close Reading:** Careful, attentive focus on word choice and structure.

This lesson structure portrays history as more complex than a single, sacrosanct story. It helps students learn that an authoritative tone does not necessarily convey the full or exclusive story. Using an additional short source that contrasts with a textbook excerpt makes it easier for students to question textbook prose and see the many sides of historical practice. By focusing on text, this structure teachers students to read carefully and to question what they read.

Sam Wineburg, “Opening Up the Textbook and Offering Students a Second Voice,” *Education Week* (June 6, 2007) Vol. 26, Issue 39.