LURIA ACADEMY OF BROOKLYN

MOLLIE BEEK

Middle School History Teacher

My Civic Spirit project took the shape of an independent research project for 7th and 8th grade students. My 7th grade class was tasked with picking a justice movement or event in American history while the 8th grade class selected their own topic under the prompt: What about American history, culture, or society interests you? My goal was to encourage the students to think more deeply about American history. Specifically, I wanted them to probe the surface to find out: What factors gave rise to events? How did historical moments impact different groups of people? How did society change as a result?

At Luria Academy of Brooklyn, we have Four Commitments that guide students and educators in our pursuit of knowledge. The Four Commitments include four qualities we strive to embody and they are prominently displayed in both English and Hebrew throughout our school. These visual reminders guided me in developing my project. Specifically, the commitment “I will be curious” called to my belief that writing history is an ongoing practice requiring reflexivity and open-mindedness. My goal for my students is that they investigate a subject in American history with the value of curiosity so they can develop nuanced and complex understandings.

The project began with students proposing a broad topic and then were guided by me to generate more pointed questions. After narrowing their scope, students then found their own sources and evaluated their value and limitations through an annotated bibliography. By investigating the value and limitations of their sources, students were able to unpack bias, collect information more thoughtfully, and answer the question: what or who is left out of this narrative? We then turned our research into drafts of essays and ultimately a final project. In tandem, the students are creating a visual representation to display in a school gallery. They will have to find or create a visual representation and create a plaque to accompany it so that others can learn from their findings.

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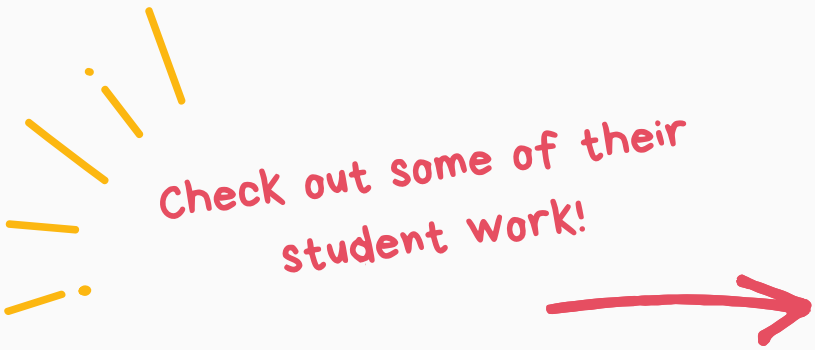
Civic Spirit gifted me with the tools to help guide my students on their individual pursuits of knowledge. I am grateful for my mentorship and support in my personal journey as an educator. This was my first year as a full-time teacher and I thank Civic Spirit in keeping me grounded in my values as I developed into an educator. With your support, I am able to share my passion for history and civics with my students and provide them with the means of being not just educated learners, but also active citizens. Hopefully, this project and the skills I shared with them will inspire them to look critically at American history and society and feel empowered to make our country more just.



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Luria Academy of Brooklyn 8th graders explore the intake process on Ellis Island and research their family history.