

[K12 Teaching and EAR?](#)

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I could use some assistance with helping preservice K12 teachers identify general works in our field that balance breadth and depth and thereby help them prepare for their future K12 classes.

The [Michigan state curriculum](#) requires that the early republic be covered in 5th and 8th grades. For example, the 8th grade curriculum includes “Era 3 -- Revolution and the New Nation” with a subsection, “Creating New Government(s) and a New Constitution,” under which are arrayed a dozen sub sub topics, like “*U3.3.1: Explain the reasons for the adoption and subsequent failure of the Articles of Confederation (e.g., why its drafters created a weak central government, challenges the nation faced under the Articles, Shays’ Rebellion, disputes over western lands).*” The typical 8th grade teacher has maybe one to two hours per week for social studies. In her search for background information she faces rows of specialized works on the subject at the library and is more likely to rely on reviews at Amazon.com or [Goodreads](#) than on reviews in the scholarly journals, none of which helps her think about this material from the perspective of teaching.

I’ve been teaching a course for undergrad history education majors that tries to address this problem. The course is based on the idea of domain-specific teaching, or pedagogical knowledge of the kind championed by [Sam Wineburg](#) and his mentor, [Lee Shulman](#). The students are preservice teachers and the challenge I face is helping them to think like “generalists” rather than like “specialists.”

For this course, the students have to map out a learning plan that they would use to prep for class once they are out in the schools; the plan targets a slice of the state mandated curriculum that the student feels especially weak in, and is essentially a syllabus for self-learning to fill that gap: it includes learning objectives and targeted questions, notes on background reading in a college survey text, a list of secondary sources to consult, a small list of networking resources (links to professional associations and journals in history teaching), a collection of primary source databases ([American Memory](#), or the National Humanities Center’s [primary sources site](#)), and a mini-“lecture” to themselves that provides a narrative or back story for the curriculum. They share these resources in a [Zotero](#) group library so that ultimately they will leave the class with a fistful of these syllabi created by themselves and their classmates. The students do not write lesson or unit plans in my course; instead they use this syllabus to write curriculum during their teaching methods classes and eventually when they’re out in the schools. They can also take the format for this syllabus into other history courses at the University and even ask instructors if they can substitute it for the usual long paper (or as an add-on).

The problem I have is with helping the students learn to locate background readings appropriate to what generalists and teachers need to do.

The “further reading” recommendations in many college survey texts are highly variable -- in many cases they recommend specialized monographs or very lengthy works like Sellers’s [Market Revolution](#) that the typical history teacher just will not read or benefit much from reading to prepare for class. Documentary readers like the Heath or Bedford St. Martin’s series that are popular at the

college level tend to channel the reader into specific sets of sources, while I want these students to learn to make their own choices about primary sources on the basis of their own reading and understanding of their future students' learning capabilities. I'm thinking here of concise biographies, surveys, or works aimed at a general readership that are authoritative and could be connected to the state's curriculum mandate.

In the early republic, I can think of biographies of major characters or short but very effective surveys like Steve Mintz's *Moralists and Modernizers*, but I'd be grateful for ideas about readings that highlight significant issues or turning points between the Revolution and the Civil War, from which teachers can cull examples, imagine primary sources that would work in their classes, and conceive of a discipline-based framework for learning that would inform their classroom activities. I'm particularly interested in economic history, an area in which these students are weakest but that is part of the required curriculum in our state.

So... is there a role for specialists like the subscribers to this network in brainstorming works that would be especially useful for K12 teachers when preparing for class? And where might teachers go to get advice on works that fit this general description: the reviews sections of major newspapers? Maybe there's a service out there that I've missed and is already doing this.

thank you

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