Re-Imagining History.

Creativity, along with the cognitive tools, has allowed me to re-imagine history; For myself and for my students. So many students look at history as a subject that is "boring", just a bunch of memorization. As a teacher of both World History and US History, it is my job to change these ideas. I want students to see *connections*, I want students to see the *emotions* that is threaded throughout history. I don't expect every one of my students to fall in love with history but if I could change just a few minds then I will feel as though I've done a good job.

Breaking down history *creatively* allows students to see particular events and people as more than just dates and facts. It allows them to look more in depth at what was really happening. The steps that need to be taken in order for this to take place requires the use of seven cognitive tools: perception, patterning, abstraction, embodied thinking, modeling, play and synthesizing.   These tools will allow for students to *re-imagine history.*

One of the most in depth topics that I teach in US & World History is the Holocaust. There is so much to learn and yet it is something my students have most likely already been exposed to on some level. They already know what it is, they already know who is responsible, what the result was. You could say many students have what us history teachers call "compassion fatigue" when it comes to the Holocaust. They no longer feel any sympathy or empathy towards the event. So when they get to me with that attitude it is my job to get them past that fatigue and open their eyes to more.

The one question students never seem to have an answer to is "How?"; "How could a nation allow a man to commit such crimes against humanity?" "How could men & women support Adolf Hitler and even at times agree with him?" While the answer is not a simple one, I can help my students discover and understand the essential ideas behind the Nazi buy-in through the use of creativity in my classroom.

In order to begin to open students eyes to these ideas you must start by opening up their perceptions. Perceiving is a tool that can be used to see and understand a hidden message in everyday life. Whether it's an object, an image, a song, etc. We can always find, through perception, something deeper. In the case of answering the question "Why did people support Adolf Hitler" it is important to look a little deeper, to perceive that "hidden message". Take for example the following photograph:
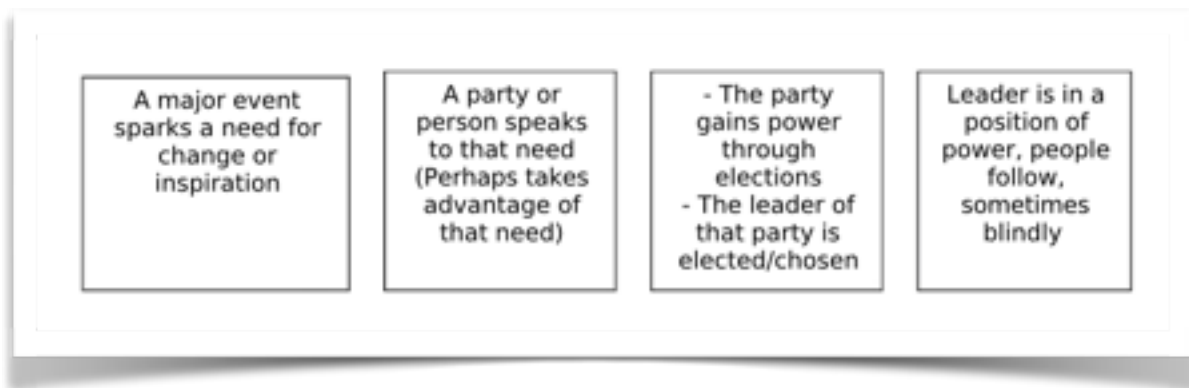

If I were to show students this photograph they might have an observation similar to the following:
"People are generally happy to see Adolf Hitler, they appear to be greeting him as he drives through a town. Several people are giving the 'Heil Hitler' salute, a sign of respect and a sign that he has the authority."

While this is a perfectly fine observation, by bringing the tool of perceiving into my classroom I can coach students to the point of reaching a different perception of this photograph. To do this I can re-image the photograph by giving them the following information:

To help us understand why Germans bought into the Nazi Party, it's ideas, it's political philosophy, etc, we must understand what led to the start of the Nazi Party in the first place. Consider a country who, depending on how you look at it, is less than 50 years old at the time of the first World War. Without getting into too much detail, following a devastating war this country is blamed and they have to take responsibility and are therefore severely punished for the start of World War I. Allied nations own interests are the root of certain punishments. The country as a result experiences an economic depression along with a myriad of other issues. This country's pride is washed away with the blood of it's soldiers. Enter a man with a ideas. A man who believes he knows how to make this country great again, how to make this country the most powerful country in the world. He shares his ideas, they spread, people listen and like what they hear. By 1933 this man has a position in the government and his power begins to grow, a chance for him to execute this plan. To save the people of this emotionally and economically depressed nation. Wherever he goes people show him respect with a salute and seem genuinely happy to see him. To many people, he is a hero.   The country, Germany. The man, Adolf Hitler.

By re-imaging it as I did in the paragraph above, perhaps they will focus on the emotion that must have been felt by German citizens post-WWI, instead of the shock they feel for what Hiltler did. History, after all, changes based on the point of view you are looking at. By changing that point of view I can help students understand how Hitler was able to gain so much support in Germany, gain so much power in a country struggling to breath. This new perception helps to frame the work we will do moving forward.

The next way to bring creativity into the classroom is through patterning. Patterning is the process of finding and/or making connections within an existing idea(s). These connections are repetitive and allow us to organize the information we are working with. As a teacher, and as a learner, I do best and teach best with visuals. I like students to be able to SEE what we are talking about. By helping my students see patterns they will better understand what is actually happening leading up to World War II and the Holocaust. To show these patterns in this particular topic we can look at the rise of leaders.

A major event sparks a need for change or inspiration	A party or person speaks to that need (Perhaps takes advantage of that need)	- The party gains power through elections - The leader of that party is elected/chosen	Leader is in a position of power, people follow, sometimes blindly

By taking a look at leaders rise to power, specifically in a democratic government where they are being elected, we can find a pattern. First, there is an event that drastically changes the country. It could be

an economic downturn, a major war, a rise in tensions between different groups of people. This event creates a need for change among the people, they are looking for inspiration. In the rise of Adolf Hitler that event is World War I and the Treaty of Versailles' harsh consequences on Germany. Next, a party or leader of a party begins to speak to that need, acknowledging the change that is necessary and details how they see "fixing" the problem. For Adolf Hitler, it was the Nazi party and his speeches promising a better future and a return to the glorious pre-World War I Germany. Once that party gains popularity they begin to gain seats within the legislative body, the Nazi party gained 33% of the vote in the 1932 election. Finally, that leader gains a position of power. Due to the success of the Nazi Party, Hitler is then chosen as Chancellor, the head of Germany. He continues to preach the ideas of the Nazi party and people blindly follow, believing he is the savior to the depression they've been living in since World War I came to an end.

This pattern will help students see that the rise of Adolf Hitler to power and the support the Nazi party received is not a rare event in history. It just happened to have a much more shocking and disastrous outcome than other examples with the same pattern.

Abstracting is a process one goes through to take an idea, process, thing, etc and simplify it to a more basic form or element. When discussing a topic as complex as the rise of Adolf Hitler to power, abstracting is a powerful tool. Being able to break down what is going on in Germany in the 1930's can sometimes be what turns the lightbulb on for a student. If I were simplify this topic but breaking it down into ONE idea, it would be PRIDE. First, I would show a simple photograph of something that would most likely ignite their own patriotism, allow them to empathize.
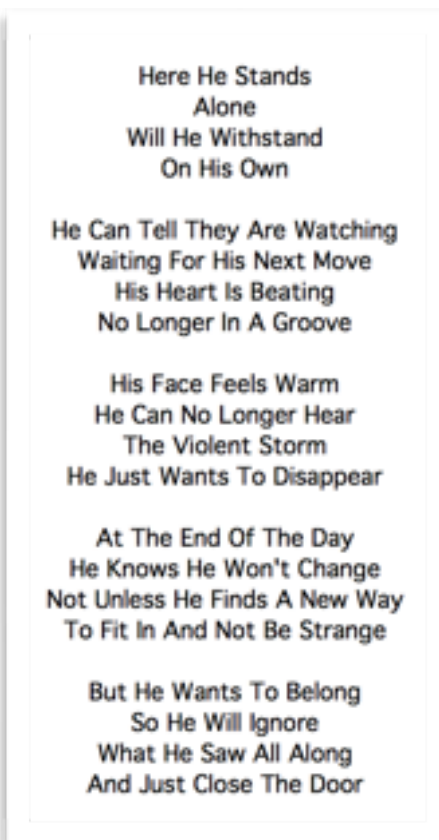

Next I would show an example of potential German propaganda, something would elicit similar emotions in a German citizen.

Was Wurden Sie Tun…

Um in Deutschland fruheren Glanz wieder herzustellen?

Abstracting a particular topic can be beneficial to students because it chooses something much simpler that students can relate to. Thinking of a time one was proud of their family, themselves, their school, their state, their nation, that's an easy thing for most people to do. Finding examples of people making compromises BECAUSE of that pride is just as easy. Someone doesn't want to admit defeat in a game they are clearly losing because of their pride. Someone doesn't want to ask for help because of their pride. If students can identify examples in their own life and find a way to empathize with the German people it will help them understand and answer "How Germans could allow a man to rise to power who was so clearly evil"

Embodied thinking is in my opinion, one of the more difficult cognitive tools involved in creativity. Embodied thinking is being able to feel through all possible senses as we experience something, it involves kinesthetic thinking as well as empathy. But how do we "feel" history? Another common theme that arises when talking about the rise of Adolf Hitler is conformity, and conformity is definitely something that can be felt. Conformity is really just a result of different emotions. So often the events and actions that have taken place in history are emotionally charged. The colonists are angry about being taken advantage of by the British and so they rebel, claiming their independence. Students can understand and empathize with this. If they can understand the emotion, perhaps they can understand the action. If they can understand the emotion behind conformity, perhaps they can understand why so many people followed and agreed with Adolf Hitler.

Here He Stands
Alone
Will He Withstand
On His Own

He Can Tell They Are Watching
Waiting For His Next Move
His Heart Is Beating
No Longer In A Groove

His Face Feels Warm
He Can No Longer Hear
The Violent Storm
He Just Wants To Disappear

At The End Of The Day
He Knows He Won't Change
Not Unless He Finds A New Way
To Fit In And Not Be Strange

But He Wants To Belong
So He Will Ignore
What He Saw All Along
And Just Close The Door

Modeling is presenting an idea in a new way in order for the intended audience to see it in more realistic terms. This is an important tool to creativity because it can really enforce the ideas that you've been talking about already. By modeling the topic of the Nazi buy-in the way like I have in the photo below it allows students to see the different levels of what is actually going on that fuels the fire of the Holocaust.

This graphic representation of different feelings, emotions and reactions felt and experienced by the German people can allow students to see the BIG picture. Everything is happening at once and it is fueling the fire.

What student doesn't like to have fun? By integrating creativity into your classroom you can integrate some fun, most likely through the cognitive tool of play, or deep play. I believe deep play to be an actual state of mind that one is in that allows him/her a certain level of freedom to create something new. Ideally I would love to go through the different cognitive tools and then use play to have students create something new based on one of the aspects they had learned. Whether this is a song, a poem, a piece of artwork, a video. They can use play themselves to show me that they have a deep understanding of the topic and can express them in their own creative way.

Synthesis is also a fun tool of creativity. Synthesis is when you take everything you've learned so far and put it together in a cohesive manner. The ability to synthesize is a great assessment tool in the classroom. Again, giving them the opportunity to create something based on all of the knowledge they gained throughout the unit to show me as a teacher that they truly understand HOW and WHY Adolf Hitler gained support and power.

Using & teaching creativity is something I personally believe in because I can see the benefits it will have for my students and my classroom overall. I want my classroom to be engaging, and I want my students to be engaged in the topics that we discuss in history. Often people believe that creativity means starting completely from scratch. But really what is happening by using the cognitive tools is that you are finding new ways to teach and portray "old" information. This might be by perceiving the topic in a different light, modeling the ideas, finding patterns within, abstracting the topic at hand, finding a way for students to feel through embodied thinking, or challenging our students through deep play and synthesis.