

I would like to take part in this institute because of the impact it will have on my teaching, how it will allow me to both broaden and strengthen my own personal professional learning network, and how it will help me to develop new resources for my colleagues in my home district and beyond.

The history of World War II first began to fascinate me in the eighth grade. Our middle school did a huge interdisciplinary program that year, focused on World War II. Students were tasked with collecting “scrap metal” (aluminum cans), selling bonds, and learning to march. That year I learned more about my grandfather’s service in France and our next door neighbor’s time on a battleship. I learned about my father’s Uncle Chester, buried in a military cemetery in Tunisia. My fascination with the period never waned, and In the course of the last year, I was honored to be one of the teachers chosen to take part, alongside one of my students, in the Albert H. Small Normandy Institute. To say that this program was life-changing would be to sell it short. One of the most impactful parts of the program was researching a local hero who fell on D-Day. By searching the internet’s archive of old phone books and census records, and scrolling through our local library’s cache of microfiche, my student and I were able to piece together the life of Sgt. Roger Eppley, even finding and speaking to some of his living relatives. It was a privilege to be a part of honoring him and sharing his story.

While I now know so much about the personal stories of American soldiers involved in the Normandy invasion, I felt like I knew so little about those who were losing their lives in concentration and death camps across Europe. At the end of my participation in the Normandy Institute, my husband joined me in Europe and I extended both my stay as well as my World War II learning journey. Over the course of two and a half weeks, we visited more sites associated with the war and the Holocaust, including Anne Frank’s house, Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Dachau, Schindler’s Factory, and numerous memorials and monuments in Berlin and Munich. I thought that this would fully prepare me to teach about the Holocaust. However, while I had personal experiences and photos galore, it was still difficult to translate that into something that adequately conveyed it to students. For example, I pushed in to our 6th grade ELA classes this fall after they finished reading *Behind the Bedroom Wall* by Laura E. Williams. I shared with them some photos and talked about what I had seen. However, I had difficulty relating these experiences in a way that was suitable for 6th graders. I didn’t want to edit the truth of what the Holocaust was, but I also didn’t want to be so explicit that the teacher I was working with would receive parent phone calls. I will soon be going into our AP history classrooms to discuss the same topic, and while this is clearly a completely different audience, it is still challenging to distill everything I learned and experienced over the course of my months or research and weeks of travel into a 30 minute presentation and discussion. I believe that this institute is exactly what I need to help me take the abundance of knowledge I have and develop strategies and ways to get it across to varied student populations.

I am the K-12 Gifted Coordinator for my district. This means that I am the caseload manager for 56 students and that I do pull-out and push-in instruction across all grades. I am able to push into a wide range of classes throughout the district. I have a well-established working relationship with teachers across the district, especially our grades 6-12 English and social studies teams with whom I have been working to develop curriculum. I think this would make me an asset to your program. I can use what I learn through the institute to affect my entire district, not just my own classroom.

Another specific way I could bring the content of this Institute back to my district would be to our American History in the Digital Age course. This is a one-semester elective course that is new to our district, this being only its second year. Because of my previous NEH experiences and knowledge, I have been asked to work with the students in this course on a number of occasions. The course focuses on showing the difference between the popular conceptions and misconceptions about American history and what the primary sources from those times actually say. This course also aims to recenter lesser heard voices and perspectives, especially those of women and Black, Indigenous, and people of color. While some might consider this European history, it has had a direct and lasting impact on American history, and as such, the material from this Institute would directly align with this course, and I would be able to help students explore questions of perspective and how history is created, focusing on these narratives. Students would be able to compare incredible primary source documents with the bevy of information they have learned from both the classroom and popular culture, as the the Holocaust has impacted media from juvenile fiction to adult bestsellers to television shows and movies. After this institute, I will be better able to help students better understand the impact of not just the Holocaust but also genocides and other human rights topics.

Through my role as gifted coordinator, I also take part in meetings with the other gifted educators in the local intermediate unit, which covers a 4-county area. I have presented to the group in the past, and am already scheduled to give a presentation at our spring meeting. I am able to take what I learn, then, and spread it to teachers at 35 area school districts, with the potential of reaching nearly 50,000 students. I would be able to take all I learn and bring that back to share out with educators throughout not only my district, but the entire region.

I have previously participated in three NEH summer programs. During previous summer seminars I have been able to learn not just from the planned activities and readings, but also from the additional excursions and discussions outside the classroom. For example, when I participated in the American Women at War Institute at the New-York Historical Society, I organized and attended group outings to the Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace, Tenement Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Shakespeare in the Park, among others. These excursions gave us not only more information and resources to take back to our teaching, but also the opportunity to further discuss and understand the readings, lectures, and tours we were experiencing during our institute meeting times. I think that this collegiality and my willingness to organize group discussions, meals, and outings beyond the regular meeting times make me an excellent candidate to be a part of this community. I am a graduate of Penn State twice over (Schreyer Honors College / Liberal Arts 2004 and Education 2007) and I would be uniquely qualified to help visiting teachers learn more about the area and become comfortable with their temporary home.

After each of these prior programs, I was able to bring resources back to my home district to which neither the faculty nor the students would otherwise have been exposed. I was able to organize and facilitate multiple in-service sessions as well as provide my colleagues with access to the lessons the teachers at the seminar and institute had made. In my classes I was able to incorporate new activities and resources of which I had not previously been aware. The experience put on by the staff and visiting scholars at these programs was exemplary, and I am extremely grateful and lucky to have been a part of them. I only hope that I will be chosen for the Making Holocaust and Genocide Education Relevant Through Inquiry and Classroom

Application Institute so that I can experience that sort of rigorous learning and community-building again.

Some questions I hope to explore through my participation in this Institute:

How can this topic be best adapted to students of different educational backgrounds and levels?  
What primary documents are readily available for students to access in order to complete inquiry-based assignments?

What are other historical events and human rights issues that can be explored through the lens that this Institute will provide?

How can you best scaffold the introduction of difficult topics with groups of different ages, educational levels, and maturity levels?