

Spring 5-12-2018

# Student and Teacher Perceptions of Completing Daily History Entries in a Seventh-Grade Texas History Classroom

Deborah Adams  
daa13a@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/metl>



Part of the [Secondary Education Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Adams, Deborah, "Student and Teacher Perceptions of Completing Daily History Entries in a Seventh-Grade Texas History Classroom" (2018). *Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning*. 12.  
<https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/metl/12>

This Manuscript is brought to you for free and open access by the ACU Student Research, Theses, Projects, and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU.

Student and Teacher Perceptions of Completing Daily History Entries in a Seventh-Grade Texas

History Classroom

Deborah Adams

Abilene Christian University

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of seventh-grade students and their teacher regarding the completion of daily history entries (a journaling activity) academically, developmentally, and relationally through data collection methods including observations, surveys, interviews, and student samples. To analyze these findings, level 1 and 2 codes were utilized. Additionally, descriptive statistics were utilized to quantitatively understand the implications of average student perceptions. From the data, three major themes were uncovered regarding students' and their teacher's perceptions of daily history which include a range of responses, perceptions of writing, and the importance of student teacher relationship. First, students held various opinions of daily history, indicating the need for teachers to differentiate activities to meet diverse student needs. Second, students' perceptions of writing indicated they wanted to improve, but often expressed a dislike of writing. Last, the student teacher relationship was important for both students and the teacher.

**Student and Teacher Perceptions of Completing Daily History Entries in a 7th Grade  
Texas History Classroom**

“Miss Adams, why do we have to do daily history, I don’t understand why we have to write every single day?” Amy asked. Before I had a chance to respond to Amy, Lee interrupted, “So they can get to know us better and so we can remember what we did.” Roger added, “It’s to help us out with our grade.” Amy fired back, “Yeah, but I still don’t like having to do all this work.” After hearing this conversation, I was reminded of the various perspectives my students had regarding their daily history. Different students expressed different ideas and sometimes these perceptions varied from day to day. I wondered if I could get a better understanding of how students felt about daily history as a journaling activity, so changes could be made if necessary.

**Purpose**

When I first heard the term “daily history” I had no idea what Mrs. Riley (all names are pseudonyms), my co-teacher for the year, was enthusiastically talking about. Did she mean having students complete a bell ringer related to the historical content covered in class or rather having students record an event that happened in history on that date in their folders? Neither of my presumptions were right. Instead, I learned that daily history entries were a journaling experience through which students recorded the ongoing events in their lives, like a diary. Throughout the year, Mrs. Riley had students complete daily history entries prior to classroom instruction as a bell ringer activity. In these entries, students kept a log of their thoughts and moods, writing at least five sentences about what occurred in their lives each day (see Appendix A). Then at the end of each week, Mrs. Riley checked her students’ entries and left comments about what the students had written.

I was fascinated by the novelty of providing students a space to keep a diary of sorts during instructional time and the enthusiasm Mrs. Riley had for this activity. Also, I was left yearning to know more about how effective students thought having this time to write about their lives was. Did they think it helped them academically by improving their writing skills and understanding of history? Did they think it provided a space for free expression? And did they feel like their relationship with their teacher was impacted through the action of sharing their daily lives? As a result, I became interested in how these adolescents perceived a journaling activity of this nature being incorporated into one of their classes. If students and/or their teacher perceived the completion of daily history as beneficial such as relationally, developmentally, or academically, the journaling practice could then be recommended to other secondary teachers. Therefore, my research questions included the following:

What are the perceptions of students and their teacher regarding daily history entries in a 7th grade Texas History classroom?

To what extent do the students and teacher feel the completion of daily history entries are effective relationally, developmentally, and academically?

During this study, I was a graduate student completing a yearlong clinical teaching placement in a seventh-grade Texas History classroom at Liberty Middle School. Liberty was located in the West Texas town of Laurel, a part of the Laurel Independent School District. At the time of the study, Liberty served about 900 students in grades 6-8. Fifty-six percent of students were Hispanic, 29% Caucasian, 11% African American, and 4% other ethnicities.

### **Related Literature**

Secondary teachers face a variety of struggles in the classroom including large enrollment numbers and time constraints. Middle school teachers can see a range of 130-150 students a day

for only 45 minutes each. As a result, teachers must decide how to allot their instructional time while addressing the developmental needs of students. However, as found by Thomas and Howell (2012) schools sometimes place a greater emphasis on teachers to make curriculum choices based on a focus on testing as opposed to the developmental needs of students. Although it is important to address students' academic needs, teachers must also acknowledge the indicated positive benefits which can occur by promoting student belonging in middle school (Ellerbrock, Kiefer, & Alley, 2014). During the middle school years, students are beginning to establish the basis of their identities at both home and school (Erikson, 1968). A way in which students can better come to know themselves is through the journaling process.

Jones and East (2010) explain that journal writing, or journaling, can occur through a variety of processes. In some cases, this may entail reflecting on learning and then responding to a prompt. In other cases, journaling may provide students the opportunity to write freely on a topic. As described above, in my study, journaling entailed daily entries in which students recorded the date, weather, and their mood along with a minimum five-sentence description of what occurred in their life within a 24-hour period. Through this journaling process, students in Mrs. Riley's class had an opportunity to choose their own writing prompt and express themselves subjectively. Jeffery and Wilcox (2014) found that secondary students, including both higher- and lower-achieving students, liked having opportunities to select their own writing prompt, but often felt they did not have as many chances to write subjectively in classes outside of English. Similarly, Shippen, Houchins, & Ramsey (2007) examined middle school writing preferences of urban and rural students, finding that both groups preferred writing on selected topics that were of interest to them possibly due to their similar "physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development" (p. 62). Since selection of writing prompt is a motivator of

students, it is important to incorporate this component into writing assignments across disciplines. Accordingly, the opportunity to write on a topic of choice may have impacted the perception students had toward completing their daily history.

Many studies have indicated the benefits journaling can have on students. Primarily, the student completion of the journaling or dialoguing process has been indicated to be an effective method for students to express and share details about themselves with their teachers (Yost & Vogel, 2012). Picca, Starks, & Gunderson (2013) found that students were more comfortable with disclosing information to their professors through a private journaling experience in their college course as opposed to sharing aloud. As a result, instructors were provided opportunities “for developing connections with students” (Picca, Starks, & Gunderson, 2013, p. 90). Not only was journaling found effective in increasing student-teacher relationship in a post-secondary setting, but it has also been found to be an effective way for middle school teachers to strengthen their relationships with students (Anderson, Nelson, Richardson, Webb, & Young, 2011). Connections between students and their teachers are valuable and could provide an opportunity for individual expression, a key component in the development of adolescents.

Another benefit studies found regarding the journaling process included the positive academic impact on students. Yow's (2015) study indicated the positive academic impacts journaling had in improving students' content understanding as they processed information and could then review their “thinking over time” (p. 75). Additionally, daily opportunities for written expression provide students an opportunity to practice their writing while receiving feedback from their teachers. Jones and East (2010) found that students in a first-grade classroom improved in terms of written expression when journaling was incorporated through daily activities. Over the course of a year, these students demonstrated growth in the areas of correct

spelling, words used, and correct punctuation as they shared their work with their teacher and received advice on how to improve written expression (Jones & East, 2010). Although it is possible these students improved primarily because of their natural progression developmentally, the constant exposure to writing provided them a greater chance for this occurrence. Writing is a key component for student success academically and middle school teachers recognize the importance of teaching writing across disciplines (Graham, Capizzi, Harris, Hebert, & Morphy, 2014). Therefore, journaling may be a way for educators to meet students' needs academically.

Although research exists regarding the journaling process in post-secondary settings and in classrooms such as language arts, math, and science, little research is available regarding the effectiveness of the journaling process in secondary history classrooms. Additionally, much of the existing literature looks at journaling related to content-related reflection prompts as opposed to an activity allowing students to keep a diary. Therefore, this research is novel as I wanted to learn more about the phenomenon/use of the journaling process through daily history entries in a 7th-grade Texas History classroom. Specifically, I hoped to learn more about the implications students and their teacher perceived through the completion of this activity academically, developmentally, and relationally. By learning more about daily history entries, information can be gained regarding the perceived effectiveness of this task as a daily activity in a middle school classroom. If the activity is perceived as effective by students and their teacher, it may be beneficial for other secondary teachers to consider incorporating a personal journaling experience or similar activity into their instructional time.

### **What I Did**

The following describes an action research study conducted in a seventh-grade Texas History classroom over the course of four weeks. I examined the perceptions of students and



their teacher in relation to the completion of daily history entries regarding perceived impacts academically, developmentally, and relationally.

### **Participant Selection**

Participation in the study was solicited from Mrs. Riley and every student in all six of her classes in a 7th grade Texas History setting. Mrs. Riley received an informational letter and signed a consent form to participate in the study. In the study, Mrs. Riley was observed as she checked students' daily history entries and was interviewed about the daily history assignment. Students in Mrs. Riley's classes were aged 12-14 years old. In all Mrs. Riley had 148 students. Demographically, the students in these classes were approximately 49% Hispanic, 32% White, 17% African American, and 2% other ethnicities. Across the classes, approximately 51% of the students were boys and 49% were girls. The students were informed of the study and received an informational letter and consent forms that their parents read and signed. Students who received consent then signed assent forms in the classroom. All participants received copies of their consent/assent forms. All students who received consent and assented to the study participated in the attitude scale survey and observations. Further, purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) was utilized to select six students to each participate in a short semi-structured interview. Students interviewed included two students with high, mid, and low perception scores of daily history as determined by the Likert portion of the attitude scale survey. Lastly, purposive sampling was also utilized to select nine students' daily history entries to be examined and photocopied/photographed during the research period after initial selection. Student samples included work from three students with high (90+), three students with mid (60-89), and three students with low (below 60) grades on their first daily history check during the research period.

### **Data Collection**

For this study, I collected data in the form of observations, surveys, interviews, and student work samples. All participants were observed three times a week while daily history entries were completed during the first five to ten minutes of class. During this time, I wrote field notes and recorded the number of students who were on-task/off-task and the number of students who completed the assignment. Additionally, I recorded the interactions students had with their peers and their teacher during this time. Field notes were also taken during the daily history checks Mrs. Riley performed during the time of the study. During these checks, I recorded the interactions between Mrs. Riley and her students.

All students took 5-10 minutes to complete an attitude scale survey with five Likert scale and two open-ended questions about their perceptions of completing daily history entries related to academic, developmental, and relational areas; however, I only used data from students' surveys, which assented and received consent to participate in the study. Perceptual data from the surveys allowed me to determine how students on average felt about the completion of daily history entries (Hendricks, 2017). After reviewing the survey results, I conducted six 5-15 minute semi-structured student interviews with selected students to better understand the students' perceptions regarding the completion of daily history as positive, neutral, or negative regarding academics, development, and relationship growth. I also conducted a semi-structured interview of 20-30 minutes with Mrs. Riley to better understand why she developed the usage of daily history entries in her classroom. Ultimately, the interviews permitted me to directly obtain information and insight on the topic from the students and Mrs. Riley (Hubbard & Power, 2003).

Finally, after the first daily history grade was recorded during the study, I collected and photocopied samples of nine students' daily history entries during the remaining time of the

study. These students were selected based on the first daily history grade they received during the research period and were a purposive sample of Mrs. Riley's classes. Student samples were kept confidential unless otherwise legally required.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from the observations, interviews, open-ended portions of the surveys, and daily history entry samples were analyzed using the constant comparative method with initial coding followed by the identification of major categories with supporting level I and level II codes (Hendricks, 2017). Tracy (2013) describes level I codes as codes that can be found in the data, while level II codes further explain and synthesize the data. I initially analyzed about 20% of my data and created a list of approximately 20 codes. These codes were then used to analyze the remaining 80% of my data. After considering the initial level I codes, I represented the major themes in my data through the creation of level II codes. Additionally, I wrote memos about each level II code to better understand each major theme found in my data (Tracy, 2013). After this process was complete, I created a codebook to provide a legend representing level I and level II codes, definitions, and examples (see Appendix B). In addition to the constant comparative method, I utilized descriptive statistics to interpret the frequency of student behaviors during observations and the averages of the survey results. By using descriptive statistics, I was able to "simplify, summarize and organize relatively large amounts of numerical data" and come to better understand the implications of average student perceptions (Mertler, 2009, p. 146).

### **What I Found**

After analyzing my data, I uncovered three major themes regarding students' and their teacher's perception of daily history which include a range of responses, perceptions of writing, and the importance of student teacher relationship. I will describe each theme by including

examples of each from surveys, interviews, and observations. (A list of survey questions and a complete list of student responses to the survey questions can be found in Appendix C).

### **A Range of Responses**

When I first considered how students and their teacher would perceive daily history entries, I believed that a few key themes would emerge related to the feelings surrounding the assignment. I thought there would be a divide in the responses between students who viewed the activity more positively and those who viewed it more negatively. However, I did not expect to see students discuss and hold such a wide range of complex responses and perspectives.

Although, I did not foresee this outcome, it is reasonable as the assignment must be compatible for students from all backgrounds and academic levels to complete. Based on these differences, students had a range of perceptions on completing their daily history logs. All of the students seemed to have their own take on daily history even if some of their ideas overlapped; they each had their own perspectives regarding their emotions, motivations, and effort levels.

Students experienced a variety of emotions regarding their daily history entries, often either positive, negative, or mixed. In surveys and interviews, students perceived positive emotions while completing daily history because it could help them destress, provide an outlet where they could be heard by someone who cared, and helped them to focus for class. Conversely, other students viewed daily history negatively regarding having to write too much, hand hurting, and a lack of privacy. However, students did not solely mention one type of feeling. All interviewed students noted both positive and negative feelings associated with daily history entries, even if they were a high, mid, or low-ranking interview subject. This indicates that this activity evoked a range of emotions from participants. Some may see more of the

positive benefits, whereas others may experience more negative emotions, but most students acknowledged both sides.

In addition to a range of emotions surrounding the assignment, students exerted various amounts of effort on the assignment which often determined their performance. Students, like James, noted that the assignment was “an easy hundred.” However, Alicia conceded that a student’s performance on the assignment was dependent upon the effort he or she exerted; some students would perform well, but some “people don’t really take it seriously enough.” This understanding that the effort exerted by the student was essential in doing well was voiced by five of the interviewed students. Karen, a low performer discussed that she did not always feel confident about her score on the assignment because “it’s late or like either I didn’t do it.” However, she felt that if she did turn in the assignment she would feel “just normal.” As evidenced by the daily log samples I collected, students placed varying levels of effort into their work. Eloise, a high scoring sample (grade of 90-100), almost always filled in the entire writing space, as seen in Figure 1.

Date: March 2, 2018 - Fri

The weather outside  
cold

My mood today  
happy, excited, annoyed

The past twenty four hours I went home and ate a snack. Afterwards  
I got ready for nights. I curled my hair and showered.  
I got to school and sat down in an assigned  
spot. We watched members light candles and  
were given a certificate and a key. We had a  
reception afterwards! We took LOTS of pictures! yesterday  
was fun! I'm so excited for tonight!

Figure 1. A portion of a high-scoring student’s daily log.

However, to score well, students did not necessarily have to fill in the entire area, as evidenced by Chad's sample (see Figure 2).

Date: 2/13/18

The weather outside  
cold

My mood today  
Tired

The past twenty four hours I had ate chicken for dinner. I had played on my xbox. I had fed my cats. I had ~~the~~ played fortnite. I had talked to a friend on the phone for a long time.

Figure 2. A portion of a high-scoring student's daily log.

Students' daily history entries that were scored as mid or low differed from the high scoring samples regarding the amount of entries and the length of the entries, as seen in Figure 3.

Date: 2/13/18

The weather outside  
0/5

My mood today  
good

The past twenty four hours I Drew a picture of Texas, played fortnite, went fishing, went to my cousins game

Figure 3. A portion of a mid-scoring student's daily log.

It is important to note that students in each range (high, mid, and low) were able to complete the assignment, but their grade was connected to the effort put into the number of sentences and

keeping up with the assignment each day. Ultimately, students acknowledged that effort impacted their performance on the assignment.

Not only did a range exist regarding the perceived effort students exerted, but a range existed amongst the motivations students had behind completing the assignment. The primary motivations students perceived for the assignment were to help them remember, to let their teacher learn more about them, and for receiving the grade. Students, such as Eloise, believed that the assignment helped them to recall their experiences, “and think about the good things that go on.” Remembering was viewed positively so students would be able to see “what we did in our history.” However, some did not like having to remember their day because “sometimes I just didn’t have a completely good day and I and I just don’t want to write at all.” Other students believed that the purpose of the assignment was to help their teacher get to know them. Through the process of daily history, students are sharing about their daily routine, which Lois noted could “allow for our teachers to maybe understand our motives and attitudes.” Lastly, some students perceived that completing daily history was primarily to “give you a higher average” or to not “fail my class.” For this reason, these students completed their daily logs. Although students perceived different reasons, there is evidence of a range of motivations prompting students to write each day. Additionally, some of the motivations were often mixed as well, as Mrs. Riley noted, “Even those who see it relationship-wise, they are very intuned [sic] to getting that 100...because they want to excel academically so they want to get it done.” It is important to remember that our students come to us with different backgrounds and as such may respond differently. Ultimately, as a teacher it is important to consider how we can help to motivate these students and respond to their needs.

### **Writing Perceptions**

I did not think that writing, as an academic component, would play as large of a role as it did in students' perceptions of completing their daily history entries. However, students overwhelmingly, discussed their perceptions of writing and why they saw this as a huge part of doing their daily history, whether positive or negative.

Many students perceived that daily history was designed to help them prepare for the Writing STAAR test. In four of the interviews, when asked about the benefits of daily history, students discussed how opportunities to write helped improve their writing skills. Improvement in writing skill was deemed important because it provided preparation for the STAAR test. Brandon noted that practicing his writing in class would hopefully help him pass the STAAR test. On a practice test he scored low, but he noted that doing daily history entries could provide him opportunities to utilize techniques taught by his English teachers. Additionally, Brandon believed that his previous daily history entries could provide inspiration for a possible writing STAAR topic because, "you never know if the um speech is going to be," in which case, "you could copy that [daily history entry] down."

Students discussed how the assignment provided them opportunities to practice writing each day. Resultingly, students voiced that they felt their writing had improved over the course of the year. Sixty percent of surveyed students indicated that they agreed their writing improved by completing daily history (see Figure 4). Writing improvement was noted regarding increased sentence length, hand writing neatness, and grammar.



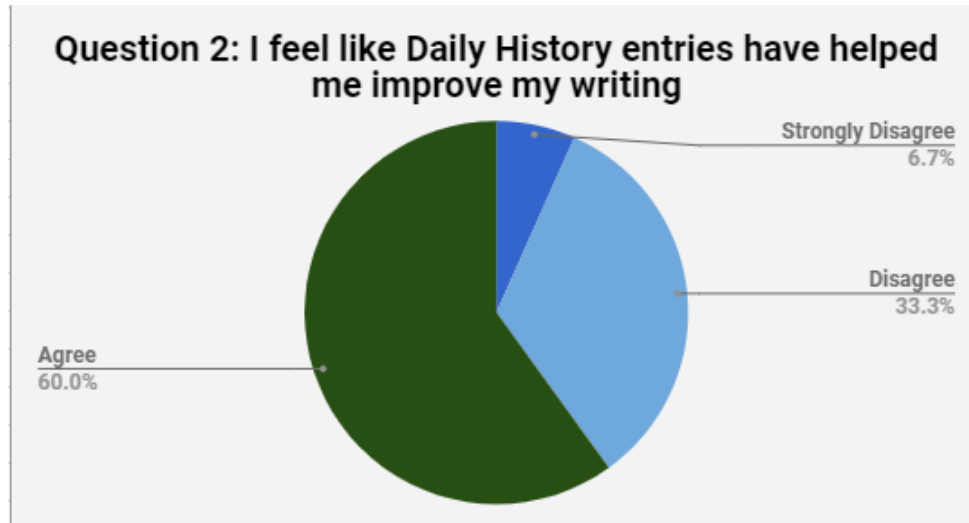


Figure 4. A pie chart depicting students' perceptions of writing improvement.

Although most students perceived writing improvement to be positive, data collected through survey responses, interviews, and observations indicated that students perceived that daily history was a repetitive activity. Over one-third of surveyed students, specifically mentioned that daily history was difficult because they did not always have something to say. Rachel commented in her survey, "I know its [sic] for a good reason and it's educational but sometimes I don't think my past 24 hrs. were interesting." Four of the interviewed students indicated this as well. Alicia said, "Sometimes I can't remember and sometimes like I don't...really do anything." Karen and Brandon both noted that when they could not think of anything to write about, they "skipped the day." Skipping the assignment for the day, caused both Karen and Brandon to have lower daily history grades. I found the problem of repetition interesting since students had the choice to write on their day or a provided topic. However, it seemed that some students did not always recognize they could write on a topic as opposed to their day.

Fifty-six percent of surveyed students indicated that they disliked writing daily history entries (see Figure 5). However, through interviews and class observations, I discovered that

many of the emotions surrounding this dislike for writing stemmed less from a dislike of daily history entries and more from a dislike of writing in general. Students described that they did not like writing because their hands hurt, they had to write too much, or they sometimes felt a time crunch. The dislike for writing may have impacted students' perceptions regarding daily history, especially as it is a writing centric task.

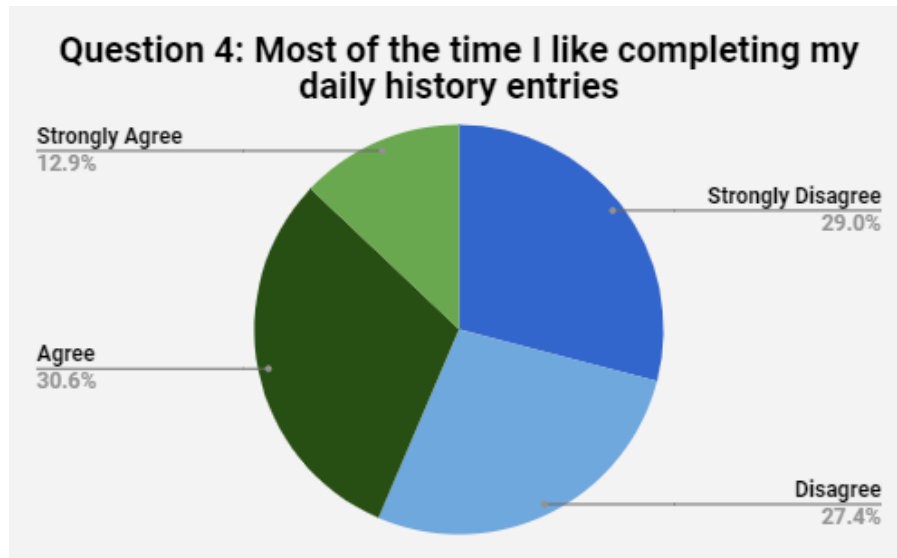


Figure 5. A pie chart depicting students' perceptions of enjoying completing daily history.

Ultimately, writing played a central role in the perceptions students had regarding daily history. Therefore, it is important for educators to consider how they can positively impact writing perceptions to encourage their students in activities that involve writing.

### **Creation and Importance of the Student Teacher Relationship**

As a teacher, I have been told repeatedly about the importance of the student teacher relationship. This relationship allows teachers to better understand their students and help them to grow as learners in a safe environment. The completion of daily history was understood by both students and their teacher as a positive and productive way to promote the student teacher

relationship. Although this was a positive experience, students and their teacher did note the difficulty of accomplishing this task.

Mrs. Riley's students expressed that they felt they were able to share more about themselves through their daily history entries. When surveyed, 83% of students agreed that doing their daily history helped Mrs. Riley know them more (see Figure 6).

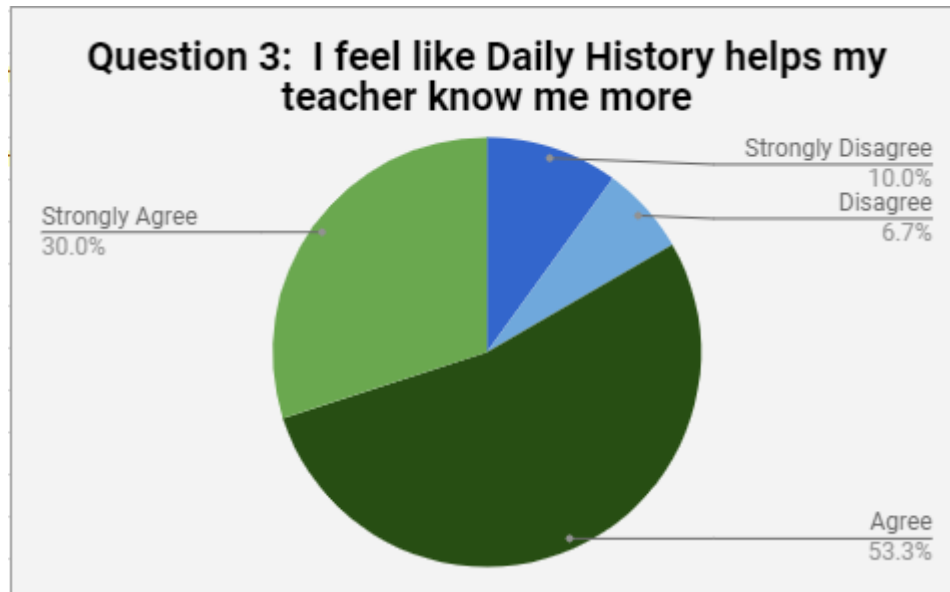


Figure 6. A pie chart depicting students' perceptions of their teacher learning more about them.

Teresa expressed that by writing in Mrs. Riley's class each day, she could share "what I like to do or like what my personality is." In all the student samples collected, students wrote about their experiences at home and school, their personal interests, and their extracurricular activities. Through these written descriptions of student experiences, students believed that Mrs. Riley could gain a better understanding of their lifestyles both at home and school.

Similarly, Mrs. Riley believed that she could demonstrate her desire of interest for her students. By reading students' daily history entries, Mrs. Riley spent about 2-3 minutes each week seeing what was going on in her students' lives. Although this was not much time, it still gave her a window into their lives. Mrs. Riley discussed that this relational aspect was the most

important part about the assignment stating, “I always try to pick something up and communicate that with them, so they know that I’m paying attention and that I’m interested.” Mrs. Riley believed that having her students complete daily history entries enabled her to establish a connection between herself and her students. Students even acknowledged Mrs. Riley’s efforts of remaining vigilant in knowing about their lives. Particularly, James appreciated how Mrs. Riley showed she cared by finding those pieces of information in the entries that really mattered. He remarked, “It made feel good inside that someone else knew cause it was about the orchestra and how struggling that was at the time.” Mrs. Riley had left him a comment encouraging his efforts; James said this comment “inspired me to do better.” As this example demonstrates, paying attention to students is valuable and can deepen the connection between student and teacher. Through this relationship students can receive support of their efforts while they are developing a deeper understanding of who they are as individuals.

Although students acknowledged the importance of forming a relationship with their teacher through daily history entries, half the interviewed students discussed how it was difficult to connect with their teachers. Brandon expressed that his other teachers did not always get to know him because “most of the teachers they only get that one paper at the beginning of the year and they only get that, so they don’t get to know us the rest of the year that much.” In middle school, it can be difficult for teachers to develop deep connections with multiple students, as some teachers may see over a hundred students a day. Mrs. Riley acknowledged this difficulty and said with so many students in a class “to grade them all in one day and to be able to still make that connection and to be able to look at them thoroughly, that sometimes that gets to be a deal”. Therefore, it takes quite a bit of intentionality on part of the teacher for connections with students to be formed.

Ultimately, it was perceived by the students and the teacher that the relationship was positive by letting the teacher know more about the students, while also permitting the teacher to demonstrate her level of care. Therefore, it is important for teachers to consider how they will develop a deeper relationship with their students, such as by using this method.

### **Implications**

The purpose of my study was to determine what students' and their teacher's perceptions were regarding the completion of daily history and how effective they viewed this activity relationally, developmentally, and academically. It is evident that daily history entries evoke a variety of emotions from students, whether positive, negative, or mixed. As a teacher, it is vital to create assignments that will cater to all students. Students come to us from a variety of backgrounds and skill levels. It is important to differentiate our lessons and subsequently our bell ringers to meet our students' needs. Students can make an activity as hard or easy as they want to. As teachers, we must offer students the ability to do so.

Academically, students recognized the importance of writing to help them improve in their school tasks. By writing consistently, students had the opportunity to practice what they had learned in their English classes or from corrections provided by Mrs. Riley. Most students indicated that this opportunity to write made them feel more confident in their writing abilities and how they would perform on the Writing STAAR. However, many students indicated that they did not like having to write. As a teacher, it is important to help students bridge their understanding of the importance of practice and having to write to likely see improvement. In doing so, students may be more inclined to complete writing assignments.

Another way to improve students' perceptions of writing may be to provide greater choice. Although students had the opportunity to select if they would write about their day or a

topic, most students consistently wrote on their day. However, this ended up becoming a problem in some cases when students believed that the activity was repetitive and could not think of what to write. As a result, teachers may need to make the opportunity to write more conducive to student choice and making sure students recognize that choice is available. Research has indicated the benefit of giving students, especially teens, choice in the classroom. During the teen years, students are discovering more about who they are and need opportunities to express themselves. Writing activities in which students can select the topic can provide students these opportunities for autonomy. By making writing more aligned to student choice and making sure students recognize that they have options during a writing activity, their perceptions of writing may improve.

The most important implication of this study is the idea that students and Mrs. Riley perceived that the student teacher relationship is vital. This finding has been indicated repeatedly in the larger body of literature related to education. Although most middle school teachers are given the opportunity to see their students each day, it can be difficult to make connections with them due to time constraints for providing instruction, as noted by Mrs. Riley and her students. However, as indicated by this study, it is possible to do so. Mrs. Riley was able to make time for creating this connection through a journaling activity. Journaling, such as through daily history entries, can allow students to share their experiences with their teachers while also providing teachers opportunities to learn about their students. In doing so, students can deepen their understanding of self and teachers can promote a student's self-esteem. However, not all teachers have to develop the student teacher relationship in this manner. What may work for Mrs. Riley and her students may not work for another teacher or at another school. Teachers do not necessarily have to make their students complete a journaling assignment to prompt this

relationship. Journaling is just one method to open communication with students. Teachers should determine what is the most effective format for them and work to establish this over the course of the school year. When the teacher develops an authentic way to connect with his or her students, it is more likely that connection will occur.

### **Future Studies and Limitations**

Ultimately, students and their teacher expressed a range of emotions regarding the completion of daily history entries. Students saw positive, negative, and mixed benefits of completing the assignment. Academically, students saw the benefit of improving their writing, but struggled with the necessity of having to write for this improvement to occur. Relationally, students and their teacher perceived the positive benefit of completing the assignment to develop a connection between themselves.

Three primary limitations exist regarding my study. Primarily, I am a biased observer. From the beginning of the school year, Mrs. Riley has focused mostly on the positive benefits of completing daily history entries. As a result, I was more likely inclined to see these benefits as opposed to other findings as I look at my data. Secondly, students I interviewed may not have disclosed their complete feelings when I asked about their perceptions of daily history entries. This may have occurred since I am one of their teachers, who expect them to complete the assignment and grade it on occasion. In the future, it would be interesting if an outside observer was to conduct the study, so data collected would likely be less compromised. Lastly, I had hoped for a larger pool of participants to consent to the study. Only 35 students of the 148 asked to participate in the study did so. With a larger pool of participating students, my findings may have been more substantial. In the future, it would be interesting to conduct this study in Mrs. Riley's classroom to see if my findings reemerge. Additionally, it would be interesting to study

other journaling experiences in middle school history classrooms and learn about these students' perceptions. In doing so, more information could be gained on the journaling process, how middle school students feel about it, and its impact in history classrooms.

As I prepare to teach next year, I am considering how I will establish my connection with students. Perhaps, I will utilize daily history entries to create these opportunities, so I can learn more about my students.



### References

- Anderson, D. H., Nelson, J. P., Richardson, M., Webb, N., & Young, E. L. (2011). Using dialogue journals to strengthen the student-teacher relationship: A comparative case study. *College Student Journal, 45*, 269-287.
- Ellerbrock, C., Kiefer, S. M., & Alley, K. M. (2014). School-based interpersonal relationships: Setting the foundation for young adolescents' belonging in middle school. *Middle Grades Research Journal, 9*(2), 1-18.
- Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Graham, S., Capizzi, A., Harris, K. R., Hebert, M., & Morphy, P. (2014). Teaching writing to middle school students: A national survey. *Reading & Writing, 27*, 1015–1042.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-013-9495-7>
- Jeffery, J., & Wilcox, K. (2014). “How do I do it if I don’t like writing?”: Adolescents’ stances toward writing across disciplines. *Reading & Writing, 27*, 1095–1117.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-013-9493-9>
- Jones, J., & East, J. (2010). Empowering primary writers through daily journal writing. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 24*, 112–122.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02568541003635151>
- Hendricks, C. C. (2017). *Improving schools through action research: A reflective practice approach* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Hubbard, R. S., & Power, B. M. (2003). *The art of classroom inquiry: A handbook for teacher-researchers* (Rev. ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Mertler, C. A. (2009). *Action research: Teachers as researchers in the classroom* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Picca, L., Starks, B., & Gunderson, J. (2013). "It opened my eyes": Using student journal writing to make visible race, class, and gender in everyday life. *Teaching Sociology*, *41*, 82–93.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X12460029>
- Shippen, M., Houchins, D., & Ramsey, M. (2007). Preferred writing topics of urban and rural middle school students. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, *34*, 59–66.
- Thomas, S., & Howell, P. (2012). Dilemmas of a middle school teacher. *Current Issues in Middle Level Education*. *17*(2), 9-15.
- Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Yost, D., & Vogel, R. (2012). Writing matters to urban middle level students: The Writers Matter program motivates urban youth to write about their lives. *Middle School Journal*, *43*, 40–48.
- Yow, J. (2015). "Can you tell me more?" Student journaling and reasoning. *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*. *21*, 71-76.

**Appendix A**

**Daily History Entry Form**

**My Daily History**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

The weather outside

\_\_\_\_\_

My mood today

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The past twenty four hours I \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B**

**Codebook**

Code Name	Level	Definition	Example
Range	II	Indication that students' perceptions of the purpose and the assignment, motivations, and effort levels are dependent upon themselves.	<p>“We have a full range of kids academically, from very low to extremely high and if it’s um not easy, the low students will not do it... Um, but it can be as hard as you make it, as hard as you want to.”</p> <p>“Some of them like it, some of them hate it. Some of them feel like it’s tedious and some of them feel like it’s just a grade and they’re going to get it.”</p>
Grades as Motivator	I	References to grades as a reason for completing Daily History.	<p>“It [Daily History] gives you a higher average.”</p> <p>“Usually I feel great because one it’s an easy hundred. And two, I usually get hundreds.”</p>
Positive Reception (PR)	I	Students indicate perceived positive impacts from doing Daily History such as feeling relieved, increasing focus, having someone there, etc.	<p>“I feel like Daily History entries help me stay positive and think about the good things that go on in my life.”</p>
Focus	I	References to how Daily History helps individuals focus for the day.	<p>“[An effective bell ringer] is something that gets you ready for class.”</p> <p>“It could help to center yourself on just be just be calmed down, that way you don’t take your anger out on any classmates or teachers.”</p>
Negative Reception (NR)	I	Students indicate perceived negative impacts from doing Daily History such as writing too much, hand hurting, lack of privacy, etc.	<p>“It just takes up too much of uh class time.”</p>
Privacy	I	Indication by students about their desire to keep parts of their lives private.	<p>“I really don’t like it because sometime [sic] I don’t want to talk about my day.”</p>

To Remember	I	References to the purpose of daily history being to remember the day to reflect now, upon the past, and for the future; both positive and negative perceptions.	“It helps me to remember the awesome or terrible day before.”
Class Routine	I	Descriptions of how the class functions during the time for Daily History for students and the teacher such as getting materials, prepping for the day, giving announcements, or taking attendance.	<p>“Daily histories give everyone time at the beginning of class to calm down.... They allow me to recal [sic] my actions of the past day, however large or small they may be.”</p> <p>“As they come in they are supposed to get out their daily history, and date it.... Then they have to just write uh 4 to 5 sentences since they last left my class.”</p>
Talk	I	References to students talking while completing the assignment, interacting with peers/teacher, or discussing what happens during the assignment.	“Most students get out their folders quickly; they talk during the activity; it’s voice level 1-2.”
Suggestions	I	Recommendations to improve the process of Daily History by students or teacher.	“We should do it [Daily History] every other day.”
Perceptions of Writing	II	Academically, students indicate the importance of, dislike, choice and improvement of writing while completing Daily History.	<p>“I think completing Daily History entries helps me with my writing.”</p> <p>“I don’t like writing because it wears out my hand. It hurts real bad and then I get blisters.”</p> <p>“Possibly a little bit more better handwriting.”</p>
STAAR	I	Mention of the STAAR as a purpose for completing Daily History.	“I think that the main purpose is to help students to improve writing skills since we are taking the writing STAAR test this year.”
Writing Improvement	I	Indications made by students or Mrs. Riley about writing improving via handwriting, sentence length, grammar, etc.	“I’ve started writing like using the right forms of I’ve used it’s hard to explain. I’ve written a sentence correctly instead of what I used to do.”

Student Choice	I	References of students choosing what to do, selecting what to write on, etc.	“1 stud said, ‘I don’t know what I did’. I ask, ‘Do you need a topic [to write on]’? He says, ‘Yeah’. I say, ‘Write on the Winter Olympics’. He says, ‘Oh yeah, I like snowboarding’.
Repetition is Problematic	I	References to feeling like Daily History is repetitive resulting in boredom or not knowing what to say.	“I don’t like them sometimes I don’t have anything to say.”  “...sometimes I don’t think may past 24 hrs. were interesting.”  “It get [sic] old and somedays I don’t want to do it.”
Dislike Writing	I	Indications of students disliking writing such as too much to write, hand hurting, not enough time, etc.	“I don’t like writing...it wears out my hand.”
Not Now	I	Examples or indications of students not wanting to do Daily History during bell ringer time.	“1 stud (Xavier) did not want to do it here-he wanted to read and would do it at home.”
Student Teacher Relationship	II	Indication of feelings related to the establishment or growth of a connection between student and teacher.	“So, I feel that if they read it they will probably understand their students better and whatever problems that they’re or the things that are happening to them.”
You Get to Learn About Me	I	References to the development or establishment of relationship from the students’ or teacher’s perspective.	“It lets it lets them [teachers] know what you’re interested, like what sports you like, what kind of things you do at home, and like what your favorite food is, color. Yeah and all that.”
To Show I Care	I	Teacher or student indication that the teacher can show they care by reading and interacting through Daily History (being heard, having someone else know, etc.).	“I’ll pick something up you know that they do outside of school or that they’re interested in. And have that little bit of conversation with them and let them know that we care and that we notice and that we’re interested in what they’re doing.”
Experiences	I	Students writing or discussing experiences in their lives such as home life, interests, extracurriculars, feelings, or school.	“I write about what I ate and if I did anything like going out somewhere. If I did something exciting at home.”

**Appendix C**

**Student Attitude Scale Survey Questions**

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
I feel like Daily History entries are a good way to start class.				
I feel like Daily History entries have helped me improve my writing.				
I feel like Daily History entries help my teacher know me more.				
Most of the time I like completing my daily history entries.				
I feel like Daily History entries help me to reflect on my day.				
How do you feel about completing Daily History entries each class day?				
What is the purpose(s) of completing daily history entries?				

**Survey Data**

1. I feel like Daily History entries are a good way to start class.

Strongly Disagree: 6

Disagree: 9

Agree: 15

Strongly Agree: 1

2. I feel like Daily History entries have helped me improve my writing.

Strongly Disagree: 2

Disagree: 10

Agree: 18

Strongly Agree: 0

3. I feel like Daily History entries help my teacher know me more.

Strongly Disagree: 3

Disagree: 2

Agree: 16

Strongly Agree: 9

4. Most of the time I like completing my daily history entries.

Strongly Disagree: 9

Disagree: 8.5

Agree: 9.5

Strongly Agree: 4

5. I feel like Daily History entries help me to reflect on my day.

Strongly Disagree: 6

Disagree: 6.5

Agree: 15.5

Strongly Agree: 3

1. How do you feel about completing Daily History entries each class day? (Each sentence is a different student's response.)

It's ok. It get old and somedays I don't want to do it. I feel like they help me forget what I'm doing yesterday or the day before. I think it's awesome because you get to learn more about me. It helps me remember the awesome or terrible day before. I don't hate it I'm so used to it now that it's natural so it's not so bad. It's fun to think and remember what I did the other day. Good It a great way to start class by reflecting on my day. They are just something to do. We should do it every other day. I feel like the Daily logs are kind of pointless. I feel pressure trying to finish it everyday. I think completing Daily history entries helps one with my writing and makes my teacher know who I am. I feel like they are a little annoying. I feel like they are alright. I feel like Daily History entries help me stay positive and think about the good things that go on in my life. I like doing Daily history it's OK and it's a good bell ringer; I really don't like how it has to be 4 sentences. Daily histories give everyone time at the beginning of class to calm down after lunch; they allow me to recall my actions of the past day, however large or small they may be. I mean, I know it's for a good reason and it's educational but sometimes I don't think may past 24 hrs. we're interesting. I think it isn't helping me and dumb. I really don't like it because sometime I don't want to talk about my day. It kinda gets annoying but I understand why we do daily History's. Not to do it. I don't feel right, I feel like I'm rushed to tell something about my day. I don't like them sometimes I don't have anything to say. I don't like doing them.



2. What is the purpose(s) of completing daily history entries?

To tell about the day before. To tell about the day before. To remember what I did yesterday. So you can learn things about people. To know what we did in our history. It gives you a higher average and it lets my teacher know more about me. It is to improve writing. To reflect on my day. To tell them what we did that day. So your hand writing, sentences get better and so your teacher can get to know you. To get a grade and to improve writing. The purpose is to help with my writing and prepare for the staar. For you to reflect back and your teacher to know you a little better. I think that the main purpose is to help students improve writing skills since we are taking the writing STARR test this year. The purpose is for the teacher to know more about us, improve our writing and reflect on our history. I don't know. I believe the purpose of daily histories is so the teachers can understand a little bit about our daily routine; this allows for our teachers to maybe understand our motives and attitudes. To get you ready and or practice for the writing STAAR. I think it's dumb because why ask people what you do everyday. I think it's to know more about me and what like/do. To help your teacher understand what happened that day and for the rest of the week. Time to set up the lesson. I believe it is to let the teacher more about me and more about what I do. To help you out in life. I don't know.