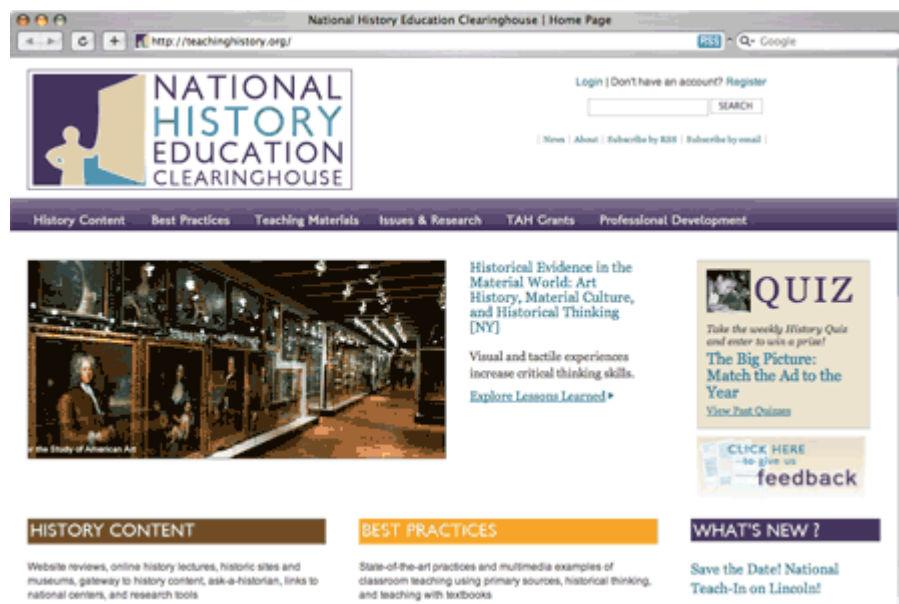# [The National History Education Clearinghouse](#)

The Common-place Web Library reviews and lists online resources and Websites likely to be of interest to our viewers. Each quarterly issue will feature one or more brief site reviews. The library itself will be an ongoing enterprise with regular new additions and amendments. So we encourage you to check it frequently. At the moment, the library is small, but with your help we expect it to grow rapidly. If you have suggestions for the Web Library, or for site reviews, please forward them to the [Administrative Editor](#).

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Dave Neumann
The National History Education Clearinghouse
http://teachinghistory.org/

At a recent gathering of history-education advocates in California, I chaired a committee of college faculty attempting to suggest opportunities for colleges and universities to support K-12 education. I grimaced—hopefully only internally—as one committee member suggested that we create a list of Websites that would be useful for K-12 teachers. I suggested as diplomatically as I

could that we consider other projects, as many such lists already exist, some far better than we could create. A recent examination of the "National History Education Clearinghouse" (NHEC) Website confirmed my suggestion. As the name implies, the site provides a clear, user-friendly clearinghouse of links to some of the best online history education resources—not only history content and lesson plans but materials on historical thinking and research as well. Indeed, though the site seems to be in the developmental stage with room for the inclusion of far more material, it nonetheless exemplifies the most fruitful results of the type of K-12/university collaboration advocated by the American Historical Association, itself a partner in the production of the Website, in its [Benchmarks for Professional Development in Teaching of History as a Discipline](). Given *Common-place*'s mission of "embracing new scholarship, teaching, and exhibits that explore all aspects of America's past and its many peoples," NHEC should be of great interest to readers.

The "National History Education Clearinghouse" is a product of the federally funded Teaching American History (TAH) grant program, which has distributed more than 800 million dollars to K-12 schools and offices of education nationwide to support professional development in history education in collaboration with colleges and universities. The Website "builds on and disseminates the valuable lessons learned by more than 800 TAH projects designed to raise student achievement by improving teachers' knowledge and understanding of traditional U.S. history." (References to "traditional U.S. history" show up repeatedly in TAH programs, as they come straight from the federal grant application.) It was jointly created by the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) and the Stanford University History Education Group. This is a compelling partnership indeed. The CHNM at George Mason University is one of the pioneers in digitizing history content and is cosponsor of *History Matters*, an excellent source for U.S. history content on the Web. Stanford professor Sam Wineburg, executive producer and senior scholar of NHEC, has done groundbreaking work with teachers and students on learning and teaching history. Together, they represent some of the best thinking and materials available to history educators at all levels. The creators explain that they "aim to bring together the many communities involved in improving history education and professional development for history teachers, allowing practitioners, historians, administrators, and history educators to present multiple perspectives, debate current issues, and work together to improve history teaching in classrooms throughout the United States." It is refreshing to see that the site includes testimonials from scholars like USC historian Karen Haltunnen, who acknowledge that their work with K-12 teachers has enriched their own professional work. Such testimonials help to keep K-12/university partnerships alive and healthy.

The site is organized with six tabs across the top: "History Content," "Best Practices," "Teaching Materials," "Issues & Research," "TAH Grants," and "Professional Development." Each tabbed area has a separate search engine to aid users. The first four tabs are most likely to be of interest to the readers of *Common-place*. "History Content" provides links to history Websites and

online primary-source collections, national history centers like the Smithsonian, electronic fieldtrips, and Website reviews. Two hundred and fifty-four sites are evaluated (unfortunately, *Common-place* is not one of them). Each evaluation includes a one-paragraph description of the site, the site's producers, and keywords for site content. As a test case of this section's search engine, I decided to look for materials related to Lyman Beecher, who was featured in an article in the October 2008 issue of *Common-place*. Typing *Lyman Beecher* into the search engine yielded some results for sites that were really about Harriet Beecher Stowe or Henry Ward Beecher. Within the first twenty hits, however, were the following: Lincoln/NET, Northern Illinois University Library's [Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project](#) (reviewed in the [January 2008 issue of *Common-place*](#)), where a one-thousand-word essay places Beecher in the context of antebellum social reform movements and provides a brief bibliography; the Cornell University Library's [Making of America](#) site, which includes digitized facsimiles of two book reviews of Beecher's autobiography; and a classroom activity on religion and social reform from the University of Houston's [Digital History](#) site, which includes excerpts from ten primary sources on reform, including one by Beecher.

The most interesting link on the first tab is "Ask a Historian." When I viewed the site, one of the top questions was, "[Was there an African-American President before Barack Obama?](#)" The anonymous reply, presumably by a historian, explains how this rumor may have developed over confusion about John Hanson, president of the Continental Congress, whose great-uncle is labeled a freedman in extant records. The thoughtful reply then continues by offering a reflection on the nature of certainty in history and concludes with a bibliography.

The second tab, "Best Practices," is much thinner, likely reflecting the relative infancy of the field rather than oversight on the part of the site designers. This area provides links to applications of some of the most interesting work on history cognition, reflecting the best nexus of scholarly research and practical classroom implementation. Given Wineburg's role in the development of this site, it is not surprising that his work is prominently represented. But other links are provided as well, including linguist Mary Schleppegrell's application of functional grammar approaches to the reading of textbooks. Schleppegrell has worked extensively with the UC Davis site of the California History-Social Science Project (CHSSP), a California statewide collaborative project for K-12 history professional development, and this article reflects her work with CHSSP staff and Davis-area teachers.

The fourth tab, "Issues and Research," seems to overlap with the "Best Practices" section, making the distinction between them unclear. Only six "Research Briefs" are provided, including articles by Peter Lee and Bob Bain, and all six involved the application of theory to classroom practice. The paucity of resources in this section is also a puzzle, as there is a substantial body of work by historians like Lee, Bain, Rosalyn Ashby, Gaea Leinhardt, Peter Seixas, Bruce VanSledright, to name a few, who might also have been included here.

"Teaching Materials" provides a gateway to online history lesson plans and a link to state history content standards. It also offers a section entitled "Ask a Master Teacher," which parallels the "Ask a Historian" section in the first tabbed area and features questions on topics such as the use of primary sources in a classroom with second-language learners. It also provides its own review of lesson plans, though at present there are only ten reviews. The reviews include a helpful lesson-plan rubric designed by NHEC staff, which considers issues like analytic thinking and scaffolding. As a test case, I examined a review of a lesson on antislavery posters (the closest topic to Lyman Beecher included in the ten reviews) from the Gilder-Lerhman Institute's *History Now* journal. The lesson receives the following comments for analytic thinking:

The Poster Inquiry Sheet provides students with a method for identifying and interpreting historical facts.

During the modeling and the group work, students [*sic*] learn and practice close reading of primary sources.

An evaluation of the use of scaffolding indicates that the lesson is appropriate for its stated audience because, while the "language used in the posters may be difficult for some students…teachers can choose to highlight sections of text to reduce the amount or difficulty of necessary reading."

One might wonder whether a site generated by TAH K-12/university collaboration would provide a search engine that filters out useless results and returns useful hits on high-quality lesson plans. The answer, in general, is "yes." While a search for "Lyman Beecher" returned hits for a book review and a College Board introduction to the Advanced Placement U.S. history course, use of more mainstream keywords *antebellum reform* yielded useful returns. Several hits represented effective lessons with primary sources, sponsored by groups like the Organization of American Historians or the National Center for History in the Schools.

The last two sections, "TAH Grants" and "Professional Development," are likely to be of more limited interest to many *Common-place* readers. The "TAH Grants" section provides a searchable database of TAH grant awards, a listserv for TAH members, and links to twenty-one articles on "Lessons Learned" by TAH participants that might assist current and future TAH project administrators and teacher leaders. Finally, the "Professional Development" area offers a calendar of professional development opportunities nationwide as well as a search engine for locating training in or near one's own community.

Apart from the overlap of the "Best Practices" and "Issues and Research" tabs and the thinness of some categories, the site works well. It is clearly organized, intuitive, and easily navigated. Most helpfully for a clearinghouse, it provides an informative synopsis of all major links, so that users can determine the possible usefulness of a linked site right from the NHEC, rather than constantly linking back and forth. Not only does the site provide access

to a wealth of primary and secondary sources, but it also provides links to high-quality lesson plans and important scholarship on teaching and learning. All in all, this site fulfills its creators' goals of providing an excellent clearinghouse or starting point for both K-12 educators and university faculty.

This article originally appeared in issue 9.2 (January, 2009).