

UCLA

Electronic Green Journal

Title

Review: A Primer for Teaching Environmental History: Ten Design Principles

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2dc431j7>

Journal

Electronic Green Journal, 1(42)

Author

Lewis, Abbey

Publication Date

2019

DOI

10.5070/G314241443

Copyright Information

Copyright 2019 by the author(s). This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Electronic Green Journal
Volume 1, Issue 42

Review: A Primer for Teaching Environmental History: Ten Design Principles

By Emily Wakild and Michelle K. Berry

Reviewed by Abbey Lewis

University of Colorado Boulder, United States

Wakild, E. and Berry, K. A. *Primer for Teaching Environmental History: Ten Design Principles*. Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press, 2018. 200pp, ISBN: 9780822371489, paperback. US\$23.95; also available in hardback. Note: Part of the Duke University Press series, *Design Principles for Teaching History*.

In *A Primer for Teaching Environmental History: Ten Design Principles*, Emily Wakild and Michelle K. Berry, veteran teachers of the subject, provide a foundation for others who wish to design a course on environmental history or incorporate aspects of human interaction with the environment into their classrooms. Their flexible approaches could be adapted to almost any course where students are asked to think critically about the natural world. Readers will find practical strategies for addressing environmental history through class discussion, project based learning, and writing. Wakild and Berry's emphasis is on course design that resonates with students, prompting them to examine human impact on nature throughout time, as well as their own roles in the environment.

The book's structure reflects the way that teachers might consider designing an introductory course. "Approaches", the first section, has students examining familiar topics in ways that will be new to them. A banana leads to a discussion on global commerce; a llama prompts contemplation over human choices about which purposes specific animals might serve. This provides a foundation for the second section, "Pathways", which moves students' attention to bigger picture issues, such as land use, energy, and clean water. The third and final section, "Applications", provides a loose, but effective framework for teachers to reflect on their practices through learning goals and assessment.

Part of Wakild and Berry's skill for connecting with students over the subject of environmental history stems from their practiced ability to connect with the students themselves. They do not shy away from students' use of social media or inclination towards technology. Instead, these become part of the course, driving students to develop a relationship with the topics on their own terms. If the students are going to tweet, they seem to reason, teachers may as well create a class hashtag.

Wakild and Berry concentrate their energy on how to teach, rather than what, but teachers in search of appropriate texts and tools for high school and introductory college courses will not be disappointed. The book has an impressive bibliography of academic and popular resources that could easily flesh out the reading list for any course. The text itself is peppered with brief mentions of relevant literature for framing class activities, presenting these as springboards for the larger goals of the lessons.

The richness of content and context provided by Wakild and Berry makes it hard to *not* want to teach a course on environmental history, or at the very least attempt one of the assignments outlined in the book. Still, the book deserves a wider audience than just those who might readily see its appeal and educators from a variety of fields and levels of experience could find ways to adapt the approaches to their lesson plans and goals. It is an excellent starting point for designing a new course or even refreshing the content of an existing one.

Abbey Lewis, abbey.b.lewis@colorado.edu, University of Colorado Boulder Libraries, Boulder, CO 80309, USA.

Electronic Green Journal, Issue 42, 2019, ISSN: 1076-7975