

History is Our Story

Many people, including parents, do not fully realize the value of history. History is always somewhat subjective of course, being a story of where we came from and (told well) where we are going, what we stand for, and the like. As a result, it's important to teach our children our own history and that of other societies. By understanding history, our children will be better able to understand their own society, and relate to foreign societies.

Opportunities to Teach History

There are many opportunities to teach history, but certain opportunities are more obvious than others. Martin Luther King Jr Day is an obvious one, and is a great way to start a dialogue with our kids about some of the more troubling parts of US History. What better way to honor the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr than to remember him and what he fought for (and how), and to teach that to our children?

How to teach?

A great way to teach someone something is to learn it with them. If you don't feel confident enough in your knowledge of history, don't worry. Even if you do feel confident, show them how to learn it themselves. This will empower them and help develop their interest in learning. Say to your child, let's learn more about this together. Knowledge of the facts (facts are often subjective in history) isn't nearly as important as knowing how to learn and being interested. Here you will be stronger than your child and will be able to teach them how to educate themselves about something.

Google and Wikipedia

The most obvious way to start learning about something new is the Internet. Simply go to Google and type in "Martin Luther King Jr" and you will get a bunch of results - including Wikipedia, which is an excellent start. You can then read about the man himself, or about the history of the day itself (less interesting). Along the way, you can divert along any hyperlinks that might be of interest. Doing this with your child, and learning alongside them, is a perfectly good way to learn. You should discuss the topic as you go, or shortly after you finish reading about it. Gather their impressions, and take

their questions further. They should have more questions about the Civil Rights movement and the like by the end. You might choose to let them investigate further on their own - being careful to watch over where they go and what they read (remember that history is subjective!).

Interest Led Learning

In this way, you will help your child develop interests and can then respond and develop them further. Sometimes this is a bit dangerous, as my 8 year old son has been drawn to Vietnam War history (originally through some comic books). His grandfather then bought him a proper Vietnam War History book complete with some rather horrific photos that were upsetting to him. Nonetheless the photos are of real events, and in my opinion will not hurt him in the long run. Unfortunately many photos and facts of our own history are pretty horrific and upsetting no matter how old you are. That shouldn't stop us from acknowledging them but we may want to hold off on teaching some of the worst abuses right from the beginning. If we develop their interest in a topic, they will eventually fill in many of the holes as we support them in discussion and provide means to learn more.

Exposure Develops Interests

It is important to expose our children to history to help them develop interests in learning different things. This means that it is important to look for opportunities to teach history and the like. History covers a very wide variety of topics and easily leads into almost any area. For example a short history of electricity might easily lead into an interest in the science of nuclear power and the politics of alternative energy. We should encourage learning by modeling it ourselves, for instance by reading books and magazines in the house, and by discussing topics of interest with our children.

Must History Repeat Itself?

History is important. I will always remember being the only student in a final year Economics course at University who knew much about the Great Depression. The lecturer had to make a special introduction to very briefly cover the history of the Great Depression in order to answer one of my questions, as he could not assume the students were aware of it (and it turned out he was right to do so). The lecture hall was

full of final year Economics Majors who hadn't ever studied the Great Depression, because it wasn't considered a necessary component of Economics! Who could blame economists for wanting to forget their biggest failure, but surely it's important for future economists to learn about such an episode. Similarly, if we do not teach our children history, there is a very good chance they will repeat the same mistakes. It should be a duty and a responsibility of every parent to ensure their child knows our past and can help plot a better future.

