

Seeking Wisdom from Those Who Know

Posted April 13, 2011

Why not learn history from those who have lived through it?

That's the thinking behind a new initiative in two of CA's U.S. history classes, where students are working alongside senior citizens.

History teacher (and department head) Kim Frederick is collaborating with a program called Sages & Seekers, which brings elders into area classrooms. The "sages" will share their stories and, Frederick expects, invigorate an oral history project. This is Sages & Seekers' first experience in a history class; prior programs at other schools have been in English classes.

Steph Wong '13 already has learned meaningful history lessons from her sage, Janet, including how World War II affected her family and how the 1929 stock market crash affected her father's employment at the stock exchange. Particularly interesting to Steph was the realization that Janet didn't wear pants at all until the seventies. "I have come to realize that we have a lot more in common than I would have expected," Steph said. "She mentions stories in passing and I have to ask her to stop because it is all so interesting to me. The things she thinks are unimportant actually fascinate me."

The seniors, aged seventy to ninety-seven, are joining the sophomore history classes for eight sessions. Besides the historical lessons from each sage's lifetime, class discussions will cover the civil rights movement, Watergate, and the Vietnam War. Some of the "sages" were on the front lines of history, as members of the military or civil rights activists. One early class included a session of rotating introductions, akin to "speed dating," allowing students to learn about each of the visitors and decide whom they'd like to interview. The CA-Sages collaboration culminates in mid-May, when students present their oral histories to the group.

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