

How to Grow A History Club

"Growth is the only evidence of life."...John Henry Cardinal Newman 1864

Williams Bay High School History Club

6 members: 1999

122 members: 2010

Total High School Student Population: 185

How does your garden grow? With a flower bed, you prepare the bed by tilling the soil, planting seeds & watering it. You remove the weeds that tend to choke your plant's growth & provide support for those plants that need it. You spend hours enjoying not only the process, but the results. As the summer wanes, you again put your garden to "bed" so it will be ready again in the spring for a new year of growth.

Growing a History Club is essentially following the same journey. Preparing the "bed" of a History Club is having a **goal** or **purpose**, a **direction** you want your History Club to take. When our History Club began 10 years ago, we wanted to "explore the geographical, cultural & historical significant events & locations around the world." (WBHS History Club Goal)

Once a purpose is decided, then a savvy advisor "plants the seeds" of interest and recruits students with similar interests. To us at the time, that meant travel! We wanted our students to see, hear & touch History as they never had before, so 6 students later, we had officially organized the History Club & were off to Europe for 15 days of historical submersion that still affects our lives today. 116 students later, we still travel to Europe, but our base of interest has expanded ten-fold. Each fall, members fill out an interest survey as to what aspect of history intrigues them the most, and we base our year's activities on these surveys. Some years it's Ancient History, others it's Local History. Each year, it is a new blossoming of old ideas that holds us mesmerized, just as that perfect rose in the garden does!

"Watering" your History Club means **student-led, student-involved** events & activities. Our History Club meets monthly, with student- elected officers conducting the meeting during High School lunch. With so many students involved in extra -curricular & sporting activities after school, lunch was the best time for everyone to attend. Our club is divided into committees that have different purposes, but are historically-oriented. Students select a committee they are interested in, and are responsible for whatever tasks & activities their committees are working on. For the adventurous, the treasure hunters are digging through codes & ciphers. Community Service calls those students interested in giving back to our community with a historical bend, finance wishing to be in charge of our year's field trips & publicity gets the creative students who love to work on the computer and write. The National History Club committee spends time examining the NHC's quarterly publications for ideas. The list is endless as to what an advisor could create to spark the involvement of students to join their History Club.

You can't have a garden without an occasional weed. "Weeds" in the History Club world can be negative attitudes expressed by students, faculty & community members over what your History Club is embracing at the moment. The best way to counter these nay-sayers, is with a positive publicity campaign. Articles & photos, both in school & community publications, as well as inviting these people to attend an event can do wonders in banishing negative vibes. It is also a very beneficial experience for your students to come up with a positive means of dealing with negativity.

Providing support for your History Club can come in many forms, from community financial donations, to school board approval for a trip overseas. You, as Advisor, must oversee the History Club, ensuring that activities are appropriate, within school district policy, student interest & parental approval. Each school district is different, but a good advisor keeps the community, school board, students & parents all informed of History Club events. Emails, posters, Newsletters, school announcements & personal contact are all invaluable tools in ensuring your History Club events are a go!

Just as you cherish those moments in your garden when your plants are in full bloom, so too, must you take time to enjoy the moments that your History Club has created. Many a student's lifetime memories can blossom with your involvement & care. A garden neglected doesn't bloom; neither does a History Club grow unless you are willing to make a commitment of time, energy & care. Make it fun!!! For everyone! Not only will you enjoy it, but you could be introducing your students to a lifelong love of History they may never have gotten were it not for you. Make it an adventure!! Our History Club does overnights, goes out to the movies together & then has dinner afterwards to discuss them. We want to make memories!

When the year winds down, just as a gardener prepares his planting beds for the next season, you, too, must do the same. Hold officer elections, start recruiting, set meeting dates, all as the old school year ends, so you & your students will be ready to begin again in the fall.

The "fruits of your labor" will be rewards you never dreamt possible. I have had students create whole new lives through their time with History Club, often selecting careers with interests first begun in their History Club years. Many have met new friends & expanded their own possibilities with confidence, all thanks to their time spent in History Club. The adventure, like gardening, never grows old.