

# History Lesson 1: the future

## Seymour teacher takes different tact

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Seymour High School history teacher William Collar tells his students the only dates they need to remember are the ones they have on Friday nights. He begins his history curriculum each year by teaching about the future. And from time to time he strolls school hallways dressed like a character from history such as Thomas Edison or a miner from the 1800s.

State Superintendent Herbert J. Grover honored Collar for his approach to teaching by naming him Wisconsin's High School Teacher of the Year for 1988-89. Collar, 45, and his wife, Holly, have three daughters, Susan, 19, Angel, 17, and Sarah, 15. Collar serves as a football coach and has taught at Seymour High School for 17 years.

Grover cited Collar's innovative teaching style and commitment to excellence among teachers as reasons for honoring him. Collar's students re-enact events that have made history with each student taking particular roles. "They are given the same information available at that time and then they make a decision based on that," Collar said.

In addition to the re-enactments, students are asked to dress up as a historical character and give a 3 to 4-minute presentation. During these videotaped presentations, the students explain their character's most significant accomplishments, answer questions about their life and give advice to today's youth.

Taping the presentations increases interest among the students. Students later watch the tape and critique each other. "I believe in the philosophy of guide on the side. Let the students help teach one another. It keeps it more interesting," Collar said.

Collar said the most significant history is that which is yet to come, so he teaches history backward beginning with the future. "History is something that has to come alive for people. Most kids look at history as traditionally boring. I teach them to learn how to handle things now based on previous decisions that were made." He discusses future goals with his students and works to build their self-esteem.

"You can have knowledge but if you don't have the courage to present it to anyone else, then what good is it." He said there is an ongoing debate among teachers about whether or not to put emphasis on content or process in the classroom. Content teaching involves emphasizing certain curricula in a certain amount of time.

Collar believes in placing emphasis on process, which involves looking at how much the students are actually learning, and changing gears if necessary. He said he wouldn't be able to teach in this type of style without the continued support of the school administration. "Some of it is radical, but it works," said Collar, referring to his donning of historical garb. "It's a team type of victory," he said in response to his recent honor.

Collar was named State Football Coach of the Year by the Wisconsin Football Coaches Association in 1985 and also was recognized by the Daughters of the American Revolution as 1977 Social Studies Teacher of the Year for his work in establishing the Seymour Historical Society and Museum.