



Teaching with WHAT HAPPENED WAS: AMERICAN HISTORY

Here, you'll find several ways to incorporate *What Happened Was*: into your American History class.

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Class Visit

If you're teaching *What Happened Was*:, Anna Leahy will waive her fee for a virtual visit tailored to your class, schedule permitting. To arrange a class visit, contact her at annaleahy@gmail.com.

Lesson #1: The Cold War

The following poems incorporate the history of the Cold War:

- "A Thousand Suns"
- "Depth Charge"
- "Chain Reaction"
- "If Walls Could Talk"

Questions for discussion:

- "A Thousand Suns" uses the names and descriptions of U.S. nuclear tests. The first test was in 1945, and most tests before 1962 were above ground. You can see some of the photos in Michael Light's gallery of *100 Suns* at <http://www.michaellight.net/suns-gallery>. You can see a visualization of nuclear detonations 1945-2012 at <https://>

www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjAqR1zICA0. Discuss the historical context for the nuclear testing that followed the end of WWII.

- “If Walls Could Talk” refers to the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. What images in the poem suggest this wall? What other walls in history might this poem suggest? With the Berlin Wall as one reference point, why do countries build walls, and why do they demolish them?

Exercise: The Cold War spanned more than four decades. Read about one historical event that occurred during the Cold War, and look for photographs or video of that event. How did that historical event look or sound? Write a factual, sensory description of the event.

ABOUT ANNA LEAHY

Anna Leahy’s poetry books include *What Happened Was*, *Aperture*, and *Constituents of Matter*, as well as three chapbooks. She is the author of the nonfiction book *Tumor* and co-author of *Generation Space: A Love Story*, a blend of memoir and history of the space age. She edited the collection *Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom*, which launched the New Writing Viewpoints series focused on teaching, and *What We Talk about When We Talk about Creative Writing*, which celebrated the series’ tenth anniversary. She directs the MFA in Creative Writing program at Chapman University and edits the international *Tab Journal*. Leahy holds a PhD in English with a certificate in Women’s Studies and an MFA in Creative Writing.



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Lesson #2: Civil Rights

At the end of 2017, *Time Magazine* named The Silence Breakers of the #MeToo movement Person of the Year. Activist Tarana Burke coined the #MeToo hashtag in 2006, and a decade later, sexual harassment was in the news. Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, Anna Leahy was a kid when Title IX went into effect and in graduate school when the Violence Against Women Act was signed into law.

Other reference points:

- The EEOC definition of “sexual harassment”
- Title IX, Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education
- The Violence Against Women Act
- “Person of the Year: The Silence Breakers,” *Time*, 18 December 2017
- the testimony of Anita Hill (1991) and Christine Blasey Ford (2020)

Questions for discussion:

- The opening poem talks about the poet’s mother’s experience in law school. Look up when the following legal protections went into effect: 1) the end of sex-segregated jobs ads (e.g., *help wanted female*), 2) Illinois constitution’s equal protection regardless of sex (the poet’s mother helped write that article in the constitution), 2) women couldn’t be barred from practicing law, and 4) the Pregnancy Discrimination Act.
- Look up Title IX. What were its original intentions and implementations? How might the events described in “What Happened Was: I was at a party at a fraternity house” be handled under current policies?
- Look up the Violence Against Women Act, the federal EEOC policy, and Title VII. How do these three policies offer ways to understand “What Happened Was: I had good news”?
- Read a few news articles about the confirmation hearing testimony of Anita Hill in 1991 and Christine Blasey Ford in 2020. Why does “What Happened Was: cause & effect” quote these two women? How are their words similar and different? What is the role of testimony in the confirmation process of presidential appointees?