

2006 Goldman Sachs Prizes for Excellence in International Education

THIRTEEN/WNET

Media & Technology Prize Winner

Asia Society, in partnership with the Goldman Sachs Foundation, recognizes outstanding schools, states, high school students, and media and technology organizations through the Prizes for Excellence in International Education. The Media and Technology prize is awarded to an organization that has developed outstanding programs using media and technology to educate students or teachers about other world regions and cultures or international issues.

The 2006 recipient of this prize is Thirteen/WNET, a New York-based public broadcasting station that is engaging high school teachers and students in issues of international significance and providing innovative multimedia teaching and learning tools via the web.

Ashlinn Quinn, Outreach Producer for Thirteen/WNET, sat down to talk with us about the Wide Angle: Window into Global History project.

Q. Congratulations on winning a 2006 Goldman Sachs Foundation Prize for Excellence in International Education. Tell us about the Windows into Global History project.

A: Just to introduce the project a little bit, the full name of the project is Wide Angle: Window into Global History and it's a project that Thirteen has created to help engage educators and students with issues of global significance by providing them with an online resource that includes video from Thirteen's documentary series Wide Angle. Wide Angle is actually the only program on American television exclusively dedicated to covering current international affairs. So it's already covered over 50 countries and it covers issues that range from the outsourcing industry in India to the plight of out-of-school children, there are an estimated 110 million children worldwide who are out of school, to the rising role of women in post-genocide Rwanda.

Q: What unique content and approaches help you reach educators and students through the Window into Global History Project?

A: The content on this site, really the uniqueness of it, stems from this compelling video program. Luckily the project benefits from the millions of dollars that went into the research and production of these compelling documentaries. And we were able as educators to strategically mine these existing resources to create uniquely compelling curriculum. So we were able to use Wide Angle's record of history in the making, it's first hand accounts, international perspectives, and vivid moving imagery, and just be able to integrate that video content into the website. And the website consists of 43 clips from Wide Angle, they're all short clips all tied to learning goals and they are organized in a couple of different ways, in lesson plans for educators and also in a video bank. They

are surrounded by other additional educational resource like guiding questions, transcripts of each of the clips, and organizers for students.

In terms of approaches, this project kind of broke new ground in that it provides downloadable video clips from original programming to the end user free of charge, and it's the first venture throughout the PBS system that did so. Another really innovative thing about this project is that it's created by global history teachers for global history teachers. So all the materials on this site were constructed by people who have direct and extremely in depth first hand experience with the materials, with the target audience, and with actually personally teaching these subject matters.

Q: What are some best practices Thirteen has established for teaching with video in the classroom?

A: We have developed kind of a list of key best practices for using video in teaching. Sometimes these are things like, you know, for example, don't overwhelm students with really lengthy video. Film is a medium that really is able to convey a lot of information in a short amount of time, and so you can really get a key point across in just a few short minutes and keeping video segments short it keeps students engaged and on task, it also ensures that the video is part of a larger learning activity.

We also advocate always providing a focus for students when they are viewing a video, and this can be something like a key question to think about or a specific task to complete while they are watching a video. This really keeps them engaged and also enables the teacher to assess understanding after viewing.

And lastly we suggest that there are a variety hands on activities and other scaffoldings that can wrap around any usage of video in the classroom. This really helps to contextualize and frame the video as part of a larger learning activity, because the best use of video is when it supports and enriches a specific learning goal.

Q: Can you tell us how educators and students can best use resources on global topics that are available from public television in the classroom and at home?

A: We really tried to design it so that it would be organized for really flexible use of the public television resources. So the videos that are available online are embedded into lesson plans, there are a total of 10 multimedia lesson plans. Those are for teachers who like to be able to see exactly how they can integrate a video into a preexisting lesson plan. But then they are also organized into a video bank which is organized thematically according to themes in global history like economic systems, human rights, nationalism. So this promotes a thematic approach to learning for those teachers who are interested in that. And keeping the videos in a video bank also enables students to go directly to the video bank and view the videos directly.

And lastly, we were able to go face-to-face, we really believe in face-to-face professional development, so over the last year or so that this resource has been online we have held a

series of workshops around New York State to introduce the resource face-to-face to teachers and we have presented at conferences as well.

I think in our experience, teachers really appreciate being provided with easy to use resources that are designed for them for use in the classroom. And they also value seeing that technology is not an all or nothing thing; that they can really incorporate technology into their teaching in small steps, and that even tiny technological advances can really enrich the work that they already do.

Q: What were some of the specific challenges that teachers face that you tried to address with this project?

A: One of our key challenges really producing this entire resource for educators and students was linking the past to the present because Wide Angle is a contemporary documentary series, it's been around since 2000, so all the films that we used they show contemporary affairs and contemporary situations. So the challenge really when you are trying to adapt this to a history curriculum is how can you use these contemporary examples to really enlighten and enrich the study of history. So that was a big challenge that we posed to our content creators for the site. And I think they really did some amazing things with the material, for example, there is a film in the Wide Angle series that's called A State of Mind, and it's one of the rare documentaries that Westerners have made in North Korea, which is a relatively closed society. And so the lesson plan that was written around this film was able to use clips from A State of Mind documentary which shows these young girls who are preparing for mass games which is a giant spectacle for the North Korean leader, to talk about totalitarianism and just issues that really impact the study of history more generally. Of course when you are talking about totalitarianism you can bring it into the curriculum at a variety of points, like when you are teaching about Stalin or Hitler. So even though these films are all contemporary they really hook into a lot of really compelling issues that go throughout the course of the study of history and they really transcend geography as well.

Q: What do you think are the most important media literacy skills that students will need to master to be successful in a global 21st century?

A: As we move into the 21st century we're just inundated with, you know, a barrage of different types of media and it doesn't seem like that is going to let up anytime soon. So any student moving forward is really going to have to become increasingly media literate. And I think one of the key issues here can broadly be construed as critical viewing because all forms of media are the product of a series of decisions made by people and these people have inherent perspectives, intentions, and biases that can be reflected in the products they create, and students may not necessarily be inherently aware of this when they are viewing television, when they are viewing movies, when they are viewing films, when they are viewing really any kind of media.

But just as students have to read critically to evaluate tone, perspective, authorship, citation of facts, and things like that, all of those skills must also be brought to bear to any

type of media, videos, blogs, the news, advertisements, anything else that is, you know, kind of, coming in and surrounding us today. So when they are investigating a video segment for example students can think about points of view. So who is being seen and heard in this video, in this screen, and whose voices are presented. They can think about are there people who aren't shown in the video, other voices or perspectives that are left out, and would those people have anything to contribute to the conversation. And then students could further try to do additional research to flesh out this information, get some of the varied perspectives that might not be provided in any one video or any one blog or any one resource.

They can also be encouraged to think about production technique, so those are visual and auditory techniques that are used in film or other media. So is there music playing in the film segment and if so, does it evoke any particular kind of emotion or tone. What about lighting and camera angle, are the way those things are being manipulated affecting how the particular video might be interpreted? And another skill that's really essential to media literacy is the ability to evaluate who and what lies behind a particular media production. So for example is someone making a profit off this film or this television broadcast? And if so, who is profiting? So kind of looking into some of the pressures that might be coming to bear, those could be from advertisers, governments, any other bodies or organizations that might lie behind a media production and be influencing what we see, that's really key.

Q: Why do you think it is important that teachers incorporate video in the classroom?

Studies have shown that people will generally remember about 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, but a full 50% of what they see and hear. So in terms of memory and retention alone, I think that's a very compelling argument for the power of video in the classroom.

Q: Thank you very much for coming in today and speaking with us. It's been a pleasure.

A: Thanks! It was a pleasure to be here.