

[Home](#) » Meet Our Teachers

Meet Our Teachers



An Interview with Mary Robillard

8th grade teacher, Rancho Medanos Junior High School, Pittsburg Unified

Fellow, UCBHSSP, Teacher Research Group

Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I am blessed to come from a diverse and strong family full of educators of all types. I spent most of my life in Livermore, CA where I was generally only, or one of a few students of color in all of my classes. This experience really has impacted the way I see the world.

What led you to become a teacher?

I have been teaching since I graduated from Sonoma State University more than twenty years ago. I have always loved history and originally thought I would pursue a Ph.D. in Medieval Studies, but during my senior year in college, I began tutoring students in an Upward Bound program. I fell in love with teaching and followed other members of my family into the profession.

What is your goal with students?

My first goal for the students is to change their thinking about history class. Instead of being a passive receiver of facts from textbooks, they need to be able to question history and historical information that they have been taught. I also want my students to see themselves in history, to learn about those who look and sound like them. I would love for them to see themselves as being able to rewrite the “textbook” and make changes for themselves based on what they learn.

What do you most love to teach about?

I love teaching about those who have been left out of the general narrative, mainly because when I was in school people who looked like me or my family were left out. Sometimes, I feel like it's a piece of fighting against the system, for me, and my students.

How has your work with UCBHSSP influenced your teaching?

Working with UCBHSSP has provided me with a strong background in [literacy instruction](#), which I have been able to share with my colleagues in the history department as well as my grade level team. I am working on changing the way history instruction is being viewed at our school, leading by example and working with those teachers who would like to change the way they teach.

What have you learned through your participation in the Teacher Research Group?

The [Teacher Research Group](#) has given me a place to grow. It exposes me to others ideas and implement the best practices no working in isolation here. When I first started with the project, I didn't have the ability to make myself heard, to share what I know and don't know. Being a part of TRG has helped me develop this side of myself. I tell my students about my TRG meetings and that I participate in order to become a better teacher for them. In this way, it is a collaboration with the project, my students and myself.

How has TRG's focus on historical thinking influenced your planning and instruction?

I am rearranging and writing my 8th grade curriculum to include more historical thinking skills, which I feel require the students to think more deeply about what is being taught. Some people might say that students at that age don't need to be introduced to this, but I think 8th graders can handle it. I am excited to see where we go together.

What is your best advice for other middle school teachers?

Don't be afraid to do what is best for your students- challenge them, learn, and teach them what you really want them to know when they leave your classroom. They can't remember everything, so focus on what is most important and make it count.

What history resource would you recommend to others?

I have been reading so many books about literacy instruction, but as far as history goes, I think that [Unchained Memories](#), in which famous actors read from the WPA slave narratives, sticks with me the most.

Note: We recommend [this lesson](#) by Mary, which can be used in multiple grade levels!

