

Alumni Spotlight: Michael Melick

El Paso-Gridley teacher is fascinated by U.S. history

Experience: Teaches U.S. history to eighth-graders at El Paso-Gridley Junior High School.

Education: Bachelor's, Illinois Wesleyan University. Graduate student, American Public University.

Family: Wife, Thayre, and two children, Waylon, a kindergartner, and Nellie Margaret, almost 5.

Who or what inspired you to be a teacher?

My high school chemistry teacher, Mr. Troll, had a knack for taking a complex subject and bringing it to a level that made sense to us. He served as a major inspiration for my teaching style. As far as why I became a teacher, I was a sophomore in college and had switched majors three times. History was the only major I could finish in four years, and teaching was the only thing I could think of that I wanted to do with a history major. I hadn't want to be a teacher because I thought it was unoriginal for another Melick to enter teaching, considering both my parents and older brother were teachers. But after I had taught for a couple years, I began to focus intently on improving my content knowledge and delivery.

What makes you proud of your school?

Our union and school board have continually cooperated on maintaining a high commitment to professional development. They also give teachers a lot of say in the development of a well-aligned curriculum. I'm also proud of our teachers. We have a diverse group of teaching styles on the eighth-grade team, but we are unified by our desire to provide our students the best possible education.

What does your fellowship mean for your career?

The James Madison Fellowship opens up a door of professional development most teachers will never have the opportunity to experience. I get to spend next summer on the Georgetown campus in Washington, D.C., and spend eight hours a day researching the U.S. Constitution. To some, that may sound like mind-numbing torture, but to me it's a dream come true. I consider the Constitution one of the most important government documents ever written, and too many people don't understand (or choose to ignore or abuse) the brilliance of it.

What's the most challenging part of your job?

Many people cringe when they find out I teach junior high, but they probably are picturing a classroom full of smart-mouthed, acne-covered, hormonal teens who care more about texting and Facebook than learning. And to be fair, those students exist. But I also get to see students who

retain the excitement and the childlike curiosity of younger students, while exhibiting the emerging ability to think critically about world issues. I'm there the first time they contemplate serious subject matter such as America's role in global politics and the justification of war.

What's a favorite project?

I have a debate elective that is very entertaining, and I always enjoy our discussions on landmark Supreme Court decisions. I also find our local history project fascinating. It surprises me how little I still know about my own community. I discovered through student projects that our district hosted an opera house and a cheese factory, for example.

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