

## Experiential Learning Enables Students To Connect With History

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For middle school students at Independent Day School-Corbett Campus (IDS-CC), participating in classroom simulations is about as close to traveling in a time machine as they can get.

For humanities teachers such as Christina Thomas, experiential learning activities can often be the ideal teaching tool especially for complex or abstract concepts.

“One of the challenges in teaching history is that students come with all different experiences in life,” she said. “When learning something new, it’s best to relate it back to what you already know. When you do a simulation, they all have a common experience to relate to.”

For example, to help seventh grade students understand the system of apartheid in South Africa, Thomas conducted a simulation that favored a small group of students. Students were assigned to one of four groups and performed various tasks to earn points. Members of three of the groups sat on the floor in small, uncomfortable work areas and under desks, earned few points for their labor and were not allowed to move from their assigned position. Members of one small group, however, moved freely about the classroom and easily earned points by overseeing the work of others.



*At Independent Day School-Corbett Campus, Mrs. Christina Thomas helped seventh grade students understand the system of apartheid in South Africa by conducting a simulation that showed bias.*

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Thomas knows if a simulation has been successful when she reads the reflections the students write after the activity is over. In this case, the students understood quite clearly that black South Africans were treated unjustly and that working conditions and life, in general, were unfair.

“I learned how unfairly and unjustly black South Africans were treated,” said Abigail Friedman.

“The South African government tried to keep the blacks at a very low status so that they would never take control of the country,” added Ashton Hatter.

Recreating historical situations reinforces key events because it engages the senses and emotions as well as the mind, making facts more personal and meaningful. In addition, research has shown that the lessons that are most effective at engaging a diverse group of learners are those that are hands-on and involve more than one of the multiple intelligences. Classroom simulation brings history to life by tapping into intrapersonal as well as body kinesthetic learning styles.

In essence, participative experiences such as historical simulations enable students to actually feel the emotions of the people of the time.

“When we were in the simulation, I learned about the cruelty and the pain that a human being can cause,” said Sean Flynn.

For teachers, when students can learn *of* history by feeling another person’s pain, that opens the door to learning *from* history.

“I don’t understand why anyone would inflict that on another human being,” said Carly King.

*Founded in 1968, Independent Day School-Corbett Campus is a fully accredited, independent school located on Orange Grove Drive in northwest Hillsborough County. The school serves 550 students in PreK3 through 8th grade and offers the International Baccalaureate program of study for all middle school students. At IDS, all children experience learning in a nurturing and highly academic environment focused on excellence and developing a positive self-concept. IDS-CC has become recognized as an exemplary school with over 3,500 visitors observing and learning from and with IDS-CC teachers about the school’s M.O.R.E. Approach to education. For more information about IDS visit [www.idsyeyes.com](http://www.idsyeyes.com).*

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