

# Hands-On History

NATIONAL TEACHER OF THE YEAR FINALIST  
HELPS STUDENTS TAKE HISTORY TO HEART

By David Bergeman

In “The Land of the Midnight Sun” there’s an Academy grad shining like the Northern Lights. MaryLee (Hyndman) Tung, ’88, teaches sixth grade in the Japanese Partial Immersion Program at Sand Lake Elementary School in Anchorage, Alaska. In September, Tung was named one of five finalists for the National History Teacher of the Year Award, which is sponsored by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

Tung was an Air Force Intelligence Officer for nearly eight years before leaving to start a family. Teaching was the next step in her career progression. “I wanted something to do after the kids were ready to start school,” said Tung, who was a History Major at the Academy. “I thought teaching was one way to give back to the community and the country.”

For the past five years Tung has co-taught a classroom of sixth graders who have been studying Japanese since Kindergarten. Some of their subjects are taught in English, some in Japanese, others in both languages; Tung handles the English side of the teaching equation. During her time as a teacher she has become a leader within her district. Tung trains fellow teachers on the use of primary sources and has been highly effective in her application of Teaching American History grants and National History Day.

Tung’s true calling card is her unique use of primary sources within her curriculum. She makes history pertinent and personal to children who haven’t lived much of it. “I want them to analyze

and come up with their own ideas, rather than me just giving them the ideas. I think that makes them better critical thinkers.”

Earlier this year Tung’s hard work was recognized when she was nominated for the history teacher award by a co-worker and a parent of one of her former students. She was chosen as Alaska’s History Teacher of the Year, an award that brought a \$1,000 prize and an archive of books and resources to Sand Lake. In September she was selected as one of five state-winners to vie for the national prize.

During the application process Tung had to submit three lesson plans. One of the examples of Tung’s approach to teaching is a civics lesson that utilizes Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Tung has students work in teams to explicate the text. “It gets them to actually analyze a primary source and look at some of the wonderful imagery King uses,” she went on, “but more importantly, apply it to their own lives. What are the ways that they can change their communities and their country for the better? What is their role in that?”

The students then write their own “Dream” speeches, which are recorded and played during school announcements in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. “I try to get kids to understand that the curriculum really revolves around them finding



their place in our society and accepting responsibility for that,” Tung explained. “It’s a great privilege to be a citizen of this country.”

It’s evident to Tung that her time at the Academy has had a major effect on her pedagogy. “I try really hard to instill Core Values,” Tung said. “We have a motto, we consider ourselves to be a team, everything we do is team-oriented. My partner and I are the leaders of the team; we’re not really teachers. Attention to detail is important, as well as setting a very high standard and understanding that you have to struggle to get there. Those things that you learn at the Academy carry over to everything you do. I think that’s why I’m a pretty solid teacher.”

Although the Academy is imbued in her personal and professional DNA, there are limits to how far she’ll go. “I’m not making them walk strips or anything,” she laughed.

Tung is humbled and honored by her nomination, but much more important to her is the opportunity to help shape the country’s youth. “You are really proud that you are able to help a child realize that they have a voice and they can make an impact on the world,” Tung paused, “that’s pretty powerful stuff.” ✓



Alaska’s 2011 History Teacher of the Year, MaryLee (Hyndman) Tung, ’88, leads her 6th grade class through a lesson.

A large advertisement for DRS Technologies. The top half features a close-up, low-angle shot of a person's face wearing a headset, looking upwards. The background is dark, and the lighting highlights the person's features. The bottom half of the ad has a red background with white text and a logo.

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