

## GREAT IDEAS FOR TEACHING

# Three Minute Teach (3MTeach)

Apathetic students - Yikes!  
What am I doing wrong?



Vast Oil Reserve May Now Be Within Reach, and Battle Heats Up



### Lost in Translation: Important Issues, unimpressed students

As a TA for Geography 1500, Environment and Development Challenges, I was excited to engage students with global issues that I felt should spark curiosity, anger and action. In this class we dealt with issues like: the destruction of the world's most biodiverse region—the Amazon; the global addiction to oil in an age where the vast majority of the world's remaining conventional oil reserves lie in one of the most volatile places on earth – the Middle East; and the 2014 drought in the Sahel which is now threatening the lives of over 20 million people.

The videos that accompanied tutorials were, in my view, captivating and absorbing, but I was disappointed to find that many students were disengaged - checking phones, scanning Facebook, one student even left class half way through class! This indicated that despite powerful topics, the teaching methods were not effectively communicating the importance of course topics to students.

In response, I started coming to class with my own 'stories from the field.' I have spent time working and researching in various contexts - Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti – and I started drawing from these experiences to tell stories that complimented the tutorial content. Students really responded to this approach: "I like that she uses her experiences to provide evidence of the tutorial topics"; "her stories are engaging and makes course topics interesting"; "I really like the stories she brings to the topics, it makes listening a lot easier and makes you think". It was clear - students enjoyed learning through storytelling. The challenge was to merge storytelling and engaged learning. How could I integrate storytelling as a teaching method and get students more involved?

### Budding Ideas: Background of 3MTeach Idea

In May 2014, I was part of the Social Sciences and Humanities 3 minute Storytelling Competition and had also chatted with others Geography graduate students about experiences in the 3 Minute Thesis Competition – both of these are growing in popularity across Canada and are not only powerful opportunities for graduate students to share their research, but are excellent learning opportunities for researchers - to critically evaluate and concisely articulate the 'big-picture' significance of research, and to communicate this in compelling ways to non-specialized audiences. If this is a powerful means of teaching and learning for graduate research- why not make it available to undergraduate students in the classroom? Three Minute Teach (3MTeach) was born.

## Engaged Students Through Storytelling



### Introducing Three Minute Teach (3MTeach)

Three Minute Teaching (3MTeach) is a teaching method *and* student assignment that aims to enhance student engagement and enrich learning through storytelling in the classroom. The goal is to captivate the breadth and significance of a societal issue in a compelling way in a limited time.

#### Learning Outcomes:

- \*To critically identify major dimensions and attributes of a geographical issue.
- \* To identify and articulate the significance of real-world societal issues beyond academia.
- \*To communicate clearly and effectively to a lay audience in a limited time.
- \*To enhance student engagement and student-centered learning

#### Required Resources: Projector.

- \*Students may provide one optional projected slide to accompany their story.

#### How does 3MTeach Work?

In the 3MTeach Assignment students prepare a 3-minute narrative that summarizes the major geographical dimensions of their topic (space, place, time and scale) The aim is to offer a research story that is true, compelling and powerful for a lay audience. In the first class, the instructor provides 3-minute research storytelling examples (eg. an instructor-led 3MTeach, examples from 3MT competitions). Students then choose a course topics and corresponding storytelling date, and presentations will be weekly at the beginning of each tutorial. Students will be encouraged to critically think about the following questions: Why is it important that research is accessible to broader audiences? What makes a good story? Why is my topic important? What are the main attributes of my topic? How can I convey the data and details of this topic effectively?

Student storytellers will be assessed by the instructor and by his or her peers. Students in the audience will draft a 1-sentence summary of each story that summarizes the geographical dimensions of their topic (space, place, time and scale). These will be used as a starting point to inform peer-review comments for the storyteller, and will be submitted to the instructor for evaluation. The summary sentences will be returned with feedback and students will be encouraged used for the in-class exam review in the last class.

#### The Contribution of 3MT to Teaching

The value of communicating research through storytelling extends well beyond the discipline of Geography. Students relate to stories, and in my class, expressed that they were more likely to remember facts and details of the topic when expressed through stories. Many teachers intuitively know this and incorporate anecdotes and jokes into their teaching to engage students. But making storytelling a more central part of student learning is the next step, and has much potential in Geography and beyond to communicate the significance of research and engage students in real-world societal issues.