Hypothesis: Using original economic documents in an introductory economics course makes the subject NOT SO DISMAL!

Rationale: Students demand “fewer lectures bogged down in detailed maths, and more time discussing important historical thinkers”.¹ These courses equip students with tools to use historical thinkers as a source of new ideas.

Methodology: Fall 2013 - Students assigned excerpts from Smith’s Wealth of Nations and Voltaire’s Letters Concerning the English Nation. Spring 2014 – students assigned excerpts from Malthus’ Essay on the Principle of Population and Persky’s A Dismal Romantic.² Students selected a section that related to textbook economic concepts covered in class and wrote a short paragraph explaining how they were connected. Two class periods of discussion expanded on these observations as well as others identified by the instructor. A 3-4 page paper was required for assessment and some multiple choice questions were included on the exam.

Results of anonymous student free response surveys suggest they:

**MOST LIKED**
- Seeing economics from a historical point of view (41%)
- Discussion (24%)

**LEAST LIKED**
- The paper (28%)
- Articles were difficult to read (24%)

Student Comments:
- “Even though these readings can be a little challenging to read….they forced one to think about what was read”
- “If we really used these writings as tools for our economic system today, maybe, just maybe, we would not be in the economic predicament that we are in today”