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This year, I have been required to think, write, present, and connect the dots from the past to today. In the past nine months, I have completed four projects. The first of these projects was '*Man's First Exploration*' which required students to create an interactive website to showcase early history. For this project, Meridian partnered with Midland Center for the Arts. Once students finished that project, they moved on to '*The Impact of World Religions on Civilization*.' Throughout this project, students learned about violence and conflicts of the past as well as present day. Students hosted a nonviolence event at Meridian. Parents and friends were invited to this event. Several guest speakers of different religions spoke, and students conducted discussions. Meridian partnered with the Helen M. Casey Center of Nonviolence in order to complete this project. To start off the new year, students completed *The Chains That Bind Us: 1500-2014*. Students learned what human trafficking is, how it happens, and what to be aware of. Once they had this knowledge, they presented to various locations throughout the community to spread awareness for human trafficking. Their last project of the school year was 'Immigration: Changing the Face of Nations.' This project required students to go as far back as possible to trace their family's heritage. Students partnered with the Midland Genealogy Society and presented their findings at the Midland Mall. While all of these projects have been a wonderful learning experience, my favorite was *The Chains That Bind Us: 1500-2014*.

There is an abundant amount of people that believe that human trafficking is not a problem in the United States. Many think that human trafficking is something who only happens overseas, and that human trafficking is not something that is worth worrying about. Sadly, human trafficking is just as bad in the United States, if not worse, than overseas. Human

trafficking is a 32 billion dollar industry that is occurring worldwide - not just in foreign countries. In fact, Michigan is the fifth most active state in the nation in terms of human trafficking. There are several reasons for this, including Michigan's open borders, expressways, and waterways. According to the Polaris Project, a non-profit organization that works to combat modern day slavery, 80 percent of victims are female, which made the project even more personal to me. Knowing real-world statistics and knowing that human trafficking is happening all around us, made the project more meaningful. This project taught all of us about the world that we live in - *The chains that bind us: 1500-2014* opened our eyes. These statistics and realizations gave me the push that I needed in order to make this project top notch.

I have also been told many times that we are not learning anything by doing projects like *The Chains That Bind Us: 1500-2014*. Many people assume that since students who learn in a project-based setting are not spending our school days reading out of textbooks, we are not really learning anything. Also, when you combine the history class and English class are combined, meeting the requirements given by the state can be hard. This could not be further from the truth. Here at Meridian, our teachers have done a wonderful job of setting up the projects so that students learn all the information that we need to, not just in world studies, but in every class. In this project, students learned about the history of slavery. They were able to learn the causes slavery, what the effects were, and everything else that would be taught in your average, non-New Tech history class. The English requirements were met by writing essays about what was learned and preparing our presentations. Our class has not only met those requirements, but the class also went above and beyond. Practicing for presentations improved our confidence and made us all-around better presenters. While doing all of this, the history that we were learning about was connected to to what is happening in our world today. Next, students took what they had learned taking it out into the community.

One of my favorite things about this presentation was that students actually made a difference. With a problem as big as human trafficking, it can be hard to tackle, but it is important to remember that awareness is the first step. While nothing necessarily happens once people know about human trafficking, nothing will happen *until* people know. Other students may have enjoyed doing the family genealogy project more, because it taught them about their past and where they came from. However, the human trafficking project was designed to save lives and make people aware. In order to make people aware, our world studies class presented at multiple places throughout the community. Our class presented at the Midland Police Station, Midland Daily News, local businesses, community organizations, and even to Michigan State University throughout the course of the project. Despite our young age, high school sophomores were able to inform community members that were much older than us, which is something that high school students do not get to do that often.

*The Chains That Bind Us: 1500-2014* was not only a project that taught me something, this project changed how I look at the world. Human trafficking is something that is happening all around us, even though people can not see it. If nobody raises awareness about something as large-scale as this, it could go completely unnoticed for years to come. This project opened my eyes to everything around me - to signs and signals that I had never noticed before now. I am much more cautious about my actions, and I plan to continue spreading awareness about such an important topic, even though the project is complete. While all of the projects in our world studies class were very important, *The Chains That Bind Us: 1500-2014* made one of the biggest impacts on my life and will stay with me forever.