Dear Dr. Frahm, Dr. Overholt, The TEPS Committee, CTA Website (Mike Thomas):

Thank you Dr. Frahm and the TEPS committee for allowing me the opportunity to attend this conference. Not only was it fantastic to go with CHS English colleagues, but being able to spend several days with English teachers from across the country was rejuvenating and inspirational. The sessions I attended varied from how to approach more meaningful grading and feedback, to how to teach students about misinformation and determining what is A.I. and what is not.

Although all the sessions were informative, four of my favorites that will impact my AP Language & Composition instruction immediately are as follows:

What If We Work Together?
AP Language & Composition Collaborative Lesson Planning
In this session, I was able to work with 7 other AP Language teachers from all across the country to dream up a lesson plan/mini unit around the topic of AI and Humanity. We began with the question: What can AI not replace? What do we need real people to do? To what extent can AI replace human interaction? We were provided with three texts as launching points for our ideas, then spent the remainder of the session discussing secondary texts, activities, and assessments that would align. It was incredibly powerful to work with teachers that have been teaching the course anywhere from 2 to 20 years in very diverse environments - we were able to contribute and brainstorm together in a google document that we can now go back to and create in our own classroom spaces. This session could have been an entire workday and I would have loved it. I'm actually adapting and integrating this mini-unit into my instruction this month.

Fighting Fake News in the Age of A.I.: Building Bridges to News and Digital Literacies
This session was delivered by Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm - two authors who greatly shaped my studies while pursuing my Master's degree. It was really incredible to be able to hear them present directly. In AP Lang, we spend a lot of time discussing ethos - what speakers do to gain their trust and credibility with an audience. In today's world of online and social media, students have a very hard time understanding that just because someone has a platform, it does not mean the information they share is reliable. In this session, we looked at examples of "information pollution" and how we are all susceptible to believe and spread false information. We looked at a variety of social media posts - texts and images - to determine elements of unreliable narrators and alerts to when what is being shared is not real or true. We then looked at news posts through a variety of critical lenses, ways that we can encourage students to think critically about the information being shared rather than taking it at face value. I am blending this session with the previous to create a mini-unit on A.I. in my AP class.

Using Graphic Non Fiction in the Classroom: a 30-year English teacher and author shared a variety of websites and resources that allow students more exposure to short, thoughtful, nonfiction in class. What really stood out in this session was the intersection between reading this type of nonfiction and integrating it into student research. By spending more time having them analyze visual texts, they are better able to approach research with an understanding of why we have to include things like in text citations, graphics, graphs and charts, anecdotes, etc. This session really made me reflect on the research process in my own classroom and how I would like to incorporate graphic nonfiction on a more consistent basis throughout the year, not just during our research unit.

SCOTUS Stories:
I had the privilege of attending a conference in October at Erie 2 BOCES through the Academy of Human Rights, where Karen Korematsu was the keynote speaker. Ever since, I have been brainstorming a unit that I could create to integrate the story of US vs. Fred Korematsu into my AP Classroom. In this session at NCTE, the Korematsu case was highlighted under a larger umbrella of storytelling - how Supreme Court cases are fascinating, but it is really the people and their stories behind the stories that make them compelling and relevant to our lives today. This session provided incredible primary resources, lesson plans, and activities for students to engage with to better interact with our American history and how it impacts our present and future. Because teaching students the importance of context is integral to AP Language and Composition, this session allowed me to consider rich historical documents that can help to ground our discussion and research.