Historica Canada Education Portal

Joshua Slocum

Overview

This lesson is based on viewing the Joshua Slocum biography from *The Canadians* series. Slocum was an author and sea captain. During a three year voyage in the 1890s, he became the first person to circumnavigate the world alone.

Aims

Students will consider the life and experiences of Joshua Slocum and his family. These activities encourage students to do further research and examine Slocum's own writings.

Background

Joshua Slocum started his career at sea as a cook. While he was never successful as a cook, he soon learned other skills that would serve him for the rest of his life. Sailor, master navigator, captain, ship owner, shipwright, and sometimes pauper, his career was as turbulent as the seas he sailed on.

He owned and operated some of the finest sailing ships of his day.

Shipwrecked in Brazil, he built, from the wreckage of his ship, a small sailing vessel in which he and his family returned to America. He restored a dilapidated old whaling boat to sail around the world. Though only having completed three years of school, he wrote chronicles of his voyages that are still popular today. Run down by the steamships that he hated, he died on the sea that he loved. Joshua Slocum is still revered for his accomplishments.

Activities

Time Allowance: 1 - 4 hours

Procedures:

The following activities are flexible enough that they can be completed individually, in pairs, in small groups or as a class depending on the needs of your students. Each activity may be used on its own or in conjunction with the others (each activity could be assigned to a small group, for example).

1. Pick one of Joshua Slocum's ships (*Northern Light, Aquindneck, Liberdade, or Spray*). Draw a picture, floor plan, or construct a scale model of the ship you've chosen. Research and write a short paper detailing how this vessel, including this class of ship, was typically used. Compare its typical use to how Joshua Slocum used it.

2. Construct a timeline of Joshua Slocum's life. Include events such as when he first went to sea, became owner of his first vessel, wrote his first book, and circumnavigated the world.

3. Conduct an interview with Joshua Slocum. Select one student to play the interviewer and the other to play the role of Slocum. The setting for the interview is a few days after Slocum has finished his circumnavigation of the earth.

4. Ask each student to select a place that Joshua Slocum stopped during his circumnavigation of the earth. Try to have as many stops represented as possible. Then ask each student to write a ship's log entry for the stop. Have them include things such as what the weather was like, who he met, what he did during the stop, what sort of provisions he purchased, and how long he stayed.

5. Provide students with blank maps of the world. Ask each student to plot Joshua Slocum's course as he circumnavigated the world. Things that could be included are: names of key points, dates of arrival/departure from various key points, key events, and dates.

6. Have students research and write short biographies of Joshua Slocum for The Globe and Mail. What was his greatest accomplishment? What was his defining moment as a person? Have them visit The Globe and Mail website to model their work after the biographies found in the "Lives Lived" section.

7. A 9 July 1898 article in the *Fairhaven Star* entitled, "An Intrepid Navigator: Capt. Slocum Arrives in Fairhaven from a Voyage Around the World," stated that the "hold of the *Spray* is filled with all kinds of curiosities gathered from various parts of the world." Have students write a follow-up article that has Joshua Slocum describing some of these "curiosities." Include what each is, where he obtained it and the circumstances surrounding his procurement of the object.

8. Virginia Albertina Walker was Joshua Slocum's first wife. In the video she is described as being a "...sea captain's wife." Research the lives of sea captain's wives. Create a diary spanning a week (or more) for a sea captain's wife. Be sure to mention some of the sacrifices and hardships she has to endure as part of her 'normal' day.

9. Students should research the advent of the steamship and prepare a visual display that compares and contrasts steamships and sailing ships. Students may wish to consider the following questions while preparing their display: What effect did the advent of steamships have on sailing ships? What effect did it have on sailors? What new skills did sailors require in order to operate steamships?

10. Have students research the methods used by Joshua Slocum to navigate while on his trip around the world. Are there any other methods he could have used? Why did he choose one method over the other? Use these methods to determine the longitude and latitude of your school.

11. After watching the video and completing some class activities have the students write a reflection paper of one page that answers the following questions:

- What character traits drove Joshua Slocum to his accomplishments?
- Why did he want to circumnavigate the world alone?
- What traits allowed him to succeed in his circumnavigation of the world?
- In your opinion, what was Joshua Slocum's most important character trait? Explain.
- What are some traits that Joshua Slocum possessed that you also possess?
- How can these traits help you or hinder you in your life?

- What was the most important thing that Joshua Slocum did? Why?

Resources

Joshua Slocum Worksheet

Joshua Slocum - The Canadian Encyclopedia

Around the World with Joshua Slocum - The Canadian Encyclopedia

Culler, R.D., *Spray: Building and Sailing a Replica of Joshua Slocum's Famous Vessel.* International Marine Publishers, 1978.

Fortman, Janis L., *First to Sail the World Alone: Joshua Slocum.* Olympia Publishers, 1978.

Pidgeon, Harry, *Around the World Single-handed: The Cruise of the "Islander."* Dover Publications, 1989.

Roberts-Gordon, R. Bruce, *Spray: The Ultimate Cruising Boat.* Sheridan House Publishers, 1995.

Slack, Kenneth E., *In the Wake of Spray.* Rutgers University Press, 1966.

Slocum, Victor, *Captain Joshua Slocum: the Life and Voyages of America's Best Known Sailor.* Sheridan House Publishers, 1993.

Teller, Walter Magnes, *Joshua Slocum.* Rutgers University Press, 1971.

The History of Steamboats

Joshua Slocum Society International