Portail de l'éducation de Historica Canada

History is not Dead: Historical Context Lesson Plan Template

Overview

“What's the point of studying that? That's the past. That has nothing to do with my life.” Students often speak of history as a dead subject, a collection of past events with no bearing on the present and even less on the future. This lesson intends to engage students in historical thinking: consider significance, analyze evidence, assess continuity and change, examine cause and consequence, consider historical perspective and form moral judgment. Ultimately, they will produce their own historical writing based on the work of others.

This lesson is a template and can be used as a study on any subject that falls into class curricula.

Background

Students should have some background contextual information on the subject in order to frame your lesson.

Activities

Time Allowance: 2-3 class periods

Procedures:

Class One

Expose students to images related to the historical event to be studied. You may project images to the entire class or have students organized in co-operative learning groups using Graffitti method. (Each group would analyze the image and agree on a brief comment to write on the reverse. The images are quickly rotated to compel a visceral reaction to each image.)

Engage students in a discussion of the images by asking questions such as: What does this image tell us about this historical event? What aspects of the image is most noticeable? Which commentary on the image is most valid considering what you know about the event? What might this image *not* tell us about this event? How could the teacher's selection of images influence how you see this event?

Have students select one of the images and write a headline related to it as it may have appeared in a newspaper of the time. Challenge students to justify their choice of words. Discuss with students how newspapers are often the first published draft of history.

Class Two

Expose students to various historical textbooks and the corresponding interpretation of the event, as normally seen in the first paragraph on the subject. You may wish to provide students with various historical

quotations of key figures or historians who have examined this event.

Have students examine these documents, either all together or in small groups, depending on the learning styles or time constraints of your particular setting. Encourage students to consider questions such as: What aspects of this event does this author consider most significant? What have others added or deleted? Has the time period of the writer influenced the interpretation of the event? What do you know about the authors? Is the interpretation based on fact? Which of the accounts most fairly represents the historical event?

Have students use each of the documents provided to write their own brief version of the event. You may wish to review the writing process at this point. Students must make decisions on significance so it is important for you to limit the length of their version. As well, students may wish to complete further research to determine the validity and/or reliability of their information. Discuss with students how textbooks are often considered the final published draft of history.

Class Three

Have students compare each others' version of the historical event. Have students identify the most significant differences between the drafts. Have students identify the most significant commonalities between each version. You may wish to rewrite a class version and select a visual to accompany the text.

Challenge students to consider how historical writing shapes our perspective of historical events in general. Ask them to consider how incomplete information or even the distortion of past events can influence decision makers today.

If possible publish or display students work on the wall or the web.

Resources

Denos, Mike and Roland Case, Teaching about Historical Thinking. The Critical Thinking Consortium: University of British Columbia, 2006.

The Canadian Encyclopedia