Portail de l'éducation de Historica Canada

The Treaty of Versailles

Overview

Students will work through a simulation of the discussions leading to the Treaty of Versailles at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919. After completing their unit on the First World War, the students will present the positions of country representatives at the simulated conference through the six months of 1919. In groups, they will present and argue their positions depending on their national perspectives (i.e. USA, UK, France, etc.). Each student will then write a brief article outlining his/her 10 key points to be included in the Treaty. These points will represent the student's personal views after having heard the arguments during the simulation.

Aims

Students will:

- Analyze and compare events of the past to the present in order to make informed, creative decisions about issues;
- Demonstrate understanding of the social, political, and economic forces that have shaped the past and present and apply those understandings in planning for the future;

- Acquire, process, and interpret information critically to make informed decisions.

Background

Students will learn about the First World War and the significant events in a global sense during the unit. They will then learn about the key battles where Canadians were involved. Throughout the unit consideration for other national histories and perspectives must be made. For example: Belgium being invaded; France forced to push the Germans back beyond the Marne; the UK after Belgium is invaded; the US after the *Lusitania* and other ships are sunk; Canada's contribution in munitions production and direct military participation.

Activities

Time Allowance: 3 classes, following larger unit on the First World War

Procedures:

For the simulation, students will be divided into study groups representing the different nations who were at the table in 1919. They will be provided with background information (populations, casualties, war damage to territory, war contribution, number of colonies, etc.) along with the chronological events of the war.

1. Armed with this information, students will discuss and then decide upon their 10 points to be included in the Treaty. Each point must be accompanied by a justification for its placement on the list.

2. The conference is set up in the classroom with France as the Chair. Each country presents its position according to the time allotted. The time allotments are to coincide with the power or leverage held at the time (i.e. France, UK and the US having more time than Italy, Japan, Germany).

** The teacher will decide how much time to allot Canada. I usually allot the same amount of time as the greater powers for obvious reasons. I do feel that it is extremely important that when the actual Treaty is presented, that a discussion about Canada's role take place.*

3. After the points are presented (maps are often used to indicate border alterations and colonial redistribution) a second round of discussions takes place during which country representatives may refute claims or positions presented in the first round.

4. Students then write, for homework, their top ten points to be included in the Treaty (this is their personal view and not the group's position). Each point must be accompanied by a justification for its position on the list. Global circumstances should be considered.

5. Finally, the students will learn what actually transpired at the Quai d'Orsay and at Versailles.

Note: If a colleague is teaching the same course or unit, it is always interesting to have his/her students be responsible for presenting the positions of the Allies and your class presenting the positions of the Central Powers or vice versa.

Critical Questions:

- Was the Treaty a fair one?
- Did it actually, as some assert, lead to WWII?

- Were the terms imposed upon Germany justified, or were they too extreme?
- Was Canada's role at Versailles a significant one? Explain.

Resources

- Prior knowledge of WWI events, social and political context.
- Fact sheets for the various countries at Versailles.
- Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World.*
- First World War Collection – The Canadian Encyclopedia
- First World War Timeline – The Canadian Encyclopedia
- Treaty of Versailles - The Canadian Encyclopedia
- League of Nations - Paris Peace Conference