

Commemoration of the Gettysburg Battlefield

Summary

Students

- Access multiple primary sources that provide a historical context for the Gettysburg Address
- Classify information from primary sources to form generalizations about the Civil War and democracy
- Hypothesize the primary theme of the Gettysburg Address

Time Frame

3 class periods of 90 minutes each

Group Size

Large Groups

Materials

Software

American Journey: History in Your Hands: The Civil War (Primary Source Media)

Background for Teachers

Students use a multimedia project, *The Valley of the Shadow: Two American Communities in the Civil War*, which has been cited by the National Endowment for the Humanities as an example of the 'best of the humanities on the Web,' to create a presentation about the significance of the Gettysburg Address. Students work on expert teams to explore the interactive history materials. By allowing students to explore raw materials of the past, students learn how to engage actively in the construction and interpretation of American history.

Instructional Procedures

Preparation

As a class, construct a timeline that puts the Battle of Gettysburg into historical context with other major events of the era.

Procedure

Divide students into four expert teams. Each team searches for primary resources and synthesizes their findings about the Battle of Gettysburg. Student expert teams concentrate on: newspapers, letters, photographs, or maps.

Brainstorm the creation of a visual organizer for gathered information. Print copies of the visual organizer to help students classify newspaper information. Sample visual organizers can be found at the Digital History Teaching Materials Web site (see Tools and Resources).

Newspaper Expert Team:

Use the newspaper database search engine to locate newspaper articles about the Battle of Gettysburg: <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu>

Search suggestion: Use the keyword 'Gettysburg' and select 'all' for the dates.

Letters Expert Team:

Use the Civil War letters database search engine to locate letters about the Battle of Gettysburg: <http://content.lib.washington.edu/civilwarweb/>

Search suggestion: Use the keyword 'Gettysburg' and select the dates '1861-1865.'

Photograph Expert Team:

Battlefield photographs

Use the Civil War Images database search engine to locate images from the Battle of Gettysburg: <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/civil-war/photos>

Modern day photographs

Imagine that you are a tourist visiting Gettysburg. Select a photo and write a postcard to describe your visit. Include descriptions and the significance of the landscape and the war monuments. Alternatively, play the role of a war correspondent, reporting on specific events.

Battlefield Map Expert Team:

Answer linked questions before and after viewing the 3-D map of the Battle of Gettysburg at the following Web site: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/A-Cutting-Edge-Second-Look-at-the-Battle-of-Gettysburg-1-180947921/>

Note: These movies average 7 MB. Download time can be significant. If you click the links below the VRML file it will begin to download.

Reconvene the class and have each expert group report on significant information they have gathered from the primary resources.

Once each group has reported, explain to the class that three months after the Battle of Gettysburg, Abraham Lincoln decided to commemorate the battle with a national ceremony. Lincoln was not the primary speaker at this ceremony, but he wrote a short speech while on the train from Washington to Gettysburg. This two-minute speech became one of the most important speeches in American history.

Ask the class to hypothesize why three months after the Battle of Gettysburg Lincoln chose to hold a commemoration. Each expert group should offer information based on their examination of materials.

Follow up by asking students to hypothesize what Lincoln could have said in two minutes that was so significant to American history.

Students read Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and consider the following questions, as a class or individually:

How does Lincoln describe the United States?

What does Lincoln believe the purpose of war to be?

What is Lincoln referring to when he says, 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'?

What is the main message of the address?

Why is this address marked as one of the most significant speeches in American history?

What lesson does Lincoln say we can learn from this battle?

Have students complete the following writing activity to synthesize their research:

Imagine that you are a journalist who was sent to cover both the Battle of Gettysburg and the Commemoration of the Gettysburg Battlefield. Write a front-page story that describes the commemoration and the events that led up to it. Writing an editorial is an alternative, as long as facts are presented.

Extensions

Too often, teachers require students to memorize the Gettysburg Address without having a clear understanding of the historical significance of Lincoln's famous speech. This activity has been used with high school students to actively engage them as historians. As students reconstruct this era of history, they improve not only their essential research and critical thinking skills, but also immerse themselves in the lives of individuals who lived the Gettysburg experience.

We have found that students begin to go far beyond the memorization of the Gettysburg Address and begin to ask probing questions of the members of the different expert teams to help them create a clear picture of this time in history. The research skills that they learn in this lesson stay with them as

they study other historical eras and seek out primary sources such as government documents, photographs, and letters to reconstruct history-making it come alive!

Assessment Plan

Teachers and students together can develop a rubric to assess the newspaper article activity. The rubric can reflect not only the writing style and content, but also the research methods used to gather the information.

Bibliography

The Utah Education Network received permission from ISTE (The International Society for Technology in Education) to share this lesson.

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