

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

Crossing the Delaware with Historic, Cultural, and Personal Interpretations by Maureen Festi

Grade - 5

Length of class period: Two 50-60 minute class periods.

Inquiry: How do the historic, cultural, and personal views of primary and secondary sources help us to understand the multiple interpretations of historical events?

Objectives:

As a result of this lesson students will be able to:

- distinguish between primary and secondary sources.
- examine the effects and affects of the Crossing of the Delaware from multiple sources
- evaluate the importance of various interpretations of this historic event

Materials - Day One:

- Painting of Washington Crossing the Delaware (full screen image)
<http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/index.php?sec=gallery>
- Background information for teacher about the painting (scroll to bottom of page):
<http://www.ushistory.org/washingtoncrossing/history/whatswrong.htm>
- Cheney, Lynne. *When Washington Crossed the Delaware.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004.

Activities - Day One:

1. Initiation: Show the painting of Washington Crossing the Delaware, but do not tell the students what it is or discuss it at this time. Explain that this is an artistic interpretation by Emanuel Leutze about 75 years after an event in history and that the dimensions of the original painting are 12'x 21', so large that it feels as if you could actually step into the painting. Ask the students to silently study the painting for a few minutes, choose one person in the painting, and journal about what you think that person is thinking or feeling at this time. Share and discuss some of the responses.
2. Discuss the painting and draw attention to the details, and possible symbolism, and the artists message in the painting. Give a brief summary of the painter's life and the history of the painting.

3. Read and discuss Lynne Cheney's picture book, When Washington Crossed the Delaware. Draw attention to the quotes from people who were actually there as opposed to the secondary sources of the book (2004) and the painting (1851).
4. Discuss why Lynne Cheney wrote the book and why Emanuel Leutze painted his huge painting about this event. Ask: If the painter and the author weren't there, how did they know what actually happened? Do you think their work is valuable? Why or Why not?

Materials - Day Two: Primary Documents

- Background history of the crossing:
<http://www.ushistory.org/washingtoncrossing/history/index.htm>
- McCullough, David. *1776*. New York: Simon & Shuster, 2005. (with audio CD)
Quotes and excerpts on pages 268-278
- Lengel, Edward G. The Glorious Struggle: George Washington's Revolutionary War Letters. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007.
 1. Page 83- map of the Battle of Trenton Dec. 25-26, 1776
 2. Pages 82 - 84 letter from George Washington to Colonel Joseph Reed December 23, 1776.
 3. Pages 86-87 General Orders December 27, 1776
 4. Pages 87-88 letter from George Washington to John Hancock December 27, 1776.
- Paine, Thomas. The Crisis: <http://www.ushistory.org/Paine/crisis/c-01.htm> first paragraph (Washington ordered that The Crisis be read to his troops before the crossing)
- Letter from George Washington to the Continental Congress:
<http://www.ushistory.org/washingtoncrossing/history/account1.htm>

Activities - Day Two:

- Divide the primary documents among four or five groups of students to question and discuss.
- Each group will read their primary documents and consider the thoughts and feelings of the men crossing the Delaware on Dec 25, 1776.
- Based on the new information they learned, students will create a tableau (a frozen scene created with their bodies as statues) of a boatload of men crossing the Delaware. It could be the same scene as the famous painting or another one. Staying in their frozen

positions, the actors will become talking statues using direct quotes or talk about what they(the soldiers) are thinking and/or feeling.

Assessment:

- After referring to their initial entry in their journal about the feelings of one person in the picture, students will write a revised entry. At the end of the entry, they will write which source had the greatest influence on their change of opinion and explain why. They will then write a paragraph to answer the question: What important elements or themes were common among all the interpretations of this event in history?

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards –

- distinguish between primary and secondary sources;
- formulate historical questions based on primary and secondary sources, including documents, eyewitness accounts, letters and diaries, artifacts, real or simulated historical sites, charts, graphs, diagrams and written texts;
- interpret data in historical maps, photographs, art works and other artifacts;
- display empathy for people who have lived in the past; and
- develop written narratives and short interpretative essays, as well as other appropriate presentations from investigations of source materials.