



America at War: Charge and Defeat

The focus of this lesson plan is the advantages and disadvantages of using new technology to revisit the past.

Subject

World History

Grade level

6-8

Duration

One or two class periods

Objectives

Students will:

- discuss traditional tools used by historians and archaeologists;
- discover how new technology sheds light on the past;
- conduct a debate on the advantages and disadvantages of rewriting the past; and
- discuss which side of the debate has the strongest case.

Materials

- Paper and pencils
- Newsprint and markers
- Computer with Internet access
- *America at War: Charge and Defeat* video and VCR (or DVD and DVD player)

Procedures

1. Begin by asking students how historians and archaeologists learn about the past. Write their ideas on newsprint. Students may respond that historians learn about the past through written records, maps and photographs; archaeologists study artifacts, including skeletal remains.
2. Next, tell students that historians today have access to technology that helps them verify historical information in new ways. Show students part of the video *America at War: Charge and Defeat*. Both segments ("General Pickett at Gettysburg" and "General Custer at Little Bighorn") illustrate the point.

3. Tell students that there are advantages and disadvantages to rewriting history. To find out why this is so, have students conduct a debate. Divide students into two groups: One group will focus on the advantages of rewriting history and the other on the disadvantages. For information on this topic, have students watch the program closely, and Web sites with this kind of information are listed below:

<http://www.bismarcktribune.com/lewisclark/2003/after.html>
<http://www.lewisandclark.org/history.htm>
<http://www.swanet.org/zarchives/gotcaliche/alldailyeditions/99may/myj052599.html>
<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~genbel/novdec/families1.html>
http://www.racesci.org/in_media/thomas_jefferson/dna_teaches_history_a_few/
<http://www.hal-pc.org/~qtaylor/dead.html>

4. During the next class period, conduct the debate. Give each side an opportunity to present its case and argue a rebuttal.
5. Conclude the lesson by asking students which side they think has the strongest case. Is it worth correcting a few misconceptions in history, or is it better to leave well enough alone?

Evaluation

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

3 points: Students participated actively in class discussions; researched the topic carefully and thoroughly; and presented a well thought-out argument supported by evidence.

2 points: Students participated in class discussions; researched the topic somewhat carefully and thoroughly; and presented a complete argument supported by evidence.

1 point: Students did not participate in class discussions; did not complete their research; and presented an incomplete argument that was not fully supported by evidence.

Extension

Ask students what insights they think were gained by finding out exactly what happened during Pickett's Charge. Do students think that this information added to our understanding of the Civil War? Suggest that students write a short essay on this topic explaining their points of view with specific examples from the program.

Vocabulary

archaeologist

Definition: A scientist who studies past human life and culture by the recovery and examination of remaining material evidence, such as graves, pottery, buildings, and tools

Context: Pottery found in a centuries-old building may tell an archaeologist what people cooked and ate.

evidence

Definition: Proof that an event or incident took place; examples include written records, photographs, fingerprints, blood samples, or fiber samples.

Context: In a court of law, the more evidence that the defense presents, the greater the probability that the suspect will be acquitted.

forensics

Definition: The use of scientific tools to resolve a legal matter, such as whether an individual committed a crime for which he or she is accused.

Context: Today scientists apply the tools of forensics to historical events to try to clarify what actually took place.

historian

Definition: A specialist who studies written records to understand what took place in the past

Context: Historians review letters and other written documents from the past to understand why historic events took place.

Academic Standards

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of the NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
- Science, Technology, and Society

Credit

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