

Historical Heroes: Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: One to two class periods

Program Description

What makes a hero? This thoughtful program encourages students to weigh the heroic value of such attributes as rebelliousness, endurance, and risk-taking. Segments feature astronauts, outcasts, and revolutionaries. This program includes one feature segment and three short segments.

Onscreen Questions

- Who are your heroes?
 - What is the difference between heroes and villains?
 - What are some factors that cause people to give up lives of crime?
 - How are criminals treated in our society?
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Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Discuss the question, "Do the ends justify the means?"
- Choose an event that raises a moral dilemma.
- Write an essay about the event that explores whether its ends justify its means.

Materials

- *Historical Heroes* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Computer with Internet access
- Paper and pencils

Procedures

1. Begin the lesson by showing one of these program segments: "The Original Gangs of New York" or "Great Books: *Les Misérables*."
2. Discuss the segment's themes. To help spur conversation, ask the following questions:
 - What do you think of the behavior of the people featured?
 - Do you think they were justified in behaving the way they did?
 - Do you think they would have behaved differently under different circumstances?
 - Do you think they had different choices other than the ones they made?
 - Did the ends ultimately justify the means?
3. Throughout the discussion, help students understand that people may behave in ways they might not otherwise just to survive. It could be argued that the early immigrants to New York, as well as Jean Valjean, the main character in Victor Hugo's masterpiece *Les Misérables*, fell into this category. This is often referred to as "the ends justifying the means," meaning that the result—in both cases, survival—is worth any sacrifices made along the way.
4. Divide students into groups of three or four. Tell them that their challenge is to select an event and explore it by asking questions similar to those in Step #2. Students may select any event that raises a moral dilemma. Possible topics include:
 - War on terrorism
 - The invasion of Iraq
 - Heightened security procedures at airports and in public buildings
 - The use of negative ads in political campaigns
5. Allow enough class time to work on the project. Then, have each group write a short essay explaining why in this event the ends do or do not justify the means. They may research the topics on the Internet for more information, but students should use the assignment as an opportunity to consider their own positions regarding difficult, often ambiguous, situations, as well as the consequences of actions.
6. During the next class period, have students share their essays. What conclusions did they draw? Did they find it difficult to answer the question? Encourage students to explain why they found the assignment challenging.
7. Conclude the lesson by asking students what they learned from this activity. Did it make them look at the world differently? Did it influence the way they assess the outcome of world events? Poll the class to find out if they feel differently now than they did before the assignment when asked, "Do the ends justify the means?"



Assessment

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

- **3 points:** Students participated actively in class discussions; considered the issues very thoughtfully and carefully; worked well with their group in developing a well-constructed essay.
- **2 points:** Students participated somewhat actively in class discussions; considered the issues thoughtfully and carefully; worked reasonably well with their group in developing a competent essay.
- **1 point:** Students did not participate in class discussions; had difficulty considering the issues; had trouble working with their group in developing an essay.

Vocabulary

gangs of New York

Definition: A term used to identify Irish immigrants of the mid-1860s who were considered inferior; as a result, they behaved unlawfully just so they could survive.

Context: During the mid-1800s, the gangs of New York looted and rioted to make a point about issues that concerned them, such as forced conscription into the Union Army immediately after arriving in this country.

Les Misérables

Definition: Victor Hugo's classic novel, published in 1862, explores the difficulty of leading an honest life under cruel circumstances.

Context: Jean Valjean, the main character in *Les Misérables*, struggled to lead an honest, productive life.

moral dilemma

Definition: A problem in which there is no clear right or wrong resolution

Context: If all your friends are cheating on a test, you are faced with a moral dilemma: Should you tell the teacher or keep quiet so that you don't lose your friends?

"The ends justify the means."

Definition: An expression that says an individual, group, or nation is justified in taking action, even if it's morally questionable, to reach a goal or objective

Context: Many people believe that the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II was a case in which the ends justified the means because, although many people died, the war came to an end.



Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media; Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing, Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions, Gathers and uses information for research purposes poses

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Individual Development and Identity
 - Power, Authority, and Governance
 - Civic Ideals and Practices
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.



Video Index—Here the video is divided into four parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units—These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link—Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources—This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. Great Books: *The Right Stuff* (5 min.)

During the Cold War, the U.S. and Soviet governments competed for power in many ways, including a race to send astronauts into space.

II. The Original Gangs of New York (32 min.)

New York has always been multicultural, but it has not always been peaceful. Visit the Five Points for a look at the real gangs of 19th-century New York.

III. Australia's Criminal Past (4 min.)

The smallest continent on the planet, Australia was once a land of aborigines and English criminals. Journey back in time to learn about Australia's social history.

IV. Great Books: *Les Misérables* (7 min.)

Do all humans deserve basic human rights? Enter the world of Victor Hugo, and explore this and other questions he confronted in his novel *Les Misérables*.

Curriculum Units

1. The Space Race

Pre-viewing question

Q: How does a country demonstrate its power and influence?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did the United States and Russia compete in a space race?

A: Both nations emerged as super powers following World War II. They then opposed each other in a cold war, building their military powers but carefully avoiding direct confrontation. Instead, they



asserted domination, power, and influence in other ways. Success in space became a contest between democracy and communism.

2. Orbiting Earth

Pre-viewing question

Q: What has been the greatest feat in space exploration?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What do you think lies ahead in the future of space exploration?

A: Answers will vary.

3. The Five Points

Pre-viewing question

Q: What defines a gang?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did the gangs of New York form?

A: The poor, immigrant neighborhoods of New York had little official protection. Gangs came together out of a need for order, security, and protection.

4. The City's Gangs

Pre-viewing question

Q: What are some reasons for modern gang warfare?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What was the relationship between early 19th-century gangs and firefighters?

A: Fire was one of New York's biggest problems in the beginning of the 19th century, and there were no professional firefighters, only volunteers. Gangs formed around local neighborhood firehouses. Insurance companies rewarded firehouses with cash payouts. Fights broke out over which firehouse would get to put out a fire. The insurance money funded the firehouses, which were essentially private social clubs, and the brawls were essentially early gang warfare.

5. A Professional Police Force

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you think today's society would be like without a professional police force?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did New York's police become known as "coppers"?

A: The early professional constables of New York did not wear police uniforms until the 19th century. When they first appeared in uniform, they were jeered at for looking like London police officers. They quickly reverted to wearing just their copper badges and earned the nickname "coppers."



6. Power and Corruption

Pre-viewing question

Q: What are some forms of corruption in today's politics?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How did gangs rig elections in their favor?

A: Ballot boxes were stuffed, and people voted multiple times. Gangs would sometimes pay men to grow beards before election days. After voting once with their beard, they would shave and vote again. They would continue shaving and voting several more times as their appearance changed.

7. Mob Violence and Civil War

Pre-viewing question

Q: What is the fairest way to determine who should be drafted into a war?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Could the draft riots have been avoided?

A: Answers will vary.

8. After the Riots

Pre-viewing question

Q: What would you do if an angry mob was coming to attack your home?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Would you have participated in New York's draft riots?

A: Answers will vary.

9. Monument to Corruption

Pre-viewing question

Q: Who do you think is the most corrupt world leader in modern times?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What were some of Tweed's positive accomplishments?

A: He built the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History. He was also responsible for providing thousands of jobs to impoverished Irish immigrants.

10. A New Era

Pre-viewing question

Q: How have American policies and attitudes toward immigrants changed over the years?

A: Answers will vary.



Post-viewing question

Q: What are some differences between 19th-century gangs and modern organized crime?

A: Answers will vary.

11. Life in Australia

Pre-viewing question

Q: What are some modern solutions to prison overpopulation?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why did the English send their criminals to Australia?

A: For many years, the English government sent criminals to America. However, when the American Revolution broke out, this policy was no longer viable. England's prisons soon became overpopulated and teeming with violent criminals and poor people who were unable to pay taxes. The English government came up with a plan to send its criminals to Australia as a way to ease the problem with overcrowded jails.

12. Buying a Criminal Soul

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever been given a gift you felt unworthy of?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What problems did France face in the early 19th century?

A: Answers will vary.

13. Human Injustices

Pre-viewing question

Q: What is the most difficult choice you have ever made?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What rights do you think all humans should have?

A: Answers will vary.

