Learning Activity - Secondary Level

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE: THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Overview

This activity should be used after students have studied the Civil Rights Movement. This History Assessment of Thinking (HAT) asks student to analyze two primary documents to demonstrate their understanding of the Civil Rights Movement. Document A is a 1936 letter from the Eleanor Roosevelt to Walter White, executive secretary of the NAACP. Document B is a 1957 letter from Daisy Bates, a NAACP representative in Arkansas, to Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins. The assessment draws on students' knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement but in a way that gauges more than just the recall of facts and dates. Students must show that they have a broad understanding of how the Civil Rights Movement unfolded and that they can actively use historical information to place the two documents in context. Students then examine the HAT's rubric and sample responses to evaluate their own work. This activity will provide feedback to teachers and students about students' knowledge of the basic narrative of the Civil Rights Movement (e.g., do students understand that lynching peaked around the turn of the 20th century and had been virtually eradicated by the time of school desegregation in the 1950s?).

Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- Understand a broad narrative of the Civil Rights Movement
- Gain experience in evaluating their work

Time Required

30 minutes

Grade level

9 - 12

Topic/s

Civil Rights Movement
Primary Source Analysis

Subject

American History

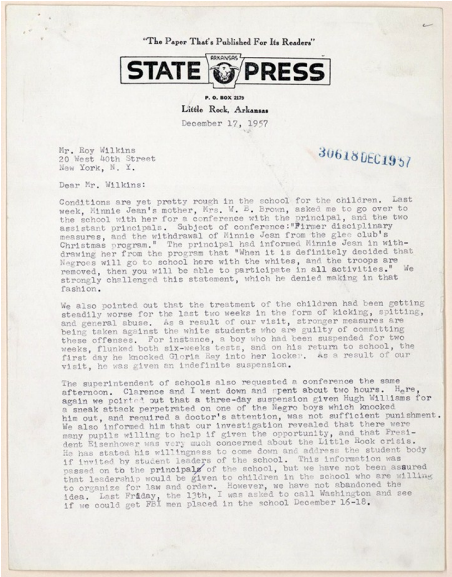
Standards

Common Core State Standards http://www.corestandards.org/

RH.6-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.11-12.5 Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

RH.9-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.



"The Paper That's Published For Its Readers"

STATE PRESS

P. O. BOX 2229
Little Rock, Arkansas
December 17, 1957

Mr. Roy Wilkins
20 West 40th Street
New York, N. Y.

30618 DEC 1957

Dear Mr. Wilkins:

Conditions are yet pretty rough in the school for the children. Last week, Minnie Jean's mother, Mrs. W. A. Brown, asked me to go over to the school with her for a conference with the principal, and the two assistant principals. Subject of conference: "Firmer disciplinary measures, and the withdrawal of Minnie Jean from the glee club's Christmas program." The principal had informed Minnie Jean in withdrawing her from the program that "When it is definitely decided that Negroes will go to school here with the whites, and the troops are removed, then you will be able to participate in all activities." We strongly challenged this statement, which he denied making in that fashion.

We also pointed out that the treatment of the children had been getting steadily worse for the last two weeks in the form of kicking, spitting, and general abuse. As a result of our visit, stronger measures are being taken against the white students who are guilty of committing these offenses. For instance, a boy who had been suspended for two weeks, flunked both six-weeks tests, and on his return to school, the first day he knocked Gloria Ray into her locker. As a result of our visit, he was given an indefinite suspension.

The superintendent of schools also requested a conference the same afternoon. Clarence and I went down and spent about two hours. Here, again we pointed out that a three-day suspension given Hugh Williams for a sneak attack perpetrated on one of the Negro boys which knocked him out, and required a doctor's attention, was not sufficient punishment. We also informed him that our investigation revealed that there were many pupils willing to help if given the opportunity, and that President Eisenhower was very much concerned about the Little Rock crisis. He has stated his willingness to come down and address the student body if invited by student leaders of the school. This information was passed on to the principals of the school, but we have not been assured that leadership would be given to children in the school who are willing to organize for law and order. However, we have not abandoned the idea. Last Friday, the 13th, I was asked to call Washington and see if we could get FBI men placed in the school December 16-18.

Daisy Bates to NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins on the treatment of the Little Rock Nine, December 17, 1957. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

PREPARATION

Materials
Have the following materials ready before the activity:

- Be able to display Eleanor Roosevelt letter
  http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/mcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(mcc/015))

- Be able to display Daisy Bates letter
  http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/civilrightsera/ExhibitObjects/DaisyBatesLittleRockNine.aspx

- Copies of the Civil Rights Movement in Context History Assessment of Thinking
  https://beyondthebubble.stanford.edu/assessments/civil-rights-movement-context

- Interactive rubric for the Civil Rights Movement in Context HAT
  https://beyondthebubble.stanford.edu/assessments/civil-rights-movement-context/rubric

- Sample student responses to the Civil Rights Movement in Context HAT
  https://beyondthebubble.stanford.edu/assessments/civil-rights-movement-context/samples

Prior Knowledge
This activity should follow a unit of study on the Civil Rights Movement. Students need to be familiar with the practice of lynching and the desegregation of schools.

PROCEDURE

1. Tell students that they will analyze two letters from the archives of the NAACP to determine which letter was written first. Display the letters from the Library of Congress by Eleanor Roosevelt and Daisy Bates, but obscure the dates on the two letters.

2. Hand out the *Civil Rights Movement in Context* HAT and ask students to complete it independently.

3. After students have completed the assessment, ask them to turn in their responses.

4. Show students the interactive rubric and sample student responses. Discuss common misconceptions and identify the elements of a strong response. Possible questions include:

   - Which letter was written first? How do you know?
   - What were some of the crucial passages in each letter? (Possible answers include: Roosevelt's references to the "lynching situation" and the reluctance of the federal government to intervene; Bates refers to the president possibly visiting and the white students who are guilty of committing offenses).
   - Ask students:
     - How do these passages help answer the assessment?
     - What historical issues are addressed in the "Proficient" responses? (Possible answers include: Brown v. Board, lynching, desegregation of schools, increased federal intervention, and the growth of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s).
     - What errors do you see in the "Emergent" and "Basic" responses? (Possible answers include: students placed letters in wrong order or did not provide specific historical information to support their answers).
     - Did you make any of the same mistakes?

5. After discussing the rubric, ask students to evaluate the responses they just submitted. Students should say whether their responses were emergent, basic, or proficient and provide a rationale for why. Remind students to reference specific passages from the letters and to list historic events that they would include to strengthen their responses

EVALUATION

1. Review students' answers to the HAT. If you identify any crucial historical misunderstanding that was not discussed during class, address it at the start of the next class.
2. Look through students' evaluations of their own responses. Are they on target? If not, why not? Discuss any patterns you noticed with your students when you return the assessments and their evaluations.
3. This type of activity at the end of a unit on the Civil Rights Movement will help to ensure that all students have an understanding of some of the most important developments in the Civil Rights Movement (e.g., lynching, desegregation, increasing federal involvement, etc.). It also provides teachers with feedback about any fundamental misconceptions.

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?ammem/mcc:@field(DOCID+@lit(mcc/015))

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Mrs. Roosevelt

March 19, 1936

Rcd. W.W. 3-21-36

Rfd. to

My dear Mr. White:

Before I received your letter today I had been in to the President, talking to him about your letter enclosing that of the Attorney General. I told him that it seemed rather terrible that one could get nothing done and that I did not blame you in the least for feeling there was no interest in this very serious question. I asked him if there were any possibility of getting even one step taken, and he said the difficulty is that it is unconstitutional apparently for the Federal Government to step in in the lynching situation. The Government has only been allowed to do anything about kidnapping because of its interstate aspect, and even that has not as yet been appealed so they are not sure that it will be declared constitutional.

The President feels that lynching is a question of education in the states, rallying good citizens, and creating public opinion so that the localities themselves will wipe it out. However, if it were done by a Northerner, it will have an antagonistic effect. I will talk to him again about the Van Nuys resolution and will try to talk also to Senator Byrnes and get his point of view. I am deeply troubled about the whole situation as it seems to be a terrible thing to stand by and let it continue and feel that one cannot speak out as to his feeling. I think your next step would be to talk to the more prominent members of the Senate.

Very sincerely yours,

Eleanor Roosevelt

Library of Congress

http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/civilrightsera/ExhibitObjects/DaisyBatesLittleRockNine.aspx

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Library of Congress