

2011-2012 Lesson Plan for Henrico 21 Awards

Lesson Title: Is Civil Disobedience Justified?

Submitted By: John Marshall & Tim Towslee

School: Glen Allen High School

Target Grade/Subject: 11th grade AP U.S. History and AP Language and Composition students

Length: 135 minutes

Summary:

Students in two classrooms (History and English) chose opposing sides of a debate that would answer the question: "Was Henry David Thoreau justified in his refusal to pay his poll tax in protest of Antebellum American policies?" Both classes learned prior knowledge of the time period and historical events that Thoreau was questioning and read his *Civil Disobedience* in class. Students formed small groups to prepare an opening statement and probing questions to be used in an electronic debate with a small group from the other class using Skype, and online SchoolSpace chatrooms. Judges were selected to monitor the debate and report a "score" using a Google Doc.

Students completed research in their groups and prepared opening arguments and questions. Only one student from each class, however, would be able to deliver the opening address to the other classroom using a webcam, Skype, and the PrometheanBoard. Students had to select their best speaker and combine their arguments before the debate began. After these opening statements, students continued the debate in online chatrooms with judges keeping score and reporting out to both classes (via Skype) periodically. The instructors added a "secret document" during the debate to force students to quickly analyze and include in their arguments. Finally, closing statements were delivered in the chat and the judges gave their final decisions via webcam, prompting celebration of the winning sides of each mini-debate. Instructors assessed the performance of each student by reading the online chat logs and each group's opening argument.

Essential questions:

How does one analyze a primary source?

How does one use a primary source in the construction of an argument?

What were the controversial policies of the American Government in the 1840's and 1850's?

How did differing groups in America view Slavery, Abolitionism, Manifest Destiny and Imperialism during the Antebellum Period?

What was Henry David Thoreau protesting in his work *Civil Disobedience*?

How effective is the use of non-violence as a protest strategy?

Is it ever acceptable to break the law to make a point?

Lesson Development:

Process/Tasks/Assessment:

AP US History students in Mr. Marshall's class and AP English Language and Composition students in Mr. Towslee's class, who were learning about the authors of the American Renaissance, formed groups of three with the goal of answer the following question in a debate against a group from the other class: "Was Henry David Thoreau justified in his refusal to pay his poll tax in protest of Antebellum American policies?" Students in Mr. Towslee's class chose to defend Thoreau, so the American history students began researching for evidence that would defend a thesis that the author was not justified. Both instructors informed their students of the structure of the debate and students began using dependable online sources and source documents that were provided by the teachers and shared electronically to form their argument, in the form of a written paper to be delivered orally, as well as probing questions that would be used to cross-examine their opposing groups. Each group also included a judge, who helped both sides in the research phase but would be neutral "score-keepers" during the debate, tracking which side was more convincing. Students were provided with 30-45 minutes of class-time and instructed to complete their arguments at home. Several students met physically outside of class, some communicated via email or the phone, or through a google-doc to compose their opening statement and questions.

On the day of the debate, the instructors communicated that each class would only deliver one opening statement to the other class, via skype and the Promethean board. The class had 20 minutes to decide who was giving the debate and combine their different papers into one argument to use against the other class. Two strategies developed, with Mr. Towslee's class choosing one strong student to deliver his argument and Mr. Marshall's class attempting to combine the best of several papers by putting their ideas up on the Promethean board. A student from each class delivered the opening argument while the other class took notes to use in the cross-examination.

After each statement, students logged into an online chatroom in SchoolSpace that the instructors created beforehand for each group. Students continued the debate in the form of questions and answers within their chatroom while both the instructors and the judges looked on. All students were expected to contribute to the discussion. The judges, also logged into the chat, kept "score" with a google doc that was visible by the instructors. Periodically, the judges were asked to report out to the group their score and why they are favoring one side. After 10 minutes of online debate in small groups, Instructors added to the debate by "revealing" a secret document that either side could use to bolster their argument. Students were given 10 minutes to read and analyze the document and then add it into their chatroom debate. After a closing argument from each side, judges reported out, via skype, to both classes which groups won each mini-debate.

After the debate and debrief by the judges, students turned in their group's opening argument which was graded according to AP History Document Based Question Rubric in Mr. Marshall's class and a similar AP-style rubric in Mr. Towslee's English class. Both teachers also printed out a copy of the chatroom debate log (attached) which shows the degree to which students were able to defend their argument and attack an opponent's thesis in a logical and articulate manner.

TIP Chart Assessment:

Research and Information Fluency:

Ideal/Target: The Teachers both facilitated the research and designed the debate to force students to synthesize the primary sources provided along with outside research. Students were assessed based on the strength of that research. Students were free to choose the best tool for finding additional sources. The task, a debate related to the merits of non-violent protesting, is both authentic and currently relevant.

Communication and Collaboration:

Ideal/Target: Teachers made possible meaningful communication regardless of physical setting through the use of electronic resources to deliver this debate. While the debate took place between two classes in the same building, it could have been between groups much farther apart. Students also collaborated within their teams to form their arguments, through the use of email, google docs, or teleconferencing, without urging from their instructors. Students engaged in reflection when the class formed their one opening argument; each group had to decide if their argument or key points should be included in the debate. Some felt theirs was very strong, others did not. During the debate the judges reflected by providing instant feedback. The teacher were able to formatively assess both the group performance (based on the judges scores and the opening statement) and the role of the individual (using the chat-room log to see how much each person contributed).

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:

Ideal/Target: The debate was designed to have students engage in critical thinking as they analyze and interpret primary sources and solve the problem of how to include them in their arguments. Students had to address which aspect of the debate questions to focus on, thus creating their own purposeful questions. (example: should we attack this motives for protest or his methods as being ineffective?) The introduction of the “secret document” during the debate forced the group to engage in time-sensitive critical thinking. Students were constantly reflecting on their argument through the role of the judge. If the judge gave a point to a member of the opposing team, students had to instantly analyze their argument and attack it from a new angle.

Creativity and Innovation:

Approaching: Students are creating meaningful arguments in the form of their opening statements through analysis of primary sources to create an original argument. They were called upon to use argumentative language and to be prepared to deliver a convincing speech.