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Inspire, Reach, and Teach Through Biography

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Introduction

What do I mean by inspire, reach and teach through biography? By introducing young people to worthy lives we may, in the words of Plutarch, the 1st-century biographer of notable Greeks and Romans, "arouse the spirit of emulation." The idea is not, of course, to expose students to individuals whose achievements seem daunting and unreachable, but to illustrate, vividly and concretely, the choices that we are all presented with—in matters both large and small—in the course of our daily lives. Plutarch explained that his design was "not to write histories, but lives." ¹

Reasons for Using Biography

I believe I can use biography as a tool to make reading, writing, and history more fascinating. In an article for the Indiana Historical Society Jane Hadeen states,

By showing how factors such as gender, race, education, etc. effect a person's perception, biographies can bring history to life and help students to see history makers as human. Teaching history with biographies can also help students see how they fit into the historical narrative. ²

In my lessons about the American Revolution, I plan to use biographies to explore great examples of how African Americans have made important contributions to our nation's history. Biography will help me bring different perspectives from the past and to show that people and issues of history are multi-dimensional. Moreover, in my experience, when students find something in common with someone who made history, the events of history will become much more interesting to them.

Rationale/Objectives

Why is history so boring? It's not; the way it's traditionally been taught is boring. Didn't you hate history class when you were in school, memorizing all those meaningless dates and names and places? Social studies instruction should challenge students to think about the events that have made our world the way it is: the

lessons should be so engaging and interactive that no child could ever find it boring. ³

The school where I teach is in 3rd year 'program improvement' ⁴ and we are mandated to use a structured reading curriculum provided by Houghton Mifflin. The Houghton Mifflin Language Arts Reading Program is designed to be used as a full-year core curriculum with instruction on developing oral language and comprehension, phonemic awareness, decoding skills, fluency, reading comprehension, writing, spelling, and grammar. This instructional program is also organized by a set of themes that integrates social studies and science. Unfortunately, our fiscally strapped district cannot afford all the components of this curriculum to actually make an effective integrated reading/social studies program, so teachers, like me, need to expand upon themes presented within the reading in order to create a comprehensive and engaging learning experience for all students.

As a National Fellow at YNI, I am creating a unit that will elaborate on 5th grade themes in social studies such as the American Revolution by using biography as a means. In the seminar, Art of Biography, I have learned that there are several types of biography; popular, historical, children's, literary, reference, fictional, and graphic, all of which I plan to try at some point. Others, such as historical and fictional, I plan to use this year. My research explores the American Revolution from the perspective of the African American patriot and illuminates significant contributions by African Americans to the war effort. The challenges I foresee will be time management, planning, and full integration with the Houghton Mifflin curriculum. My barometer of success will be gauged by my students' motivation and engagement, participation, and the ability to utilize graphic organizers to support the writing of and production of a comprehensive multi-paragraph book report and, eventually, a Power Point presentation about their biographical subject.

Why use biography? Using biography in the classroom is both academically compelling and a challenging way to encounter new worlds. Biography and autobiography provide initial entry to the study of periods of time and of places with which there may be little familiarity. In other words, it's a great starting point for building background knowledge on a particular topic, i.e., the American Revolution. Students also like them because they are more readable, less like work, and more pleasurable to learn history from than by textbooks alone. Biographies bring life to history. They make these people, patriots, colonials, loyalists, slaves, or their masters, more accessible and knowable.

I have worked with a diverse body of students in an urban elementary school throughout my twelve year career, and I have observed through behavior and attitude an unquestionable disconnect on the part of my students from the homogenized textbook version of history, typically written from the perspective of the conquerors over the conquered. However, I have also observed my students' fading interest in reading come back to life with the use of historical novels, ability level biographical picture books, and especially books that positively portrayed individuals of color, similar to the students in my classroom.

Last year a visiting professor from San Francisco State University offered to teach a history lesson to my students about the American Revolution. It was a generous offer indeed, a welcomed respite from the loneliness of a self-contained classroom. On the day she returned to my classroom to teach her lesson, she brought armfuls and bags full of varied leveled, 3rd through 6th grade, picture books and biographies about the American Revolution, many of which included African Americans patriots. I witnessed a palpable shift in enthusiasm. My students were awakened from their textbook comas; they couldn't wait to get their hands on one of her books. They were so happy, even my reluctant readers! I asked one student, "Why did you choose that book?" He answered, "I like the pictures", then interjected, "hey, this soldier looks like my uncle!" Clearly the books were 'cool' because they were newer, bigger, and more vivid, but moreover, they connected to

them because these books included a wider and more diverse cast of characters.

Students are more interested in reading books in which, at least in part, reflect more of who they are. It's obvious when you think about it, but can be less so when you, as the teacher, are the "majority" minority in your own classroom. Good pedagogical practices emphasize the use of multi-cultural materials and lessons that are mindful of the populations in our classrooms. I'm choosing to do just that and by writing this unit I am including the seldom taught contributions of freed and non-freed African Americans during the time of the American Revolution. ⁵

The books I have chosen will allow students to read about and discover new faces connected to the American Revolution. In addition, I want to introduce reading and research opportunities that will examine the biographies of African Americans involved in the American Revolution that go beyond the shackles of slavery. I hope to embed recognition and cultural pride into an era of U.S. history through the use of biography. In addition, I want to examine these stories and pick out ideas and misconceptions that students may have. The purpose for this unit is to enhance and engage students with the theory that when they can see themselves reflected in their learning, students are more interested and simply put, learn better. In Ussery's research she points out the benefits of positive portrayal of African Americans in literature.

Children learn about their world through books used in the classroom. The positive portrayal of African Americans in children's books is essential because picture books introduce some children to African American culture, and all children need to see characters like themselves in books. ⁶

Lastly, to accomplish my goal of inspiring, reaching, and teaching, this unit will also include ideas shared from my seminar, Art of Biography, as well as books and research discovered through the YNI Institute. The lessons/activities will be within the guidelines of California's Common Core Standards of reading, writing, research, speaking and listening, presentation, and history and will serve to embellish the required Houghton Mifflin curriculum we use in our district.

Demographics

The Bayshore School District, where I teach 5th grade, is a very small two school public school district, K-8, just outside of San Francisco. The Bayshore community is very small but rich in history, cultural diversity, and sense of pride. It began as Bayshore City in 1932, but the community voted to be annexed to Daly City in 1963. Because it is such a small district, Bayshore students generally stay with their classmates and peers for a nine-year period. In fact, many students are 2nd generation students and some teachers have taught both the students and their parents. ⁷

The Bayshore School District is also considered a "low-performing" district and Title 1, as 78% of our population qualifies for the Free or Reduced-Priced Lunch Program. Garnet J. Robertson Intermediate, where I teach, is in its' 3rd year of "Program Improvement" and has a statewide rank of 4 out of 10. ⁸ With a little more than 300 students, 40% of our district's populations are English language learners and eleven percent of the whole student body is identified as learning disabled. We have an ethnic/racial mix of 32% Filipino, 28% Hispanic or Latino, 20% Asian, 9% African American, 6% Pacific Islander and 3% White. ⁹

Lastly, our district has about twenty teachers and the school settings are intimate and the teachers know each other. The racial make-up of teachers is predominately white or European decent, 80%, and then 1% Asian, 1% Hispanic or Latino and of these teachers, 15% are male.

Background/Content

American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it. ¹⁰

When the Revolution started, the American colonies had a population of about two and a half million people, one fifth of whom were black, mostly slaves. The courage and bravery demonstrated by African Americans during the Revolution influenced legal decisions in the northern states to abolish slavery, leading to freedom for about 60,000 slaves. Yet for the most part, acts of heroism and the contributions of African Americans during the Revolution either went unrecorded or was not widely publicized. ¹¹

In 1776 Congress allowed the recruitment of free blacks and within a year shortages of soldiers encouraged the Patriots to accept blacks in large numbers into the military. The majority of black Patriot troops came from Northern states. But even states such as South Carolina and Georgia that prohibited the enlistment of blacks, used them as auxiliaries. Possibly 5,000 of the 30,000 Patriot troops were black. General Washington accommodated, if not exactly encouraged, the recruitment of free blacks when, on Jan. 12th 1777, he instructed that recruiter enlist none but freemen. He conspicuously failed to mention race. Connecticut passed an act that allowed for the exemption of any two men who could provide a substitute, no matter his color. They also soon passed a second act that allowed masters to provide their slaves as substitutes, as long as the slave was granted his freedom. Rhode Island was the first state to pass a slave enlistment act, and in 1778 the First Rhode Island Regiment was formed and over the next five years 250 former slaves and freeman served within its ranks. They were the only all-black American unit at the siege at Yorktown, (See: *The Yorktown Chronicles*; <http://historyisfun.org/yorktown-chronicles/films/siege-of-yorktown.htm>), and formed an important part of Major General Benjamin Lincoln's division. ¹²

Many African Americans also served on warships or on private vessels. The Continental Navy, unlike the army, recruited blacks, both free and enslaved, from the beginning of the Revolutionary war. This was partly due to their need for sailors of any race, but also that many African Americans were experienced, having worked on merchant ships or by serving in the British and state navies. As many as a quarter of the slaves who escaped to the British ended up on ships. African Americans on both sides served as pilots, carpenters, laborers, and also often performed a range of menial duties. ¹³

It was with these menial labors that most African Americans involved in the war were employed. Patriots were uneasy with the notion of arming slaves, and even the British often used African Americans as a means of liberating other white soldiers for combat. In actuality, the majority of African Americans who participated in the Revolution helped behind the lines instead of fighting. When blacks were incorporated into the British army, the loyalists often maintained a racialized structure and made limited use of the troops in combat. Several hundred of Cornwallis's black troops served as body servants or were employed in other servile capacities. At Petersburg, Cornwallis issued regulations that allowed each field officer to keep two black

servants and other officers were allowed to keep one. Soldiers also disobeyed orders and had black servants. Blacks were thought to have a better tolerance for heat and were often assigned the heavy labor when the weather was considered too disagreeable for the white troops. ¹⁴

There were also many complaints that the British army in particular did not provide adequate food, clothing, or medicine for their slave and free black populations. The death rate from disease was conspicuously higher among black troops than white. Overcrowding just intensified the problem. Smallpox ravaged the troops and hundreds and maybe thousands of blacks died from the disease. Patriots commented that the British would turn out the sick black soldiers so that they had to fend for themselves or hope to find help among the patriots, which was usually lacking. African Americans saw hope in the armies for their independence, but they weren't completely blind to the realities of service. ¹⁵

When I was a student, history books were chock-full with heroic stories of Washington, Revere, and Adams, but never of people of color. Textbooks have gotten better since I was a student; however they still lack the authentic content I believe my students sorely want and need. So now I ask: "What about Freeman, Lafayette, and Salem?"

While researching this unit, I found books that celebrate the lesser known but significant lives and contributions of African Americans in our nation's early history. I want to share that with my students. Many now know about the Revolutionary War's first martyr, Crispus Attucks, a dockworker of African descent, was killed at the Boston Massacre, but far fewer know about Jordan Freeman at the Battle of Groton Heights, Connecticut, September 6, 1781. Freeman, fighting alongside his former master, Colonel William Ledyard, threw a spear that killed British Major William Montgomery. ¹⁶



Plaque dedicated to Jordan Freeman At the Battle of Groton Heights Fort Griswold, Connecticut, September 6, 1781 ¹⁷

In this unit, students will read the books *Jordan Freeman Was My Friend* by Richard White, *Black Heroes of the American Revolution* by Burke Davis, and *Almost Invisible: Black Patriots of the American Revolution* by Kate

Salley Palmer. These books will serve to introduce students to African American participants and heroes of the American Revolution. They are level appropriate for 5th graders, are contextually interesting, and include supporting images and illustrations that will enable students of varied reading abilities to glean both information and enjoyment.

In the historical novel, published in 1994, *Jordan Freeman Was My Friend* by Richard White we learn about the massacre at Groton, Conn., in 1781, when Benedict Arnold's troops decimated the Revolutionary militia. Most of the characters are based on real people, and the language and background details are rendered with spare authenticity. The tale is narrated by a twelve-year-old Billy Latham. Billy first describes his hardworking but happy boyhood and his friendship with freed slave Jordan Freeman, who comes into Billy's life when he saves the boy from a marauding bull. Freeman is a hired man to Colonel William Ledyard, who commands the troops who are building Fort Griswold. Billy becomes a water boy at the fort; as a witness to the massacre, he sees the men, including Jordan and his Indian friend Tom Wansuc, fight bravely, with tragic outcomes for most. The language is deliberately simple and the morals spelled out plainly: bigotry is evil; loyalty to family, friends and country is the highest virtue. ¹⁸

I chose *Almost Invisible: Black Patriots of the American Revolution* by Kate Salley Palmer, published in 2008, because it is a well-researched book with exciting scenes of valor in battle and is a reminder that even the most 'invisible' person can be a hero. It has lively illustrations and narrative that illuminates the contributions of the African American patriots who fought in George Washington's Continental Army and also highlights the service of more than two dozen black patriots, including Tobias Gilmore, an African prince who regained his freedom by joining the Army and later became one of Washington's bodyguards. Like William Cooper Nell, Palmer ends this book with a quote from Harriet Beecher Stowe, who said black patriots exhibited bravery 'of a peculiar beauty and merit' because they fought for a nation which did not acknowledge them as citizens and equals.' ¹⁹

In a very readable style and ideal for 5th grade, published in 1976, Davis's *Black Heroes of the American Revolution* relates the stories of a few of the approximately 5,000 black soldiers who participated in the Revolution, emphasizing their unselfishness fighting a war from which few would substantially benefit. Readers will discover Edward Hector, the brave wagoner of Brandywine; artilleryman and slave Austin Dabney; William Lee, the aide and closest companion of George Washington throughout the war; and many others that will be mentioned within this unit. ²⁰

I also chose these books to reference and read aloud in class; *America's Black Founders, Revolutionary Heroes & Early Leaders with 21 Activities* by Nancy I. Sanders, *African Americans in the Revolutionary War* by Michael Lee Lanning, and *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* by William Cooper Nell, all of which will further highlight the African American experience during the time of the American Revolution.

America's Black Founders, Revolutionary Heroes & Early Leaders with 21 Activities by Nancy Sanders, published in 2008, celebrates the lesser known but significant lives and contributions of our nation's early African American leaders. Many know that the Revolutionary War's first martyr, Crispus Attucks, a dockworker of African descent, was killed at the Boston Massacre. But far fewer know that the final conflict of the war, the Battle of Yorktown, was hastened to a conclusion by James Armistead Lafayette, a slave and spy who reported the battle plans of General Cornwallis to George Washington. Sanders weaves the histories of dozens of men and women, soldiers, sailors, ministers, poets, merchants, doctors, and other community leaders, who have earned proper recognition among the founders of the United States of America. To get a better sense of what these individuals accomplished and the times in which they lived, readers will celebrate Constitution Day,

cook colonial foods, publish a newspaper, petition their government, and more. This valuable resource also includes a time line of significant events, a list of historic sites to visit or explore online, and Web resources for further study. ²¹

In *African Americans in the Revolutionary War*, Citadel Press, 2005, military historian Michael Lee Lanning reveals the little-known, critical, and heroic role African Americans played in the American Revolution, serving in integrated units; a situation that wouldn't exist again until the Korean War, more than 150 years later. In the words of the author, "The daily life of black soldiers, sailors, and marines in the Revolution differed little from that of their white comrades. Though prejudice and discrimination did not evaporate with the first shots at Lexington, black servicemen in the Revolution certainly experienced a marked increase in equality throughout the war. Ultimately, as in every armed conflict, soldiers in trenches and sailors and marines in the forecandle judged men by their performance rather than by the color of their skin as they fought for their country's liberty, their unit's pride, and their mutual survival." ²²

In *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*, Nell has documented the African American heroes and patriots who fought during the Revolutionary War, many of which, who have been forgotten by historians and writers. He identifies many black soldiers; Henry Hill, a veteran of numerous battles, including Lexington, Princeton, and Yorktown; Peter Salem, Titus Coburn, Alexander Ames, Barzilai Lew, Cato Howe, Seymour Burr, Jeremy Jonah and numerous others. In addition to identifying and discussing many of these individuals and the events in which they participated, he often narrates subsequent historical events and or issues in which they were the subject. His work is impressive not only for its wide-ranging scope but for its rich and thorough documentation. Information was obtained from such repositories as the Massachusetts state house archives, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Suffolk County Probate Records Office, inscriptions from graveyards in Middletown, Connecticut, North Attleboro and Concord, Massachusetts, as well as the Massachusetts State House, Federal Records, Newspapers throughout the United States, and many other publications. In addition to these sources, he also relied upon the memories, accounts, and writings of individuals, as well as other institutional records. This book is also organized by state, which is especially helpful in 5th grade, and will provide narrative for map making of the thirteen colonies. ²³ In honor of his amazing book first published in 1855, in certain copies, but not all, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the following introduction:

THE colored race has been generally considered by their enemies, and sometimes even by their friends, as deficient in energy and courage. Their virtues have been supposed to be principally negative ones. This little collection of interesting incidents, made by a colored man, will redeem the character of the race from this misconception, and show how much injustice there may often be in a generally admitted idea.

In considering the services of the Colored Patriots of the Revolution, we are to reflect upon them as far more magnanimous, because rendered to a nation which did not acknowledge them as citizens and equals, and in whose interests and prosperity they had less at stake. It was not for their own land they fought, not even for a land which had adopted them, but for a land which had enslaved them, and whose laws, even in freedom, oftener oppressed than protected. Bravery, under such circumstances, has a peculiar beauty and merit. ²⁴

In addition to these books, I also plan to use historical fiction novels /fictional biographies from the Scholastic series, *Dear America*, from a girl's point of view, and *My Name is America*, from a boy's perspective, to enrich my Social Studies thematic units on colonial life and the Revolutionary War. I chose books from both of these

series because they are very "kid" friendly to read. They are written in first person narratives, in the style of journaling, from a child's point of view ranging from the sixteenth century up until the 1960's. For the purpose of my unit, I whittled the list down to just those that center on colonial life and the American Revolution. I will use them for literacy circles and SSR, (silent sustained reading). Students genuinely enjoy these books because they include very realistic and real photos and illustrations of the time throughout which I find helps students stay engaged. ²⁵

Strategies

Integrating language arts with all subjects is essential to my students' success, including history/social studies. This is especially true for struggling learners who are reading and writing below grade level. Integrating literacy and social studies will help students see the natural connections between and across subject matters presented in their school curriculum. Moreover, by using biography as a learning vehicle, students will use skills such as interpreting non-fiction informational text, the writing process of prewriting, drafting, and revising, as well as using research to build and present what they have learned from their person of interest.

Graphic organizers may look like simple, but they actually help improve students' comprehension and encourage them to think critically as they begin to understand how different topics connect to each other as a whole piece. They also help organize thoughts and information. Another reason I use graphic organizers is to scaffold the writing process. It is a supportive instrument that breaks topics for paragraphs into manageable chunks and as well is a tool for brainstorming ideas around a theme.

Lessons: Language Arts, Social Studies, Grade 5

My unit focuses on teaching my students about African American patriots of the American Revolution through biography, but I also want to begin with a simple yet effective activity to launch biography. The first activity, Bio-Poem, is an autobiographical poem that I will teach in the first weeks of school that will also serve as an 'ice-breaker' and introduction for students and me. This bio-poem uses a graphic organizer that guides and supports. In subsequent lessons, I will use the same format to begin historical biographies about important African American figures of the American Revolution.

Lesson 1: My Bio-poem: A Lesson of Self-Discovery and Peer Introduction

Bio-Poems can be used at the beginning of school as an opening activity for the first week of school. They can also be used anytime throughout the year when introductions are necessary. In this lesson students will use the writing process as well as computer word processing skills. This activity ensures success and builds self-esteem.

Learning outcomes

Students will use the writing process to think and write creatively to introduce themselves to each other as well as to visitors.

Materials/Resources (double click icon)

- Bio-Poem graphic organizer ²⁶
- Glue/Construction paper/Tape
- Paper/Pen/Pencil

Technology Resources

- Computers
- Digital camera (optional) or regular camera
- Overhead or multimedia projector

Anticipatory Set/Pre-activities

Teacher will share an original Bio-Poem on self by way of using a transparency on the overhead, and will inform students that people reading the completed versions of the Bio-Poems will learn some interesting facts about the authors. Completed items will be displayed.

Procedures

1. Pass out attached "handout" for Bio-Poems. Explain that the Bio-Poems will be used to introduce themselves to each other and to visitors to the hall (or room).
2. Go over the ten lines that form the poem. Brainstorm ideas together. Model how the poem should be written by using a transparency on the overhead projector to display a completed Bio-Poem on self. Discuss fully what type of items should be included per line.
3. In the computer lab, have students begin the writing process. Circulate to make sure students are on the right track. Allow students to choose the font type and size. (This makes final products look great.)
4. Have students work together in pairs to proof, edit, etc. Finished copies are not needed at this point.
5. Prior to going or while in the lab, have students use a digital camera to snap pictures of each other. The photographs will be displayed along with the Bio-Poems. After typing the Bio-Poem, each student will add his/her own picture to place on the sheet with the poem.
6. Print final copies of the poems—in color, if possible.
7. Have a sharing session, wherein each student reads his/her poem to class. Laminate completed Bio-Poems and display in the hallway or classroom for all to read and enjoy as they visit.

Assessment

Displayed Bio-Poems will be evidence of desired outcome.

If desired, teacher can devise a rubric to check off each phase of this writing project, sample lesson/rubric. ²⁷

Lesson 2: "Historical Bio-Poetry" A Lesson of Historical Discovery

Learning outcomes

Students will demonstrate the ability to write clear and grammatically correct sentences, paragraphs, and compositions. Students will take knowledge gained from one genre to apply it to another genre. All students will describe the attributes/contributions of individuals of the American Revolution in poetry form. Students will use the information they gathered about their historical "hero" to write a bio-poem.

Materials/Resources (double click icon)

- Bio-Poem graphic organizer
- Paper/Pencils
- Books: *Almost Invisible: Black Patriots of the American Revolution* by Kate Salley Palmer and *Black Heroes of the American Revolution* by Burke Davis

Technology Resources

- Computers
- Scanner/printer
- Overhead or multimedia projector

Anticipatory Set

I will begin saying, "Last time we used the bio-poem format, you used it to talk about yourself and shared it with classmates and today we will expand upon that knowledge and use the new information you gathered from your reading to write bio-poems about your historical person." (Hand back poems from the beginning of the year to remind them)

I will then pass of the handout on historical bio-poems.

I will explain that the students have to follow the format for a bio-poem by including information about their figure to fill in the blanks. For example, they will put their historical figure's name for the title and go from there.

I will go step by step through each of the lines in the poem.

I will then give the students an opportunity for guided practice.

Procedures

1. Students will use the information they previously gathered to write a bio-poem about their influential figure.
2. Students must follow the bio-poem format.
3. Students will be given two class periods to write their bio-poem.

4. In the computer lab, have students begin the writing process. Circulate to make sure students are on the right track. Allow students to choose the font type and size. (This makes final products look great.)
5. Have students work together in pairs to proof, edit, etc. Finished copies are not needed at this point.
6. After typing the Bio-Poem, each student will include picture to place on the sheet with the poem.
7. Print final copies of the poems—in color, if possible.
8. Have a sharing session, wherein each student reads his/her poem to class. Laminate completed Bio-Poems and display in the hallway or classroom for all to read and enjoy as they visit.

Assessment

The teacher will assess students' understanding of the lesson through observations made during the class period. The teacher will walk around reading over students work and observing the students understanding of the writing activity. The teacher will also assess the students from their finished project.

Lesson 3: Real Lives - Real History ²⁸ , Historical Figures of the American Revolution

This lesson is designed to provide knowledge Revolution is and understanding about prominent people in European History, how and why their lives shaped the times, and how history was reflected their own lives. This biography-based unit will explore the lives of great figures in the past as well as their role in the American Revolution. Students will use three different graphic organizers; Biography Report, Mock Interview, and Bio-Cube, (all attached), to collect information on their subject. They will also be given time in the computer lab to research their subjects/figures, including pictures/portraits. The final project will be to culminate all their found information, working in pairs, and put into power point presentation to present to the whole class. (The Power Point will be accomplished at a later time from these activities)

Learning outcomes

With support of graphic organizers, students will produce clear and coherent writing (including multiple paragraph texts) in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. With guidance and support from peers and adults, students develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. Students will also conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic. Lastly, students will report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; students will speak clearly at an understandable pace.

Lesson Objectives

To develop a better understanding of American History during the time of the American Revolution, 1770's to the 1780's by studying the lives of the lesser known, but none-the-less significant players of the time. Students will examine the lives of an African American figures and correlate events in their lives with the history of the time and how history shaped their course or how their actions shaped history.

Materials/Resources (double click icons)

- List of Names
- Biography graphic organizer
- Paper/Pen/Pencil
- Book: *America's Black Founder's, Revolutionary Heroes & Early Leaders*
- Tag board

Technology Resources

- Computers/Internet/printer
- Overhead or multimedia projector

Procedures

1. Students read Palmer's *Almost Invisible: Black Patriots of the American Revolution* and Davis' *Black Heroes of the American Revolution*
2. I will read excerpts from Lanning's *African Americans in the Revolutionary War* and Nell's *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*, and *America's Black Founder's, Revolutionary Heroes & Early Leaders* and have available for reference
3. Students will choose a historical figure from the list
4. Students will go into the computer lab to research subjects
5. Students will use the biography graphic organizer to pre-write
6. Students will pick a partner and will conduct mock interviews with each other as if they were the historical figure
7. Students then write a biographical report on their historical figure
8. Students will type final drafts in the computer lab and include any pics/portraits

Lesson 3a: Mock Interview

Students will formulate and record questions and suggested answers to gain knowledge of their historical person as if they were going to have the opportunity to interview him/her. Speaking and listening standard: Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others.

Materials/Resources (double click icon)

- Paper/Pen/Pencil
- Mock interview questions

Procedures

1. In groups of two the students will take their chosen biographee and research this historical figure.
2. One student will play the role as the interviewer and the other as the historical figure.
3. They will practice the interview and finally perform the interview with the whole class as an audience.
4. The student audience will be given time to ask questions at the end.

Assessment

The teacher will monitor peer interaction to make sure interviewer and interviewee are on task and are being productive. The teacher will walk around reading over students work and observing the students understanding of the writing activity. The teacher will also assess the students from their finished project.

Lesson 3b: Biography Cubes

Students make a cube from a paper pattern. Each side of the cube has a picture, fact, and information about the biographee. In the center of the cube each student can place a little clue about the person. Students in the class can try to guess who the cube represents by reading the clues on the different sides of the cube. This will be done using an electronic free version from "Read, Write, Think", a free online version: Bio-Cube.

1. Research, read and complete the biography graphic organizer and mock interviews, before making the cube.
2. Teacher will demonstrate how to make a cube via LCD projector, print, and show how to fold.
3. In the computer lab, have students go to website and fill in their info on the bio-cube. Circulate to make sure students are on the right track.
4. Have students work together in pairs to proof, edit, etc.
5. Prepare your printer for card stock, or save on file to print on the staff copier.
6. Print final copies of the cubes.
7. Have a sharing session, wherein each student reads his/her cube to table groups and in class.
8. Stick cubes on desk for reference.
9. Prior to going or while in the lab, have students use a digital camera to snap pictures of each other. The photographs will be displayed along with the Bio-Poems. After typing the Bio-Poem, each student will add his/her own picture to place on the sheet with the poem.

Assessment

The teacher will assess student understanding of the lesson through observations made during the class period. The teacher will walk around reading over students work and observing the students understanding of

the writing activity. The teacher will also assess the students from their finished project.

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Appendices

California Common Core Standards for 5th Grade ²⁹

Reading Standards: Foundational Skills

4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
 - a. Read on-level text with purpose and understanding.
 - b. Read on-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.
 - c. Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

Reading Standards For Informational Text

1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
2. Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.
3. Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

Writing Standards K-5

4. Produce clear and coherent writing (including multiple paragraphs texts) in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5. With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

7. Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
8. Recall relevant information from experiences or gather

relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.

Speaking and Listening Standards/Comprehension and Collaboration

4. Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 5 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

5.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.

5.1b Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.

5.1c Pose and respond to specific questions by making comments that contribute to the discussion and elaborate on the remarks of others.

5.1d Review the key ideas expressed and draw conclusions in light of information and knowledge gained from the discussions.

5.2 Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

5.3 Summarize the points a speaker makes and explain how each claim is supported by reasons and evidence.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.

8. Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

9. Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, at the high end of the grades 4–5 text complexity band

independently and proficiently.

History-Social Science

5.5 Students explain the causes of the American Revolution.

1. Understand how political, religious, and economic ideas and interests brought about the Revolution.
- 5.6 Students understand the course and consequences of the American Revolution.
2. Describe the contributions of France and other nations and of individuals to the outcome of the Revolution.

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 - *Cannons at Dawn: The Second Diary of Abigail Jane Stewart, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 1779* by Kristiana Gregory (May 2011)
 - *Standing in the Light: The Diary of Catharine Carey Logan, Delaware Valley, Pennsylvania, 1763* by Mary Pope Osborne (May 2011)
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