

Dan Basom

Unit Critique

12-7-07

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TE 802

Lesson Outline-

Topic= Road to Revolution (1754-1776 American History), 8th grade American History

Day 1- View film, "Williamsburg- Story of a Patriot", students fill-in film notes, discussion points: Patrick Henry, effigy, Lexington and Concord, the idea of independence, create mini-packet of materials (a mini-pack is a small collection of crossword puzzles, matching worksheets, and word-searches that have to do with this topic)

Day 2- View film, "Cry Riot", film-notes, discussion topics: Sons of Liberty, Sam Adams, martyr, allow students to turn in any missing work (end of first marking period)

Day 3- Give time to read Johnny Tremain books in class, day shortened because of assembly

Day 4- "Founding Fathers" video (Part I), sheet to fill-in aspects of the founding fathers' personal and political lives, discussion topic: the founding fathers had flaws, stop movie periodically to fill-in important aspects of the founding fathers' lives and bring them to the students' attention

Day 5- Reading on Colonial Wars (read aloud in-class), sheet to supplement reading (stop periodically and make sure students are getting answers), discuss French and Indian War, show clips from "Last of the Mohicans"; specifically: British Red-coats, Mohawk hairstyle (discuss its current popularity also to tie into students' lives), fighting styles

Day 6- "Founding Fathers" video (Part II), use the same sheet from Day Four to continue to fill-in aspects of the founding fathers' personal and political lives, again talk to students about the fact that these men had flaws, allow time to work on mini-packs

Day 7- Half-day: watch feature film "National Treasure", talk to students about the places shown in "National Treasure" and discuss the importance of the Declaration of Independence (this film was viewed on closed circuit television--half-day activity for all of our classes watching in different classrooms)

Day 8- Reading: "The Steps to War", read aloud with class, lead students through answer sheet that corresponds with the reading, discussion: the idea of tyranny, Intolerable Acts, Minutemen, Lexington and Concord, "Shot Heard 'Round the World", give time for mini-packs

Day 9- Correct mini-packs, read skit: "Massacre in Boston", discuss Boston Massacre, go over the survey that students completed for my TE 801 class (7th hour only as this was the only class to receive the surveys)

Day 10- Review, pass out review sheet, allow students time to work on sheet, go over sheet

Day 11- Test, set-up for next unit

I chose to teach this particular unit for two specific and weighty reasons. First, the state of Michigan requires all eighth grade students to acquire accurate and meaningful knowledge surrounding the American Revolution and our country's founding fathers. It is my belief that the State of Michigan is most justified in this requirement, as much of our nations' cultural and philosophical values were nurtured and cultivated during this important time in history. Second, my mentor-teacher gave me this unit as one of my requirements during my intern teaching assignment. I was most pleased to have the opportunity to teach this unit to my students, as I feel that the "Road to the American Revolution" is an essential aspect of history for students to comprehend and appreciate. The leaders and the events of these significant years helped to shape the nation we have today. I feel that one of the main purposes of our American K-12 schools in today's society is to appropriately prepare our students for the future by giving them a strong foundation of knowledge concerning our unique American history and heritage.

I chose to teach this unit by using different teaching methods (worksheets, films, discussions, readings, skits). The use of different teaching methods allowed my students to gain knowledge in a variety of ways. By using these different genres of teaching methods, I am potentially able to address the needs of many different types of learners: auditory, visual, tactical, kinesthetic (sometimes I let them work around the room), etc. The use of a variety of activities and teaching modalities provides the teacher with different avenues in which he/she can customize their students' learning.

What I hoped to achieve in this unit was for students to gain a basic understanding of the events leading up to America declaring its independence from Great Britain. This was my main goal. Another goal is to help students infer information from readings, which they will be asked to

do on their MEAP tests and other standardized tests (not to mention college classes some day).

My final goal is to push students to do their best work and to give their best effort. The objectives I want students to attain are: the ability to recognize that the founders of our country were not perfect human beings, the ability to identify major events leading up to the United States declaring its independence, the ability to identify why the American colonists were upset with Great Britain, the ability to identify influential people of this era, and the ability to gain an understanding of what some of these places/events we are talking about look like.

Things that went well:

1. Students gained a good sense of what happened during this time in American history. Students were able to tie in the events we discussed with other events which preceded "Road to the Revolution". General comments that the students made in class and during our many discussion times signaled to me that the students had a good understanding of the events and the personalities during this pre-American Revolution time period. Judging from the class' test scores and the responses on tests, I feel that my students now understand the major events and the major influential figures of this era.
2. Students did a good job of inferring information based on the readings they did in class. I talked with the students prior to doing these exercises about how reading for information was an important skill to have for the MEAP test and for college classes. We read some of the readings aloud together as a class, and when I would check for understanding by asking students questions, most all of the students were able to pull information from the text as support for their answers.
3. Students were very inquisitive about what was going on during this time period. Students were asking follow-up questions about things we were talking about. In retrospect, I could

have taken more time to ask for these follow-up questions, as it wasn't just one or two students who were asking follow-up questions. In general, my students seemed more interested in the curriculum than usual.

Things that didn't go well:

1. The films that were showed in this unit did not consistently captivate the students' attention. One of the methods that I use in guiding the students' independent thinking during the films is to ask questions that require some in-depth thinking. Some classes were quite active in wanting to respond to these questions, whereas other classes did not care to participate in this activity. Some of the films that were shown had students totally captivated and eager to formulate questions; whereas in other films that were shown, I had to do quite a bit of classroom management in order to keep students on-task and engaged in the learning process.
2. Not enough time was given to students for sufficient discussion or to complete the lessons/to work on mini-packs. I would have liked to have given my students more time to work on assignments and also more time to discuss certain aspects of what we were doing. As I mentioned previously, many students were actively involved in formulating their own questions, and I would have liked to have had more time to address these questions. I suppose time is one of, if not the biggest, constraint within education.
3. Management of my newest class, gaining respect, and maintaining order were a major struggle within this unit. As a whole, the third class that I started lead-teaching for during this unit has a much more difficult time in the educational setting (both academically and behaviorally). This particular class, which is the last class of the day, is a very social class. I had trouble maintaining the students' attention (at times), and I have learned that

sometimes I need to allow this social group more time to speak their minds and to encourage more student participation than in the other classes which I teach. The classroom management of this newest class was an on-going struggle throughout this unit. Yet as the unit continued, I feel I consistently improved my teaching methods day by day. This was evident in the fact that this particular group of students started to do a better job both academically and behaviorally as the unit progressed.

What I learned from teaching this unit is that classes can be very different from one another. I have a class that is very social and needs more time to vocally express how they feel and display their knowledge of what is going on in the unit orally. I have another class that I need to ask more leading questions to encourage oral participation. Another thing I learned from this unit is that I will never have enough time to teach as much as I want in a unit. Therefore, I need to carefully choose both what to include and what to exclude from my units. I learned that if my students enjoy the curriculum they are learning, they seem to work harder and take more away from the unit (other than the answers they produce on their tests). In order to keep my students captivated, these decisions of what to include and what to exclude are important choices that must not be taken lightly.

A surprising aspect of this lesson was that the students were most inquisitive, and they posed questions that they had formulated on their own. The amount of questions that the students asked actually exceeded my expectations. Many students seemed genuinely interested in learning more about this time period instead of just asking questions in hopes of having to do less work in class. Putting myself back in 8th grade, I don't remember many students asking these sorts of questions or being as interested as my students were. This high level of student interest was a pleasant surprise.

The biggest unanticipated problem from this unit was the lack of time which made progressing through the curriculum most difficult. During this unit we were frequently interrupted with other activities/assemblies going on in the school that were outside of my control. Because of these outside factors, I could not cover as much material with my students as I would have liked. Some events that I would have liked to have discussed with greater depth had to be glossed over and given thin descriptions, as I simply didn't have adequate classroom time.

The way that I dealt with this problem of time was to decipher what things in this unit were the most important things for my students to learn. Once I deciphered which aspects of the unit were most important, I placed these at the forefront of the material to cover within the unit. Those parts of the unit that I didn't have time to go over in-depth, I had students do for homework so as to at least provide an introduction and a general understanding of things I could not fully cover within the class period. I'm aware that many students may have glossed over their homework or not done it altogether, yet I gave them the opportunity to be exposed to the material.

The detours I made from my original plans were to drop a lesson or two from the unit and focus on what was most important. Some things I will try to cover with the next unit, and other aspects I simply don't have the time to cover. Because of outside factors, I had to make the decision to either put things on hold or eliminate them altogether. The decision of what to teach and what to exclude is an important teaching skill and an important management tool. These detours made it impossible to cover everything that I wanted to in the unit, but I did the best I could to make these tough decisions.

Observations from students' work provided me with information about what the students understood well and the aspects of the unit that students were struggling with. Students

displayed great knowledge of the events and influential figures in colonial America. Both in oral discussion and written assessment the students displayed a strong understanding of these topics. Students struggled, however, with vocabulary within the unit. I gave the students a vocabulary sheet as the unit began, and we briefly went over some words on the sheet. Through observing oral discussions and checking written assessments, I noticed I had very few students who had mastered the definitions of these words. I suspect that because we spent such a large portion of time on influential figures and events and only briefly touched on vocabulary that the students focused on these aspects the most with their assignments and their test. This has made me understand that what I choose to focus on is likely to be the same thing the students focus on when interpreting what is most important to learn for the unit. Yet again, this is a powerful position for a teacher to have.

Nothing really surprised me in terms of what I heard from the students as far as questions that were asked and comments that were made. What did surprise me was the frequency of these questions and comments about the unit. Perhaps student participation and intrigue is a result of the students becoming more comfortable with myself as the teacher and more comfortable in the classroom with their peers, or perhaps it is because the students were generally more interested in this unit within our curriculum.

If I were to teach this unit again, I might structure differently how students watch the films. Since many students seemed inquisitive, I would have them write down questions before the film starts that they would like to know more about, and then have them write down questions that they formulate during the showing of the film. This would most likely help my students to have an opportunity to be more inquisitive and also provide them a better way of following along with the film. After the film, I could ask students what questions they had that were answered and which ones were left unanswered. One other thing I would do differently would

be to go over vocabulary more in-depth and have the students create sentences using the vocabulary words to provide evidence that they understood the meanings of these words.

I have already been formulating ideas for our next unit on how to better teach the vocabulary to my students. I want to correct errors I see in my teaching, so that I ensure my students are able to learn the things I feel are important for them to learn. Also, not only for this class but for any future classes, I want to make sure I give students an opportunity to formulate their own questions and to have the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding in a variety of ways.

It is important for me to remember that power the teacher holds over his/her classroom environment and how the materials are presented must be tempered with wisdom and knowledge.