

The Christmas Truce

By Nicole Maassen – Bartow Middle School

I. Lesson Summary

Summary

This lesson takes a humanistic approach to studying trench warfare during the first World War. Amidst the horrors of life in the trenches month after month, soldiers from both the German and British armies spontaneously hold a cease-fire on Christmas Eve night. It all starts when the British soldiers hear the Germans singing in their native language. Although the British soldiers cannot understand the words, they easily recognize the tune as being “Silent Night.” From their own lines, they begin to sing along with the Germans in English. It doesn’t take long before men from both sides are popping their heads up to peek at the opposing forces. Soon, a few brave souls carefully approach “No-man’s Land” to greet the enemy. The night is filled with games and sharing of chocolates and champagne. For a brief moment during the horrible war, the men find solace and fellowship. The next day, both sides resume their duties and once again pick up arms against one another.

Objectives

This lesson follows the following SSS Benchmarks...

SS.C.2.4.3 – Student will be able to understand issues of personal concern: the rights and responsibilities of the individual under the U.S. Constitution; the importance of civil liberties; the role of conflict resolution and compromise; and issues involving ethical behavior in politics.

SS.A.5.4.3 – Students will be able to understand significant events leading up to the United States involvement in World War I and the political, social, and economic results of that conflict in Europe and the United States.

U.S. History Event or Era

This event takes place during World War I.

Grade Level

This lesson is mainly geared toward middle school, but is easily adaptable for elementary or high school. If you are teaching high school, simply leave off the final day’s activity of creating children’s books (unless you think it would work for your students).

Materials Needed

- Preferred - “The Christmas Truce” History Channel DVD
- Optional - “Silent Night” DVD starring Linda Hamilton (Not Rated)
- “The Christmas Truce” DBQ
- “Christmas in the Trenches” by John McCutcheon (Children’s book)
- Colored or white computer paper and / or construction paper
- Markers, crayons, and / or colored pencils
- Single hole punchers
- Scissors
- Yarn

Lesson Time

Three 45-minute periods.

II. Lesson Procedures

Procedures

Day One:

- 1.) Show clips from the History Channel’s documentary on “The Christmas Truce.” (Clips may vary – choose what will work best for your class. Alternatives may be found online.)
- 2.) An optional alternative or addition is the movie, “Silent Night” starring Linda Hamilton. Showing the entire film will take additional days. The running time is 100 minutes.

Day Two:

- 1.) Hand out the DBQ (it has the same title as the lesson plan and is found on this website).
- 2.) Walk the students through the directions, essay question, and historical background.

- 3.) Students will individually look at each document and answer the questions that go with it. Encourage them not to spend too much time on the questions. The important thing is for them to have time to write their essays.
- 4.) Depending on the number of times your students have actually done DBQs, you may or may not need to spend extra time explaining the process. If some students don't quite finish, you can allow them extra time tomorrow, while students who finished their essays can begin tomorrow's activity when they get to class.

Day Three:

- 1.) Show students the children's book entitled, "Christmas in the Trenches," by John McCutcheon.
- 2.) Students will be creating their own children's book describing the events of the Christmas Truce.
- 3.) Students may either work individually or in groups/pairs at your discretion. Have them consider the age of their audience. This will incorporate many Language Arts standards.
- 4.) Have students select their paper and markers/crayons. Students should fold the paper in half (like a hamburger). Punch holes next to the center fold and tie the pages together with yarn. Cut off the excess yarn.
- 5.) Students will now write their stories and will decorate their pages with illustrations.
- 6.) Have students get creative in their ideas, using information from the last two days to help them. You can make it a contest and / or participation grade. You can have them present their work to the class and / or display their work around the room. Encourage them to have fun with it.

III. Activities

- Watch clips from History Channel's documentary entitled, "The Christmas Truce"
- Optional – watch "Silent Night" DVD, Not Rated
- DBQ: "The Christmas Truce"
- Students create their own children's books

IV. Assessment

The DBQ is this lesson's assessment. Any further assessment for this activity is optional. I personally would include a few questions on a unit test or quiz. You can also judge their essays or children's books as a class grade. It is up to your discretion.

V. Resources

- "The Christmas Truce" History Channel DVD
- Various resources from the coordinating DBQ
- "Christmas in the Trenches" by John McCutcheon