

The Newsies' Strike of 1899

By Nicole Maassen – Bartow Middle School

I. Lesson Summary

Summary

This lesson is designed to look at child labor in the late 1800's by taking a more detailed look at the newsboys, or "newsies", of New York City. Students will watch a documentary on the true story behind the Disney movie, "Newsies." They will then complete a Document Based Question and will write a persuasive essay on the subject. Afterward, they will design and create propaganda in the way of posters, flyers, etc. to convince other newsies in 1899 to join the strike against William Randolph Hurst's *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*.

Objectives

This lesson follows the following SSS Benchmarks...

- SS.A.1.3.3: Knows how to impose temporal structure
- SS.A.5.3.3: Knows the causes and consequences of urbanization
- LA.B.1.3.3: Produces final documents that have been edited

U.S. History Event or Era

This event takes place during the Progressive Era in American history, in which labor reform begins to take shape.

Grade Level

This lesson is mainly geared toward 8th graders.

Materials Needed

- "The Newsies" Disney DVD with Special Features
- Paper (any of the following: computer, colored computer, colored cardstock, construction)
- Pen / pencil
- Crayons / Markers
- Scissors
- Rulers
- Other craft items as desired

Lesson Time

Three 45-minute periods.

II. Lesson Procedures

Procedures

Day One:

- 1.) Select "Special Features" and "The Strike: The True Story" from the Disney DVD "Newsies." Students will watch the segment. If you have extra time and can get it approved, you may choose to add several extra days and show the movie itself first. The film is rated G, is based on a true story, and is a musical. If you choose not to show the film, the documentary on the true story is still interesting.
- 2.) After the clip is finished, hand out the DBQ (it has the same title as the lesson plan and is found on this website).
- 3.) Walk the students through the directions, essay question, and historical background. They will work through the documents and write their essays tomorrow.

Day Two:

- 4.) 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 to write the essay.
- 5.) 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:

- 6.) Students who have finished their essays should get the following materials: their choice of paper, pen/pencil, crayons/markers, scissors, rulers, etc.
- 7.) Students may either work individually or in groups/pairs at your discretion. Students should develop propaganda to be distributed to other newsies and child laborers, urging them to join the strike.
- 8.) 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

- Optional – watch Disney’s “Newsies” (great for FCAT week, light and fun to watch)
- Watch “Newsies” documentary – “The Strike: The True Story”
- DBQ: “Newsies’ Strike of 1899”
- Propaganda posters, flyers, etc.

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 propaganda creations as a test grade. It is up to your discretion.

V. Resources

- Disney’s “Newsies”
- Various New York Times Articles (clips provided in the DBQ)