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Focus Project

Improving Comprehension in my Social Studies Curriculum

My question for this focus project was, *“What does research have to say about effective methods of improving students’ content area reading comprehension during social studies lessons?”*

I chose this question because I really enjoy teaching history and I think the students like learning the material that is presented to them. However, I feel that even though the material that is presented in the textbook is appropriately presented and is interesting, I still would like to expand on what is presented. I think expanding the material will not only make the lessons more enjoyable but will also help the students comprehend the material on a deeper level.

I first began by asking the eighth grade students in my class what lessons they enjoyed learning about during our year in history class. The general consensus was the Civil War lessons were the most fun. A lot of the students mentioned the smaller lessons that they learned about that made up the unit. I decided to focus on these smaller lessons that made up our Civil War unit: The Emancipation Proclamation, The North vs. The South, and the 54th Massachusetts Infantry. It was interesting to see that the students wanted to learn more about these topics because I thought they were “breezed” over in our textbook and should have gone into more depth. It was good to see that the students wanted to learn more. After interviewing the students to see what lessons they would like to learn more about, I went to the MSU online library to find articles to help me answer my question. I decided to create three lessons to incorporate what I learned from this

class as well as other articles I found while doing research for this focus project.

The first lesson about the Emancipation Proclamation incorporates the article, “Web-Based History Learning Environments,” and “Where We Read from Matters.” The first article provides a link to the Virtual History Museum that teachers and others are able to use to help with making their history lessons more interactive. The second article also states how important online learning can be.

The second lesson is an inquiry circle that I found to be helpful after reading, “Inquiry Circles in Action.” The basis for the inquiry circle is to have students ask questions about the opinions of the North and the South during the Civil War. “We explicitly teach kids to merge their thinking with the information and to stop, think, and react as they read nonfiction.” This is my goal with lesson two; I want the students to think about why each side during the Civil War felt so strongly that they were right. Also after reading the article, “A Critical Literacy Perspective for Teaching and Learning Social Studies,” I wanted my students to start asking questions about what they were reading in their textbooks. In this article the authors state that in order to make history meaningful, students should “search for voices missing or silenced in texts and bring them to the forefront of the classroom.” Also in this article was another quote that reinforced my idea to do inquiry circles. “The social studies classroom is the perfect forum for students to find their true identity because it fosters a climate where students can open their minds, think creatively, and be open to the possibility of social hearing.” Lesson two has the students working in small inquiry circles to discuss the North and South’s viewpoint of the Civil War. This lesson I believe will have the students asking more questions about the opinions of the people from either the North or South.

Lesson three is a reenactment of the 54th Massachusetts regiment during the Civil War. This regiment was a great topic of discussion in my classroom this year and I wanted to do something to expand upon the very short section that was included in the students' textbook. I thought about showing the movie, *Glory*, which is about this group, however, I think having the students create their own skit after researching more about the 54th will be more meaningful.

“What does research have to say about effective methods of improving students' content area reading comprehension during social studies lessons?”

According to the research, I need to incorporate other ways of teaching besides just reading from the textbook. This other teaching needs to be teaching that will make the material more meaningful for my students. In numerous readings I garnered that lessons that are taught to students should be meaningful for them, otherwise there is no point in learning it. That is why I feel that the following lessons will help the students want to learn more and therefore will aid in their comprehension. Students will be asking questions that are of interest to them and will have the chance to work with a group to discuss presented material. Asking questions is something that a lot of the articles really stated is important in comprehension. Two of the provided lessons rely a lot upon the students asking questions to delve deeper into the material. Doing these three supplemental lessons I feel will help my students comprehend the material that is presented to them in their American History textbooks.

Lesson Plan One – Emancipation Proclamation

Materials Needed:

American History textbook, Scrap Paper,

Civil War website: www.civilwar.org, PowerPoint:

<http://www.civilwar.org/education/teachers/curriculum/civil-war-curriculum/middle-school/antietam-and-emancipation/>

Handouts:http://telegraph.civilwar.org/education/curriculum/Middle/3%20Antietam%20and%20Emancipation/Antietam%20and%20Emancipation%20Lesson%20Package_Middle.pdf

Students will read the Emancipation Proclamation chapter in their American History textbook.

After reading the chapter together, students will move around the TV to watch the slideshow.

The first slide asks the students to write what emancipation means, so the students will do this, trying to remember what they have just read.

After students have had time to write down what they think emancipation means, we will have a short discussion about what they thought.

The next slide tells the students what emancipation means.

Continue through slideshow with students until we get to the Emancipation slides. These slides can be used to reiterate prior learning and to expand on what was already taught in the textbook.

Before reading paragraphs, take turns reading the vocabulary words on the side of the handout.

Read paragraphs together with their partner. Then call on a pair to read the paragraph to the class.

With assigned partners, discuss what each paragraph means.

When finished with the slideshow, work with partner to do the Emancipation Proclamation Activity handout.

Assessment:

Turn in handout for a grade.

Lesson Plan Two – North vs. South

Materials Needed:

American History textbook, Paper, Pencils, Poster Board

Students will get into assigned inquiry circle groups.

Students will read the chapter about the North vs. South in their American History textbook together.

Students should note any questions that arise while reading and question the opinions of each side of the Civil War.

When finished reading, students will work together to come up with questions they have about the North or South reading material as a group. Students can work to answer any questions that can be found in the text.

Students should question “why” each side, North and South, felt the way they did during the Civil War.

Each group will divide their poster board into 2 sections: North and South. They will write their questions for each side in the appropriate spaces. Using other textbooks, the internet, and the classroom library students will work together to answer their questions and put them on the poster board.

Students will confer with the teacher when finished. The teacher should look for completed questions and make sure information is accurate. When approved by the teacher, students will present their findings to the class. Other classmates will take notes on new questions that may arise.

Lesson Three – 54th Massachusetts Regiment

Materials Needed:

Paper, Pencils, American History textbook

After reading the short section about the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, students will do more research about this historic group. In their inquiry groups, students will research information about the 54th and create a short skit involving all members.

The teacher will be looking for the following information to be presented in their skit, along with other standards included in the rubric:

- People involved
- Places the 54th went to

- Battles engaged in
- Commanders/Officers
- Problems faced: because of war time and personal issues because of race

Historical Role Play : 54th Regiment

Teacher Name: **Mrs. Smock**

Students Names: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Historical Accuracy	All historical information appeared to be accurate and in chronological order.	Almost all historical information appeared to be accurate and in chronological order.	Most of the historical information was accurate and in chronological order.	Very little of the historical information was accurate and/or in chronological order.
Role	Point-of-view, arguments, and solutions proposed were consistently in character.	Point-of-view, arguments, and solutions proposed were often in character.	Point-of-view, arguments, and solutions proposed were sometimes in character.	Point-of-view, arguments, and solutions proposed were rarely in character.
Knowledge Gained	Can clearly explain several ways in which his character \"saw\" things differently than other characters and can clearly explain why.	Can clearly explain several ways in which his character \"saw\" things differently than other characters.	Can clearly explain one way in which his character \"saw\" things differently than other characters.	Cannot explain one way in which his character \"saw\" things differently than other characters.
Required Elements	Student included more information than was required.	Student included all information that was required.	Student included most information that was required.	Student included less information than was required.