

III. A Year in the Life

Subject(s):

Time Needed: two 50 minute class sessions

Objectives:

- ✓ engage the students in historical research
- ✓ create opportunities for students to imagine and compose fictive experiences and characters based in historical fact
- ✓ work on group participation and oral presentation skills
- ✓ familiarize the students with Waterbury history and the “Brass City Life” website
- ✓ develop photograph analysis skills

Areas/Disciplines Covered:

American Studies (interviews, reading photography)
English (grammar, composition)
History (US, local)
Urban Studies (neighborhoods, urban development)

Materials:

- internet access (Day One)
- poster size copies or overhead projection of period pictures from “Brass City Life” website (Day One)
- instructional sheet (Day Two)
- paper and writing utensils for students

Procedure:

DAY ONE:

1. Introduce the lesson to the students as a research and writing activity. This will be a two-part session. On the first day, begin by asking the students, “What was the most important year in your history (life)?” Encourage them to think critically. Follow-up quickly by asking “Why?”. Was it because of a personal achievement? Was it because of a family event? Next, tell them that they are going to answer the question of “What was the most important year in Waterbury history?” by investigating, in groups, a few years in Waterbury history.

2. Bring the students’ attention to the board. Put up your picture posters or overheads. Taking each one individually, briefly show the students how to analyze photographs. Simple things such as background, clothing, and scenery combined will tell the students a lot about the period and the people in the photo. Provide 2 examples of this analysis and then offer them an example. Allow them to read the elements of the picture to deduce information from it. The questions that the students ask of their pictures should be: Who, What, When, Where, and Why?

3. Count the students off into 4 groups. Each group will then be handed a piece of paper that tells them the year that they will study. Their goal today will be to compile as much information on that year as possible from the “Brass City Life” website

(www.brasscitylife.org). The years that offer the most information are: 1729 (Bunker Hill: Bunker Hill Rd/Grandview laid out), 1853 (Overlook: Scovill family lays out new road which begins the neighborhood), 1955 (Brooklyn: flood), 1967 (South End: Rt. 8 dedicated). These years offer many differences in experience so that the students can investigate eras that they may not be familiar with. All of these dates may have different amounts of information but encourage the students to find as much as possible making certain that they are using the pictures as a primary resource. They will be able to compensate later on. Looking elsewhere on the internet for information will only be appropriate once they have exhausted the resources on the site.

4. Allow the students the entire period to search. Just before they leave remind them that you will pick this project back up tomorrow and to hold onto their research notes.

DAY TWO:

1. Bring the students back into conversation on the topic by asking them some of the interesting facts that they found yesterday. After this is finished, explain the two projects of today's work: one, to compile their research into a report, and two, to present them to the class. They will only have 25-30 minutes to write, so encourage them to be expedient. Their writing project will be an *historical fiction*. Because the information on the website may be insufficient for a detailed report, they will use this technique to create a narrative for that year or event (however they decide to format their report). Explain to them that an historical fiction is a written piece that is based in fact but with added information that is fictional (but could have actually happened). Take one of their interesting facts from the beginning of class and craft an example from it. [Ex: If someone mentioned that in 1955 there was a flood in Brooklyn, then you could offer as an example to them an historical fiction which describes one of the firefighters in the flood and what s/he did to save a cat.]

2. Instruct the students that they must work as a group, write quickly but thoroughly, and then be ready with 2 people to present their article. Hand out an instructional sheet which outlines to them that like the previous lesson, their historical fiction must answer: Who, What, When, Where, and Why? They must address: a.) Who they are, b.) What they're doing, have done, will do, c.) When their situation is happening, when they're living, d.) Where they are (which neighborhood are they in, where it is on the map) and, e.) Why they're there, why they're doing what they are doing, etc. Lastly, they should discuss why their year is important. As references, they must include elements and visual facts from at least two relevant pictures. Give them 25-30 minutes. If they run low on time, they may bullet-point some of their information.

3. Next, call each group for a short, 4-5 minute presentation of their research and article. Look for accuracy in research but also creativity in the narrative. Afterwards, collect the pieces and additionally grade for technical skill. You may use these pieces later to influence upcoming lessons or possibly to fashion a theater project.

Related Resources:

Vocabulary List

historical fiction: a creative and imaginary depiction of a historical event, person or place based in elements of fact.