LESSON: INTRODUCTION TO HISTORY DAY – THEME
“2020: BREAKING BARRIERS IN HISTORY”

Essential Questions: 1. What do we mean by “Breaking Barriers in History?” Why do we have a theme?

Objective: At the end of this lesson students will understand the basics of the National History Day theme in relation to completing their project.

Grade Level: 6 – 12

Time Needed: 50 minutes or more

Materials: White board, markers, notebook paper, National History Day in Minnesota Theme Narrative, National History Day Theme Narrative, Contest Rule Book, questions to consider

Procedure

Before Class: To gain understanding of the National History Day theme for 2020, “Breaking Barriers in History,” discussion in the form of a Socratic Seminar is encouraged. Socrates encouraged his students to continue asking questions and often relayed to them that he did not always know the answer. The discussion modeled below is built around the concept that we do not know the answer to how all topics relate to the theme, but we need to continue researching and ask questions to find the answer.

Possible questions to consider for the board: 1. What do we mean by barrier? 2. Is a barrier always physical, what are other kinds of barriers? 3. What are the kinds of ways to break a barrier? 4. Any other questions you would like to consider?

1. Outline the goals for the day. What do we want to get out of this conversation?
   - We need to understand what the theme means before selecting topics. In the end, we are going to be looking for History Day topics that have connections to the theme. The theme is a lens by which we view topics. We need to understand what these words mean in order to see how these ideas played a part in history.

2. As a group, students will share a goal they have for the day. One person shares, then the next person will share their goal, and make a connection between the goal they just heard and their own or something related in their classroom. This will hopefully build a shared desire for participation. Throughout the sharing, the facilitator will record the goals on the board next to the other questions already prepared.

3. Explain the Socratic Seminar method. With your knowledge of the National History Day program, we are going to have an open conversation to keep you thinking about the use of the theme and the program. A Socratic Seminar is based on Socrates and his students having conversations and constantly bringing up more questions to consider. With this method, we are going to set goals of what you would like to achieve and share responses. After setting goals, we will look at the questions and add anything else you would like to consider. We will set ourselves in a circle to welcome conversation. I do not have the answers to these questions. This is a time for us to all explore the theme and History Day further to benefit your classroom.

4. After explaining the process, read the National History Day in Minnesota Theme Narrative. You could also choose to use the National History Day Theme Narrative. Instruct students to underline, highlight, and write down questions they have regarding the reading they have done. The “Guided Notes for Theme” may be helpful to younger students in breaking down the essential elements of this year’s theme.

5. After the reading the narrative, ask students to write down some synonyms of the theme words and jot a few notes to the questions below. When they are complete, start the discussion by asking a question and having a student answer it. The questions will likely either be about the History Day process or about the definitions of the words below. Questions to consider (on the board):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Connection and Process</th>
<th>Theme Words and Key Ideas</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you have to use the theme words in your project?</td>
<td>1. What is the definition of barrier?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What makes a strong theme connection?</td>
<td>2. What does it mean to break a barrier?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. What does “in history” mean?</td>
<td>3. Does it have to be about a famous person in history?</td>
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<td>4. Will local, United States, and world history topics work with this theme?</td>
<td>4. Other questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Other questions?</td>
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</tbody>
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6. With about 15 minutes left of class, or assigned for homework, ask: What questions were answered? Which were not? What other questions did the discussion generate for you?

7. Following the conversation, create a list of possible topics to study and to be added to throughout the next few lessons while choosing topics.

**Lesson Extension/Alternative**

**Out-of-Class Assignment:** Have the students read the theme narratives either the day before in class or as homework. Have them underline key words and write down key points they would like to remember. Have them answer the questions that will be on the board and come up with questions of their own.

**Small Group Responses:** Consider having the students write answers to the questions after the reading and working in small groups or pairs instead.

**Theme Connection Ideas:** Have students review the narratives and provide basic definitions for the ideas. Once they understand the definitions, students should be encouraged to think about how these ideas play a role in different topics. Using the samples provided – or selecting samples from relevant course content – show examples of successful theme connections. Remind students that they may not know the answers to these ideas when they pick their topic, but should look for these ideas early on in their research process.

**Group Question Generation:** Read the theme narrative prior to the lesson. Mark places in the reading where questions from your students may occur. In class, explain that you are going to create a class list of questions for discussion based on the History Day theme. Read the theme narrative with your students, stopping to generate a list of questions on the board. This should include any questions that students come up with and any questions that you anticipated but did not come up during the reading. After reading the theme narratives, lead a class discussion to try to answer the questions. For each question you answer, see if you can create another question to add to the list. This can be based on the information from the question just answered, or just a general question about the theme. Essentially, you are modeling the process of generating research questions students will need to use during the research portion of the project. Explain that new information should generate more questions. Before the end of class, have students write a summary of what they understand the theme means to them.

**Lesson Bibliography**

- Socratic Seminar: [http://www.studyguide.org/socratic_seminar.htm](http://www.studyguide.org/socratic_seminar.htm)