LESSON: CHOOSING A TOPIC 1 – USING HISTORICAL ERAS

Essential Questions: 1. What is an era? 2. What are some synonyms or other words to describe an historical era? 3. How are historical eras usually defined? 4. How do events in history relate to the History Day theme?

Objective: At the end of the lessons students will be able to distinguish the vastness in a historical era, distinguishing events within different eras, and the possibilities of interests in each era for topic selection.

Grade Level: 6 – 12

Time Needed: 50 minutes

Materials: Worksheet: Choosing a Topic 1, Worksheet: Choosing a Topic Using Historical Eras, textbooks, encyclopedias, timelines, general history books, images, chalkboard/whiteboard, chalk/markers

Procedure

1. In a whole class setting, ask students if they are familiar with how historians break up history into eras or in the 20th century decades. For up to three minutes, discuss what a historical era is, and why it is used in history. (Dictionary.com definition: A period of time marked by distinctive character, events, etc.).

2. Make a list of eras or significant decades students are familiar with on the board (five to seven eras). With these examples, have students name ONE event/invention/figure associated with that era.
   - Renaissance – New paintings
   - Medieval – Kings and Queens
   - Colonization – Tri-corner hats
   - Early America - Independence
   - Civil War – Slavery
   - World War I – Trench warfare
   - World War II - Holocaust
   - Imperialism – Loss of indigenous culture
   - Ancient Rome – Julius Caesar
   - Ancient Greece – Olympics
   - Pre-Columbian – Native American creation stories
   - Make sure whatever era used in the introduction is also included

3. When one item is listed with each era, ask a student who did not share if that is what they would have written for that era. Ask a few other students what other item they would include in the era of their choice.

4. Explain that this illustrates the broad range of historic eras. Though we often associate one topic or idea with a certain era, there is often many other things happening also that are just as important.

5. Give the following instructions: Today you are going to investigate three historic eras of their choice. You can take examples from opening activity, or use another textbook/timeline to discover an era. Using the worksheet provided, you will fill in the following blanks on Worksheet: Choosing a Topic 1 about the three eras to become familiar with the time period and possibilities in each era.
   - Social – Relating to society such as class status, friendly relations, and/or customs
   - Political – Related to the government, laws, practices, policies
   - Religion – Fundamental set of beliefs and practices
   - Intellectual – Education of society and new ideas or developments
• Technological – Advancements in technology in all aspects such as transport and agriculture
• Environmental – Interactions and appreciation of what surrounds the community

6. As a class example, pick a second era to categorize. Find a major event/or individual in an era and define which aspect of SPRITE it belongs to. Also, have students start considering how it connects to the theme as discussed in the last lesson. (Example: Era – Civil Rights Movement. Event – March on Washington. SPRITE category – political. Connection to theme – will vary)

7. Have students share their findings with one era. Remind them of the vast amount of possible topics and choices. Add the topics they recommend to the list started in the theme lesson. Keeping a running list available on the board or on a Google Doc for students to reference.

8. For the next lesson, they will need to revisit an era of their choice to further investigate for topic selection.


Lesson Extension/Alternative

Increase or Decrease Areas of History to Brainstorm: For different learners, the number of eras required, or points of SPRITE, can be limited or expanded. For higher-level learners AP has other guides such as: PARTIES (Political, Art, Religion, Technological, Intellectual, Economic, and Social), PERSIA (Political, Economic, Religious, Social, Intellectual, Artistic), and C-GRIPES (Cultural, Geographic, Religious, Intellectual, Political, Economic, and Social).

Brainstorm Using Historical Eras: Students could also use a timeline rather than eras. Some good examples are provided in the “Lesson Bibliography” below. Students would identify particular period of time in which they are interested.

• Worksheet: Choosing a Topic Using Historical Eras

Begin with a Familiar Topic: Instead of choosing an era, have the students choose a topic they are familiar with, then branch out to choose the era that belongs in. Continue with the rest of the activity on a smaller scale with the one topic already related.

Lesson Bibliography

Eras:
• http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/eras.html
• http://worldhistoryforusall.sdsu.edu/bigeras.php

Timelines:
• http://www.animatedatlas.com/timeline.html