

Lesson 1: Curating History!

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will be introduced to the final unit project. For the unit project, students will assume the role of a curator at the Clements Library at the University of Michigan. As a curator, they will develop their own exhibit to explain the causes of the American Revolution. They will choose 10 primary sources that we have analyzed throughout the unit and 5 additional primary sources that they have found on their own to curate their historical story. For each source, students will write a paragraph description on a “plaque” of how it relates to their broader historical narrative. When creating this exhibit, students should think about what sources they believe would be the most compelling, what story they want to tell, from whose perspective should the story be told, what they want the museum goer to learn after visiting their exhibit, and most importantly, what the purpose of their exhibit is. Students will present their exhibits to the class and explain the purpose and story of their exhibit. On the final day of the unit, students who live near the University of Michigan will go on a field trip to the Clements Library, talk with a real-life curator, and see the primary sources the curator chose to tell the story of the causes of the American Revolution.

To learn about the role of a curator in this lesson, students will look at online exhibits at the Clements Library and complete a scavenger hunt to navigate the Clements website and see how curators put together primary sources to develop their own unique story. The exit slips at the end of each of the following lessons will serve to support students in providing them with a deeper understanding of the skills needed to complete the final project.

Concept Question:

- Who is a curator and what does their job entail?

Topical Essential Question:

- What decisions must curators make to tell historical stories?

Overarching Essential Question:

- What are the causes of the American Revolution?

Learning Objectives

- Students will be introduced to the goals of the unit and will explore what they will have to do for the final unit project.
- Students will examine the job of a curator by navigating online exhibits at the Clements Library.
- Students will acknowledge that all historical stories have some purpose and perspective they are told from, and it is the job of historians to try to identify the biases and extract the truth from those stories.

Instructional Plan

Provide overview of the unit.

Explain to students that this is the first lesson in our unit about the causes of the American Revolution. Each lesson in this unit will highlight a particular event, philosophy, group of people, or law that culminated into the American colonists declaring independence from Great Britain and starting the American Revolution.

Explain to students how they will work as real historians.

While students investigate the causes of the American Revolution, they will also practice the duties and skills that effective historians use to be creative, thoughtful, and open-minded researchers. To learn these duties and skills, each lesson topic will be paired with a particular historical job that students will assume the role of and historical skill that students will practice. To organize their work and keep their investigations in one place throughout this unit, students will be given an almanac (workbook) to record their notes, readings, and activities.

Introduce the almanac.

Hand out an almanac to each student and explain that they will need to keep this for the entirety of the unit as they will do all their work for the unit in it. The almanac will also have copies of all the primary and secondary source documents students will work with throughout the unit, so they can keep their ideas and sources organized for the final project.

Introduce students to the layout of the almanac.

Ask students to write their name on their almanac and to open it up to the first page. There are several sections within the almanac.

- **Section 1: The Index**
 - The first section is the index with the lesson names and page numbers.
- **Section 2: Historical Jobs**
 - The second section includes a list titled, “Historical Jobs.” At the beginning of each lesson, students will write the description of the historical job they will assume that day.
- **Section 3: Historical Skills**
 - The third section has a list titled, “Historical Skills.” At the beginning of each lesson, students will write the description of the historical skill they will practice that day such as corroboration, sourcing, and contextualizing.
- **Section 4: Daily Lessons**
 - Each lesson for this unit will have all the primary sources, secondary sources, notes, and assignments within the almanac. Every piece of work that a student completes for this unit will be within the almanac. At the beginning of each lesson, students will work on a Do Now question that hooks their engagement and provokes thought for the upcoming lesson. At the end of each lesson, students will write an Exit Slip about how the lesson gave them a deeper understanding in

responding to the overarching essential question, “What are the causes of the American Revolution?” and will provide them with greater insight to complete their unit project.

What are essential questions?

Turn the almanac to today’s lesson, *Curating History!* Point out the concept question, topical essential question, and the overarching essential question.

- **The Concept Question**
 - The concept question will be a question that students should be able to answer by the end of the lesson. It has a clearly defined solution and will serve as a support to think about the other two types of questions.
- **The Topical Essential Question**
 - The topical essential question will be a question that we address within the lesson, but it will not have a definitive answer. This question is meant to stimulate debate and discussion within our class and may leave us with unclear answers. It is frustrating to think about questions that do not have defined answers, but it helps us challenge our thoughts and makes us more thoughtful learners.
- **The Overarching Essential Question**
 - The overarching essential question is the question that we will discuss and tackle for the duration of the entire unit. All of our lessons and our unit project will serve as guides to help us answer the overarching essential question, “What are the causes of the American Revolution?” Being able to effectively answer this question using evidence and reasoning is the main purpose of our entire unit.

Flip to the “Historical Jobs” section of the almanac.

Let’s answer the concept question for this lesson, “Who is a curator and what does their job entail?” Ask the students if they know who curators are and what they do. After a few students share their thoughts tell them to write down the definition of a curator in the space provided within their almanac. Explain that curators are the people at museums who are in charge of a collection of exhibits. In a history museum, they find certain sources and arrange them in an exhibit to share with the public. Generally speaking, curators tell stories. Share that today they will look at a few online exhibits from the Clements Library at the University of Michigan to have a greater understanding of the job of a curator.

Why are we learning about curators?

Explain to students that they are learning about the job of a curator because for the unit project, they will become curators at the Clements Library at the University of Michigan. As a curator, they will develop their own exhibit to explain the causes of the American Revolution. They will choose 10 primary sources that we have analyzed throughout the unit and 5 additional sources that they have found on their own from the Clements Library website to curate their historical story. For each source, students will write a paragraph description on a “plaque” of how it relates to their broader historical narrative. When creating this exhibit, students should think about what sources they believe would be the most compelling, what story they want to tell, from whose perspective should the story be told, what they want the museum goer to learn after visiting their exhibit, and most importantly, what the purpose of their exhibit is.

Flip the almanac back to today’s lesson, “Curating History!”

Ask students to complete a quick write in their almanac (about 5 minutes) about what they think of when they hear, “The American Revolution.” During this time, they should also make a list of what they think the causes of the American Revolution were. Remind students that even if they do not know, they should not write “I don’t know.” They should use context clues in the phrase “American Revolution” and prior knowledge to infer and hypothesize their response. Tell students that this will not be graded, and it will serve as a comparison to what they know now and what they will know by the end of the unit. Let students know that they will be amazed at how much they will learn over the next few weeks!

Clements Library background information.

Explain to students that there is a library at the University of Michigan that specializes in learning all about early American history. They have thousands of documents, pictures, maps, journals, and artifacts from America’s early history, especially about the American Revolution. A lot of the documents we will be using throughout the unit will be taken from the Clements Library. Today we are going to learn about the job of a curator by looking at online exhibits at the Clements Library at the University of Michigan.

If your school is near the University of Michigan, at the end of the unit you can take your class on a field trip to the Clements Library, talk to a curator there, and have students ask them questions about their job. They will also develop an exhibit for your class on the causes of the American Revolution just like your students will be doing for their final project.

The Clements Library online exhibit site navigation.

Before students start the activity, you should model with students’ full attention to guide them through the website and navigate them to the specific links. Use the following directions to get to the Clements Library online exhibits.

- Go to the Clements Library homepage. <https://clements.umich.edu/>
- At the homepage in the right corner there is a tab called “Explore Collections.” Click on that tab.
- Now, scroll down the page until you see the “Digital Resources” section.
- Click the box that says, “Online Exhibits.”
- Scroll through the online exhibits that the Clements Library offers.

The Clements Library online exhibit activity.

Either independently or in pairs, give students 10 minutes to look through a few of the online exhibits. In looking through these exhibits, students should think about and jot down in their almanac responses to the following questions:

- What about the exhibit is interesting?
- What story is the curator trying to tell?
- Whose perspective is shown in this exhibit?

After skimming a few exhibits, students should choose one exhibit that looks the most interesting to them. For 20 minutes, students should examine one exhibit to look deeper into. Students should respond to the following questions in their almanac:

- What exhibit did you choose?
- Why did this exhibit look interesting to you?
- What decisions did the curator have to make to tell this story?
 - What documents did the curator choose?
 - Why did the curator choose these documents?
 - What story is the curator telling in this exhibit?
 - Why was it important for the curator to tell this story?
 - Whose perspective is shown throughout the story?
 - Why did the curator choose to tell the story from this perspective?
 - Whose perspectives are left out of this story?

Curator activity share out.

After each student has thoroughly looked through one of the online exhibits and reflected about it in their almanac, have students share some of their responses out loud. After students share, facilitate a whole class discussion on what students noticed about the various decisions the curators had to make while telling their story through their exhibit. You can go through each question that students responded to for their activity to activate their thoughts.

How to be an effective curator.

Explain that being a curator is an extremely difficult job because there is so much thought, preparation, and awareness that is involved in telling an accurate historical story. A curator has to make sure their story is not biased, shows multiple historical perspectives, and is honest and compelling. In addition to this, curators should think about what they want the museum goer to learn after viewing their exhibit and need to have a substantial purpose for their story. Explain that when students act as curators for their final project to answer the question, “What are the causes of the American Revolution?” they will have to consider all of these challenges and difficulties in order to be a successful curator.

Exit slip.

What decisions must curators make to tell historical stories?