

Social 20 WWII Timeline Artifact

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Subject: Social 20

21CC: Collaboration and Critical Thinking

Summary:

Having recently researched the end of WWII in both the European and Asian theatres students were divided into groups of three to create a timeline of events for WWII. The project involved students taking 100 specific events from their notes, textbooks, and research and justifying why each event was important to the development and progress of WWII. Events ranged from the politics to artistic movements, economic structures to technological innovations, from major battles and important moments to prominent figureheads and thinkers.

Working in groups of three students were to select the 100 events they felt were crucial to the war and be able to justify their choices. Once the events were selected students collaborated and make decisions of how to best present and share their choices in an organized and easily accessible way. Additionally, the students knew that not only would the timeline assignment would be a useful study tool that they could refer to when preparing for the upcoming test but that the timelines would be on display in the classroom.

Immediately students assigned each member of their three groups to find 33 important events and come up with a brief justification for the event's inclusion. From that point on students used a large variety of resources to compile the 33 events for which they were responsible. Drawing from the textbook, the Internet (mainly history.com and <http://www.ushmm.org>), videos, testimonials, and other authentic artifacts (such as historical photos or relics like armbands, military uniforms, etc.) students began to select, what they felt, were the important events in WWII.

Often students would come together with their group and discuss what they had found. Members of the group would discuss the relevance or importance of an event. When an issue came up, one student vehemently defending an event the others thought was not significant, the students turned to other groups to mitigate the problem. Thus, students had conversation with each other, beyond their immediate groups, to decide whether a specific event is important, whether or not there were similarities between the groups, and to discuss differences in what each group found to be important (for example one group argued that Japan's attack on Manchuria in 1931 was the start of WWII while others maintained that the driving force for WWII was in fact Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939). This process allowed students to

examine what each other was researching and discover many important components of WWII that they would not have learnt otherwise.

Once the students has selected all their events, and prepared a defense for each, the task of organizing the information in an easily accessible way began. Most groups printed off their information, cut it into bite size strips, and began plotting the events out on a long sheet of poster paper. From this point the students began to consider the visual appeal of their timeline. Some choice to make Photoshop and Clipart pieces to accompany the information, some choice to make the timeline into more of a time stream to alter the aesthetics, and another group choice to create a branch along which each piece of information was a leaf. Each group decided on an aesthetic theme for their timeline and proceeded to organize the events around the theme.

With the theme decided students assessed how to best space, organized, and orientate the information. Worried about space, some groups make their text smaller. Concerned with “a wall of writing” some groups chose to colour code their information based on a range of criteria from year to whether the event was a social, political, technological, artistic, Axis, Allies, or Soviet action. Once an organizational scheme was established students went worked on finishing the timeline before presenting.

The last major component of the assignment was the presentation. When completed each group positioned their timeline in a different spot in the classroom. Next, each student went around and looked at the different timelines while making notes about the similarities and differences in the information and presentation style. After a few minutes of note-taking and observations students rejoined their groups. Then each group brought their timeline to be displayed at the front of the class. The group at the front then described their final product, how it reflected their original intentions, and what they had discovered which they hadn't previously known.

After the group presented the rest of the class was invited to ask questions about either the information on the timeline or the appearance and organization. When questions students had to defend their choices, for the information, or explain their intention, with the aesthetics, which had the students using their critical thinking ability. Any discrepancies, deletions, or additions that an individual group had were questioned and discussed by the class. Students had to connect moments in time separated by geography and by time and suggest how various events linked together and impacted the course of WWII. Lastly, the students had to have a clear and concise reason for their organization, choice of images, and any other visuals which contributed to their visual appearance.

Each group presented their timeline, defending their choices, and then selected a place in the classroom to affix the final product. The timelines are still up in the room as a reference for the students and have become an important tool in our Social 20 class.

Generally each group functioned well as a unit. However, there were certain issues that arose which impeded the progress of the entire group. For example, the students felt that those who had a poor attendance record could not complete their “fair-share” of the work simply because being in the classroom and being part of the discussion was an important component of the assignment. Not showing up to class but having selected 33 events was judged by the students to be insufficient. Secondly, students who had a preference towards a specific aspect of the assignment would “trade” responsibilities. One truly gifted artistic student spent more of her time working on the aesthetic of the assignment. In exchange, her partners accepted the responsibility of researching more important events between the two of them. One final issue, while the three students of one group researched important events on their own, one student volunteered to type all of the research if the other two started creating the timeline itself. This arrangement became a problem when the student who was in charge of the typing missed a couple classes and the other two students were left with a fully designed timeline devoid of any time plots. Most of the issues encountered in this assignment were minor and easily corrected but the “trading” work meant that certain students would have less interaction with the research while others had less of an input into the final design of the timeline

Reflection:

By focusing the majority of the timeline assignment on student group work and research, the assignment was very student led. Within groups students made decisions about what information was important, how to organize and present their work, what roles each student should play, and how to defend their choices. The teacher’s involvement in the lesson was heavy in the beginning, when describing the assignment, resources, and final product but from that point on the lesson was primarily student led. The students guided their own learning based on interest, research, and inquiry.

A second important detail was how the students began to question historical facts. When deciding how one event or person affects future events and people students found that history is complicated and diverse. Finding the same information from different resources students discovered that “facts” are open to interpretation and the relationship between events was never as concrete as textbooks had painted them to be. Students were interested in examining the same event from different points-of-view, the relationship between political movements and artistic movements, the spread of technology its effect on the progress of the war. Thus, this assignment had students critically examining the nature of facts and how history is recorded.

While the assignment did a great job of empowering students to direct their own learning and spark discussions about history the potential for unfair distribution of work is worrisome. The majority of groups evenly divided the work and found ways for everyone to be involved. Some groups had students focus on components of the assignment that highlighted their

strengths. A few groups had students whose poor attendance greatly impacted the success of the rest of the group. In order to circumvent such issues in the future the assignment could include a peer-evaluation. A peer-evaluation would allow students to voice their opinion on the contribution of the whole group. Knowing that the peer-evaluation impacts their final mark students may be motivated to please their group members and do their fair-share of the work. Secondly, if the assignment were more clearly divided between the research time and the creation time then the students could be redirected to focus on one component at a time which, hopefully, would see students not trading jobs and equally sharing the work load. Lastly, some groups became more concerned with the actual appearance of the timeline rather than focus on the content. A way to mitigate this division could be to find alternative ways of presenting or organizing the information beyond a physical timeline. Perhaps a digital program could be used, there are countless timeline templates on the Internet, or, leaving the whole concept of a timeline behind, the students could find an innovative new way to present the information, share it with the class, and still have it readily available and easily readable ensuring its continued importance as a classroom resource.



1915 that he developed electromagnetic theory.
wards the Smith's prize (1854), Adams Prize (1863), Rumford Medal (1866) and Keith's Prize (1869-70)
Edinburgh Scotland he attended Marischal College Aberdeen he became Professor of Natural Philosophy in 1868

