

HISTORY TALKS

Students research a historical figure and event related in some way to the Mississippi River. Then, in a talk show format, they present their character in a short speech followed up by questions from the “audience.”

TEACHER NOTES FOR DISCUSSION

This creative activity brings the people and events of the Mississippi River to life so that students can begin making connections between different people and events that relate the past to the present.

Students may choose from the list of figures provided or may come up with their own. Before the actual talk show takes place, you will want to compile and distribute a list of the famous people that will be appearing on your particular show. This will give students an opportunity to read a little about each character and come up with challenging questions for each guest.

Set up the classroom to resemble a talk show. Things like host’s desk and guest chairs, audience chairs, microphone, music, and a talk show sign will set the stage. You may even want to video tape the show for more realism.

You may assume the role of the talk show host or choose a student to play the role. It is the talk show host’s responsibility to bring a sense of realism to the drama as well as to model excellent, detailed questions for the “guests.”

Start with the music and welcome the guests. Proceed by letting the panel of esteemed historical figures introduce themselves (including background information). Encourage the audience to ask the panel intriguing questions about the past as well as “what if...” questions about significant events in history.

Evaluate students on their (auto)biography and the accuracy of their performance.

Objective

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- use resource materials and the Internet to research a key historical figure that influenced Mississippi River culture.
- assimilate enough information about the famous person to be able to portray a compelling facsimile of that person.
- answer questions about the life and times of a historical figure.
- formulate and ask intelligent questions.
- write and present a short expository piece.

RELATED STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS

History

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

- understands that specific individuals and the values those individuals held had an impact on history
- analyzes the influence specific ideas and beliefs had on a period of history
- analyzes the effects specific decisions had on history
- knows different types of primary and secondary sources and the motives, interests and bias expressed in

Language Arts

Standard 4. Gathers and uses information for research purposes

- uses a variety of resource materials to gather information for research topics
- determines the appropriateness of an information source for a research topic
- organizes information and ideas from multiple sources in systematic ways

Time Considerations

Instructor preparation:
30 minutes

Student activity:
two or three classes

HISTORY TALKS

UNDERSTAND YOUR MISSION

In this activity, you will research and take on the character of an interesting person who helped shape culture along the Mississippi River. You will write an (auto)biography of your famous person and participate in a talk show to discuss and answer questions about “your” accomplishments.

CHART A COURSE FOR EXPLORATION

This is your chance to assume the identity of a key historical figure that influenced culture along the Mississippi River.

Gather Your Supplies

- costumes
- research material
- props for a talk show

Go Beyond

Choose a modern event and deal with it as your historical figure. For example, what would Thomas Jefferson have to say about Civil Rights? Write an essay on your views.

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The following is a list of some of the Mississippi River figures you can choose to research and “become.” There are many other figures past and present that have had an influence on culture along the river. Remember, guests usually appear in a talk show because they have something to talk about or “plug.” If you choose someone other than a figure on this list, make sure you will have a topic to address and enough information to complete the entire activity.

- Dred Scott’s lawyer on the Supreme Court’s decision
- Lewis or Clark on their latest trip
- Louis Armstrong on his album with Ella Fitzgerald
- Scott Joplin on his book *School of Ragtime*
- Mark Twain on publishing *Puddn’ Head Wilson*
- James Buchanan Eads on the completion of his bridge
- Ulysses S. Grant on his victory in Vicksburg
- General John C. Pemberton on his defeat at Vicksburg
- Bill Clinton on the Flood of 1993
- Thomas Jefferson on the Louisiana Purchase
- Eero Saarinen on his design for the St. Louis Arch
- Robert Fulton on inventing the steamboat
- Jean Lafitte on his participation in the War of 1812
- William Alexander Percy on relief efforts for the Flood of 1927
- Tecumseh on efforts to band Indian nations together
- Hernando De Soto on claiming the Mississippi Valley for France
- Bix Beiderbeck on leaving the band the Wolverines
- Susy Twain on her book about her father
- Black Hawk on his rivalry with Keokuk

PART A

Using primary and secondary resources write a one-page autobiography of “yourself.” Include who you are and your purpose for appearing on the talk show. Make sure you deal with the life of your figure up until the time of your important event. For example, as Thomas Jefferson, you cannot talk about the death of Jefferson or anything after the event that you are talking about or “plugging.”

PART B

Your teacher will provide you with a list of who will be appearing on the show and their event or topic. Your job as an audience member is to have a good grasp of who the guests are and be ready to ask probing and thought-provoking questions. Use your teacher’s list or come up with other questions. Again, make sure you ask questions that pertain to the guest’s life up through the time they are portraying.

Be ready to answer questions pertaining to:

- the big picture
- achievements
- implications
- contributions
- significance
- quirks
- influences
- future implications

HISTORY TALKS

	EXPERT	PRACTITIONER	AMATEUR
WRITTEN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY	<input type="checkbox"/> information is presented in character <input type="checkbox"/> all information is correct	<input type="checkbox"/> information presented is in character <input type="checkbox"/> some incorrect statements of facts are made	<input type="checkbox"/> information presented is not in character <input type="checkbox"/> lacks factual information
GRAMMAR, USAGE, MECHANICS (G.U.M.)	<input type="checkbox"/> contains no more than 2 grammar, usage, mechanics (G.U.M.) errors	<input type="checkbox"/> contains no more than 4 G.U.M. errors	<input type="checkbox"/> contains five or more G.U.M. errors
PRESENTATION	<input type="checkbox"/> organized and focused <input type="checkbox"/> realistic and entertaining	<input type="checkbox"/> somewhat organized and focused <input type="checkbox"/> realistic	<input type="checkbox"/> not prepared <input type="checkbox"/> disorganized

REFERENCES

Kendall, John S. and Robert J. Marzano. *Content Knowledge: The McREL Standards Database*. <<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>>, March 16, 2000.