How to Plan a History Block for Grades 5-8
Developed by Janet Langley

The soul/personal GOALS for each History block include:
1. Connecting the students to a specific time in evolution
2. Helping them to appreciate the gifts of the culture and people of a particular time and region
3. Bring an awareness of the impact that the culture had on its time and into the future
4. Give the students a sense of the timeline of History
5. Help students to understand the relationship of the geography of an area to the people and culture that existed there
6. Strengthen the soul capacities of the students (for example, help them to understand and then rise above the attitude of racism)
7. Help further incarnate the student onto the earth

What other goals do you have for your block? List them.

Areas of SKILL DEVELOPMENT that can inform your choices of student assignments:
1. Compositional
2. Other language skills (vocabulary, spelling, word origins, grammar)
3. Further develop reading skills
4. Artistic development (music, poetry appreciation, painting, drawing, modeling, etc.)
5. Speech development and public speaking skills
6. Movement
7. Map skills- drawing maps and developing an awareness of spatial relationship among the countries of the world
8. Creativity
9. Further develop social skills through group projects and classroom interactions
10. Strengthen long and short term memory
11. Thematic opportunities for mental math

With each assignment, note which of the above skills will be worked on by the student. Make a plan to address any deficiencies.
Main Lesson PRESENTATION Possibilities:

Make a list of the many lessons that you might include in your History block, including the following:

1. Biographies (very important—list the ones that you consider important to the block— even if there are more than could be covered)
2. Geography of the country/region and its location in the world (This includes climate, topography, major/important bodies of water, flora and fauna, deserts, rainfall, etc.)
3. Culture (architecture, visual arts produced during the period, sculpture, music—type and its role in the lives of the people, drama)
4. If possible, describe the daily life of the people (include educational opportunities, professions, food, clothing, shelters/homes, festivals, birth, rites of passage, marriage and death ceremonies and customs)
5. The role of women in the society
6. The type of government or rule of the time
7. Religions and religious festivals
8. Language of the culture (origin and if it has contributed to our language, bring this awareness)
9. The impact that this culture had on the world then and now
10. Major events whether manmade or natural disasters
11. Stories, legends and/or myths from that culture
12. Possible field trips
13. Possible guest speakers

Once you have listed the possibilities for lessons in the above categories, along with any others that would be relevant to your block, begin to prioritize the lessons. Those lessons that you feel are a first priority, should comprise the framework of your block. After you have selected your first priority lessons, determine the number of days in the block you still have left to fill (if there are any!) and select those additional lessons that will bring a balance to your block. (If you have 15 lessons in the block and you chose 14 biographies to present—go back to the drawing board!)

Remember, when setting up your daily lesson plans to keep in mind the time needed for #12, #13 along with block review and block test time, if needed.
Structure/Considerations for a History DAILY LESSON PLAN

Suggested daily rhythm: (Certainly this can be tweaked, as needed.)

8:15- Handshake, morning verse
8:20- Movement activity
8:30- Speech work (seasonal or thematic poem)
     and/or
     Music (recorder/singing)
8:40- Mental math (using block theme at least some of the time)
8:45- Review of yesterday’s lesson
8:55- New Learning (THE LESSON) with activity/ies
9:35- movement activity (stretching)
9:40- Bookwork
10:10- Clean up, ending verse and/or grace and dismissal for snack

Considerations on the above lesson activities:

Movement Activity: Be very conscious here- movement, “warm up” activities at this age should be focused on bringing the student “in” and getting them ready to listen and work…you will not be able to cover the curriculum if you are still spending 30-60 minutes on the first three activities.

Speech work: Remember to introduce the poem through an imagination or some picture that the students can use as a reference point, an anchor.

Music: You might want to consider alternating days with speech and music so you have more time to develop one or the other. On the days my class had music class (not orchestra), we would just practice speech.

Mental math: Again, on those days that my class had math in a later period, I postponed this until that time.

Review of the lesson: When determining your approach to the review, ask yourself, “What was the major theme of yesterday’s lesson? What were the major images, concepts, facts of the presentation?” Design your review to focus/highlight these areas. Be creative here! Teachers that “retell” every lesson are in danger of developing a culture in the classroom where some of
the students don’t feel it’s necessary to listen to the story the first day, since it will just be retold on the second. That being said, I would recommend having the class “retell” the story if they are going to be asked to write a composition that basically summarizes the story.

Here are just a few ideas of other approaches to the review besides “retell”:

1. Use removable names/labels on maps so that you can remove them and have students replace them
2. Review the story by proper nouns, nouns or verbs- as they appear chronologically
3. Write out a summary of the story leaving blanks and have the students fill in the blanks (you can choose to provide possible answers in a list or not)
4. Divide the class into small groups- give each group part of the story to act out- give them a basket full of possible props to use and 10 minutes to come up with their part- act it out
5. “Around the World” – Have a number of questions about the lesson the day before (at least 50% more than you have students)
6. Ask the students to write review questions- what s/he thought was an important part of the lesson- ask the class the qs
7. Make up a “Jeopardy” type game, divide the class into 2 or 3 teams- remember they have to answer with, “What is ___________?” For example, you could do this with the life of Benjamin Franklin using the categories: Early Years (Birth-18 yr.), Businessman, Scientist, Citizen (his role as a citizen of Philadelphia- how he made life better for those who lived there and his role as a citizen of the nation/world.)
8. List the chronological events of a person’s life, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine (if on the computer, use a large font), make as many copies as you would need for teams of 2-4 members, cut each list up so that each event is separate. Mix up each set of events so it is not in chronological order. Hand out a set to each team, give them a certain number of minutes (5 maximum, depending on the number of events) to place the events in chronological order. You can decide whether they can use their notes or not.
9. Identify the first major event or person that dramatically changed the life of the person you are studying- what might have happened if he or she did not have this experience or encounter? For example, had
someone from Crete rather than Paris from Troy been selected by the Greek goddesses to settle their dispute about who was more beautiful...and he had chosen Athena?

Note: you can combine, adjust, be inspired by the above- have fun and make your review serve the assignment or goal of the lesson.

When Planning the New Learning portion of the Lesson:

1. First find an imagination around which you can build the lesson. For example, when telling the biography of Louis XIV of France, draw a picture on the blackboard of a radiating sun. Begin with this image and then connect it to Louis, the “Sun King”.
2. Make a list of the highlights of the lesson, those topics/people/images that you want to include in the presentation.
3. Make a point to include some new vocabulary in your presentation (a few choice adjectives or adverbs at least!)
4. Make a list of any resources/items you might need for the lesson and procure these prior to the morning bell- don’t waste precious time hunting around during class.
5. When presenting the lesson to the students, be mindful of those opportunities when something in the new lesson harkens back to a lesson that you taught them in an early grade or even earlier that year- remind them of this.
6. In the 5th grade, the lesson and the story are often separate presentations...for example: you might do a lesson on the geography of India and end with the story of “Manu and the Fish”. By the time you get to Ancient Greek History, the story becomes the lesson...for example: The story of the “Battle of Thermopylae”.

Things to Consider When Creating Student Assignments:

1. Refer to the Skills list discussed earlier and plan your assignments to support a variety of skills.
2. When it comes to student compositions, take into consideration the aspects of writing on which you wish to focus and then be creative in how the assignment will accomplish this. Avoid assigning a composition on “A Day in the Life of a ______” for every block or culture. Strive
for at least one writing assignment a week during History blocks. (This includes writing poetry.)

3. Make sure that the instructions of the assignment are very clear. Nothing frustrates students more than to come up short on an assignment because they did not understand what you wanted or how to do what you asked.

4. Group writing assignments can be fun for the students and help develop social relationships, but they are usually time-consuming. I suggest limiting these to maybe 2 a year.

5. There are, however, many wonderful activities that can be done in a group for example: creating a 3-D map, building a diorama, putting on a play or puppet show, etc.

6. Certainly by 5th grade most of a main lesson book’s entries should be the student’s own work. Except for assignments such as maps, a thematic poem or drawings from the blackboard, the main lesson book should be the student’s own creation, reflecting his/her skills and understanding.

7. Consider doing some of the paintings in painting class on smaller paper and including them in the book. (This is especially great for Botany.)

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