

OBJECTIVES

Project-based
learning

Interpreting History

Student groups will:

- ▶ analyze a given quote about history and identify the concept that inspired it.
- ▶ use USA TODAY and a history text to research current and historical events, figures, relationships, etc. that illustrate the quote/concept.
- ▶ develop a lesson plan that uses this research to teach the quote/concept to classmates.
- ▶ evaluate their lesson against its stated objectives.

WEEK 1: First, ask students to define “history” and read their definitions aloud. As a class, discuss how history is similar to an unsolved mystery, a morality tale, a crime scene and a conveyor belt. Is history primarily a matter of facts or perspective? Are there historical truths? If so, what are they? Next, divide the class into small groups and assign each group one of the following quotes: 1.) “All history is modern history.” – *Wallace Stevens* 2.) “There is no law of history any more than of a kaleidoscope.” – *John Ruskin* 3.) “The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman.” – *Willa Cather* 4.) “The history of all . . . existing society is the history of class struggles.” – *Karl Marx* 5.) “. . . history is a pattern of timeless moments.” – *T. S. Eliot* Give groups ample time to discuss and record at least three different interpretations of their quote. Finally, ask them to decide what basic concept the quote conveys.

WEEK 2: Last week, student groups analyzed an assigned statement about history. This week, ask groups to peruse their history book and recent copies of USA TODAY for at least four anecdotes, events, relationships, etc. that illustrate the concept conveyed by their quote. Then, tell student groups that they will be creating a 40-minute history lesson that teaches the quote and its concept to classmates. They must incorporate the historical illustrations of their quote into their lesson. Moreover, their lesson must include an innovative activity – one never before experienced in a classroom – that will engage their peers. (In other words, no worksheets, *Jeopardy!* games, essays, skits, etc.!) Give groups time to develop ideas for their lesson.

WEEK 3: Last week, students decided how to explain their quote with examples from history. They also decided on an innovative way to teach the quote’s concept to classmates. This week, students will write a formal lesson plan and prepare for their upcoming stint as teachers. Explain the elements of a simple lesson plan to students – e.g., objectives, resources/materials, timeline, procedure/activity, evaluation, etc. On the blackboard, create a lesson plan template for groups to copy. Then, give groups time to create their plan, gather materials, and practice teaching their lesson. Remind students that all individual group members should have equal roles in preparing and presenting the lesson.

WEEK 4: Last week, student groups prepared a lesson based on a given quote about history. They also wrote a formal plan and practiced teaching their lesson. This week, each group will take turns teaching the class. Before beginning, explain that teachers often perform self assessments after lessons to evaluate how well things went. Thus, group members – either individually or collectively – should reflect on their lesson in writing. Prompt students to explain which parts of the lesson went well, which could be improved and whether or not their objectives were met. Finally, after all groups have taught and evaluated their lessons, ask students to redefine “history.” How, if at all, have their definitions changed?