

Title:

Past Imperfect: Examining Secondary Sources of the American Revolution

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Abstract:

This three-day United States History unit examines the problems encountered when using historical films in the classroom and how primary and secondary sources should be utilized as a starting point for classroom discussion. The unit is designed for ninth grade students.

State Standard(s):

B.12.2 - Analyze primary and secondary sources related to a historical question to evaluate their relevance, make comparisons, integrate new information with prior knowledge, and come to a reasoned conclusion.

B.12.4 – Assess the validity of different interpretations of historical events

Essential Historical Questions:

How accurate is *The Patriot*, a film about the American Revolution? What difference does historical accuracy make?

Perspectives on the Question:

Movie makers/actors	Will my movie attract viewers earn a profit?
Movie patrons	Does this historically based movie interest me? What have my friends/movie reviewers said about it?
Historians	Is this movie accurate? Does this movie distort people’s image of history? Do the benefits of this movie outweigh the negatives?
Teachers	How does this movie impact my students’ understanding of history? How does this understanding affect my teaching of history?

Learning Targets:

Knowledge

Terms:

Patriot

Loyalist (Tory)

Historical Figures

Banastre Tarleton

Francis Marion

Thomas Sumter

Andrew Pickens

Historical Themes/Events

King's Mountain

Battle of Cowpens

Race Relations on Southern plantations

Impact of Tories on the English/Southern colonial forces

Character of military leaders (Pickens, Sumter, Marion)

Skills and Processes

- Reading strategies for primary sources
- Cooperative learning skills
- Listening and note-taking skills
- Writing Skills
 - *Thesis
 - *Persuasion
 - *Supporting details
 - *Opposing viewpoints

Reasoning and Creative and Critical Thinking

- Consider multiple perspectives
- Distinguish between unsupported expressions of opinion and informed hypothesis grounded in historical evidence
- Use primary sources to analyze and determine the validity of secondary sources
- Hold interpretations of history as tentative

Dispositions and Attitudes

- Consider the motives and ethics of movie makers

- Think about the relationship between commanders and militia/African-Americans/Tories in the movie and then in primary sources.
- Think about the movie makers motive in changing the above relationships on film
- Think about the effects of inaccurate history being portrayed in “history-based” movies and the impact it will have on the public

Instruction:

Preliminary Activities:

Day One

1 – Class will open with a three minute clip from the movie *Sweet Liberty*.

2 – Students and teacher will discuss meaning of the clip (How movie producers take “liberty” with their portrayal of history in movies.)

3 - Students will receive Handout #1.

4 – Students will watch each clip one at a time and try to discover the inaccuracies that are visible to them.

5 – Students and teacher will have follow-up discussion and clarification of these inaccuracies.

6 – The following closing questions are to be completed orally or written. (choose one or all three)

A – Have you ever wondered if “historically based” movies are accurate or inaccurate? Is it an important question to ask?

B – Do you believe that the errors we found today are significant or insignificant? Explain your response.

C- Can you think of any other titles of inaccurate movies? Name and discuss.

New Learning Activities:

Day Two and Three

1 – Background and contextual information on *The Patriot* will given. (Use teacher knowledge, textbooks, and maps to do this)

2 – After initial knowledge has been obtained, students will look at primary sources in order to understand the character and relationships involved in the movie. (Marion, Sumter, Tarleton, etc.) Students will take notes on these primary sources.

During note-taking, questions for students to consider could include the following. How do the leaders view the militia? What kinds of problems are the Continentals facing? What is your opinion of the men (Tarleton, Marion, Sumter) after reading their letters? What happens at the battles at Cowpens and King's Mountain? What is the role of the Tory in the south?

Is the treatment of African-Americans mentioned? If not, what would you infer that treatment to be like?

3 – Students will view selected clips from *The Patriot*.

4 – Students will complete Handout #2 in a think-pair-share format

5 – Class will discuss questions and overall opinion of the film

6 – Students will be given Handout #3 and complete the assessment in class

Post-Learning Activities:

After Assessment is returned

1 – Class will discuss the value of the assignment. Students will be asked if this assignment will change their movie watching habits.

2 – Students will also reflect in pairs on ways to improve their writing for next time based on the rubric expectations.

Assignment:

Students will respond in essay form to the following writing prompt.

Mel Gibson, star of *The Patriot*, is quoted as stating, “If one were to adhere to historical accuracy all the way, you’d probably have the most boring two hours on earth, but firstly it’s entertainment and we’ve taken license with history to make it more compelling.” In a well organized essay defend or refute Gibson’s opinion. Make sure to create a thesis statement with supporting detail from the textbook, primary sources, and movie clips. Acknowledging the opposite point of view in your argument is required.

Assessment:

Goal of Performance or Product:

For students to reflect on the motives and effects of Hollywood’s “historical” moviemaking after analyzing *The Patriot*.

For students to compose an organized essay with a persuasive thesis and supporting detail for their argument.

Role of Student:

Students will analyze and reflect on information.

Students will then make an evaluative decision and support it through writing.

Audience of Performance or Product:

Classroom teacher

Teacher may choose to use peer editors or have students share work before turning it in.

Situation:

Assessment task will be completed in class where resources are readily available.

Scoring rubric is available online.

Resources:

Film Resources:

The Alamo (1960)

Glory (1989)

Gone with the Wind (1939)

Last of the Mohicans (1992)

The Patriot (2000)

Sweet Liberty (1986)

Internet:

General Marion to Colonel Peter Horry Jan. 10, 1782

<http://www.schistory.org/displays/RevWar/archives-online>

General Marion to Colonel Peter Horry Jan. 18, 1782

<http://www.schistory.org/displays/RevWar/archives-online>

General Sumter to General Marion June 14, 1781

<http://www.schistory.org/displays/RevWar/archives-online>

General Sumter to General Marion June 15, 1781

<http://www.schistory.org/displays/RevWar/archives-online>

Secondary Sources:

Mark Carnes, *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies* (1995).

Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris eds., *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution As Told by Participants* (1967).

William Ross St. George Jr., "Review of *The Patriot*." *The Journal of American History*
87 (December 2000): 1146-1148.

Teacher-Made Resources:

All handouts and worksheets are available online at the Teaching American History
Grant Program website.