

NEH Shifting Power on the Plains Lesson Plan

Brief Description:

This lesson brings to life the tragic events of the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890 and gives students an opportunity to practice multiple perspectives and to grow as a critical consumer of the media

Objectives:

Students will

- Explore the multiple perspectives different groups of people involved in the conflict had (examining bias, reasons for thinking the way they did, etc.)
- Learn the historical events of the Wounded Knee Massacre (the event itself and the steps leading to it)
- Discuss how different sensationalist reports coming out of the area may have influenced the outcome of hostilities at Wounded Knee
- Be exposed to key figures surrounding this historical event

Keywords:

Big Foot, Samuel Whitside, Ghost Dance, Wovoka, Yellow Journalism, Sioux, Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890

Materials Needed:

- Journals/Writing Paper for student reflection
- Highlighters
- Printed Out Copies of Different News Reports with Sensationalist Headlines
- Computer and Projector for .PPT
- Images of Ghost Dance, Sioux Leaders, U.S. Officers and Wounded Knee Massacre

The Lesson:

Day 1

Up to this point students should be familiar with the Great Indian Wars of the late 1800's; who were key players for both Native tribes and the United States, what treaties and promises had been made to Native peoples, why treaties had been broken and the impact that action had on Native peoples.

When class begins I will tell the students we will be learning about the last great "battle" of the Indian Wars in the 1800's. But I will let them know upfront that it is

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“one of the most controversial topics in American History,” which should get them a little interested.

Before diving into the events leading up to Wounded Knee or even announcing that we will be learning about Wounded Knee I will ask them to answer this question: “have you ever been involved in or heard about something that at first wasn’t really true but because rumors and gossip started to spread around a really bad thing ended up happening? Almost like the rumors made the thing true?”

I imagine some of my students will think of something right away, others will struggle thinking this abstractly. When asking for examples I will be looking for something they can somehow relate to and would transfer well into the context of a lesson, *a school fight*. I will then ask students if this statement can be true, “sometimes the two people who get into a fight didn’t really even want to fight each other at first but it ends up happening anyway because they are worried about other things; how they might look in front of their friends, who they are protecting, etc.” Then I’ll ask if gossip and rumors seem to push people into fights- which should really get my 8th grade girls fired up.

Once the point is made that rumors can create something that might not have previously existed I will introduce the class to one of the greatest and saddest “fights” of all, a fight that many who were involved would later regret or hardly understand how it had happened in the first place. I will also say that for others we’ll never know what they thought of the event later in life because they were killed one cold December day in 1890...

Then I will introduce the name of the event, writing two names on the whiteboard. The Battle of Wounded Knee and The Massacre of Wounded Knee. I will ask students to write down both names in the journals and draw a line down the middle of their paper in between them. Then I will ask them to take a few minutes to generate on each column of their paper under those headings words that show how different these two names are.

Draw a line down the middle of the white board and begin handing dry erase markers to students. Have them come to the board and write down 2-3 words that they included in their journal and have them pick another student by tossing/handing the marker to them.

Once enough words are on the board have a little discussion about what had been generated and ask what factors could make one group of people call it a massacre and another group of people call it a battle? (Bias, perspective, culture, experiences, etc.).

Now the stage is set for teaching the students the buildup to Wounded Knee and the actual event. I will do this with the included .PPT.

The .PPT covers:

1. The great problems the Sioux people faced as they lost their land, culture and way of life to the U.S. government.
2. How the Sioux tried to address these problems (prophet Wovoka and the Ghost Dance).
3. Sioux reactions to the Ghost Dance, U.S. government and newspapers reactions to Ghost Dance (here the sensationalist headlines are introduced- this is where I will ask can anybody guess from these headlines where this is going?).
4. Native leaders get worried as U.S. troops are sent. U.S. soldiers begin bringing in Native leaders and Sitting Bull is killed.
5. Bigfoot's band tries to flee to the Red Cloud Agency to seek shelter with Red Cloud but is apprehended and brought back.
6. Stop at Wounded Creek for the night, U.S. agents force Bigfoot's band to hand over their weapons and a massacre later ensues.

Day 2

As class begins do quick 5 min. review of what was learned the day before (if KWL chart was used on first day just go over that).

Split class up into groups of 4, handing out copies of newspaper headlines, both sensationalist and accurate reporting (after thinking about this I changed my mind from having students look at Wounded Knee accounts to some present day news articles- both because I want to have them focus on analyzing bias, perspective and this idea of thinking critically about what the media feed them in different contexts and also for lack of a plethora of wounded knee articles that I could get my hands on- you could do whatever you feel more comfortable with. So I'll have some New York Times/other accurate newspapers vs. Weekly World News fare.)

Ask students to identify which newspaper articles/headlines are biased and which are not by highlighting with a marker the biased ones. They then, as a group have to come up with a few sentences defending their decision on why a certain headline is biased or not. (I will hover around groups and have conversations with them as they go).

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I will then write three questions on the whiteboard- which they can talk about for ideas as a group but will each have to answer by themselves in their notebooks, they will also have to copy down this definition:

Yellow Journalism- Journalism that exploits, distorts, or exaggerates the news to create sensations and attract readers.

1. Do you think journalists should be allowed to write anything they want to whether people know that they are making it up or not? Why or why not? (Hint: What kind of responsibilities does a journalist have to the public?)

2. What kind of effects can come about as a result of journalists doing this?

3. Do you think journalists/the media still do this today? Have you seen anything like this? How do you deal with it?

Assessment:

Later in the class or at the beginning or on the next day if time is running out have students be able to graphically organize the events of Wounded Knee as well as include their own definitions that discriminate between Battle, Massacre, Yellow Journalism and how that can impact people even today.

Submitted By:

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