



Boulder County Latino History Project Lesson Plans

Title: What is an American?

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Overview

Lesson Overview	Using a strategy called “Philosophical Chairs:” and relying on primary and secondary sources, students discuss what makes a person “American.” I use this lesson in subsequent lessons to consider the question, “Who is the ‘American’ in the American Dream?”
Author(s) & School	Lee Lazar, Casey Middle School & Meghan Lukens - Peak to Peak
Grade Level/Course	Middle School This lesson is tied to my unit on “The American Dream” developed for a course called Eighth Grade Social Studies, a civics, geography, economics and history. (pre-Columbian through pre-1890 US) course
Standards	1. Analyze and interpret historical sources to ask and research
Time Required	One class period plus homework before and after this lesson While this lesson can be taught as a stand alone lesson, it is best if embedded in a larger context such as privilege, civil rights, immigration, etc.
Topic	Government/government programs/laws; Immigration; Civil rights activity
Time Period	2000-2013
Tags (keywords)	American, American Dream, immigrant, citizenship, language, Latino, Hispanic, Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, citizen

Preparation *(Links to worksheets, primary sources and other materials):*

Materials	<p>Several primary and secondary documents presented on a view only Google doc. These should be printed out before the lesson for homework or available electronically.</p> <p>http://teachbocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/American-Dream-Primary-Sources.pdf</p> <p>https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zzlwNOPGMiFK8mCBepCk990LqBOpu_dCgT4wT944ARs</p>
Resources/Links	<p>For more information on using Philosophical Chairs, see Philosophical Chairs Discussion Scholastic</p> <p>Using Philosophical Chairs by: David Duez</p>



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Teachers and students can create their own padlets by signing up for a free account at padlet.com.

Lesson Procedure *(Step by Step Instructions):*

1. For homework, students should view the Google doc. Print out or access online using google classroom, for example.
2. Students should number 1- 13, then view the pictures and give them each a short description such as soldier, newborn, court case, etc. The pictures of old and young Fred Korematsu, along with the text, should be viewed as a single image.
3. Students should then rank the images (photos and documents). Ask students to list at least five qualities they observe in the photos and used for their ranking (patriotism, hard work, legal status, participation in government, generations of a family ...) Which images display a high degree of "Americanism"? Which ones do not? Students should rank the images from 1-13.
3. During class, students participate in an activity called "Philosophical Chairs," a type of structured debate. In this activity, students are asked to take sides. Students from one side of the debate go to one end of the room. The undecided students occupy the sidelines. Students can switch sides if persuaded, as can students who are on the sidelines. One side starts by giving its argument. The other side then responds by summing up the argument and using the name of the student who made the argument. For example, "Lee, I heard you say that . . . ," then gives their counter argument or new argument. Students should refer to homework as a launching point for various scenarios to discuss.
5. The point of the Philosophical Chair is not to win, but rather to share ideas and learn. Let students know that you will ask them to recount which arguments they found most persuasive even if they did not switch sides. Students should refer to their homework during the debate.
6. Before closing the Philosophical Chair, give a few minute warning so that students who have not had a chance to offer their opinion have the opportunity to do so. After closing the PC, repeat this offer, as some students choose to dominate even when given guidance to allow a full spectrum of participation.
7. Randomly choose students to share aloud the most persuasive point(s) they heard. This holds students accountable for listening, not just talking.
8. For homework, students should write a paragraph explaining what makes a person truly American and cite at least one example from the Philosophical Chair. This allows every student to participate and earn credit as well as complementing written skills with oral ones.

Evaluation/Assessment: *(Methods for collecting evidence of student learning)*

1. **Assessment option one: students submit a written paragraph expressing what makes an American (citizenship, acculturation, patriotism, shared values, performing the duties and responsibilities of American citizens . . .). This paragraph can be modified for ELL and SPED students and other students who struggle with writing. Students could use bullet points rather than complete sentences, teachers could offer**



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- sentence starters or closed paragraphs (sentences with blanks to fill in), for example.
2. **Assessment option two: students will create, together or individually, a packet of words and images that explains graphically what makes a person American.**
 3. **In addition, all students will include a self-assessment of their Philosophical Chairs performance. This performance assessment will include the following four questions, which have been borrowed from authors of Philosophical Chairs.**
 - a. **Did you agree with your original position?**
 - b. **Explain why your position changed or did not change and your reasons.**
 - c. **What was said that made you stronger in your position or change your mind?**
 - d. **Rate your participation from 1 - 4 and explain. Here are criteria.**
 - i. **Did you organize and present your thoughts clearly?**
 - ii. **Did you allow others to speak and speak one at a time?**
 - iii. **Did you give verbal clues to your listener, "I have three points," or "My thinking is related to so and so's point," for example.**
 - e. **What questions do you still have? What do you still wonder?**

