Teaching with Primary Sources Activity

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Grade 5

Primary Sources:
- Year books from Donora Smog Museum (1840’s)
- Multiple articles of clothing from Donora Smog Museum
- Picture of girls on steps from Prints and Photographs on Library of Congress website
- Newspaper article from Historical Newspaper on Library of Congress website

Standards:
1.4.5 B. Write multi-paragraph informational pieces (e.g., essays, descriptions, letters, reports, instructions).
1.6.5 D. Contribute to discussions.
1.6.5 E. Participate in small and large group discussions and presentations.
8.1.6 B. Explain and analyze historical sources.
8.1.6 D. Describe and explain historical research

Comparing Clothing from the 1840’s to Today’s Clothing

I would begin this lesson by researching what types of clothing were worn in the 1840’s. I would make a typical outfit worn by a teacher at that time. I would then come to class wearing that outfit. I would ask the students if they notice anything different in my clothing. Next, I would give the students’ time to discuss my outfit and what makes it different then the types of clothing that people wear today. I would then ask the students to look around and think of characteristics of outfit worn by people today. On the board, I would write their comments about the outfit. On one side I would write characteristics of the outfit of the 1840’s and on the opposite side I would write characteristics of outfits of people today.

Next, I would present the different primary sources to the students. I would show them the year books from the Donora Smog Museum, the articles of clothing from the 1840’s also from the Donora Smog Museum, the pictures of the children from the Library of Congress website and also the newspaper article from the Library of Congress website. After explaining what each artifact is, I would put the students into groups. Each group will then receive one of
the artifact and they will be given 5-10 minutes to observe and take notes on each object or picture. One person in the group will be the facilitator (the person in charge of getting the group to stay on task), one will be the writer (the person taking notes on the artifact), another will be the presenter (the person in charge of presenting their information), and the last student will be the time keeper. At the end of the 5-10 minutes, the students will switch the artifacts so they have a new one to observe and take notes on.

After the students have had the chance to observe and take notes on each artifact, the students will have the chance to share their findings with the class. Each presenter will stand up and present their notes on each artifact. When the presentations are done, I will tell the students they will be completing a Venn diagram. I will take the time to show the students what a Venn diagram is and how to use it. I will show them an example of a completed Venn diagram on the overhead projector. Then, I will pass out a Venn diagram sheet to each student. I will tell the students they are to compare the clothing worn in the 1840’s to the clothing that is worn today. They have to have at least 3 facts in each section of the Venn diagram. I will secure the artifacts in the front of the room so the students can see them while they are working on comparing and contrasting the clothing of the 1840’s and the clothing of today.

When the students are finished with their Venn diagrams, I will ask them to turn them in so I can look at them. I will check the Venn diagrams and return them to the students. The last thing I will ask the students to do is write a one paragraph paper. The topic of the paragraph will be about whether or not they like the clothing worn in the 1840’s and why. In this paragraph, the students will be expected to write in complete sentences with correct spelling and grammar and have a minimum of 7 sentences. The students will be given time to brainstorm, look at the artifacts and decided their choice, and computer time to type their paragraph.
In this lesson, the students will not only be exposed to multiple primary sources from history but they will be practicing many skills. They will be using their social skills by working in groups and presenting information, writing skills by doing the Venn diagrams and the paragraph, and learning how to work with primary sources and see how useful they really are. They are not just looking at a text book but they have actual objects to see and feel. It gives the students a better picture of what the clothing was like in the 1840’s, see pictures of teachers and students and their clothing, and look at newspaper articles of that time. I feel this is an activity that the students are involved and interested in working with primary sources.