Action Plan for Learning

Fourth Grade Language Arts and Social Studies:  
*Connecting the Dust Bowl to the Donora Smog Incident*

Teaching with Primary Sources Workshop

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Primary Sources
Local Sources

- A photograph showing the Donora-Webster Bridge going across the Monongahela River found in the Donora Digital Collection under Smoke and Smog row 1, picture #1
- An interview with a victim of the Donora Smog Incident on the loss of her grandmother found in the Donora Digital Collection under Oral history documentaries, student project #2

National Sources

- An interview about the Dust Storms in Oklahoma.
- Photograph from The Dust Bowl

PA Teaching Standards

- 1.4.3.A. Write narrative pieces
- 1.5.3.B. Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic
- 8.1.3.C. Understand fundamentals of historical interpretation.

This lesson is designed for third or fourth grade. It can be used in Social Studies and incorporates Language Arts. I would begin this lesson by using a primary resource to grab the students’ attention. Primary resources are a great way to incorporate history into any lesson and help make it come alive. Since the students were not around during the time of the Dust Bowl and The Great Depression, it is hard for them to relate or connect. Using primary sources in lessons helps to make this possible.

This lesson could be used during a unit on the Great Depression or independently. I would first show the students the picture of the abandoned farm from The Dust Bowl. I will tell students to talk with a partner and discuss where this may have taken place. We can discuss as a class, and I will inform students that this is an abandoned farm from the Dust Bowl era. Students will continue to discuss and draw conclusions based on the photograph. I will then give students some background information on The Great
Depression and specifically, The Dust Bowl that took place in The Great Plains region due to drought and dust storms.

Students will then listen to the interview from 1940 from Mrs. Flora Robertson talking about the dust storms in Oklahoma. This will allow students to gain a first hand perspective of someone that lived through this time. I will then have students write in journals to respond to this interview. Students can then share their thoughts and responses with a partner or small group.

Students will then be introduced to the Donora Smog Incident, an occurring that is similar to the Dust Bowl that happened right here in Pennsylvania. I will show the students the photograph of the smog that encompasses the Donora-Webster Bridge. Students can discuss similarities and differences between the two photographs, the smog incident, and the Dust Bowl. We will then listen to an account from a survivor from the Donora Smog Incident. Students will write in their journal responding to this interview.

As a class, we can complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the two historical events.

To conclude this lesson, students will complete a writing activity that ties both together. Students will write a diary or journal entry as if they were living during one of the events. Students can answer such questions as: What do your living conditions look like? How would you feel if you lost someone in the disastrous weather? What would you do if you were forced to move? What would you do during this hard time? How were you and your family affected? Students may then read their journal entry to a partner or the entire class.
References


