Newspapers Then and Now: An Oral History Activity

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March Workshop for Teachers

Action Plan for Learning
Pennsylvania Academic Standards:

1.6 Speaking and Listening

   1.6.5.A. Listen to others.

   1.6.5.E. Participate in small and large group discussions and presentations.

   1.6.5.F. Use media for learning purposes.

8.1 Historical Analysis and Skills Development

   8.1.6.A. Understand chronological thinking and distinguish between past, present and future time.

   8.1.6.B. Explain and analyze historical sources.

Inquiry Based Learning Model:
**Questioning:** Students will be told that today they will be investigating the question: How are newspapers today different from newspapers of the past? Students will make predictions.

**Researching:** Students will listen to a short sound clip of a Pittsburgh newspaper representative speaking about Pittsburgh publications in 1942.

**Discussing:** Students will participate in a class discussion about what they have just listened to.

**Creating:** Students will get into small groups and explore a modern newspaper and an old newspaper, recording their findings and preparing to present their findings briefly to the class.

**Reflecting:** Small groups of students will briefly present their findings of the differences in newspapers from the past and present to the class.

**Description of the Activity:**

The title of my Action Plan for Learning (APL) is “Newspapers Now and Then.” Newspapers are a wonderful tool to use in the classroom, because they are full of current events and relevant information. They can be used to teach any subject and, in many cases, are free and easy to come by. So, when I came across a Library of Congress (LOC) oral history sound clip about newspapers from Pittsburgh produced during World War II, I knew that newspapers would be the focus of my activity. This activity is designed to take up a forty minute class period, but could easily be shortened or lengthened as needed. I would probably do this activity with fifth graders.

To begin the activity, the teacher will ask the students how they think newspapers today differ from newspapers ten years ago, twenty years ago, thirty years ago, and older. This is the questioning part of the Inquiry-Based Learning Model (IBLM). The students will come up with several predictions, as a class, as to how newspapers today are different from newspapers of the past. The teacher will write these responses on the board.
Next, the students will listen to a short sound clip from a LOC oral history. The clip is one minute and twelve seconds long. It is taken from a longer interview, around eight minutes long, called “Dear Mr. President,” recorded in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in early 1942. This is the researching part of the inquiry based learning model. “Dear Mr. President” is a recording taken during World War II. It is people from all walks of life, and it includes a section from people living in the Pittsburgh area at the time, who recorded messages to President Roosevelt, with the understanding that he would actually receive these messages. Most of the people talked about the efforts that they were personally making to ensure that the United States of America won the war. I found this clip in the “After the Day of Infamy” section of the LOC’s America Memory Collection. The URL is [http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aafcphhtml/afcphhome.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aafcphhtml/afcphhome.html)

The portion of the clip that the students will be listening to is a man by the name of Clark W. Kelley, who introduces himself as a representative of Western Pennsylvania newspapers. The specific URL for Mr. Kelley is located at [http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/afc1942003.sr58](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.afc/afc1942003.sr58). He says that there is complete unity among all Pittsburgh publications in support of every phase of the war effort. He goes on to say that all differences of opinion between the newspapers and their readers that existed before December 7th (Pearl Harbor) have disappeared. He speaks for a little over a minute.

After the students listen to the sound clip of Mr. Kelley, they will participate in a class discussion about what they have just heard. This is the discussing part of the inquiry based learning model. The teacher will ask the students some questions to get them thinking such as: “What time period do you think this recording was taken?” (Hint: December 7th); “What war is this man talking about?”; “Who was our president at this time?”; “What are some of our newspapers in the Pittsburgh area today?”; “Do you think all of the readers of these newspapers
agree on many things?”; “Do you think the newspapers themselves tend to have different opinions?”; Can you think of a time or an event when most people had the same or similar opinions?”; “Can you think of a time or an event when people had very different opinions?”; Asking just one or two questions should start a nice class discussion but if not, I will just ask students all of the questions above.

After the class discussion, the students will be divided into groups of approximately four or five students. Each group will receive one newspaper from within the past few weeks, and one newspaper from the past. They do not have to be the same publication. This will be the creating part of the inquiry based learning model. I have been saving newspapers my entire life, and I am lucky enough to have quite a few that my parents and grandparents saved as well, so I would use these at this point in the activity. If a teacher did not have access to old newspapers such as this, he or she could probably access them and print them at a library, or from an internet database. The students will have about ten minutes to write down all of the things that they notice are different between their two newspapers. It could be obvious things like color, font, size and weight of the paper, the texture of the paper, the price of the paper, etc.; or things that are less obvious such as more or less advertisements, editorials, or local stories, and the opinions inside the newspaper. They may notice differences in the performance of sports teams or even mention of modern things like the internet and iPods. Anything that can be observed is considered legitimate.

Finally, the groups of students will take turns presenting their findings to the class. Each group will only have about two minutes to do this, so it will be a very informal presentation. This is the reflecting part of the inquiry based learning model. After the groups are finished presenting, the students will compare what they have learned from each group to the predictions
that they made at the beginning of class. Also, discuss why things have changed. Ask why they think newspapers are now in color instead of black-and-white? Why are newspapers generally smaller now? Etc. This concludes the APL activity. It will be followed by a brief assessment based on the above activity.

Assessment:

I will give the students a brief quiz to assess their knowledge of what we discussed in class today. Students will have ten minutes to list as many differences between today’s newspapers and newspapers of the past that they can think of. They must be differences that we discussed or mentioned in class. To get 100 percent, students must list at least ten differences. The differences are to be listed in the form of a sentence. The quizzes will be graded as follows:

10 sentences – 100% Excellent

9 sentences – 95% Great

8 sentences – 90% Good

7 sentences – 85% OK

6 sentences – 80% Average

5 sentences – 75% Average

4 sentences – 70% Below Average

3 or less sentences - Unsatisfactory