John W. Fields
A Slave Narrative
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Teaching with Primary Sources
Dr. Dave Lonich and Mr. Nikolas Roberts
I. Pennsylvania Teaching Standards

8.1.U.B - Evaluate the interpretation of historical events and sources, considering the uses of fact verses opinion, multiple perspectives, and causes.

8.1.6B - Explain and Analyze Historical Sources

8.1.3B - Identify fact, opinion, multiple points of view, and Primary Sources as related to historical events

II. Inquiry Based Learning Model

A. Questioning: Instructor informs students that grades will be given by the grades A-F by pulling a piece of paper out of a hat with the letter grade written on it. This will be used to make a relation to the injustice of being sold into slavery at random.

B. Researching: Students will break into partners and begin reading the transcript of John W. Fields, an ex-slave from the Civil War period.

C. Discussing: Using the student’s prior knowledge, the class will discuss the conditions of being a slave at the time of the Civil War.

D. Creating: We will discuss the similarities and differences of being a child during the Civil War and as a child of today. What would a student do if he were put in the same position of Mr. Fields? How do the students think that someone like Mr. Fields still led a moral and physically clean life? What did Mr. Fields mean by stating: "Our ignorance was the greatest hold the South had on us?"

E. Reflecting: The classroom will review material from the transcript and students will list five difficulties of being a slave. Students will also make a poster of a slave auction as themselves being the slave.
III. Description

The lesson of John W. Fields: A Slave Narrative would begin by the instructor stating that grades will be given by the grades A-F being written on pieces of paper. If the student picks a piece of paper with the letter grade of an "F", that is the grade that he will receive on their report card for this class. Then it would be discussed how this decision form a piece of paper can change a person's life—by not making the honor roll, parents getting angry, GPA being lower, and so on. The instructor would encourage students to ask each other questions about this injustice and work in groups to achieve diversity of the students’ views. (Questioning).

A transcript of John W. Fields, will be used, found online at the Library of Congress: http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html. This slave narrative will then be handed out to each small group of students. The students will then partner-read the transcript and see how Mr. Fields’ life was changed by a little piece of paper being pulled from a hat. A picture of Mr. Fields will also be shown at the slave narratives from the web site. The instructor would ask the students what they thought the main idea of the article was and discuss the author’s point of view. (Researching).

The instructor will then ask the students how they would feel and act if they were put into the same situation as Mr. Fields. By the simple act of pulling a piece of paper out of a hat, Mr. Fields was taken away from his mother, siblings, and everything that he had ever known, at the young age of six years old. The class then could discuss the conditions of being a slave, the separation of families, the hard, never-ending labor, the desire to learn to read and write and the severe punishments that were given if rules weren't followed.
The discussion could then be directed to discuss the similarities of being a child slave of the Civil War and living in today's society. The instructor will encourage the students to ask open-ended questions such as:  “What would be the major differences of children in the 1860’s as compared to today?” and, “How do the students think that someone like Mr. Fields still tried to be a good and moral person after all that he had seen in his life?”

The instructor will emphasize the author's main quote of Mr. Fields stating, "Our ignorance was the greatest hold that the south had on us." Discussion could then turn toward the great desire of the slaves to learn to read and write, and how they took advantage of every opportunity to educate themselves. We would specifically discuss the question of punishment that would be given if a slave was caught trying to learn to read and write. (Discussing)

The students would then create a flyer of themselves being auctioned as a slave. They would need to create a physical description of themselves, and a snapshot (taken of themselves in class with a Polaroid Camera). Students would list their strengths and weaknesses as if they were to be sold (e.g. how much money it would cost to buy them, if they have had any children, and the description of the jobs that they have had, and if they worked well by themselves or had to be watched over. It could also be listed if they have ever tried to run away.) This could also be an assignment, depending on class time available. (Creating)

IV. Assessment:

Mr. Fields stated, "In most of us colored folks was the great desire to be able to read and write. We took advantage of every opportunity to educate ourselves."
The students would then write a short essay on the importance of education to the slaves, why it was so important that the slaves were better educated, and how the outcome of their lives could have been different. (Reflecting). This would be presented.

Name:

Eye-contact  1  2  3  4  5  
Voice     1  2  3  4  5  
Content     1  2  3  4  5  
Neatness     1  2  3  4  5  

Comments:

The student's oral presentation would be judged on the above criteria. This would be discussed before the oral presentations would begin. The students would be evaluated using the above rubric, with one being the lowest possible score, and five being the highest possible score in each category. The lowest possible total score would be four, and the highest possible score would be twenty.

The instructor can end the lesson by showing the students the web site from which the slave narratives were taken from, and stress the importance of oral history and how everyone has something interesting that has happened, even though it may seem insignificant. Students would then be told how we may never have learned the story of John W. Fields if someone hadn't taken the time to listen and record his story. His story could have been lost forever. This could build up to the students doing their own oral history project.