

NEH Hudson River Workshop Lesson Plan 2013

Teacher: Derek Frieling

Subject: American History

Grade Level: Dual Credit (Usually Juniors and Seniors)

Summary:

Students will determine whether or not the construction of a canal should be built. Students will understand the benefits as well as the downfall of constructing a canal and relate to the lesson because of the local example used. Students will also learn the political, social, and economic effects the Erie Canal caused and will make up their own minds about the construction of a canal locally.

Historical Lessons of the Erie Canal

Rationale:

The purpose of history is to learn from past mistakes so to not repeat them. Or on the other hand, replicate the successes in history. The purpose of this lesson is to examine the history of the construction of the Erie Canal and its effect on history based on economic, social, and environmental issues. Then these lessons will be applied to modern factors to determine if history should be repeated.

Time:

2-3 weeks, parts of several classes

Grade Level:

Intended for Dual Credit American History, but can be adapted to other levels

Lesson Plan:

Divide students into three groups. Students will have to determine whether or not a canal should be built from St. Joseph to Hannibal, Missouri. Each group will be given primary source documents to help determine whether or not the canal should be built. However, the documents for each group will be different and carefully selected by the teacher. The first set of documents will pro-canal, the second set will be anti-canal, and the final set will be an incomplete mixture of both sides. These primary source documents will examine the building of the Erie Canal and the positive and negative effects the canal had on history.

The first two groups of students will be witnesses that will prepare a presentation to convince the third group, a special committee in the Missouri State Senate, whether or not the canal should be built. The testimony must address economic, social, and environmental issues. The testimony must cite at least 5 direct references to the primary source documents. After each group has made their presentations, the Senate committee will recess to make their decision. This third group will make a press release in which they will explain their decision and why it is in the best interest of the public. The press release must include at least 5 direct references to primary source documents.

As a follow up activity, all the students will be required to write an essay. The prompt will be the following: How does the Erie Canal lead to the temperance, women's suffrage, Sabbatarianism, Second Great Awakening, or abolition (pick one) movement? You will need to compare and contrast the economic situation prior to and after building the canal. Finally, predict what effects building a canal would have on St. Joseph and Missouri?

Primary Documents:

Clarke, Thomas Curtis. Water-Way: From the Ocean to the Lakes.

<http://eriecanal.org/texts/Clarke/Clarke.html>

Digging Clinton's Ditch: The Impact of the Erie Canal on America, 1807-1860.

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma02/volpe/canal/>

The Erie Canal and Its Relations to New York. <http://eriecanal.org/texts/Scribners-1877/Scribners-1877.html>

Finch, Roy. The Story of the New York State Canals.

<http://eriecanal.org/texts/Finch/Finch.html>

National Significance and Historical Context – Erie Canalway.

www.eriecanalway.org/documents/07-2_National_Significance_Final.pdf

Tyron, Warren. A Mirror for Americans. <http://eriecanal.org/texts/Mirror.html>

Whitford, Noble. History of the Canal System of the State of New York. Chapter 25.

<http://eriecanal.org/texts/Whitford/1906/Chap25.html>