

LESSON PLAN 1 - DEFINING HEROES

OBJECTIVE:

By the end of the lesson students will be able to develop their own criteria for the word 'hero'

SUMMARY Your class will first need to develop the criteria by which it will select its heroes. What kind of people do they want to profile and honor? Perhaps the heroes are citizens who are giving back to the community. Or maybe they are people who are passing on local traditions and culture, or eliminating suffering for others, or forging innovative ideas that make a difference.

Perhaps they are older members of the community. Acknowledging that some fascinating people and their stories will be lost soon, your class may decide to profile only those heroes who are over 60 years old. Or maybe your students would prefer to focus on a particular ethnic group within the community, or concentrate on a specific theme, such as environmental activism.

Alternatively, a hero can also be a building or a park — it doesn't necessarily have to be a person. What is important is that students think deeply about the concept of a hero and are free to interpret the project in a way that has relevance for them. In this first exercise, students will identify and discuss the critical qualities that make up their heroes. There is obviously no right answer; indeed, the hope is that each group of students will come up with its own unique criteria.

In this lesson, it's important to challenge your students to move beyond the traditional conceptions of heroism — beyond police officers, fire fighters and athletes. Aside from physical acts of bravery and strength, what other qualities make up our heroes?

Activity

Have your students break up into their pre-assigned groups. Select one person in each group to be the reporter and another to be the recorder. For 15-20 minutes, each group will discuss the notion of what it means to be a hero and create a list of the qualities that they associate with the word. The recorders will write down what each group comes up with.

Before they start to compile their list, you may want to give your students some discussion prompts. You can have your students copy down the dictionary's definition of a hero and see if it conforms to their own definition. If not, how is it different? Many of the qualities contained in the definition speak to physical courage and strength. Are these the only qualities that make up a hero? What about the less physical traits?

You can also list some modern day personalities on the board — current stars from the world of music, sports and politics as well as more traditional heroes like Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Muhammad Ali. What qualities do these people possess?

Are they heroes or cultural icons? What is the difference between the two? Do your students feel that today's heroes are "authentic" or created by a media marketing campaign? For example, a billboard campaign by the sports broadcaster ESPN has a picture of two female professional basketball players with the caption, "Without sports, who would we follow?" How would your students answer this question?

Another discussion area can focus on the events of 9/11 and its aftermath. Who were the heroes that emerged from that tragedy? What qualities did they possess? How has our view of heroism changed in the wake of the events?

Once the small group discussion is over, have each reporter write her group's list on the board. Who are the groups' heroes, and what qualities do they possess? Are there some common characteristics that start to emerge? How does the class perceive the media's influence on heroism?



LESSON PLAN 2 - DEFINING THE NEIGHBORHOOD

OBJECTIVE:

By the end of the lesson students will be able to:

- 1) identify the elements that make up their neighborhood
- 2) reach a class-wide consensus on how it will define 'neighborhood' for the purpose of this project

SUMMARY In addition to defining the criteria for the personal qualities of its heroes, your class will also have to define the geographic boundaries of its neighborhood. All of the heroes will be selected from within this area, so your students should seriously consider how they want to define it.

The concept of neighborhood is a flexible one. It can be viewed as narrowly as the few blocks around the school or as the broadly as the entire state in the more rural regions of the country. The purpose of this exercise is to have your students not only identify the geographic parameters for the project, but also to have them discuss the concepts of neighborhood and community. For example, if your class has students from different parts of the city or town, how will they decide to define the concept of neighborhood for the purpose of this project? How is the neighborhood different from the community?

The neighborhood may also serve as a backdrop for your students' final pieces. For example, a park in your neighborhood may have been the center of civil rights protests in the 1960's. In this case, your students could interview local heroes who participated in these protests and interweave archival footage from the events with the interviews, telling both the story of the heroes and the neighborhood at the same time.

Activity

Have students break into their pre-assigned production groups, and ask them to write down the names of their neighborhood and three words that they would use to describe that neighborhood. Next, have each student draw a map of his neighborhood, complete with a handful of landmarks. The map doesn't have to be too detailed, and landmarks can include both people and physical structures.

Have the class come back together, and ask the students to name their neighborhoods and the words they used to describe those areas. You may want to have one student record the list on a board. Here are some possible questions to consider.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do most of the students come from the same neighborhood? Do they mostly use the same words to describe that neighborhood? What trends start to emerge?
- Have some students chosen to broadly define the concept of 'neighborhood'? If so, why did they?
- Is a neighborhood only defined by geographic considerations, or is it a broader term?
- How important is the concept of neighborhood in today's world?
- How has their neighborhood changed over the last few years? How has it changed over the last few generations?