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Supporting Critical Thinkers Through Literacy: Using Literacy in Social Studies Classrooms to Support Higher-Level and Critical Thinking

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Literature Review

The adoption of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has put more pressure on teachers to utilize authentic literature in the classroom, and a need to teach more critical thinking skills. (Evans & Clark, 2015)

“We recommend teaching students to examine social studies contents more globally from a critical literacy perspective” (Soares & Wood, 2010)

“Rarely, if ever, are social studies students presented with a complex issue that demands research, questioning, and an awareness of various points of view and bias”. (Pescastore, 2007)

“This emphasis has been joined with a conceptualization of critical thinking skills as a kind of knowledge equally important to content knowledge and the belief that the two should be taught hand in hand” (Peary & Duplass, 2011)

Examples of Literature

Primary Sources - Journal Entry, Photographs, Newspapers

Political Cartoons/War Propaganda

Fiction - Man in the High Castle, Suite Francaise, Chains

Graphic Novels - A People's History of the American Empire

Film & Digital Media - Crash Course, The Century, Prohibition

A Curriculum Project Designed
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Research Questions

How can I incorporate literacy in a social studies classroom that inspires students to make connections with the content?

How can I build off that and then get my students engaged in higher level thinking in the classroom?

Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson Title: The Spanish American War

Central Focus: The US went to war with Spain to help Cuba gain its independence.

Standards Addressed:
HS.2. Analyze the complexity and investigate causes and effects of significant events in world, U.S., and Oregon history.

HS.5. Examine and evaluate the origins of fundamental political debates and how conflict, compromise, and cooperation have shaped national unity and diversity in world, U.S., and Oregon history.

HS.10. Evaluate an historical source for point of view and historical context.

Procedure:

Students will go through the Spanish American War chapter of A People's History of the American Empire. Teacher will do a guided reading activity by asking students to read select pages and ponder questions as they do so. At the end of the chapter the teacher will ask students their overall thoughts of the readings, what did they learn, what do they think would have been nice to add. Students will watch Crash Course: American Imperialism as an introduction to the rest of the Imperial mini unit.

Methods

- Connections to 2011 Oregon Social Studies Academic Content Standards.
- Learning Objectives, Essential Questions, and Big Ideas based on social studies content standards.
- Objectives tied to formative and summative assessments.
- Incorporation of diverse forms of literature in instruction based on research from Literacy Review.
- Analysis skills developed from reading help deepen critical thinking skills.

Reflection

- Critical Thinking comes from quality literary resources.
- Historical Era drives availability of resources (primary, political cartoons, films or short videos, and graphic novels).
- More research is needed on the new technological tools regularly available.

References