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Ancient Civilizations: Opening Unit

Mr. Donn and Maxie's Always Something You Can Use Series

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Preface

I am a teacher. With “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) being the law of the land, and with every teacher required to help raise test scores on standardized tests, we are all looking for ways to improve our teaching. Today there are national Common Core State Standards for teaching as well as various state standards that students are expected to meet. Maybe your state or school district has exit exams students are required to pass. Your circumstances will be different from mine but we all have the same goal in mind. Help our students reach their goals.

The Mr. Donn and Maxie’s Always Something You Can Use series was written in part because when I went looking for help as a new teacher there was nothing there. The lessons you are about to use are ones that I have used in the classroom myself, with input from my colleagues, friends, students, and especially my wife.

I currently teach in an urban school with all its challenges and difficulties. I teach both language arts and social studies. I have been in various levels of secondary school grades 6–12.

Focus: This book, and the rest of the books in the series are for teaching Ancient History. Each book is a separate unit that deals with each of the different ancient civilizations. Each book has within it a complete unit on ancient history. Within each unit there are various types of lessons. Each unit will contain vocabulary lessons, writing lessons, and activity lessons. The variety will hopefully keep all your students involved, entertained, and learning.

In *Classroom Instruction that Works*, Marzano et al list ten research based strategies. The ancient history series uses these ten strategies, as well as other concepts, ideas, and strategies, to build lesson plans and instruction around. For those who are unfamiliar with Marzano et al, here is a quick recap of those strategies.

- Identifying Similarities and Differences
- Summarizing and Note Taking
- Reinforcing Effort and Providing Recognition
- Homework and Practice
- Nonlinguistic Representations
- Cooperative Learning
- Setting Objectives and Providing feedback
- Generating and Testing Hypotheses
- Cues, Questions and Advanced Organizers

These strategies and concepts are imbedded into the lessons. You won't find a place where it says "We will now use the strategy of Cooperative Learning." Instead you will find cooperative learning within the lesson. An example of this is in the Ancient China unit; students are divided into groups, and each group chooses or is assigned one of the dynasties. That group is given an opportunity to research, create a presentation, and then present their product to the class. This project is monitored by the teacher as to progress and deadlines. Their product is then placed in the classroom for all to see, share, and use. This same project includes Marzano's strategies of "Reinforcing effort and providing recognition," "Nonlinguistic Representation," and "Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback."

The Mr. Donn and Maxie Always Something You Can Use series also uses ideas and concepts to help make teaching and learning enjoyable—ideas such as "Word Walls" to help build vocabulary, various writing ideas to stimulate interest in writing, and games, pictures and graphic organizers to increase efficiency and retention.

We worked very hard to bring you the best ideas we could to make history a subject that students would want to learn.

Mr. Donn and Maxie's Always Something You Can Use Series

Ancient Civilizations Opening Unit
Five Themes of Geography, Archeology, Early Humans

Introduction

This book includes an Opening Unit for Ancient Civilizations with lessons for Five Themes of Geography, Archeology, and Early Humans, a lesson plan for a substitute teacher, a Lesson for the Year in Review (Last Days of School), and an A-Z Writing Activities Quick Look Guide to use all year long.

Level/Length: Lessons are written with sixth graders in mind, but can easily be adapted for grades 5–9. Lessons are based on a 55-minute class period and can be adjusted to fit any time frame. Some lessons are longer than one class period. As written, the time frame needed to complete an opening unit for ancient civilizations that includes First Days of School, Five Themes of Geography, Archeology, and Early Humans is 3–4 weeks.

Description: The opening unit is composed of mini-units, one each for Five Themes of Geography, Archeology, and Early Humans. These units can be taught consecutively, selectively, or individually at any time throughout the year. Activities include Searching for Elvis, the Job of an Archaeologist, Dig in a Bag, Artifacts/Fossils/BCE, Artifact Trading and Moral Dilemmas, Grids and Maps, Sandbox Dig, Time Capsule, Upright Man, Handy Man, Neandertals, Cro-Magnon Man, Cave Art in the Classroom, and a Treasure Map (Island Map). Activities are varied and include classifying, abstracting, map work, reading, writing, speaking, researching, interpreting, presenting, and other higher level thinking activities.

Rationale: In view of the latest government guidelines on education with No Child Left Behind, these lessons were developed to meet standards applicable in most states. Lessons are designed to address various learning styles and can be adapted for *all* students' abilities.

Here's wishing you the best year ever!
Lin & Don Donn

First Days of School

Time Frame: 2–3 days (55 minute periods)

Preparation:

- Syllabus (for students)
- Letter home (for parents)
- Decorate your room with wall displays: Travel posters of Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, Greece, Rome, China, map of the ancient world
- Decorate the entrance to your classroom with a sign over the door that reads, “Welcome to Ancient Times!”

Daily Question: No daily question for day one

- Day Two: What is a daily question?
- Day Three: Name three school rules.

Open Class: Say: “Welcome to Ancient Times!”

Introduce Ancient Civilizations

- Write on the overhead projector or board the phrase: ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS.
- **Ask:** “Is anyone familiar with the spelling rule “i” before “e” except after “c”?” (Wait for a show of hands.)
- Underline the word ANCIENT
- **Say:** “The study of ancient civilizations may not always follow the rules with which you are familiar. This will be a fun year. We have a great many fun and unusual things planned. To be able to do them, we cannot waste time.”

Set Up for the Year:

- *Set Expectations*
- *Daily Question:* Explain what students are to do each day when they first arrive in the classroom.
- *Group Activities:* Talk about group activities. Groups will be changed all the time. Tell them that they will not always be able to work with their best friend. You will be assigning people to groups. (Mix them up—change the student mix and the number of people in a group. Use group sizes of three, five, and two.)
- *Journals:* Direct students to set up their loose-leaf notebooks into six sections. Explain what purpose the journal serves and what is expected of them.
- *Syllabus:* Hand out syllabus. Go over it. Direct them to place their syllabus in the back of their journal.
- *Give them a letter to take home.* (An example of a letter home is included at the end of this section.)
- *Seating Chart:* We allow students to “purchase” their choice of seating with ten As. Until they achieve ten As, they will sit where you assign them a seat. Once they have

ten As, they can select their choice of desk, excluding the teacher's and excluding any seats that have already been purchased by other students.

- Unless they own it, the person sitting in the seat selected by a ten-A student must move. Students may not sell their seat at any time, but they may freely swap seats with someone else if both individuals “own” their seat. Swap requests must be presented in writing to the teacher for approval prior to swap. Both students must sign the swap request.
- *Complete any other housekeeping activities, such as distribution of textbooks if you have them, review of school rules, etc.*

Opening Days of School: Example of a letter home

Date
School name
Address
Phone
Teacher's name

Dear Parents,

This year in sixth grade social studies, we will be studying six ancient civilizations: Mesopotamia, India, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and China.

Students will need to divide a loose-leaf notebook into six sections with dividers between the sections. They will also need a set of colored pencils or crayons.

Each of the units will have unique activities. There will be occasions throughout the year when friends and family will be invited into the classroom to share our education experience. We will be sending invitations home for these activities as far in advance as possible, as we do hope you will attend.

If you would like to visit the class at any other time, please make arrangements through the office. If you need to reach me for any reason, please call the school and leave a message for [Teacher's name]. Please leave a day and evening number where you can be reached. I will return your call as soon as possible.

We look forward to a wonderful year! Thank you.

Sincerely,
Teacher's Name