

American History Activators

First Americans through the Constitution

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Welcome to American History Activators

First Americans through the Constitution

Immerse students in living history as you introduce seven major milestones in American history. Whether used as lead-ins to upcoming lessons or as wrap-up activities, these mini-simulations provide your students with experiences that will shape their historical perceptions and positively enhance their understanding of past, current, and future events. Each of the seven units is brief, requires little preparation, and includes a ready-to-use lesson, background essay, narration, and postscript. Each unit concludes with a corresponding Common Core-based historical investigation activity, which utilizes students' historical thinking skills and provides a driving question with primary and secondary sources for analysis.



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Introduction

Purpose

These simple-to-use Activators supplement your U.S. history classes and immerse your students in “living history” situations. Students get up from their desks, move around in different classroom configurations, and find themselves drawn into history that becomes compellingly real. For a variety of reasons, students seem to function better and learn more when actively engaged. American History Activators provide brief, clever, and exciting experiences for your students.

What Are Activators?

Activators possess three common elements, which embody a philosophical foundation.

1. Activators are simple and brief and require little background reading or preparation. Most Activators take one to two class periods.
2. Duplication requirements are minimal. Brief essays read and visual schematics displayed can provide all the background information students need.
3. Activators involve most, if not all, of your students, even those of limited English fluency.

Special Lessons

American History Activators provide experiences that shape students’ historical perceptions and positively enhance their understanding of past, current, and future events. As you introduce the units to your students, help them understand that we re-create history because doing so has an inherent value.

- **Be Prepared.** Be sure to read the **Setup, Directions, and Lesson Plan** options thoroughly before introducing the Activator to your students. Enlist students’ help in setting the scene within the classroom.
- **Reinforce Student Response.** During the action of an Activator, your students are involved in issues and events. When students make personal comments, either in class or during the **Debriefing**, praise them for their astute remarks. Your reinforcement of their experiences emphasizes for all students that history is real because it touches them. Above all, express your pleasure that students are so involved.



Teaching tip

Every student in your class will be standing, walking, marching, crawling, lying down, negotiating, plotting, and perhaps even “sailing” as participants at crucial turning points in the development of our country.



Teaching tip

An Activator provides memorable experiences that your students will retain long after other school events fade.

Introduction

Activating History

Lessons in the traditional social studies classroom embody mainly visual and auditory learning. However, many students learn more effectively in kinesthetic situations. Activators emphasize the use of body movement, or the kinesthetic learning style often seen in skilled athletes, dancers, and actors. Perhaps students respond so positively and energetically to classes in physical education, shop, art, or home economics, not to mention extracurricular activities, because they can move around and socialize as they learn. Kinesthetic learning can be underutilized in social studies, yet this form of active learning generates highly effective and often indelible lessons.

Ability Levels

Activators are appropriate to use for various grade and ability levels and appeal to a wide variety of student learning styles. Activators follow the thesis: "Keep it simple and get kids up and moving."

Gifted Students. Most gifted students love to play roles. They will probably ad lib dialogue with great success. Some gifted students are natural directors.

Drama Students. Tap your drama students to play the pivotal roles. Allow them time to rehearse, and document the performance by filming it.

Middle School Students. Spend some time before and after the action of the Activator explaining the whys of the event dramatized. Also, it is suggested that you tap your best and brightest to perform the key roles.

Lower Ability and Limited English Students. These two groups of students appreciate and respond well to the kinesthetic learning of Activators. Rehearse two or more times. Do not proceed with the action of the Activator until everyone knows exactly what will occur and when.

Grouping Students

Activators promote the concept of "students as workers and teachers as managers and facilitators." Activators allow students to participate in their learning in ways that are often unfamiliar to them. Consider the following when planning the action of an Activator:

- **Student Directors.** You may select four or five student directors early in the school year to rotate responsibilities for a series of Activators. Allow each director three or four days to prepare for his or her Activator. Meet with the cadre before and after the action of the first Activator. Review your standards and expectations for the Activators. Grant enough latitude so they may apply their talents—and their time—fully.

Lesson Plan

Overview

This Activator will involve your students in one of the world's greatest migrations. Perhaps fifty thousand years ago or more, nomadic Asians crossed a land bridge connecting Asia and North America and discovered the New World long before Europeans touched upon the continent's soil. These first "Americans" gradually fanned out all over a vast continent never before inhabited by humans. Your students' wandering band will cross Beringia's bridge and explore this new land. Many of them will be persuaded by others to settle in a certain region. As they do, they will learn about America's original immigrants, their diversity, and the geography of the regions in which they settled just before the Europeans arrived.

Setup

1. Duplication

- **Background Essay**—*class set*
- **Postscript**—*class set*
- **Regional Information Sheets**—*one for each member of the eight (or less) groups*
- **Second Wavers' Notes**—*enough for all the students who cross the land bridge in the second wave of Siberian immigrants (They use these sheets for note-taking)*
- **Roster of the People**—*one copy to divide your class (see #4)*

2. **Schematic, props, costumes:** First, make your **Schematic** choice (see **Directions**) and study it carefully. Bring to your classroom props or costume pieces to create the setting of pre-Columbian America. (Examples: fake spears, headbands, colored beads, bracelets, drums, recorder, flutelike instruments, etc.)

3. **Roles:** Since there will be three students in each of the eight groups, some ten to twelve of your students will be in the second wave of arrivals. This means you should place your most responsible and articulate students in the first-wave groups. All remaining students are second wavers who wander from region to region to hear recruiting pitches from regional spokespersons.

Teaching tip

Consider having students from another class serve as second wavers.



Teaching tip

If you have a small class, you may wish to eliminate one of the regions.



Directions

1. To get the best from your students in this Activator, advanced preparation is essential. By this, we mean that students should be put into first-wave and second-wave groups a few days before. First wavers need a class period to prepare their presentations. Perhaps while the first-wave presenters meet and prepare, you could show the second wavers a video on the First Americans (see **Resources to consult**).
2. Ensure that your students learn the historical background. To augment what is contained in your history textbook, choose one of these options: 1) hand out the **Background Essay** either the day before the class as homework or pass it out to be read in class; 2) give a formal lecture based on what is in the essay plus your own knowledge of the subject; 3) show a video or video snippet, using the suggestions in the **Resources to consult** section.
3. After the **Background Essay** is reviewed and discussed, display the **Schematic** and go over which option (A or B) you plan to carry out. Emphasize what will happen under the option you've selected and for which you have made preparations.
4. Have students bury their backpacks in a corner of the classroom, don any costume pieces they've created and brought in, and then go outside to be led on a five- to fifteen-minute trip (this simulates the long trek from Siberia to the land bridge). Next, before they reenter the classroom (crossing Beringia), separate the first wavers and second wavers. Allow the first wavers to come through the door (the land bridge) and set up for their presentations (if you are using Option A, a similar kind of bridge or door should be simulated outside). To give first wavers more time, take the second wavers on another short hike before reentering the classroom.

After this, you have at least three different options for running the Activator:

Option A

1. See **Option A Schematic**.
2. After their "Siberian trek," pass out the **Second Wavers' Notes** sheets and explain what you expect from them.
3. Students play out the Activator in a large venue (preferably outside the classroom), where each of the eight regional peoples sets up a kind of booth and "pitches" its region to second wavers who roam from region to region, listening and taking notes.



Teaching tip

Elementary teachers: You may want to extend this Activator to three or four days.



Teaching tip

You may want your students to carry all their belongings with them as they make their trip from Siberia to America across the Bering Land Bridge.

Background Essay

Place: North Atlantic Ocean, North America—Eastern Canada

Time: 980s–1020 CE

This Activator will involve you in a daring transatlantic voyage to “discover” North America and in your bold selection of a site on which to build the first documented European settlement in America. As you recreate this epic voyage and colonizing attempt, you will learn about these Norse adventures and the skills it required not only to complete the voyage but to build a successful colony as well. Get ready to experience a sea-going adventure just like intrepid Norse sea captains (and sailors) like Bjarni Herjólfsson, Leif Eriksson, and Erik the Red did, braving watery dangers and exploring new lands about 985 through 1020 CE—all this five hundred years before Columbus sailed!

Who were the Vikings?

The Vikings, Norse, Norsemen, or Northmen, who appeared like a bolt from the blue in the late eighth century were fair-haired Germanic tribes who lived in Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and eventually Iceland). Mostly farmers and herdsman, some Norse left their homes and families to sail to other distant shores to explore, often to colonize, but in some cases, to raid, pillage, and kill. Theirs was a pagan religion (before they converted to Christianity) with a bloodlust warrior code, generating violence, cruelty, and fear among their victims. One of these victims wrote, “Deliver us, O Lord, from the wrath of the Northmen.”

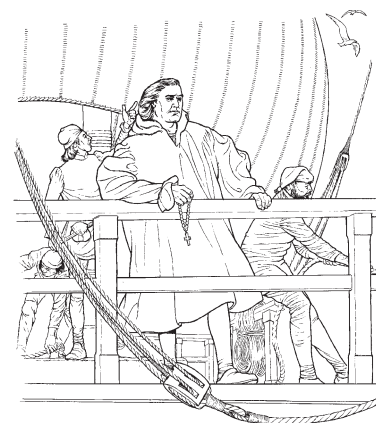
Exploding myths

Actually, the ongoing myth of Norse barbarism needs to be abandoned, or at least toned down. Some Norsemen went viking occasionally; these warrior-raiders were usually omitted from their family’s first-born-son inheritance tradition. Hence these Norsemen were left with little to do and an abundance of energy. Travel and adventure were outlets for them. Most revealing, Viking culture, at the same time as their conquests, produced remarkable literature (eddas, sagas,

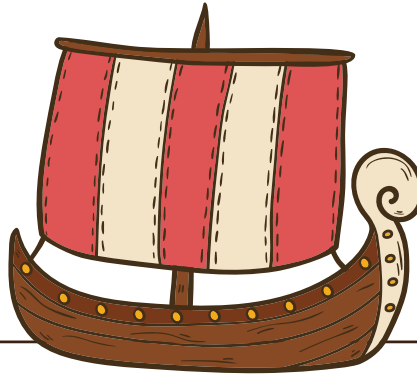
poetry) and fine art (furniture, jewelry, designs). In addition, Norse communities, especially in Iceland, practiced a democracy rare among medieval societies, where women, if not men’s equals, were granted more rights (e.g., property rights) than other contemporary European women and enjoyed higher status. What seems to stick in our modern minds is the blood-soaked history of the Vikings and their supreme sea-going skills that enabled them to sail all over the known world of c. 1000 CE. As they did, they traded, explored, and settled in far-flung places like Russia, the eastern Mediterranean, coastal France, England, Scotland, Iceland, Greenland, and even North America!

The Norse and Columbus

For many decades, perhaps centuries, scholars gave little credit to the Norse as the true European discoverers of America. After all, this “discovery” leading to a few Norse outposts briefly colonizing North America in about 1000, didn’t alter world events very much. To be honest, the largest transformation occurred after the voyages of Columbus, in about 1500, initiating the so-called Columbian Exchange, a transoceanic two-way transfer of plants, animals, peoples, diseases, and culture between Europe and America. The Vikings had little to do with this particular exchange. What they did do as Europeans, however, is “discover” America five hundred years before Columbus set sail. Transformational or not, the Norse, it is now conceded by scholars of the subject, were the first Europeans here!



Landfall Decision Sheet



Ship's Name:

Sea Captain/Drottin: _____

Crew Members: _____

After careful analysis, we choose as the best site to establish our colony

Site:

Because:

Likewise, we choose as the worst site

Because:



Our new Norse colony's name is
