

THE STAGING OF THE INDIANA FRONTIER

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INDIANA AND THE NEW NATION

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RATIONALE

To walk in somebody else's shoes offers certainly the best way to understand attitudes and behaviors that would otherwise remain strange and distant. The distance between the life of the Northwestern frontier and to-day's youth seems sometimes insurmountable. By having students recreate and reenact life as it was in Indiana about two centuries ago I hope to build a bridge between history and the generation destined to the new frontiers in space.

Last summer I wrote the paper for this seminar with this project in mind. It will serve as a canovaccio was used in the commedia dell'arte. This form of theater, started in Italy in the 16th century and very popular until the early 18th century all over Europe, offered great freedom to creativity. On the bases of the canovaccio or story outline, the various theater companies could represent a new play every time they moved from one city to the next in order to interest as directly as possible the local audiences.

From the sketched history I researched about the Richerville family, William Wells and the Connor brothers, the students will have the opportunity of writing a play on how the diversified forces on the frontier interacted with each other and with the native Indians. I selected the characters of my paper thinking about with which kind of individuals students of a rural school district like mine would easily identify. I feel that the heroes I chose are more approachable than the shining stars in the history books.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

According to their talents and inclinations all students attending the American History course required in high school will contribute to the project. Tenth and eleventh graders will write, stage and perform a drama as end of semester play. The preparation of this event will stretch over the semester and will involve also the cooperation of the teachers of world history, English, art, music, home economics, vocational education and science.

The history teachers will help in researching the events of the period while the science teacher will lead the students in the inquiry about the changes in the environment.

The English teacher will guide in the writing of the script and the art instructor will advise in the designing of the scenery.

In their music classes the students will learn to execute and eventually compose the music to be performed in the play.

In home economic the designated group of students will saw the costumes and learn to prepare the kind of food appropriate to the time and place.

The vocational classes will make tools, furniture and weapons.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. Map and outline the Indiana frontier by referring to the rivers of the Northwestern territory.
2. Draw a time line covering the beginning of white penetration in the Mid-West to the time of the Northwest Ordinance. Events of European history occurring in the same period will appear parallel to the events of the North American continent.
3. List and name the different nationalities present on the frontier within the frame of the time line.
4. Explain the reasons for the concentration of such different peoples in specific areas.
5. Describe the distinguishing characteristics of the diverse life styles on the Indiana frontier.
6. Recreate on stage the environment suitable to host scenes from the time in history under study through background scenery and internal decorating.
7. Write and enact dialogues fitting the characters of my paper and the circumstances in which they lived.
8. Outline the phases of American penetration from the South and the East.
9. List the changes brought about by the the Northwestern Ordinance in the life of each characters of the play.

SEQUENCE OF ACTIVITIES

1. All students in the project shall read my paper and invent a plot with characters taken from it. Study guides will help the students through this process.
2. Class discussions and voting will result in the plot to be adopted as base for the drama.
3. All students shall avail themselves of the direct experience gained from visits to historical sites like Vincennes, Lincoln Boyhood Farm, Fort Ouiatanon.
4. The students shall be divided in groups according to their interests.
5. Each group will specialize in the research and reconstruction of one single aspect of the world of the frontier. Specific goals will be set to be reached within a determined period of time. Contracts between the teacher and each single group will formalize the advancement of the project.
6. One day each week will be reserved for research and sharing of information within the group and within the class.

EVALUATION

The six weeks grading period adopted by my school will be the base of division for the three stages of the project: research and planning, production and execution.

Along the way the groups of students will be evaluated and graded on the bases of the group forms and the contracts.

Both of these tools combined will account for one fourth of the six weeks grade.

The ultimate evaluation of this project will be given by the audience the night of the performance of the school play.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The main source of this project will be the production of this Institute. The research papers and the lesson plans presented by the participants offers such an abundance of information about the period we will recreate that I do not think other sources will be needed.