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How Do Historians Create a Story?

Grade levels: 9th-12th; Can be adjusted to lower grade levels

Time: 5-7 class periods

Lesson Overview: Students often struggle with making the connection between primary sources and the story behind them. This lesson helps students understand and make the connections between different primary sources (census records, letters, diary entries, and other documents) and the life story of some veterans. This lesson will guide students through documents needed to create short narratives about a veteran buried in Santa Fe National Cemetery. It also contains biographies already written by SFCC students and professors, so high school students are able to look at examples and compare the story they inferred from primary sources to an official biography. This lesson could be a stepping stone to additional research being done using local sources or for students to create their own family's story.

Essential Question: How Do Historians Create a Story?

Learning Objective: Students will be able to use details/inferred details from primary sources to write a short narrative that summarizes key events in the life of New Mexicans who served in the U.S. forces.

Relevant Common Core Anchor Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

Relevant New Mexico Social Studies Standards:

9-12.US.2. Develop supporting questions that contribute to an inquiry and demonstrate how, through engaging source work, new compelling and supporting questions emerge.

9-12.US.5. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.

9-12.US.8. Construct explanations using reasoning, correct sequence, examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanations given their purpose.

Materials Needed:

- [“Ordeal by Cheque”](#) checks printed out (for introduction)
Downloadable PDF available at <http://ghsbears.pbworks.com/f/Cheques.pdf>
- Veteran model packet: Use the primary sources included with [the biography of Vincent Ojinaga](#)
- Computers connected to Internet

- Graphic Organizers/Timelines (there are several online timeline creators if you are wanting a technology aspect, but a handwritten one works too)

Additional Online Resources:

- <http://www.findagrave.com> – to do a grave find – good for finding dates of death if not available in the primary sources provided
- <http://www.ancestry.com> – this is a subscription service used for genealogy, some public libraries and historical societies have subscriptions and are open to the public to use.
- <http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/> - this a museum in Washington DC that has a collection of headlines and newspapers for you to view
- <https://sites.sfcc.edu/vlp/biographies-geographical/> - SFCC Veterans Legacy Program website/biographies
- <https://www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/santafe.asp> - Santa Fe National Cemetery website
- <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/> - The OWL at Purdue University is a wonderful site to help students with citations, endnotes and footnotes, as well as Bibliography pages.

Procedures:

This lesson should be done in groups of two or three students.

Day 1/Hook:

1. Break students up into groups. Download the cheques from the Vanity Fair article [“Ordeal by Cheque”](http://ghsbears.pbworks.com/f/Cheques.pdf) available online at <http://ghsbears.pbworks.com/f/Cheques.pdf>. Copies should be made for each group and checks should be cut out so students can organize them and move them around. Ideally, students should be able to look at all the checks, but if time is a concern the number of checks used may vary.
2. Give students the directions to create a story of Mr. Lawrence Exeter, Sr. by solely using the checks provided. Have them create a timeline to show when certain things occur, making sure they document how they came to that conclusion by having them make connections from one check to another. Afterwards, have each group write a summary of what they learned about Mr. Exeter Sr. just from his checks. Essentially, this should mimic the process of historians piecing together history based off of only primary source materials.

Note: This activity often takes a full day because the students enjoy creating a story for Mr. Exeter. If time is a factor, the number of checks used can be limited.

Day 2:

1. Ask students what Mr. Exeter accomplished in his life, having them refer to their finding from the checks as evidence. Explain the concept of historiography (the study of historical writing) and note that the students have already begun this process by putting together the puzzle of the checks. Remind them, however, that the checks do not tell the complete story.
2. Ask the students how they think historians find evidence to tell the stories of people or events. What kinds of documents do historians use? Have students brainstorm a list of possible documents that could be helpful in historical research. Have a student keep track of the list on a white board.
3. Pass out printed primary source documents included in the VLP [biography for Vincent Ojinaga](#). Give students time to analyze the documents with their groups and create a timeline in their notes, briefly summarizing information they can infer from each source.

4. Have the class come together and complete a timeline on the white board. Start by asking what kinds of information need to be represented on the timeline. Some information will come quickly.

Some questions to probe students with- do we know his birth date? Death date? What he did, and when? What job did he have? Education level?

Have the students make connections and determine what kinds of educated assumptions can be made based on the source material. What was happening in the United States and the world during the dates being looked at? What other sources can the students use? If possible, have students utilize a newspaper database to look up what kinds of things were happening during this time. If not, an internet search would be sufficient.

3. Teacher Model/Think Aloud: Do we have a date of death? (No.) So how can we find one? Suggest FindAGrave.com to show students how to look up information. (We see Mr. Ojinaga passed away in 2013.) From there explain what an obituary is and why it would be important to a historian. Use one as an example ([here is one from The New Mexican](#)). Where did Mr. Ojinaga live in the last record we have? Explain to students that working from that last known location, we need to look at local newspapers to see if there is an obituary for this soldier to complete his information.

4. Now, that we have a more complete timeline, ask students what other questions they have. Make a list. Can we find the answers to these questions? How? Explain how sometimes this information is missing or gone. Why would we be missing information for this soldier? Get the idea across that different ethnic groups have information missing, especially with a soldier that served during World War I and was a minority. Are there some secondary sources maybe we could use to fill in some blanks?

Days 5-7:

1. Pass out a copy of the VLP biography of Vincent Ojinaga. Give them a few minutes to read the document with their partners and highlight the information that they already identified from their own analysis of the sources.

2. This would be a good opportunity to remind students about different methods of citations. Have them utilize Ojinaga's biography to consider the utilization of the citations. Also explain why it is so important to cite your sources to avoid plagiarism.

3. Have a conversation with the class about their findings. Did the assumptions and timelines created by the class follow the biography? How? How does the biography expand the knowledge of Mr. Ojinaga's life?

4. Now explain that they are going to do their own research using primary sources on another soldier. Individual students should choose names from the list of soldiers' names on the [VLP biography page](#). Students should use the sources/links and processes they practiced with Mr. Ojinaga to find several different primary sources and write a short narrative about that person's life using those primary documents. *Do not give them the already written biography, but start with the primary sources! Have the students create their own timelines with the information found. NOTE: Some of these biographies have more primary sources available than others. Please preview the documents before giving the information to the students.

5. After giving students time to go through the data, assist them with any additional research ideas they might have. What did the person's unit do? What exactly was the job the person did in the military? What did the local newspapers say? If there is time, maybe schedule a trip to the

local historical society/museum to see what information the librarians there can help students locate.

6. Have students write a biography, create a Prezi, or some other presentation project to present to the class. After they have finished their presentation of the information, pass out the biographies written by the VLP team to have them compare their research.

Extension Activities:

- Take students to your local historical society to use the resources available there for research purposes.
- Have students research their family's history.