

John Brown and Jefferson Davis...Equal Justice?
Lesson Plan
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Grade Level: High School

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks Connections:

USI.36: Summarize the critical developments leading to the Civil War.

USI.39: Analyze the roles and policies of various Civil War leaders and describe the important Civil War battles and events.

Introduction: Students study American history in its chronological order and often fail to make connections across time periods since the events are in different chapters in their textbook or on different pages in their notebook. This lesson seeks to force students to critically examine the actions of two of the most infamous individuals associated with the Civil War Era. Students will also examine the attitudes of the nation concerning these two men, their actions and their punishments.

Objectives

1. Students will be able to think critically and creatively using historical sources.
2. Students will be able to express themselves clearly both orally and in writing.
3. Students will be able to properly use technology.
4. Students will be able to work research and draw working comparisons.
5. Students will understand the historical significance of John Brown and Jefferson Davis.

Instruction

1. Students will go to the computer lab and use the following websites throughout the lesson.
 - a. <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/johnbrown/brownlinks.html> and http://www.tncrimlaw.com/civil_bible/john_brown.htm for John Brown's writings and coverage of his actions
 - b. <http://www.cwc.lsu.edu/cwc/links/docs.htm> and <http://www.jeffersondavis.net/> for Jefferson Davis's writings and views on his life
2. Students will use these two websites to research Brown and Davis. Students must answer the following question about each individual,
 - a. Why are they studied in American History?
 - b. What was the public reaction to their actions?
 - c. What happened to them after their actions were stopped/concluded?
3. Students will have 2-3 days in the computer lab to sift through all of the information and answer their questions. Students will then return to the classroom and report out on their finding through questioning.
4. Once the teacher is satisfied that the research has been completed, students will be given additional questions for homework:

- a. Account for the different treatment of Brown and Davis.
- b. Why might it be said each was “used”?
- c. Did either receive justice? Why or Why not?

Conclusion: This assignment could be used as a lead-in to research papers or a student selected project. Students could choose two historical figures to research and compare. The most important part of this lesson is that students are able to think critically and creatively with history.

Commentary/Logic: This lesson drives at the question of equal justice but at the same time asks the question "were these different treatments good for the country". This lesson could lead to many discussion government action and reaction in many time periods. Most importantly this lesson will get students thinking critically about a historical question, in essence doing real history.