

## **Viewing Events from Multiple Perspectives** **By Andi Stix, Ed.D. and Frank Hrbek**

As we begin a new century, one in which globalism is no longer a concept, but a growing reality, it is important for our nation's students to understand and analyze current issues of public debate with an eye toward the varied interpretations and approaches various players bring to the discussion of each problem. According to Arias, Hitchens, and Roupp, "Discerning fact from opinion and identifying multiple perspectives in cross-cultural encounters are desirable outcomes of instruction in our increasingly interconnected world" (Ask Eric)<sup>1</sup>. One might assume that in the past only white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant males made decisions in this country, but it would be a mistake to believe that problems have always been considered from just one point of view. And in this world, where the boundaries separating peoples of different races, religions, and ethnicities are becoming more and more blurred, one thing has not changed: multiple perspectives need to be considered in the making of public policy and the resolution of disputes that affect the nation, the state, the towns, and each and every household. The multiple perspectives brought to bear on issues of local, national, and international affairs will help our modern society decide some of the most problematic issues of our time. And students at all levels need to understand that there are always different opinions on issues of great import. Further, they need to learn to consider these differing perspectives, and to put themselves in their "adversary's" shoes in order to become more sensitive to the views that come to bear on decisions and the consequences of those decisions for all parties involved.

Current standards for the Social Studies stipulate that students should be able to "locate, access, analyze, organize and apply information about selected public issues—recognizing and explaining multiple points of view" (Standard Xc)<sup>2</sup>. Other standards require students to "explain how information may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference" (Standard Ib)<sup>3</sup> and to "demonstrate an understanding that different scholars may describe the same event or situation in different ways but must provide reasons or evidence for their views" (Standard IIa)<sup>4</sup>. While it is certainly important to incorporate lessons that meet these standards for the sake of meeting them, it is also important to present students with opportunities to consider problems and issues from perspectives that differ from their own, in an effort to sensitize them to the needs and concerns of others. It is our hope that, by employing strategies that promote the consideration of multiple perspectives, students will become both better critical thinkers and better human beings.

Important to this process of sensitizing students and encouraging them to use critical thinking skills, is the use of primary source documents as part of the curriculum, in addition to

the use of historical fiction. Primary source documents are important for obvious reason, but many social studies teachers ask why it is important to include historical fiction in a classroom not dedicated to the study of the Humanities. The response, as Suzanne Miller writes, is that “The few studies of the influence of literature in history classes suggest that reading, discussing, and writing about historical fiction and biographies provokes strong historical interest/understanding and development of critical thinking strategies. For example, middle school students learned to compare sources and evaluate issues and events from multiple perspectives. Although these studies did not specifically focus on students’ developing understanding of cultures or diversity, taken together, they suggest that literature-history integrations may have promising influences on student understanding and thinking”<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, including young adult literature in the Social Studies classroom allows students to easily identify with protagonists set in historical contexts, and to extend their imaginations to the varied consideration of problems and issues throughout history. Such literature allows students “to make personal connections with their learning and to approach it from a number of perspectives”<sup>6</sup>. The vicarious experiences provided by young adult historical fiction offer students a more personal connection to material that can otherwise seem disconnected from their own lives.

In order to reach students at their level and extend their knowledge and consideration of complex issues and problems, we began to train teachers at Simon Baruch Middle School #104 in Manhattan. We designed a strategy, the “Lobbyist Hearing”, that requires students to think about an issue from multiple perspectives. In addition, this strategy incorporates the use of historical fiction, in the form of “teaser” sheets, to engage students at their level. Using a jigsaw approach, students are broken into groups, where each student is assigned a different letter. They are then “jigsawed” into new groups of students who were assigned the same letter. Each new group is each given a teaser sheet representing one of the perspectives on the issue. The groups are asked to become experts on their point of view and present their “side of the story” to a congressional committee, which will decide the outcome of the situation. After the groups become experts, they are jigsawed back into their original groups, where they share their knowledge and viewpoints with the other members, so each student has a preliminary understanding of all perspectives. Again, students are jigsawed back into their expert groups, where they identify the main points of their argument. Each member of the group is then given a key area or two to research and prepare as part of a speech. When each member of the group has completed his/her research and searched for primary source documents, the group comes together to prepare a unified speech to deliver before the committee. Because the various

arguments are presented for the entire class, students are able to listen and consider more closely the opposing viewpoints, and must think about the issue from a variety of perspectives.

According to Gale Treible, an eighth grade teacher at Simon Baruch Middle School, the teaser sheets are an important part of the lobbyist activity. They are brief informational samples of historical fiction that help guide groups and individual students toward an understanding of a given perspective. Because they are brief, each group receives a balanced amount of reading, and the information provided offers an accurate but fairly detailed background for the students. And though each teaser sheet is fictional, the information is historically based brings the information to life, stimulating the students' imagination. Finally, because students are asked to conduct further research, uncovering primary source documents, considering scholarly interpretations, and analyzing various forms of information, no student can be left behind. The teaser sheets provide enough information that students who do not conduct further research, or only conduct minimal research, can still participate in the hearing, relying on the teaser sheets for facts and opinions.

This strategy engages students on multiple levels, but more importantly, it teaches them to consider that there is always another side to every argument, issue, or problem. Incorporating this activity into any number of different units will help train students to consider varying perspectives in myriad situations, so that they might learn to apply such critical thinking in their own lives, as they grow and face situations that demand sensitivity and understanding. Opening students' minds to the possibility of different points of view, and asking them to analyze and explain points of view that differ from their own, teaches them about compassion, tolerance, and understanding just as it requires students to raise their thinking to new levels.

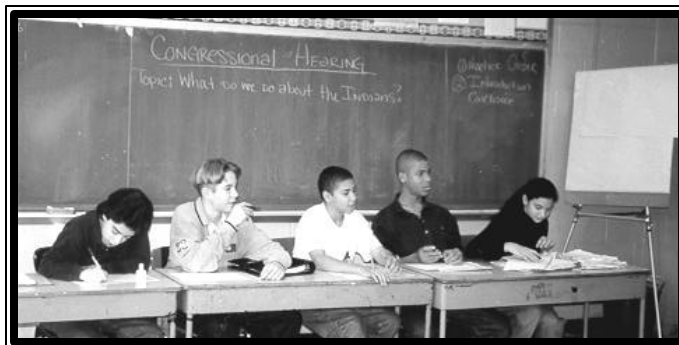
The sample lobbyist hearing below asks students to determine the fate of the Lakota Indians. The perspectives provided in the extended lesson<sup>7</sup> represent the points of view of the Lakota Indians, the United States Army, the Homesteaders, and the Businessman. We have reproduced here a sample teaser sheet for the Lakota Indians perspective. The question of what to do with the Indians was a prominent one in the late 1800s. The Army was sympathetic to the Lakota, and simply wanted to keep the peace between them and the homesteaders. The homesteaders wanted to keep the Lakota in check, limiting their allotment of land. The businessman wanted to exploit the land and shrink the size of the reservation on which the Lakota were located. The Lakota themselves wanted to maintain their way of life and to be free to roam and settle the land as they wished. Students may have their own opinions as to what should have been done, but here they are asked to take on the perspective of someone with whom they may disagree. No matter, as that is the purpose of the lesson. Ultimately, the Lakota were

forced to remain on the reservation, which was made smaller and smaller, until it consisted only of useless land.

It is important to keep in mind that this strategy can be used to explore a number of historical problems and issues, in which varying perspectives affected the ultimate outcome. Some examples of issues for which this approach would be appropriate include slavery, prohibition, women's suffrage, entering WWI and WWII, and immigration, among others. Ultimately, we believe this approach to learning and considering multiple perspectives will engage and interest students as they consider, research, argue and persuade others to look at things from "their" perspective.

## Lobbyist Hearing

In this simulation, students participate in a congressional hearing, where panel members listen to the persuasive arguments of different interest groups to determine the fate of the Lakota Indians in the late 1800s. The participants become lobbyists representing the Lakota Indians, the United States Army, the Homesteaders, and the Businessman. They argue and cajole, trying to persuade the congressional panel to their point of view of what should be done.



*Panel Members Listening to Persuasive Arguments*

### Setting the Stage

1. Pose the following question to the students: Describe a time when someone tried to persuade you to do something? In cooperative groups, have students discuss their personal experiences with the other members of their group.
2. After they have finished the discussion, pose the following questions: Generate a list of what each of the stories had in common with one another. Describe in detail the techniques in which someone tried to persuade you. Have the students record their responses.
3. Bring the class together and chart the results on chart paper, so that their responses can be saved and referred to from time to time.
4. Describe the lobbying simulation to the students: The class will be divided into four groups, each taking a different point of view of a controversial, open-ended issue. Each group will research that viewpoint and will have to write key issues on index cards. These key issues will cue them as to what to say before a congressional hearing committee. Each student will be given one key issue to cover. The major objective of every group is to compose a speech that, with the very first words, captivates the audience, holding their attention and pulling them to their side. The last speaker is just as important. For when this person is finished, the listeners should be right in the speaker's pocket. It is every group's job to sway the committee to their way of thinking, using persuasive speech and intelligent arguments, so that when the congressional representatives vote, they will vote for those who spoke most persuasively.
5. Negotiable Contracting of Rubric Criteria: Ask students to place themselves in the position of the teacher. Now that they have a good idea of the task, what criteria should be used for grading the simulation? Allow students to brainstorm criteria in their cooperative groups. The teacher lists the results on large chart paper as a reference guide, which can be posted in a visible area of the classroom. The following are sample ideas:
  - a. Address key issues in their speech
  - b. The first person grabs the audience
  - c. The group's speech is sequenced well

- d. The last person's speech leaves the audience with something to think about
- e. Good eye contact
- f. Speak persuasively and to the point

Determine how much each section is worth for the entire grade.

## Preparing the Lobbyists

1. Begin by breaking the class into cooperative groups of 4 students in each group. Call each cooperative group a "home-base group." Designate each student within the group as letter A, B, C, and D. There should be within every home base group an equal number of students. Assign the lobbying roles to students A, B, C, and D. You might have students sign up for a particular lobbying role, but that might present a problem when too many sign up for a favored or "popular" part. (Now you are confronted with the problem of how you'll be handling the rest of the class. To which students do you assign the least favored lobbying role? Will you be accused of "favoritism?" For example, most students will be eager to play the role of American "patriot," rather than take the part of the odious British "Red Coat." Most kids would rather play the "lawman," and tend to shy away from the "outlaw.")
2. "Jigsaw" the class into new groups. Ask all As to sit together, all Bs, etc. This way you will be dividing the class into four major lobbying groups. Each letter will lobby for their particular cause. For example, in the "End of the Frontier" lesson, which deals with the west from the 1860s to the 1890s, there was considerable controversy over the Indian issue. In this case, A students could represent the homesteaders, B: the Army, C: the Native Americans and D: big business. Depending on the size of the class, you may have more than one cooperative group per point of view: In other words, two groups of four students for the "A" point of view, two groups for "B", etc.
3. In advance, photocopy each point of view. Distribute all of them to the entire class. Ask the students to read all of them in class or for homework. For their specific point of view, have students highlight the essential points with a marker. Distributing a starter sheet prevents student failure for those who would not go beyond the handout. However, encourage students to do individual research beyond the handouts they've been given. They may use the classroom library or different centers in the classroom where the teacher has placed resource materials, primary sources, trade books, textbooks, CD ROM applications, or an access to the Internet. To simply "mouth" phrases from the handout is self-defeating. If they haven't ventured beyond the handout material, they have gained very little from the lesson, though they will still be able to participate. It is the individual research, knowing the essential facts, becoming a "true believer" in a cause, which gives the speaker the passion and the drive to score his or her points and win over the audience.
4. In their lobbying groups, students discuss what they individually highlighted. They share the information they culled from their research sources. They now become "experts."
5. Jigsaw the students back into their original home-base groups, having one student from each lobbying, expert group. Each student shares their expert knowledge with the others in the group. This is important as it gives every student a general background of the other perspectives as they begin to prepare for their expert, lobbying groups.
6. Jigsaw students back into their expert, lobbying groups. Distribute the Organizational Sheet that follows--one per group. In a brainstorming fashion, students generate a list of notable points in the section titled "Brainstorming Key Issues." Every idea that is generated is listed

without making any judgement of its validity. Allow students 5 minutes to complete the task. Timing students will increase production.

7. Once their ideas have been reported, students decide which issues they should cover. They now decide the sequence or order and write that in the bottom section of the handout. Students discuss which ones should come first, second, and last during their speech. The class will be instructed, and this should be emphasized, that the first person must make a powerful opening speech. This begins the buildup to the last person's "keynote" address, which should have the impact of leaving a lasting impression.
8. Distribute 3x5 index cards to all students. Ask each student to take on one or two points from the list and to write a 30 second to one minute speech first on scrap paper. (As an option, the teacher may wish to ask the students to write a formal speech where the writing process is used.) Obviously, each student should have different point(s) to make before the Congress. Each student constructs a speech to "win" the listener over through persuasion, by using a good hook so that Congress will listen, working on emotions to get them involved, emphasizing facts to substantiate the point(s). Once the speech is written, the student highlights the essential words. Only the essential words may be written on index cards. The teacher must oversee that students do not write out the speech in full sentences on the index cards. This will prevent them from reading off a card. Tell students that you will be grading them not only on the content of what they have to say, but also on good speaking behavior. Review the criteria of assessment: persuasive speech, presentation skills, and proper sequencing ability. Ask your students to generate a list of what good speaking behavior means: good eye contact, punctuating important points by using different tones of voice, showing that you care about what you are saying as you show personal interest and emotion. Students may wish to add a background song, a chart, a picture, gestures or body language, or a drawing to embellish their speech. If students have the passion for their cause, they will carry the audience with them. And if they can do that, they'll carry the day.
9. Pull one student from each group. These students will now form the panel that will hear the groups. Make sure that there is an odd number of students. If need be, pull one extra student to make it an odd number. At the end of the simulation, they will have to vote to make a decision. Obviously, this can only be achieved with an odd numbered group. As each student is pulled, the index card is given back to the lobbying group who must now incorporate those points into their speeches. This structure provides for a well-balanced panel, containing members from all different points of view who have "expert" knowledge. However, they are now told to discuss their views with each other and abandon their original bias. They must now serve impartially, as they are being called upon to render a decision. While the rest of the lobbying groups practice, the students on the panel discuss their positions and collectively write open-ended questions that they hope will be answered. It is important to give them time to bond as a group in their new role.
10. While the Congressional group is working together, the other groups practice their speaking skills as they take on their roles of lobbyists who try to convince or persuade the Congress to their way of thinking. The teacher circulates from group to group giving assistance.

# Organizational Sheet

**Point of View:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Students' Names:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Brainstorming Key Issues:**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Which issues will you cover? Place them in order:**

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 7. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 9. _____ | 10. _____ |

## **The Hearing**

1. Have the congressional committee sit in front of the room behind desks, with notepaper and pens or pencils, to take notes and to jot down questions they might want to ask of each lobbying group. Each Congressional member stands up and states his or her name to set the stage.
2. To begin the simulation, the teacher announces the day, time, and location of the hearing as well as the issue that is about to be heard.
3. Call on one lobby group at a time. Ask them to stand against the side wall, facing the rest of the class in the order they will be giving their speeches. This way the rest of the class can see their faces as well as the committee's faces, and clearly hear the presentations.
4. Before beginning to speak, the first speaker in each group states the person and the special group or cause they are representing.
5. Each member gets a turn to speak. This lesson, the "lobbying" enactment, can also serve as an opportunity for the teacher to observe speaking skills, knowledge of subject matter, and the effectiveness of each student to lobby for the cause.
6. As students listen to other groups, they fill in the chart that follows.
7. At the end of their address, the congressional committee asks follow up questions. Each panel member should be required to ask at least one open-ended question of the lobbyist, focusing on one speaker, to engender full participation of the class.
8. Repeat the process with the rest of the lobbying groups.

## **The Decision**

1. In private, the committee discusses what they have heard. They need to render a decision and state reasons why they rendered the decision.
2. At the same time, the rest of the lobbyists quietly write down their prediction as to what the committee will decide.
3. A committee member stands up and renders its decision.
4. The teacher collects the charts to assess how well each student paid attention.

### **Post Activity: Charting the Results**

1. Tell the students that they are now the public and have heard the congressional committee render its decision. They are no longer lobbyists, and this has become a personal decision. Ask all of the students to get back into their home base groups, which were their original groups before they were sectioned off to a particular point of view. Inform the groups they will be given enough time to brainstorm all of the possible solutions to the controversy. They should discuss if they agree with the congressional committee's decision, or if they formulated a decision that was better than anything else offered.
2. The teacher asks the class for the different decisions that emerged in the cooperating groups. The teacher creates a chart with the issues. Then the instructor takes a vote on each decision and charts the results with a bar graph.
3. For homework, students may write their reflections on the experience and whether or not they agreed or disagreed with either of the decisions.

### **Post Activity: Analyzing the Government**

1. Now that students have had the opportunity to be lobbyists and analyze one another's performance, ask them to find out what is happening in their own local, state, or national government. Oftentimes, there are cable television channels that air congressional debates and speeches where the lobbying technique is used. Some students may wish to view Court Television to listen to the techniques that are used there.
2. Distribute another piece of chart paper and ask the students to fill in their responses from what they view on the television.
3. Hold a class discussion on what they have analyzed. You may wish to chart the results.

**Chief Hungry Wolf**

**Chief Hungry Wolf, the equal of the great warrior chiefs Crazy Horse, Gall, and Sitting Bull, spoke to the Lakota people at the Ghost Dance ceremony, at Wounded Knee, January 1, 1889.**

There will be a new day soon for our people. Once again the buffalo will be found in large numbers on the plains. The spirits of our ancestors will join with our people, and we will again be a nation of great warriors. We will again hunt as we did in the old days, before the White Man came like a flood to our land. We will live as the Lakota nation had always lived, a free people, enjoying the freedom of the earth beneath the sheltering sky.

The Lakota nation will not fight the White Man. That will not be our way. We have never lied as the White Man has lied to his Lakota brothers. We have never cheated the White Man as the White Man has cheated us. Whenever the Lakota nation has given its word, we have always kept our word. All the White Man did was to make treaties that he never honored. Every treaty the White Man made was broken. The Lakota are a great nation. We do not lie. We do not cheat. And we are not driven to kill others for the yellow metal that is dug from the ground.

But on this day our hearts will not be heavy as we celebrate the Ghost Dance. We prepare for the day when our world will again be as it was before the White Man's coming. Our hunting grounds will again be filled with game. Our young warriors will ride free across the Great Plains. The buffalo will once again give life to our people, so that they do not go hungry and starve because their bellies are empty. There will be no fences and the land will be open to everyone. There will be no Iron Horse running across our sacred lands. The White Man's talking wire will be no more.

The Great Spirit will smile down on the Lakota nation, for the Earth will be as it was. Clean water will flow again. Fresh grass will cover the earth as the buffalo robe covers the ground in the teepee. The buffalo will be everywhere. The deer and elk and antelope will again roam the land in plentiful numbers. And once again, the land that stretches from horizon to horizon will be here for all to enjoy.

The Ghost Dance calls to the spirits of our ancestors to join with the Lakota nation. Their spirits will make our people free. Their spirits will once again make our people great warriors. It is their spirits that will make us great hunters again. The White Man is like a swarm of grasshoppers. He devours and destroys everything in his path. The White Man's way is not the way of the Lakota. We do not need the White Man's whiskey. We do not want the White Man's gifts. We do not want to live as the White Man lives. And we do not want his sicknesses. We only want to be as we always were, before the White Man stole our land. Before he cheated us and broke every treaty he made with his Indian brothers. The White Man has a heart of stone. He has a forked tongue like the snake.

We will celebrate the Ghost Dance and honor the spirits. The Lakota nation will once again be a great people. We will live in peace. We will live with honor. We will live with dignity. And the Lakota nation will again be proud and free.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> “Teaching World History: The Global Human Experience Through Time.” *ERIC Digest*. ERIC Identifier: ED419772. Apr. 1998. ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies. April 1998. <[http://165.224.220.67/databases/ERIC\\_Digests/ed419772.html](http://165.224.220.67/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed419772.html)>.

<sup>2</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*. (Washington, D.C., 1994), 105.

<sup>3</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*. (Washington, D.C., 1994), 79.

<sup>4</sup> National Council for the Social Studies. *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*. (Washington, D.C., 1994), 82.

<sup>5</sup> S. Miller. “Making the Paths: Constructing Multicultural Texts and Critical-Narrative Discourse in Literature-History Classes.” *Center on English Learning and Achievement*. No. 7.8. 1996. School of Education, University at Albany. <<http://cela.albany.edu/paths/miller.html>>

<sup>6</sup> stenhouse.com— from S. Steffey and W.J. Hood. *If This Is Social Studies, Why Isn't It Boring?* (York Harbor, ME: Stenhouse Publishing, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> A. Stix and F. Hrbek. *Exploring History: The Oregon Trail*. (Westminster, CA: Teacher Created Materials, 2001).