Stories Along the Hudson: Albany Heroes

Unit: Voyage to Albany: A Living History Program

Destination(s)

Albany Heritage Area Visitor's Center

(518) 434-0405
25 Quackenbush Square
Clinton Ave. & Broadway
Albany, NY 12207
http://www.albany.org/visitors-center/

Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence

518-432-4432
194 Livingston Avenue
Albany, NY 12210
WWW.UndergroundRailroadHistory.org

Irish American Heritage Museum

(518) 427-1916
370 Broadway
Albany, NY 12201
http://www.irishamericanheritagemuseum.org

County
Albany

Grades
7th Grade

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Summary
Students synthesize information gathered during the trip and previous lessons. They also conduct research using oral histories gathered from modern immigrants in the Albany region. Then they practice analyzing and interpreting information gathered, comparing and contrasting it to information about past inhabitants of Albany. Each activity can be used alone, adapted, or expanded.

**Question**

- How are current "faces" of Albany influenced by "faces" of the past?
- What is immigration and how has it affected our community?
- What is oral history?

**Content Understanding(s)**

- History/patterns of immigration to the U.S. and NY
- Impact of immigrants and settlers on the Hudson Valley Region's industry, architecture, environment, etc.
- Primary vs. secondary sources
- 20th century social life in Albany

**Concept Understanding(s)**

- Value of oral histories and other first-person accounts
- How point of view affects historical understanding
- Techniques for gathering oral history
- Connections between the community's past and present
- Appreciation for the area's cultural diversity

**Vocabulary**

Immigration, emigration, oral history, primary sources, secondary sources
Suggested Time Frame(s)

At least five 45-minute class periods if you do all activities.

Narrative

1. "Voice" in history. Discuss with students the concept of "voice" in the telling of personal stories as history. Then, divide students into groups of three or four and have them pick a book (oral history, memoir, or other first-person narrative) telling the story of a historical figure. After completing their reading, each group should select excerpts to read aloud to the class. Follow the read aloud with a class discussion. Ask questions like the following to prompt students.

   - How did it feel to put yourself in that person's shoes?
   - What impressions did you gather of the various lives you heard about?

2. Immigration. Provide students with some background and historical context of immigration. Use your textbook and other resources. We gave a lecture on the history of immigration to the US and New York beginning with Native American arrival on the continent and ending with present day immigration. We also showed excerpts from a video, *Ellis Island* (see resource list). Assign students an essay, based on quotes and scenes from the video.

3. Oral history. Assign students to interview a family member about a memorable holiday or special activity. Don't impose too many guidelines yet; students just need to let the conversation happen in this exercise. After this experience, conduct an activity that helps students recognize open vs. closed questions. Demonstrate techniques by conducting an interview (in our case, we tried to interview an Albany native) in front of the class. Let students practice using recording equipment.

Ask school staff, families, and others to help you identify immigrant community members willing to come into the classroom for an interview session. Divide students into small groups to research and conduct interviews. Discuss the difference between secondary and primary sources. Ask students to use secondary sources to research their interviewees' home country and culture. Using their research findings, student groups should identify "starting" and "ending" points for their interviews and use this framework to develop and organize questions.

4. Conduct and present interviews. Discuss with students the idea that their list of questions can serve as a guidepost, but that they should expect to pursue leads unique to the conversation that develops with their interviewee. Once interviews are completed, students write an essay synthesizing their new knowledge of the
You may also have students develop a "radio" broadcast by editing their interviews into a piece to be aired at a special parents' night or other school event or even on a local public radio station. Explain that they should edit out comments that are unrelated to immigration, are difficult to hear, or are inappropriate in other ways. Add music and student narration if desired and if time permits.

**Supplies Used**

- Video on immigration (see resource list)
- Tape recorders

**What Should Students Know At The End of This Lesson**

See essential questions and understandings above.

**What Should Students Be Able To Do at the End of This Lesson**

- Identify and evaluate primary and secondary sources
- Prepare for, conduct, and synthesize and oral history interview

**How do you assess student learning?**

Participation in classroom discussions and work group. Quality of essay and/or radio broadcast. Have students conduct a self-evaluation and consider this as well.