

Lesson Plan for Strategies: The Achievements of the Sumerian Empire

Randi Gibson
Stanford Middle School, Long Beach, CA

Background

This class has been studying the early civilizations of the Tigris and Euphrates River area. The students have learned the basic elements that must be in place as civilizations develop. They understand that until ancient cultures were able to settle, grow crops, and domesticate animals to create a stable food supply, advancements in technology and cultural achievements were not possible. They have viewed video clips of the geography of the area, created geographic maps, and participated in oral readings of sections of the textbook about Mesopotamia and the Land Between Two Rivers.

English proficiency level: Beginners to advanced beginners

Grades: 6

Standards: California History-Social Science Content Standard 4) Cultural Anthropology, History Content Standard 6) Historical Perspective

Preparation

Content Objective: Students will identify four achievements of the Sumerians and explain their importance.

Language Objectives: In pairs, students will read about the achievements of the Sumerians. Students will write about one of the achievements and share out loud with classmates.

Materials: Paper, coins, water, religious figures, paper bags, laminated tree maps for each group, giant tree map to fill in as a class, blank sentence strips, cards with name of achievements and pictures, envelopes, colored markers, white boards

Motivation

Prepare one paper bag per student group with several items inside (a piece of paper, a coin, water, and a religious figure). Distribute bags to groups and instruct students to examine the items and to discuss with each other what they believe the items may be used for, based on information shared in prior lessons. Circulate and question the students. Ask the students to decide which item they believe may be the most important to a civilization and explain why. The purpose of the anticipatory set is to get students thinking about the achievements of societies and how they impact our lives. Accept responses from several groups and then explain the objectives for the day, referring to those posted on the board.

Presentation

Distribute a laminated tree map and an envelope that contains written information about four achievements of the Sumerians to each student group.

Working in pairs or small groups, have students categorize and organize each of the four achievements, details about that particular achievement, and the picture that represents each achievement. Circulate among the groups, offering support and asking questions to check on student understanding.

When most groups are finished, ask students to share out their answers. As the class progresses through each of the achievements, complete the class tree map posted on the board, as a visual reinforcement for each student. Following the placement of each of the achievements, lead the class in an informal discussion about the importance of each achievement.

Practice/Application

Assign each student pair or group one achievement. Instruct students to write a sentence on a sentence strip, in marker, identifying the achievement and explaining its importance, using the information provided for them from the tree map activity.

After the students have completed their sentence strips, ask one student from each group to stand and read their sentence out loud to the class and tape it to the class tree map in the appropriate place. Monitor and assess comprehension throughout the procedure.

Review/Assessment

Distribute a different color marker to each student at the table groups. Ask each student to write one achievement learned during the lesson on the white board provided, and pass it on to the next student. Continue for several minutes until each group no longer has ideas to record. Then ask student to identify the most important achievement of all and to justify their opinion.

Extension

The following day, instruct students to share information in a variation of the above review. Using the information from the tree map and group sentences, have students write an essay about the achievements of Sumer, and follow the writing process.