

Dr. Samuel A. Mudd House Museum Evidence Based Lesson

Lesson Rationale

The purpose of this lesson is to give the teacher the opportunity to present students a chance to analyze one of the many controversies surrounding the story of Dr. Samuel A. Mudd by having them use historical thinking skills to analyze a series of documents and formulate an evidence based response.

Essential Question

The lesson presents the students with the essential question “When did Dr. Mudd recognize the ‘injured man’ as John Wilkes Booth?” Controversy surrounds the idea of whether Dr. Mudd knew he was treating John Wilkes Booth on April 15, 1865. Not surprisingly, historical documents fail to agree on the subject. This divergence in opinion allows the students opportunity to practice the skills that historians use when presented with historical controversy. *NOTE* The term “injured man” was taken from Dr. Mudd’s official statement.

Grade Level

This lesson was designed for middle and high school students. The sources have been modified to allow students to access difficult vocabulary, but may need to be further modified depending on the level/specific need of individual classrooms.

Lesson Components

The lesson includes three components:

- 1) **Background PowerPoint**-this PowerPoint provides background information to help set the historical context of the lesson.
- 2) **Historic Documents**-the lesson was designed using six historical documents. Each source offers the reader a unique answer to the overall historical question. The sources were carefully selected to give the students the opportunity to analyze the author’s background/motive and to scrutinize the validity of the author. Furthermore, sources were carefully selected to give the students the opportunity to evaluate the extent to which the sources do or do not corroborate one another. Finally, the document set is accompanied by a timeline to give students additional background and contextual information.
- 3) **Graphic Organizer**-the graphic organizer was designed to give the students guidance as they analyze each of the documents. It offers students advice on questions historians use to analyze sources and serves as a place for students to record and compare information. The questions allow students the experience of analyzing sourcing, contextualizing, evaluating the validity, and assessing corroboration for each source.

Lesson Format

This lesson was formatted to take place in several stages or “rounds.” This format can be followed as is, or modified to suit the instructor’s specific needs/desires for the lesson. The current format will fill one 90 minute block period or two 45 minute periods.

Opening: The instructor sets the appropriate background knowledge and historical context using the provided PowerPoint. Students may take notes, or the instructor may simply choose to move quickly through the information if time is an issue.

Round One: The instructor distributes the document sets (including the timeline) and the graphic organizer. The teacher may choose to distribute the documents one at a time, or as an entire packet. The teacher and class should work through “Round One” (Document A) together. The teacher could model a read aloud, ask students to silently read the document, or have the students follow the think-pair-share format depending on the ability level of the students. The graphic organizer should be completed using the information provided in the document and discussed as a class to ensure accuracy. Understanding Document A is important, as it serves as a baseline for the remainder of the lesson.

Round Two: Complete “Round Two” using documents “B” and “C.” Have the students read and analyze each document and record their information on the graphic organizer. These documents have been placed in the same round because they contradict each other. This gives the students the first opportunity to examine the concept of corroboration.

Round Three: *Note* This round can be omitted if time is a concern. The students repeat the same process as in rounds one and two. This round provides three additional documents and adds to both sides of the historical argument.

Lesson Assessment

Round Four: The lesson is designed to have students produce a written argument that answers the essential question and is supported by evidence from the documents provided. The specific parameters of the assessment were purposely not set in this lesson to give the instructor full control over the assessment of the lesson.

Feedback and Field Trips

It is the sincere hope of the Dr. Samuel A. Mudd House museum that you find this activity a helpful lesson to your classroom. Please feel free to send any questions about the lesson to muddnews@gmail.com We would greatly appreciate your feedback regarding the lesson and welcome any suggestions, modifications, and adaptations that you use in the delivery of the activity.

Additionally, please consider bringing your students to the Dr. Samuel A. Mudd House Museum on a field experience. A tour can be set up by emailing drmuddtours@gmail.com or by calling either 301-645-6870 or 301-274-9358. If distance is prohibitive, please email us about the possibility of setting up a virtual experience for your students.