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Ideas with IMPACT

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Role Play the History Way

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Role Play the History Way

(Bringing your Social Studies Lessons to LIFE)

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Background

As a high school social studies teacher, I am always looking for new ways to bring my classroom to life, to make historical events more interesting for my students and to form a better connection to the events of the past. The summer of 2022, I attended a 2 day professional development hosted by the National Museum of African American History and Culture and coordinated by The Zinn Education Project and Rethinking Schools. The title of the PD was, "Make Good the Promises – Reconstruction and it's Legacies". It was an amazing professional development housed in a classroom full of teachers from around the country and the best part is that the PD took place inside the museum, which we had access to before and after the public arrived.

Truly an awesome teacher experience. One of the sessions was on how to conduct a role play activity. This past school year, I tried 3 of the role play activities in my classroom, and the students responded very well!

Role play activities do take a bit of time to set up, there are discussions that need to be had before the activity, and time should be allotted at the end to debrief with the students, but when executed properly can be such a powerful experience for your students.

Photos from the PD I attended

Goals

The goal of this project is to have students experience a lesson or unit using role play strategies. Role play is a versatile teaching method that can be adapted to various subjects and age groups, making it a valuable tool for educators aiming to create engaging and effective learning experiences. This project will concentrate in implementing role play strategies into the middle school and high school social studies classrooms.

This project will highlight several sample lessons that you can take back to your classroom, share various resources to help you implement the lessons quickly and take you through a brief simulation of a role play activity I have done in the past.

Objectives

Role play is a valuable teaching and learning technique that can offer numerous benefits in the classroom. Here are some of the advantages of incorporating role play activities into your teaching:

1. **Active Engagement**: Role play encourages active participation from students. They become actively involved in the learning process, which can enhance their understanding of complex concepts.
2. **Real-Life Application**: Role play allows students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life situations. This can help bridge the gap between theory and practice, making the subject matter more relevant and memorable.
3. **Enhanced Communication Skills**: Students develop their communication skills as they interact with classmates and assume different roles. They practice speaking, listening, and non-verbal communication, which are essential life skills.
4. **Critical Thinking**: Role play often requires students to think critically and make decisions in the context of the role they are playing. This can improve their problem-solving abilities and decision-making skills.
5. **Empathy and Perspective-Taking**: Role play encourages students to see issues from different perspectives by taking on different roles. This can promote empathy and help students understand different points of view.
6. **Creativity**: Students have the opportunity to be creative in role play scenarios, as they must think on their feet and improvise based on the situation. This fosters creativity and adaptability.
7. **Conflict Resolution**: Role play can help students practice conflict resolution skills. They may encounter and resolve conflicts within the scenarios they are acting out, which can be a valuable life skill.
8. **Cultural Understanding**: Role play can be used to explore different cultures and historical periods, helping students gain a deeper understanding of diversity and cultural differences.

9. **Increased Engagement**: Role play can make learning fun and engaging, which can motivate students to participate actively in class and look forward to lessons.
10. **Memory Retention**: Because role play is often a memorable and hands-on experience, students are more likely to remember the information and concepts they have learned through this method.
11. **Language Development**: For language classes, role play can be especially beneficial. It provides a context for using the language in a practical way, which can improve vocabulary, fluency, and language comprehension.
12. **Confidence Building**: Role play can boost students' confidence, especially if they have to speak in front of their peers or take on challenging roles. This increased confidence can spill over into other areas of their academic and personal lives.
13. **Experiential Learning**: Role play is a form of experiential learning, where students learn by doing. This hands-on approach can be particularly effective in reinforcing concepts and skills.
14. **Assessment Tool**: Teachers can use role play as an assessment tool to evaluate students' understanding of a subject or their ability to apply knowledge in practical scenarios.
15. **Teamwork**: Many role play activities involve collaboration and teamwork, which are important skills for students to develop as they prepare for future careers.

Bottom line is we want our students to

Gain knowledge.

Have Fun.

Be comfortable.

and

Interact with history in a unique/real world way.

Florida Standards

Link to the updated 2023 Florida Social Studies Standards

Role play activities can be utilized for all of the middle school social studies classrooms including lesson on African American History, US History, Holocaust History, Geography, Economics, Civics and Government, World History

Sample Middle School Standards

6th grade standards

SS.68.AA.2 Analyze events that involved or affected Africans from the founding of the nation through Reconstruction.

SS.68.HE.1 Structure and Functions of Government

SS.6.G.3 Understand the relationships between the Earth's ecosystems and the populations that dwell within them.

SS.6.G.5 Understand how human actions can impact the environment.

SS.6.E.2 Understand the fundamental concepts relevant to the institutions, structure, and functions of a national economy

SS.6.CG.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the origins and purposes of government, law, and the American political system.

SS.6.W.1 Utilize historical inquiry skills and analytical processes.

Sample High School Standards that can be used

7th grade standards

SS.7.G.3 Understand the relationships between the Earth's ecosystems and the populations that dwell within them.

SS.7.G.5 Understand how human actions can impact the environment

SS.7.E.2 Understand the fundamental concepts relevant to the institutions, structure, and functions of a national economy.

SS.7.CG.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the origins and purposes of government, law and the American political system.

SS.7.CG.2 Evaluate the roles, rights, and responsibilities of United States citizens, and determine methods of active participation in society, government, and the political system.

SS.7.CG.3 Demonstrate an understanding of the principles, functions, and organization of government.

SS.7.CG.4 Demonstrate an understanding of contemporary issues in world affairs, and evaluate the role and impact of United States foreign policy.

8th grade standards

SS.8.A.1 Use research and inquiry skills to analyze American History using primary and secondary sources.

SS.8.A.2 Examine the causes, course, and consequences of British settlement in the American colonies.

SS.8.A.3 Demonstrate an understanding of the causes, course, and consequences of the American Revolution and the founding principles of our nation.

SS.8.A.4 Demonstrate an understanding of the domestic and international causes, course, and consequences of westward expansion.

SS.8.A.5 Examine the causes, course, and consequence of the Civil War and Reconstruction including its effects on American peoples.

SS.8.G.3 Understand the relationships between the Earth's ecosystems and the populations that dwell within them.

SS.8.G.5 Understand how human actions can impact the environment.

SS.8.E.3 Understand the fundamental concepts relevant to the institutions, structure, and functions of a national economy.

SS.8.CG.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the origins and purposes of government, law and the American political system.

SS.8.CG.2 Evaluate the roles, rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens, and determine methods of active participation in society, government and the political system.

SS.8.CG.3 Demonstrate an understanding of the principles, functions and organization of government.

High School Standards

SS.912.A.1 Use research and inquiry skills to analyze American history using primary and secondary sources.

SS.912.A.2 Understand the causes, course, and consequences of the Civil War and Reconstruction and its effects on the American people.

SS.912.A.3 Analyze the transformation of the American economy and the changing social and political conditions in response to the Industrial Revolution.

SS.912.A.4 Demonstrate an understanding of the changing role of the United States in world affairs through the end of World War I

SS.912.A.5 Analyze the effects of the changing social, political, and economic conditions of the Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression.

SS.912.A.6 Understand the causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the United States role in the post-war world.

SS.912.A.7 Understand the rise and continuing international influence of the United States as a world leader and the impact of contemporary social and political movements on American life.

SS.912.AA.2 Analyze events that involved or affected African descendants and changed the American economic, political and social landscapes between 1776-1865.

SS.912.AA.3 Identify significant events, figures and contributions that shaped African American life from 1865-1954.

SS.912.AA.4 Analyze economic, political, legal and social advancements of African Americans and their contributions and sacrifices to American life from 1954 to present, including factors that influenced them.

SS.912.G.3 Understand the relationships between the Earth's ecosystems and the populations that dwell within them.

SS.912.G.5 Understand how human actions can impact the environment.

SS.912.E.1 Understand the fundamental concepts relevant to the development of a market economy.

SS.912.CG.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the origins and purposes of government, law, and the American political system.

SS.912.CG.2 Evaluate the roles, rights, and responsibilities of United States citizens and determine methods of active participation in society, government, and the political system.

SS.912.CG.3 Demonstrate an understanding of the principles, functions, and organization of government.

SS.912.CG.4 Demonstrate an understanding of contemporary issues in world affairs, and evaluate the role and impact of United States foreign policy.

SS.912.S.7 Social Problems/Analyze a range of social problems in today's world.

Steps for any Role Play Activity

Step 1 – Teacher Preparation

Before conducting a role play or simulation activity in your classroom, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with what role play in the classroom should look like.

Here are some great articles to help you in preparation of any role play activity in your classroom.

How to — and How Not to — Teach Role Plays (Zinn Education Project)

WANT TO FACILITATE ROLE PLAYING IN YOUR CLASS? (Harvard University)

Classroom Simulations and Role-playing - Ask an Educator (Youtube Video by Educational Partners)

Step 2 – What role play IS NOT – a conversation with your students.

When you are ready to enhance your classroom with a role play activity, I find it helpful to talk about / show my students that role play IS NOT as well as what it is.

Video Appears To Show California Teacher Mocking Native Americans

Role play is NOT

- **Mocking another culture or person**
- **Taking on an "accent"**

Step 3 – Establish Guidelines for Activity

Guidelines for Role-Play Activities

1. **Active Listening:** Pay close attention to what others are saying and doing. Good listening helps you respond appropriately and contributes to a more realistic scenario.
2. **Stay in Character:** Try your best to stay in the role assigned to you. Think and act like the character you're portraying. This makes the role-play more authentic and educational.
3. **Stay on Topic:** Keep the discussion focused on the scenario and learning objectives. Avoid going off-topic, as it can detract from the learning experience.
4. **Ask Questions:** If you're uncertain about your role or the scenario, don't hesitate to ask for clarification from the teacher or your fellow students.
5. **Participate Actively:** Engage actively in the role-play. The more you invest in the activity, the more you will learn from it.
6. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Be mindful of cultural differences and sensitivities. Avoid stereotypes and offensive behavior related to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or other factors.
7. **Have Fun:** Role-plays can be enjoyable and educational. Approach them with a positive attitude and a willingness to learn.

By establishing guidelines and being mindful of these potential pitfalls, educators can create a positive and effective role-play experience for their students while fostering a respectful and inclusive classroom environment.

After selecting your topic

Step 4 – Select a topic (Identify an appropriate issue or controversy, past or present, that requires resolution)

Step 5 – Establish Roles/Nametag

Create a role for each student in your class. (If you are unable to do this, multiple students can have the same role, but during the activity they can't "meet" themselves.

Once you have given each student their role, have them write the name of their "character" on a nametag and place on their garment in a location where other students will be able to see.

Step 6 – Student Research

(Students conduct research to collect information about the specific views of the party or individual they represent in the role-play)

I usually create a one sheet bio of each "role" – this can cut down on the research time required in class, but you can also require the students to do the research beforehand or for HW.

I then have the students create a "cheat-sheet" on a large index card with the major points / perspectives or their role.

Sample Role

Lucy Stone

I was the first woman from Massachusetts to earn a college degree and used my education to fight for justice. Like many women's rights activists, I started as an abolitionist before the Civil War. I spoke out against slavery and for women's rights at a time when women were often prevented from speaking publicly.

After the war, I traveled with Susan B. Anthony to try to convince abolitionist organizations to merge with the women's movement to campaign for equal rights for all. I was frustrated that many abolitionists, who I had worked with for years, felt the need to champion the rights of Black men first. Nevertheless, in 1866 we formed the American Equal Rights Association (AERA).

I helped lead the AERA's campaign in Kansas in support of two state referenda that would have given the right to vote to African Americans and women. I spoke to so many crowds in Kansas during the first three months of the campaign that I lost my voice and had to return home. But when I left, the campaign took an ugly turn and I was "utterly disgusted" when Anthony brought racist Democrat George Francis Train to campaign for women's suffrage and stopped championing the referenda for Black suffrage.

Unfortunately, this split between those who believed we needed to fight for Black rights first, and those who wanted to prioritize women's suffrage, only grew larger. I tried to argue both against abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Wendell Phillips, who believed that "the cause of the Negro was more pressing than that of woman's," and against women's rights advocates like Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who began to associate themselves with racists in the Democratic Party. Ultimately, however, Stanton and Anthony went too far when they came out against the 15th Amendment that gave Black men the right to vote. I and others who believed that the 15th Amendment was an important step in the right direction parted ways with Stanton and Anthony and created the American Woman Suffrage Association to continue to fight state by state for women's right to vote.

Time for ACTION

Step 7 – Set up your area

If you have a large classroom, with enough space for students to walk around, you can do this in your own space. I find it much easier to use the hallway in front of my classroom to give the students ample space for the activity.

Step 8 – Set up parameters/requirements

I like to use a timer as well as have a worksheet with sample questions that students are completing as they are conducting activity.

Example of requirement I use in my class of approximately 30 students where each student has a different role (so potentially there are 29 other people they can meet). Normally a conversation between 2 students will take approximately 5 minutes. A minute each for them to introduce themselves and their points of view and then about 3 minutes for the "conversation between the roles".

If you allot 30 minutes for this activity, the students should be able to "meet" 6 other students. Normally my classes spend between 30 to 45 minutes completing the activity.

Step 9 – Circulate

As the teacher, you should not engage in the activity, but your role should simply be an observer. Make sure students are on task, asking the right questions, recording their answers, mingling with other "characters".

Step 10 – Debrief

As part of my debrief, I have each student give a 30 second introduction of themselves (since they won't really meet every character) and the have an opportunity to share something interesting they learned from another student. (I build in the debrief questions into the activity - so that the students are not put on the spot at the end).

Sample debrief question …

8. In your role, find someone you could take common action with. Come up with one idea for the action you might take together to further the causes you are passionate about. Who is the person and what action might you take together?

Supply List Links

I have included links to each item on Amazon, but you can find these at most office supply stores.

Large Index Cards	
Name Tags (1 per student)	
Clear Dry Erase Pockets	
Clip boards	

Suggestions for Role Play Topics

Role Play Topics Middle/High School

1. Ancient Civilizations:
    - Topic: Ancient Egypt Role-play: Students can take on the roles of pharaohs, priests, and peasants to simulate daily life in ancient Egypt.
    - Topic: Ancient Greece Role-play: Organize an assembly in the style of an ancient Greek agora where students play the roles of philosophers, citizens, and politicians debating important issues.
2. Medieval Times:
    - Topic: The Crusades Role-play: Students can act as knights, kings, and merchants in a role-play that explores the motivations and consequences of the Crusades.
    - Topic: Feudalism Role-play: Create a feudal manor simulation where students take on the roles of lords, vassals, and serfs to understand the feudal system.
3. American History:
    - Topic: The American Revolution Role-play: Recreate the Continental Congress, with students assuming the roles of famous figures like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin to debate independence.
    - Topic: The Underground Railroad Role-play: Students can role-play as escaped slaves and conductors, experiencing the challenges and risks of the Underground Railroad.
4. World Wars:
    - Topic: World War I Role-play: Organize a diplomatic conference where students represent various countries and negotiate the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.
    - Topic: World War II Role-play: Simulate a wartime press conference with students taking on the roles of key leaders like Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Adolf Hitler.

5. Civil Rights Movement:
    - Topic: The Montgomery Bus Boycott Role-play: Students can reenact the events of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, with some playing Rosa Parks and others organizing the boycott.
    - Topic: The March on Washington Role-play: Students can simulate the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, with some playing Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders.
6. Ancient Empires:
    - Topic: The Roman Empire Role-play: Create a Roman Senate role-play where students debate issues such as expansion, citizenship, and governance.
    - Topic: The Inca Empire Role-play: Students can take on the roles of Inca leaders and commoners to explore the structure and culture of the Inca Empire.
7. Industrial Revolution:
    - Topic: Factory Conditions Role-play: Divide students into factory workers and factory owners to simulate the working conditions and labor disputes of the Industrial Revolution.
    - Topic: Child Labor Role-play: Students can role-play as child laborers, factory owners, and activists in a discussion about child labor laws and reforms.
8. Colonial America:
    - Topic: Jamestown Settlement Role-play: Have students play the roles of English settlers in Jamestown, facing challenges like starvation, disease, and interactions with Native Americans.
    - Topic: Salem Witch Trials Role-play: Students can reenact the Salem witch trials, taking on the roles of accused witches, judges, and accusers to understand the hysteria of the time.

9. The Renaissance and Reformation:
    - Topic: The Medici Family and Renaissance Art Role-play: Students can assume the roles of prominent Renaissance artists like Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, discussing their works and seeking Medici family patronage.
    - Topic: Martin Luther and the Reformation Role-play: Organize a debate where students take on the roles of Martin Luther, Catholic Church officials, and secular rulers, discussing the Protestant Reformation's impact.
10. Age of Exploration:
    - Topic: Christopher Columbus and the New World Role-play: Students can role-play as explorers, indigenous people, and European monarchs, reenacting the first encounters between Columbus and Native Americans.
    - Topic: Magellan's Circumnavigation Role-play: Simulate Ferdinand Magellan's voyage around the world, with students taking on the roles of crew members and explorers facing the challenges of the journey.
11. Enlightenment and Revolution:
    - Topic: The Enlightenment Thinkers Role-play: Students can portray Enlightenment philosophers like John Locke, Voltaire, and Rousseau, engaging in a salon-style discussion on their ideas.
    - Topic: The French Revolution Role-play: Organize a mock trial where students assume the roles of key figures like King Louis XVI and Maximilien Robespierre, debating their actions during the revolution.
12. Industrialization and Imperialism:
    - Topic: Industrial Revolution and Labor Unions Role-play: Students can represent factory workers and factory owners in a negotiation over labor conditions and rights during the Industrial Revolution.

- Topic: Scramble for Africa Role-play: Create a diplomatic conference where students take on the roles of European colonial powers, discussing the partitioning of Africa.

13. World War I and Interwar Period:

- Topic: Treaty of Versailles Role-play: Simulate the Versailles Peace Conference with students portraying leaders from Allied and Central Powers, discussing the treaty's terms and consequences.
- Topic: Roaring Twenties Role-play: Students can assume the roles of flappers, gangsters, and politicians in a 1920s-themed party, discussing the social and cultural changes of the era.

14. World War II and the Cold War:

- Topic: Yalta Conference Role-play: Students can reenact the Yalta Conference, with roles such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin, discussing post-World War II Europe.
- Topic: Cuban Missile Crisis Role-play: Have students portray John F. Kennedy, Nikita Khrushchev, and advisors in a crisis simulation, discussing the decisions made during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

15. Civil Rights Movement and Social Change:

- Topic: Civil Rights Sit-ins Role-play: Students can act as civil rights activists participating in sit-ins at segregated lunch counters, experiencing the challenges they faced.
- Topic: Women's Suffrage Movement Role-play: Organize a suffrage parade with students taking on the roles of suffragettes and anti-suffrage advocates, highlighting the struggle for women's voting rights.

16. Modern Global Issues:

- Topic: The United Nations and Diplomacy Role-play: Students can represent delegates from various countries in a simulated United

Nations General Assembly, discussing contemporary global issues.

- Topic: Refugee Crisis Role-play: Students can assume the roles of refugees, humanitarian aid workers, and government officials, discussing the challenges and solutions related to the refugee crisis.

Supplemental Links/Resources

Zinn Education Role Play Lesson Plans

Sample Climate Justice Role Play Lesson Plans

Meet Today's Climate Justice Activists: A Mixer on the People Saving the World

Sample Asian American Role Play Lesson Plans

The Other Internment: Teaching the Hidden Story of Japanese Latin Americans During WWII

Sample Economics Role Play Lesson Plans

The Power in Our Hands: A Curriculum on the History of Work and Workers in the United States

Sample World History Role Play Lesson Plans

Hunger on Trial: An Activity on the Irish Potato Famine and Its Meaning for Today

Link to all of Zinn's Teacher Materials

ZINN EDUCATION PROJECT

Additional Links to Role Play Activities

Role-Playing World History

Role-Playing US History