

Unit/Lesson Description

Having an understanding of their community’s history can provide students with the background necessary to interpret its current decisions. Being familiar with the people, places, and things that have contributed to their community in the past can help students as they analyze present civic, economic, social, and educational policies.

This lesson challenges students to investigate the background of their community, building on the brief history that was part of their brochure in Unit Six. By using community resources to research the past and by compiling the oral histories of senior citizens, students will build on their understanding of how people in the past evaluated costs and benefits as they made decisions that have had lasting impact.

Concepts

Civics – community history: social, civic, economic, religious, educational, cultural, geographic

Related Subject Areas

Social Studies – history, geography, economics, sociology

Math – time line, calculations, percentages

Language Arts – reading, writing, speaking, research, oral reports

Science – early inventions, land use

Fine Arts – illustrations, music

Technology – calculators, computer graphics, and word processing

Research Skills – finding historical information

Instructional Objectives

Students will be able to:

gather and analyze information.

compute simple calculations and percentages.

communicate clearly in written and oral modes.

Time Required

3 - 5 class periods (research done outside of class)

Materials Required

Activity 1, *Scavenger Hunt* (one per student)

Activity 2, *How Long Did They Live?* (one per student)

Activity 3, *Cemetery Secrets* (one per group of 4 - 5 students)

Visual 1, *Where's the Info?*

Visual 2, *Hints for a Successful Interview*

pictures of famous men and women of history

pictures, from newspapers and magazines, of current news events

several sheets of white poster board

index cards (4" x 6") (one per student)

three-ring binder or folder (optional)

large sheets of white construction paper (12" x 18") (one per student)

one piece of newsprint for each student

one stick of sidewalk chalk for each student

Procedure

1. Display pictures of George Washington, Babe Ruth, Amelia Earhart, Martin Luther King, Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, or other men and women in history, and ask the following question: What did these people do in their fields of interest that has affected the way we do things in those fields today? (*Washington: fought for the freedom that the U.S.A. enjoys; Ruth: set a standard for baseball excellence and effort; Earhart: was adventurous in the early days of flight, leading to other expeditions; King: fought for the civil rights legislation that protects all Americans; Roosevelt: a First Lady who worked to protect the rights of children and poor people*)
2. Explain that studying people and events of the past can help students understand why things occur as they do in the present.
3. Display pictures of important recent news events. Use pictures from weekly news magazines, newspapers, or sporting events. (Avoid sensational items involving violence or scandal.) Ask students what historical events or discoveries may have had an impact on the events featured in the pictures. (*Answers will vary depending upon the pictures. For example, a picture of the space shuttle may remind students of early space travel or the voyages of Magellan or Columbus. A picture of a computer may elicit comments about early technology or inventors such as Edison or Gutenberg.*)

4. Review the brief community history that students compiled for their brochure, and discuss how that story of the community can be expanded for a more in-depth picture. (*Students may respond that they would like to learn more about the civic, social, economic, geographic, or educational history of their town.*)
5. Divide the class into groups of four or five students. Display Visual 1, *Where's the Info?* Tell students to brainstorm ideas about where they can find different kinds of information about their community. Remind students that the best ideas in a brainstorming session are usually not those that are generated early. It takes time to get past the obvious responses to the unique ones. Allow at least 10 minutes for groups to think of and record ideas.
6. Ask groups to choose what they consider to be their five best responses to share with the rest of the class. Record students' responses. When the discussion is complete, assign two or three students whose printing is neat and legible to copy the ideas to a piece of poster board for class display. (*Answers may include: library; historical society; state archives; old newspapers; interviews with elderly residents; church, school, or court records; cemeteries; architectural and real estate records*)
7. Tell students that they are going to use the resources they listed to help them complete a scavenger hunt about their community.
8. Distribute a copy of Activity 1, *Scavenger Hunt*, to all students, but instruct them to work in groups to complete the activity. Suggest that students assign sections of the activity to group members so that they do not duplicate each other's work. Allow at least a week for students to complete the activity, but check progress daily.
9. When all scavenger hunts have been completed, distribute a 4" x 6" index card to each student. Explain that the class will create a deck of *Community History Cards* about their community. Each student will choose one famous person, place, or event discovered through the scavenger hunt and draw on one side of the card an illustration of it (e.g., the first post office). On the other side, students should write names, dates, or other pertinent information to describe their illustration. (If students prefer to type their information, they can use a computer and then glue the data sheet to the back of the card.) Students can display the cards in class and use them as a learning center in which they can quiz each other about community history.
10. Explain that the research students did during the scavenger hunt was just one way of learning about their community's history. Ask the following questions:

- a. If you wanted to find out about the things you did as a baby, whom would you ask? (*parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles*)
 - b. If you wanted to find out about things your parents did as babies, whom would you ask? (*grandparents, great-grandparents, elderly relatives*)
11. Explain that senior citizens in the community can be a valuable resource in the search for a town's history. An oral history can convey information about the past that may not be found in books or written records.
 12. Assign students to work individually or in pairs to interview the oldest community member they know. They should tape record the interview or write down the questions and answers. The information will be compiled and organized and used to produce a written narrative.
 13. Have students brainstorm some questions that can be used in their interviews. Guide students to include questions about early jobs and about changes in prices, income, taxes, goods, services, and amenities the community has provided over the years. They should also include questions about the physical community such as landmarks that may have been torn down or created. They should also learn about the interviewee's perceptions of how society in general has changed in the past 50 years or so. As students suggest questions, write them on the chalkboard or on an overhead transparency. Ask a student who is adept at keyboarding to type the list on a computer, then duplicate and distribute the questions to all students.
 14. Display Visual 2, *Hints for a Successful Interview*, and review the rules in a class discussion.
 15. Assign each student to complete her interview and to write a summary of it in a coherent narrative. Remind students about writing a good topic sentence and following it with a well-organized series of supporting details. Tell them to use exact quotations when appropriate. Tell each student to add their report to his/her Local Government CECH-UP notebook. Reports can also be duplicated and placed in a binder or folder for a classroom booklet that can be shared with other students.
 16. Review the importance of research and oral histories in learning about a community. Explain that a local cemetery can also be a storehouse of history. It contains names of pioneers in the community and may also include bits of information about them carved on gravestones. Some stones may also contain interesting epitaphs. Define *epitaph* as "a brief statement commemorating a

- deceased person.” Explain that there are a number of web sites that contain lists of epitaphs. Encourage students to consult the CECH web page for links.
17. Distribute a copy of Activity 2, *How Long Did They Live?*, to each student. Explain that there are a number of historical observations that can be easily overlooked. For instance, the cemetery can reveal times of catastrophic events or changes in medical technology. Assign this activity for homework, and explain that it will help students recognize clues to the past. (*Mary Smith, 45; Josef Saronef, 83; Brenda Gunther, 48; Thomas Noe, 52; Rachel Edwards, 68; Darcy Evans, 80. (1.) Youngest – Mary Smith; (2.) Oldest – Josef Saronef; (3.) Avg. age of those born before 1890 = $35+48+52=135$, $135/3=45$; (4.) Avg. age of those born after 1890 = $83+68+80=231$, $231/3=77$. (5.) Percentage increase = $77-45=32$, $32/45=71.1\%$ increase.*)
 18. Divide the class into groups of four or five students. Distribute a copy of Activity 3, *Cemetery Secrets*, to each group. Assign groups to complete the activity during a field trip to a local cemetery. (If a field trip cannot be scheduled, ask students to have their families take them to a local cemetery to complete the activity.)
 19. As an optional activity, give each student a piece of clean newsprint and a stick of sidewalk chalk. Explain that they can make a rubbing by placing the newsprint on the gravestone and rubbing the newsprint with the side of the chalk. A note explaining the student’s interest in the stone can be attached to the rubbing, and the rubbings can be displayed around the classroom.
 20. Discuss the students’ cemetery findings, comparing the length of life in the 1800s with the length of life more recently. (*Students should note that people generally live longer now than they did in the past.*)
 21. As a culminating activity for this lesson, distribute a large (12” x 18”) sheet of white construction paper to each student. Assign each student a five-year time period, working backwards from the present (e.g., one student has 2000 - 2004, the next has 1995 - 1999; next has 1990 - 1994, etc.). Have each student use colored markers to illustrate a poster about one important civic, economic, educational, religious, sporting, cultural event, or a person from that five-year time period. These posters can be hung in the classroom, or, more ideally, in a central location such as the school library, for other students to observe and study.

Closure

Assemble all the information that students have gathered about the history of their community. Have students review their data (research, oral histories, cemetery facts, etc.) and discuss the major findings. Engage students in a discussion of how present and future decisions in the community may be affected by decisions that were made in the past. Suggest several specific issues such as allocation of land for parks or schools, zoning ordinances that restrict or encourage business development, demographics such as increasing numbers of young or elderly citizens, education referendum choices, and legal decisions. Have students list their predictions for future community decisions and seal the predictions in an envelope addressed to themselves. Have students open the envelopes six months from now to find out how accurate their forecasts were.

Assessment

An evaluation of the students' interview summaries, written reports, posters, and other related activities of this lesson will serve as a means to assess their mastery of concepts. They should have become adept at gathering and analyzing information in order to develop a clear understanding of the importance of their community's history as it relates to understanding the present and making wise decisions in the future.

Extension

Ask students who are artistically or musically talented to collaborate in creating a slide show and song about the community's history. A photographic slide show can be set to music, including existing tapes or student-created songs. (Students who possess the technology skills to do so can create a *PowerPoint* or *Hyper Studio* presentation, inserting photos and music.) The show could be presented at a school board meeting, a town council meeting, or during a local festival celebrating the town's history.

ACTIVITY 1

SCAVENGER HUNT

The history of a community is made up of information about people, places, and events. Work with your team to answer the questions below about your community.

1. Where was the first building in your town located? Write the address below, then draw a map on a separate sheet of paper indicating its location. _____

Why was this a good location for the first building? _____

2. Who were some of the first settlers in the community? List their names. Then use a current phone directory to see if the family still resides in the community.

Notable names of the past _____

Same names and addresses in the present _____

3. When was the first library card issued? To whom? _____

4. Which was the first church established in the community? When? Where? _____

Continued

Continued

5. What was the first school? Where was it located? _____

6. Is there any relationship between the location of the first school and the location of the first church? If so, what were the benefits of this relationship in location?

7. Did any local event ever receive national attention (e.g., tornado, flood, railroad disaster, big business deal, discovery, sporting event, etc.)? Describe it.

8. Name some early retail businesses and find their locations on a map.

Continued

Continued

Why did they choose to locate where they did? _____

Which are still in town? _____

9. Find out about the first police or fire department. Who were the first officers?

Where was the station? _____

How big was the force? _____

10. How has medical care changed over time? Find out about early doctors, hospitals, and health care facilities. List names, locations, and any other information you can find about pioneers in health care in your community. _____

11. What was the name of the first local newspaper? _____

Try to find the earliest edition. What was the headline news? _____

Continued

Continued

12. What kind of government does your community now have (e.g., mayor/council, council/manager, county council)? Has this always been the case?

13. Find information about the original civic leaders of your community. Who were they? Were they elected or appointed? How long did they serve? Do any stand out as being particularly good or bad? Are any present leaders descendants of those early ones? _____

14. Choose another first in the community (e.g., post office, bank, grocery store, library, restaurant, factory, road, court house, theater, gas station, etc.). Tell where it was, when it began, what happened to it. Also include a short discussion of the costs and benefits it experienced as a result of its location.

ACTIVITY 2

HOW LONG DID THEY LIVE?

The image displays six tombstones arranged in two rows of three. Each tombstone is a simple, upright, rounded-top stone with text inscribed on it. The text is a mix of humorous epitaphs and factual birth and death dates. The tombstones are separated by thin horizontal lines.

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Here lies Mary Smith Born 1888 Died 1933 | Josef Saronef Born 1907 Died 1990 | I told you I was sick! Brenda Gunther Born 1812 Died 1860 |
| <i>Been There, done that.</i> Thomas Noe Born 1855 Died 1907 | See you later. Rachel Edwards born 1908 died 1976 | Darcy Evans <i>Lived a good life.</i> Born 1855 Died 1907 |

ACTIVITY 2

HOW LONG DID THEY LIVE?

1. Who died at the youngest age? _____
2. Who died at the oldest age? _____
3. Find the average age of those who were born before 1890. _____
4. Find the average age of those who were born after 1890. _____
5. Calculate the percentage increase in life span between those people born before 1890 and those people born after 1890. (Hint: Subtract one average from another, then divide that number by the average life span of those born before 1890.)

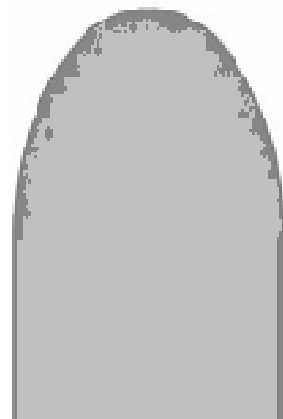
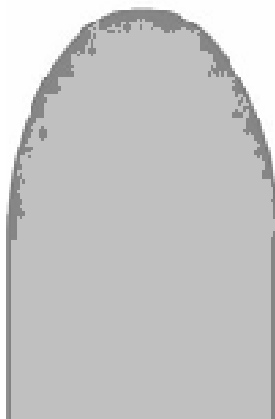
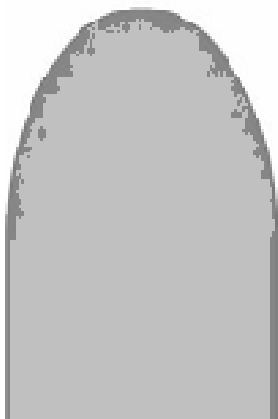
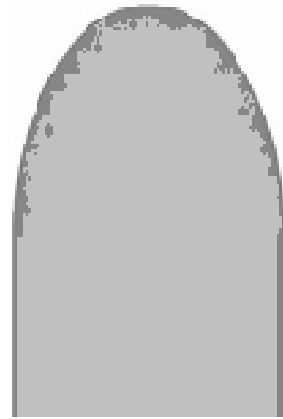
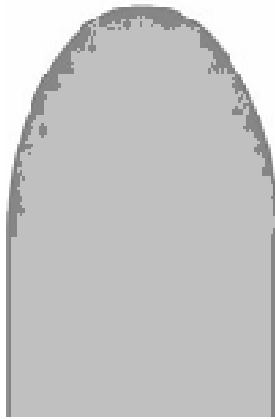
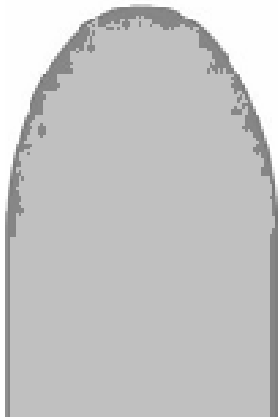
6. Why does life expectancy increase over time?

7. Imagine that Mary Smith, Thomas Noe, Josef Saronef, Rachel Edwards, and Darcy Evans had all died in 1910. At what age would each have died? _____

8. What might explain so many deaths at one time? _____

ACTIVITY 3

CEMETERY SECRETS



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1. Find the oldest gravestone. Whose is it? When did the person die? _____

2. Write the **name** and year of **birth** and **death** of a person who died in:

the 1800s _____

between 1900 and 1910 _____

between 1910 and 1920 _____

in the 1920s _____

in the 1930s _____

in the 1940s _____

in the 1950s _____

in the 1960s _____

in the 1970s _____

in the 1980s _____

in the 1990s _____

3. Whose name is on the largest stone? _____

4. Describe the most unusual stone. _____

5. Does any stone have an interesting epitaph? Write it here. _____

On the back of this sheet design a gravestone for a famous living person (actor, athlete, politician), and write an appropriate epitaph.

Continued

ACTIVITY 3

CEMETERY SECRETS (continued)

Locate six gravestones that have something in common (for instance, find the six earliest birth dates, the six earliest dates of death, several persons of the same last name, several people of various ages who died in the same year). Reproduce the six gravestones' messages on your gravestones sheet. Explain why you chose these six.

6. List the names of any community founders whose remains are located in this cemetery. _____

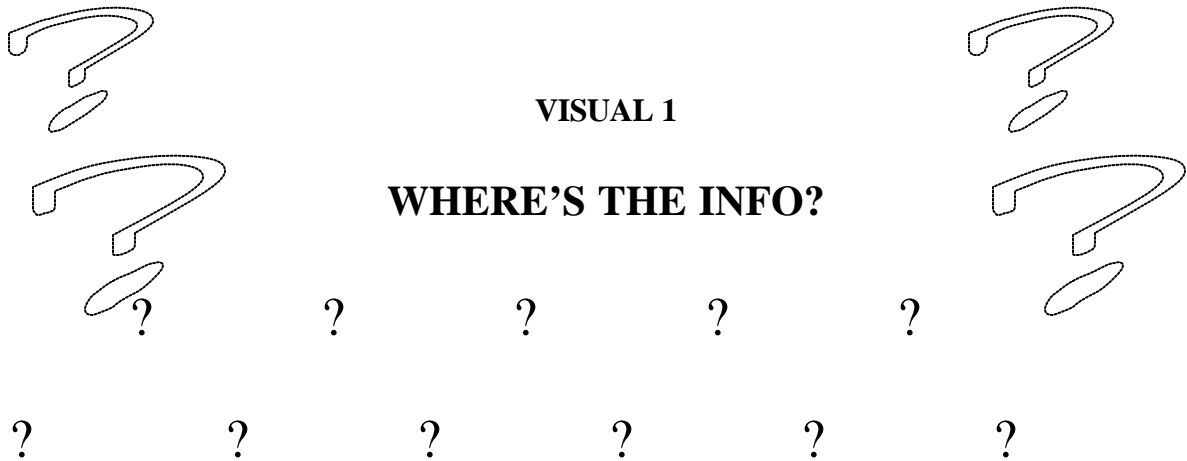
7. List the names of persons whose last names are also street names in your community. _____

8. Why would a street be named after a person? _____

9. Find a very old gravestone in this cemetery. Is that person's last name one that is still present in your community? What is the name? _____

10. Why was this cemetery located here? What was this area like when the cemetery was established? How has this area changed? _____

11. Is this cemetery still used for burials? If not, where are people buried?



Where would you look for information about the history of your community?

VISUAL 2

HINTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

Things to do

Set up an appointment.

Prepare a list of questions.

Be prepared with paper, pencil, tape recorder.

Arrive on time.

Speak clearly.

Look at the person.

Act interested.

Ask some questions that call for a “yes” or “no” response
(for easy comparison with the responses of others.)

Ask some open-ended questions (questions that cannot
be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”).

Respond to the person’s answers.

Thank the person.

Send a “thank you” note the next day.

Things NOT to do

Mumble

Ask a question without referring to a previous answer.

Make judgments about the person’s answers.

Act distracted or disinterested.

Act hurried.

