

Lesson Plan – Breaking Down Identity Barriers (WWII and 9/11)

Prepared by Adam Grossman with the help of Alley Schottenstein

Ohio Standards Correlation

History: Grade 12, Benchmark B, Points 2 & 3

People in Societies: Grade 12, Benchmark A, Points 1 & 2

People in Societies: Grade 11, Benchmark C, Point 4

Introduction

On February 3, 1943 — a day in the midst of a war motivated by identity persecution — the U.S.S. *Dorchester* was torpedoed off the coast of Greenland (Krome), causing a tragic turn of events for the military passengers of this vessel. As the ship began to sink four military chaplains — Protestant Reverends George L. Fox and Clark A. Poling, Catholic Priest John P. Washington and Reform Rabbi Alexander Goode — worked as a team to save the lives of their fellow passengers. They risked their lives by not only giving up their life jackets to the other soldiers, but also by forsaking their ability to board the lifeboats (picture collection and letter from Rollie). According to survivor Rollie T. Phillips: “The chaplains stood together as the ship went down.” He recalled being “close to the ship when she sank and the memory of them standing together” united (Rollie’s letter). Some of the survivors even claimed that the four men were praying together (Krome). This heroic and patriotic act made a tremendous impact on the American people because despite the fact that anti-Semitism and anti-Catholic sentiment still resonated within America, these four chaplains bonded together and broke down identity barriers. Before William Herberg’s *Protestant, Catholic, and Jew*— a text suggesting that America was a country composed of Judeo-Christian values — this event helped to facilitate interfaith dialogue between Christians and Jews.

In fact two years after this event on November 28, 1945, the *Committee of Catholics for Human Rights* presented an award in Goode’s memory recognizing his role on the U.S.S. *Dorchester*. The award stated that Alexander Goode was “[a] man of G-d who made the supreme sacrifice so that others might live to carry on the struggle against the evil forces which menaced the world. His unselfish choice in electing to go down with the fatally wounded fighting ship S.S. *Dorchester* will forever remain the annals of mankind. A symbol of the greatest heights to which human beings may hope to rise; an inspiring symbol of man’s love for his fellow man and G-d.” Similar to the *Committee of Catholics for Human Rights*, the U. S. Postal Service released a commemorative stamp on May 28, 1948, praising all four chaplains. This was the first time a Jewish person was featured on a postage stamp, as well as the first time a Jewish person designed a stamp (Louis Schwimmer). Both of these events symbolized how America’s definition of a citizen began to change.

In addition to stamp artist Louis Schwimmer, artists throughout the country were moved by this instance of religious pluralism. Through art, Americans have been able to visualize the compassion and bravery of these four chaplains. If one examines the depictions of the four chaplains in a stamp collection, various portraits, a stain-glass memorial window at West Point’s Post Chapel, and a mural, one will see that each of

these images portrays the four men huddling together in one strong spiritual bond. Ultimately, these four chaplains not only defined the meaning of heroism, but also demonstrated that being a hero meant breaking down identity barriers. Emblematic of ideal brotherhood, their story will never be forgotten.

By Alley Schottenstein

Goals

1. Analyze primary sources to see how role of chance impacted society
2. Identify perspectives of diverse cultural groups in the analysis of current issues
3. Research and application on specific material
4. Recognize importance of art on society

Activities

I. Open the class by asking the students to reflect on the following questions:

1. How does your nationality, culture, religion, race, sex, etc. define you?
2. How does this definition make you distinct?
3. What if your definition of yourself was not accepted by the greater society?

II. Divide the students into groups of three. Explain that prior to 1943 many anti-minority groups existed in America (includes anti-Jewish and anti-Catholic). Pass out the four chaplain's stamp and postcard, and ask the students to answer the following questions.

1. What symbols do you notice in the stamp and the postcard?
2. What emotions and feelings does the symbols in the stamp evoke? What about the postcard?
3. What messages are apparent? Are they verbal, visual or both?
4. Who do you think is the intended audience?
5. What do you feel is the artist and the American government's intention by the stamp? What about the postcard?
6. Do you feel that the stamp and postcard effective? Why?
7. How could the event and subsequent stamp and postcard aided minority and majority relations?

III. Have the students share their answers. Explain the story of the four chaplains and how it helped reshape Jewish and Christian relations.

IV. Ask the students to remain in the same groups, and pass out the attached picture of the government issued stamp that commemorated the events in the aftermath of 9/11. Ask the groups to answer the following questions.

1. What symbols do you notice in the stamp?

2. What emotions and feelings does the symbols in the stamp evoke?
3. What messages are apparent? Are they verbal, visual, both?
4. Who do you think is the intended audience?
5. What do you feel is the American government's intention by the stamp?
6. How does the "Heros USA" stamp compare to the stamp in honor of the four chaplains?
7. Do you believe the stamp best represents America in the aftermath of 9/11? Why or why not?

V. Pass out the attached articles that discuss the issues of the proposed monument in honor of the firefighters actions after 9/11. Ask the following questions to the class for discussion.

1. What issues do the articles bring up about the photograph and the proposed monument?
2. How did the photograph best represent America in the aftermath of 9/11?
How did the proposed monument best represent America in the aftermath of 9/11?
3. How important is historical accurateness in relation to art?
4. How can artistic representations and/or government issued posters or stamps help improve or hinder relations between majority and minority groups?

V. Project: Create either a stamp or a monument that best represents and honors the importance of diversity in America today. This can be in relation to the individuals that helped in the aftermath of 9/11, the soldiers in Iraq, or another event that holds personal meaning to you. In addition write a paragraph detailing the reasons why you choose the particular event and used the certain themes and symbols?

Resources

Chaplaincy

Mural of the four chaplains who drowned on the Dorchester in World War II, Pittsburg, Pa; and memorial window. West Point, N.Y. Photographs
Found: Flat File. Cabinet 1, Drawer 7

Chaplaincy

Picture Collection
Found: Picture Collection

Goode, Alexander

Biographical Information
Found: MS # 66/ Box 1/ Folder 1

Goode, Alexander D.

Citation of honor presented in memory of Rabbi Goode by the committee of Catholics for Human Rights. November 28, 1945.

Found: Flat File. Cabinet 5, Drawer 10.

Goode, Alexander D.

Correspondence between Harold C. Greenstein and Rollie T. Phillips, Jr.,
Describing the activities of the four chaplains on board the Dorchester as it sank.
April-May, 1952

Found: Correspondence File

Goode, Alexander D.

Picture Collection

Found: Picture Collection

HUC-JIR (Cincinnati)

Presentation of the Four Chaplains Portrait to the College by the American
Legion. February 6, 1956.

Found: Tape Recording No. 287

Krome, Frederic, "Rabbi Alexander Goode: One of the World War II 'Four Chaplains'"
Union of Reform Judaism. (September 27, 2005), week 97, day 2, print out from
e-mail.

Mahoney, John J.

Letter to S. Joshua Kohn, Melvin Mills, N.H., December 7, 1944. 2p.

*On the heroism of Chaplain Alexander Goode during the sinking of the U.S.S
Dorchester.*

Found: Correspondence File

Philately

First day issue of U.S. Stamps honoring Four Chaplains of World War II- 1943.
who gave their lives when the U.S.S Dorchester sank, February 3, 1943, May 28,
1948.

Found: Miscellaneous File

Philately

"Jews on Stamp Collections," compiled by James D. Raymond. Montreal, Canada

Found: Miscellaneous file

Flag Raising at Ground Zero US postage stamp

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Answer the following questions about the above stamp:

1. What symbols do you notice in the stamp?
2. What emotions and feelings does the symbols in the stamp evoke?
3. What messages are apparent? Are they verbal, visual, both?
4. Who do you think is the intended audience?
5. What do you feel is the American government's intention by the stamp?
6. How does the "Heros USA" stamp compare to the stamp in honor of the four chaplains?
7. Do you believe the stamp best represents America in the aftermath of 9/11? Why or why not?

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PETITION: STOP FIRE STATUE FDNY: faction says design alters Sept. 11 history

BYLINE: By MICHELE McPHEE DAILY NEWS POLICE BUREAU

Firefighters are circulating a petition in a bid to stop the FDNY from erecting a controversial statue in front of Fire Department headquarters. The proposed monument was inspired by a famous photograph of three white firefighters raising an American flag amid the World Trade Center ruins.

But instead of depicting firefighters Dan McWilliams, George Johnson and Billy Eisengrein, the 19-foot-tall bronze statue will feature one white, one black and one Hispanic firefighter.

"We have no problem with our African-American and Latino brothers being represented, just not with that image," said Capt. Kevin McCabe, of Engine 236 in Brooklyn. "That image is sentimental, and to change it is to tamper with a part of the Fire Department's history."

"It wasn't done for Iwo Jima, and shouldn't be done for the World Trade Center," said Bill Mirro, recording secretary for the Uniformed Firefighters Association.

The petition, started by Engine 236 Firefighter Steve Cassidy, was faxed to firehouses last night, accompanied by a letter to Mayor Bloomberg asking to stop the sculpture from being placed in front of 9 MetroTech Center in Brooklyn.

"There are two clear images that Americans will never forget. One is of President Bush standing atop a pile of rubble with his arm around the shoulder of a firefighter. . . . The other is of three New York City firefighters raising an American flag," Cassidy wrote. "These are real events that positively reflect on the FDNY. It is our history, and it should not be changed."

Cassidy suggested that the FDNY commission a sculpture that depicts firefighters of every race and nationality - and of both genders - digging for their fallen colleagues at Ground Zero.

Angry calls and faxes

While the petition was circulated throughout city firehouses, Fire Department officials were bombarded with angry calls and faxes from around the country - charging that the department has abandoned historical accuracy for political correctness.

"We have been taking a hit on this," said one high-ranking FDNY official, "but we are not going to reverse this short of a court order."

The statue was commissioned by developer Forest City Ratner, which owns the MetroTech site that houses FDNY headquarters. Company President Bruce Ratner defended the statue yesterday, saying he meant it to be symbolic of all 343 FDNY members who died on Sept. 11.

"This statue commemorates firefighters of all races and nationalities who gave their lives to preserve our American values," he said. "Questions about race or ethnicity played no part in the brave deeds firefighters performed on Sept. 11, and it does a disservice to the memory of the thousands lost on that day to raise such issues."

The widely reprinted photo was taken by Thomas Franklin of The Record, a New Jersey newspaper.

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9/11 LITERALISM; AN UNSEEMLY FUROR OVER A DIVERSE MEMORIAL

From a cynical perspective, the controversy over the now-canceled firefighters' statue in New York City may be a sign that the backbiting of pre-Sept. 11 normalcy has returned to that stricken megalopolis four months after terrorists flattened part of its financial district.

The \$180,000, 19-foot bronze was to have been erected outside Fire Department Headquarters in Brooklyn. The inspiration for the design was the now-famous photograph of the flag-raising by firefighters on the wreckage of the World Trade Center. But the monument was never meant to portray the event literally.

The three firefighters in the photo were white, as are about 94 percent of New York City's 11,495 firefighters. Only 2.7 percent are black and 3.2 percent Hispanic.

But this ratio is not representative of the city itself, nor of the hundreds of police and firefighters from other venues who came to help, nor of the millions of Americans who donated so much to the relief effort there.

Fire department officials sensibly proposed that the monument, a tribute, too, to 343 firefighters killed in the attack, reflect their diversity and that of the city itself. It would have given black firefighters their due – they lost 3.8 percent of their own, more than their percentage in the FDNY -- as well as Hispanic firefighters, whose numbers weren't available.

Fire Department officials are looking for another design because of complaints from the three white firefighters in the photo taken by Tom Franklin of the Record of Bergen County, N.J.

In retrospect, the planners of the memorial might have been wiser to conceive of a tribute that did not borrow from such a familiar image. But the sniping at their design is still discouraging. On Sept. 11, the city pulled together as one, overcame differences and subdued past pettiness. Therein lay its inspiration for the rest of the nation.

As Bruce Ratner, president and CEO of Forest City Ratner Cos., which planned to pay for the statue, told the New York Daily News: "Questions about race or ethnicity played no part in the brave deeds firefighters performed on Sept. 11, and it does a disservice to the memory of the thousands lost on that day to raise such issues."