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A Virtual Tour of Shiloh

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Often a teacher will wish to load up his or her students in a bus and take them on a field trip just so they can show the students the sights and sounds of a place outside the classroom. In today's society, history is all around us. From local Native American burial mounds to entire Civil War battlefields, history in many cases is just a short drive away. Unfortunately, with fluctuating fuel costs, required permission slips, and tighter school budgets, many students are missing out on the fun and excitement that accompanies a field trip to an historical location.

Importance of a Virtual Field Trip

As a result of these restrictions, the concepts of electronic field trips have been gaining grounds in recent years. Recently, researchers, in conjunction with the Grand Canyon National Park, implemented an authentic digital learning experience for over 1500 students (<http://www.grandcanyon.org/fieldinstitute/>). The researchers discovered the keys to enhancing the learning experience involved a combination of strong planning along with granting access to all of the learning materials for the students, and presenting a strong theoretical base of instruction before implementing the virtual field trip (Cassady, Kozlowski, & Kornman, 2008).

It was during my third year of teaching that I decided to introduce a virtual field trip to my students. I was teaching 10th grade World History at a county school in the northern section of Mississippi. As the year progressed, various teachers in my department voiced their concerns over the lack of technology that was being provided by our school. An agreement was made by our teachers that we could enhance the learning experience of our students if we could reinforce lectures with computer based images. Therefore, a group of concerned teachers, including myself, pooled our individual district allocated Educational Enhancement Funds (EEF) and purchased a large screen television and AverKey to assist with displaying computer images on the television.

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The AverKey is an inexpensive PC/MAC to T.V. conversion unit that allows teachers to simply push a button to show various computer images on their televisions. My first use of this technology was for PowerPoint presentations, which, when looking back, were boring and too full of text. As I continued to refine my lessons, I noticed that more and more students were responding more profoundly to the lectures in which I displayed images and short video clips. At this point, I decided to completely break away from the textbook by creating strong mini-lessons in which the students would be separated from the section to section; chapter after chapter, routines that so many of my colleagues, including myself, had been using. While the world history textbook I was using discussed the American Civil War in five sections, I decided to expand and insert a mini lesson on the battle of Shiloh, a battlefield of which I had visited multiple times as a teenager. The discussion of a battle is important because it allows the students to actually experience the carnage of war while examining the various military tactics used by the generals in that battle. It has been my experience that many students lacked a basic understanding of military tactics as well as the consequences and horror that are experienced when two armies face each other in mortal combat. By conducting a stronger, visual and auditory enhanced lesson detailing one major battle, I discovered the students were able to master a larger amount of the details of the lessons as compared to the rest of the chapter. Sure, students can always study a definition of the Anaconda Plan but when it came time for the essay section of the chapter exam, they always wanted to discuss the Battle of Shiloh.

In this article, I will include the various sources for which I used as primary sources. The experience of the Shiloh interactive lesson, however, should not be limited to a rigid point and click world. I always found it difficult to choose the sources I wanted to use. From the battle's opening day surprise shots to Nathan Bedford Forrest's final charge on April 8, 1862, and subsequent wounding, the battle holds myriads of interesting stories and ultimate mysteries. These various and intimate stories should be experienced by the students and guided by the teacher.

Planning the Tour

The virtual field trip to Shiloh can be broken down into a couple of class sessions depending on the length of the class. Over the years, I have learned the most important aspect of teaching this lesson is to present the material as a single battle. While examining the material, a teacher may feel overwhelmed due to the multiple historical connections leading to the critical battle that occurred over two days in April 1862 at Shiloh. As an example, during one of my attempts, I started with the capturing of Forts Henry and Donaldson in February of 1862. The

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students enjoyed the discussions as well as the daring escape that was performed on the night of February 15, 1862, by Nathan Bedford Forrest. The students, unfortunately, became confused as to how the Confederates ended back in Corinth and why the Union army did not immediately pursue them. As a result of this confusion, I found it best to start the virtual tour's curriculum with General Grant being stationed at Pittsburg Landing and the Confederate's General Johnson based in Corinth. In my experience, the best way to set up the battle is to follow historian Jay Wertz's statement, "If I were to describe the Battle of Shiloh to my 17-year-old son, whose interest in military history is limited to wars involving air combat, it might go something like this: The battle was like a football game." (p. 68). With this concept in mind, I first introduced the players involved in the battle.

Beginning the Tour

To begin the virtual tour, I introduced contemporary pictures of the Union generals (Grant, Sherman, Prentiss, Wallace and Buell). These photos were collected from various websites on line through a simple Google Images search and incorporated into a slide show for the students. When discussing Grant, I noticed the images that caused the greatest discussions were the ones displaying the general in camp, or, in a day-to-day situation. These photos allowed the students to see the general as he would have been seen through the eyes of his fellow soldiers instead of viewing the more familiar staged portraits that were so common to that era. The discussion of Grant is in essence the discussion of one of the four major figures of the Civil War (Lincoln, Lee and Davis being the other three). Many discussions developed concerning Grant's personal appearance. One student described Grant's appearance as "rough but ready," while another commented that he appeared to be "a deep thinker." These initial impressions may be overly simplistic, but they did allow me to freely guide their first impressions towards a more personal and complex view of Grant's psychological makeup. At this point, I found it necessary to display various pictures of Grant's wife and extended family when beginning an earnest discussion of his personal life. After all, many historians have concluded there is a profound mystery behind the Grant image (Rafuse, 2007). I asked the students to comment on the meaning of General Sherman's description of Grant when he said, "To me he is a mystery, and I believe he is a mystery to himself (2007)." After hearing this comment, one student concluded, "Perhaps Grant is a mystery because we simply do not understand his ability to make quick decisions to his generals while under fire." At this point I felt it was necessary to offer to the class for viewing, images of Sherman, Prentiss, Buell, Wallace, as well as the other key Union generals.

Once the visual imaging of the Union generals was finished, I attempted to show to the

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class pictures of those leaders who were opposing Grant at Shiloh. The Confederate generals, with the possible exception of the appearances of their uniforms, appeared to be in similar fashion with their Union counterparts. The students admired the appearance of Albert Sidney Johnson as well as that of P.G.T. Beauregard, who was described by historian Maurice D'aoust as "Flamboyant" (2006). However, due to the fact that many of the students had favorite Confederate leaders of whom they had become familiar from various external sources, I always found it important to include at this stage an in-depth image of the then Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest. Perhaps my selection of Forrest was due to the fact that north Mississippi was the heart of operations for his later famous raids and thus led to numerous battlefields and campaigns that extended within each student's neighborhood.

After visually examining the leaders that existed on both sides of the battle, I next presented the students with colorful images of the battlefield. Before viewing these individual images, however, I found it is important for the students to first view a geographic map of the area. I did this through the use of a giant poster board that was placed at the front of the class. Through past modifications I also found the use of a dry erase board, or even a chalkboard, can be used as a substitute of the poster board. The poster board contained the Shiloh battlefield map that I had previously assigned as an enrichment activity for students wanting extra credit. However, it must be remembered that the key objective is for the students to have a visual reference to determine the movement of the Union and Confederate troops throughout the two-day battle.

As I began to discuss the development of the battle beginning with the first shots fired at Fraley Field, I would simultaneously trace the movements of the troops over the geographic map. The motive was to attempt to show how the battle progressed with the Confederates attacking in three large waves. As the first waves crashed upon the pickets of Grant's troops, General Sherman rode to the front to evaluate the scale of the attack. While mounted atop his horse in Rhea Field, he was surprised by a group of Confederate troops. These Confederate soldiers raised their rifles and fired upon the general. As the bullets flew towards him, Sherman raised his hand, in signal to his troops, and was immediately struck in the hand by a ball and shot. At this time, I would pause and present the students with a ball and shot artifact that I had purchased at a Civil War relic store (for approximately \$8). As it was passed around the class, I asked the students, "If this ball and shot struck your hand, would you be able to continue to ride your horse and direct your troops for two days?" This actual artifact of the carnage allowed the students to put into their own intimate perspectives the strong determination of generals such as Sherman who was commanding many men to their deaths during those fateful two days in April of 1862.

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At the conclusion of the bullet discussion, I found it beneficial to show the students visual pictures of the terrain of the battlefield. Upon a prior visit to the battlefield, I had brought my digital video recorder and taped interesting sections of the battlefield. By reviewing these videos, the students were able to view the terrain as it appears today. The fact the battlefield of Shiloh has remained, for the most part, in its original state due to its isolated location makes it a great instrument for a virtual field trip. From the Hornet's Nest, to the Bloody Pond, and all the way to the cliffs over-looking Pittsburg Landing, the students are able to view the battlefield in vivid color much as the soldiers, who fought the battle, did with their very own eyes. More importantly, through the use of video hosting servers such as You Tube and Google, I have been able to embed the videos on the Internet for easier access as well as to allow the students to view the videos at home or at the library. Furthermore, since the teaching of this lesson I have discovered better videos are available by completing a simple search of YouTube. For example:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1x4PK4I2Go>)

My final step in the virtual field trip of Shiloh was to display the individual costs in blood and suffering the two days of battle had on individual soldiers. Through my study of the battle, I found one of the most powerful and saddest documented stories came from a native of Illinois, William Hervey Lamme (W.H.L.) Wallace. Wallace was a lawyer and a Union general who was considered by General Grant to be one of his best and brightest officers. Starting at the rank of private in the 11th Illinois, he quickly rose to colonel and finally was selected to lead a division at Shiloh. As the battle of the Hornet's Nest progressed in its intensity, it was Wallace who held his men together and ordered them to hold their lines at all costs in order to give Grant the precious hours he had requested. Sadly, during the heavy fighting Wallace was mortally wounded. He was taken from the battlefield and eventually arrived at Grant's headquarters in Savannah, Tennessee. There in Savannah, Wallace's wife had just arrived to visit with her husband. For the next three days she stayed at his side until he eventually succumbed to his wounds. His last words to his wife were, "I will see you in heaven." In a twist of fate, it was General Prentiss, a colleague of Wallace who would receive the glory for his defense of the Hornet's Nest. In fact, it was not until a recent article by Timothy Smith (2008) that Wallace finally received his fame as the true "Hero of the Hornet's Nest." In telling this personal story, I discovered the students connected with the Union troops as more than an invading army. Furthermore, one student even commented, "Why would someone from Illinois give their life so far from home?" Another student replied, "Sometimes there can be heroes on both sides." This really put into perspective the true nature of a civil war. Furthermore by reading the story aloud this form of auditory learning connected with the visual images of the virtual field trip and therefore reinforced the objectives through various teaching

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strategies.

Conclusion of the Tour

Once the virtual tour had been completed, I usually broke the class into smaller groups. At this point I distributed two photos to each group (one of a Union soldier and one of a Confederate). These pictures can easily be obtained through a simple Google images search and printed via a black and white printer. I then told the students to examine each person and find similarities and differences in the expressions as well as overall appearances. I also asked the students to complete a paragraph describing what they thought each soldier must have felt at the start of the battle. Finally, the students were asked to present their findings to the class.

At the completion of the presentations, I asked the class what conclusions could be made regarding the Battle of Shiloh? I also asked the students, "What was accomplished by the battle?" Overall, I found the students now viewed the Civil War as more than just a distant war rather, students expressed the war as being a series of horrific battles, one after another. After all, 500,000 soldiers died during the Civil War, and as one result of this conflict, for example, the majority of Mississippi's post war budget went towards purchasing artificial limbs. Therefore, the war should be viewed as a tragic and costly event with the virtual field trip creating a better prospective to today's young people of the type of warfare that existed over 100 years ago which forced so many young men to pay the ultimate price.

As a further primary source for the virtual tour, I would encourage the presentation of pictures of the battlefield at Shiloh that had been taken during the month of April. These pictures would more closely duplicate the true appearance of the terrain and foliage of Shiloh at the time of the battle.

The lesson described here is not intended to be the only way to use this material. By all means, create virtual tours that you and your students will both enjoy. The best tip to follow is to insure the virtual field trip reinforces the various learning styles associated with your students and reinforced by Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences. For example, visual learners will enjoy being exposed to the pictures; while tactile learners will enjoy the hands experiences of the bullets and auditory learners will benefit from hearing the story of W.H.L. Wallace. Through the use of multiple modes of teaching the virtual field trip will become stronger and have a more lasting effect on the students.

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