

LESSON PLAN

Haiti: perception and reality



OBJECTIVES

This lesson will help students:

- learn to analyze media (visuals as well as printed text)
- understand the importance of context
- gain knowledge about the History of Haiti

GRADE LEVEL: 9 – adult

MATERIALS

- Several newspaper articles about Haiti
- Several books about Haiti
- VHS/DVD copy of *Once There Was a Country: Revisiting Haiti*
- *Once There Was a Country: Revisiting Haiti* Resource Guide as a hand out.

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED: Minimum of two hours. The adaptations to the lesson suggested in this document will allow for additional, follow-up classes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

An unstable political climate, in which 33 out of 54 governing bodies have ended in political upheaval in Haiti, has left infrastructure and social programs to disintegrate. One of the most well known facts is that “Haiti is the poorest country in the Western hemisphere,” but very little if any of Haiti’s accomplishments are widely known.

Maya Angelou ends the film saying, “Cultures must not be forced to reinvent their history with each new day. Confirmation of achievements can elevate the most marginalized. All nations must teach their children about their own contributions. Haiti’s contributions to world history deserve attention.”

The film provides an excellent springboard for a series of lessons that integrate language arts and social studies. *Once There Was a Country: Revisiting Haiti* can help students to learn about Haiti, examine media portrayals and coverage of news about Haiti, immigration, U.S. foreign policy and healthcare as a human right.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Step 1: In preparation for the class, ask students to bring a picture of Haiti and either a newspaper article or a book written about Haiti. Before showing the film, ask students to tell you what they know about Haiti. If you have Haitian students in the class, please ask them to go last, since they will probably know more. Write the list on the board. As the list is being generated, be sure to ask students where they learned the facts that they are gathering. When the list is complete, discuss what percentage of it is positive and what percentage of the facts on list are negative facts.

Step 2: Introduce *Once There Was a Country: Revisiting Haiti* by telling them that they are about to see a film that reveals many things about Haiti that they may not know and others that they might. Ask them to pay close attention to what the film



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says about poverty and about how Hollywood and Americans have formed certain perceptions of Haiti that exclude positive representations.

Background information on Haiti is available on the *Once There Was a Country: Revisiting Haiti* website:

<http://www.OnceThereWasACountry.com>

Step 3: Show the film *Once There Was a Country: Revisiting Haiti*. The film is 53 minutes long. It is recommended that you show the film in its entirety. If time restraints don't allow the discussion and exercises to immediately follow the film you may assign some of the suggested writing assignment(s) and/or research after the screening and conduct the rest of the lesson during the following class session.

Step 4: After the film, have students discuss the following topics and whether they knew about them before the class:

- The slave revolt in Haiti: why was it significant?
- Successful healthcare programs in Haiti
- Haitian immigrants and their treatment: how is their plight different from other Caribbean immigrants (like Cubans, for example)?

Depending on available time and the skill level of your students, they can complete a writing assignment where they can research any of these topics further for a follow-up class.

Step 5: Discuss why LaRochelle stopped taking his medicine at the beginning of his treatment. Was this irresponsible of him? Was LaRochelle lazy? Would these attitudes subscribe to the list your and your students made at the beginning of the class?

Step 6: Discuss what influenced LaRochelle's decision to leave the country. Was LaRochelle's decision to leave to find work and to stop taking his medication justified by his financial need? Was he right in doing so? Analyze what facts the "biased" reporters in your class left out in order to make their argument. Did they take LaRochelle's financial needs into consideration? Should they? What other devices did the students use to convey both points of view?

Step 7: Spinning a story. Ask half of your students to pretend to be a "biased reporters" bent on making LaRochelle look bad. Ask the other half of your class to be "conscientious reporters" who want to sympathetically portrait LaRochelle's tough decision to leave his home to show more than one angle. Take 5-10 minutes to have them write a few sentences as per your instructions to present their arguments.

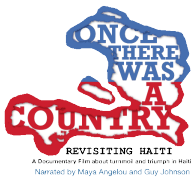
Additional discussion questions for the film are available in the film's **Discussion and Study Guide**:

<http://www.oncetherewasacountry.com/studyguide.pdf>



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EVALUATION

You may have students answer the following questions from the *Once There Was a Country: Revisiting Haiti* **Discussion and Study Guide**:

- What images do people have of Haiti?
- Where do those images come from?
- What do you think of when you think of Haiti?
- What do you think of when you think of *Little Haiti* in Miami?
- Do you think you have an accurate picture?
- Did the film provide you with any new information about this?
- How are Haitians typically portrayed in American popular culture?
- How are the people you “meet” in the film like or unlike those portrayals?
- Did you learn anything about Haiti/Haitians? If so, what and why didn’t you already have that information?
- Where might you go to find accurate information about Haiti, Haitian-Americans and other community groups?

Photocopy the newspaper articles that students brought to class and make them available to all, or pick a few articles that subscribe to the items on the list you created at the beginning of the class. Ask students to read a book about Haiti tied to your curriculum. It is important to tie this exercise to existing curriculum by either choosing something that is already on the required reading list for Language Arts, or a book that is connected to a required Social Studies topic. How do the facts presented in the articles compare to the facts as presented in the book? There are many, many possible titles. For a handy list, please see the *Once There Was a Country: Revisiting Haiti* **Resource Guide**:

<http://www.once therewasacountry.com/resourceguide.pdf>

POSSIBLE ADAPTATIONS OF THIS LESSON

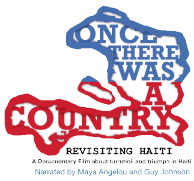
I. Have students research newspaper coverage of the U.S. occupation of Haiti in 1915, for instance. Have them read excerpts from “The Magic Island” by W.B. Seabrook. Compare the differences between the point of view of the articles they gathered and the point of view presented in the text of the book they have read.

- Does the book reflect American’s attitude towards Haiti at that time?
- How would that book be received today?

NOTE: Another book with a more accurate, contrasting historical perspective, which can be used in this exercise is “Written in blood” by Robert Debs Heini and Nancy Gordon Heini.

II. Rather than supplying information on Haiti yourself, have students research and write a short historical “backgrounder” about Haiti’s independence and civil war.

After they turn in their assignments, discuss how the racial division that caused the original civil war in Haiti. Were these differences ever reconciled? Did any other country help Haiti at that time?



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Here is a fact that will come up: In 1838 France recognized Haitian independence in exchange for a financial indemnity of 150 million francs. Slave holding nations, including the United States, shun Haiti for almost forty years, fearful that its example may stir unrest among their slaves. Over the next few decades Haiti was forced to take out loans of 70 million francs to repay the indemnity and gain international recognition. Did France and the United States make matters worse? Discuss whether these attitudes towards Haiti have been outdated or whether they still uphold.

III. *Once There Was a Country: Revisiting Haiti* may be used to explore the experience of immigrants. Ask students to consider the following factors and compare what they see in the film to the experience of immigrants they know or have read about:

- Place of origin / birth
- Historical circumstance
- Reason for leaving
- Circumstances of departure
- Length / method of trip
- Language / knowledge of English
- Job skills / training / education level
- Expectations
- Family situation

- Invite first generation immigrants from your community as guest speakers to your class and ask them to share their stories. Compare their experience with the experience of the people in the film.

- Research and discuss U.S. immigration policy. How does the law treat Haitians differently from other immigrants? Do you think the policies are appropriate? Why or why not?

- Research and discuss U.S. policy towards Haiti. Why did the U.S. begin an economic embargo?

RESOURCES

You may use *Once There Was a Country: Revisiting Haiti* **Resource Guide** as a handout:

<http://www.once therewasacountry.com/resourceguide.pdf>

Our website also includes an extensive list of links that might be useful in planning this lesson.

<http://www.once therewasacountry.com>

STANDARDS

Main standards covered (based on Florida State Standards) include:

Language Arts – Reading

Standard 1:

The student uses the reading process effectively. (LA.A.1.4)



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Standard 2:

The student constructs meaning from a wide range of texts. (LA.A.2.4)

Language Arts – Writing

Standard 2:

The student writes to communicate ideas and information effectively. (LA.B.2.4)

Language Arts – Listening, Viewing, and Speaking

Standard 2:

The student uses viewing strategies effectively. (LA.C.2.4)

1. determines main concept and supporting details in order to analyze and evaluate non-print media messages.
2. understands factors that influence the effectiveness of nonverbal cues used in non-print media, such as the viewer's past experiences and preferences and the context in which the cues are presented.

Language Arts – Language

Standard 2:

The student understands the power of language. (LA.D.2.4)

1. understands specific ways in which language has shaped the reactions, perceptions, and beliefs of the local, national, and global communities.
2. understands the subtleties of literary devices and techniques in the comprehension and creation of communication.
3. recognizes production elements that contribute to the effectiveness of a specific medium.
5. critically analyzes specific elements of mass media with regard to the extent to which they enhance or manipulate information.

Language Arts – Literature

Standard 2:

The student responds critically to fiction, nonfiction, and drama. (LA.E.2.4)

4. understands the use of images and sounds to elicit the reader's emotions in both fiction and nonfiction.
5. analyzes the relationships among author's style, literary form, and intended impact on the reader.
6. recognizes and explains those elements in texts that prompt a personal response, such as connections between one's own life and the characters, events, motives, and causes of conflict in texts.
7. examines a literary selection from several critical perspectives.
8. knows that people respond differently to texts based on their background knowledge, purpose and point of view.

Social Studies - Time, Continuity, and Change [History]

Standard 1:

The student understands historical chronology and the historical perspective. (SS.A.1.4)

1. understands how ideas and beliefs, decisions, and chance events have been



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used in the process of writing and interpreting history.

2. identifies and understands themes in history that cross scientific, economic, and cultural boundaries.
3. evaluates conflicting sources and materials in the interpretation of a historical event or episode.
4. uses chronology, sequencing, patterns, and periodization to examine interpretations of an event.

Additional relevant standards include:

U.S. History

Standard 5:

(1880 to the present day). (SS.A.5.4)



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