Level 5 History - Museum Magic

PEEL in Practice: 1300 ideas for quality teaching
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A life-size Eros greets you on the way in saying “Welcome. I am Eros, the Greek God of love. Please come in and see our Ancient Greek display.” Just inside the door you see a scaled model amphitheatre and dramatical mask before moving on to the mannequins dressed in a peplos and chiton. Life size armour and weapons, chariots, a food stall from the agora… all and more were part of the museum created in a classroom by a Year 8 and a Year 9 class.

I was becoming frustrated with the boys in my Year 8 and 9 English and Society and Environment (S&E) classes who complained that the texts studied were boring and irrelevant. I was also particularly frustrated by a few students who would do all the preparatory work but lack the confidence to finish work and hand it up. One student was often absent on days assessment was due. I asked myself how to engage these students, maintain their enthusiasm and maintain the curriculum.

I decided to give my classes a choice of English novels in an attempt to include them in the decision-making. I brought 6 different texts into the class for people to look at. Interestingly not everyone wanted the option, but those who did were happy to discuss the merits of each text and to follow a democratic process to choose one. Both classes chose the same text!

The novel, “Pankration” allowed me to integrate S&E history with the unit. I told the students that we needed to study the history of Ancient Greece but while reading the novel they had a choice of how that would happen. They could:

a) Follow the S&E text and answer the questions;
b) Do a research project and poster;
c) Follow a process to research an aspect of Ancient Greek culture and then create a display in the form of a museum.

The overwhelming result was to create a museum, again in both classes.

The students then drove the learning process. We visited a local museum, not to learn about local history, which they had done before, but to evaluate the effectiveness of different displays. Students noted 3 features of 3 displays they liked and 3 features of displays they disliked. They then tried to emulate the features they enjoyed and avoid those they didn’t in their own displays. Most students chose to work in groups of 2 or 3.

I then formulated a research process that I wanted students to follow when researching for any purpose. They needed to use a minimum of 3 sources, make notes and write a bibliography. Students went about their research and making their displays with fervour. I was extremely pleased with the students who set themselves high but achievable goals. Often their displays required artistic/technical expertise that I couldn’t supply so they asked other teachers who were generally happy to help.
10 lessons (5 English & 5 S&E) later the displays were ready to be put in the museum. I took this opportunity to have a museum ‘opening’. Each student spoke for between 30 seconds and 2 minutes explaining their display and what it represented. At the opening their other subject teachers, teachers who had helped, the Assistant Principal, and Principal admired their work while tasting foods mentioned in the Pankration novel and looking at each other’s displays.

Overall the unit was a success with ALL students contributing significantly to the museum. All students said they liked the novel and there were a few personal achievements worth noting. One boy, who usually goes bright red before stuttering painfully, researched thoroughly and spoke knowledgeably for 2 minutes without changing colour at all! One girl who is usually away for assessment tasks spent a lunchtime with me shopping for resources and spent a weekend sewing before presenting her well researched assignment.

Not everything was perfect and many students did not attend to their bibliography or notes well enough. Next time I would spend time at the beginning of each lesson reminding students to complete these formalities. After saying this however, the retention of knowledge in this task was incredible which became evident in a class quiz I ran 3 weeks after the opening. I was impressed with student knowledge not only on the topic they presented but also on the topics others presented. It was always obvious that students had put a lot of effort and learnt from their own displays. It was evident after this quiz that students had also learnt from their peers’ efforts.

Assignment

**JU6 – A museum about Ancient Greece**

You know what the features of an effective display include. With a partner from your work group, choose an artifact that will illustrate a particular aspect of Ancient Greek culture and present it to that it will be interesting and informative for visitors. Once you have chosen an artifact, check the sheet next to the whiteboard and make sure that no one else in the group has chosen the same one. (Museums only have one display of each aspect.)

In order to do this, you will need to follow the steps outlined by Mr. Hay in his talk on Research Skills.

You will need to hand up the following with the final product:
- Steps in the process sheet
- Bibliography sheet
- Note-taking sheet

**Criteria for Assessment**

- Visually stimulating
- Information is accurate and communicated with appropriate language
- All planning and note-taking sheets are handed in and are well-documented
- It is obvious that both team members have contributed to the final product (you may like to write down what each person is responsible for as part of your plan)
Due Wednesday of week 5. There will be no extensions!

You will have all Society and Environment lessons and homework in weeks 3 and 4 to complete this work, but no lessons in week 5.

The museum will be set up Thursday of week 5 in lessons 1 and 2 ready for the grand opening in lesson 3. Think about whom you would like to invite to this opening. I would like to invite Mr. Hill, Ms Fisher and Ms Forrest. We will probably use the opening to sample the foods we have read about (and I can find) in Pankration.

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