

Social Studies Heroes and Villains LESSON PLAN

Grade: Jr. High (various grades)

Lesson: Social Studies Heroes and Villains

Class length: 45 min

Note to reader:

This lesson plan was designed as a “flex block” for junior high students. Students from any grade could sign up for this class. There are no prerequisites. This lesson could easily be retooled for high school.

Objectives:

- Students explore why it is important to humanize heroes and villains in social studies
- Students do internet research to uncover the “human side” of social studies heroes and villains
- Students consider strategies they could use in the future when they encounter heroes and villains in social studies

Before class

- Cue videos
- Test audio

Activities

Time	Objectives	Activities	Materials
2 min	Take attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Take attendance ● Have 1-2 students get chromebooks (or similar tech) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Computer ● Class list / seating plan
3 min	Generate interest in lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Show first 2 minutes of Meet the Villain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Note: For younger grades / religious schools, you need to manually turn down volume in the scene with Al Pacino due to profanity. Ensure you screen the video yourself first so you are familiar with when this will be needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Meet the Villain” - YouTube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOnC6l7hu-0
15 min	Students explore why it is important to see SS heroes and villains as complex humans, not just good or bad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Get students to identify heroes and villains they are familiar with. ● Ask students: What makes a hero a hero, or a villain a villain? What do/can they do, or not do? Make a list of responses on the board. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Some ideas may already start to emerge re: how heroes and villains are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Whiteboard ● Markers

		<p>complicated and not necessarily just one thing. Indulge these ideas just enough to get them out there, but you may need to park them for a few minutes and circle back a little later in the discussion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask students to consider who might be considered a hero or villain in social studies. Challenge students to explain why they feel this person is a hero or villain. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Note: My students identified some possible “heroes” - like Christopher Columbus - as villains. This created a perfect opportunity to ask questions like “Was this person always considered a villain? Why did people’s views of this person change? Can someone be both a hero and a villain?” ● Ask students whether someone can be a hero and a villain at the same time. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make reference back to the heroes and villains students came up with at the start of the lesson as needed - e.g. Darth Vader, other complex characters with a good and dark side. ● Ask students why they think it is important to consider the light and dark sides of heroes and villains in social studies. The students will probably come up with this answer on their own, but the key messages you want to convey or underline are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seeing villains as only bad makes it hard for us to understand how regular people like us can get wrapped up in bad things. (e.g., people voted for Hitler - were they being good citizens by voting? Or do they share some responsibility for what happened?) ○ Seeing villains as the sole responsible party lets everyone else off the hook, and makes it hard to understand how bad things end up happening. ○ Putting heroes on a pedestal makes it hard for us to see how regular people like us can contribute to important changes. ○ If we understand heroes and villains as human, with all the complexity this involves, we can see that we are part of the story too. 	
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15 min	Students explore specific heroes and villains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students work in groups of 3-4 to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Choose a hero or villain ○ Do internet research to see what they can learn about the person that might be different from their hero / villain persona ○ Have one person from each group make a list of the things the group finds • Note: If a group chooses Hitler, you will need to support them in finding credible websites, and in interpreting what they find. There are a lot of white supremacist sites that publish “good” things about Hitler that you will want to avoid. You will also need to make sure the purpose of the task is clear—we are not trying to make Hitler seem like a great and misunderstood guy, but rather to explore a very bad moment in history in a way that helps us more accurately understand what happened and how evil can flourish on a mass scale, part of which involves letting a single bad actor take all the blame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chromebooks
5 min	Students share their findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have each group share 1-2 things they found about their hero / villain 	N/A
5 min	Students consider how they might apply what they have learned in future social studies classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students how they might be on the lookout for heroes and villains in their future SS careers, and what they think they should do when they see someone being portrayed as just a hero or just a villain (how will they apply what they learned in this class?). • Close class 	N/A



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